Worldly Rites: The Social and Political Significance of Religious Services in Louisiana, 1803--1865.

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WORLDLY RITES:
THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE
OF RELIGIOUS SERVICES IN LOUISIANA,
1803-1865

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of History

by

Julia Huston Nguyen
B.A., Mount Holyoke College, 1995
M.A., Louisiana State University, 1997
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For Steve
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In antebellum and Civil War Louisiana, religious rituals contained more than spiritual meaning. They also carried social and political significance that can illustrate a great deal about that society. Sabbath services, holidays, revivals, baptisms, weddings, and funerals all reflected the values that Louisianans believed to be important. By looking at religion and the ways that residents of Louisiana experienced it, not only on a daily basis but also during the major milestones of life, one can come to a greater understanding of the ways in which they structured their society and interacted with it.

Through an examination of Louisiana religion, one can easily discern the primary importance placed on family. Religious events reinforced family ties by bringing them together, not only for the major stages of life such as birth, marriage, and death, but also for regular church services and for special holidays scattered throughout the year. The opinions of members of the wider community were also considered significant. At the same time, Louisianans expected religious expression to conform to societal norms, and it taught people how they were expected to behave through the rituals in which they participated. These ceremonies showed men and women that their priorities and loyalties should lie primarily with their families while they also served to instruct citizens in the significance of the community and the need to secure society’s approval in matters such as marriage, death, and at other important points in life.

Finally, these events show the importance of religion to Louisiana society. Despite many protestations that the state’s citizens were irreligious and preferred fun to
worship, religion held a significant place in the state’s culture, and society in general valued both the spiritual and the social and political aspects of religious rituals. No ceremony considered in this study carried a purely religious meaning, and participants recognized this fact. They accepted the larger implications that religious activity had for their lives. Throughout the antebellum period and the upheavals of the Civil War, religion and its ceremonies retained a central place in the experiences and actions of many men and women in Louisiana.
INTRODUCTION

Historical study of religion in the antebellum South has changed over time. Early works by historians including Walter Posey and Ernest Thompson considered the subject from a denominational perspective. In *The Baptist Church in the Lower Mississippi Valley*, Posey traced the development of that denomination from the American Revolution through the mid-nineteenth century, while Thompson's *Presbyterians in the South* covered nearly four hundred years of Presbyterian activity in the region. Similar works examined denominational growth on a statewide level, such as Roger Baudier's *The Catholic Church in Louisiana*.¹

The field broadened considerably with John Boles's *The Great Revival*. Boles examined the ideas and beliefs that sparked the spiritual awakening of 1787-1805 and the impact that evangelical culture had on the antebellum South. This trend continued with the work of Donald Mathews, Anne Loveland, and Kenneth Startup. In *Religion in the Old South*, Mathews acknowledged that many of his assertions were merely theories that historians still needed to test. He explored the religious experiences of the southern people as well as at the ides of their ministers in an attempt to understand how and why evangelical Protestantism came to dominate southern religion. Mathews looked at the evangelical belief system as a whole, rather than at one denomination. While focusing on evangelical ministers, Loveland's *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order* explored the social meanings that attached themselves to events such as conversion and reception into a church. Startup studied religion from a different view-
point in *The Root of all Evil*. He looked at the attitudes of southern clergy toward economic development and used the study of religion as a way to uncover the economic views of southerners.²

While each of these authors concentrated on white southerners, Eugene Genovese began to explore Christianity’s place and significance in slave communities in *Roll, Jordan, Roll*. He carefully described the rituals in which enslaved African-Americans participated and examined the role of Christianity in the formation of black identity and a coherent slave community. In *Slave Religion*, Albert Raboteau studied the origins of slaves’ religious practices and how they developed on plantations and in towns.³

Although great strides have been made in the study of southern religion, one area largely neglected is the social and political significance of the popular religious experience. It has been studied by historians of other regions, most notably David Hall, Patricia Bonomi, and Michael Engh. Hall’s *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment* concentrated on the popular practices that contained special meaning for early New England settlers and uncovered the significance they assigned to those rituals. In *Under the Cope of Heaven*, Bonomi examined the connections between faith and society and politics in colonial America, arguing that religion often influenced those institutions. Engh’s book, *Frontier Faiths*, described the interactions among Catholics, Protestants, Jews, and Buddhists in early Los Angeles, exploring the ways that frontier society altered and was altered by traditional religious practices. All of these books attempted to understand what meanings society assigned to religious experiences, and I bring these questions to bear on the South.⁴
In my study, I look at religious customs and rituals, including both practices, such as weekly church services and family devotions, and special occasions, such as baptisms, weddings, funerals, special fasting and prayer days, revivals, and holidays. While every southerner did not experience all of these events, each played a significant role to certain segments of the population. I do not look at these practices from a purely religious viewpoint. Certainly, the spiritual meaning of a baptism or Sunday service contained significance for participants and their personal beliefs. Rather than focusing on this aspect, however, I attempt to uncover what meanings ceremonies had for men and women outside of the spiritual world. How people used church rituals to express their secular needs and desires can help discover a great deal about how they envisioned their society and what they hoped to get out of it.

Antebellum Louisiana serves as the primary focus of my study. This state presents an excellent opportunity for comparing two very different but also very closely-linked worlds. Settled in the early years by Roman Catholics from France, Spain, and Acadia, by the early nineteenth century southern Louisiana - especially the city of New Orleans- attracted immigrants from Germany, Ireland, and the Caribbean, as well as other nations and all parts of the United States. In addition to the original Catholic settlers, the population of the area included many denominations of Protestants, Jews, and African-Americans who held a wide variety of Afro-Christian beliefs. The cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity of southern Louisiana was not matched in the northern part of the state, which people began to settle in earnest during the antebellum period. Although old and significant Catholic populations existed, especially in Natchitoches, northern Louisiana - settled by migrants from the southeastern states as
well as the North - more closely resembled other southern states with their large Prot-
estant majority. Within this category, however, considerable denominational variety
existed, creating conflicts and debates among members and clergy.

Religion has been present in Louisiana history since the days of Spanish and
French exploration. When settlement began in present-day Louisiana – first at Natchi-
toches and later at New Orleans – the founding of churches and introduction of reli-
gious services became a priority of the French colonial government. The 1717 charter
granting John Law’s Company of the West control of Louisiana required the Company
to “build at its expense churches at the places where it forms settlements.” The Com-
pany of the West and its successor the Company of the Indies followed the directive
haphazardly until 1721, when the crown reprimanded its directors for not carrying out
the religious will of the king. Article Three of the Code Noir, promulgated in 1724,
forbade the practice of any religion except Catholicism, a law that the Spanish would retain.5

Despite the efforts of the crown, religion was neither a regular nor a significant
part of life for the average settler in French colonial New Orleans. There was no short-
age of opportunities for worship. In addition to daily masses and special celebrations
of holy and feast days, non-religious events were also marked in church. When Jean-
Jacques Blaise D’Abbadie became governor of Louisiana in 1763, for example, an ad-
dress and Te Deum at St. Louis church marked his arrival in the colony. At the same
time, too, fewer than twenty-five percent of the city’s population attended mass each
Sunday, and not quite half made their annual Easter duties. Although St. Louis church
was located in the center of New Orleans and nearly all public and government events
included a church service, most colonists found that organized religion had little to do with their everyday lives. The struggle to survive in a newly planted colony took precedence over everything else. Outside of New Orleans, people had a much more difficult time observing the rituals of church life. Most colonists were isolated on farms strung along the Mississippi River, and few priests visited the countryside. At the same time, carving subsistence out of a foreign environment left little time or energy for elaborate ceremonies. According to Father Henri LaVente, who wrote a scathing memoir of his time in the colony, settlers outside New Orleans had “neither occasion nor desire to practice any religion at all.” Most went months or even years without attending organized worship.

In 1763, the Treaty of Paris ended both the Seven Years War and French rule in Louisiana. Most of the present state went to Spain, and Britain received West Florida, encompassing the present-day Florida parishes. Despite the best efforts of Spanish Catholic priests, religion remained a mere formality, rather than an integral part of life, for the average Louisianian under Spanish rule. In a report made nine years after Spain’s acquisition of Louisiana, Governor Luis de Unzaga wrote, “the frequent practice of the Sacrament of Communion is not well looked upon.” As in the French period, rural residents faced a chronic shortage of clergy and opportunities to practice their religion. During the last part of the eighteenth century, the colony grew tremendously, but the number of priests did not increase proportionately. In his 1772 report, Governor Unzaga pointed out the need for many more religious men to serve the “churches established that have no priest because they are scarce” as well as the need for more churches. By 1802, C.C. Robin commented, “the immense region of Louisi-
Ana has no more than a dozen priests, secular or ordained." Because of this problem, people performed baptisms, marriages, and burials according to their own needs. Under Spanish rule, thousands of immigrants from various parts of the world, including Acadians from Canada, Canary Islanders, refugees from Saint Domingue, and slaves from Africa arrived in Louisiana.

As the eighteenth century drew to a close, more and more Americans – many of them Protestant – arrived in Louisiana. Although governors Esteban Miro and Francisco Carondelet felt uneasy about the willingness of Americans to become loyal Spanish subjects, they saw the need for more settlers, especially those who owned slaves and would cultivate the land. Opportunities for commercial activity also attracted merchants. By 1803, C. C. Robin noted the large number of Anglo-Americans swelling the population of the colony, especially New Orleans.

During negotiations for the acquisition of Louisiana in 1803, many residents began to question exactly what the place of religion would be in the new American territory. Under the governance of both France and Spain, Catholicism had served as the established religion, and all others had been excluded by law, if not in practice. Louisiana in 1803 was an overwhelmingly Catholic place. According to Baton Rouge resident and local historian E. A. Young, the new territory “was under the influence of the Catholic priests.” Protestant churches sprang up almost immediately, however. Christ Episcopal Church was the first, appearing in New Orleans in 1805. Other parts of the state, especially the Florida parishes, saw similar beginnings of Protestant religious activity. Throughout the antebellum period, Protestant churches continued to spread across the state, especially in northern Louisiana. The Jewish population also
grew during the antebellum period, though not so quickly as Protestant denominations.\textsuperscript{10}

In the first half of the nineteenth century, many groups of immigrants came to Louisiana – especially New Orleans – and each brought their own religious beliefs. Although a large number of French and Saint-Domingue immigrants came into the state and found rapid acceptance among the native Creole population of French and Spanish descent, other groups had different receptions. Germans and Irish made up the two largest immigrant groups to enter the state, and the majority of both groups was Catholic. The large numbers of Catholic immigrants that arrived in New Orleans during the antebellum period increased both the number of Catholic communicants in the city and the ethnic and cultural tensions among those communicants. The Creoles of French and Spanish descent looked down upon German and Irish immigrants, in part because of different religious traditions within Catholicism.\textsuperscript{11}

By 1861, when Louisiana seceded from the Union, the religious situation in Louisiana had changed a great deal. At the end of the antebellum period, Catholics were no longer in the majority in most parishes of the state, although they were still an extremely influential segment of the population. Protestant denominations of nearly every variety could be found even in the former Catholic bastion of New Orleans. At the same time, the number of religious bodies had exploded, going from just a few understaffed Catholic institutions in 1803 to over 300 churches listed in the 1860 census.\textsuperscript{12}

My dissertation will fill a significant gap in the study of antebellum southern religion. It moves beyond a focus on a single denomination or group of denominations

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to examine all of the religious varieties that existed in Louisiana and the ways in
which they interacted. While asserting the importance of religion for southern society,
many historians have neglected to look at the actual practices and uncover what they
meant for society. By looking at religion and the ways that residents of Louisiana ex­
perienced it, not only on a daily basis but also during the major milestones of life, I
hope to come to a greater understanding of the ways in which they structured their so­
ciety and interacted with it.

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The ritual that many Louisianians held in common and participated in most frequently was the weekly church service. It is difficult to determine precisely how many people attended worship each week, however. Church membership lists, when extant, tell only part of the story because many more people were present at services than actually joined the church. While the 1850 and 1860 censuses included information about the number and seating capacity of religious institutions in each parish, these numbers do not give an accurate picture either. Each group reported its own statistics, a practice that leads to suspicion of inflated numbers. Also, the number of people that a church could seat is not necessarily the same as the number of people who attended. Theodore Clapp's church in New Orleans, for example, was often full to capacity, while Jesse Wright observed a Baptist meetinghouse in the same city “not so much as a fourth part filled.” Scholarly estimates are that roughly one third to one fifth of the antebellum population attended church on a regular basis, while even fewer joined.  

All Judeo-Christian groups shared the same basic elements of worship, which included prayers, singing, and a sermon by the minister or rabbi. Within that framework, however, considerable differences existed that could significantly affect the religious experiences of members and other attendees. Many Baptists and other evan-
gelicals, for example, disapproved of organized choirs and organ music. In these bodies, the entire congregation joined in singing hymns. In other churches, however, a subset of members or professional musicians sang and played while the congregation listened. Music was just one element that could vary widely among religious groups.  

Among Christian groups, a convenient division can be made between liturgical and evangelical churches. Liturgical denominations, which included the Catholic, Episcopal, and Lutheran, were inclusive in membership, a trait that stemmed from their background as state churches. They did not insist upon any tests of faith or experience before a person could join the church, and they practiced infant baptism, which brought children of members in to the fold as well. These religious bodies based their services on a fixed liturgy of prayers, creeds, and hymns that called for the participation of the entire congregation at varying points. Although sermons were a significant part of the service, they were only one portion of a larger whole.  

Evangelical denominations, including Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Campbellite, and many other smaller sects, believed in the need for a conversion experience and had exclusive memberships based on only those who had undergone the change. At Mount Nebo Baptist Church, for example, “those only are to be admitted . . . who upon profession of their faith have been baptized by Immersion.” Others might attend, but they were not seen as part of the community of believers. Their services were much more loosely structured, and the sermon served as the focal point. Evangelicals were much more likely to refer to their services as “preaching,” and they generally disapproved of creeds. Alexander Campbell, for example, called them “heretical and
schismatical." Instead, members of evangelical denominations relied on their common bonds of belief to foster feelings of community.\(^4\)

Both evangelical and liturgical denominations offered their own opportunities for congregational participation. In evangelical churches, the emphasis on individual salvation brought members into public view as they shared their experiences. Many churches, like Mount Nebo Baptist in St. Tammany Parish, New Salem Baptist in Livingston Parish, and Hephzibah Baptist in East Feliciana Parish, required prospective members to undergo conversion and testify to that event before the congregation. At Hephzibah, Mary Morgan shared her religious experiences in August of 1827. Others – including William and Malicha Kerby, Nancy Lee, Nancy Felps, Hetty Brown, Margaret Woodward, and Sarah Roberts did the same. Joel Ott and his wife, along with Sarah Muzzy, John Tunnage, and William Slocum “came forward and declared what the Lord had done” at Mount Nebo. In 1837, J. A. Dearborn, a Baton Rouge minister, introduced Henrietta Barton to his congregation, and she gave her history. In Covington, Kittie and Mary Fate, two young girls in their teens, both “joined the church and professed religion.” When Ann Raney Thomas joined a new Methodist church near her home, she felt an obligation “to set the first example of not being ashamed of my Savior, but to confess him before men.”\(^5\)

Some of the same methods of participation were open to slaves as to whites. In evangelical denominations, slaves testified to their conversion just like other members of the congregation. At Hephzibah Church in East Feliciana Parish, Sely and Jane, two female slaves, spoke of their experience and were received into the fellowship in July of 1814. In later years, many other enslaved people, including Cherry, Dicy, Harriet,
Lightonbo, Jacob, Pamela, June, Flora, Jemima, Soocky, and Betty, also related their conversion and became members. At Mount Nebo, the congregation received Martin, Peter, Thomas, and Jacob. Many evangelical churches like Mount Nebo and Hephzibah welcomed slaves as long as they had undergone the requisite spiritual conversion.6

On the other hand, the congregational participation in the prayers and creeds of liturgical services allowed laymen and women – as part of the larger church body – to feel a strong sense of community and involvement. Especially in the Roman Catholic, Episcopal, and Lutheran churches, worship followed a set pattern, and all members joined in answers to the minister, prayers, and recitation of creeds. In 1839, on a visit to Natchitoches, Episcopal bishop Leonidas Polk found “the responses were fully sustained throughout the entire service” by all members of the congregation. Maria Inskeep discovered that involvement in the Episcopal liturgy gave her a feeling of kinship, not only with the other members of her church, but also with her sister, whom she knew was reciting the same prayers and creeds in another state each Sunday. According to Inskeep, “I feel sure that our souls are united in our devotions.” Felix Poche also felt comforted by the fact that wherever he traveled, the Catholic mass would always include “the same prayers which we, ever Sunday, read together in our parish church.” Through their responses, parishioners helped shape and sustain the service and claimed full participation in it.7

Many free blacks, especially in New Orleans, were Catholic, and observers often noted them among the most frequent churchgoers. Benjamin Latrobe attended a service at St. Louis Cathedral while visiting New Orleans, and he stated that African-American women made up at least half of the congregation. St. Augustine’s Church in
the lower part of the city also had a substantial number of black parishioners. The New Orleans Catholic churches were not officially segregated, although many required African-Americans to sit in separate sections or take communion after all whites had done so. For example, while observers like Joseph Holt Ingraham and Frederick Law Olmsted reported that black and white worshipers sat next to each other at the Cathedral, St. Augustine’s had seats set aside in the aisle for slaves. In Natchitoches, black worshipers also had to wait until all whites had taken communion before they could receive the sacrament.⁸

Despite evidence of racial prejudice and an absence of African-American clergy responsive to their own needs, the nature of the Catholic service gave black worshipers a real sense of participation. Like white members of the congregation, African-Americans helped sustain the service with their responses. Benjamin Latrobe observed many black men and women – both slave and free – participating fully in a mass at St. Louis Cathedral, for example. The Sisters of the Holy Family were a group of free black nuns in New Orleans who encouraged other members of their community to take part in the liturgy and singing at St. Augustine’s church, where many free people of color worshipped. They believed that such involvement brought a feeling of community and belonging among parishioners.⁹

At the same time, despite the unifying nature of the service, liturgical denominations faced conflict among members. In Louisiana, this strife generally centered on ethnic questions. The issue of what language to use tore several Catholic churches apart. Although the mass itself was conducted in Latin, members of Catholic congregations naturally wanted to hear sermons in their own tongues. In Baton Rouge, the longstanding custom was to alternate every other Sunday between French and
longstanding custom was to alternate every other Sunday between French and English. The 1843 decision of Father Joseph Brogard to offer French sermons only once each month set off a fierce controversy. In New Orleans, groups built separate churches, as when Irish and German Catholics raised money for St. Patrick, St. Mary’s Assumption and other churches located in immigrant enclaves. In smaller towns, however, separate churches for ethnic groups were not possible. Some churches therefore attempted to compromise. St. Joseph’s church in Baton Rouge, for example, offered both English and French services each week during the 1853 Lenten season, a time when the city’s Catholics were most likely to attend. The Catholic church was the one most affected because most Episcopalians came from Anglo-American or British backgrounds, while Lutherans were almost exclusively German. Only Catholic congregations contained French and Spanish Creoles along with Irish and German Catholics.10

Evangelical churches also faced internal conflicts. In religious bodies based on the spiritual equality of all members, class issues often intruded. Nancy Willard wrote scornfully about a Methodist woman who was loath to give up dancing. Ordinarily, that would have been enough to get her suspended, but, as Willard observed, “she is rich and that hides many sins in this World.” Willard was disgusted that wealth would make such a difference in a church that stressed equality.11

For many denominations, conversion was a primary goal. This led to attempts to sway members of other denominations. J. B. Hall, a staunch Presbyterian, regarded the addition of two Catholics and two Methodists to his church as “quite a victory.” He also reported the conversion of two Baptists. According to Hall, his church had “a commission to kill all the sects,” and “we therefore spare none.” When Priscilla Bond
married and moved to her husband’s hometown, the staunch Methodist received several visits from the Episcopal minister in an effort to convert her. Even those denominations that usually did not actively seek converts rejoiced when a new member joined. A Franklin resident, for example, informed Episcopal minister Charles Hilton that his daughter wished to leave the Catholic faith and join the Episcopal church. Hilton congratulated the man heartily and hurried to meet with the girl.

Most Protestant sects seemed particularly bothered by Catholicism and spent much of their effort trying to convert Catholics. On a trip to Natchitoches, James Giles described Catholic residents as “worshipping the Pope and the Devil.” W. A. Scott, a Presbyterian minister in New Orleans, called for missionaries to help convert Catholics as a way to advance “moral principle.” In 1846 C. P. Clarke began a church in the First Municipality of New Orleans, “the French part of the city.” A Protestant minister, Clarke hoped to attract many converts among the Creole population. During Annie Jeter’s childhood in New Orleans, she was never allowed to attend a Catholic service because “my father was very much opposed to them.” Kate Sully of Mandeville faced opposition from several family members when she became a member of the Catholic church. Her father forbade her to go to confession, although Sully was determined to fulfill all of her duties as a devout Catholic.

For Christians, communion served as the focal point of many services. The members of Hephzibah Church saw it as an occasion upon which they, “by the most sacred us of bread and wine, are to commemorate together the dying love of Christ.” As the word indicated, the ritual was designed to bring the congregation together through their shared beliefs and the powerful symbolism of eating and drinking to-
Although Christians recognized the importance of communion, most did not partake of the sacrament every week. Catholics had the obligation to confess their sins and receive the host at least once a year. Felix Poche made a solemn determination to take the sacrament as often as possible, but his intention did not include weekly communion. Even when they did not partake of the bread and wine, however, Catholic worshippers at St. Louis Cathedral “profoundly adored this . . . visible presence of the Savior” during the service. Many churches appointed special days as their communion season, and they only administered the Lord’s Supper at those times. During the two years that she spent in Monroe, Caroline Poole recorded only three opportunities to take communion there. At Salem Baptist Church in Livingston Parish, the rules of order stipulated that communion be offered “once a year or oftener if it is required.” The leaders of Hephzibah Church in East Feliciana Parish, for example, “resolved that the Church Commune three times a year (viz) March, July, and November. The congregation made communion so infrequently because the act must be “pre-ceeded always by solemn self-examination.”

The number of regular and occasional communicants was far smaller than the number of people who professed membership or affiliation with a church. Maria Marshall reported that of the many people who attended an Episcopal service near Shreveport, only she and her aunt took communion. As the examples above show, many people felt that they must prepare themselves sufficiently for the solemn ritual of the Lord’s Supper. Too frequent a presence at the communion table could indicate that a person did not take the sacrament seriously enough. On the other hand, many Louisianians were simply indifferent. In Cocoville, Mother Mary Hyacinth of the Daugh-
ters of the Cross found that only three hundred people out of a total Catholic population of ten thousand bothered to fulfill their yearly Easter duty of confession and communion.17

For Catholics, first communion was one of the most significant rituals in a person's life, bringing him or her into full participation in the church. Boys and girls prepared carefully for the service, and they received illustrated cards that served as lifelong mementoes of the occasion. Celine Fremaux spent months preparing for her first communion, and "I began to think more seriously of things religious." She sewed her own dress for the mass, and the family ordered special shoes and a candle from New Orleans. A wreath and veil completed the ensemble. Fremaux remembered the day as a momentous day in her life and religious development. In Cocoville, students of the Daughters of the Cross went on a retreat before the first communion mass, which their families attended. According to the nun who oversaw the process, the "girls were at the height of their happiness" when they finally received the bread and wine. Samuel J. Peters experienced his first communion as an adult after marrying a Catholic woman and converting to her faith. She and other close family members participated in occasion, which held great significance for Peters.18

The first experience of the Lord's Supper was an especially momentous event, even for Protestants. Luther Tower accompanied his close friend to church for the occasion of his first sacrament in a Methodist church, and both men recognized its importance. Ann Raney Thomas remembered her first communion, also during a Methodist service, vividly in her memoirs. She represented the event as a turning point in her life that transformed her practice of religion from mere form to true dedication and
belief. In the Inskeep family, the daughters prepared carefully in Sunday school classes for the time when they would receive the sacrament. Communion was not to be taken lightly among churchgoers in antebellum Louisiana, nor did they feel the need to rush into the practice. Instead, they generally waited until their own faith could "lead in good time to the Holy Communion."¹⁹

Of the evangelical denominations, Baptists insisted upon closed communion. This practice meant that only adherents to that sect could take communion in a Baptist church. Regarding themselves as true believers among heretics, they did not wish to pollute their rituals by allowing others to take part. Other evangelicals, however, criticized this stance as unchristian. W. P. Ford, although a Baptist minister, invited all who had been baptized by immersion to receive at his church, and he regarded criticism of his actions to be contrary to the law of God." Ford believed that opening communion to others than just Baptists was fulfilling his duty as a minister of the Word and would create more harmony among the denominations. Henry Marston, a Presbyterian, called the Baptist policy "very unchristianlike & uncharitable." The debate over closed communion raged throughout the antebellum period and was one of the main issues that divided Baptists from other evangelical groups.²⁰

Even denominations that opened their communion to all Christians instituted another form of restriction when administering the Lord's Supper, however. It was a common practice in both Catholic and Protestant churches for all whites to receive the sacrament before black members were allowed to approach the table. In 1843, the wardens of St. Martin's Church in St. Martinsville decreed that that worshipers must retain strict segregation during communion and cautioned African Americans "not to
presume to make themselves equal to whites.” Instead, blacks had to wait until all whites had partaken of the bread and wine before they could do so. By isolating black communicants, white church leaders lessened the spiritual and social intimacy that arose from eating and drinking together as a community of believers.21

Although individuals and families generally pledged allegiance to a single denomination and church, large numbers of people attended other institutions with surprising frequency. Clarissa Town lived in Baton Rouge with her daughter and son-in-law, an Episcopal minister. Although the family worshiped together at St. James church most Sundays, Town went to the Presbyterian church with no qualms when Episcopal services were not available. She drew the line there, however. On the rare occasion that neither the Episcopal nor Presbyterian churches offered preaching, Town stayed at home. In New Orleans, Henry Marston heard discourses from a Baptist and a Presbyterian minister in the course of one day. Another resident of that city, Maria Inskip was a devout Episcopalian who relished opportunities to attend Christ Church. On occasion, however, bad weather prompted her to go to a Methodist church that was closer to her home. Similarly, Matilda Waters belonged to the Baptist church “but on account of the inconvenience of attending its worship in a distant part of the city,” she regularly went to Felicity Street Methodist Church. Luther Tower, also a New Orleans resident, attended most of the city’s major churches, including the Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist, Unitarian, and Episcopal on a regular basis, although he considered himself a member of the First Presbyterian Church. For a large number of Louisianans, denominational affiliation did not prevent them from attending devotions at other churches as well.22
In rural areas and small villages, it was often impossible for a person to attend the service of his or her choosing. Episcopal churches, for example, were located primarily in New Orleans and the state's larger towns like Baton Rouge and St. Francisville. Eliza Anne Robertson, who lived in Iberia Parish, had been raised an Episcopalian, but there was no church near her home. She therefore attended Methodist services, and even those were only available every other week. At the end of 1854 Robertson lamented, "I have not heard an Episcopal sermon for nearly a year." In Monroe, Caroline Poole and other residents attended preaching at the courthouse whenever a minister came to the town. Sometimes they heard a Methodist, and at other times a Baptist. James and Mary Carr also went to whatever services were available in Clinton, including Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist. In rural northern Louisiana, the members of the Marshall family and their neighbors all went to church on the rare occasions when a minister passed through, "irrespective of creed, or of the creed of the preacher." Rural Louisianians of many different denominations took advantage of every opportunity to attend devotions, even if it meant attending a church other than their own.

Louisianians attended worship for many different reasons. Of course, spiritual development and the desire to praise God were extremely significant. Marsh Scuddeo saw weekly devotions as a time to "pour out our heart in supplication to God for ourselves and others" and sought religious growth through his attendance. Henry Marshall found that one of Theodore Clapp's sermons "caused me to reflect more seriously upon my own conduct." Finally, Julia Nash observed that attendance at devotions inspired "a true resolution to serve God" in her. There is no doubt that the pri-
mary function of religious services was to inspire devotion and spiritual growth. At the same time, however, other elements factored into the reasons that people went to church and what they got out of their experiences.24

Worship also served to strengthen family ties, especially when members were separated from each other. In 1849, Henry Lawrence traveled to New Orleans while his wife remained at home. He missed her company a great deal and wrote, “I think often and fondly of thee my darling wife when at church and wish that thou wert by my side.” Maria Inskeep, too, was reminded of absent relatives while at devotions. When Caroline Poole traveled from New England to Monroe to work as a governess, church services “recalled associations connected with home both solemn and pleasing.” Felix Poche found that attendance at mass brought visions of his wife and the many times they had prayed together during that ceremony.25

Other reasons also existed. Many people found a social outlet in church. After regaling his business partner with an account of a friend’s wedding, John Dick reported, “I have not seen a lady since I came to town.” Dick was hopeful for his prospects, however, because “tomorrow is Sunday so I mean to go to church & to make up a dozen visits.” The editor of the Southern Advocate rhapsodized about his visit to Concord Baptist Church, asking, “who . . . would wish to be elsewhere . . . when . . . he can mingle in social converse with his friends, see the ladies in their pretty attire.” Church served as an ideal place to meet a spouse, especially if similar religious beliefs were a priority. Louisianians, especially those who lived in isolated rural areas, also relished the chance to meet friends and catch up on the local news.26
Similarly, worship services served as entertainment in many cases. E. Andrews, for example, regretted that he and his wife had not attended church recently, but he reported looking forward to the preaching of a traveling minister. On a trip to New Orleans, Benjamin Latrobe went to St. Louis Cathedral with “the hope of hearing good and affecting church music.” Mary Hyacinth Le Conniat believed that Catholics in Avoyelles Parish went to mass only for entertainment. She reported that they went to church “as though to a spectacle.” One New Orleans man admitted that he went to services at the First Presbyterian Church in order to hear the preacher’s “natural eloquence,” even though he found the doctrines expressed to be “revolting.” He stopped visiting that church when a new minister took over because “there is nothing to interest me in your manner.”

Some Louisianans hoped to derive intellectual benefit from weekly devotions. Kate Stone attended one sermon that touched on various historical subjects, including the fall of Rome and Napoleon. In many cases, however they were disappointed. James Edward enjoyed a sermon he heard Francis Hawks of Christ Church deliver, but, to Edward’s dismay, Hawks “Displayed more elegance than profundity of thought.” On another occasion, Edward complained, “never have I heard a sermon with so little theology” after a visit to Theodore Clapp’s church. Finally, although Thomas Pollock enjoyed the discourses of the Presbyterian minister in Shreveport, he found the man and his sermons “of limited intellectual range.”

At other times, simple curiosity served at the motivating factor. According to Theodore Clapp, his Unitarian church in New Orleans attracted a number of people who came in order “to listen to the novelties of an heretical pulpit.” Visitors to the city
ranked a service in his house of worship as something they must experience, along with amusements such as the theatre and opera. During a trip to New Orleans, James Giles made a visit to St. Louis Cathedral, although he was not impressed by the mass. In 1842, Ellen Martin reported, "I am going to one of the Roman Catholic churches this afternoon to see the ceremony." Eliza Anne Robertson and two friends also attended a Catholic mass, wishing to learn more, but "we did not understand any of the service." When Orlando Adams went to school, his mother instructed him, "you must tell me how you like the Catholic church and their ceremonies and what kind of churches the Baptists and Presbyterians have." Living in the country, she could not go to these places, but she hoped to hear about them from her son. The Catholic church was most visited by the curious, especially new residents to New Orleans and southern Louisiana who had little experience with that faith.29

When unable to attend regular worship, many Louisianians felt extremely disappointed. While living at Fort Jackson, Eliza Berry lamented, "no church in this place sunday after sunday no sweet bell calling us to repair to the temple of the Most High." A young woman visiting her brother in Velasco also complained about the lack of churches in the area. Although the family had their own weekly devotions, she missed hearing "the word of God – from his own ministers." In 1854, Jared Sanders received from his father, urging him and his brother to go to church "every sabbath." The boys' father lamented, "we have no minister as yet" and hoped that his sons would take advantage of their "great privilidge." For Jeff McKinney, the dearth of Baptist churches was "the gratest objection that I hav" to living in Alexandria. For both personal and
spiritual reasons, many felt their lives lacking when regular services were unavailable.\textsuperscript{30}

Of course, large numbers of residents rarely or never attended church with few qualms. This occurred for a wide variety of reasons. Some rejected organized religion and its ceremonies. Henry Kirby did not attend services because he could "not persuade myself of the utility." In Avoyelles Parish, Mother Mary Hyacinth of the Daughters of the Cross found that most Catholics did not feel that the church held any relevance for their lives. They had lived for so long without a resident priest that they saw no need to begin attending church when one settled in Cocoville.\textsuperscript{31}

Weather, illness, fashion, or a more enticing option also took their toll on church attendance. In early 1848, John Robert Buhler reported that his houseguest stayed home while the rest of the family went to devotions because "she complains of a headache." A month later, Buhler's wife Mary stayed away because she had no clean gloves. According to Kate Stone, her brother declined to accompany the family to church one Sunday because "his coat was not quite good enough." Similarly, Clara Solomon and her sisters skipped synagogue because "we had no new bonnets." Bad weather and shopping trips also got in the way of their plans to attend. Mary Carr also found that rain interfered with her ability to go to church.\textsuperscript{32}

Others used their absences from church to protest a particular minister. By refusing to be present at certain times, church members made their dissatisfaction clear. While visiting his father, John Robert Buhler almost never went to church in order "to avoid hearing Simon," a minister he disliked. During the summer of 1844, Madaline Edwards arrived at Theodore Clapp's church to find him absent. Upon learning that a substitute would read a printed sermon, which Edwards stated, "I can
substitute would read a printed sermon, which Edwards stated, “I can not endure,” she got up and returned home. Edwards believed that she had better things to do with her time than listen to a poorly-delivered discourse. Eliza Anne Robertson, too, absented herself from church attendance when “I heard that Mr. Jenkins was going to preach.” She could not stand his sermons, and “I could do better by staying at home.” Nancy Willard, who lived in rural Bossier Parish in northern Louisiana, found all of the nearby churches unsatisfactory and stated, “I hardly ever go to Preaching and when I do I hear so little that I care to hear that it is hardly worth the trouble.” According to Willard, “it does me more good to stay at home and read my Bible.” Although all of these people valued their religious experiences and looked forward to the opportunity to attend worship with other members of the community, they believed that their own devotions benefited them more than a sub par service.

On the other hand, Louisianians considered a good sermon to be worth great inconvenience. While he took great pains to avoid the minister at his father’s church, John Robert Buhler made strenuous efforts to attend the sermons of a minister he admired. Calling the appearance of Mr. Purviance in a New Orleans church “too rare a pleasure to be forfeited on acc’nt of a little rain & mud,” Buhler and his wife braved a winter rainstorm in order to be present. Mary Moore “dragged out” to church in order to hear a new minister, despite unpleasant weather. John Allen traveled to another town when he heard that “the celebrated Dr. Graves” would give a sermon. Although the trip involved difficult travel through the countryside of northern Louisiana, Allen was not disappointed by the three and a half hour discourse.
Just as they could pick whether or not to attend services, Louisianians could also choose which church to patronize. In most cases, of course, family, tradition, and belief influenced the choice. Antebellum observers believed, however, that fashion and status also played a part when some people chose a church. While visiting New Orleans in 1820, V. M. Randolph contrasted the Presbyterian church, where the minister gave a good sermon and donated half of his salary to charity, with the Episcopal church, which was “elegantly ornamented” and whose rector “loves good cheer.” The fashionable of the city preferred the latter institution, and Randolph observed, “ladies dress to fine & perfume too much.” He found the “great deal of finery about the communion table” distasteful. According to Theodore Clapp, “the aristocratic among us” generally chose “a fashionable place of worship on the Lord’s day morning, to gratify a love of dress, to indulge that wicked, pitiful vanity.” The editor of *The Comet* in Baton Rouge also believed that fashion determined which church some segments of society attended.35

As Catherine Clinton notes, choice of denomination was one of the few areas of autonomy available to antebellum women. The editor of the *Baton Rouge Comet* recognized that female members of the community possessed the power to choose their own congregation, although he attributed their choices to “variety.” Ann Raney Thomas, raised an Episcopalian, converted to the Methodist church while living on the Louisiana frontier. Thomas even persuaded her husband, a lifelong Baptist, to join the Methodists a few months before his death. Kate Sully became a Catholic while at school, and continued to practice that religion after her return home, despite serious opposition from her family. According to Sully, “they don’t like it a bit about my be-
ing one, but I reckon they will have to become accustom to it, for go to confession and
communion I will if I have to fight the Old Scratch himself.” At the end of the antebel-
lum period, Priscilla Munnikhuyse[n Bond reported to her mother that the local Epis-
copal minister was trying to convert her, but “I fear I am too far gone a Methodist for
that.”36

Bond herself noted, however, that she was considering a change to the
Presbyterian church. Recently married and living with her husband’s family, Bond
wanted to fit in. Janet Crawford, a member of the First Presbyterian Church of New
Orleans did change her church when she married an Episcopalian. The influence of
her Methodist husband pushed Cilistine McLain to convert from Catholicism. Clearly,
not all women felt completely free to choose their own denomination. Subtle pressures
to conform affected some, while others had to deal with more overt opposition. Sully
faced the active disapproval of her family members, who tried to keep her from
attending services. In a similar situation, Henrietta Barton’s staunchly Methodist
friends and family tried to keep her from joining a different church. Despite
opposition, both Sully and Barton persevered, as did many other women, to determine
their own religious affiliations.37

In all but the Catholic church, members of the congregation chose the minister.
A process designed to bring the entire congregation together, calling a pastor carried
the potential for conflict if portions of the body felt that a few prominent members
were controlling the search. The bylaws of Christ Episcopal Church in Napoleonville
put the vestry in charge of calling a rector, “they having due regard in such election to
the previously ascertained wishes of the members of the Congregation and especially

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of the Communicants of the Church.” Although this system allowed for the involvement of all who attended Christ Church, it favored those who participated more fully and regularly in services. St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church in Pointe Coupee restricted decision-making power to those members “who shall have owned or hired a pew . . . for one year, or shall pay annually unto the treasury . . . a sum of not less than Five Dollars.” Members received “one vote for each sum of Twenty dollars subscribed and paid.” The wealthy clearly had an advantage in choosing a new minister and other church matters.\(^{38}\)

In other cases, leaders acted when they noticed a trend among their fellow parishioners. At Christ Church Episcopal in New Orleans, for example, the rector’s poor health made satisfactory completion of his duties impossible. The vestry noticed that “the congregation . . . has been gradually falling off and has now almost deserted the Church.” In order to reverse this action, they asked for James Hull’s resignation. It is doubtful, however, if such a move would have been tolerated in a more democratic denomination, such as Hephzibah or Salem, Baptist congregations that required the approval of the entire body before ministers could be appointed or dismissed. A similar situation in which a group of church members grew to dislike their minister and dismissed him resulted in a schism that divided the small town of Grosse Tete. Those who attended occasionally but were not members, a group that made up about three-fourths of the congregation, “immediately formed an opposition party . . . and swore the church should not be ruled by the members alone.”\(^{39}\)

Although men most commonly handled these matters, a few women made efforts to shape their local churches to their own requirements. In Iberville Parish, for
example, a group of women led by Mrs. Dickinson became dissatisfied with their minister. They stayed away from services for a while but missed the practice of regular worship. Dickinson soon learned that a young preacher living in a nearby town was available. Enlisting the financial support of several prominent members of the congregation, she hired the young man, causing a rift in the church but also securing a satisfactory pastor for her needs. Although Mrs. Dickinson certainly was an exceptional case, she illustrates the determination that many women had to claim their place in institutional religion.  

Although the Catholic hierarchy appointed all priests, Catholic churches did not escape conflict over ministerial appointments. During the antebellum period, New Orleans was the scene of several rifts between the marguilliers, or lay trustees, and the bishop. Early in the American period, newly-appointed Bishop William Dubourg found himself denied access to his cathedral by the trustees, who supported the much-loved but highly antagonistic Father Antonio Sedella. Eventually, Dubourg won control of his cathedral, but the problems did not end. When Abbe Louis Moni, who had served St. Louis Cathedral since 1819 died in 1842, the marguilliers nullified Bishop Blanc’s appointment of Etienne Rousselon as a replacement. They also enlisted the local French-language newspapers to spread their argument that Americans had the right to choose their own priests. The battle raged for two years before new parish elections brought marguilliers who supported the bishop. In other towns, marguilliers also protested when they did not approve of an appointment. Having accepted American ideal of self-determination and autonomy from external authority, Louisiana Catholics protested the ability of the bishop to select their leaders. In every case, how-
ever, the rebellion eventually failed, and the power of the Catholic hierarchy remained intact.41

White Louisianians were not the only ones with the power to choose their denominational affiliations. Both free blacks and slaves also exercised authority in this matter, although sometimes curtailed by circumstances. Freedom of choice was never absolute for African-Americans, no matter their legal status. Some slaveholders, for example, forbade any kind of religious activity among their workers. Mary Reynolds recalled, "we never heard of no church," on her master’s plantation. Ceceil George also remembered that her owner did not allow his slaves to attend a church. Other slaveholders insisted that their slaves go to white churches, where they worshipped under close supervision. According to Polly Shine, her master “made us go every time they had church.” On his plantation, William Mathews’ master stopped at each cabin to round up all of the slaves for worship on Sunday mornings. Similarly, Catherine Cornelius’ owners required all of their chattel to attend the Episcopal church along with them.42

At other times, slaveholders hired a minister to preach on his or her plantation. Both Franklin Hudson and the owner of Bayside Plantation brought local preachers in once a month to conduct services for their slaves. Leithan Spinks also recalled that his master made a similar arrangement on his plantation. In many other cases, a planter or member of his family conducted services for slaves. William Ford, for example, read and explained the Bible to his slaves each Sunday. His brother-in-law Peter Tanner did the same. None of these situations was designed to offer slaves any choice in the matter.43
Despite limitations, however, slaves often went to extraordinary lengths in order to control their religious lives. Ella Washington recalled that her owner did not allow slaves to have their own meetings, but “we sneaks off and have pot prayin’.” Mary Reynolds and other slaves on her plantation did the same. Despite the danger of capture, she and her family also slipped off to a neighboring place for prayer meetings. Reynolds also remembered services in the cabins on her own plantation, during which slaves would “pray with our heads down low and sing low.”

Restrictions also existed for the free black population of Louisiana. Although they had no masters to dictate a certain religious affiliation, state and local governments sometimes acted to limit choices. In 1848, the first African Methodist Episcopal church opened in New Orleans. It quickly drew a congregation of over 1500 people and became a significant institution in the free black community. Ten years after its establishment, however, the city of New Orleans outlawed independent black religious groups and shut the church down. Devout women and men were not to be deterred, however. Evidence exists that members of the African Methodist Episcopal church continued to meet clandestinely through the last years of the antebellum period and the Civil War.

Once they had chosen a denomination to their liking, some church attendees reacted audibly to sentiments expressed during a sermon. In 1844, Madaline Edwards was a member of Theodore Clapp’s church in New Orleans. When he gave a sermon on the duties of men in May of that year, Edwards felt so overcome by Clapp’s words and their relevance to her own situation as the mistress of a married man that she began to cry. Caroline Poole reported, “now and then you might hear a groan of approba-
tion run around the assembly” when she attended services in Monroe. When they felt touched by the ideas presented in a sermon, many Louisianians did not hesitate to show their feelings openly and in public.46

Many free blacks also voiced their opinions during the service. In the 1850s while traveling in the South, Frederick Law Olmstead slipped into a Protestant African-American church in New Orleans. Seated in the gallery with three other white people, Olmstead observed that the ministers and remainder of the congregation were black. As the preacher delivered his sermon, both male and female members of the audience began to utter expressions such as “That’s it, that’s it!” and “Oh, yes!” At the climax of the sermon, an elderly woman began dancing and clapping. The minister tried to continue his sermon, but as her religious enthusiasm spread to others, he conceded and the entire congregation broke out into song.47

Like other Louisianians, slaves were often active, rather than passive, participants in the service. They vociferously indicated their approval when the preacher expressed a satisfactory sentiment and did not hold back when they felt moved by the spirit. Elizabeth Ross Hite recalled that she and other slaves preferred their own devotions to those organized by the master because “you could not shout and pray like you wanted to. Dats what I call religion, prayin’ and be free to shout.” She also noted, “dere was more religious women dan men.” Sarah Wilson reported that while attending a racially-mixed church, she and other members –both black and white – would “git happy an’ shout” during the sermon.” Similarly, Orelia Franks remembered participating in the emotional shouting and singing that took place during plantation worship.48
All behavior during services was not religious, however. Attendees often slept, talked, and otherwise disrupted sermons. During a visit to St. Louis Cathedral, Joseph Holt Ingraham noticed worshipers talking, laughing, and flirting. Ingraham himself attended merely to watch the priests and congregation, not to participate in the mass. He and his companion arrived in the middle of the celebration and walked through the crowd of kneeling worshipers in order to find a good observation point. The editor of the *Louisiana Democrat* criticized the citizens of Alexandria for leaving early and admonished, “if one doesn’t intend to remain and witness the conclusion of the services he should stay away.” Caroline Poole felt “much annoyed by children crying,” and she was also horrified when a mother nursed her baby in church. College student Thomas Bowie rarely paid attention during services, except on the rare occasions when he sat next to his mother. At other times, he read novels, napped, and “sat in the pew with Miss F. and did nothing all the time but squeeze her hand.” Designed to inspire solemn devotion and all-consuming faith in attendees, services often failed to keep them either awake or attentive.49

Antebellum Louisianians were also honest critics of the religious services they attended. On many occasions, they approved of the preaching and rituals they attended. C. L. Van Ness found both Theodore Clapp and Francis Hawks to be “very eloquent speakers,” and described his attendance at their churches as a “great pleasure.” After the conclusion of her church’s communion season, Asenath Copes Phelps reported to her father, “we were all much pleased with the sermon.” Similarly, in January of 1859 Mary Folger noted “a most excellent sermon” from her church’s regular minister in her diary. Eliza Anne Robertson went even further, calling one preacher
“the best I ever heard” and declaring, “no one could listen to him without feeling that they will try to be good.” In Bossier Parish, John Allen had long looked forward to the visit of a minister from Tennessee. He “expected much... and was not disappointed” with the three and a half hour sermon. Madaline Edwards, a regular attendant at Theodore Clapp’s church in New Orleans who often recorded her impressions of the services. In October of 1844 she remarked that he delivered “a glorious sermon.” Early in the following year, Edwards found Clapp’s discourse “excellent” and “could find nothing in todays to cavil at.”

At other times, however, they found much to criticize, especially with regard to sermons. When Madaline Edwards attended a Methodist church rather than Clapp’s, she noted, “to hear him (a luminary too) after Mr. C is like drinking slops after the richest wines.” E. P. Ellis found one New Orleans pastor satisfactory but overrated, while Nannie Roberts believed that her minister “preached a very dull sermon.” During a trip to visit relatives, Sarah Ker Butler observed, “I have been to church several times, but heard only 2 sermons that pleased me.” In 1843, her sister-in-law Sarah Butler attended devotions with a cousin. Two ministers preached, and Butler came back unimpressed with their efforts. In a letter to her sister, she complained, “I never saw any one try so hard to cry and succeed as badly a they both did in my life.” In 1860, Eliza Rives reported that the sermon she heard while visiting her mother “was not as good as it might have been, upon so interesting a subject.” A member of a New Orleans synagogue, Clara Solomon also critiqued the services she attended. On one occasion, she recorded, the rabbi’s “discourse possessed no interesting points, and seemed to fail of its intended object. I am not at all pleased with him.”
African-Americans also stated their judgment of ministers and services to friends and family. While visiting New Orleans, Benjamin Latrobe overheard a group of free people of color discussing the Mass they had just attended. While one man praised the new priest and his ability to recite the liturgy, a woman in the party disagreed. She preferred one of the other priests and compared his voice to a bell. Growing up on a plantation, Clara Brim recalled that the man who conducted church meetings for William Lyons's slaves "was a good preacher." Similarly, Alice Cole approved of most preachers who gave sermons to her and other slaves on James Henson's place, but not all of them. In all of these cases, the pastor was white, but black attendees felt no qualms about voicing their opinions.52

One thing most likely to bring criticism was political preaching by ministers on issues that had no clear moral angle. Many Louisianians believed that men of the cloth should stay out of more worldly matters such as politics. The editor of *The Baton Rouge Gazette and Comet* declared "the introduction of local and party politics into the pulpit" to be "one of the ugliest features in the distorted physiognomy of the times." While they tolerated calls for laws to protect the Sabbath or discussion of other religious issues, church members generally wanted their pastors to remain above the tumult of party politics.53 In addition to preaching, the service itself also garnered criticism. While Anna Butler disliked a service featuring "long extemporaneous and rambling prayers and sermon" that made her long for the structure of the Episcopal liturgy, Sarah Wright found the orderly Episcopal service boring. At St. Louis Cathedral, James Giles wondered at the "superstition" of the Catholic church, as exemplified by practices such as the sprinkling of holy water on the congregation.54
Even though most criticisms circulated privately among friends and family, word could get around about a certain minister or church. By the time Kate Adams had a chance to hear the new preacher in her area, her acquaintances were already comparing him to his predecessor. According to Elise Ellis, when residents heard that Mr. Wall was preaching at the Episcopal church in Terrebonne Parish, “few persons will enter until it is ended.” One of Mary Jane Robertson’s friends reported that Father Lameudie had been present at a nearby church, and while her family did go to church for the benediction, they did not attend Lameudie’s sermon because Robertson had already warned her about his dismal performance in Plaquemine. John Hamilton reported that one minister’s performance was not “so bad as was represented,” but another had so alienated locals “that there is scarcely any that comes to hear his sermons.” Clearly, word of mouth played a significant role in alerting community members to a particular church or minister’s merits and shortcomings.55

Seating at devotions can give important clues about Louisiana society and its values. The ways in which people ordered themselves while at worship also shows how they ordered their social relationships. In many institutions, members were required to rent or buy pews. In Houma, Richard Butler paid one hundred dollars every year to rent a seat at St. Matthews Episcopal. Jean Baptiste Gerchaud bought a pew at his St. James Parish church for fifty dollars, a sum the planter could easily afford. In 1835, when construction was completed on the New Orleans First Presbyterian church, Maria Bryan Harford noted that the building “is crowded on Sabbath to over-flowing.” Although “at present the seats are free,” Harford reported that the institution would soon hold a sale of pews. She fervently hoped that her husband would buy one,
“or we shall be excluded entirely.” At the Dispersed of Judah Synagogue, Clara Solomon and her sister were appalled when they arrived to find that their names had been removed from their customary places. Their father, absent on business, had been unable to pay the rent, and Clara found it “most unpleasant to go without having a seat, particularly always being accustomed to one.” Theodore Clapp criticized this practice, arguing that it kept the poor from receiving the benefits of religion. He even went so far as to claim, “churches are constructed on purpose to shut out the poor.” Clearly, the practice of selling or renting pews weeded out those who could not afford the price and served to homogenize the congregation in terms of wealth.56

Many churches depended on the income from pews to cover operating expenses. In 1816, when Christ Church completed a new building in New Orleans, a local newspaper estimated that rent on the pews would bring an income of two thousand dollars each year. This money was in addition to the thirteen thousand dollars raised by auctioning off sixty-one of the seventy-two pews.57 Some churches, however, made a point of providing free pews. Evangelical denominations, which stressed the equality of all believers, were less likely to sell or rent seats. At his own church, Clapp reserved a portion of the seating for visitors and those who could not afford to rent a pew. The Dispersed of Judah Synagogue also had places at the back for those who had not rented their own, but Clara Solomon found them “very uncomfortable, and far inferior to the ‘front row.’” The message was conveyed that places of worship, like society as a whole, placed a high value on wealth.58

In some places of worship, men and women sat in separate sections. This practice occurred most notably in Jewish synagogues, but many Christian – especially
evangelical — churches segregated the sexes as well. This custom emphasized the
gender differences and separate roles that existed for men and women in Louisiana
society. More often, however, seating was arranged in family groups, thus illustrating
the importance that people placed on the institution.59

Seating was often segregated by race or condition. In the 1820s, Plains
Presbyterian Church built a special gallery for black members. Hephzibah Church also
built an addition for African-American members during that decade. According to
Mary Scranton, black Catholics in Lafayette had to sit at the back of the church, while
whites sat at the front. At St. James Episcopal in Baton Rouge, black members did not
attend morning services, but seats were provided near the doors at the back of the
church for servants of the white members. Except for some of the Catholic churches of
New Orleans, religious bodies that allowed black members separated black worshipers
from white with galleries, special sections, or by making them sit outside, as William
Mathews experienced.60

Many slaves and free people of color attended white churches along with white
members of the community. Alice Cole remembered that “slaves did not have a
church of their own but the white folks didn and they always had a place fixed there
for us.” Sarah Benjamin recalled that her master would bring slaves with him when he
went to church, and they sat in an arbor outside the building while whites worshiped
inside. Clara Brim attended both services and Sunday school at her master’s Methodist
church. Pauline Johnson and Felice Boudreaux went with their mistress to mass every
Sunday and on every holy day. As noted above, some masters even required that
slaves attend church with them.61
Other enslaved people went to special services separate from those for whites but under the supervision of white churches. Several New Orleans churches including the Methodist and Episcopal opened mission churches for the city’s African Americans. Marsh Scuddeo attended one such service, in which an elderly slave led prayers “for blessings upon Africa, upon their pastor, and the missionary.” In Baton Rouge, St. James Episcopal organized afternoon services for the slaves of its members, as did nearby Plains Presbyterian Church. Matthew Thomason, a Methodist circuit rider who served Houma, Tigerville, Thibodaux, and Algiers in the years leading up to the Civil War, also delivered sermons to slaves on Sunday afternoons. This practice was common among Louisiana churches. Often, slaves heard a different message than the whites who worshipped in the morning. Thomason, for example, preached about the doom of Babylon and the new paradise from the twenty-second and seventeenth chapters of Revelation to his white listeners, while slaves heard a sermon taken from Genesis, which stressed obedience to God.62

On many plantations, masters either hired white preachers to minister to their slaves or performed the services themselves. Richard Butler, for example, paid G. W. Stickney fifty dollars to preach to his slaves. Harriet Meade employed a minister for several years to serve her workers’ religious needs. On the Ker family’s plantation, an ordained minister served as tutor to the white children during the week and preacher to the slaves on Sunday. John McDonogh built a brick church on his plantation near New Orleans where a neighbor spoke to the slaves on the Sabbath. Both Franklin Hudson and the owner of Bayside Plantation brought local preachers in once a month to conduct services for their slaves. Leithan Spinks also recalled that his master made a simi-
lar arrangement on his plantation. In many other cases, a planter or member of his family conducted services for slaves. William Ford, for example, read and explained the Bible to his slaves each Sunday. His brother-in-law Peter Tanner did the same. In northern Louisiana, James Carson had the local pastor minister to his slaves, and if the clergyman was unavailable, "he or one of the boys reads a sermon, hymns, and the bible to them every Sunday." 6

On occasion, a slaveholder granted permission for his workers to attend services on another plantation in the area. In the summer of 1840, Bennet Barrow noted in his diary that he "gave the negroes permission to go over to Robt. H. Barrows to preaching." Barrow also observed, however, that he rarely granted such favors, and he viewed this trip as a special treat for his slaves, not as a regular custom. On a later date, he denied permission for another trip to the same location. Chris Franklin's master also allowed slaves to travel to other plantation in order to attend religious meetings. Masters were less likely to grant permission for excursions like these because they generally did not encourage worship outside their own oversight and control. 6

Many members of white society believed that religion had a salutary effect on slaves. Clarissa Town, whose son-in-law was a minister, maintained that frequent attendance at church "makes them much better servants and more easily managed." Others believed that Christianity would help create bonds between slaves and their masters. The editor of the Louisiana Baptist argued that African Americans were "more susceptible of religious influence" than whites and urged their instruction in Christian doctrines. 6
Others believed that slaves had no need for religion, and many slaveholders even felt that Christianity would have a negative effect on their workers. Bennet H. Barrow, for example, blamed the disobedience of his neighbor’s slaves on “his having them preached to for 4 or 5 years past – greatest piece of foolishness anyone ever guilty of.” He believed that slaves were too ignorant to understand the true tenets of Christianity, especially when so many churchgoing whites exhibited false and hypocritical religion. Henry Bibb reported that although his master was a deacon in a Baptist church, he often expected slaves to work on Sunday and rarely allowed them to attend religious service. Generally, Bibb’s master permitted only elderly slaves – beyond both labor and revolt – to participate in religious activities. Alphonse Field recalled that his master did not allow church on his plantation, and Fields had no religious experiences until after Emancipation.67

Of course, whites also saw the need to supervise slave religion. One planter stipulated in instructions to his overseer that “no negro preachers but my own will be permitted to preach or remain on any of my places.” He also demanded that they white minister who came each Sunday must finish his services by sundown and that slave meetings end by ten p.m. The editor of the Feliciana Democrat argued that a slave “should be required to attend the same church with the family to which he belongs” and called for all independent black religious activity to be halted. This editorial appeared in 1857, shortly before the city of New Orleans banned all African-American religious bodies. In 1859, Hephzibah Church in East Feliciana Parish, which had always had several enslaved members, formed a special committee to oversee those members. In addition to providing religious instruction for slaves, at least two mem-
bers of the committee were required to attend the monthly services that Hephzibah
sponsored for its black members “and see that they deport themselves in a proper
manner.” At the same time, Louisiana – like other southern states - was toying with
methods to reduce the numbers and autonomy of free blacks. Clearly, the political cli­
mate of the late 1850s made whites nervous about any kind of independence among
African Americans, whether it was personal freedom or their own church.68

Masters also hoped to control the message that slaves received at church. Ser­
mons given by whites to slaves often harped on the theme of obedience. According to
William Mathews, all he and other slaves heard was “obey de marster, obey de over­
seer, obey dis, an obey dat.” Slaves believed that such sermons omitted the true nature
of Christianity, and they recognized that ministers were not likely to preach on sub­
jects that would incur the wrath of slaveholders.69

For these reasons, a large number of slaves, however, preferred their own ser­
vices. As Mandy Rollins observed, “sure, we had a church on de plantation. We
couldn’t do like we wanted to while we was dere.” Slave-organized meetings gave
them the opportunity to worship as they wanted, rather than following the dictates of
the slaveholder. Sometimes these meetings took place with the knowledge and permis­
sion of the master. Mary Stirling reported that two of her slaves had formed “an inde­
pendent church” that attracted most of the other workers on her plantation. Osborn, a
man who belonged to Joseph Copes, organized worship for Copes’s other slaves, and
he worked vigorously to ensure their participation. For his part, Copes knew of the
meetings and encouraged them. In addition to the neighbor who came each week, two
of John McDonogh’s enslaved men preached on his plantation. Pierre Landro hired a
free black man to give sermons on Trinity plantation on a weekly basis. William Lyons took those who wished to church with him each Sunday, but he also allowed a slave to conduct regular prayer meetings.  

In many cases, however, slaves had to hold prayer meetings in secret. At Trinity plantation, the slaves “wanted to pray all the time,” not just on Sundays. They built “our own church in de brickyard way out on de field,” where the slave Mingo conducted services every night. In order to avoid detection, they prayed in the dark. The slaves had to keep their meetings a secret from their master because Landro “didn’t want us to have too much religion.” Landro believed that frequent participation in worship services would use time and energies that his workers should devote to farming. Henry Bibb slipped off his master’s plantation in order to attend a service, despite the realization that he would be whipped if caught. Sarah Benjamin, too, recalled that slaves had to conduct their meetings without the knowledge of the master and post guards to look out for the master.  

Although Protestant slaves could appoint one of their own to serve as a minister and therefore hold religious meetings even if the master did not provide a spiritual outlet, Catholic slaves faced a different situation. Despite church rules requiring slaves to attend church, many Catholic slaves were denied regular access to mass. Mary Scranton, for example, recalled that while her master had all of his slaves baptized in Lafayette, they were rarely able to worship in the Catholic faith. When the priest made trips to the plantation, he “neber come t’see d’cullud folks a ‘tall.” Many slaves like Peter Ryas and Joseph James complained that although their masters attended church regularly, slaves were not allowed to do so. Father John Marie Odin observed of
southern Louisiana, "most of the French do not wish to hear about instructing their slaves... often they do not even permit them to go to church." A number of white Protestants also bemoaned the unwillingness of Catholic planters to allow their slaves full participation in religious services. John McDonogh blamed the religious indifference of Louisiana Catholics for their unwillingness to allow participation in church rites by slaves. Of course, this was an issue that depended upon the whim of the individual master, as McDonogh himself realized. At the same time, the structure of the Catholic church meant that slaves could not easily improvise their own masses. Because of this, some began attending Protestant services.72

When holding their own services, slaves could identify with a black preacher and feel more certain that his message was true Christianity, not the wishes of the master. Mary Reynolds recalled that when she and her parents slipped off the plantation to attend a nearby prayer meeting, the leader "told us that a day would come when Niggers only be slave of God." At the same time, enslaved ministers had strong ties to their flocks because of their shared condition. These elements prompted most slaves to prefer black pastors to white.73

These secret devotions featured one of the most notable rituals transferred from African religion: overturning a pot to muffle the sounds. According to Ella Washington, slaves would carry a large pot out to the woods and gather around it. When a person wished to pray, he or she would "stick de head in it and pray." Similarly, William Mathews observed that each slave on his master's place would bring his or her own pot "to keep de echoes from getting back an' somebody hearing dem." On Richmond
Butler's plantation, slaves varied the practice. Lacking pots, they dug holes in the field and prayed into the holes.\textsuperscript{74}

The use of pots to muffle sounds was just one of many practices that merged Christianity with African rituals. Slaves who came to Louisiana stemmed from many different societies with a wide range of practices, but most scholars of African traditional religion agree that enough similarities existed among the various groups to discuss their religious beliefs as a whole. African traditional religion centered on a supreme deity, who was served by many lesser gods.\textsuperscript{75}

Voodoo, practiced in New Orleans and the surrounding area, contained many elements of African religion. Brought to Louisiana by refugees from St. Domingue in the late eighteenth century, voodoo incorporated both West African and Roman Catholic beliefs and rituals. Ceremonies centered on dancing to call zombi, the snake spirit and a wide variety of other saints or gods. The loose organizational structure of voodoo gave women the necessary room to become leaders, and during the nineteenth century, several women led voodoo practices in New Orleans, where slaves and free people of color would meet along the shores of Lake Pontchartrain at night to practice their religion. Marie Laveau was the most famous and one of the most influential leaders of Louisiana voodoo during the antebellum period. Certainly, much has been written about Laveau, both true and untrue. Everyone claims to remember her or to have attended her ceremonies. While she was not the all-powerful force depicted in many accounts, she was an extremely influential woman.\textsuperscript{76}

Born at the end of the eighteenth century, Laveau occupied the pinnacle of the New Orleans voodoo community, and in the postbellum period passed that position to
her daughter, also named Marie. The two women dominated the practice of voodoo, and according to some observers, fundamentally altered the rituals. They added worship of the Virgin Mary to the liturgy of voodoo and opened the religion to limited outside view, allowing many people to witness ceremonies for the first time. They also brought a commercial aspect to voodoo, selling charms and spells to wide clientele, both black and white. Marie Laveau and her daughter were not the only women to take leading roles in voodoo rituals, however. Sanite Dede, brought as a slave from Saint-Domingue, was one of the first priestesses, and she became prominent in the early nineteenth century. Marie Saloppe was another early practitioner who trained Marie Laveau. Betsy Toledano also worked as a voodoo priestess, using the knowledge that her grandmother had passed down to her. Voodoo also had many powerful male priests during the nineteenth century, but one cannot discount the extraordinary place that black women held in the religion.77

While voodoo – with its loose hierarchical structure and intense involvement by individuals – was primarily an urban sect, the isolation of most areas of rural Louisiana generally gave laymen and women more power to act in religious matters. For the entire antebellum period, much of the state remained unsettled, with few churches or established congregations. Upon arrival at Cocoville in 1856 to begin missionary work, Mary Hyacinth Le Conniat of the Daughters of the Cross found religious resources strained. Although she eventually planned to instruct a boy to take over the duty, for the present, she reported to her parents, “I answer the Masses.” In rural southern Louisiana, Ann Raney Thomas regretted the lack of churches near her, and
she arranged for an itinerant preacher — who happened to pass by on his way to another engagement — to hold services at her home.78

Traveling ministers rarely passed in many parts of Louisiana, however, and many people found themselves conducting services on their own. From daily family prayers to Sunday services read from the Book of Common Prayer, isolated women created religion where none existed. Mattie Marshall read the Episcopal service to her father and siblings each Sunday in northern Louisiana, for example. In the southern part of the state, Jane Chinn engaged her children in “scripture reading, hymn singing, and evening prayers” each night. The Ker family employed a preacher as the children’s tutor, and he generally led services on Sundays. On occasion, however, Mr. Hart was unavailable, and Mary Ker led worship that included “a sermon two hours long.” One woman, living with her brother in desolate Velasco, lamented the family’s inability to attend regular services. She tried to make up for the void with “prayers and family worship,” but the experience was not the same. As this example shows, laymen and women did their best to supply the rudiments of religion in isolated areas, but they sorely missed organized church attendance and the ability to worship with other believers.79

Although churches sprang up relatively quickly in New Orleans, visitors, especially from New England, often found a scarcity of places of worship. When visiting New Orleans during the 1830s, for example, Joseph Holt Ingraham noted that New Orleans had “but one church to every three thousand and two hundred inhabitants, the estimate, for the most religious nations, being a church and clergyman for about every one thousand of the population.” A decade later, A. Oakey Hall commented, “not a
New England town but contains more churches.” They were also shocked by the lack of upkeep. Ingraham also observed that the Episcopal church was overgrown with weeds and seemed deserted. Another Protestant church he encountered was equally dilapidated. To many visitors, all of these observations suggested that Louisianians— and more precisely New Orleanians—did not value religion as highly as residents of other parts of the country.80

At the same time, visitors and recent residents in New Orleans complained continually about the lack of respect Creoles paid the Sabbath. It was a significant point of conflict between Creoles and Protestant Americans because Catholicism did not insist upon abstinence from leisure activities on Sunday after the obligation to attend mass had been fulfilled. Upon arriving in New Orleans, Marsh Scuddeo remarked, “you have no idea of the wickedness of this place.” He described artisans at work and theaters open on Sunday, as well as military drills and horse races. Similarly shocked, Clement Watson compared Sunday in the city to any regular weekday. According to John Dunlap, “nearly every thing that is termed amusement takes place on Sunday,” a circumstance that was unheard of in his native Maine. Because “the Catholicks go to Church in the morning and . . . go to the Theatres in the evening,” James Neale called New Orleans “the most abominable place on earth.” Similarly, Samuel Gray observed that “vital piety is a commodity less sought after than cotton, flour, pork, sugar & molasses.” He was horrified to learn that even the mayor attended balls and committee meetings of Sunday. Finally, George Endicott called New Orleans “in a moral point of view a vile place.” This kind of criticism traveled far, and New Orleans garnered a national reputation for Sabbath-breaking. Before Thomas R. R. Cobb
ever visited the city, he stated, “I have heard often of the desecration of the Sabbath in this city.”

New Orleans was not the only community to incur the disapproval of new arrivals. Down river from the city in Plaquemine Parish, Tryphena Fox noted that they Creoles “are generally indolent and none of them have the least respect for the Sabbath.” Card games, gambling, dancing, and hunting were the primary occupations on that day. In sugar-producing St. Mary Parish, the editor of the *Planters' Banner* noted “but five churches in the parish, while we have seven grog-shops and gambling houses.” The congregation of Hephzibah Church in East Feliciana Parish suspended G. W. Catlet for buying pigs on Sunday. In Mount Lebanon, a local editor called for a convention of church members to meet and devise a solution “to keep the Christian Sabbath from profanation,” which he considered a statewide problem. By 1852, the editor of *The Daily Comet* congratulated the citizens of Baton Rouge for the “the great change for the better in the observance of the sacred Sabbath,” although some businesses remained open on that day.

Church leaders also entered the debate. In 1846, W. A. Scott of the First Presbyterian Church in New Orleans gave a sermon “on the necessity and propriety of observing the Sabbath” from an economic point of view. He maintained that keeping Sunday as a day of rest refreshed workers and allowed them to accomplish more on the other six days. Caleb Dow, an Episcopal minister, called on his diocese to place its official stamp of disapproval the established practice among sugar planters of working on Sundays during the grinding season. According to Dow, “like an avalanche this practice goes crashing down through the whole framework of society.” In an address
before a Connecticut audience, Joel Parker - pastor of a New Orleans Presbyterian church - held up Sunday military reviews as evidence of the contempt that the city’s residents had for the Sabbath. On the other side of the issue, Theodore Clapp grew to respect the Catholic position during the decades that he worked in New Orleans. He believed that Catholicism, unlike many Protestant churches, produced constant religious feeling rather than Sunday-only piety. Clapp pointed to the example of a Creole woman who prayed each day in her own chapel and structured her days around the rituals of the church. In this context, Clapp believed that leisure pursuits on Sundays did not lower the moral tone of the Catholic population.83

Marsh Scuddeo blamed southern Louisiana’s disregard for the Sabbath on “the great number of French and Spanish.” He, like many others, hoped that the large numbers of Protestant Anglo-Americans moving into Louisiana would rectify the situation. At the beginning of the 1820s, Benjamin Latrobe believed that the intermarriage of Creoles and Americans would eventually mitigate the custom of merrymaking on Sunday, although he saw little short-term effect. Leonidas Polk, while missionary bishop for the southern region, expressed the belief that “the rapid advance of the American population upon the French, produces an annual increase of minds accessible chiefly to protestant influence.” In 1841, the editor of the Crescent City noted fewer stores open on Sunday and optimistically remarked, “the pure American spirit is doing away with the looseness and recklessness of the ‘ancien regime.’” Nearly two decades later, just before the outbreak of the Civil War, however, Thomas Cobb found “the streets are crowded with carriages & omnibuses – the shops are all open – the people busy in traffic” in addition to military drills, balls, and horse races.84
Both local and state governments made attempts to insure what they believed to be proper respect for the Sabbath. Benjamin Latrobe reported a bill by the state legislature in 1819 that would have outlawed dancing and commerce on Sunday. That attempt failed, as did similar bills at the local level. Many Louisianians who deplored what they saw as profanation of a sacred day believed that government regulation was the wrong solution. The editor of the Baton Rouge Comet, for example, rejoiced when more business owners seemed to curtail their Sunday operations. At the same time, however, he opposed the efforts of the city council to enact “Sunday Ordinances” because “all reforms of a permanent character are voluntary.” The editor of the Louisiana Baptist also opposed “prohibitory laws” and instead proposed that a convention of church members gather in order to devise a solution. Rather than get the government involved, many editors and ministers hoped to sway public opinion enough that people would simply stop working and playing on Sundays.

Many individuals did go to considerable lengths in order to avoid what they saw as desecration of the Sabbath. As a child, Mary Martin “was pious & would not let Father buy her fruits on the sacred day,” despite the examples of widespread commercial activity in her hometown of New Orleans. In northern Louisiana, Esther Eliza Wright petitioned her father to close his store on Sunday. Unlike most other sugar planters, Episcopal bishop Leonidas Polk refused to work his slaves on Sundays during the grinding season, despite the fact that observance of the Sabbath meant reduced profits and spoiled cane. These efforts meant little, however, when a large portion of the population acted in the opposite way.
Other Anglo-Americans, however, adjusted easily to the customs of southern Louisiana. Thomas Bolling Robertson called the juxtaposition of “half a dozen sermons” with fireworks and theater performances “balanced,” and he expressed neither shock nor disapproval. Samuel Walker expressed a small amount of guilt over the way he spent his Sundays, but he also realized, “we are not more holy from being on that day long-faced or serious.” In addition, Walker saw hypocrisy in those who called for strict observance of the Sabbath but failed to act in a Christian manner during the rest of the week. Frederick Ruffert, too, criticized “people who are very pious; but only on Sundays.” Jacob Bechtel observed that the Catholic custom of attending mass in the morning and leisure activities in the afternoon was as valid as the practices of “the most devotional people at the North.” One Saturday in West Feliciana Parish, Bennet Barrow grew irritated when his houseguests wanted to stop dancing at the stroke of midnight. To keep the party going, he locked the doors, “but dance they would’ent.” These examples show that the simplistic Creole/Protestant dichotomy cannot explain all aspects of Louisiana society.88

For their part, Creoles often resented interference they saw as overly-strict and hypocritical. They maintained that “the Sabbath is, literally, as the term imports, a day of rest, and not a day of religious labor.” They also saw Protestant criticism of their Sunday activities as part of larger efforts to erase French and Spanish influences on Louisiana culture and society.89

Among the city’s Jewish residents, observance of the Sabbath could also be a thorny issue. Because the Jewish Sabbath fell on Saturday, it was much more difficult to avoid labor on that day. For Clara Solomon, observing the Sabbath meant missing a
day of school. Each week, she had to make up the work that her classmates had done on Saturday. Although she continued to absent herself from school on the Sabbath, Solomon resented the extra work that the practice caused her. She also felt that missing Saturday classes was causing her to fall behind the other girls in her class. Solomon and her sisters went on shopping trips and promenades on the Sabbath along with other members of the New Orleans Jewish community. Many did not attend synagogue every week and treated Saturday more like a regular day than a holy time.\(^9\)

Although a common ritual among Louisianians of every class and ethnic group, the weekly worship service contained the potential to cause a great deal of conflict among the varied groups that made up the state’s population. Each denomination had its own requirements for devotions and often discounted the beliefs of other sects. At the same time, however, participation religion provided inhabitants with a sense of belonging and worth. Of course, church attendance meant different things to everyone, but it clearly had a significance above the purely spiritual. It provided people with entertainment and fellowship and reinforced the values that they held.

End Notes


6 Hephzibah Church Books, 14 July 1814, 12 August 1827, 6 June 1830, 7 April 1832, 29 July 1832, 10 November 1832, LLMVC; Mount Nebo Baptist Church Minutes, 30 October 1830, 3 July 1841, 30 November 1841, 25 December 1841, LLMVC.

7 Leonidas Polk to Board of Missions, 17 May 1839, Leonidas Polk Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina (hereafter SHC); Maria Inskeep to Fanny Hampton, 22 April 1837, Fanny Leverich Eshleman Craig Collection, TU; Felix Pierre Poche Diaries, 2 August 1863, TU. As Tamar Frankiel has noted, ritual brings empowerment through participation. See Tamar Frankiel, “Ritual Sites in the Narrative of American Religion,” in Thomas A. Tweed, ed., *Retelling U.S.*


12 J. B. Hall to Joseph S. Copes, 25 May 1853, Joseph S. Copes Papers, TU; Priscilla Munnikhuysen Bond to her mother, 27 February 1861, Priscilla Munnikhuysen Bond Papers, LLMVC. See also Wills, Democratic Religion, 93; Walter Brownlow Posey, Religious Strife on the Southern Frontier (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), 23.

13 Diary of Rev. Charles Hilton, 17 April 1865, TU.

14 James Giles to Annabella Giles, 4 December 1838, Giles Family Papers, SHC; Scott Sermons, 10 August 1843; C. P. Clarke to Harriet Severence, 2 February 1846, C. P. Clarke Letters, LLMVC; Annie Jeter Carmouche Memoirs, TU; Kate
Sully to Mary Jane Robertson, 28 June 1861, Mary Jane Robertson Papers, LLMVC. See also Posey, *The Baptist Church in the Lower Mississippi Valley*, 135-136.


19 Luther Field Tower Diary, 9 August 1846, LLMVC; Ann Raney Thomas Memoirs, Thomas Papers, TU; Maria Inskeep to Fanny Hampton, 29 April 1861, Craig Collection, TU.


22 Clarissa Leavitt Town Diary, 15 May 1853, 10 July 1853, LLMVC; Henry Marston Diary, 16 March 1856, Marston Papers, LLMVC; Maria Inskeep to Fanny Hampton, 21 December 1856, Craig Collection, TU; Obituaries, 5 April 1850, Lafayette, Andrew Chapel, and E. Steele Chapel Charge Records, TU; Luther Field Tower
Diary, 12 January 1845, 26 January 1845, 30 January 1845, 13 September 1845, 1 February 1846, LLMVC.


25 Henry Lawrence to Frances Lawrence, 4 March 1849, Brashear and Lawrence Family Papers, SHC, *Records of Ante-bellum Southern Plantations*, ser. J. pt. 5; Maria Inskeep to Fanny Hampton, 22 April 1837, Craig Collection, TU; Padgett, ed., "A Yankee School Teacher in Louisiana," 663; Felix Pierre Poche Diaries, 2 August 1862, TU.

26 John Dick to Benjamin Farar, 9 June 1821, Benjamin Farar Papers, LLMVC; *Trinity Southern Advocate*, 5 November 1853.


29 Clapp, *Autobiographical Sketches*, 251; James M. Giles to Annabella Giles, 10 November 1838, Giles Family Papers, SHC; Ellen G. Martin to Elizabeth S. Martin, 23 March 1842, Elizabeth S. Martin Letters, SHC; Eliza Anne Robertson Diary, 11 March 1855, Eliza Anne Robertson Papers, SHC, *Records of Ante-bellum Southern Plantations*, ser. J. pt. 5; Eliza Adams to Orlando Adams, 20 January 1856, Israel Adams and Family Papers, LLMVC.

30 Eliza U. Berry Travel Diary, 14 January 1831, Eliza U. Berry Papers, SHC; ? Sanders to Jared Y. Sanders, 3 March 1854, Jared Sanders and Family Papers,
LLMVC; Jefferson McKinney to Jeptha McKinney 8 May 1846, Jeptha McKinney Papers, LLMVC.

31 Henry Kirby Diary, 12 March 1854, Sereno Taylor Papers, LLMVC; Mary Hyacinth Le Conniat to Yves-Marie Le Conniat, 25 August 1856, in McCants, ed., *They Came to Louisiana*, 44.


34 John Robert Buhler Diaries, 2 February 1851, LLMVC; Mary Moore to John Moore, 20 July 1858, David Weeks and Family Papers, LLMVC; John Allen to William Allen, 18 October 1859, William A. Allen Correspondence, LLMVC.


36 Catherine Clinton, *The Other Civil War: American Women in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1999), 43. *Baton Rouge Daily Comet*, 14 December 1853; Ann Raney Thomas Memoirs, Thomas Papers, TU; Kate Sully to Mary Jane Robertson, 28 June 1861, Mary Jane Robertson Papers, LLMVC; Priscilla Munnikhuysen Bond to her mother, 27 February 1861, Priscilla Munnikhuysen Bond Papers, LLMVC.

37 Priscilla Munnikhuysen Bond to her mother, 27 February 1861, Bond Papers; First Presbyterian Church Record Book, 4 July 1858, TU; Obituaries, 6 July 1850, Lafayette, Andrew Chapel, and E. Steele Chapel Charge Records, TU; Kate Sully to Mary Jane Robertson, 28 June 1861, Mary Jane Robertson Papers, LLMVC; J. A. Dearborn to John Gano, 28 November 1837, Dearborn Letter, LLMVC. For dis-
cussion of pressures on women to conform to their husbands' religion, see Heyrman, *Southern Cross*, 201-202.

38 "Articles of Association, 10 January 1853, Christ Episcopal Church Minute Book, LLMVC; Constitution and By-laws of St. Stephen's Church, 10 February 1855, Albert A. Batchelor Papers, LLMVC.


40 John Slack to Hall Slack, 11 July 1854, *ibid.*


51 Upton, ed., *Madaline*, 249-250; E. P. Ellis to Emily Ellis, 13 February 1837, E. Ellis Papers, LLMVC; Nannie Roberts to Josephine Smith, 17 April, 1855, Abishai W. Roberts Papers, LLMVC; Sarah Ker Butler to Mary Ker, May 1850, Ker Family Papers, SHC; Sarah Butler to Anna Butler, 25 October 1843, Anna and Sarah Butler Correspondence, LLMVC; Eliza Rives to Thomas Benjamin Davidson, 27 November 1860, Thomas Benjamin Davidson Papers, SHC; Ashkenazi, ed., *Civil War Diary*, 300. See also Eugene D. Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "The Religious Ideals of Southern Slave Society," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 70 (spring 1986): 13.


54 Anna Butler to Sarah Butler, 12 March 1854, Anna and Sarah Butler Correspondence, LLMVC; Sarah Wright to Augustus Wright, 14 August 1857, Wright-Boyd Family Papers, LLMVC; James Giles to Annabella Giles, 10 November 1838, Giles Family Papers; SHC.

55 Kate Adams to Orlando Adams, 2 March 1856, Adams Papers, LLMVC; Elise Ellis to Anna Butler, 5 January 1847, Anna and Sarah Butler Correspondence, LLMVC; “218” to Mary Jane Robertson, April 1862, Mary Jane Robertson Papers, LLMVC; John Hamilton to William Hamilton, October 1819, 13 March 1839, William S. Hamilton Papers, LLMVC.


68 James O. Breeden, ed., Advice Among Masters: The Ideal in Slave Management in the Old South (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), 232; Clinton Feliciana Democrat, 14 February 1857; Hephzibah Church Books, 5 March 1859, LLMVC.


76 H. E. Sterx, The Free Negro in Ante-Bellum Louisiana (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1972), 265. A large number of interviewees of the Louisiana Writers’ Project in the 1930s and 1940s, for example, claim to have seen Laveau or to have personal ties to her. See the narratives of Octavia Fontenette, Anita Fonvergne, and Joseph Jeffrey, in Clayton, ed., Mother Wit, 73, 78, 127. Other examinations of Laveau and voodoo include Robert Tallant, Voodoo in New Orleans ([1946]; Gretna: Pelican Publishing, 1983); Henry C. Castellanos, New Orleans as it Was: Episodes of Louisiana Life, ed. George F. Reinecke (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 90-101. See also Raboteau, Slave Religion, 75-77

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79 Maria Southgate Hawes Autobiography; Jane McCausland Chinn Reminiscence, LLMVC; Mary Susan Ker Journal, 7 April 1850, John Ker and Family Papers, LLMVC; A. H. W. P. to Fredrica Pearson, October 1834, A. H. W. P. Letter, HNOC.


81 Marsh Scuddeo to Charles Scuddeo, 20 December 1846, Scuddeo Letter, LLMVC; Clement Watson to George Watson, 26 November 1844, Watson Family Papers, TU; John Dunlap to Beatrice Dunlap, 22 December 1844, Dunlap Correspondence, TU; James P. Neale to Emily Neale, 20 March 1838, James P. Neale Letter, TU; Samuel Gray to Samuel Merrill, 1 January 1848, Samuel Gray Collection, HNOC; George Endicott to Eliza Endicott, 7 March 1834, Antebellum Letter Collection, HNOC; Thomas R. R. Cobb to William Mitchell, 9 May 1858, Thomas R. R. Cobb Papers, SHC.


84 Marsh Scuddeo to Charles Scuddeo, 20 December 1846, Scuddeo Letter, LLMVC; Latrobe, ed., *Journals*, 175; Leonidas Polk to Board of Missions, 17 May
1839, Leonidas Polk Papers, SHC; New Orleans Crescent City, 11 December 1841; Thomas R. R. Cobb to William Mitchell, 9 May 1858, Cobb Papers, SHC.

85 Latrobe, ed., Journals, 176.

86 Baton Rouge Daily Comet, 5 September 1852; Mount Lebanon Louisiana Baptist, 1 January 1857.


90 Ashkenazi, ed., Civil War Diary, 300, 318-319, 412.
Sundays were not the only occasions when members of a congregation came together to worship. Holidays occurred throughout the year and provided reasons for celebration with others. While some like Christmas, Easter, and other Catholic feast days had religious origins, others were state-sponsored events that took place primarily in churches. Whatever the origin, however, all holidays offered a break from the normal routine and offered Louisianians the chance to devote time and energy both to God and to each other.

Christmas was often seen as the high point of the year for Christians. It commemorated the birth of Jesus Christ, and the celebration of the day generally stretched for several days or weeks. Many Louisianians exchanged modest presents on Christmas. Raymond Fox gave his wife writing paper and a small clock in 1860, while she received a lace collar from her in-laws. Among the Creoles of Louisiana, French customs prevailed during winter celebrations. Christmas was a solemn day, often devoted to mass and private devotions rather than merrymaking. The Fremaux family, for example, did not exchange gifts on Christmas. Instead, they attended mass to mark what they called “a Religious Feast Day.” In Breaux Bridge, the priest reported large crowds at the Christmastime masses in 1849.

Along with the religious observance of Christmas came gift giving and visits on New Year’s Day. Celine Fremaux and her siblings considered January 1 to be “our
Gift-day.” Many Anglo-Americans, too, followed a tradition of gift giving on New Year’s Day rather than on Christmas. In early nineteenth century America, the period between Christmas and New Year’s Day was a time of generalized celebration, and the exchange of small token gifts was included. While some families, like the Fremauxs, might prefer to give presents on New Year’s Day and others, like the Foxes and the family that Elizabeth Powell worked for near New Orleans, exchanged gifts on Christmas, there was no strict pattern for society as a whole.3

Many Louisianians also attended church on New Year’s Day. As devout Catholics, the Fremaux family made a point of participating in the special mass conducted on January 1. Catholics were not the only churchgoers on the first day of the year, however. In New Orleans, Luther Tower went to a New Year’s service in a Presbyterian church. Worship services gave worshipers a chance to reflect on the previous months and helped set the proper tone for the upcoming year. Celine Fremaux considered going to mass “the best way to begin the year.”4

Like Francophone Catholics, Episcopalians generally attended church on Christmas Day, although they did not view the holiday as purely a religious one. In Terrebonne Parish, Elise Ellis and her family did not participate in any parties, and they marked the day by “going like good children to church.” The Wilkinson family of Plaquemines Parish attended Christmas services conducted in their plantation’s chapel by the local Episcopal minister. English customs of visiting and gift giving also prevailed among Louisiana’s Episcopalians. Once they had attended worship, the Wilkinsons exchanged presents among family and friends and hosted a lavish Christmas
party. In this way, Episcopalians like the Wilkinsons blended both religious and secular Christmas traditions.\textsuperscript{5}

Catholic and Episcopal churches followed the custom of decorating with greenery for the holiday. John Robert Buhler reported in 1848 that the Episcopal women of West Baton Rouge Parish were “busily engaged” decking the building with greenery two days before Christmas. In Terrebonne Parish, Elise Ellis described her church as “beautifully dressed” with four large wreaths and a center bunch of evergreens hanging from the ceiling. Luther Tower and Jacob Bechtel both noticed that the Episcopalians in New Orleans also brought greenery into their houses of worship in preparation for the holiday. Bechtel and others believed that the adorning of churches at Christmas was an appropriate way to pay homage to their Savior, and they scorned those denominations that did not mark Christmas “by appropriate testimonial . . . that the remembrance of that auspicious event is constantly fresh and green.”\textsuperscript{6}

In Britain and its American colonies, Puritans and members of other Calvinist denominations had erased Christmas from their calendars. Deeming it a heretical and wasteful holiday, they did nothing to set it apart from any other day, not even to attend worship services. By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, however, many Calvinists, even in New England, began marking December 25 in some way. Most often, the day was a time for family togetherness and devotion, but members of a church family also gathered on occasion. Thus, in Louisiana, members of some evangelical Protestant denominations attended church on Christmas as well as Catholics and Episcopalians. The differences between evangelical and liturgical commemorations of Christmas were considerable, however. The austere manner in which many
evangelical groups observed Christmas as a time for penitential prayer contrasted sharply with the more elaborate ceremonies and lush decorations of liturgical denominations. The congregation of Mount Nebo Baptist church designated Christmas Day, 1836, “as a day of Humiliation and prayer with fasting.” In New Orleans, Jacob Bech­tel observed with disapproval denominations that “from a too cold and formal renun­ciation of these graces of the holy Season suffer it to come and go unheeded.” 7

By the middle of the nineteenth century, however, even the austere religious nature of evangelical Christmas observances was giving way to a more secular cele­bration of the day, and many Louisianians of all denominations celebrated Christmas in an overwhelmingly nonreligious manner. Living on a plantation near New Orleans, Elizabeth Powell thanked “God for ever having given us a Christmas to commemo­rate” in her diary, but she also noted “it has been celebrated in this place, to-day by feasting.” To one observer, “egg noggs and ‘popping crackers’” were the most preva­lent symbols of the occasion. While many people, like the examples cited above, made church attendance a central part of the holiday, for countless others Christmas was a season set aside for visiting and parties. One young woman described “quite a merry Christmas,” including a dinner party with neighbors that featured tableaux and plenty of good food. On family of sugar planters hosted a number of relatives from out of state for the Christmas holidays. Their stay included several parties with the ubiquitous eggnog as well as boating trips and visits to and from friends and neighbors. For Ellen McCollam, Christmas of 1843 was “a very dull one no one here to dinner but my uncle.” She was used to much larger and more vibrant celebrations, such as the once experienced by James and Eliza McHatton. After exchanging gifts with family mem­
bers, they gave a ball that drew guests from neighboring plantations and nearby Baton Rouge and lasted well into the next morning.  

Especially for rural Louisianians, visiting was a significant part of the Christmas season. After perhaps months of isolation on farms, they had a chance to lay aside their work and spend time with family and friends. Tryphena Fox, living with her small family in sparsely populated Plaquemines Parish, often felt lonely and looked forward to holiday visits. When her father-in-law spent a few days with the Fox family just before Christmas, she reported to her mother, “I enjoyed his visit far more than I could tell you. It seemed so nice to have Somebody here, to talk with us & relieve the monotonous life.” When she had to spend Christmas day alone with her children, Fox felt “very lonesome,” although “if it had been any other day I should not have felt so.” Rural people looked forward to Christmas, therefore, not only for its religious meaning and gift giving, but also because the occasion broke the monotony and loneliness of everyday life.

Slaves, too, looked forward to Christmas as the highlight of the year. Many masters gave up to a week off from heavy labor in the fields, and slaves had time to relax, visit family, and attend the parties often given by local slaveholders. According to Frances Lewis, her master gave a big dinner on Christmas day, and each slave received a glass of eggnog. H. B. Tibbetts gave his slaves a week of vacation, and his wife believed “they injoy a Christmas week as much as it is possible for them to do.” The Tibbetts slaves celebrated with a supper and dance as well as several weddings. On the Knight plantation in Tensas Parish, Christmas also brought the celebration of many weddings. Solomon Northup reported that his master Edwin Epps allowed a
three-day vacation, but others in the Cane River area gave as many as six days off. In his experience, local planters took turns giving a lavish feast for all of the slaves in the neighborhood. The men and women dressed in their best clothes and gathered for a bountiful meal unlike their usual diet of pork and corn. The Christmas season also brought dancing, music, and “a little restricted liberty.” Alice Cole’s master, too, furnished “a good Christmas dinner” with “nearly anything a person could want to eat,” but Agatha Babino recalled “chicken and grease to make gravy and flour” as the only additional foodstuffs at Christmas.10

As the above examples show, visiting friends and relatives on neighboring plantations was a significant part of the Christmas celebration for slaves, just as for members of the white community. The season carried special significance for slaves, however, because their movement and free time were so heavily restricted during the rest of the year. Catherine Cornelius remembered the luxury of a week’s vacation to spend as she and other slaves pleased between Christmas and New Year’s. For many house servants, however, the Christmas season brought more, not less, work. Agatha Babino recalled that her master and his family often entertained houseguests at Christmastime, and “dat mean more cooking and sich.”11

Masters also gave gifts to their slaves. Bennett Barrow had pants made for his male workers. In addition, he purchased some trinkets for his slaves while on a trip to New Orleans and presented them on Christmas day. Frances Lewis’ master furnished slave children with stockings full of candy, a custom that Elizabeth Ross Hite also remembered. James McHatton gave small items such as handkerchiefs, pipes, and shoes to his slaves. Tryphena Fox presented her household slaves with shoes, sewing sup-
plies, and castoff clothing. In many cases, slaveholders used Christmas as a time to furnish slaves with clothing, blankets, and other necessary items. One of Fox’s servants, for example, was given her summer clothing as a Christmas gift. In this way, they sustained the image of themselves as paternal protectors without incurring heavy additional expenses.¹²

One of the most prevalent customs was that of “Christmas gift.” Although masters did give their slaves presents, workers also demanded them. According to Charles Slack, he was interrupted by “a negro at every moment peeping in and demanding his Christmas present. lucky for me this day comes but once a year.” Frances Lewis recalled that she and other slaves “greeted everyone in the Big House with ‘Christmas gift, Christmas gift.’” Tryphena and Raymond Fox, too, heard the familiar phrase from their slaves.¹³ As the custom of the Christmas gift shows, the holiday season was one during which the normal relationship of master and slave loosened somewhat. Slaves felt free to demand presents of their owners. The merriment and relaxation of Christmas helped slaves deal with the deprivation and hard work that they faced the rest of the year and helped masters retain effective control over their workers.¹⁴

New Year’s Day generally marked the end of the slaves’ holiday and return to work. Many masters also chose that day to distribute clothing for the upcoming year and small presents. Frances Doby recalled that her master stood on the gallery of his house on the first day of each year and gave all of the slave children picayunes. Alcee Fortier recalled that his family also presented clothing and food to their workers amid the exchange of New Year’s greetings.¹⁵ Occasionally, slaves would receive other
holidays as well. Eli Sanders of Mansfield gave his workers the Fourth of July off, as well as Christmas and New Year's Day. Albert Patterson also recalled that his Plaquemines Parish master mounted a barbeque for his slaves on Independence Day.\textsuperscript{16}

On sugar plantations, however, celebration of the Christmas holidays and New Year holidays was subordinate to the cane-grinding schedule. Ripe sugar cane must be quickly harvested and converted to juice before spoilage, and the process could not be interrupted for a holiday celebration. Generally, during the cane harvest, hands worked around the clock in shifts to finish the job. When grinding was complete, slaveholders gave their workers some time off, both to allow them to rest from their considerable exertions and to make up for any missed holidays. Like the normal Christmas to New Year span, special dinners, visiting, and gift giving marked this period.\textsuperscript{17}

Although the Christmas season was important to many in the nineteenth-century, Easter was regarded as the more spiritually significant holiday. It was generally a time for infrequently held ceremonies such as communion and confirmation. During an 1853 visit to Baton Rouge, Bishop Leonidas Polk visited St. James Episcopal Church on Easter Sunday, confirming three white members. He also celebrated communion, and later in the day, Polk confirmed several African-Americans. Several years earlier, Polk spent Easter in Natchitoches, where he baptized and preached to a large group, including many people who had traveled a considerable distance to be present. In New Orleans, Easter was also the time appointed for communion at Christ Church, while several Rosedale families had all of their children baptized on Easter, and many chose that day to take communion as well.\textsuperscript{18}
Not all Christian communities celebrated Easter, however. Many evangelical groups regarded Easter, like Christmas, as a suspect invention of Catholicism. They therefore treated Easter like any other Sunday. The members of Mount Nebo Baptist Church in St. Tammany Parish did not distinguish Easter from the other Sundays during the year, nor did Hephzibah Church in East Feliciana Parish. The day was not set aside for communion or any other special ceremony.\(^{19}\)

For Catholics and Episcopalians, the weeks leading up to Easter, as well as the day itself, had profound meaning. Lent was a time for the devout to dedicate themselves to prayer, reflection, and self-denial. Lent was also the period during which Catholics were required to perform the Easter duty of confession and communion. Although an Episcopalian, Samuel Peters took communion during Lent, a solemn period during which he could bring the proper gravity and reflection to the occasion. In the Feriet family, mother and daughters applied themselves to devotions, while the son made preparations for his first communion. In Baton Rouge, Frances Weeks and her classmates were released from classes during holy week so that they could attend services each day.\(^{20}\)

Churches of both denominations in New Orleans remained open every day during holy week — the week between Palm Sunday and Easter — for prayer and held special services on Good Friday. Antoine Blanc, archbishop of New Orleans, stipulated that all churches offer instruction “calculated to enlighten the Faithful on the duties, and make them relish the practice, of a Christian life.” Benjamin Latrobe observed that St. Louis Cathedral and the public square in front of it were “excessively crowded” with “about one thousand people” during the days leading up to Easter. Special deco-
rations adorned the building, and people came in a steady stream to pray before the
black-draped altar and statues of the Virgin Mary and Jesus. Special regulations cov­
ered the behavior of Catholics during Lent. They were forbidden from eating meat on
Wednesdays and Fridays and on the last four days on Holy Week. On all other days,
they could consume meat only once. Additionally, Catholics could not partake of fish
and meat at the same meal. On Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, devout Catholics
fasted.

Good Friday, the day upon which Jesus was crucified, was considered espe­
cially holy among Catholics and Episcopalians. Luther Tower observed that the day
was “celebrated among the Catholics and Episcopalians as a kind of religious festi­
val.” On Good Friday in 1848, Samuel J. Peters, Jr. expressed the fervent hope that
“all Christians will observe this day.” In New Orleans, Benjamin Latrobe noted that
Catholics who conducted business as usual every Sunday closed their businesses on
Good Friday. Many Catholics made visits to nine different churches in New Orleans
on that day. Worshippers gathered to make the Stations of the Cross, and they brought
children to kiss the cross.

Of course, all Catholics and Episcopalians did not devote themselves to reli­
gious activities during Lent and holy week. Clarissa Town complained of the small
congregation that gathered for special services during Lent. On both Ash Wednesday
and Good Friday, few Baton Rougeans felt the need to go to church. Town observed,
“it seems almost impossible to get a congregation on a weekday . . . . Business and
pleasure engrosses most of their time and thoughts.” While visiting Natchitoches dur­
ing holy week, Leonidas Polk also found that crowds were small, although more peo-
ple attended on Good Friday. In New Orleans, Good Friday was also observed by many who shirked worship during the rest of Lent. Benjamin Latrobe reported that most of the city shut down on that day so that people could attend church. Latrobe noted that irony that a city renowned for its disregard of the Sabbath should so carefully and devoutly observe Good Friday.23

Along with Lent came Mardi Gras, the final burst of gaiety and merrymaking the proceeded Ash Wednesday. Especially in New Orleans, the celebrations could become raucous as revelers donned costumes and pelted each other with flour. In outlying areas, balls and parties took place. F. de Feriet reported to his sister that his wife and daughters “danced like mad” during the carnival season leading up to Lent, while M. Cenas observed, “as usual our carnival has wound up with several weddings.” Some Louisianians felt that Mardi Gras celebrations went too far. Thomas Ellis wrote scornfully of “boys, darkies and women . . . cutting tall swells round town, scaring children, dusting decent people & other foolish things.” Charles Hilton, an Episcopal minister, blamed weak attendance at Ash Wednesday services on “yesterday’s Mardi Gras folly.”24

In addition to giving an outlet for merrymaking before the discipline of Lent, Mardi Gras also helped ease tensions in New Orleans and other part of southern Louisiana. As Thomas Ellis noted, many of the participants were masked “boys, darkies, and women,” people who generally had little power in society. They were able to pelt their “betters” with flour and commit acts of insubordination that otherwise would not have been tolerated. But, because these actions occurred during a special holiday dedicated to misrule, they served to reinforce the social order rather than tear it down.
Even while they were mocking those whom society had placed in a higher position, poor, black and female celebrants had to recognize the conventions that held them in check.25

In addition to Christmas and Easter, Catholics also celebrated a wide variety of other feast and holy days. The Virgin Mary occupied a central place in Catholicism, and the month of May was devoted to her. Archbishop Antoine Blanc called for special benedictions to be read at services marking the beginning and end of the month and on one day in each week. These prayers were designed "to inspire you with a more filial devotion towards Mary our Immaculate Mother." Each ethnic group or church had its own special saint and celebrated his or her feast day in a special way. In New Orleans, for example, the Irish community marked St. Patrick's Day with a procession in which marchers with banners followed several members of the clergy to St. Patrick's church for a high mass. While many Catholics failed to observe all of the feast and holy days, large numbers of devout church members were steadfast in their devotions. According to one Baton Rouge observer, the women of St. Joseph's church "do not forget, that there are Saint's days, and periods of the year, for special devotion."26

Although the Catholic Church demanded that masters allow their slaves time off to celebrate feast and holy days, most did not. Pauline Johnson and Felice Boudreaux recalled that they and their master's other slaves went to church in Opelousas on "eb'ry chu'ch hol'day," and Louis Evans' master gave his workers Easter off in addition to Christmas. Such slaveholders like theirs were rare, however. Catho-
lic leaders often complained that their owners denied slaves full access to the rituals of the Church year.27

While most holiday celebrations in Louisiana were Christian, the Jewish community also observed special religious days. Families often assembled to celebrate the holy days even if they never set foot in a synagogue during the rest of the year. Passover and the High Holy Days were the most significant occasions of the Jewish religious year. Yom Kippur – the Day of Atonement – and Rosh Hashanah – the start of the new Jewish year – brought members of the Jewish community together in autumn. On Yom Kippur, men and women were expected to fast as penance for their sins. They also gathered in the synagogue, where special prayers were recited. In the Goodman family, everyone attended services on Yom Kippur, though not all family members fasted. Ginny Goodman “thought that I had a great many sins to atone for I fasted from five o’clock Friday evening until half past seven on Saturday.” Clara Solomon described the day as “a voluntary punishment for our past sins, to expiate them, and on that day pray for the past, present, and future.” She and her sister also attended both the Kol Nidre service on Yom Kippur eve, which began the holiday, and the Yom Kippur service, which lasted for several hours. On both occasions they found the building crowded with people who did not come to regular Sabbath services. According to Solomon, “Kippur brings together all the Congregation.” She and her family fasted, using smelling salts to help with the hunger pangs and headaches that the practice caused. Shortly after Yom Kippur came Sukkot, but the Solomon family did not observe the day. The children went to school, and the family went about its busi-
ness as usual. Although the New Orleans Jewish community mounted a festival every year for Sukkot, the Solomons never attended.\textsuperscript{28}

In springtime, Passover was a time to celebrate the deliverance of the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt. The traditional observance included cleaning the house to remove leavened food products, attending services at the synagogue, and a special family service – the seder – which centered on eating matzo. In New Orleans, the Solomon family engaged in “a general cleaning up” before Passover, and abstained from eating leavened bread during the holiday. As during the High Holy Days, synagogue of the Congregation Dispersed of Judah was crowded with people, “all in their holiday clothes and new bonnets.” In addition, Clara Solomon obeyed the Biblical injunction against writing on holidays.\textsuperscript{29}

Although many families like the Solomons and Goodmans observed large portions of Jewish holiday customs, many others did not. During an 1842 visit to New Orleans, M. Wiener observed that the synagogue there was sparsely attended on the High Holy Days and that few families followed the special dietary restrictions of holidays like Passover. In a highly secularized and assimilated community like that of New Orleans, many Jews felt little need to continue religious traditions. In other parts of the state, where a few Jewish families might reside in the same area, the resources simply did not exist to celebrate holidays in the traditional manner.\textsuperscript{30}

All of these various religious holidays brought people together as members of a religious group. Families – who generally shared the same religious beliefs – and congregations were the core groups of celebrations, and activities centered on these tow units. At the same time, church and state could become intertwined through some
religious holidays. In 1837, the Louisiana legislature named Christmas and Good Friday “days of public rest and days of grace.” Although businesses were not required to close, citizens had relief from bill paying on those days, and the act gave state recognition and approval to those days.31

Other types of holidays, however, brought people together as common citizens, and Louisianans celebrated a number of state-declared holidays in religious ways. These occasions were sponsored by civic leaders, but the proclamations establishing them generally included a call for people to attend church. Although elected officials refrained from endorsing a particular faith or religious body, they did push Judeo-Christian observances of government holidays of various types, especially fast days and Thanksgiving.

At intervals throughout each year, the president or governor appointed fast days. Citizens were encouraged to abstain from eating, pray, and attend church on those occasions. Many people did commemorate fast days in the religious manner recommended. Even Bennett Barrow, who almost never set foot in a meeting house and mocked his more devout neighbors, went to church on a fast day in 1841.32 In many cases, the fast day was set aside for a specific reason. In 1849, President Zachary Taylor set aside August 3 “to pray to God to relieve the Land of the dreadful Scourge” of cholera, while several years earlier the death of President William Henry Harrison prompted his successor John Tyler to declare a day of prayer.33

Louisiana also imported the New England custom of Thanksgiving during the antebellum period. In Puritan New England, Thanksgiving was an occasion for celebrating the completion of the harvest through church attendance and family gather-
ings, although a day of thanksgiving and prayer could be appointed at other times as well. George Washington set aside November 26, 1789 as a national day of thanksgiving and gave official support to what had been a minor regional holiday. Because the French and Spanish had colonized Louisiana, however, its residents lacked this cultural heritage. As more Anglo-Americans moved into the state after the Louisiana Purchase, Thanksgiving was one of many customs that they brought with them. Initially, new residents, especially transplanted New Englanders, celebrated the holiday on their own. In New Orleans, the New England Society met each year to commemorate the landing at Plymouth Rock with a service at Theodore Clapp's Unitarian church and a dinner. For men and families far from home, the activities of the New England Society helped them feel a little less homesick. 

The first official Louisiana Thanksgiving was declared by Governor Alexander Mouton and was celebrated on January 15, 1846. Conforming to the tradition of Thanksgiving as a harvest festival, the Louisiana celebration took place at the end of the sugar harvest. In later years, however, governors began appointing a day in late November or early December like other states. For Julia Merrill, a native of New England living in Tensas Parish, the first Louisiana Thanksgiving was a triumph that allowed her family "the privilege of showing our thankfulness for mercies past." She planned, "a real Yankee dinner" for the occasion. Merrill attributed the event to that fact that Governor Mouton had "seen the evil of his ways, and has at length repented."

Louisianians applied a wide variety of meanings to the holiday. One Baton Rouge editor saw Thanksgiving as a time to unite "all the various classes of people" in
the state, and he believed that it was significant "in a political, if not religious point of view." At the same time, many residents supported the efforts of Sarah Josepha Hale to set aside a fixed day for Thanksgiving and make it a national holiday. The editor of the *Baton Rouge Comet* gave both publicity and support to her 1853 request that all state governors appoint the last Thursday in November as a day of Thanksgiving.

Many Louisianians celebrated Thanksgiving by attending church. In New Orleans, Luther Tower commemorated the first official Thanksgiving by listening to a sermon at the First Presbyterian church. The next fall, the congregation of Mount Nebo Baptist Church in St. Tammany Parish gathered on November 26, 1846, "it being the day set apart by the Governor of our state for public thanks giving and prayer." In Concordia Parish, families from the surrounding countryside came into St. Joseph in order to hear a Thanksgiving sermon. Mary Taylor and her family attended church in Clinton along with their neighbor, William Broadway.

Others observed the day in alternative ways. John Robert Buhler declined to attend a Thanksgiving sermon while visiting his father in 1848 because he disliked the minister. If he had been at home however, Buhler would undoubtedly have been in church on Thanksgiving. Anna Farrar and M. E. Tucker also remained absent from the various services available in their areas. In New Orleans, nonessential city employees were given the day off, and civic leaders encouraged other business owners to suspend, "as far as convenient, their usual avocations on that day." Many, however, did not. In Baton Rouge, as well, large numbers of businesses opened on Thanksgiving. The overseer of Bayside Plantation continued his work on Thanksgiving in January of 1846, but at the end of the day, he decided that he "did wrong in so doing."
Some Louisianians, however, completely ignored the holiday. As the continuation of a “time honored custom of our English ancestors” that came to the state by way of transplanted New Englanders, Thanksgiving seemed foreign to many Creoles. Luther Tower reported that when Governor Mouton began the official celebration of Thanksgiving, “there seemed to be no notice take of the day by the Catholics.” Ten years later, the editor of the Feliciana Democrat complained, “for some cause... thanksgiving day has almost invariable been a mere delusion and mockery in Louisiana.” He observed although ministers offered services on the day, they preached to nearly empty churches. The editor also believed it “better to have no thanksgiving than simply a nominal one.” In Baton Rouge, too, “Thanksgiving... was very meagerly observed,” despite a number of churches’ holding services that day. As this shows, many people saw no need to go to church or devise any other form of commemoration on Thanksgiving.40

Some years, the annual Thanksgiving took on a special meaning. In 1847, December 8 was designated as Thanksgiving Day. Combined with the usual church services and holiday dinners was a grand parade to celebrate Zachary Taylor’s triumphant return from the Mexican War. In 1853, following a summer yellow fever epidemic that ravaged many Louisiana towns, a Baton Rouge editor proclaimed Thanksgiving a day to “thank the Powers above, that ‘they are not dead.’”41

While fast days and Thanksgiving could be found across the entire United States, Louisiana also had a special holiday of its own. January 8 commemorated Andrew Jackson’s victory over the British in the Battle of New Orleans. Known as “the Glorious Eighth,” the day was celebrated with both military parades and church ser-
vices. The custom began the day of the battle, when Abbe Guilliame Dubourg con­ducted a high mass while the armies fought a few miles away. After the American vic­tory, Jackson asked Dubourg to conduct a public service at St. Louis Cathedral. On January 23, Jackson and his officers processed through a triumphal arch in the Place d’Armes to the Cathedral. After receiving praise from the citizenry and Abbe Dub­ourg, they made their way into the church, where a Te Deum was chanted. In later years, this pattern would be preserved.42

The Battle of New Orleans had national significance as the final chapter of the War of 1812. At the same time, however, it affected New Orleanians in powerful ways. In the first years of American rule, Creoles and Anglo-Americans faced each other in an uneasy relationship. Creoles resented the newcomers, whom they deri­sively dubbed “Kaintucks,” and chafed under the American political system. When Jackson came to defend the city, therefore, some Creoles were not sure that they op­posed a British victory. For their part, many segments of the Anglo-American population and government entertained grave doubts about the loyalty of the Creole inhabi­tants of southern Louisiana. Jackson, however, rallied all segments of the population to fight with his troops. After the battle, Jackson offended the Creole population, but most inhabitants continued to see him as the city’s savior. Although ethnic conflicts persisted in New Orleans, the battle served to show both Creoles and Anglo­Americans that Creoles had a place in rapidly-Americanizing Louisiana society.43

Some participants in the battle and thanksgiving mass predicted that January 8 would become a national holiday, equal to the Fourth of July and Washington’s Birth­day. Indeed, in some parts of the United States citizens did commemorate Jackson’s
victory for several decades with parades, speeches, and dinners occurring in major cities. The date never reached the status of a second Independence Day that some foresaw, however, and observance of the victory ceased with the outbreak of the Civil War.\textsuperscript{44}

Although predictions of widespread national celebration did not come to pass, the day did remain important to Louisianians during the entire antebellum period. In 1837, January 8 was declared a state holiday, along with other patriotic days such as the Fourth of July and Washington’s Birthday. The state’s citizens, especially in New Orleans, marked the day with a wide variety of secular and religious festivities. In 1845, Luther Tower observed, “the glorious 8\textsuperscript{th} has been ushered in by the firing of cannon and ushered out by firing cannon.” He attended a military parade featuring veterans of the battle and members of the legislature. The procession ended at St. Louis Cathedral, “where an address by one of the dignitaries of the Church was delivered with the usual ceremonies of the Catholics.”\textsuperscript{45}

Louisianians sometimes complained that celebration of the eighth was waning, but the holiday remained a vibrant one until the outbreak of the Civil War. In 1859, Gustave Breaux was one of a large crowd that watched the military procession that made its way through New Orleans with General Winnfield Scott at the head. Clearly, the citizens of New Orleans had not lost sight of the need to celebrate an event that solidified the position of the United States in the international community and eased ethnic tensions in the city, even while they were growing increasingly uneasy over their place in the Union. During the Civil War, however, larger military concerns
eclipsed the Glorious Eighth, and the celebration was not resumed after the end of the war. 46

Holidays were special times when Louisianians got together to celebrate important religious, civic, or societal values. Christmas, although religious in origin, evolved into a primarily secular holiday in which families and friends came together for parties, dinners, and presents. Lent, holy week, and Easter all remained strictly religious times for Catholics and Episcopalians, while Mardi Gras served as an outlet for stress and merriment before the self-discipline of Lent. For the small, assimilated Jewish communities of Louisiana, Passover and the High Holy Days provided occasions to come together in ways that they did not at other times. In all of these cases, holidays reinforced the primacy of both the blood family and the church family.

Among state-supported holidays, fast days asked for God’s mercy in times of trouble, while Thanksgiving offered praise and gratitude for blessings bestowed. Both occasions linked the government with religion in powerful ways as governors and other leaders urged their constituents to gather in houses of worship. The commemoration of the Battle of New Orleans was also celebrated with a religious service. Each occasion called upon Louisianians to gather as citizens while at the same time reinforcing the place of the church. While it did not matter which group they joined, Louisianians were expected to practice a religion of some kind.

Holidays, like Sunday services, were also events in which Louisianians of every age group could participate as part of the religious year. Many other forms of church services, on the other hand, were tied to a specific stage in the life cycle. Baptisms, weddings, and funerals were all designed to mark a significant point in a per-
son’s life. How they did so can provide important information about the society that performed these rituals.

End Notes

1 Tryphena Fox to Anna Holder, 1 January 1860, in Wilma King, ed., A Northern Woman in the Plantation South: Letters of Tryphena Blanche Holder Fox, 1856-1876 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), 95-96.


3 Geary, ed., Celine, 123; Elizabeth Powell Diary, 25 December 1856, quoted in Leigh Eric Schmidt, Consumer Rites: The Buying and Selling of American Holidays (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 179. Although Nell Riley Slater Hughes asserts, that gift giving on New Year’s Day was primarily a Creole custom, Schmidt argues in Consumer Rites that the custom was common in the rest of the United States and England as well. Anglo-American migrants to Louisiana, therefore, would have practiced it along with their Creole neighbors. See Hughes, “Louisiana Holiday Customs” (MA thesis, Louisiana State University, 1963), 1-2, 4-5; Schmidt, Consumer Rites, 108-122, 124-125.

4 Geary, ed., Celine, 125; Luther Field Tower Diary, 1 January 1845, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University (hereafter LLMVC).


6 John Robert Buhler Diaries, 23 December 1848, LLMVC; Elise Ellis to Anna Butler, 5 January 1847, Anna and Sarah Butler Correspondence LLMVC; Luther Field Tower Diary, 23 December 1845, LLMVC; Jacob Bechtel to George Bechtel, 23 December 1848, Jacob H. Bechtel Papers, Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Special Collections Library, Duke University (hereafter DU).

7 Mount Nebo Baptist Church Minutes, 26 November 1836, LLMVC. See also Restad, Christmas in America, 31-33; Schmidt, Consumer Rites, 24-26, 124-125.

8 Elizabeth Powell Diary, 25 December 1856, quoted in Schmidt, Consumer Rites, 179; Baton Rouge Daily Comet, 27 December 1853; Sarah to unknown, 23


Charles Slack to John Slack, 25 December 1846, Slack Family Papers, SHC, Records of Ante-bellum Southern Plantation, ser. J. pt. 5; Frances Lewis narrative, in Clayton, ed., Mother Wit, 159; Tryphena Fox to Anna Holder, 1 January 1860, in King, ed., Northern Woman in the Plantation South, 94. See also Nissenbaum, The Battle for Christmas, 279-282.

See Restad, Christmas in America, 66, 87-88.


See Moody, Slavery on Louisiana Sugar Plantations, 88-89.

Clarissa Leavitt Town Diary, 27 March 1853, LLMVC; Maria Inskeep to Fanny Hampton, 22 April 1837, Fanny Leverich Eshleman Craig Collection, Special Collections Library, Tulane University (hereafter TU); Leonidas Polk to Board of Missions, 17 May 1839, Leonidas Polk Papers, SHC; Baptisms, Communicants, 24 April 1859, Church of the Nativity Parish Register, LLMVC.

Mount Nebo Baptist Church Minutes, LLMVC; Hephzibah Church Books, LLMVC. See also Schmidt, Consumer Rites, 195.


23 Clarissa Leavitt Town Diary, 9 February 1853, 25 March 1853, LLMVC; Leonidas Polk to Board of Missions, 17 May 1839, Leonidas Polk Papers, SHC; Latrobe, ed., Journals, 220.

24 F. de Feriet to Jacinade de Feriet, 29 March 1823, Feriet Letters, TU; Thomas Ellis to Emily Ellis, 24 February 1857, E. John and Thomas C. W. Ellis and Family Papers, LLMVC; M. Cenas to James Cenas, 7 April 1851, Pierre G. T. Beauregard and Family Papers, LLMVC; Rev. Charles Hilton Diary, 1 March 1865, TU. See also Blanton and Nolan, “Creole Lenten Devotions,” 534.

25 Thomas Ellis to Emily Ellis, 24 February 1857, Ellis Family Papers, LLMVC.


31 See Restad, Christmas in America, 96.


35 Julia Merrill to Catharine Merrill, 23 December 1845, quoted in Appelbaum, Thanksgiving, 111. See also Hughes, “Louisiana Holiday Customs,” 64.

36 Baton Rouge Daily Comet, 21 November 1853.

37 Baton Rouge Daily Comet, 19 October 1853.

38 Luther Field Tower Diary, 15 January 1846, LLMVC; Mount Nebo Baptist Church Minutes, 26 November 1846, LLMVC; Anna Farrar to her daughter, 30 November 1860, Richardson and Farrar Papers, SHC, Records of Ante-bellum Southern Plantations, ser. J. pt. 6; Mary E. Taylor Diary, 29 November 1860, Hunter-Taylor Family Papers, LLMVC.


40 Baton Rouge Daily Comet, 14 November 1852; Luther Field Tower Diary, 15 January 1846, LLMVC; Clinton Feliciana Democrat 6 December 1856; Baton Rouge Daily Comet, 21 November 1853, 27 December 1853.

41 Baton Rouge Daily Comet, 21 November 1853. See also Hughes, “Louisiana Holiday Customs,” 66.


44 See Remini, Battle of New Orleans, 192-193.

45 Luther Field Tower Diary, 8 January 1845, LLMVC. See also Restad, Christmas in America, 96; Baudier, Catholic Church in Louisiana, 381.

46 Gustave A. Breaux Diaries, 8 January 1859, TU.
Periodically, religious revivals broke out in antebellum Louisiana, as in the rest of the country. Although Louisiana had not experienced the earlier religious enthusiasm of the eighteenth century that swept America's British colonies, by the early nineteenth century the phenomenon had reached the new American territory. The revivals of Louisiana were scattered, much like those of the rest of the South during the first half of the nineteenth century. As John Boles points out, the antebellum South did not experience sweeping revivals in the way that other places, like upstate New York's Burned-Over District, did. Instead, Louisiana's occasions of religious excitement generally occurred in isolated, localized spurts. Some widespread revival activity occurred in Louisiana during the late 1830s, it also occurred throughout the entire antebellum period.¹

Revivals had two purposes: to gain new church members from among the unconverted, and to inspire a new religious commitment in people who had backslidden after joining a religious group. Sarah Wright, for example, reported that one revival in her area had attracted both new converts and one man who had previously been expelled for drinking. Organizers and participants considered both functions to be important, but they emphasized the conversion experience.²
Camp meetings, which took place in rural areas, were the most well known form of revival and a common occurrence in antebellum Louisiana. People came from the surrounding area and camped out at the revival site for several days. They ate, sang, prayed, and exhorted together, and the separate setting emphasized the special nature of a camp meeting revival. At the same time, camp meetings isolated participants from the routines of everyday life that could distract them from spiritual development. While the camp meeting was a frequent and significant form of religious activity, all revivals did not take place in this kind of setting.

A religious revival could occur anywhere. Those that took place indoors were generally referred to as protracted meetings. Henry Marston, for example, attended one in the small town of Clinton in 1856, and Franklin had “a great revival” two years earlier. During the antebellum period, a large number of small town and villages in Louisiana experienced outbreaks of religious excitement, including Minden, Vidalia, Pattersonville, Jackson, and Baton Rouge. Despite its reputation for impiety, New Orleans also did not lack for revivals. During an 1857 visit to the city, Sarah Wright witnessed protracted meetings in both Baptist and Campbellite churches, with ministers “preaching and baptizing for more than a week.” Although she did not mention the number of Baptist converts, Wright noted that thirty-three white and black New Orleanians had joined the Campbellites. When Luther Tower visited a Methodist revival in the city, he found a “good deal of excitement” as exhorters gathered around several seekers to pray and sing. While the setting of a religious meeting was significant, it did not determine the strength of a revival.
Whether it took place at a rural campground or in a town, many Louisianians were willing to make strenuous efforts in order to attend a revival. Eliza Rives braved the “very cold” weather of a northern Louisiana November in order to travel to a distant meeting. Despite the conditions, she found “a good congregation” assembled upon her arrival. In isolated areas, participants might travel several hours or more than a day to reach the revival site.5

Although they could occur at any time throughout the year, most revivals took place in the autumn. Toward the end of the year, the harvest was winding down in most parts of the state, and farmers had more time to devote to nonagricultural pursuits. In 1845, Rapides Parish experienced a camp meeting in October, while one occurred during the previous month in St. Helena. In September of 1836, Hephzibah Church in East Feliciana Parish had a revival that lasted six days. A revival during the same month of the following year went on for seven days. According to E. A. Young, revivals of the Plains Presbyterian Church in East Baton Rouge Parish “were generally held in August when the farmers were laying by the crops.” In northern Louisiana, the Vidalia circuit of the Methodist church held camp meetings every October for several years. Fall was not the only time for revivals. Mary Norton reported a “considerable revival of religion” in Catahoula Parish during June of 1851, while a Pattersonville minister began a protracted meeting in January of 1855. The Presbyterians of Clinton held a lengthy revival in early April of 1856. Although churches favored autumn as a more convenient time for revival meetings, enthusiasm could break out at any time of the year.6
Organizers planned revivals carefully in order to maximize their effectiveness. They invited well-known preachers who specialized in stirring up religious enthusiasm and chose dates that would allow the most area residents to attend. Especially in rural areas, camp meetings had to be advertised well in advance so that people could make arrangements to attend. Concordia Parish Methodists and Presbyterians, therefore, placed announcements in the local newspaper up to a month before their meeting. Similarly, the Feliciana Democrat announced plans for a protracted meeting at the Clinton Presbyterian Church, including the names of the five clergymen who would participate, several weeks in advance. Advance planning, however, could not guarantee the success of a revival. In Pattersonville, one minister laid plans to spark a revival during an upcoming church conference, but one observer found "very little excitement" when the conference finally got under way.\textsuperscript{7}

Methodists are most-often linked with camp-meeting revivals, and Methodists did sponsor a large number of them. The Vidalia circuit of the Methodist church sponsored yearly camp meetings in northern Louisiana, and a Methodist church near Mansfield held a camp meeting that lasted nearly two weeks. The Methodists were not the only denomination to see the value of revivals, however. All evangelical groups could and did mount revivals during the antebellum period. While a student at Centenary College in Jackson, E. John Ellis reported that a Presbyterian revivalist from Texas "is making quite a stir among the folks here" during a weeklong meeting. During the 1850s, Campbellites in Baton Rouge and New Orleans mounted revivals, and the Baton Rouge newspaper predicted that other denominations would follow suit so that they would not be outdone. In 1855, Salem Baptist Church in Livingston Parish had a
revival that resulted in the baptism of thirty-one men and women. In Minden, John Houston also reported a Baptist revival. All of these churches believed that revivals—although not necessarily the camp meeting model—had a great deal of potential for attracting new members.  

At the same time, many revivals featured joint efforts by many denominations. In 1836, Mary Christmas reported that Jackson was being swept by "religious excitement" that included having "able ministers of every denomination to labour among us for the last month." In cases like this, organizers saw more value in cooperation than in more exclusionary activities.

Many Louisianians, even those who were staunch members of an evangelical denomination, distrusted revivals. Nancy Willard, for example, noted the success of a revival at Cane Church in Bossier Parish but doubted that it would have any lasting impact because some of the new converts "is very wild." She believed that their commitment would be short-lived once the excitement wore off. In Baton Rouge, one observer asserted that revival participants would join "which ever side makes the most noise," rather than basing their choices on true religious feeling.

Liturgical denominations especially were suspicious of the enthusiastic nature of revivals. Episcopalians like the Marshall family who lived in northern Louisiana considered revivals to be "religious dissipation." They believed that such events merely drew attention to participants without having a real or lasting spiritual impact upon them. Some, however, engaged in behavior that can be regarded as revivalistic. For example, Episcopal Bishop Leonidas Polk spent a week in Baton Rouge during May of 1858. In that time, he and several other ministers preached every day, and
"there were a good many persons confirmed." The enthusiasm of the week's events almost persuaded David Magill, a young schoolboy, to be confirmed, but he faltered because "I fear I am not good enough to take such an important step." Two years later, Bishop Polk arrived in St. Francisville with two ministers. They planned a week of preaching followed by confirmations. In this case, as with many revivals that occurred in liturgical denomination, confirmation – rather than baptism – was the main outcome. Many Episcopalians, for example, had been baptized as children. At a revival, therefore, they confirmed the baptismal vows made for them by godparents.11

The Catholic Church, especially, pushed revivalism during the mid-nineteenth century to combat both the influence of Protestantism and the ubiquitous problems of Catholicism in Louisiana: too few priests and indifferent members. Sponsored by either parish priests or religious orders, revivals – often called missions or retreats – were carefully planned to increase the piety of area Catholics. Priests from a wide variety of religious orders gave sermons on the major themes of Catholicism, including death and salvation, sin and hell, and conversion. Candles, statues, bells, and other elements of Catholic ritual were used to reinforce the words of the sermon. The retreats primarily targeted Catholics and did not seek to convert people from other faiths. During the Lenten season of 1854, a citywide mission occurred in New Orleans. Thousands of Catholics flocked to the churches, inspired in part by the incredible yellow fever epidemic that had killed over 9000 of the city's residents the previous year. In rural areas, Catholic revivals were naturally smaller. Mother Mary Hyacinth of the Daughters of the Cross and other members of her convent participated in several retreats in Avoyelles Parish. On one occasion, fifteen adolescents and twenty adults
gathered. They participated in masses, singing, and a procession with a statue of the Virgin Mary. The local priest gave several sermons each day, and at the end of the retreat, many — both young and old — made their first communion. One year later, 115 local residents took communion, and a large number of those were also confirmed. As noted above, confirmation of baptismal vows was a significant result of Catholic revivals. Priests also hoped to bring members of their Parish into more frequent practice of confession and communion, especially on retreat occasions when a bishop was not available.12

Confirmation, as shown above, was the primary result of revivals in liturgical denominations. Because most Catholics, Episcopalians, and Presbyterians had been baptized as small children, it would be redundant for them to undergo the rite again. At confirmation, people repeated the baptismal vows that had been made for them by sponsors. Often seen as a coming of age ritual, confirmation marked a young person’s conscious determination to enter into a covenant with God. Many Catholics and Episcopalians viewed this as the most important religious sacrament one could receive. M. S. Denton called the ceremony “a blessing” that strengthened the resolve of Christians to lead worthy lives, while Maria Inskeep believed that confirmation “is one of the serious and interesting ceremonies of our church.” The “solemn vow” made Catholics and Episcopalians full members of their churches, and revival activities could be used to encourage this final step.13

Both the Catholic and Episcopal churches required that a bishop administer confirmation. During most of the antebellum period, the entire state of Louisiana fell under the Catholic diocese of New Orleans. In 1853, a portion of northern Louisiana
was split off to create the diocese of Natchitoches, with bishop Auguste Martin residing in that town. The Episcopal church of Louisiana acquired its first bishop, Leonidas Polk, in 1841, and he was also based in New Orleans. This concentration of both Catholic and Episcopal bishops in New Orleans made their periodic visits to individual parishes occasions ripe for the rise of religious enthusiasm because the faithful perceived them as special events.\(^{14}\)

Regardless of denomination, large numbers of people attended revivals. Most, however, did not experience the dramatic conversion that characterized these events. At a Methodist revival in Vernon, the *Southern Times* noted many attendees concerned with religious matters but also a great deal who were not. For many Louisianians, a revival was simply another form of entertainment. In 1845, Jefferson McKinney informed his brother that he was planning to attend a camp meeting with a few of his acquaintances. According to McKinney, “I think I schal see some fun with them.” Neppy Hamilton “enjoyed myself highly” at the first camp meeting she attended, and she believed that the slaves she brought had a good time as well. Hamilton was especially amused by “a great deal of shouting and weeping.” Neither McKinney nor Hamilton went to camp meetings with any intention of seeking conversion. They merely wanted some entertainment.\(^{15}\)

Louisianians also attended revivals as a social outlet. Camp meetings at Plains Presbyterian Church, located in a rural part of East Baton Rouge Parish, featured evening prayer meetings in local homes and communal dinners on the church grounds in addition to multiple sermons each day. Participants could therefore visit with each other in addition to listening to sermons. J. B. Porter reported that one friend used an
1859 camp meeting as a place to meet girls. For rural inhabitants, gathering at a religious event gave them the chance to interact with more people than they might see during the rest of the year. In addition to spiritual development, therefore, they also relished the opportunity to meet new people and renew old friendships.  

Although religious revivals featured preachers who gave lengthy sermons, converts controlled the progress and outcome of these events. Many carefully planned meetings failed because enough men and women did not experience conversion. The number of participants who converted, not the number who attended, determined the success of a revival. Few observers of religious meetings mentioned how many people they saw in the audience, but most counted how many joined a church or were baptized. In Vernon, the editor of the *Southern Times* reported on a Methodist revival. Although noting that many people “both regenerate and unregenerate” attended and showed great piety, he considered the revival to be a failure because “there were . . . only six or eight penitents . . . and one or two conversions.” He went on to state, “compared with similar gatherings in the former years this was considerably inferior in point of numbers.” In Franklin, on the other hand, one woman bragged that 173 white and black participants joined the church during a revival. Sarah Wright noted that a revival in Greenwood brought eleven people into the Baptist church, including one backslider who had seen the error of his ways. As these examples show, judging the success of a revival was subjective. The Greenwood event was considered a triumph because the number of converts represented a significant proportion of the small settlement. In a larger place, eleven new members may have been seen as a mere pittance. Similarly, one of the reasons observers deemed the Vernon meeting a failure
was its small size compared to previous years. In general, however, a large number of conversions meant a successful revival.17

Although most Christian denominations places strict limits upon the public speech of female members lest it evolve into the male preserve of preaching, participation in camp meetings offered opportunities for active religious involvement that normal church services did not. In addition to being part of the audience, women were also converts, musicians, and exhorters. Large numbers of female Louisianians - both black and white - attended camp meetings. Kate Adams, for example, went to several revivals while living in Tensas Parish. Nippy Hamilton went to her first meeting in 1858, taking her slave Lucinda with her. Eliza Rives made a special trip to her mother’s home in order to attend a Presbyterian revival.18

As in church congregations, women made up a large percentage of converts at revivals and camp meetings. For example, during three days in September of 1845, sixteen people experienced conversion at a revival at Line Creek Church. Of those, at least six were women. In New Orleans, Lafayette, Andrew Chapel, and E. Steele Chapel – three Methodist churches that merged in 1848 – held a revival meeting in February of 1851. Thirty-three people joined the church during that period, including nineteen women. All but one of the six converts at the revival of Van Buren Methodist church were women, and an 1856 meeting in Greenwood produced conversions from an equal number of male and female attendees. Women were not only attending camp meetings, but they were also publicly expressing their faith and religious enthusiasm by undergoing conversion.19
At many meetings, women took prominent roles in leading prayers and exhorters. At a Methodist meeting, Luther Tower reported both men and women kneeling together as converts while a similar group of people prayed and sang around them. On other occasions, women shared their religious experiences and called on audience members to repent their sins. According to Polly Shine, during summer camp meetings near her master's plantation, both male and female slaves spoke publicly about their conversions. Revival enthusiasm allowed women of to step outside the usual restrictions that society placed upon them.20

Many people believed that camp meetings were not a proper setting for women for these very reasons. In 1840, John Harrison learned that his future wife, Elizabeth Baer planned to attend a camp meeting. He expressed his disapproval in strong terms, stating, “surely the ravings of insane men and women . . . cannot be proper subjects of curiosity to a lady.” Harrison considered the unbridled outpouring of religious emotion at camp meetings to be dangerous because “when this whirlpool of the passions is once set in motion near you, nothing can save you from being swept into its vortex,” something he hoped his fiancé would avoid. Some antebellum commentators even believed that revivals caused madness in susceptible women. Many others like Caroline Merrick, however, concentrated on the possibility for salvation and saw camp meetings as both positive and necessary.21

Strict limits on the active participation of women in religious services did exist in antebellum Louisiana. They were not allowed to serve as members of the clergy or deliver sermons, a prohibition based on St. Paul's call for women to remain silent in the church. At camp meetings, however, women could test these boundaries. Often
held in the open air, away from home and the established church, camp meetings exis-
ted on the fringes of society, and women could therefore step outside their pro-
scribed roles. Even at protracted meetings held in the same churches that restricted
female participation, enthusiasm took over. The very nature of a revival, designed to
stir up religious feelings that normally stayed under the surface, contributed to a sense
of specialness. While the majority listened, sang, and prayed, some took more visible
roles as they exhorted others to repent or shared their conversion experiences with the
audience. Anything was possible when moved by the spirit.

In addition to white women, male and female slaves also found a rare religious
outlet in revivals. Alice Cole and Lafayette Price recalled that many joined churches
during camp meetings along with members of the white population. Polly Shine also
remembered camp meetings on her master’s plantation during the summers. Accord-
ing to Shine, the camp meeting was “one time they would let the Negro talk about his
or her religion.” Even at racially-mixed meetings, slaves often conducted their own
activities away from white participants. This allowed black men and women an ele-
ment of freedom in their revival activities, although a few white men generally super-
vised the proceedings. While most slaves attended revivals organized by white
churches, Adeline White recalled “‘vival meetin’s on de place ‘mongst de slaves” led
by a black preacher. At these events, enslaved men and women came forward “and tell
dey ‘terminations to serb God.”

Louisiana slaves remembered camp meetings as special times when many peo-
ple were overcome by the spirit. Polly Shine recalled that, “every body would get
happy and shout,” while Sarah Benjamin noted “lots of singing.” In Kate Curry’s ex-
perience, revival meetings in brush arbors sparked “shoutin’ an’ singin’.” Many historians have argued that much of the ritual of the revival, including singing, shouting, and being overcome by the spirit, had strong correlations to African religions. In this way, the revival helped bring slaves to Christianity while at the same time providing space for the retention of some African religious practices.23

In most cases, the final event of a revival was the mass baptism of converts. Line Creek church baptized fifteen of the sixteen men and women who converted during a three-day revival in September of 1845. On the last days of an 1836 revival at Hephzibah Church, ninety-four new members were baptized. Sarah Benjamin recalled seeing “as many as two hundred babbtides after a big meetin.” On Adeline White’s plantation, “preacher Robert” baptized slaves at a special spot following revivals that he organized.24

Baptism was not just confined to revivals, however. As the event that brought a person into the community of faith, it was considered one of the most important sacraments of the Christian church and was required for full participation in church ceremonies. As Caleb Dowe, an Episcopal minister wrote, “baptism sanctifies – sets apart from the world, and consecrates to God.” Churches like New Tickfaw Baptist in Livingston Parish, Mount Nebo Baptist in St. Tammany Parish and Hephzibah in East Feliciana required baptism in order for men and women “to participate of all the ordinances” of church life. No person could be considered a Christian without receiving the sacrament.25

While baptism was the most basic ritual of Christianity, it was also one of the most divisive religious issues in antebellum Louisiana. Each denomination had its own
views on what constituted a proper baptism, and they often came into conflict with each other. Countless denominational newspapers, magazines, and pamphlets were published on the issue, and Louisianians participated in the debate. The Carpenter family of East Feliciana Parish subscribed to a Baptist periodical that often tackled the subject, as did newspapers like the *Louisiana Baptist.*

Many evangelicals, especially members of the Baptist church, insisted that infant baptism was a false doctrine. In a Baptist magazine article, one author argued that infant baptism amounted to "self-deception." He also believed that the practice weakened the Christian church by adding members who had not experienced true conversion. Finally, he asserted, "those denominations that have practiced infant sprinkling . . . are more corrupt, more worldly, and less pious" than churches that eschewed the custom. He and many other evangelicals believed that the only true baptism was administered to a person who had undergone true conversion after mature consideration. The covenant of New Tickfaw Baptist Church allowed the admission only of those adult members who could give "credible evidence of their regeneration." The emphasis upon baptism of those who had reached the age of reason and accountability meant that the sacrament was a conscious choice on the part of these men and women.

Other congregations, especially Catholics, Episcopalians, and Lutherans, practiced infant baptism for a wide variety of reasons. Often, the primary motivator was concern for the souls of unbaptized infants in the event of death. Given the mortality rates of antebellum Louisiana, no one could assume that a child would live to maturity. Many also saw it as a way to bring children into the religious community of their parents. By allowing children to become members — on a provisional basis because of
their age – of their family’s church, these denominations hoped to strengthen both the religious group and the family unit, which they viewed as a cornerstone of society. Families would worship together, and, upon reaching maturity, children would naturally join the church in which they had been reared.28

Among evangelical denominations, both Presbyterians and Methodists baptized infants and children as well as adults. At the New Orleans First Presbyterian Church, seventeen children and two adults received the sacrament from 1857 through 1859. The oldest child was nine, and the youngest was three months old. At Lafayette, Andrew Chapel, and E. Steele Chapel, three Methodist churches that merged in 1848, the three years following consolidation saw the baptism of thirty-nine children and six adults. Unlike liturgical denominations, however, Methodists did not require sponsors for the children they baptized. This denomination stood in the middle of the debate over infant baptism in that it allowed the practice but did not require it.29

In the Catholic, Episcopal, Presbyterian, and Lutheran churches, babies were supposed to be baptized as soon as possible after birth. In antebellum Louisiana, however, this was not always possible. Early in the nineteenth century, C. C. Robin observed that a few priests served large “isolated and sparsely populated regions.” Priests made infrequent trips through these areas, during which “he regenerates with the water of baptism men who are already enfeebled by old age.” In Avoyelles Parish, for example, many Catholic families lived twenty or more miles from the Parish church. Rather than make the arduous journey with small children, they waited until the priest made his periodic rounds of the countryside. Then, neighbors would gather at one house, where baptisms would take place along with a mass and blessing of marriages.
When he first arrived in Natchitoches to work as a Catholic missionary, Yves-Marie LeConniat was shocked by “the immoral custom of leaving little children stay unbaptized for a good length of time.” While living in a remote part of Pointe Coupee Parish, Ann Raney Thomas asked a passing Presbyterian minister to administer the rite to her daughter, who was seven years old. Similarly, Eliza Anne Robertson lived in a town with no Episcopal church. Although she herself attended the Methodist church, she waited until Episcopal bishop Leonidas Polk arrived in town for a missionary visit to have her children baptized. As Polk himself observed during a missionary trip to the Natchitoches area in 1839, Protestants there and in other parts of the state “have no one to baptize their children.”

Residents of New Orleans and other towns could have their young infants christened more easily. Jules and Harriet Blanc had their daughter baptized three days after her birth, while George Lanaux was taken to church for christening less than two weeks after he was born. Edward Alphonse Toledano received the sacrament when he was just over one month old. Theodore Barnette, too, was about one month old when he underwent baptism at St. Louis Cathedral, and his cousin Charles Provosty was three months old. At the German Lutheran Church, Anton Hellig was christened two days and Carolina Haagen two weeks after birth.

In many other cases, children were not baptized – even in liturgical denominations – until their parents underwent a religious conversion, and then the entire family received the sacrament together. In the Slack family, for example, an Episcopal priest baptized Martha on Easter Eve. The next day, all five of her children followed suit. Susan Pipes and her four children were all baptized on the same day, even sharing the
same godparents. Of course, nonreligious parents were unlikely to have their children christened, but when they did join a church, parents generally brought the entire family with them.32

The process of baptism also stirred controversy. Baptists and a few other churches insisted on full immersion as the only true form of baptism because that was the way that Jesus Christ had been baptized. In their Articles of Faith, the founders of Hephzibah Church listed “baptism by immersion” first. Nearly half a century later, members of the church reiterated this belief in their Declaration of Faith, maintaining that “immersion in water . . . is pre-requisite to the privileges of a church relation. The founders of Mount Nebo Baptist Church and New Tickfaw Baptist Church also insisted on immersion as the only acceptable form of baptism. Campbellite churches also believed, in the words of Alexander Campbell “immersion in water . . . is the one, the only apostolic or Christian baptism.” Members of these denominations used nearby streams, rivers, and lakes for their baptisms.33

Most denominations mocked this stance and viewed sprinkling as acceptable. In 1848, J. M. Elam noted that Campbellites in his hometown of Baton Rouge were strong believers in immersion as the only acceptable form of baptism. Elam called this stance a “strange infatuation” in “an age of humbuggeries.” For those who sprinkled their postulants, it was the use of water and the words and religious feeling of the ritual that mattered. One drop would work as well as an entire river.34

In addition to the form of baptism, the setting also depended on denominational affiliation. Many Catholic and Episcopal churches included baptism as part of the Sunday service. In such cases, those who served as sponsors stood before the con-
gregation with the priest and other godparents and pledged publicly to oversee the child’s spiritual development. Emily Caroline Douglas, for example, “walked to up to the font” during the Sunday service to act as godmother for her nephew. Ria Marshall and Mary Furman both stood with their uncle at the Natchitoches Episcopal church when reciting the baptismal vows for Furman’s young daughter. This practice visibly affirmed the baptized person as a member of the congregation and publicly announced those who would be responsible for his or her religious education and welfare. In New Orleans, the Maspereau family included their child’s baptism as part of a church services as well. It was perfectly acceptable for families to have their children christened during a service. Catholics also brought children to church for private baptismal ceremonies. The circumstances of a baptism – whether during a service or at any other time – were not as important as the setting. In the church, it was certain that a priest would administer the rite and record it properly. The requirement was also an attempt to reinforce the central place of the church in the lives of Louisiana Catholics. In isolated areas, however, this rule could be waived. Yves-Marie LeConniat performed baptisms as private homes in the outlying areas of Natchitoches parish, and many other Louisiana priests did the same.

A large number of Episcopalians, however, chose to hold baptisms in private homes. Unlike Catholics, members of the Episcopal denomination were not required to hold the christening in a church. Charles Hilton, for example, baptized five-year-old Louisa Jones at the home of her grandfather in New Orleans, and he traveled to nearby McDonoghville in order to baptize an infant. Also in New Orleans, A. P. and Jason Gray were christened at their father’s home. The five Keep children of Rosedale were
all baptized at their home on Easter day in 1859. Methodists could also hold baptisms at home, as in the case of the infants Sarah Keener, Phoebe Armistead, and Martha Clarke of New Orleans.  

Parties often followed private baptisms, much to the dismay of priests. After one such occasion, at which a large company assembled, Episcopal cleric Charles Hilton noted in his diary the determination “to object to liquors at private baptisms.” Samuel Peters attended the christening of the infant Theodore Thompson, at which “about twenty persons were present.” After the ceremony, Peters and the other guests spent two hours “chatting eating & drinking many good things.” Although clergymen disapproved of spirits and other forms of celebration at an important religious event, the family of the child believed that baptism had a broader meaning beyond the purely spiritual. The occasion also celebrated the addition of a new family member, and parents wanted to share their happiness with relatives and friends.  

The isolation of rural Louisiana, however, often meant that families baptized their children without the community involvement that they desired. In Plaquemine Parish, for example, Tryphena and Raymond Fox were the only participants when Raymond Fox’s father, an Episcopal priest, baptized their first child. Tryphena Fox desperately wanted some of their friends and family to attend, but their remote location prevented a gathering of guests. Other families waited to baptize their children until they could have relatives present. William and Ann Johnson’s five youngest children were all born in Concordia Parish, and the family could easily have taken them across the Mississippi river to the Catholic church in Natchez for baptism. They waited, however, nine years after the birth of Marie to bring all five to New Orleans.
There, family members and close friends attended the ceremonies and served as godparents. The Weeks family delayed their young son’s christening a few months so that his uncle, for who he was named, could stand as godfather. For many Catholic and Episcopalian families, baptism marked not only a child’s entrance into the church, but also his or her introduction into the family, and they wished to share that occasion with other relatives.\(^{40}\)

As the examples above show, some denominations, including the Catholic, Episcopal, and Lutheran, required godparents to be chosen for the baptized child. Their job was to nurture the spiritual life of the young person and insure his or her Christian development. Some godparents viewed their role even more broadly. Victoir Brustie and her husband were sponsors to a young New Orleans girl, and when her mother died, they offered to take her in. According to Brustie, “all that a mother and a father could do we are both willing and obliged to do by the oath that we pledged to her dying mother.” There was no legal obligation for a godparent to take on the job of an actual parent, but some like the Brusties felt an obligation to do so. At the same time, families also recognized that godchildren had a special relationship with their sponsors. When Paul DeClouet’s godfather lost his son, DeClouet’s father Alexandre prompted him “to write to him a few lines of condolence” because of the special relationship that they shared. Similarly, Charles Conrad believed that serving as godfather to his nephew would “give me additional claim to his respect.”\(^ {41}\)

In many cases, family members or other people with a close relationship to the family were chosen as godparents. Zenon and Charlotte LeDoux served as sponsors for their younger sister Elizabeth, while Jean Raymond and Marie Amie Montegut did
the same for their niece, also named Marie. Most baptismal records do not indicate what relationship the godparents had with the child, and one should not infer too much from shared surnames. It is likely, however, that Ursule Bercier was somehow related to Joseph Bercier, for whom she stood as godmother. Similarly, Celeste Dufresne and Edmond Bourgeois were probably relatives of their goddaughter, the child of Joseph Dufresne and his wife Adele Bourgeois. When Celine Fremaux was born, her parents chose Victorine Blanchard, whom Mrs. Fremaux had served as a governess, for godmother. Celine’s brother Paul had an aunt and uncle for sponsors, while family friends sponsored young Edouard Fremaux. In the case of Celine, the selection of her godmother maintained ties to the wealthy and socially prominent family for which Mrs. Fremaux had worked. Similarly, William and Elizabeth French chose Zachary Taylor for their son’s godfather in 1845. Taylor had not yet reached the height of his successes in the Mexican War and election to the presidency, but he was a prominent and respected resident of Baton Rouge. Although some families did make similar choices for financial or social reasons, most appeared to honor ties of kinship or close association over rank.42

Religion also played a role in the choice of godparents. Catholics were required to have only Catholic sponsors. When Protestants converted to Catholicism, they often chose members of the clergy as godparents, perhaps because their family members could not or would not serve. Mary Hyacinth of the Daughters of the Cross sponsored Protestant children who wished to become Catholics in Cocoville, and her brother, a priest, did the same in Natchitoches. Kate Sully’s family opposed her decision to convert to Catholicism while a student in New Orleans, so she asked a local
priest to be her godfather. In all of these cases, the priests and nun had also acted as
spiritual advisers, another factor that played into their students' decisions.43

In other denominations, the rules were not as strict, but conflicts did occur.
One New Orleans woman – an Episcopalian – hoped to have a close friend serve as
her daughter’s godparents. At first the friend agreed, but she later withdrew because
“she does not seem to feel it would be right in her as a Presbyterian.” Although the
child’s mother was saddened, she agreed, “she is perfectly right as she could not en­
join what she did not follow.” Although infant baptism was perfectly acceptable to
Presbyterians, there were enough differences between the two sects that all parties
thought it best to choose a different godmother. 44

Parents could also serve as sponsors for their own children. Tryphena and
Raymond Fox, for example, were the godparents for their oldest daughter. Mary
Furman served as sponsor for her daughter, along with two other relatives. When
Phoebe and her husband had their daughter christened in New Orleans, they “stood for
their little one.” Although it was perfectly acceptable for parents to take on this role, it
was quite rare. They preferred to select other family members or close friends for the
job.45

If the godparents were not available for the baptismal ceremony, proxies could
stand in for them. Hore Browse Trist and his mother-in-law stood up for Trist’s
brother Nicholas and his wife Virginia when their young brother and sister were chris­
tened. Marie Guillory substituted for Euphrasine Rousseau when Apallonie LeDoux
was baptized. Later, William Cooley served as a proxy for Joseph LeDoux when Apal­
onie’s cousin Bernard LeDoux was baptized. Although proxies stood at the font and
pronounced the baptismal vows during the ceremony, they were not considered to be godparents to the child, nor Louisianians consider them to have the special relationship that sponsors had with their godchildren.⁴⁶

Often, children were also named for their godparents. This practice was most prevalent among German Lutherans. Of the 306 children baptized from 1840 through 1843 at the New Orleans German Lutheran Church, 179 carried the given name of a sponsor. The godfathers of Johann Georg Gottfried Melliton, for example, were Johann Georg Muller and Gottfried Prossmann. Catherina Ober sponsored Catherina Bub. Members of other groups practiced the same custom. Paul Fremaux, for example, was named for his aunt and godmother, Pauline, and both of Simon and Maria Cucullu’s children shared names with their godparents. Alexandre Fontenot served as godfather for his grandson and namesake. Harriet Aspasie Blanc was given the name of her aunt and godmother, Aspasie Peters, while Charles Smith’s middle name was that of his uncle and godfather, Dominique Seghers. Among Anglo-Americans, Mary Weeks named her infant son for her brother, Charles Conrad, and Conrad also served as godfather. All four of William and Elizabeth French’s children shared either a first or middle name with a godparent, including William Taylor French, whose godfather was Zachary Taylor. Naming a child for his or her godparent was a way to honor the sponsor and also to reinforce the special relationship forged between them during the baptismal rites.⁴⁷

In the evangelical denominations, sponsors were unnecessary. For those denominations that eschewed infant baptism, conversion and testimony were followed by a public baptism surrounded by members of the congregation. Although many
members joined and were baptized during a revival, others simply gave their testimony during a church service and were baptized the same day or shortly thereafter. This event took place at a local lake or river if the sect required full immersion. Otherwise baptism occurred in church or at the camp meetings site. People came forward, in the presence of the entire body, to undergo the rite and be received into the family of believers. At Hephzibah Church, converts like Nancy Powers, Mary Morgan, Melicha Kerby, Nancy Lee, Abigail Rebecca Roberts, and many were all “Baptized and received into full fellowship.” In September of 1845, six women and ten men were baptized when they joined Line Creek Church. Baptism was a communal event that reinforced the exclusive community of believers of many evangelical sects, and the entire congregation served to guide the new member.48

In most cases, slaves required the permission of their masters in order to be baptized. When his slave Rachel wished to receive the sacrament, one New Orleans master gave his written consent directly to the preacher. The downside of this requirement was that slaveholders could withhold consent if so inclined. When slaves organized their own services in secret, they could avoid this restriction. They neither had to ask the masters permission to be baptized nor accept his or her choice of sponsor.49

Many African-American men and women did receive baptism in black congregations. Adeline White, for example, remembered that “preacher Robert,” one of her master’s slaves, baptized her and other members of their church at a special place on the plantation. Josh Jackson, a slave belonging to Eli Sanders, also served as minister on Sanders’ plantation, “and when anyone joined the church he would Baptise them in the creek.” In these cases, the postulant came before fellow slaves or
the creek." In these cases, the postulant came before fellow slaves or free people of color, and the rite of baptism served to reinforce bonds of race and condition.50

Others joined interracial churches. On Easter Sunday in 1853, the rector of St. James Episcopal church in Baton Rouge baptized five adults and several children belonging to area residents. Dianah Watson was baptized in the Mississippi River near Baton Rouge by the white pastor of her church. Kate Curry also recalled that white and black members of her church near Shreveport were baptized in the river together, although the minister administered the rite to whites before slaves. In Monroe, Alice Cole witnessed the same process: "the white people first, then the negroes." At Hephzibah Church in East Feliciana Parish, membership was open to "any person professing faith" by means of baptism. Several area slaves, including Minty and Amy received that sacrament from the church's white preacher. On several occasions, he immersed large interracial groups, such as the one that included the enslaved women Minty and Nicy.51

In racially-mixed congregations, white participants sometimes discounted the baptismal experiences of black men and women. According to Alice Cole, a white minister near Monroe often baptized converts of both races after camp meetings. On one occasion, however, and elderly slave woman became overcome by emotion and nearly drowned. Afterward, the preacher "never would try baptizing slave women anymore." He found her reaction to a powerful religious moment so distasteful that he denied the experience to other enslaved women. In Franklin, the local newspaper poked fun at a gathering to baptize "two Ladies and a negro woman." The author called the baptism of the black woman "ludicrous," and he also reported that several
who witnessed the event "laughed outright." Both the author and the other whites present saw the baptism as entertainment rather than as a solemn and life-altering occasion. In both cases, whites indicated that the religious experiences of black Christians were neither as valid nor as deserving of respect as those of their own race. Finally, in 1860, Mary Furman observed that several of her slaves had planned to be baptized on her plantation. The minister failed to show up, however, giving the men and women "quite a disappointment." Clearly, many whites did not give the religious rituals of slaves the same importance as their own.32

Among Catholic and Episcopal slaves, the process of choosing godparents was more complicated. Many had their sponsors — often members of the master's family — chosen for them. Near Rosedale, Martha and Henry Slack served as godparents for a group of fifty-five enslaved children baptized together on their plantation. In the same area, Sarah Woolfolk sponsored ten slaves her family owned. Members of the Metoyer family — free black planters who lived near Natchitoches — also took on the role of godparents for their slaves. This practice was an extension of slaveholders' paternalistic beliefs. Just as slaveholders believed that slaves needed their guidance in order to lead productive lives, they also felt that enslaved men and women needed the tutelage of their masters in order to become proper Christians.53

On other plantations, parents were able to choose the sponsors for their children. In November of 1855, a priest baptized eighteen slave children living on the same plantation. All of the children had other slaves for godparents, indicating that parents, rather than the master, had picked them. On the Natchitoches Parish plantation of J. B. Prudhomme, a similar situation occurred. All of the sixteen children Fa-
ther Levosnete baptized had enslaved godparents. Mary Scranton, who grew up on a plantation near Lafayette, had a grandmother and an uncle for godparents. In cases like this, the choice of godparents helped reinforce both fictive and real kinship ties, a necessity when parents and children could be sold away from each other.54

For Catholic slaves, baptism was often the one aspect of church life that they were able to participate in. Joseph James’ master had all of his slaves baptized in the Catholic church, but “he didn’t ‘low slaves to go ‘round to church.” Peter Ryas, who lived near St. Martinsville, remembered a similar situation. Mary Scranton was baptized at the Catholic church in Lafayette, but the local priest “neber come t’ see d’ cul­lud folks a ‘tall.” For many Catholic slaveholders, baptism could not be neglected, even if they denied their slaves access to mass.55

Despite the many controversies involving baptism, Christians did consider it a necessary sacrament. When an unbaptized person fell ill, therefore, family and friends made strenuous efforts to remedy the situation. In Natchitoches Parish, members of the Metoyer family would administer an emergency baptism to a sick child, followed by proper church ceremony when the infant recovered and a priest was available. Ernestine Robertson reported that her son “had not been well,” so the family took him to church for baptism. Similarly, Tryphena Fox’s young son was in poor health, and she “so feared he might be taken from me before he could be baptized.” When he finally received the sacrament, she felt as if the event “has taken a great weight from my mind.” Adults like Margaret Patterson of New Orleans and John Quitman Moore of Rosedale also underwent emergency baptisms when a serious illness struck.56
Both revivals and baptisms concerned themselves with the place of people in society and the church, and the two were often closely linked. Revivals were designed to bring people into the church and maintain their religious commitment. At the same time, revivals drew large numbers of people who never experienced conversion. They attended for many reasons, both social and religious. Even if they never joined a church, many Louisianians participated in Christian rituals and events through revivals. In this way, religion permeated Louisiana society more deeply than the number of church members would suggest. The final event of a revival was the baptism, which cemented the convert's status as a Christian.

Whether administered to an adult at a revival or to an infant, baptism was necessary for admission to a church. Despite the many arguments between those who believed in full immersion and sprinkling or other denominational differences, there were certain common elements. Baptism reinforced the important place that family held in antebellum Louisiana. Family members sometimes received the sacrament together, and in denominations that required sponsors, relatives were usually chosen. At the same time, baptism was an important ritual that marked a major transition in life. In evangelical denominations, a young person could experience conversion and be baptized once he or she reached the teen years. Although many people did not do so until much later in life, the baptism ritual can be seen as part of the coming of age process for young Louisianians. In liturgical denominations, confirmation was the main coming of age ritual, and baptism marked a person's arrival in the family. In both cases, religious activities helped families celebrate significant events.
End Notes


2 Sarah Wright to Augustus Wright, 31 May 1856, Wright-Boyd Family Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection (hereafter LLMVC). See also Bruce, And They All Sang Hallelujah, 77-79.

3 See Loveland, Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order, 72.

4 Henry Marston Diary, 6 April 1856, Henry Marston and Family Papers, LLMVC; Sarah Wright to Augustus Wright, 4 May 1854, Wright-Boyd Papers, LLMVC; Sarah Wright to Esther Boyd, 1 April 1857, ibid.; Luther Field Tower Diary, 4 November 1846; LLMVC. See also Loveland, Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order, 77-78.

5 Eliza Rives to Thomas Benjamin Davidson, 27 November 1860, Thomas Benjamin Davidson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (hereafter SHC). See also Bruce, And They All Sang Hallelujah, 3.

6 "List of Converts," September 1845, Jeptha McKinney Papers, LLMVC; Jefferson McKinney to Jeptha McKinney, 3 October 1845, ibid.; Hephzibah Church Books, September 1836, 22 September 1837, LLMVC; Vidalia Concordia Intelligencer, 19 September 1846, 9 October 1847, 16 September 1848; Mary A. Norton to Sophia Collins, 3 July 1851, George H. Carpenter and Family Papers, LLMVC; Harriet Meade to Mary Moore, 11 January 1855, 18 January 1855, David Weeks and Family Papers, LLMVC; Henry Marston Diary, 6 April 1856, Marston Papers, LLMVC. See also Bruce, And They All Sang Hallelujah, 70.

8 Vidalia Concordia Intelligencer, 19 September 1846, 9 October 1847, 16 September 1848; Eliza Rives to Thomas Benjamin Davidson, 25 September 1859, Davidson Papers, SHC; E. John Ellis to Thomas Ellis, 30 March ?, E. John and Thomas C. W. Ellis and Family Papers, LL MVC; Baton Rouge Daily Comet, 14 December 1853; Sarah Wright to Esther Boyd, 1 April 1857, Wright-Boyd Papers, LLMVC; Salem Baptist Church Minute Book, LLMVC; John Houston to William Allen, 3 September 1858, William M. Allen Correspondence, LLMVC. See also William Warren Sweet, Religion in the Development of American Culture, 1765-1840 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952), 150; Walter Brownlow Posey, The Baptist Church in the Lower Mississippi Valley, 1776-1845 (Frankfort: University of Kentucky Press, 1957), 62-63; Bruce, And They All Sang Hallelujah, 51-53.


10 Nancy Willard to Micajah Wilkinson, 28 November 1857, Micajah Wilkinson Papers, LLMVC; Baton Rouge Daily Comet, 14 December 1853. See also Bruce, And They All Sang Hallelujah, 54.

11 Mary Marshall to Mattie Marshall, 24 August 1853, Marshal-Furman Family Papers, LLMVC; David Magill to Charles Weeks, 31 May 1858, Weeks Papers, LLMVC; Richard Butler to Mary Stirling Butler, 6 April 1860, Thomas Butler and Family Papers, LLMVC.


13 M. S. Denton to Louisiana Woolfolk, 9 December 1857, Slack Family Papers, SHC, Records of Ante-bellum Southern Plantations, ser. J, pt. 5; Maria Inskeep to Fanny Hampton, 29 April 1861, Fanny Leverich Eshlemann Craig Collection, TU.

14 See also Baudier, The Catholic Church in Louisiana, 403.

15 Vernon Southern Times, 20 May 1859; Jefferson McKinney to Jeptha McKinney, 3 October 1845, McKinney Papers, LLMVC; Neppy Hamilton to her sister, 29 September 1858, William S. Hamilton Papers, LLMVC. See also Bruce, And They All Sang Hallelujah, 54-56, 79, 130.


17 Vernon Southern Times, 20 May 1859; Sarah Wright to Augustus Wright, 4 May 1854, 31 May 1856, Wright-Boyd Papers, LLMVC.

18 Kate Adams to Orlando Adams, 21 July 1856, Israel Adams and Family Papers, LLMVC; Neppy Hamilton to her sister, 29 September 1858, Hamilton Papers, LLMVC; Eliza Rives to Thomas Davidson, 25 September 1859, Davidson Papers, SHC.


20 Luther Field Tower Diary, 4 November 1846, LLMVC; Polly Shine narrative, in George P. Rawick, ed., The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography: Supplement, Series 2, (10 vols., Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979), 9: 3517. For comment on the opportunities for women at camp meetings, see Catharine Clinton,


“List of Converts,” September 1845, McKinney Papers, LLMVC; Hephzibah Church Books, September 1836, LLMVC; Sarah Benjamin narrative, in Rawick, ed., The American Slave, ser. 2, II: 256; Adeline White narrative, in Rawick, ed., The American Slave, ser. 2, X: 4027. See also Raboteau, Slave Religion, 227-228. Kenneth O. Brown has called the camp meeting a combination of revival, proclamation, and sacrament, and baptism was an important part of the events. See Kenneth O. Brown,
Among Jewish Louisianians, a naming ceremony and bris—or ritual circumcision—served to introduce infants to the religious community. On the occasion, parents would assign a Hebrew name in addition to the English given name. This act, along with circumcision for male babies, cemented the child’s place as a member of the Jewish faith. In New Orleans, Kate Goodman held a “very short but pretty & impressive” naming ceremony for her daughter at her home, for which the entire family gathered. Goodman also chose family members to serve as godparents for her child. Some Jewish families did not follow this naming custom at all, however. Leah Levy declined to hold a naming ceremony for her youngest son, because “she did not wish that one child should be different to the others.” For many like the Levys, a naming ceremony would set them apart when they were trying hard to assimilate to mainstream Louisianana culture. See for examples Cely Nevins to Lou Wharton, 10 November 1861, Edward Clifton Wharton and Family Papers, LLMVC; Elliott Ashkenazi, ed., *The Civil War Diary of Clara Solomon: Growing Up in New Orleans, 1861-1862* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 154.


29 Baptisms, First Presbyterian Church Recordbook, TU; Baptisms, Lafayette, Andrew Chapel, and E. Steele Chapel Charge Records, TU. See also Gregory A. Wills, *Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority, and Church Discipline in the Baptist South, 1785-1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 5.

LeConniat to his parents, 8 November 1861, *ibid.*, 135; Ann Raney Thomas Memoirs, Ann Raney Thomas Papers, TU; Mary Anne Robertson Diary, 18 April 1855, Eliza Anne Robertson Papers, SHC, *Records of Ante-bellum Southern Plantations*, ser. J., pt. 5; Leonidas Polk to Board of Missions, 17 May 1839, Leonidas Polk Papers, SHC.

31 Samuel J. Peters, Jr. Diary, 30 May 1850, 15 March 1862, LLMVC; George Lanaux Baptismal Certificate, March 1841, George Lanaux and Family Papers, LLMVC; Theodore Barnette Baptismal Certificate, 16 August 1820, Charles Provosty Baptismal Certificate, 14 March 1826, LeDoux Family Papers, TU; Baptisms, German Lutheran Church Papers, TU.

32 Baptisms, 24 April 1859, 19 January 1861, Church of the Nativity Parish Register, LLMVC.


35 Emily Caroline Douglas Autobiography, Emily Caroline Douglas Papers, LLMVC; Mary Furman to Mattie Marshall, 14 May 1859, Marshall-Furman Family Papers, LLMVC; M. Cenas to James Cenas, 7 April 1851, Pierre G. T. Beauregard and Family Papers, LLMVC.

36 Yves-Marie LeConniat to his parents, 16 June 1862, McCants, ed., *They Came to Louisiana*, 154. See also Miller, “A Church in Cultural Captivity,” 42-43.

37 Rev. Charles Hilton Diary, 7 March 1865; 18 January 1865, TU; Samuel J. Peters, Jr. Diary, 27 May 1849, LLMVC; Baptisms, 24 April 1859, 19 January 1861, Church of the Nativity Parish Register, LLMVC; Baptisms, March 1851, 29 April 1851, Lafayette, Andrew Chapel, and E. Steele Chapel Charge Records, TU.

38 Rev. Charles Hilton Diary, 26 January 1865, TU; Samuel J. Peters, Jr. Diary, 15 May 1848, LLMVC.

40 Marie Alice Johnson, Catherine Johnson, Eugenia Johnson, Josephine Johnson, and Gabriel Clarence Johnson Baptismal Certificates, 13 June 1856, William T. Johnson and Family Memorial Papers, LLMVC; Charles Conrad to Mary Weeks, 16 June 1832, Weeks Papers, LLMVC.

41 Victoir Brustie to Ann Johnson, November 1856, Johnson Memorial Papers, LLMVC; Alexandre DeClouet to Paul DeClouet, 28 May 1860, Paul DeClouet Papers, LLMVC; Charles Conrad to Mary Weeks, 16 June 1832, Weeks Papers, LLMVC.


43 Mary Hyacinth LeConniat to Yves-Marie LeConniat, 25 August 1856, in McCants, ed, *They Came to Louisiana*, 51; Yves-Marie LeConniat to his parents, May 1861, *ibid.*, 128; Kate Sully to Mary Jane Robertson, 28 June 1861, Mary Jane Robertson Papers, LLMVC.

44 Rosa to Martha Nicholls, 18 May 1847, Nicholls Family Papers, TU.

45 Tryphena Fox to Anna Holder, 28 June 1857, in King, ed., *A Northern Woman in the Plantation South*, 68; Mary Furman to Sadie Marshall, 14 May 1859, Marshall-Furman Papers, LLMVC; Maria Inskeep to Fanny Hampton, 2 May 1846, Craig Collection, TU.

46 Hore Browse Trist to Nicholas Trist, 29 April 1826, Nicholas P. Trist Papers, SHC; Apollonie LeDoux Baptismal Certificate, 15 April 1817, Bernard LeDoux Baptismal Certificate, 10 September 1856, LeDoux Papers, TU.

47 Baptisms, German Lutheran Church Papers, TU; Geary, *Celine*, 20; Jose Salustino Cucullu Baptismal Certificate, 28 October 1813, Cucullu Family Papers, TU; Luis Maria Cucullu Baptismal Certificate, 25 November 1816, *ibid.*; “Registe des enfants,” Ozeme Fontenot and Family Papers, LLMVC; Samuel J. Peters, Jr. Diary, 30 May 1850, LLMVC; Charles Edmond Dominique Smith Baptismal Certificate, 8 April 1832, Schmidt Family Papers, TU; Charles Conrad to Mary Weeks, 16 June 1832, Weeks Papers, LLMVC; “Children of William and Elizabeth French,” St. James Episcopal Church Papers, LLMVC.
48 Hephzibah Church Books, 15 May 1824, 11 August 1827, 11 November 1827, 25 August 1828, 8 September 1832, May 1837, LLMVC; “List of Converts,” McKinney Papers, LLMVC.

49 ? Elliot to John Brown, 26 June 1856, Elliot Consent for Baptism, HNOC.


52 Alice Cole narrative, in Rawick, ed., The American Slave, ser. 2, III: 751-752; Franklin Planter’s Banner and Louisiana Agriculturalist, 9 July 1846; Mary Furman to Sadie Marshall, 29 January 1860, Marshall-Furman Papers, LLMVC.

53 Baptisms, 15 May 1859, 31 March 1861, 30 June 1861, Church of the Nativity Parish Register, LLMVC. See also Gary B. Mills, “Piety and Prejudice: A Colored Catholic Community in the Antebellum South,” in Randall M. Miller and Jon L. Wakelyn, eds., Catholics in the Old South: Essays on Church and Culture (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1983), 186. See Stafford Poole and Douglas J. Slawson, Church and Slave in Perry County, Missouri, 1818-1865 (Lewiston, MO: Edwin Mellen Press, 1986), 63, for examination of possible meanings that white sponsorship could carry.

54 Plantation Record Book, 11 November 1855, TU; Natchitoches Parish Documents, 19 October 1856, LLMVC; Mary Scranton narrative, in Rawick, ed., The American Slave, ser. 2., IX: 3481.

Ernestine Robertson to Mary Jane Robertson, 23 June 1860, Mary Jane Robertson Papers, LLMVC; Tryphena Fox to Anna Holder, 14 October 1864, King, ed., *A Northern Woman in the Plantation South*, 140; Baptisms, 5 October 1850, Lafayette, Andrew Chapel, and E. Steele Chapel Charge Records, TU; Baptisms, 1860, Church of the Nativity Parish Register, LLMVC. See also Heyrman, *Southern Cross*, 153.
Marriage unites two people in order to form a new family unit. For antebellum Louisianians it was not merely a personal event, however. Each half of the bridal couple brought familial expectations and prejudices to the relationship, as well as concerns over property, status, and religion. Not only did marriage mark a person’s transition into full adulthood, but the circumstances surrounding a wedding also illustrated some of Louisiana society’s deeply entrenched values.

Courtship began the process that ended with the wedding ceremony. Young men and women began the search for a mate during their teens, as they finished education and men began their own jobs. Eliza Harbour and Charles Collins formed an attachment even before she went away to boarding school, and they maintained their long-distance courtship as she completed her studies. While a student at Jefferson College, Thomas Bowie occupied his time flirting and holding hands with girls in church. Adolescence was a time to become acquainted with the opposite sex and engage in romances.¹

Arranged marriages were few, but they did exist, especially among the state’s Creole population. Celine Fremaux recalled that a woman she knew in Baton Rouge had been engaged as a child to a cousin and married him as soon as she left school. In Avoyelles Parish, Mary Hyacinth LeConniat observed of her students, “some are
promised far in advance in marriage," a fact which made them “not masters of them­selves.” Among the free people of color in Natchitoches Parish, arranged matches, such as the one that took place between Ambroise Severe Dupre and Sidalise Sarpy, remained fairly common throughout the antebellum period. ²

By the early nineteenth century, however, the ideals of romantic love and the companionate marriage were becoming the norm, and most young people chose a spouse based primarily or at least partially on romantic love. Frederick Conrad, for example, referred to his fiancée as “my sweetheart” and lavished affection on her. Tryphena Fox took her promise to love her husband very seriously, and she cherished him as “one who hath offered me heart and home.” When she agreed to marry Braxton Bragg, Elise Ellis marveled at her transformation into “a gentle loving being.” ³ Families generally accepted the new model of marriage, and the majority of young Louisianians were allowed to find their own partners. Walter Brashear expressed a sentiment held by many parents when he declared, “I have always determined to be reconciled to the choice which my children should make.” Similarly, J. B. Walton believed that his daughter “ought to be allowed to determine the matter alone.” ⁴

Although they recognized that their children should have the freedom to marry as they pleased, families did not give up the right to advise during the process of selecting a mate. Most fundamentally, they did this by limiting a child’s exposure to unacceptable men or women. Suzette Huppe counseled her son Bernadin Lafton to remain vigilant with any men his daughters might meet and determine if their family status, habits, and prospects would make them suitable husbands. She urged him not to allow the girls to attend amusements unchaperoned because they might meet strange
and undesirable men. If this did happen, Lafton must discourage the relationship before it got serious. In a similar manner, the Loisel family had their daughters’ fiancés live with them for a period of months as a form of probation before the wedding. These families hoped that by exercising careful oversight, they could protect their children from making an unwise match.5

In both a young person’s selection of a mate and a parent’s advice on that choice, many factors came into play. Money was one of the most important. One suspects Micajah Barrow was only half joking when he wrote, “I’ll never marry – unless I could find a good looking Lady that possessed some fifteen or twenty working hands – as I now want negroes very much indeed.” Both men and women took the wealth and prospects of a future spouse into consideration very often. Thomas Robertson, for example, estimated that his future father-in-law was worth between sixty and eighty thousand dollars. In Shreveport, Lucy Gooch wed her father’s business partner “for the sake of the family” because he could supply much-needed capital to the Gooch’s store. When Amelia Byrne married in 1853, a friend believed “she will do very well,” because her husband was a successful businessman with good prospects. John Allen reported approvingly that his friend Garnet Bates had chosen a bride whose father “owns a great deal of fine bottom lands.” Clarissa Dougherty had some property of her own, but her aunt rejoiced when she married a man who was “entirely clear of debt and has a very good beginning to commence with.” On the other side of the issue, Bennet Barrow deplored “Yankey speculators coming out here to seek their fortunes by marrying,” like the man his sister-in-law planned to wed. Later, he observed that a neighbor married “a Dandy from the North repeatedly saying he would never marry a
woman that was not rich.” Clearly, financial concerns did have an impact on courtship.6

The family of one’s intended spouse could also make a difference. Ann Butler believed that a large inheritance was not enough for Dr. Fan to overlook an acquaintance’s “want of high birth and standing.” Conversely, Jared Sanders commended a friend for choosing the daughter of a “most excellent woman.” Robert Patrick observed in his diary that neighbors in his hometown believed he was engaged to a young woman he spent a great deal of time with. Although Patrick admitted “I used to make love to her,” his distaste for her family meant, “I never had the most distant ideal of marrying her.” In northern Louisiana, William Wadley’s mother interfered in his engagement “with a girl that she considered beneath him socially.” Clearly, young men and women, along with their families, tried to avoid making matches with individuals who came from different social backgrounds.7

Marriage between cousins occurred fairly often in antebellum Louisiana, especially among the wealthier classes. In 1844, prosperous planter Robert Barrow wed his cousin Mary Barrow in West Feliciana Parish. Another Barrow, Willy, also married a cousin. One Terrebonne woman married her mother’s first cousin, while Lucy-Ann Chew also selected a cousin for her spouse. In St. Landry Parish, George Lanaux wed Jeanne Odile Laneaux, his first cousin. When members of the same family married, it ensured that property would remain concentrated in the family. It also relieved any concern individuals might have over the suitability and social standing of the intended spouse. Among free people of color, especially those who lived outside of New Orleans, relatives might be the only people available for a legal marriage. Near Natchito-
ches, for example, members of the Metoyer family often chose cousins for spouses, although some members brought mates from New Orleans. Some Louisianians, however, frowned on allowing cousins to marry. When William Weeks and his first cousin Mary Palfrey became engaged, many family members tried to persuade them to break it off, citing “their . . . numerous objections to intermarriage.” Most cousins, however, faced few obstacles when they wished to unite.8

However, Catholics who wished to marry cousins had to obtain special dispensation from the bishop. The Catholic Church had restrictions against marriage within three degrees of consanguinity and two degrees of affinity. This rule meant that first, second, and third cousins as well as family members from different generations needed a waiver of church rules. Joseph Hebert and his cousin Victorine Dupuy applied for permission through their priest, Peter Lucas, in West Baton Rouge Parish, as did Joachim Richard and Emee Blanchard. Richard and Blanchard stated that cousin marriage was a common custom in their area. In most cases, the church freely gave permission to relatives within the proscribed categories.9

Ethnicity, too, was a consideration to individuals while courting. Many native Creoles of French or Spanish descent, for example, preferred to enter unions with other Creoles or with Francophone and Spanish-speaking immigrants. The huge influx of refugees from Saint Domingue and Cuba, along with continued immigration from France and the Spanish Canary Islands, enlarged the pool of potential spouses who would share the same languages and many of the same customs as Louisiana’s Creoles. More than half of Francophone immigrants married Creole women, while over ninety percent of Creole men chose brides from among their own group.10
Throughout the antebellum period, however, large numbers of Creoles and Anglo-Americans intermarried. More than half of Creole women wed outside their ethnic group. Although many of those women did choose French-speaking husbands from France or the Caribbean, a large number united with Anglo-American men as well. Mary Brown Jones wed St. Julien de Tournillon in 1813, and her son, Hore Browse Trist, married Marie Bringier twenty-one years later. In Alexandria, Jefferson McKinney married Irene Guery, a Creole woman. In all of the above cases — and in general — the Creole partner was Catholic, and the Anglo-American was Protestant.11

While religion could play a role in courtships, few people let adherence to different faiths end an otherwise happy relationship. Many Louisianians hoped to find a spouse who shared the same religious beliefs and customs. Roberdeau Wheat felt certain that his father, an Episcopal minister, would approve of his intended bride “for she is a true member of the Church.” It was not uncommon for members of different denominations to marry, despite the insistence of Baptists and Methodists that members only select partners from within their own faith. Priscilla Munnikhuysen, for example, felt no qualms when marrying a Presbyterian man, although she had been raised a devout Methodist. Janet Crawford, a Presbyterian, married an Episcopalian and began attending his church. Ann Raney, who was raised as an Episcopalian and converted to Methodism, was married to a lifelong Baptist. Shortly before his death, however, Raney’s husband joined the Methodist church because he believed “it did not look well for a man to belong to a different church to his wife.”12

When Catholics and non-Catholics united, the situation became more complicated. The Catholic Church insisted that a priest must perform interfaith ceremonies in
order for the marriage to be valid. If a Catholic married a non-Catholic without the participation of a priest, he or she must undergo the ritual of penance and reconciliation and have the union blessed by a priest. The only exceptions to this rule were those isolated areas where priests were not available. Beginning in 1831, Louisiana Catholics also had to receive special permission from the bishop in order to marry those of other faiths. These rules were designed both to discourage interfaith unions and to ensure that Catholics would not leave the Church if they did contract such marriages, which the Catholic hierarchy called “painful” and “ill regulated.” In 1840, the Council of American Bishops further stipulated that persons entering an interfaith union must promise to baptize and raise their children as Catholics. In a few cases, one member of the couple changed religious affiliation. A Protestant St. Francisville man, for example, converted to Catholicism for his bride. In New Orleans, Victor Souza, a Jewish man, was baptized at St. Louis Church just three weeks before his wedding to Rose Bordeaux. Cilistine McLain, on the other hand, “broke loose from all Catholic ties unhesitatingly” when she married a Methodist man.13

Interfaith marriages among Louisiana’s Jewish population were fairly common. According to one scholar, half of the Jewish men who settled in New Orleans between 1801 and 1815 married Christian women. This trend was in part because of the dearth of Jewish women, but similarly high rates of intermarriage continued into the 1830s, by which time more Jewish women had migrated to the state. Clara Solomon, for example, noted nothing unusual in the wedding of Judith Hyams to Horatio Sprigg, in a ceremony performed by an Episcopal minister. Joachim Kohn married Marie Martin in the Catholic Church, and his nephew Carl married the daughter of
Maunsell White, a wealthy Protestant merchant and planter. Judah Benjamin, who would serve in the United States Senate and the Confederate cabinet, married Nathalie St. Martin, daughter of a wealthy Creole family. Intermarriage was so common that the founders of Congregation Gates of Mercy omitted the law denying membership to men who had married non-Jews from its charter.\(^{14}\)

Some, however, disapproved of interfaith marriages. Commenting on the engagement of a cousin, Cely Nevins stated, “what a good think it is that they are of the same faith.” Ironically, she wrote this to another relative who had married a Christian. The bylaws of Congregation Dispersed of Judah stipulated that persons who “have married out of the Jewish faith, they shall have made a public avowal of atonement for such act” before they could join the synagogue. A current member who married a person of a different religion “shall forfeit all rights and privileges of membership.” Indeed, in a national periodical, a leading Jewish clergyman advocated cutting members of interfaith unions off entirely from the Jewish community.\(^{15}\)

According to Louisiana law, whites could not marry free people of color, nor could free blacks marry slaves. When members of these groups wished to form unions, therefore, informal relationships like placage were the result. Placage was the established custom of white men taking mistresses from among the free black population. These arrangements could be casual, or they could involve intricate contracts that spelled out how the placee would be supported and what compensation she would receive if the relationship ended. While some placage unions were transitory or manipulative, others were long-lasting and involved true affection. During a visit to New Orleans, Frederick Law Olmsted observed that some men “form so strong attachments,
that the relation is never discontinued, but becomes, indeed, that of marriage, except
that it is not legalized or solemnized." Also in New Orleans, one free black woman
and her white suitor had a Catholic priest perform the marriage ceremony without a
license. Although not legally binding, the couple viewed their relationship as sacra-
mentally valid.16

Most free people of color, however, preferred to contract legal marriages with
members of their own group. Ann Amie and Sophie Charlotte Bingaman of New Or-
leans both married free black men. The marriages of Alexis Porche and Marie
D’Arensbourg and Joseph Decuir and Louise D’Arensbourg of Edgard were also cele-
brated between free people of color. In northern Louisiana, members of the Metoyer
family intermarried with other free families of color in the Cane River area, including
the LeComte, Monet, Rachal, LaCour, and Dupre clans. They also found spouses in
New Orleans and among free black immigrants from Saint Domingue.17

For women, matrimony was seen as a necessity. Anna Butler deplored the mar-
riage of a friend to “a widower with six children,” but Butler recognized, “in her de-
pendent state, she cannot be particular.” Similarly, Ann Thomas did not want to re-
marry after the death of her husband, but she had small children to support. She re-
garded her second union as “not my choice but a matter of necessity and conven-
ience.” Friends of Martha Kenner advised her to advance the date of her planned wed-
ding during her father’s serious illness. In the event of William Kenner’s death, they
feared that she and her younger sisters “would be left without a protector.” Similarly,
Rachel O’Connor fretted over her nieces’ “very helpless situation without parents or a
brother that is old enough to take charge of their property.” She saw marriage as the
only solution to the problem. Antebellum women had few occupational options, nor were they considered able to administer any property they owned. Society therefore believed that women should marry in order to secure financial stability and a protector who would guard their interests.18

Protection and financial support were not the only reasons that women considered marriage necessary. As Eliza Ripley recalled, “old maids were rare . . . . The few exceptions served to emphasize the rarity of an unmated female.” One New Orleans woman was thrilled at receiving a proposal because she “began to think there was great danger of her not having Mrs on her grave stones.” In Donaldsonville, Maria Welman was “dreadfully afraid of living a life of single blessedness” and therefore “made a resolution to be married before Christmas.” To that end, she engaged herself “partially” to three different men. In the pre-Civil War South, a woman had no established role outside of marriage, and many feared that they might spend their lives in the limbo of spinsterhood.19

Widowed parents often chose new spouses in order to provide a parent for their children. Herman Noble reported that his uncle Micajah Barrow was restless and unhappy because his children had no mother. According to Noble, Barrow wanted to “have a home for his children,” something the widower believed he could not provide alone. Ann Butler felt certain that a widowed neighbor would quickly remarry “if she gets a good offer.” Although she made teasing remarks about the widow’s preference for parties rather than mourning, Butler believed, “it would be the best thing for her & her children if she made a prudent match.” Bennet Barrow married his sister-in-law, which had been the dying wish of his wife. Emily Barrow believed that her sister
would be a kind and loving mother to her children. In most cases, the ability to love and take care of stepchildren was the primary motivation in a widow or widower's choice.20

In many cases, two young people were forced to marry because of pregnancy. In New Orleans, Ann Amie was four months pregnant when her mother found out about her condition and demanded a wedding the same day. In West Feliciana Parish, Rachel O’Connor reported that her neighbor’s son and his wife had a child six weeks after their wedding. Another nearby couple had been married less than four months before their son was born. Both of these cases occurred during the same summer. Referring to another recent wedding, O’Connor observed, “I don’t expect they will be so smart, but there is no knowing.” Later, O’Connor reported that a friend who married in April “expects to be confined in August.” Although it is impossible to know how many pregnancies occurred before marriage, it certainly was not an unknown or unacknowledged circumstance in antebellum Louisiana.21

Once two people decided to marry, they encountered a wide variety of societal and family obligations. Often, the first step was to obtain consent of the bride’s family. Arthur Lesconflair wrote to his fiancée’s brother, sister, and brother-in-law asking for their blessing before his wedding. Although Adelaide Prescott was a grown woman with children of her own, her fiancé petitioned both her father and sister for their consent. John Leigh called this act “a respect, a right universally conceded – customary and besides it is positively enjoined by Madame Adelaide M. Prescott.” Clarissa Davis was also an adult when she married Lewis Davis. She would not name a date for the ceremony, however, until she had obtained the permission of her aunt and uncle.22
Although adult men were considered more independent than women, securing the blessing of the groom’s parents was also often considered a vital step. When Mary Raney married John Smith without the knowledge of his family, she worried that they would be angry with her. Charles Palfrey apologized to his father for marrying without the family’s knowledge or permission. When she married without the consent of her husband’s family, Mary Farrar Wilkinson begged her father-in-law, “let me throw myself on your mercy, for the precipitous step I have taken.” While recognizing Joseph Wilkinson’s right to take offense at the marriage, she asked for his pardon and promised to be a good wife to his son.23

Many young people believed that it was their duty as respectful children to secure the consent of their parents. They also realized that family harmony often depended on this important move. Looking back after three years of marriage, Bennet Barrow believed that no one should “marry a Daughter against the mothers will.” In his experience, “hatred or dislike remains with her forever.” Because angry or resentful in-laws could make life difficult for newlyweds, it was in the best interest of everyone to obtain their blessing.24

Although generally a formality, this stage was necessary if either one of the parties had not yet reached the age of majority, twenty-one. In St. Charles Parish, the parents of the minor Marie Piseros had to give their consent before a parish judge and two witnesses for her marriage to Louis Lebranche. Melanie Guillier’s father also came to the St. Charles Parish court to give permission for his young daughter’s union. When Ned Means married a minor without her father’s consent, the father pressed charges in order to have the union nullified. Similarly, a St. James Parish couple went
to Mississippi for their wedding because “the marriage, in the minority of the young lady could not be valid in Louisiana without parental consent.”

During the antebellum period, the average age of marriage in the South was twenty for women and twenty-one for men. Many people, of course, were much older or younger when they married. Elizabeth Bieller was just fifteen when she married Felix Bosworth, while Harriet Lewis attended the wedding of a Grand Cane bride who was only fourteen. During his residence in Louisiana, Timothy Flint observed that in Creole households “marriages take place when the parties are very young, and mothers of fifteen are not uncommon.” Although Flint generalized too broadly and overlooked similar occurrences in Anglo-American families, the point remains that many young men and women were minors when they married and therefore needed the permission of their parents or guardians.

Most parents and guardians happily gave their consent to a child’s choice of partner. When she wrote asking for his permission to marry, Frederick Conrad recognized that his younger sister was “about to decide upon one of the most serious, and important acts of your life,” but he trusted that she would choose wisely and promised to support whatever decision she made. Walter Brashear replied to the request of his daughter’s fiancé with a letter praising Henry Lawrence’s “industry, sobriety, intelligence, and honesty of purpose.” If parents had been involved in the courtship process, they were likely to approve of the selection their offspring had made.

Many, however, either withheld consent or considered doing so for a wide variety of reasons. The age of their children could sometimes induce parents to resist giving permission to marry. John Christian Buhler was reluctant to let his son marry
before he had finished school and obtained a law license, which could not be done before John Robert Buhler turned twenty-one. Hore Browse Trist, too, wanted his son to complete his studies before rushing into marriage, as did the mother of Josephine Cross. Aglae Bringier’s family were “all indignant” when she proposed marrying because they considered her “a mere child – even physically . . . – but morally a child to all intents & purposes.” In New Orleans, Henrietta Ray wanted to marry at eighteen, but her father withheld his consent and made her wait until she was twenty-two. When Alfred Weeks wanted to marry while still a student, his mother admonished him, writing, “no parent wishes his child to marry at so early an age.” Ann Baines’ mother had a different kind of age-related concern. Her daughter became engaged to a much older man “who has a daughter older than herself.” Parents did not want immature young people to rush into an unwise union, nor did they approve of huge disparities in age.28

A prospective spouse’s background also played into family concerns. Bythell Haynes thought highly of the young woman her son wanted to marry, but she balked at the marriage because “the standing in society of her father, and some of the relations, are not as fair as I could wish.” Among other things, Hore Browse Trist objected to “the pecuniary position” of his son’s chosen betrothed when he demanded an end to the courtship. A Mrs. Wadley of Ouchita Parish broke off her young son’s engagement to a girl she considered socially inferior.29

In addition to concerns over status, many parents and guardians worried that future spouses were only interested in the wealth that a young person possessed. Ann Thomas recalled that when a local carpenter discovered that her ward Louisa Whitaker would inherit three thousand dollars from her mother’s estate, he “commenced paying
attention to her right away.” Both Raney and the executor of the estate worried about the situation and “talked to her about him being a very unsuitable man for her.” In southern Louisiana, one man believed that his daughter’s suitor “had probably made calculations which would be disappointed.” In both cases, parental figures tried to stop the marriages, but did not explicitly forbid them.30

When parents did place obstacles in the way of a marriage, elopement was often the result. Antoinette Bernard ran away from the home of her guardians to get married, as did Mary Robert. William Munson and Adelaide Howell first tried to elope in November of 1837 with the help of her brother. Her father caught them in that attempt, but another try four months later was successful. William Stirling and his bride married in Baltimore, and they kept the match a secret from their families for as long as possible. Young lovers were determined to marry, despite the opposition of their parents.31

Society generally frowned on runaway weddings, and the consequences could be severe. Noting three elopements in just over a month near Greenwood, Sarah Wright remarked, “the fashion will be kept up – although it be a wrong one.” One woman believed that a young man who eloped “stole his wife,” and Mary Davis remarked that a young woman involved in an elopement “has behaved very badly.” Jacob Bieller disinherited his daughter when she ran away to marry Felix Bosworth “contrary to my express wish.” Another man living in southern Louisiana also cut his daughter out of his will when she “ran off about 15 days ago with a man named Cahoon.” Hore Browse Trist, who observed the situation, called it a “catastrophe.” When Becky Dunn of Baton Rouge eloped with a New Orleans man, “none of the family
will speak to her” upon her return as a married woman. Mary and Charles Pearce were “afraid to leave the house” after their runaway wedding because of the angry reaction of her father.32

Some Louisianians, however, felt sympathy for the young people in certain situations. The editor of the Baton Rouge Daily Gazette and Comet believed, “there may be cases where an elopement is excusable.” Elizabeth Copes wrote sympathetically about the elopement of an acquaintance. Although “some censure them very much,” Copes felt that they had done the right thing because “her father acknowledged he could make no reasonable objection” to the match. Copes planned to call on the young couple to show her support. Hannah Dunlap also called on a bride who had eloped.33

Parents were not the only family members to express concerns or disapproval over an engagement, especially when one of the parties was widowed. Although Nicholas Trist expressed the belief that his new stepfather would be “a Protector and a friend and a Father,” and the children of Alfred Carr greeted their stepmother “quite cordially,” many family members had great difficulty accepting a new spouse. David Magill reported that his cousins were “much opposed” to their father’s remarriage. When Caroline Joor became engaged with the blessing of her mother, her brothers and brother-in-law interfered in the relationship until she ended it. In New Orleans Jules Blanc proposed marrying a widow only fifteen months after the death of his first wife. The late Harriette Blanc’s brother was appalled and stated, “I should prefer that he should never marry again.” Other members of the family refused to call on Jules
Blanc's fiancée "because they are all shocked at the idea that Jules so soon began to think of replacing my dear sister Harriette."\textsuperscript{34}

Most weddings, however, took place with the full blessing and involvement of family members. Augustin Rousseau and Catherine Chapron married "with the consent of . . . his father, and . . . with the consent and full approval of all of her family. St. Julien de Tournillon and Mary Jones wed "by the advice & consent of their relations and friends." Once the consent and approbation of family members had been secured, a young couple could begin planning their wedding.\textsuperscript{35}

Among the enslaved population of Louisiana, special circumstances dictated many of the details of courtship and marriage. Like white Louisianians, most slaves had considerable freedom of choice when picking a mate. The slaveholder, however, could influence the decision, especially when both parties belonged to him or her. Chris Franklin recalled that slaves had to ask his master for permission to marry, although "de marster he mostly say 'Yes' 'thout waiting." Emilier Carmouche, too, required all slaves to apply for consent to wed. Families, too, played a role. Tolas Parsons required his slave women to obtain the consent of their parents as well as his own permission before they could marry.\textsuperscript{36}

When contracting a marriage with a man or woman belonging to a different master, slaves generally had to acquire the permission of both owners. One planter stipulated in his overseer's instructions that men and women must obtain the planter's consent before contracting a marriage abroad. N. F. Rice gave his slave Edward permission to marry a woman owned by Joseph Copes, "should such an arrangement meet the approbation of the parties concerned."\textsuperscript{37}
Many slaveholders were reluctant to allow their slaves to marry off the plantation. Joseph Embree did not want to let Peter take a bride belonging to Henry Marston because Chaney resided with her master in Clinton. Embree believed that by going into the town on a regular basis “he would meet with more temptations to get into rascality or meanness.” He was willing to agree to the match, however, if Marston “would protect him in good behavior” by supervising Peter’s visits to Chaney. Even when both individuals lived on the same plantation, complications could arise. Hore Browse Trist had several slaves on his plantation who belonged to his absent brother Nicholas. When one of them wished to marry Cooper, one of Hore Browse Trist’s slaves, he discouraged her, pointing out that she could be sold any time and warning her “not to form any permanent connexion.” Trist opposed the match because of “the effect it may have on her husband” if Lavinia were ever sold. Trist, like many masters, however, eventually accepted the choice of his slave.38

In French and Spanish colonial Louisiana, marriage contracts were required once a white man and woman agreed to marry and had acquired any necessary permission. They listed each person’s assets and any deviations from the community property law that he or she desired. Once Louisiana joined the United States, marriage contracts were no longer mandatory. Louisiana remained a community property state, however, and many people chose to modify the provisions of that law with a contract. When Charles Rowley and Eugenie Soria married in 1846, for example, they explicitly stated, “no partnership or community of augments and gains shall exist.” Soria renounced any claim to the property that her husband might acquire during their marriage, and he in turn relinquished claim to administer the property she already owned.
Finally, he agreed to pay four hundred dollars each quarter to support his wife. George Otis Hall gave his bride ten thousand dollars along with furniture and plate before they married. Along with twelve hundred dollars worth of jewelry, this served as her dowry. According to the contract she made with Ogden Dunning, Amanda Van Wickle’s dowry came from money her father owed her. The custom continued throughout the entire antebellum period. As late as 1858, Jean Baptiste Ferchaud, who served as a magistrate in St. James Parish, was writing marriage contracts for couples there.39

As the examples show, a marriage contract was often used as a way to protect the bride’s interests when she owned considerably more property than her intended husband. Eugenie Soria brought more into the marriage than Charles Rowley, and he had no control over her portion. When Amanda Van Wickle married Ogden Dunning, he gave up any claim to the slaves and property she had inherited from her mother. Van Wickle’s mother, Virginie LeDoux Dayries had enacted the same stipulations when she married Jacob Van Wickle nearly twenty years earlier. Mary Weeks had inherited considerable property from her first husband, and her contract with John Moore stipulated that “the future spouse shall retain the full and entire administration of all her property and effects without any control . . . on the part of the said future husband.”40

Marriage contracts were also used to modify Louisiana inheritance laws. By law, a spouse must inherit one third of the deceased person’s estate, but individuals could renounce this inheritance before they married. If Anne Marie Castarede outlived her husband, she would inherit only two thousand dollars. George Otis Hall supplied
his bride with a dowry, but he stipulated in the contract that the cash and goods would revert to him if she died without bearing him children. These provisions were intended to keep property in the family of the original owner and prevent it from passing into the family of a spouse. Charles Weeks hoped to arrange a contract so that – if he should predecease his wife – a future husband could not gain control of her property. He wanted to insure that she would not fall prey to adventurers who would marry her for her inheritance and waste it.  

Before they could hold the ceremony, Catholics were also required to publish the banns, or notice of their intent to marry, three times prior to the ceremony. This rule was designed to inform community members of the upcoming event and to solicit information about any potential impediments to the union. Archbishop Antoine Blanc also considered the banns an important tool to teach young people “the grave consequences involved in the indissolubility of the conjugal tie.” Publication on three consecutive Sundays created a waiting period that helped ensure that individuals entered into matrimony carefully and after serious thought. Many Catholic Louisianians, however, neglected this step, an omission the archbishop condemned.

Among the state’s wealthier inhabitants, preparations for a wedding included gathering a trousseau for the bride. While living in Pointe Coupee Parish, Ann Thomas ordered several items from New Orleans for her ward’s wedding. Across the river in St. Francisville, the Hall family also obtained their daughter’s trousseau from the city. Elise Ellis and her mother made a special trip to New Orleans in order to purchase “the wedding paraphernalia” for her nuptials. Rose Norris traveled even farther for her trousseau. She lived in Ouchita Parish, a considerable distance from New Orleans,
where she and a relative made several purchases. In addition, relatives gathered at her home to spend a busy month sewing. Nellie Wright spent two months sewing her wedding dress and making other arrangements for the occasion.\(^{43}\)

The trousseau generally included a special dress for the bride. In Pattersonville one bride wore a dress of white silk brocade. Kate Ellis had a gown made of white moiré and point appliqué lace. Her tulle veil fell to the floor and was secured with a wreath of catalpa and orange blossoms. Two New Orleans women who had a double wedding also wore white silk brocade trimmed with blond. The veils were three yards long and suspended from “very elegant wreaths of orange blossoms.” They completed the ensemble with satin slippers, kid gloves, and lace handkerchiefs. Ellen Wright’s elaborate gown of satin with a tulle overskirt had puffed sleeves and decorations of blond lace and sprigs of white flowers. Annie Baker, on the other hand, wore a dress that she already owned at her wedding.\(^{44}\)

Many families spent extravagant sums on weddings, perhaps in efforts to impress their acquaintances. Rachel O’Connor reported that Robert and Mary Barrow spent $5500 on the wedding dress and jewelry alone. According to O’Connor, “much less would have answered every purpose,” especially when “many would be glad to have that much, to begin the world with and make a cheaper dress do.” Even lower sums could draw her criticism. She wrote that a cousin had less “sense than a gander” for spending more than one hundred dollars on a wedding for a friend.\(^{45}\)

Family and friends came together to help prepare for the occasion. Harriet Meade helped a neighbor ice cakes for her daughter’s wedding, and one of Annie Harding’s cousins helped in the preparations for Harding’s marriage. Mary Stirling

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and her relatives spent weeks getting ready for her daughter’s wedding because Stirling “wants it to be a fine one.” Bennet Barrow supplied a leg of mutton for a relative’s wedding, while Sarah Ker and several others baked and iced “three large cakes” for their cousin’s nuptials. In Grand Cane, Harriet Lewis helped Cecilia Edgerly and her mother make preparations for Cecilia’s wedding. In situations like these, weddings brought forth efforts not only from the extended family of the bride and groom, but also from the entire community.46

Friends, family, and neighbors also entertained the young couple and guests who might have arrived from out of town. Sarah Butler reported that “almost everyone” in her neighborhood attended a party for a local couple. In New Orleans, the Copes family gave a party for Anna Reese and her fiancé. Angela Conrad organized a dinner for newlyweds in her neighborhood as well. In Bayou Goula, John Hampden Randolph reported “a party every night” during the days before and after the wedding of Caroline Butler and William Turnbull. At least one event was expected during the day surrounding a wedding. No one in St. Francisville entertained Nellie Stewart and her new husband, which one local woman found unusual. This slight was perhaps related to the fact that the Stewarts invited only a small number of relatives and no neighbors or friends to the ceremony.47

A wedding was generally considered a community event. Families were expected to invite a wide circle of relatives, friends, and neighbors to the occasion. Anna Reese’s family invited “just as many as the house will hold” to take part in her marriage ceremony. Ann Stirling asked “all the family” to attend her daughter’s ceremony. The Skilman family issued invitations to “nearly every body” in their area to
their daughter’s wedding, as well as a large contingent of the groom’s family and friends from Natchez. According to Kate Stone, planters in Ouchita Parish were expected to invite their overseers to weddings as a symbol of noblesse oblige from employer to employee.48

Under certain circumstances, however, a “private” wedding was acceptable. When Louisa Whitaker married John Powers, all of her connections believed that he was only after her inheritance. Because few saw a reason for celebration, “only our nearest neighbors were invited.” Miss Kemble and her groom had only “her very particular friends” and those who had given them parties as guests at their wedding when they heard that some acquaintances were planning a raucous charivari. Elise Ellis and Braxton Bragg had a private wedding with only close relatives because they only had two months to plan the event and the Ellis home could not hold many guests. Nellie Stewart’s wedding was also “very private” because “the house is so small they have no room large enough to dance in or have a supper.” In New Orleans, when a free woman of color and a white man held a Catholic wedding ceremony, they invited “none but the family — and not all of them.” One bride and her family had made preparations for a large wedding party when a close relative fell gravely ill. They put off the celebration, therefore, and decided “the affair will take place quietly when he is recovered. Ann Thomas remarried less than a year after her first husband’s death, and she invited only fifteen close friends to the event, “knowing that some persons would censure for being in such haste.”49

The number of guests at a wedding could vary widely. Julia Nash and W. H. Young had “about one hundred persons” at their ceremony. Between fifty and sixty
guests went to Ellen Wright's wedding, and the same number celebrated the marriage of Louisa Kitteredge. Seventy-five well-wishers attended the wedding of Mary Chew, while “about forty only” came to see Stephanie de Lavillebeuvre wed to Victor Forstall. Annie Baker's wedding had thirty guests, a number which her cousin pronounced “just about enough to make it pleasant.”

At the same time, invitations to a wedding celebration served as careful delineations of the social strata. The guest list of a wedding showed who was included in a social circle and who was not. Even when people from different classes attended together, differences existed. In Ouchita Parish, for example, overseers and their families would go to weddings given by their employers, but “they did not expect to be introduced to the guests but were expected to amuse themselves watching the crowd.” Invitations could also show the lines of community disagreements, in which cases omission was as important as inclusion. Bennet Barrow reported of the 1840 marriage of Ann Skilman, “nearly everybody is invited to the Wedding but the Barrow family.” When her niece Harriet Flower married, Rachel O'Connor was embroiled in a property dispute with other members of the Flower family. She therefore was not included in the festivities and had to hear about it from another relative. When Harriet's sister wed, O'Connor reported “I did not know of it for some time after.”

On occasion, the preparations for weddings led to conflicts and arguments among family members, especially when drawing up the guest list. W. J. Harding fumed when his future brother-in-law “had so little regard for either of us as to invite strangers to our wedding and those too who he knew were disagreeable to us.” Harding proposed to his fiancée Elizabeth Conrad that they either elope immediately or
hold the event at a different relative’s house. Edward Murphy worried when he invited some of his friends to his wedding without first consulting his future mother-in-law.\textsuperscript{52}

In urban areas, elaborate invitations were often printed and sent to guests. This custom was especially prevalent among the Creole population. When Marie Loew married Alfred Charbonnet in 1860, her father sent small engraved cards in French to family and friends inviting them to the ceremony. A. B. Roman and his wife did the same for their daughter Therese. For Marie Huchet de Kernion’s marriage to Emile Bernard, her mother issued invitations – also in French – to the church wedding. The family of the bridegroom had invitation cards printed when Edouard Morphy married Alice Perry at St. Louis Cathedral. Creoles were not alone in printing elaborate notices of upcoming weddings, however. Clara Godwin’s parents sent out cards inviting friends and relatives to her New Orleans wedding to Henry Hall at Christ Episcopal Church, and Daniel Goodman issued invitations to his daughter Louisiana’s wedding to Edward Wharton, which took place at their home. The two latter examples were in English.\textsuperscript{53}

Generally, however, guests were invited in a letter or by word of mouth. Caleb Swayze included notice of his wedding in a letter to his cousin Mary Weeks, and he asked her to notify another relative as well. Another Weeks relative also had some of his guests invited by word of mouth, and was “not so ceremonious as to send a formal note” to those who lived close enough to be part of the planning. Annie Harding sent a brief letter to her aunt asking Mary Moore to attend her upcoming wedding. Among most of Louisiana’s residents, an invitation to witness a marriage was not expected to
be a formally engraved card. The act of inviting family and friends was more important than the form.  

Relatives and friends made strenuous efforts to attend weddings. Elizabeth Copes urged her brother to make the trip home to New Orleans for the marriage of a close friend. According to Elizabeth, the bride and groom both wanted him to be present, and "it will not appear well for you not to be home." Richard Butler's mother, siblings, and many cousins traveled to his wedding in Mississippi, and in 1853, Alex and John Barrow made the lengthy journey from St. Francisville to Nashville in order to be with their brother on his wedding day. Several years later, the Barrows went to New Orleans for a cousin's wedding.

Often, however, it was simply impossible to be present. Richard Butler missed a cousin's wedding because he had too much work at his plantation to make the journey from Terrebonne Parish to Natchez. Frederick Conrad recognized that his sisters, busy with their households and young children, could not go to New Orleans to witness his marriage. Sarah Butler was away from home visiting friends when her brother married, and she was not able to return in time for the occasion. The distances involved and difficulties in arranging reliable transportation, as well as important agricultural, business, and household duties made attending weddings difficult for some Louisianians.

The bride and groom were also expected to choose attendants for the ceremony. Often one bridesmaid and one groomsman stood up with the couple. The bride of Frederick Conrad chose his sister Elizabeth to be her bridesmaid. Sarah Ker waited on her cousin, and the bride's brother was groomsman. Larger weddings, however,
had more attendants. Anna Reese chose four women, including one she designated “first bridesmaid.” Her fiancé had at least two groomsmen. Nellie Wright, too, had one friend serve as first bridesmaid, and she picked two other attendants as well. Elise Ellis chose her cousins Jane Young and Anna and Sarah Butler as her bridesmaids.57

Most weddings took place at the bride’s home. Lucy Watson, a widow, married Thomas Kelley at her home in New Orleans. Eleanor’s Dyar’s wedding took place in the house of her father, and Marie Celeste Landry married Edouard Duffil at her parents’ Donaldsonville home. In Rosedale, Sarah Pipes married James Saunders at her father’s house. R. F. McGuire brought his niece Mary into his home when she was orphaned, and her marriage ceremony to John Stevens also took place there. Eliza Ripley recalled that, among her family’s acquaintances in New Orleans, “Protestant weddings were home affairs.”58

The Catholic hierarchy required most members to marry in a church. An 1858 pastoral letter from Archbishop Antoine Blanc stated, “we forbid the Sacraments of Baptism and Matrimony to be administered out of the church.” He did make exceptions for those Catholics who lived too far from an available priest, but even urban Louisianians, who had no problems finding a priest, sometimes ignored this rule. In New Orleans, Catholic priest Constantine Maenhaut married Victoire Rousseau to George Doane at the home of her guardian John Freret. The priest of Annunciation Church married another New Orleans couple, Henrietta Ray and her husband at her father’s house. When a true hardship case arose, the priest or bishop granted special dispensation. Father John Abbadie of St. Michael set strict geographic limits for his parishioners. For those living a certain distance from the church, he would perform a
ceremony in a home, although he recommended a church service for all. If an intended spouse lived within the limits, Abbadie insisted upon a church wedding.⁵⁹

Despite the violations, Catholics were more likely to hold the ceremony in a church than members of other denominations. Marie Loew and Alfred Charbonnet were married at St. Anne’s church in New Orleans. When Emile Chanut married Emiline Fourche, they held the ceremony at the Jesuit’s chapel in New Orleans and followed it with “a little gathering at the house of the Bride’s mother.” The Catholic church regarded marriage as an “august Sacrament,” and believed that participants would take matrimony more seriously if the ceremony took place inside the church.⁶⁰

In some cases, Protestant weddings did take place in a church. In northern Louisiana, Sarah Wright attended a marriage ceremony in a Campbellite church. Sanford Horton and Mary Flanagan were married at St. Lukes Episcopal church in New Orleans, as were Lancelot Biggins and Catharine Redikier. In Rosedale, Henry Slack married Louisiana Woolfolk and Sebastian Schwing married Maria Pointer at the Episcopal Church of the Nativity. Lizzie Wells’ wedding took place in a northern Louisiana church because “the parents of the bride were not willing for her to marry Mr. Burgess.”⁶¹

Not all wedding ceremonies were religious, however. Justice of the peace Alphonse Canonge married Francisco Ripoll and Antoinette Lepaullard in 1848. Four decades earlier, a justice of the peace married David Weeks and Mary Conrad in St. Mary Parish. In the early years of the nineteenth century, civil ceremonies were especially common because of a shortage of priests and Protestant clerics outside of New Orleans. As C. C. Robin observed in 1803, “otherwise the intended spouses would

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lose in waiting too many days of love.” A Justice of the Peace, for example, had married Amedee Martel and Eleanor Chochere of Opelousas, because the parish priest was absent on church business. Upon his return, Father John Raviol blessed the marriage. Many even eschewed a religious ceremony altogether, which the Church condemned. Yves-Marie LeConniat, a young priest in Natchitoches, often made trips into the countryside to bless marriages that had been performed by a civil authority.62

The wedding ceremony for a slave varied widely depending on the setting in which it took place. A large number merely indicated their intention to begin married life to the master. Joseph Jones recalled that when slave couples on his master’s plantation asked for permission to marry, “he tell ‘em ‘All right’ an’ dey go togedder. Dey married den.” Similarly, when one of Michel Thibodeaux’s slaves came to him for consent, “he tell him ‘Yes’ and tell de gal to go with de man and dat was de way dey marry.” According to Susan Smith, “when a young man want to marry a gal he speak to marster.” The master would read from the Bible, and then they were considered married. In Monroe, Alice Cole’s master “would tell them that his consent was all they needed to get married.”63

Jumping the broomstick was a common slave wedding ceremony that could be performed with the master’s involvement or entirely within the black community. Agatha Babino’s father and mother “jump over de broom” before the master and a local judge at their wedding. Similarly, Donaville Broussard recalled that his aunt and her groom “jump over a broom handle, and day mean dey was marry.” In Lafourche Parish, Julia Woodrich remembered that her mistress would read a few line from a book and then slaves would hop over the broom. Although Elizabeth Ross Hite as-
serted that the plantation minister married slaves, they also jumped over a broomstick as part of the ceremony. Virginia Bell, on the other hand, considered the custom to be superstitious and proudly reported that her master “married us ‘cordin to Gospel.’”

A black or white minister married some slaves, but this was not a common occurrence. A black minister married two slaves belonging to the Edmondson family in northern Louisiana. On the McHatton plantation near Baton Rouge, the plantation preacher, who was also a slave, united enslaved men and women, accompanied by closing remarks by the master “to the effect that this marriage was a solemn tie.” Mandy, a slave belonging to the Jeter family was married to another Jeter slave by a white minister in a New Orleans church. In Rosedale, the rector of the Episcopal Church of the Nativity married three couples on Mound Plantation. Louis Evans, who grew up on a plantation near Grand Coteau, recalled that the local priest united Catholic slaves. In general, masters were reluctant to give slave marriages the legitimacy that a church ceremony would suggest. Jim Henson’s slaves “would beg Maser to get them a preacher,” but he refused. Slaves longed for recognition of their unions as official and lasting. Although they realized that there was no civil or legal validity to their marriages, slaves took the ceremonies seriously.

For a marriage between two white participants to be legal, at least two witnesses had to sign the certificate. In many cases, family filled this role. The father and uncle of Louisa Anne Walsh served as witnesses for her marriage to Charles Mather, for example, and Marie Landry’s father and three other relatives did the same for her. When Joseph Saul and Mary Grant united in Plaquemine Parish, relatives of each signed the marriage certificate. James Ure witnessed the wedding of Isabella Ure and
Caleb Milkado in New Orleans; and Robert Van Rensselaer did the same for Virginia Van Rensselaer and Hamilton Wright. At a Rosedale church, Joseph Woolfolk signed for Louisiana Woolfolk and Henry Slack, while S. C. Schwing witnessed the ceremony of Sebastian Schwing and Maria Pointer. In Edgard, Alexis Porche and Marie D’Arensbourg, both free people of color, had their ceremony witnessed by two of three of D’Arensbourg’s relatives and one of Porche’s. By signing the marriage certificate, family members signified their approval of the ceremony.\textsuperscript{67}

Jewish weddings were an exception to this custom. Jewish law stipulated that relatives of the bride and groom must not sign the marriage certificate as witnesses. Jewish Louisianians like Hart Schiff and Joachim Kohn, therefore, chose close family friends to witness their weddings. Thus, Rabbi James Gutheim and Isaac Hunt served as witnesses when Gutheim’s colleague Joseph Lewin married Abraham Forschheimer and Henriette Rosefield at the Congregation Gates of Mercy synagogue. Similarly, Louis Gensler, Hermann Sion, and B. Simon signed the marriage certificate of Joseph Berge and Bertha Dessauer.\textsuperscript{68}

After the ceremony came the reception in most, but not all, cases. One couple who married in New Orleans went straight from the church to the steamboat. They were an unusual case, however. Most families saw entertaining the friends and relatives who had come to witness the ceremony as a vital part of a wedding.\textsuperscript{69} When a reception was held, it could take many forms depending on the resources available and the denominational affiliation of the family. Most included a meal of some kind. David Pipes and his bride had “a splendid dinner” following their wedding. Julia Young reported that a “splendid supper although I say it myself” accompanied her
marriage to W. H. Young. Ellen Wright’s reception supper featured “every variety of meats – cakes – pies – custard – sweet meats – fruits – Nuts &c. . . . two bottles cordial on each table, Champaigne on side table.” Other receptions were less elaborate. Lizzie Wells and Lovet Burgess offered their guests only cake.  

Dancing was a popular pastime at many weddings. Byron Johnson reported that he “danced just as much as I wished” at a cousin’s reception in New Orleans. At Harriet Flower’s wedding, her brothers “all danced towards the breaking up time.” Edward Butler, upon learning that a friend’s reception would not include dancing, anticipated that he would not enjoy himself.

Many Louisianians disapproved of dancing at weddings – or at any other time. Butler’s friend was marrying a religious woman in a church ceremony, and they felt that dancing would be out of place in their celebration. When he married Joseph Smith and Katie Pinkerton, Episcopal minister Charles Hilton regarded the three hours he spent at their reception a waste of time. He vowed, “shall never do so again,” because of the “indecent” dancing that occurred. Laura Gordon’s father, a Methodist, would not permit the guests at her wedding to dance in his home, but he made no objection when a neighbor opened his house to the party. The bride, groom, and their guests danced until one o’clock in the morning.

Whatever the refreshments were served at a wedding reception, cake was almost always present. Sometimes referred to as “the bride’s cake,” it served as the focal point of the event. The bride’s family often sent slices of wedding cake to guests who could not attend. Mary Folger and her family, for example, did not go to the wedding of a friend, but they did receive a piece of cake. Elizabeth McKitteredge’s mother sent
some of her wedding cake to the McCollom family, which had attended her sister’s wedding two years earlier but not this one. They also gave pieces of cake to those non-invited acquaintances whom they wanted to inform of the event. Marie Bingaman and St. Felix Cazanave invited only family members to their wedding, so they sent slices of wedding cake to friends. In addition to serving as refreshment for guests, the cake was also seen as a memento of the wedding.

Following a wedding, slaves generally celebrated with a reception as well. Catharine and William, who belonged to the Wright family in northern Louisiana, had a supper in the quarter following their wedding. In Lafourche Parish, Julia Woodrich’s mistress “would give dem a chicken supper” whenever slave married. Catherine Cornelius recalled that slaves on her master’s plantation near Baton Rouge “had sweetcakes and a little frolic” after wedding ceremonies performed by the master. Emilier Carmouche provided a barbeque for all of his slaves when a couple married. According to Elizabeth Ross Hite, weddings were “big affairs in dere quarters” on her master’s plantation.

For house servants, members of the white family often became involved in planning the celebration. Clarissa Town assisted a friend in making a wedding dress for the friend’s slave. Mary Susan Ker and her cousin Fanny Baker spent a day making cakes and a supper for the wedding of two slaves on the Ker plantation. On a southern Louisiana sugar plantation, the white family’s daughters made cakes for the weddings of two slave couples. On the McHatton plantation near Baton Rouge, white children “made molasses gingerbread and sweet potato pies, and one big bride’s cake.” They also gathered greenery and decorated a building in the quarter for the
wedding feast. The involvement of white Louisianians in slave weddings was a manifesta-

tion of the paternalism that many displayed toward their workers. House servants were the recipients of this attention because they came in closest contact with their owners.76

Recognizing the importance of a wedding and desiring to make it special, slaves sometimes borrowed finery from their owners for the occasion. Matilda, who belonged to the Edmondson family, wore some of her mistress’ jewelry, while her groom had on his master’s watch and chain. Elizabeth Ross Hite recalled that slaves on Pierre Landro’s plantation gathered “all de same trimmings – de veil, gown, and everything” for their weddings.77 As on the Landro plantation, many slaves endeavored to produce a special dress for the bride to wear. In Baton Rouge, Kitty and her bridesmaid both wore white swiss with “wreaths of snowdrops and evergreen.” While Nancy Brackenridge wore a castoff satin gown accessorized with ribbons and white flowers, Matilda, a slave woman living in northern Louisiana, wore a white swiss dress on her wedding day.78

Slave weddings often took place during the Christmas holidays. Laura Tibbets reported that three couples on her plantation were married at Christmastime. On the Boyd plantation in northern Louisiana, Catharine and William were married during the week between Christmas and New Years Day, as were Nancy and Aleck Brackenridge on the McHatton place near Baton Rouge. According to John Knight, over a dozen couples married on his Tensas Parish plantation on Christmas day. They probably chose that time because they had the free time to hold the dinner and dance that went along with the weddings.79
Slaves did not always have the power to choose a mate freely, nor did their unions carry any legal status. Marriages could be broken up at any time because of sale or simply the whim of the master. This threat of separation did not dissuade slaves from forming families, however, nor did it lessen the importance they placed on the wedding ceremony. For slaves, as for white Louisianians, a wedding was a special time to celebrate love and the joining of two individuals in a new family unit. They therefore did all that they could to make weddings both memorable and meaningful.

In addition to celebrating with special dinners, parties, and dancing, white Louisianians also desired to broadcast news of a wedding in the family. Letters to friends and relatives were often full of all the engagements and marriages that had occurred in the area. Thus, Herman Noble passed along reports of a cousin’s wedding to his aunt, while Mary Baines entertained Anna Butler with accounts of both a wedding and an engagement. In towns, wedding announcements were also printed in newspapers. Ann Butler read of a relative’s marriage, which had occurred out of state, in the St. Francisville newspaper. David Magill, who lived in Baton Rouge, also learned of a relative’s wedding in the paper. Notice of the union of Willie Barrow and Mattie Pilcher also appeared in a Baton Rouge newspaper. James McKinney and Caroline Haworth announced their marriage in an Alexandria newspaper, and F. A. Lebeau and his bride did the same in Pointe Coupee. Newspapers provided newlyweds with another way of letting friends and family know of their marriage.

Although some guests gave gifts to the young couple, it was not expected. Eliza Ripley recalled the wonder that she and her friends felt “the first time we saw a display of wedding gifts.” On that occasion, there were only a few gifts, and they were
modest. Upon her marriage, Ripley “was surprised by a solitary wedding present, a napkin ring.” Ellen Wright received a present of a linen chemise when she married. In most cases, however guests did not give wedding presents. 

At times, community members added a charivari – during which men serenaded the couple with as much noise and disorder as possible – to the wedding celebration. At night, a crowd made up primarily of young men would gather at the home of the couple beating on tin pans and making a great racket. Thomas Batchelor described a charivari mounted in his honor as “noises you never heard in your life.”

David Weeks and his brother-in-law gathered a group of New Iberia men “with horns and bells tin pans guns and every thing that could make noise and music” when they mounted a charivari. According to James Sterett, participants also dressed up “in Harlequin Dresses, Turkish & Pantomimic false faces – mules dressed with cow horns carts with coffins, Priests, Fryars, and every thing calculated to be conspicuous reduculry.”

Charivaris occurred when people made what others considered to be a mismatched pair. According to A. Oakey Hall, the community punished both “the sanguine youth who is on his knees to a venerable spinster” and “the gouty millionaire, who totters to the feet of mammon-infatuated girlhood.” Thomas Batchelor, for example, was a middle aged widower who married a much younger woman. As he reported to his grown son, “when I brought your step mother home we had a splendid shivereee.” James Sterett described a similar event directed towards a widow who married a younger man. People also mounted charivaris when a widow or widower remarried too soon after the death of a spouse. In Clinton, A. G. Miller’s wife had only been
dead for thirteen months when he took a new bride. A group of local young men, therefore, planned a charivari for him. A New Orleans man who had remarried a mere three weeks after his wife’s death was also greeted by “the awful mystery of the Charivari.”

Many couples went to great trouble and expense to avoid the embarrassment of a charivari. When a New Orleans couple learned that some young men of their acquaintance planned one, the bride decided that they “would be married immediately and go right off.” Although they did not hold the ceremony right away as she wished, the couple left New Orleans the same day that they married. Eliza Bowman and her husband also left town right after their wedding in order to avoid being “serenaded with Tin pans & other like instruments.” The most accepted way to avoid a charivari, however, was to give a ball or party. One Louisiana widower gave a public ball in order “to keep the people from making a charivary” when he wed a younger woman. In addition to hosting a ball and a supper, one New Iberia man also treated the participants in his charivari to drinks. In New Orleans Madame Don Andre’s serenaders demanded “an elegant Ball & supper for five Hundred people and one thousand dollars for poor of the Hospital.” Although the widow initially balked at the demands, she compromised after two nights.

As these examples show, society saw the need to comment on spousal choices, although most did not go to the extreme of a charivari. Instead, men and women made statements to each other when they perceived a bad choice. Anna Butler disapproved when an acquaintance married “a gentleman several years younger than herself, and inclined to be dissipated.” Harriet Stirling explained her inability to remember the
name of a friend's new husband by stating, "he is not of much account an overseer I believe." Kate Stone also commented on the marriage of a planter's daughter to an overseer, wondering, "why she married him," and predicting an unhappy union. John Dick criticized the husbands of two women he knew in New Orleans, calling the men "among the least valuable & interesting, if not among the most insignificant and contemptible, of their species." Although he hoped for the best, Dick was not optimistic that the marriages would be happy ones.  

After the wedding, some couples took a honeymoon trip, which often included visits to relatives. Abner Gaines and his wife spent the two weeks after their wedding paying visits to family and friends. Lavilla McDonald and her new husband traveled from New Orleans to Clinton, where they visited with well-wishers. Doctor Kilpatrick and his bride also spent their honeymoon "on the Bayou visiting." Rose Norris and her husband left shortly after their marriage in Ouchita Parish for Baton Rouge "to visit his people." During the nineteenth century, however, the idea that the honeymoon could be a pleasure trip for the newly-married couple began to win adherents. One New Orleans woman and her groom planned a short vacation in Mobile following their wedding. Leodocia Kent and her husband also left for a "wedding tour" after their ceremony.  

Others remained in the area to receive the visits of well-wishers. Among Eliza Ripley's circle of friends and acquaintances, "it was the fashion for the newly-mated to remain quietly in the home nest." Ann Butler and her daughters called on several new brides in the St. Francisville area during the antebellum period. In Baton Rouge, Clarissa Town and her family also paid visits to newly-married women. Eliza Anne
Robertson attended the wedding of Adele Gates and John Marsh, and then she called on the bride the next day. The bride would be expected to return all of these visits, the beginning of her social life as a married woman. In Terrebonne Parish, Elise Ellis Bragg reported that one woman had received calls from "most every body," and "Heaven knows when she will be able to return her calls." Once she had completed this duty, a young woman had made her transition into adulthood and could settle into her new role as a matron.

The events surrounding a wedding were designed to usher a young man and woman into the adult world while reinforcing societal norms. Paramount among these was the central place of the family. As Louisianians began the process of choosing a mate, they were expected to heed the advice of parents and other relatives on a wide range of issues ranging from money to religion. If they did not, individuals could face exclusion from the family. The actual wedding ceremony also reinforced the place of both family and community in Louisiana society. Family and friends came together to prepare for and celebrate the union of two young people. Ideas about marriage were changing during the first half of the nineteenth century. More and more, Louisianians saw it as a personal event, in which two people were united primarily by love. These changes, however, did not erase the strong focus on the entire family, not just on the bridal couple, that had always characterized marriage. At the same time, society as a whole continued to enforce its norms and censure unions that violated them.

End Notes

1 Ann Lobdell to Lewis Stirling, 5 April 1939, Lewis Stirling and Family Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University (hereafter LLMVC); Thomas C Bowie Diary, 15 March 1857, Southern Historical Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
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6 Micajah Barrow to Anna Maria Johnson, 25 February 1850, W. M. Barrow and Family Papers, LLMVC; Thomas Bolling Robertson to William Robertson, 31 March 1821, Walter Prichard Collection, LLMVC; Richard Hackett to Robert Hackett, 20 November 1850, Gordon-Hackett Family Papers, SHC; Anna Butler to unknown,
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9 Peter Lucas to Antoine Blanc, 6 March 1850, Archdiocese of New Orleans Archives (hereafter ANOA); Peter Lucas to Antoine Blanc, 27 April 1850, *ibid*.


11 St. Julien de Tournillon and Mary Brown Jones Marriage Contract, 23 September 1813, Kuntz Memorial Collection, TU; H. Browse Trist and Rosella Bringier Marriage Certificate, 24 June 1834, Trist Family Papers, HNOC; Jefferson McKinney to Jeptha McKinney, 21 March 1846, Jeptha McKinney Papers, LLMVC. See also La-

12 Roberdeau Wheat to his mother, 29 April 1853, John Thomas Wheat Papers, SHC; Priscilla Bond to her mother, 27 February 1861, Priscilla Munnikhuysen Bond Papers, LLMVC; First Presbyterian Church Recordbook, TU; Ann Raney Thomas Memoirs, Ann Raney Thomas Papers, TU. For examination of evangelical views on interdenominational marriage, see Heyrman, *Southern Cross*, 139-141.


18 Anna Butler to unknown, 6 July 1856, Anna and Sarah Butler Correspondence, LLMVC; Ann Raney Thomas Memoirs, Thomas Papers, TU; Anna Mercer to


20 Herman F. Noble to Anna Maria Johnson, 20 May 1853, Barrow Papers, LLMVC; Ann Butler to Robert Butler, 26 January 1850, Robert O. Butler Papers, LLMVC; Davis, ed., *Plantation Life in the Florida Parishes*, 368.


23 Mary Raney Smith to Ann Smith, October 1851, Thomas Papers, TU; Charles Palfrey to William Palfrey, 18 March 1856, Palfrey Family Papers, LLMVC; Mary Farrar Wilkinson to Joseph Biddle Wilkinson, 21 July 1837, Wilkinson-Stark Family Papers, HNOC.


27 Frederick Conrad to Sidney Conrad, 28 January 1825, David Weeks and Family Papers, LLMVC; Walter Brashear to Henry Lawrence, 17 June 1844, Brashear

28 John Robert Buhler to John Christian Buhler, 20 April 1847, Buhler Family Papers, LLMVC; Hore Browse Trist to his son, 14 January 1856, Trist Family Papers, HNOC; Edward Murphy to Josephine Cross, 5 January 1847, Murphy Family Papers, HNOC; Hore Browse Trist to Nicholas Trist, 24 January 1845, Nicholas P. Trist Papers, SHC; Anita Fonvergne narrative, in Ronnie W. Clayton, ed., *Mother Wit: The Ex-slave Narratives of the Louisiana Writers' Project* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990), 75; Mary Weeks to Alfred Weeks, n.d., David Weeks and Family Papers, LLMVC; Sarah Butler to Edward Butler, 13 November 1853, Butler Family Papers, LLMVC.

29 Bythell Haynes to her son, 30 October 1856, Henry Marston and Family Papers, LLMVC; Hore Browse Trist to his son, 14 January 1856, Trist Family Papers, HNOC; Anderson, ed., *Brokenburn*, 305.

30 Ann Raney Thomas Memoirs, Thomas Papers, TU; Hore Browse Trist to Nicholas Trist, 5 May 1834, Nicholas P. Trist Papers, SHC.

31 John Robert Buhler Diary, 27 April 1853, Buhler Papers, LLMVC; Sarah Wright to Augustus Wright, 14 November 1853, Wright-Boyd Family Papers, LLMVC; Ann Lobdell to Lewis Stirling, 17 November 1837, Lewis Stirling and Family Papers, LLMVC; Mary Davis to Alfred Conrad, 4 March 1838, David Weeks and Family Papers, LLMVC; Ann Butler to her son, 27 July 1856, Thomas Butler and Family Papers, LLMVC.

32 Sarah Wright to Mary Wright, 19 December 1853, Wright-Boyd Papers, LLMVC; Hannah to Beatrice Dunlap, 4 December 1850, Dunlap Correspondence, TU; Mary Davis to Alfred Conrad, 4 March 1838, David Weeks and Family Papers, LLMVC; Jacob Bieller Will, 15 December 1834, Snyder Papers, LLMVC; Hore Browse Trist to Nicholas Trist, 5 May 1834, Nicholas P. Trist Papers, SHC; David Magill to Mary Moore, 6 April 1857, David Weeks and Family Papers, LLMVC; Sarah Wright to Mary Wright, 24 November 1853, Wright-Boyd Papers, LLMVC. See also Stowe, “The Not-So-Cloistered Academy,” 102.

33 *Baton Rouge Daily Gazette and Comet*, 18 April 1860; Elizabeth Copes to Joseph Copes, 18 March 1858, Joseph S. Copes Papers, TU; Hannah Dunlap to Beatrice Dunlap, 4 December 1850, Dunlap Correspondence, TU.

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47 Sarah Butler to Robert O. Butler, 19 January 1850, Robert O. Butler Paper, LLMVC; Elizabeth Copes to her brother, 31 October 1854, Copes Papers, TU; Alfred Conrad to Mary Weeks, 6 June 1837, David Weeks and Family Papers, LLMVC; John Hampden Randolph to Moses Liddell, 15 May 1853, Moses and St. John R. Liddell and Family Papers, LLMVC; Anna Butler to Edward Butler, 28 June 1854, Butler Family Papers, LLMVC. See also Raleigh Anthony Suarez, Jr., “Rural Life in Louisiana, 1850-1860” (Ph.D. diss., Louisiana State University, 1954), 458.

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89 Ripley, *Social Life in Old New Orleans*, 90; Sarah Butler to Anna Butler, 10 June 1842, Anna and Sarah Butler Correspondence, LLMVC; Richard Butler to Anna Butler, 10 June 1844, *ibid.>; Elise Bragg to Sarah Butler, 29 June 1849, *ibid.>; Clarissa Leavitt Town Diary, 23 May 1853, LLMVC; Eliza Anne Robertson Diary, 29 April

90 Elise Bragg to Sarah Butler, 29 June 1849, Anna and Sarah Butler Correspondence, LLMVC.
Death evokes some of the most primal fears and intense feelings in people, and rituals involving mortality are integral parts of all religions and civilizations. An examination of funeral rites, therefore, can shed light on the ways in which people viewed both society and their place in it. In Louisiana, conflicts and differences among religious denominations concerning funerals illustrate the many sociopolitical conflicts of the antebellum era. Death rites include the deathbed scene, preparation of the body and funeral arrangements, the procession, burial, and mourning. In ordinary times as well as during epidemics and war, funerals reveal cultural values.

Nineteenth-century Louisiana was a deadly place. In addition to the problems of childhood diseases, influenza, and infections that struck all of America before the development of modern medical practices, certain diseases were particularly dangerous in the low-lying, semi-tropical state. Carried by the mosquitoes that flourished in swamps and marshes, malaria and yellow fever were regular scourges. Poor drainage and primitive sanitation, especially in New Orleans, led to cholera. Hundreds could die of any of these ailments in any ordinary year, and during yellow fever or cholera epidemics, the number of deaths often reached in the thousands. In most cases of sickness, doctors could do little, and death loomed omnipresent.

Travelers and new residents in the antebellum era often alluded to the sickly nature of Louisiana. During his exploration of Louisiana from 1802 to 1806, C. C. Robin...
noted the frequent occurrence of yellow fever and other diseases in New Orleans and the Attakapas region. Yellow fever he attributed to the low, swampy land and a lack of good air circulation that forced residents to breathe unhealthy swamp vapors. As more people crowded into New Orleans and other towns, Robin predicted, those places “must become more and more dangerous by the day.” In 1803, during his first summer in New Orleans, French prefect Pierre Clement de Laussat suffered from an attack of yellow fever, and asserted, “the climate and spells of excessive heat retarded and prolonged my convalescence.” Despite his own experience and witness of the “ravages” that yellow fever caused, especially among newcomers to the area, de Laussat believed that the climate of Louisiana was not overly harmful.¹

Later in the nineteenth century, many people – especially Louisiana residents – argued that disease did not claim more victims than other areas. Most residents and visitors, however, seemed more struck by the frequency of disease than by the state’s healthful climate. In 1833, Carl Kohn, having fled to the Mississippi Gulf Coast during that summer’s yellow fever outbreak, deplored the “fevers and choleras” of New Orleans. On a trip down the Mississippi River, Joseph Holt Ingraham referred to the “pestilential climate” of Louisiana and argued that New Orleans “must always be more or less unhealthy” because of its low, swampy land. Theodore Clapp, who lived in New Orleans for more than three decades, reported in his autobiography that he had experienced twenty serious epidemics during that time, and that sickness was prevalent even in non-epidemic years. In his own memoirs, Timothy Flint assured his reader that reports of the city’s disease-ridden nature were “undoubtedly estimated according to the fact.”²
All of this sickness and dying gave the rituals of death special significance in Louisiana. Mortality preyed on the minds of its inhabitants and – in an era when disease was poorly understood – always seemed just around the corner. In order to deal with this, nineteenth-century Louisianians used elaborate patterns of behavior. The deathbed scene was the first element in a series of events that culminated in a lengthy period of mourning. Victorian Americans considered the circumstances of a person’s death highly important, and Louisianians felt no differently.3

Many of the dying used impending death as an occasion to profess religion and make up for earlier spiritual shortcomings. In 1849, for example, Methodist minister H. N. McTyeire baptized Fanny Dewey, who was dying. The next year, McTyeire did the same for Margaret Patterson, whom he found “professing faith on deathbed.” Not uncommonly, those who had never undergone baptism requested to receive that sacrament before they died. Many denominations considered it of utmost importance in order to escape eternal damnation. Thus, McTyeire baptized David Morrill, a dying infant, quickly in 1851. Similarly, Charles Hilton, an Episcopal priest in New Orleans, baptized Mr. Shepherd, who was dying of smallpox.4 Many who had already undergone baptism desired to make further statements of faith before death. Oliver Crary, for example, had joined the Methodist church in New Orleans as a young man, but he had never taken communion. H. N. McTyeire therefore came to his deathbed and administered the sacrament before his passing. Crary’s mother and siblings gathered around him and took communion as well.5

As the example of Oliver Crary shows, family was extremely important in antebellum Louisiana, and whenever possible the entire circle of relatives gathered at the
deathbed. This reunion held great importance for both the dying person and his or her kin. As Esther Eliza Wright suffered from scarlet fever, "she called her Father to her and said O my Papa I think I shall die I want to see mama and sister Catherine." Later, her mother read the Bible to the girl until she finally died. Emma Caffery reported that the entire family gathered at her cousin Clara's bedside and prayed with her before the local Episcopal minister administered the Lord's Supper. Often, family members participated in whatever religious activities the minister performed. When Mr. Cosbey lay dying of consumption in New Orleans, his aunt remained at his bedside and took communion with him. As Maria Inskeep's husband languished on his deathbed, she summoned their minister and the couple, together with their five children, participated in the Lord's Supper. This event held great meaning both for Abram Inskeep and for his family as their last chance to participate in a religious activity together.6

The dying person often gave parting messages to those near him or her. When Margaret Ellis died in 1852, her last thoughts were of her mother, who had been confirmed in the Episcopal Church but had never taken communion. On her deathbed, Margaret "begged her to take the Communion" as her dying wish. Shortly before her death, Bennet H. Barrow's wife exacted a promise that he would not remarry, unless he married her widowed sister. Emily Barrow believed that her sister was the only woman who would treat her children as family rather than as stepchildren.7

Because of the importance they attached to the dying moments, family members generally wished to be present at the deathbed of a loved one, but it was not always possible. Helen Carter was one of the lucky ones. She set out from Clinton for Plaquemine when she received word of her stepmother's condition and was able to see the woman
before her death. Others came too late. When it became apparent that his partner was
dying, Thomas Morris sent immediately for Mr. Carrell’s family, who lived in a nearby
New Orleans neighborhood. Unfortunately, a heavy storm delayed their progress, and
Carrell’s sisters arrived at his lodgings “too late to find him alive.” Thomas Morgan
died while one of his sons was on his way from New Orleans to Baton Rouge, and as
Morgan’s daughter Sarah recorded, “father had died waiting for him.”

For many Catholics, the most important concern was reception of the Last Rites.
When Thomas Morris’ business partner, Mr. Carrell, contracted his final illness, Morris
immediately sent for a priest who administered the Last Rites. Similarly, Samuel Peters
summoned a priest to the bedside of his wife’s grandmother, “from whom she recd. the
‘extreme unction.’” Unitarian minister Theodore Clapp, an admirer of the Catholic
Church, saw this as one of the great contrasts between Catholics and Protestants. For
Catholics, all – rich and poor – received the Last Rites, while Clapp felt that poor Prot­
estants often died “without a clergyman, without a prayer, without a friend.” Most Lou­
isianians, whether Catholic or Protestant, desired some kind of religious experience be­
fore dying. Last Rites were not necessary in order to receive a Catholic burial, however.
When Elise Ellis’ neighbor died, he refused the services of a clergyman and disavowed
belief in an afterlife. Despite this, his funeral “was conducted with all the form and
pomp of the Catholic Church. In some instances Catholics delayed calling for the priest
until too late. According to Mother Mary Hyacinth Le Conniat of the Daughters of the
Cross, a group of nuns living in Avoyelles Parish, area residents often refused to take a
priest to see a dying person, believing that it would bring bad luck to the household, or
that the invalid “will become frightened and die sooner.” In these cases, the deceased was not denied a religious burial.9

After a person died, preparations for the funeral began immediately. Friends and family tried to bury a person as quickly as possible, often on the same day, in order to avoid the problem of rapid decomposition. Although premature burial of an unconscious but still living person was a prevalent worry in the nineteenth century, Louisiana residents could not afford to wait. In other parts of the country, including New England, family often waited up to three days before burial. The hot and humid climate of the Pelican state, however, made this impossible. Mortuary practices were primitive, and few bodies underwent embalming before the Civil War.10

The practice of rapid burial began in the early years of settlement in Louisiana. In July of 1769, John Fitzpatrick reported to John Bradley that Bradley’s messenger had arrived sick and died. “As he was in Such a Condition that he would not keep any Longer,” Fitzpatrick had his remains buried right away. Nearly a century later, prompt interments remained the norm. By the late antebellum period, embalming was becoming more common in the United States, but few Louisianians used the services of embalmers or morticians. Many funerals, therefore, took place on the same day that death occurred. Frances Butler succumbed to disease early in the morning on September 28, 1855, and her family buried her at four o’clock that afternoon. Similarly, Philip Hickey died at one A.M. on October 1, 1859, and his funeral took place at two p.m.11

In most cases, corpses were buried within a day or two after death. On November 18, 1844, Rachel O’Connor reported to her sister in law that Lewis Davis would be buried that day. Davis, a neighbor of O’Connor’s, had died the day before. Similarly,
young William Henry Hart passed away on October 18, 1857 and his parents laid him to
rest him the next day. In rare cases, two days might elapse between death and interment.
John Chiles, for example, died on March 22, 1860 but his ceremony did not take place
until the 24th. In the same year, Elizabeth Johnson of Rosedale was buried two days af­
ter her passing. When Josephine Joyce died in September of 1859, her funeral was also
held two days after her death. Very few interments occurred more than two days after
death.12

The rapid burial of corpses meant that family and friends had to travel quickly in
order to attend funerals. Often, they set out as soon as news of a serious illness reached
them, hoping to keep a vigil at the deathbed. When Sarah Wright received a telegram
warning her of her son’s grave condition, she left at once for his school in Kentucky
with her youngest daughter. The difficulty of traveling, however, slowed their progress.
The women first traveled by stage from Cheneyville to the Red River, and then they
waited at the mouth of the Red River for several days for a boat to take them up the
Mississippi River. Sarah Wright described the delay as “killing.” By the time they ar­
rived at Augustus Wright’s school, he had been dead and buried for a week. Anyone
who lived more than a day’s journey from relatives would probably not arrive in time
for the funeral services.13

The presence of family and friends at a burial helped console the bereaved. Ac­
cording to Bennet H. Barrow, that several relatives stayed with him and his wife follow­
ing the death of two children “relieved us some.” When Ann Lobdell lost her daughter,
she found the aid and comfort of her cousin extremely helpful. Family was one of the
most significant institutions in the antebellum South, and at times of extreme stress like the death of a loved one, it became even more important.\textsuperscript{14}

As late as the 1860s, many parts of Louisiana remained sparsely settled, which made the gathering of family and friends for funerals more difficult. The inability to have loved ones present at these ceremonies weighed heavily upon the bereaved. At the time of her son’s death, Ann Raney Thomas lived in a remote area, the nearest neighbors several miles away. She and her husband buried their son with “no white person there.” For Raney, this funeral seemed especially melancholy because no family or friends could be present to share in her grief.\textsuperscript{15}

Preparations for funerals were often organized along gender lines. Women cleaned the body and dressed it, although male friends might perform this duty for a man, as in the case of Thomas Morgan. Men, on the other hand, arranged to have the coffin built, hired a hearse, and had death notices printed. When Stephen Bell’s stepfather died, his mother immediately began making the muslin shroud while her son sent a slave to work on the coffin. Mary Carr and her daughters went to the home of a neighbor following the death of his wife in order to make her shroud. Eliza Anne Robertson also assisted in preparing a shroud for her neighbor. After a friend’s child died at his house, Charles Weeks sent for his stepfather’s carpenter to make the coffin.\textsuperscript{16} The family of the deceased had to work quickly in order to complete all of the necessary arrangements. When William Weeks died in 1819, his cousin sent a letter by messenger to Weeks’s stepson, asking that the coffin be built in time for a funeral the next day. With great speed, those connected to the deceased laid out the body, procured a coffin and hearse, and notified relatives and friends.\textsuperscript{17}
In many cases, the family distributed notices that contained information about a person’s death and the time and place of the ceremony. Funeral announcements could take several forms, often depending upon the economic status of the deceased’s family. In most cases, they were printed at a local stationer’s shop. Relatives had the choice of several designs. Some simply stated the relevant information with no embellishment, while others featured heavy black borders, engravings, or poetry. Pictures on the notices naturally centered on mournful themes. Skulls, weeping willows, and sobbing women draped across tombstones were common. Mourners with limited funds could purchase blank notices. These followed the same basic form as the printed notices but left spaces for the name of the deceased and the date, time, and place of the funeral. Relatives could therefore save the time and expense of using a printer. Members of the Miller family of New Orleans, for example, were free people of color who often struggled to make ends meet. When the family patriarch, James Miller, Sr. died, they bought blank notices and filled in the relevant information themselves. Like most other blank announcements, Miller’s featured a picture of a graveyard scene. Others had thick black borders or verses of poetry. Finally, some families sent handwritten notices to friends and neighbors inviting them to the funeral. The families of Israel L. Adams and Jane Buck both sent notes to announce their burials. In such cases, the relatives either chose not to incur the expense of formal announcements or lived in an area with no printer or stationer.

Funeral notices followed the same basic form that changed little during the antebellum period. The notice of Perez Ripley’s death is a representative example. When he passed away in December of 1856, his announcement read, “The friends and acquaint-
ances of the late Perez Ripley, are requested to attend his funeral, to-morrow morning, at 10 o'clock.” In the case of a child or a married woman, the invitation was generally issued in the name of the parents or husband. For example, the announcement of Margaretia Hoffman’s death invited “the friends and acquaintances of Mr. F. X. Hoffman” to her funeral. Sometimes the date and place of death or the age of the deceased would also be included, as for Philip Hickey, who died at his plantation Hope Estate on October 1, 1859 at the age of 82. Even handwritten notices followed this pattern. The announcement for the funerals of Israel Adams and Jane Buck, for example, are nearly identical to printed announcements. Among French-speaking Louisianians, relatives used a similar form. The notice of Marguerite Dupre’s funeral, for example, read “vous etre prie d’assister aux Convoy et Enterrement de feue Dame Marguerite Dupre.” In addition, mourners were told where they could view the body before the ceremony.

In addition to notifying people of a death and inviting them to the funeral, the notices also served a more personal purpose. Their presence in many manuscript collections indicate that mourners often kept the notices as mementoes of the deceased, much like hair jewelry, deathbed photographs, and other popular antebellum memorial items. They were intended to remind friends and family members of their loved ones and also to remind the living that death could come at any time.

In a town with a newspaper, an obituary might often appear as well. Charles Lavaux Trudeau’s obituary in the Louisiana Gazette and Mercantile Advertiser celebrated him as “an old and much respected inhabitant of Louisiana” who had served the local New Orleans government under both the Spanish and Americans. The Pointe Coupee Democrat published a notice of the death of Marie Therese Olinde David in

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March of 1860. A widow who had lived over one hundred years, the obituary remembered her as one of the oldest natives of the parish. Also in 1860, the same paper eulogized Zenon Ledoux as “one of the noblest representatives of that old and chivalrous Louisiana Creole population, of which so few are left in our parish.”

By examining obituaries, one can determine many of the values and behaviors that Louisianians considered important. When Amelia Compton died in 1859, for example, the Louisiana Democrat celebrated “her admirable management of her large household” as one of her most notable virtues. J. F. Brent, a young lawyer, was honored for gaining “high honor for his age” in his profession, while another young man was mourned as “cut off in the midst of his hopes, and his usefulness.” When Judge Isaac Preston died in 1852, his obituary highlighted the fact that he had “filled the highest public stations.” Many death notices, like that of Louisa Blanchard extolled the strong religious beliefs of the deceased.

Family remained the most important element in burial rituals, but in some cases, local organizations aided the relatives of deceased members with the arrangements. In Baton Rouge, for example, the St. James Masonic Lodge hired hearses, had coffins built, and provided music for the funerals of members. In Clinton, the local Masons issued invitations to the funeral of James Eubanks. Although they took over tasks that usually fell to the family of the deceased, these organizations did not undermine the importance of kinship. Instead, the efforts of Masons and other groups were regarded as an extension of family duties. Members of fraternal organizations referred to each other as “brother,” and they took that role seriously.
The most visible part of the funeral service was the procession, in which family, friends, and other mourners carried the body to the place of burial. In 1843, when Hanna Conrad died, a friend described the funeral, which took place at sundown, to Conrad's sister in law. S. M. Avery remembered the torchlight walk to the cemetery, "attended . . . by a large concourse of sympathizing friends," most clearly. Processions showed the place of the deceased in society. The lavishness and size of the cortege showed the class position of the dead person and also gave an indication of his or her character. Elizabeth Brown's aunt, for example, described the child as "a great favorite of all that knew her" and gave that Brown's spotless character as the reason for the large number of people who accompanied her body to its burial. According to the obituary of Charles Trudeau, the lengthy train of mourners that followed his remains to the grave served as a testament to "respect for departed worth." To antebellum Louisianians, a large number of mourners processing to the cemetery indicated that the subject of the ceremony person had lived a life worthy of respect.28

If the deceased belonged to a fraternal or civic organization, the group often participated in the funeral cortege. When James Eubanks died in Clinton, his Masonic brothers led his procession from the home of Stephen Yarborough — where his remains rested — to the Methodist church for a service. They then accompanied the body to the Clinton cemetery. The order of the Eastern Star prescribed elaborate rules for participation in funeral marches. As a pamphlet in the possession of the Barrow family stated, members must wear the order's mourning colors of green and white and march in strict precedence in the funerals of members. When the Fremaux family's neighbor - a member of the local fire department - died, Celine Fremaux recalled that all of the firemen
walked in his procession “with music and furled banners.” In addition, a fire truck bore the coffin to the cemetery.29

Family and friends often furnished carriages for mourners during funeral processions, and many considered carriages essential. The family of Philip Hicky rented vehicles from the stables of H. A. Castle for any of their acquaintances who wished to join Hicky’s funeral cortege, and the family of Josephine Duplantier used the same stable when she died in Baton Rouge. Those mourning John Baptiste Kleinpeter could also accompany his remains to their resting place in carriages. According to Mother Mary Hyacinth of the Daughters of the Cross, Avoyelles Parish residents rode in funeral processions in carriages or on horseback behind a rider carrying a cross. John Bunyan Taylor’s family could not rent enough equipages for all of the mourners at his wedding, but according to his mother, their neighbors and friends were “kind in furnishing carriages to go to the grave.” Similarly, when Mr. Jones could not hire any carriages in Trinity for the funeral of his son, he borrowed them from friends in the area rather than conduct the procession on foot.30

Many people considered a funeral that lacked a cortege to be one of the most melancholy scenes they could witness. E. John Ellis, for example, wrote his mother about the burial of a Mrs. Whitaker in Jackson, recalling, “no bell tolled no procession followed her to her last resting place.” During the New Orleans yellow fever epidemic of 1841, James Edwards described the many trains of mourners he saw in the city. All were depressing to him, but he found the funerals of one person who was buried “with not a single person following after him, to perform the last rites of fellowship” the most affecting. The lack of mourners at a funeral indicated that the deceased either lived far
away from family or had not been able to form relationships with people who cared
enough to mourn his or her passing. Antebellum Louisianians considered both situations
unfortunate.31

Families generally held the funeral service itself either at home or in a church. In
the antebellum era, most funerals took place in a house. When Mr. Crosbey did in New
Orleans, Episcopal minister Charles Hilton preached a funeral sermon “on the duty of
following Christ” at his house before accompanying the body to Girod Street cemetery
for burial. When A. Wish died, Hilton conducted services both at the house and the
grave. Sarah Ker Butler described one home funeral to her sister in law as far too
crowded. According to Butler, the entire house was filled, and she could not hear the
service. “How much better it would have been to have the service in a church,” she
felt.32

Some – especially Catholic – funerals did take place in a church. The services
for Caroline Lanne, Odilia Baggot, Francisque Esteves, and Chevalier Boisdore all oc­
curred in New Orleans churches, while Eliza Scallon’s funeral was celebrated at St. Jo­
seph’s Catholic Church in Baton Rouge and Felonice Landry was buried from the
Catholic Church in Paincourtville. All church funerals were not Catholic, however.
James Eubanks’ ceremony took place at the Methodist Church in Clinton, and Mary
Cheatem’s family had her service conducted at a Methodist Church in Baton Rouge.33

Funerals served a significant purpose in the grieving process. They allowed fam-
ily members and friends of the deceased to express their feelings and publicly show devo-
tion to their lost loved one. Not only did the outward expression of grief often help
the bereaved deal with their loss, but it was also necessary in order to keep the approval
of the community. When a neighbor, Mrs. Walker, died in 1858, Nannie Roberts reported, “it was truly heart-rending to witness the grief of Dr. Walker and his poor helpless little children.” Luther Field recalled that a friend “seemed almost frantic when the coffin containing the body of his wife was about to be closed from his view forever.” Similarly, when William Kenner lost his wife in 1814, his business partner described him as “inconsolable,” a fitting expression of grief. Finally, when a schoolmate of Mary Wright died in 1857, her father “wept much over the corpse and put his face against her cold cheek.”

Calmness or grief that ended too quickly elicited disapproval. When Ann Raney Thomas married her second husband just eleven months after the death of her first, she kept the news secret for as long as possible because “some persons would censure for being in such haste.” In New Orleans, Jules LeBlanc’s engagement fifteen months after the death of his wife created sensation in his family. According to LeBlanc’s former brother-in-law, “not a member of the Blanc, Denegre, Musgrove or Lanreus families has been willing yet” to call on the woman “because they are all shocked at the idea that Jules so soon began to think of replacing my dear Harriette.”

Family members also endeavored to demonstrate their grief and respect for the dead through the funeral arrangements. When Isaiah Norwood died at the home of his cousin Martha Batchelor, she fretted over the rites. She had hoped to procure a metal coffin, but had to settle for a “very nice sypress coffin,” which she trimmed with lace and black velvet. Although she continued to worry about the funeral, Batchelor’s neighbors assured her that she “had done all that was necessary.” When James Martin died, his family buried him “with every suitable preparation which was necessary to his
station in life.” In Martin’s case, the family wished to show their respect for both him and his place in society through his funeral.36

In an attempt to convey proper respect for the dead, families often incurred major expenses. The burial of Cadet Rossignol, a student in New Orleans, cost $39.20 in 1812. The service included a vigil and the services of priests, chanters, and choirboys as well as use of the censer, cope, and wax candles. In 1814, Berthe Grima’s funeral featured three priests, three chanters, choir boys and well as three dozen candles. Other expenses included a vigil and ringing of the church bells along with use of the cope, censer, and cross. The total cost came to $158.60. Two decades later, when Magdalaine Zamora died, her mother spent $130.25 on a funeral at St. Louis Cathedral, and the family of William Waters spent $72.00 on his funeral in 1853. These represented significant expenses for the antebellum era. Upon her arrival in Natchitoches, Mother Mary Hyacinth le Conniat of the Daughters of the Cross was shocked by the amount of money residents spent on funerals. She described shrouds made of silk and coffins lined with satin and velvet. According to Mother Mary Hyacinth, the body lay in a beautifully decorated coffin and then another, plain one was built to keep the decorated coffin from getting dirty in the grave. Other expenses were incurred for a hearse and carriages, black bows, and a monument. Finally, priests received from $10 to $40 for officiating at the funeral. While families did not consciously try to spend as much money as possible on an extravagant ceremony in order to show off, they did feel that the details of a person’s burial should be as good as or better those of his or her life. It served as a testament to the worth of the deceased that his or her family was willing to spend a great deal of money on his or her memory.37
Society even expected similar efforts for strangers or acquaintances who died without nearby relatives. James Edwards’ friend J. Yates Bartlette died in New Orleans, far from his family. Edwards therefore took the responsibility for his funeral, and had Bartlette buried “with all proper solemnity.” Eugene Ricketts was “a stranger, from Flemingsburg, Kentucky” when he died at James Baker’s hotel in Bayou Sara, and he had neither friends nor family in town. Baker, however, arranged a funeral for Ricketts, and even issued notices to Bayou Sara residents.38

When a funeral was not possible, the shock of death was intensified. In 1848, Walter Nicol lost his wife, children, and several other family members when the boat bringing them across Lake Pontchartrain to New Orleans sank. Nicol participated in an extensive search that lasted several days, but he never recovered the body of his wife. According to Nicol, the pain of not finding her remains and his inability to give her a proper funeral increased his sorrow. Nicol, however, could still hold a funeral service without the corpse of his wife. For others, that was not possible. When Mrs. White’s husband died, she wished to give him a proper Episcopal funeral. She summoned Reverend Charles Hilton to perform the rites, “but as he has committed suicide I could not concur.” Hilton remained with the widow a short time to console her, but he could not provide the service she desired.39

The rituals of death did not end with the funeral. Antebellum Louisianians regarded the choice of burial place as an extremely significant one. In towns, religious cemeteries appealed to many. New Orleans residents could choose from Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish graveyards, in addition to municipal cemeteries and those that belonged to organizations. Early settlers established a cemetery on St. Peter Street, but it
soon became full and closed in the 1780s. St. Louis Cemetery I, founded in 1789, and its neighbor built in 1823 served the Catholic community in the antebellum era. In the 1840s and 1850s, as the city’s population grew rapidly, St. Patrick’s Cemeteries I and II and St. Louis Cemetery III, among others, also opened for Catholic burials. Protestants were buried in the Girod Street Cemetery. Beginning in 1828, the Jewish congregations Gates of Prayer, Gates of Mercy, and Dispersed of Judah each founded their own cemeteries, and Hebrew Rest opened just before the Civil War.40

For those who did not desire burial in a religious cemetery, municipal and organization cemeteries existed. Masons and Odd Fellows each owned a graveyard, and the Fireman’s Charitable and Benevolent Trust founded two burial grounds, Greenwood and Cypress Grove, before the Civil War. The New Orleans suburbs of Carrollton, Jefferson, and Lafayette each built a cemetery, as did the city’s municipal districts. Finally, Jose Lula operated the St. Vincent de Paul Cemetery as a profitable business.41

Although the Jewish and Protestant communities in New Orleans used a portion of a Catholic cemetery before they could purchase their own, the denominations generally kept their cemeteries separate. Once they were able to establish their own burial grounds, members of non-Catholic religious groups transferred bodies to the new area. In 1851, Elizabeth Hart visited one of the Catholic graveyards in New Orleans, and although she remarked, “it is a most beautiful place,” she also added, “I would hate to be put in it” because she was a Protestant. Similarly, Catholics of different ethnic groups had their own cemeteries. St. Patrick’s cemetery, like the church of the same name, primarily served Irish immigrants. Among the city’s German population, St. Joseph’s was the graveyard of choice.42
In smaller towns, each church might have its own burial ground nearby. Isaiah Norwood, for example, was buried in the Presbyterian Church’s cemetery in Point Coupee. In Cheneyville, Sarah Wright reported that two friends had been interred in the Campbellite church’s graveyard. Jewish congregations founded cemeteries in Pineville, Plaquemine, Baton Rouge, Shreveport, Monroe, and Opelousas during the 1850s. This acquisition of a burying ground often occurred even before they built a synagogue.  

Many small villages, however, lacked separate cemeteries for each denomination. Caroline Poole spent three years in Monroe and described the cemetery in her diary. According to Poole, graves were scattered around the burial ground, and “here and there a cross shows that the tenant of the narrow house was a catholic.” In Natchitoches, Timothy Flint found that “Spanish, French, Americans, Indians, Catholics and Protestants lie in mingled confusion.”  

In many cases, the deceased wished for a religious burial. According to Mother Mary Hyacinth le Conniat of the Daughters of the Cross, the citizens of Natchitoches generally lived without religion, but they desired “to be . . . buried by a Catholic priest.” Outside of New Orleans, few Jews resided in areas with a large or active Jewish community. Many who resided in small towns, therefore, stipulated that their families transport their bodies to New Orleans for burial in a Jewish cemetery there. David Lazard of Mississippi, Joseph Guggenheim of Jeanerette, and Hayman Levy of Monroe were among those who had graves in the Congregation Gates of Prayer Cemetery.  

Residents of rural areas generally had little choice of burial place because of the distances involved. Often, a small portion of the family’s land would be designated as the cemetery. According to Cyrus Boyd, most farms and plantations featured burial
grounds “generally 10 to 15 Rods from their dwellings and are fitted up with the most scrupulous care.” The Stone family had a graveyard on their plantation, as did the Barrow family. Similarly, H. B. Tibbetts buried his brother and children on his plantation and enclosed the area with a brick wall and evergreens. In some cases, even those who lived near a town chose to be laid to rest on the family’s land. All of the members of the Woolfolk family of Rosedale, for example, were interred in the family vault on Mound Plantation, rather than in the cemetery in Rosedale. Alfred Weeks served as an exception to this custom when his son died. Writing to his sister that “I am not willing to bury him on the plantation,” he instead expressed a wish to inter his child in the New Iberia cemetery where his brother, nieces, and nephews lay.47

As the case of Weeks shows, most Louisianians exhibited a strong desire to lie near other family members. In describing the plantation cemetery where the bodies of his brother and children were located, H. B. Tibbetts stated his desire eventually to be buried there as well. When Alfred Sessions lost two children in the same day, he had them buried together in the same grave. Similarly, when Catharine Stirling died, her parents put her next to her brother Lewis. For Sarah Ker Butler, the sale of her childhood home was most distressing because it was the site of the cemetery where her grandparents, father, and siblings lay. Not only would strangers own the cemetery, but no other Ker could be buried there. When the Stone family of northern Louisiana built a new cemetery on their plantation, they had the bodies of family members disinterred from the old plot and moved, so that all members could rest together in the same location.48
Others hoped to remain in or return to places they considered home. Mary Kenner, for example, grew up in Natchez, Mississippi, but spent all of her married life in New Orleans. When she died there in 1814, therefore, a family friend reported to her father, “she had expressed a desire to be interred here.” Maria Harris, on the other hand, wished to be buried at her childhood home of Jackson rather than in Clinton where she lived with her husband. Similarly, Matilda Waters, who lived in New Orleans with her husband and children, asked that her body be taken to her own family’s graveyard outside the city rather than to the Waters family tomb, where it lay temporarily until the arrangements for transfer could be made. Although Judah Touro had spent more than half a century in New Orleans, in his will he requested that the executors take his body to his birthplace of Newport, Rhode Island for burial in the Jewish cemetery there.49

Temporary burial occurred often because of the lack of embalming methods and primitive transportation network. Walter Nicol’s daughter died in New Orleans, and he planned to bury her in Springfield, Louisiana. Until he could arrange to have the body transported across Lake Pontchartrain, however, he entombed her in the Girod Street cemetery. Samuel Peters’ sister died before construction on her father’s tomb could be completed. The family therefore deposited her body in another vault and moved it seven months later when the Peters tomb was finished. Similarly, when Tryphena and Raymond Fox lost their infant in 1860, they had not yet built a family resting place. A neighbor allowed them to place the baby’s corpse in his tomb until they could construct one of their own.50

When a family member died away from home, strenuous efforts were often made to return the body for burial. William Johnson died in Pascagoula on the Missis-
sippi Gulf Coast, and his family brought him back to Louisiana for burial. Even significant distances did not deter many Louisianians. Augustus Wright died of typhoid while a student in Kentucky and was interred in Lexington. Six months after his death, however, his mother had his remains carried to her plantation near Cheneyville. Similarly, when Thomas Butler died on board a steamboat in St. Louis, friends in that city helped his son bring his corpse to St. Francisville. One even accompanied Butler's body down the river to insure that no mishaps occurred. Friends of Mr. Stacy, who died in New Orleans, also accompanied his remains home on the steamboat. Similarly, when Charity Barrow died in Nashville, her family brought her to their plantation and buried her there. Ursin Bouligny even transported his dead wife from Paris to New Orleans.51

A family's wishes about the place of burial could not always be honored, however. When Cora Wheeler died while spending the summer of 1851 in Bay St. Louis on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, her father reported "we shall be compelled to bury her here as it is impossible to remove the body, decomposition having taken place already.52 At other times, conflict arose between family members over where to place a corpse. When Nathan Tibbetts died in Lake Providence, his widow wished to have the body sent to her in Boston so that she could bury it in Mount Auburn Cemetery. Nathan's brother, who also resided in Lake Providence, refused because "Brother Nathan it seems did not wish to be near them (his family) when living, and he made no request to be carried there when dead." At the same time, H. B. Tibbetts felt that his sister in law had driven his brother away and resented her sudden and – in his eyes – hypocritical expression of grief. Instead, H. B. Tibbetts had Nathan buried on his own plantation next to his chi-
dren and reported, "he rests in peace," something he doubted would be the case if Hannah Tibbetts succeeded in her request.53

In religious cemeteries, regulations could also thwart family wishes. Rules often stipulated that those who had committed suicide or violated other religious proscriptions could not be buried in consecrated ground. The Catholic church forbade burial to Masons and members of other secret societies, for example. At the Jewish Congregation Gates of Mercy cemetery in New Orleans, those who had “married contrary to Jewish law” as well as people who had committed suicide, prostitutes and their offspring, and aborted fetuses were segregated from all others in a separate section. The Congregation Gates of Prayer required permission before family members could erect headstones or other markers on graves.54

Finally, a once-acceptable gravesite could become unsatisfactory, often because of community conflicts. Mary Weeks became unhappy with the choice of the New Iberia cemetery as the final resting place of her children. She worried that such a public place, where many interments had recently taken place, would expose her children’s graves to “the licentious and profane,” especially because “I hear the Catholics have little reverence for the Graves of Protestants.” As a Protestant residing in a mostly Catholic area, her concerns reflected some of the cultural and religious conflicts that occurred in Louisiana. Similarly, Sarah Ker Butler lamented that strangers, who would not respect the graves of her relatives, now owned the family cemetery. Although mourners hoped to secure a burial site where the remains of their loved ones would never be disturbed, this was not always possible.55
In New Orleans and other parts of southern Louisiana, the above-ground tombs elicited much comment from visitors and newcomers to the area. Early in Louisiana's history, settlers discovered that the high water table made in-ground burial unsatisfactory. According to V. M. Randolph, an 1820 visit to a New Orleans cemetery brought the sight of "a man digging a grave knee deep in water." Coffins floated in the open holes, and during heavy rains that caused flooding, the buried caskets could become dislodged. During the antebellum era, therefore, those who could bear the expense built family tombs that resembled little houses or bought one of the numerous vaults stacked along the cemetery wall. Only the poor were laid to rest in the ground.56

Once the corpse lay in the ground, a few rituals remained, and mourning served as the most visible element. Among the upper classes who could afford purchasing new clothing, family members of all denominations wore mourning dress, and elaborate rules governed its use. Immediate family members generally wore all black for at least a year. Women wore black dresses while men attached black armbands to their sleeves. Any jewelry must be made of jet or commemorate the deceased, such as a ring made of his or her hair. Celine Fremaux Garcia recalled that when her grandmother died, the entire family went into deep mourning, and the pink and blue party dresses that her mother had just made were given to friends. Eliza Ripley recalled that when she put on mourning for her brother, even her underclothes were black. After at least a year, the transition to second mourning began. In April 1836, not quite two years after the death of her father, Frances Weeks informed her mother that she would soon change to second mourning, which featured dresses of gray, lavender, and other subdued colors, because "I think that it would be unhealthy for me to wear mourning this summer." Frances Weeks

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also hoped to begin wearing coral jewelry if her mother thought “that it would be proper.” Gradually, as time passed, relatives of the deceased would begin to include more colors in their wardrobes.\textsuperscript{57}

At the same time, those who had recently lost close relatives were expected to retire from society. Samuel Peters recorded that only immediate family members attended the baptism of his daughter, an event that would usually feature a festive celebration and draw a large number of friends, because Aspasie Peters was in mourning for her newly deceased grandfather. During the Carnival season of 1826, Mathilde de Feriet reported to her aunt, “being in mourning, we are deprived of the pleasures of the season.” Several years later, Mathilde felt shocked by the number of people she saw at the theatres in New Orleans “while the epidemic has put at lest two thirds of the population into mourning.” In this aspect of the death ritual, large portions of society clearly did not conform to the behavior that was anticipated from them.\textsuperscript{58}

In some evangelical denominations, especially the Baptist, a person’s burial had few ceremonies attached to it, but a minister preached a funeral sermon a month or more afterward. James Corkern’s sister, for example, died in late 1861, and her funeral sermon took place in mid-February of 1862. Similarly, Rev. Reeves preached Sybil McKinney’s funeral discourse more than a month after her death. Mrs. Palmer of Clinton died and was buried in June of 1863, and the local Baptist minister spoke on her life in July.\textsuperscript{59}

Often, Catholic families held memorial masses on the first anniversary of death. The children of Louis Couvertie held a mass at St. Louis Cathedral exactly one year after he died. Catholics believed that such services would help the soul move from Purga-
tory to Heaven, but they also had a purpose for the living. Like the change from deep to second mourning clothes after a year, this service marked the end of the intense phase of grieving and a gradual return to normal life and activities.  

Although the anniversary mass marked a significant milestone, deceased relatives were not forgotten in Catholic Louisiana. All Saints Day on November 1 was a time to show respect for the dead. According to Frank Babin, Catholics spent the day cleaning the graves of their loved ones, decorating them with flowers and candles, and saying prayers. As Dora Miller described the practice, New Orleanians of every class participated and mingled in the city’s cemeteries. On her visit, Miller found flowers “on every costly tomb and lowly grave.” Clearly, the rituals of All Saints Day remained open to Catholics from every segment of society, and the veneration and remembrance of dead relatives was not an exclusively upper-class phenomenon. Although, as Madaline Edwards observed, many Protestants found the celebrations of All Saints Day sacrilegious, she believed that for Catholics it was “beneficial to themselves” both as a way to remember and cherish those who had died and as an element of the grieving process. After his visit to a Catholic cemetery on All Saints Day, John Dunlap saw the issue differently, and although he felt “the whole scene was quite imposing and caused feelings of the most solemn character,” he condemned the practice as an “error” and superstitious.  

For slaves as well as their masters, funerals carried special significance, although the wishes of slaves sometimes conflicted with those of the master. On rare occasions, an ordained minister celebrated slave funerals. For example, the rector of the Episcopal Church of the Nativity in Rosedale buried three of the Woolfolk family’s
slaves in the early 1860s. Clara Brim recalled that her master also brought a white minister to his plantation in order to inter slaves, and John Smith of Grand Coteau had the local Catholic priest conduct his slaves’ funerals.62

More commonly, the master or a slave preacher conducted funeral services. When cholera killed Elvina, a slave living in the plantation of John Christian Buhler, in 1849, Buhler himself read the funeral service. Catherine Cornelius recalled that on her master’s plantation, Brother Aaron, a fellow slave, performed the rites for all who died. Similarly, on the plantation of Elizabeth Ross Hite’s master, Jacob Nelson, a slave and in her opinion the “best preacher on de plantation” conducted funerals Chris Franklin, too, recalled that an “old cullud clergyman” preached when slaves died on his master’s Caddo Parish plantation.63

Slaves treasured family ties no less than their masters. When on his deathbed, Andrew called together his relatives and friends on Residence Plantation, “and expressed a hope that he would meet them all in heaven.” The significance of family ties often manifested themselves in burial arrangements. In 1849, when John Christian Buhler’s slave Mary lost two of her children to cholera in the space of two days, the brother and sister were buried side by side in the same coffin. According to Catherine Cornelius, her fellow slaves had no headstones in their cemetery, “but we planted willow trees to know de place where one of your kins was buried.”64 On many plantations, masters set aside a separate area for the slaves’ cemetery. For Catherine Cornelius and others on her master’s plantation, a plot of land “back of de plantations” served as the burial ground for the slaves. Agatha Babino recalled that slaves and whites used separate sections of the same cemetery on Ogis Guidry’s plantation near Carencro. On the
plantations surrounding Grand Coteau, masters and slaves also shared the same plot of land, although they were again segregated.65

In New Orleans, slaves and free people of color did not have separate cemeteries from whites. Many of the graveyards in the city did have segregated sections, however. The older Catholic portion of the first St. Louis cemetery was not segregated, but the Protestant area did have a small part at the rear set aside for African Americans. In St. Louis II, the portion between Iberville and Bienville Streets contained the graves of black New Orleanians. Although, as historians have noted, the Catholic church had no policy of segregation, local custom dictated differently. Some scholars have attributed this change to the Americanization of the city during the nineteenth century and see it as part of a larger hardening of racial attitudes after the French and Spanish colonial periods.66

When a slave died, all of the other slaves endeavored to attend the service. According to Harriet Meade, only one person on her plantation remained absent from the funeral of her slave Emily. Most of the domestic slaves belonging to Sarah Wright helped bury Henny, who had worked in the house. On Trinity Plantation, Elizabeth Ross Hite remembered that all of the enslaved people went to funerals. When “Maum Emma,” a slave woman living near Shreveport, died, Maria Hawes recalled that all of the plantation’s residents “marched, singing their melancholy chants, around her grave.” Similarly, Catharine Cornelius recalled, “whenever anybody died, dey all was let off form work to go to the funeral.” Cornelius’ statement reveals the main determining factor in a slave’s decision to attend a funeral: permission of the master. When an elderly man on his plantation died, St. John Liddell gave all of the slaves time off from work to
bury him. He only allowed them to stop work half an hour early, however, so that most of the day was still devoted to labor. Ceceil George recalled that her master would not allow any of his chattel to attend funerals because it would take them away from their jobs. Sarah Benjamin’s master also forbade his slaves from attending funerals during the day, so she had to miss the burial of her mother.67

For certain slaves, especially those who had worked in the master’s home, members of the white community attended the funeral. Maria Hawes, for example, recalled that all of the area planters were present at the burial of Emma, her host’s housekeeper. Relatives and fellow slaves, however, buried most enslaved men and women, without the presence of the master or other whites. Often, these funerals took place at night because masters would not allow a break in work in order to bury the dead. On the plantations where Chris Franklin and Louis Evans lived, slaves had an all night wake when someone died.68

At the same time, enslaved people often could not show respect for their deceased family members through material items in the same way that whites could. Masters provided the basic items needed for a funeral, including the coffin, and their quality generally depended upon the whim of the master. Elizabeth Ross Hite reported that her owner supplied “swell-looking coffins, well made too,” which plantation carpenters constructed. In the experience of Catherine Cornelius, slave carpenters also built coffins, but they were just plain wooden boxes. Ceceil George criticized the hastily nailed together planks that served as a coffin on her owner’s place. In one instance, George remembered that the coffin was too small, so a man broke the corpse’s neck in order to make it fit. Finally, Polly Shine recalled, “when a slave died he was just drug down
there to a hole in the ground and covered over with dirt.” In each of these cases, the quality of the materials depended upon what the master was willing to provide.69

For most families – both black and white – a funeral was a personal occasion in which relatives and friends mourned together. However, burial ceremonies could also have an overtly political or social meaning, especially those of prominent political or military figures. Planned by civic leaders, they were often meant to convey a message to the general population. The public services held in New Orleans for Andrew Jackson, for example, celebrated not only his legacy as hero of the Battle of New Orleans and president of the United States, but also the ideals of Jacksonian democracy. According to Luther Tower Field, the funeral ceremonies for Jackson took place in the Place d’Armes in the center of the city. W. A. Scott, a prominent Presbyterian minister preached a sermon at his church, followed by a procession to the Place d’Armes that Field described as “the largest that ever was seen . . . in New Orleans.” The ceremonies and Reverend Scott’s sermon centered on Jackson’s role as hero of the Battle of New Orleans in 1815. Immediately behind the hearse came carriages filled with survivors of the battle. As Scott pointed out, this could bring the entire city together, “without any reference to the politics of the living.” Madaline Edwards, who witnessed the ceremony, agreed, commenting, “party feeling seemed forgotten to day and all classes and nations of the metropolis joined to swell the train that paid this last tribute to his memory.”70

Similarly, when Henry Clay and Daniel Webster both died in 1852, the city of New Orleans declared separate days of mourning following each man’s death. City leaders also organized an elaborate ceremony honoring Clay and Webster, along with John C. Calhoun who had died in 1850. At a time when sectional tensions ran high and
many southerners - feeling persecuted by northern states - began to question their place in the Union, the city leaders celebrated the lives of the Great Triumvirate – a South Carolina states rights advocate, a Massachusetts senator, and Kentucky’s Great Compromiser –together. Delegations of citizens from each of their home states served as chief mourners and led a procession with representatives from every state. Following the procession and the depositions of urns in a cenotaph in Lafayette Square, prominent clergymen and members of the judiciary offered prayers and eulogies. The ceremonies were quite elaborate, and the city government spent over a thousand dollars advertising the event in local papers and printing programs. Samuel J. Peters, a resident of the city, described the ceremony as “grand and imposing,” with a procession of over five thousand people.71

When William Henry Harrison died in office, New Orleans was one of many cities around the nation to give him a ceremonial burial. The event included a long procession in which delegates from each state marched. Also, representatives of the city’s Irish, German, French, Spanish, and Anglo-Americans flanked the urn. This sent a unifying message to a city that was still sharply divided between Anglo-American and French and Spanish Creole and was experiencing a massive influx of Irish and German immigrants. The procession made its way along a route draped in black to the church of Theodore Clapp, one of the city’s most famous and popular ministers, for a funeral sermon. All day, minute guns sounded, and businesses remained closed.72

Some public funeral services lacked such a unifying message. In December of 1821, the Creole community of New Orleans organized a funeral service in memory of Napoleon Bonaparte. Notices appeared in the French sections of local papers, and the
service took place at St. Louis Cathedral. Americans, most of whom were very recent
migrants and did not get along with Creoles, were not welcomed. Twenty years later,
little had changed when a memorial mass was planned for Bonaparte. The invitations
were issued in French, and no person could obtain admittance to the ceremony at St.
Louis Cathedral without an invitation. Clearly, the Creole community of New Orleans
did not go out of its way to encourage attendance by Americans. In a city where ethnic
tensions remained strong, these rites honoring Napoleon were hardly planned to bring
the two factions together.\textsuperscript{73}

In 1852, Cuban immigrants in New Orleans commemorated the execution of
General Narciso Lopez, who had led an abortive attempt to free Cuba from Spanish
rule, with a memorial mass and "a Grand Funeral Ceremony" at St. Louis Cathedral.
Like the memorial services for Napoleon, a relatively small group of people organized
the event. The "creoles of the Island of Cuba" were refugees from a failed attempt to
achieve the island's independence from Spain under the leadership of Lopez. This ser­
vice, however, was open to all "friends to their cause," and there were many in New
Orleans. Like men across the South, New Orleanians dreamt of extending the American
slave regime to Cuba, a prime sugar-producing island. Many had even gathered on
Round Island in the Gulf of Mexico in August of 1849. They met under the leadership
of George White in order to plan an invasion of Cuba with Lopez. Although the United
States government quashed the planned expedition, Lopez went forward with his own
group of men and was killed on September 1, 1851. A large number of New Orleans
residents, both Cuban and American gathered a year later to pay tribute to his memory
and his cause.\textsuperscript{74}
Military funerals also presented a message to citizens, especially in wartime. During the Mexican War, the funeral of Captain Quarles took place. A resident of New Orleans, he had died in the Battle of Churubusco, and his body was brought home for burial. As James A. Walker described the ceremony, “one splendid company of military formed the escort – then came the pall bearers – next chief mourners – followed by the Genl. and staff in full military costume – with an immense concourse of citizens.” Walker saw the ritual as a call for other citizens to follow Quarles’ example whenever the nation needed soldiers. A year earlier, Jacob Bechtel recorded his impressions of the ceremony for “the lamented Ringgold and Cochran,” whose bodies passed through New Orleans on their way home from Mexico. According to Bechtel, “the military force was very effective.” Scenes like these were designed to stir patriotic feelings in spectators and increase public support for the war.75

General Edmund Pendleton Gaines died in New Orleans in 1849, and his funeral drew a crowd of thousands. A career soldier whose service stretched from the War of 1812 to the Mexican War, Gaines had resided in New Orleans for several years, and many citizens felt that they had a special claim to his memory. The notice of his death in the Picayune asked businesses to close during the public ceremony, which took place on June 8. The minute guns in Lafayette Square and the Place d’Armes sounded from sunrise until the end of the funeral. Theodore Clapp delivered a eulogy, and a large military procession – which included the Louisiana state militia – accompanied the body to the train station, so that it could travel to Mobile for burial. The ceremonies for Gaines concentrated upon his long service in the army and his patriotism. His obituary in the Picayune celebrated both “his high military genius” and “his devoted patriotism.”
The governor of the state, in calling for the militia to attend his procession, called Gaines "a gallant and veteran officer." 76

Zachary Taylor held office as president of the United States when he died in 1850, but to many residents of Louisiana he was most importantly General Taylor, their own Mexican War hero. Upon learning of his death, the city of Baton Rouge, where he had resided for several years, mounted an elaborate military funeral. According to one resident, "since the news of his death reached here there has been nothing doing but firing cannon an making processions. Taylor’s burial “with all the honors of war” shows where citizens and their leaders felt his legacy should lie. Many Louisiana men had served and died in the Mexican War, a cause that was popular among many in the state. Both Gaines and Taylor represented what was perceived as the rightness and glory of that war to both the citizens and the leaders of Louisiana. 77

The death of John A. Quitman in 1858 carried many meanings for Louisianians. Like Taylor, Quitman had been a hero of the Mexican War. He was also an outspoken states rights politician who served in Congress and as governor of Mississippi. Finally, he had been a staunch supporter of Narciso Lopez’s efforts to free Cuban from Spanish control, a cause popular in Louisiana. In New Orleans, the minute guns in Lafayette Square fired all day on July 22 “as a mark of respect to his memory.” In addition, the flag at city hall flew at half-mast, and the mayor requested that all ships on the river and places of business also lower their standards. This display commemorated both Quitman’s service in war and his political leanings at a time when many southerners felt increasingly alienated from the rest of the nation. 78
Not all public funerals occurred for national figures. In 1859 the city of New Orleans organized a service for A. D. Crossman, a former mayor who had led the city during the catastrophic yellow fever epidemic of 1853. The procession featured members of the Fireman's Charitable Association, the Fire Department, the New Orleans Mechanics Society, and the Howard Association in addition to Crossman's family and friends. In this case, the city gathered to pay tribute to a man of local prominence and celebrate his service to the people of New Orleans. In Baton Rouge, the city government marked the death of B. F. Harney, surgeon at the army's garrison there, with the usual tokens of respect: businesses closed and the minute guns sounded all day. Harney had served at the Battle of New Orleans as well as the Black Hawk, Second Seminole, and Mexican wars before spending his old age ministering to the Baton Rouge post. The ceremonies in Baton Rouge were designed to celebrate both Harney's past participation in the nation's various military engagements and his many years of work in that city.  

In addition to conveying social and political meanings, public funerals also served as entertainment in antebellum Louisiana. F. B. Conrad reported, "I was entertained (or perhaps I ought not to have been)" during a military funeral in New Orleans. Public funerals featured elaborate processions and long speeches designed to hold the interest of spectators. Often military groups of civic institutions like the fire department participated as well, adding the sight of colorful uniforms and banners.  

Finally, nature could affect the ways in which Louisianians buried their dead. Epidemics raged with alarming frequency in the state, and they often disrupted and forced changes in accepted funeral practices. In years such as 1853, when the worst yellow fever outbreak occurred, the churches, cemeteries, and priests were simply over-
whelmed by the number of corpses. Even a milder epidemic could strain resources. At the same time, a lack of understanding of disease led public officials to alter burial procedures in an attempt to halt the sickness.

Yellow fever was the most serious disease to attack Louisiana. Although medical technology and record keeping were sketchy, it is believed that the first cases occurred as early as 1739, and the disease reappeared several times during the colonial period. By the 1790s, yellow fever had been positively identified in New Orleans and had probably come with refugees fleeing St. Domingue. The first epidemic struck New Orleans in 1796. By that point, the city had a large and growing population crowded on low-lying, mosquito-infested land. The 1796 outbreak killed roughly 350-400 out of a total population of six thousand, and at least a quarter of non-Creole whites perished. After this first epidemic, serious yellow fever seasons occurred eighteen times before 1860. During the summer of 1847, so many people succumbed that the Archbishop of New Orleans sent a call to all of the priests in the diocese, asking them to travel to the city and help with the sick and dying. Outside of New Orleans, yellow fever also appeared in towns along the state’s waterways as populations increased and travel between towns became more frequent. Baton Rouge, St. Francisville, and Alexandria suffered most, but other places saw the disease as well.

The most serious epidemic took place in 1853. Out of a total population of 100,000, forty percent contracted the disease, and at least nine thousand died. Each week, from July through September, hundreds of people died, and at the height of the epidemic in late August, more than 250 corpses were buried each day. Residents reported that funeral processions passed in a nearly constant stream, and there simply
were not enough people to assist with burying the dead, a problem which the flight of thousands of New Orleans residents from the city exacerbated. Acting on past experience, many of the city’s inhabitants habitually left during the summer months for cooler spots on the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain or the Gulf Coast. When the epidemic struck, thousands more fled the city, leaving the immense job of nursing the sick and burying the dead behind them.84

In early August, the New Orleans cemeteries reached a breaking point. At the Fourth District Cemetery, only six men worked to dig graves for the seventy-one bodies that arrived on August 5. When they quit at the end of the day, approximately forty coffins lay unburied. Those that were buried rested in graves eighteen inches to two feet deep, covered by only a few inches of dirt. In the heat of an August weekend, the remains decomposed and swelled, causing many of the coffins to burst. Area residents and local newspaper editors felt outraged but there simply were not enough men to dig graves. On August 9, the city closed the cemetery and employed a chain gang of slaves to bury the remaining caskets in shallow trenches. Other cemeteries faced similar problems, and gravediggers often worked until late in the night trying to keep up with the influx of bodies.85

All elements of the death ritual suffered during the 1853 epidemic. Although most ministers, including Theodore Clapp, remained in the city in order to help, others left, causing a shortage of clergy. According to Clapp, several ministers fled, and of those who stayed, fifteen died. Even if all of the city’s clergy had been present and healthy, the number of deaths exceeded their capacity. There was neither enough time nor enough people to visit all of the dying or perform the customary graveside rites. At
the same time, the city government ordered that funeral processions eliminate the customary dirges and tolling of church bells. So many corteges passed through the city that the unceasing noise disturbed sick residents. By August of 1853, most who died of yellow fever received nothing more than a brief march to the cemetery with whichever relatives had not yet succumbed to the disease.  

At the same time, churches held special religious services in attempts to combat the epidemic. Leonidas Polk, Episcopal Bishop of the Diocese of Louisiana wrote a special prayer for the churches under his care, asking for forgiveness and an end to the sickness. The rector of Christ Church designated August 26 as a day of prayer and humiliation. Archbishop Antoine Blanc called for public prayers from the city’s Catholics as well. The next month, Mayor A. D. Crossman set aside September 2 as a citywide day for “religious exercise.” Many of the city’s churches held special services in the morning and tolled their bells throughout the day.

New Orleans was not the only city decimated by the 1853 epidemic. Plaquemine, Baton Rouge, Bayou Sara, and nearly every river town experienced yellow fever. One observer even believed, “it is as bad if not worse in the small towns.” In Baton Rouge, seventy-three of the 110 soldiers at the garrison contracted the disease, and thirteen died. Methodist minister A. G. Goodwin of that city offered his services to the entire population, and spent the late summer and early fall tirelessly ministering to the sick and burying the dead. In Clinton, on the other hand, Emilie Watts reported that the only minister in town, a Methodist, had left when the disease arrived. His absence meant, “our dead were obliged to be buried without a funeral service.” Although no town
matched the incredible number of dead in New Orleans, many small villages lost a larger proportion of inhabitants.\textsuperscript{88}

Cholera also periodically swept through Louisiana and caused large-scale mortality. The results were similar to those of yellow fever, especially during the great cholera epidemic of 1832. Theodore Clapp reported that all but two Protestant clergymen fled the city, causing a shortage. He therefore spent more than two weeks in a constant round of visiting the sick and burying the dead. According to Clapp, he often stayed at the cemetery or the deathbeds of New Orleans residents until late at night, only to arise early the next morning and continue. During the outbreak, a Catholic priest of Theodore Clapp's acquaintance served at the deathbeds of Protestant and Catholic alike because there were not enough clergy members. Although he could not perform the Rite of Extreme Unction for non-Catholics, he devised his own ceremony for those who wished to make a profession of faith. The priest asked the dying person if he or she believed in God, and upon receiving an affirmative answer he said a short prayer. In November 1832, F. de Feriet described the scene in New Orleans to his sister. According to de Feriet, "in the streets and in all the houses there were only dead or dying. They buried everywhere, and it happened that as many as 64 bodies were crowded into the cemetery where they could not find sufficient room for them." Maria Inskeep observed, "the cabinet makers and carpenters cannot make the Coffins . . . fast enough for the demand!" The city faced a shortage of hearses, so drays, carts, and even wheelbarrows carried caskets. At the cemeteries, corpses lay in piles and eventually landed in mass graves without coffins. According to Clapp, bodies were laid to rest "without a single
mark of mourning or respect, because the exigency rendered it impossible." Many families even buried their dead in gardens or threw them into the Mississippi River.  

Local governments often changed burial practices in efforts to combat disease. After the 1817 yellow fever epidemic, New Orleans officials offered the Catholic church land for the construction of a special mortuary chapel next to the cemetery. The municipal leaders hoped that confining corpses to one location would keep sickness from spreading. Finished in 1827, for several years New Orleanians could only bring bodies to the chapel of St. Anthony of Padua for burial. In 1822, during a severe yellow fever outbreak, the New Orleans Board of Health ruled that the Catholic Cemetery was too small and that the constant digging of graves too close to recently-interred corpses spread infection. The Catholic Church, therefore, had to procure a new burying ground. The city did not always enforce such rulings, however. The next year, the *Louisiana Gazette* of New Orleans published a letter to the editor complaining that the old Catholic cemetery was still in use and "jeopardizing the lives of our fellow citizens" despite the Board of Health’s ordinance and an act of the state legislature. In each of these cases, a severe epidemic forced people to alter their burial practices.  

Louisianians often thought about mortality. Although the rituals that accompanied death had a strong spiritual basis, they also served important social and political purposes. Death could have a public side as Louisianians expressed their political beliefs through ceremonies for public figures. At the same time, funerals and mourning served as a way for people to pay tribute to their loved ones, insuring that they would not be forgotten. Mourners also used funerals as a way to deal with the grief of losing a relative or friend. At the same time, the rituals of death could testify to the class position.
and character of the deceased. By providing a proper funeral, relatives demonstrated to society not only that the deceased had been a worthy member of society, but also that they possessed the proper familial devotion. Family was arguably the most important institution in antebellum Louisiana, as the rituals surrounding death show. Bodies were grouped together in family plots or tombs, and people often went to great lengths in order to accomplish this.

End Notes


4 Baptisms, 25 March 1849, 5 October 1850, 19 April 1851, Lafayette, Andrew Chapel, and E. Steele Chapel Charge Records, Special Collections Library, Tulane University (hereafter TU); Diary of Reverend Charles Hilton, 30 January 1865, TU.

5 Obituaries, 13 April, 1850, Lafayette, Andrew Chapel, and E. Steele Chapel Charge Records, TU.
6 Jesse D. Wright, “Life of Esther Eliza Wright,” Wright-Boyd Family Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University (hereafter LLMVC); Emma Caffery to unknown, 3 March 1855, Caffery Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina (hereafter SHC), Records of Ante-bellum Southern Plantations from the American Revolution through the Civil War, ser J., pt. 5, ed. Kenneth M. Stampp (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1985); Diary of Reverend Charles Hilton, 10 January 1865, TU; Maria In-skeep to Fanny Hampton, 21 December 1856, Fanny Leverich Eshleman Craig Collection, TU. See also Gary Laderman, The Sacred Remains: American Attitudes Toward Death, 1799-1883 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 28.


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LLMVC; Burials, 19 March 1860, Church of the Nativity Parish Register, LLMVC; Josephine Joyce Funeral Announcement, 29 September 1859, Adolphe H. Huguet and Family Papers, LLMVC.

13 Esther Wright to Mary Wright, September 1857, Wright-Boyd Papers, LLMVC; Sarah Wright to Ellen Wright, September 1857, ibid.


15 Ann Raney Thomas Memoir, Ann Raney Thomas Papers, TU.

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17 Henry Flower to Stephen Ball, 22 October 1819, Weeks Papers, LLMVC.

18 Examples of printed announcements can be found in several manuscript collections, including the French Family Papers, LLMVC and other collections cited in notes 19-23. See also Margaret M. Coffin, Death in Early America: The History and Folklore of Customs and Superstitions of Early Medicine, Funerals, Burials, and Mourning (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1976), 71-72.

19 James Miller, Sr. Funeral Announcement, 25 February 1848, William T. Johnston and Family Memorial Papers, LLMVC.

20 Israel L. Adams Funeral Announcement, 2 January 1860, Israel L. Adams and Family Papers, LLMVC; Jane Buck Funeral Announcement, 8 August 1861, ibid.

21 Perez Ripley Funeral Announcement, 31 December 1856, Sarah G. Brown Collection, LLMVC; Margaretha Hoffman Funeral Announcement, 22 September 1848, E. P. Ellis and Family Papers, LLMVC; Philip Hickey Funeral Announcement, 1 October 1859, French Papers, LLMVC.

22 Israel Adams Funeral Announcement, 24 January 1860, Adams Papers, LLMVC; Jane Buck Funeral Announcement, 8 August 1861, ibid.

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23 Marguerite Dupre Funeral Announcement, 26 February 1849, New Orleans Funeral Notices, LLMVC. Several examples of announcements in French are included in the New Orleans Funeral Notices collection.


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27 Treasurer’s Report, 20-21 March 1851, Freemasons St. James Lodge Papers, LLMVC; James Eubanks Funeral Announcement, 4 February 1851, E. P. Ellis Papers, LLMVC.

28 S. M. Avery to Mary Weeks Moore, 2 September 1843, Weeks Papers, LLMVC; Amy Kaye to John A. Collins, 6 November 1844, George H. Carpenter and Family Papers, LLMVC; New Orleans Louisiana Gazette and Mercantile Advertiser, 7 October 1816.


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37 Trilingual Funeral Certificate, 9 December 1812, HNOC; Berthe Grima Funeral Bill, 21 April 1814, Grima Family Papers, HNOC; Josephine Zamora Bill, 14 September 1833, St. Louis Cathedral Ephemera Collection, HNOC; Daniel Monroe Receipt, 24 July 1853, Waters Family Papers, TU; Mary Hyacinth le Conniat to her Parents, 6 December 1856, in McCants, ed., *They Came to Louisiana*, 60.

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77 Douglass Montan to George W. Chase, 28 July 1850, George W. Chase Papers, LLMVC.

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82 Franklin Planter’s Banner and Louisiana Agriculturalist, 16 September 1847. See Carrigan, The Saffron Scourge, 22, 26, 51-54.


84 See Duffy, Sword of Pestilence, 8, 167; Roger Baudier, The Catholic Church in Louisiana (New Orleans: Archdiocese of New Orleans, 1939), 375.

85 New Orleans Delta, 8 August 1853. See Duffy, Sword of Pestilence, 63-65.


87 New Orleans Daily Delta, 2 September 1853. See Baudier, Catholic Church in Louisiana, 375; Duffy, Sword of Pestilence, 90-93; Carrigan, The Saffron Scourge, 342-343.


89 Clapp, Autobiographical Sketches, 233; F. de Feriet to Jacinade de Feriet, 19 November 1832, de Feriet Letters, TU; Maria Inskeep to Fanny Hampton, 29 October 1832, Craig Collection, TU; Clapp, Autobiographical Sketches, 233.

CHAPTER 6
THE SPIRIT UNDER STRESS:
RELIGION DURING THE CIVIL WAR

War placed strains on the normal rituals of Louisiana citizens. As in every other aspect of Louisiana society, the Civil War had a profound impact on the spiritual experiences of civilians as well as those of soldiers in both the Confederate and Union armies. Because Federal forces took parts of southern Louisiana, including New Orleans, in early 1862, a large portion of the state spent several years under occupation. This period, therefore, presents an excellent opportunity to study religious practices under extreme stress. By examining the ways in which the war affected the religious lives of Louisianians, one can also uncover the impact that it had on the institutions and values important to their society.

The Civil War fundamentally altered church services and the ways in which they were conducted. In many towns, ministers were among the most strident supporters of the Confederacy and the war effort. They preached in favor of secession following Abraham Lincoln's election to the presidency and called for enlistment in the Confederate army once the war began. Writing to her sister, Josephine Rozet described Benjamin Palmer of the First Presbyterian Church in New Orleans was "a thorough patriot & preaches war until there isn’t a man left in our confederacy." The sermon Palmer gave on Thanksgiving Day in 1860 strongly urged secession and appeared in newspapers across the South. Palmer’s words helped fuel the frenzy, as did those of
other ministers. Thomas Pollock sent a copy of Palmer’s discourse and one by William Leacock of Christ Church, New Orleans to his mother, and recommended that she share them with friends. Although the rector of St. James Episcopal Church in Baton Rouge gave his Thanksgiving sermon the title, “An appeal for peace,” he counseled supporting the Union only if southern interests would not be compromised. Dissenting opinions met opposition in many areas. According to one young woman, members of the Plaquemine Presbyterian Church dismissed their minister “on account of preaching Union sermons.”

Although Palmer and others became celebrated for their sermons during the winter of 1860-1861, not all Louisianians approved of such activism. Sarah Ker Butler criticized the Confederate fast day sermon of Bishop Atkinson because “it embodies the feeling, which has made it impossible (to me) to feel enthusiasm on our side.” Butler considered herself a patriotic southerner and supporter of the Confederacy, but she believed that Atkinson and others went too far. W. H. Pearce condemned the Thanksgiving sermons of Palmer and Leacock and felt, “the influence of such men when they become Partizans . . . must be potent for evil.” Pearce and others like him believed that ministers should remain aloof from politics, especially during the secession crisis. As John Ellis remarked to his mother, he missed Palmer’s Thanksgiving discourse, “& am glad of it.” Ellis, like Pearce and Butler, supported states rights, and Ellis eventually served in the Confederate army. These people did not consider themselves Unionists, but they felt uncomfortable with the strong pro-Confederate statements ministers issued.
Louisiana did have a small Unionist population, primarily in New Orleans. Dora Richardson, an Englishwoman living in that city, did not support secession, and she often felt uncomfortable in church when the minister preached a sermon in favor of southern nationalism. Although “the church was crowded to suffocation” with people who favored his sentiments, Richardson stated, “forever blessed be the fathers of the Episcopal Church for giving us a fixed liturgy” that limited the rector’s time for expressing his political beliefs. By January of 1861, Richardson reported that many Unionists who were not Episcopalians attended Trinity Episcopal church because the structure of the service meant “the pastor has not so much chance” to preach in favor of secession.³

In the first months of the war, as regiments left for the front, many churches had special dedication services, in which the minister blessed the regimental standard and preached a sermon in honor of the soldiers. In May of 1861, Dora Richardson reported that regiments attended “the prominent churches” in New Orleans in order to have their banners consecrated. Richardson and her friend watched the ceremony at Christ Church, where the rector blessed the Washington Artillery before its departure. With the flags of the battalion placed along the chancel rail, Rector William Leacock reminded the members of their position as Louisiana’s finest and assured them, “our prayers will ascend for your safety and return.” Similar scenes occurred in houses of worship across the state. Kate Sully, for example, witnessed the benediction of a local company’s flag at the Catholic church in Mandeville, and the event made a profound impact upon her. Several members of the Stone family attended the ceremony for the Madison Parish Militia and reported a large crowd present. As sermons in favor of se-
cession had done, these services gave the blessing of the clergy to southern efforts to achieve independence.⁴

When Confederate troops arrived in an area, the local churches often welcomed them with open arms. In Grand Coteau, the Catholic church reserved a number of pews strictly for the use of soldiers, while the rector of St. Peter’s Episcopal in New Orleans sent a letter to James Hill inviting the officers and men of Hill’s company to worship there. A. D. McCoy informed Hill that St. Peter’s conducted four services each week, “at any of which your company would be gladly welcomed.” Kate Stone seemed glad to see three soldiers among the large congregation at a north Louisiana church one Sunday, although she wished the institution would provide more comfortable benches for “our heroes.”⁵

At the same time, many Confederate soldiers made strenuous efforts to attend devotions when army duties permitted. According to Henry Kopman on Sunday, “almost all the boys have left camp for Church.” Kopman had guard duty that day, “and so am deprived of the pleasure of going.” As Felix Poche traveled around Louisiana with his regiment, he searched for local Catholic churches and participated in services whenever possible. While based in north Louisiana, Frank Adams reported “we can go to church . . . when ever we want,” although he appreciated this privilege more for the pretty girls he met than for the spiritual experience.⁶

When unable to attend a church, some Confederate soldiers could take advantage of the services their regimental chaplains conducted, but the Confederate army consistently suffered from a shortage of clergy. While stationed near Fredericksburg, Reuben Pierson reported that an adjutant to General Thomas J. Jackson preached near...
his regiment's camp every Sunday, and on occasion a member of the Fifth Louisiana also gave sermons. While stationed in Berwick City, James Corkern could only take part in worship every two weeks because the chaplain had to serve two camps. Not all soldiers in the Confederate army desired to spend their Sundays in devotion, however. Many saw the Sabbath simply as a time for rest or amusement. Silas Grisamore and his comrades whiled away one Sunday playing cards, although they later repented and attended a sermon given by a visiting minister.

In addition to conducting Sunday services whenever—and wherever—possible, chaplains undertook many of the other duties of peacetime ministers. They baptized, confirmed, and confessed men preparing to go into battle and administered Last Rites to the dying. James Sheeran, Catholic chaplain to the Fourteenth Louisiana, hoped to prepare “all the Catholic soldiers of our Brig. to meet their God as well as to meet their foe,” and expressed the belief that soldiers fought better when they had confessed their sins and taken communion before battle.

New Orleans fell to Union forces in May of 1862, and that city—along with a large piece of southern Louisiana that grew each year as the army pushed north and west—remained under enemy occupation for the duration of the war. Some churches welcomed Federal soldiers at their services, although generally only after the leadership of the institution had changed. In October of 1863, Christ Church in New Orleans published weekly notices in the *Times* inviting “visitors in the city, members of the army and navy, and citizens generally” to attend on Sundays. By that time, however, the church operated under the control of T. E. R. Chubbock, a Union chaplain. Benjamin Butler had removed the original rector for refusing to read prayers for the United
States government. Coliseum Place Baptist Church also published invitations to
“members of the Army and Navy” after a Union chaplain took over. \textsuperscript{10}

Local citizens and many ministers had mixed feelings about the presence of
Federal soldiers at devotions. In Baton Rouge shortly after Union forces arrived in the
city, Calvin Hendrick reported that many officers had appeared in his church for a
Sunday service. Hendrick was somewhat taken aback by their attendance, but to his
surprise they “behaved well,” even when Hendrick offered prayers for the Confederate
government and armed forces. Sarah Morgan, also in Baton Rouge, noted the presence
of Federal officers at St. James Episcopal Church. Although she resented their occupa­
tion of her town, Morgan was pleased that they quietly followed the service and “felt
uncomfortable for them” when a Bible reading “seemed so singularly appropriate to
the feelings of the people.” On another occasion, Morgan returned the bow of officers
when leaving the building. Not all Louisianians behaved in such an accepting manner,
however. According to Clara Solomon, many New Orleans women left their pews as
Union officers entered them. \textsuperscript{11}

Like many antebellum visitors, northern soldiers often felt shocked by the ac­
tivity that took place on Sundays in New Orleans and other parts of southern Louisi­
ana. Samuel Gault described a “lack of respect for the Sabbath” that included open
shops and “public street amusements,” while Charles Blake maintained, “such a Sab­
bath breaking community I never saw before.” S. F. Snell deplored the absence of a
“quiet peaceful Sabbath” in his camp at Brashear City. He decided, however, “I am
not going . . . to find fault with the army . . . it is a very hard case to establish the New
England customs of Christianity in an army and in a country too where the Sabbath
has been so shamefully desecrated by the citizens of Louisiana." The army did attempt to enforce observation of the Sabbath within the demands of military necessity, however. In January of 1865, Union Headquarters in New Orleans issued an order that soldiers not on duty could not attend "Theatres, Billiard Rooms, and other places of amusement, although tolerated in this community by local custom."¹²

Many kinds of religious expression took on political significance during the war, including the devotions of slaves. Since Nat Turner's revolt in 1831, the religious activities of slaves had aroused the suspicion of a large number of southern whites, and the war heightened those feelings. In 1863, William W. Pugh warned of an increased danger of insurrection caused by the presence of Union troops in the area. He believed that "the large assemblies of negroes for the ostensible purpose of religious exercises" masked a much more sinister goal. According to Julia LeGrand, "some of the Federals preach to the Negroes in the churches, calling them to 'sweep us away forever.'" Substantial portions of the New Orleans population believed this rumor. LeGrand, however, doubted that the African Americans of New Orleans would rebel, despite the urgings of northern chaplains. Although few if any slaves plotted insurrection during wartime religious services, they did infuse those meetings with new meaning. As Adeline White recalled, as soon as slaves heard about the war, they began "prayin' for freedom to come quick" during their secret worship.¹³

In occupied areas, services could attract the censure of the Union commanders. The Episcopal churches led religious opposition to Federal occupation in New Orleans and other Louisiana cities. As soon as the Pelican state seceded from the Union, Leonidas Polk, Episcopal bishop of Louisiana, devised a new prayer to replace the
standard one for the president and government of the United States in the Episcopal liturgy. In a pastoral letter to his flock dated January 30, 1861, Polk ordered that they use “the Governor of this State” instead of “the President of the United States.” He also substituted “the people of this State in general, and especially for their Legislature now in session” for “the people of these United States in general, and especially for their Senate and Representatives in Congress assembled.” When Louisiana joined the Confederacy, a prayer for Jefferson Davis and the Confederate government became part of the service. Polk made all of these changes despite the fact that individual bishops lacked the authority to alter the Book of Common Prayer. He believed that national needs took precedence over procedure.\(^{14}\)

After Federal forces took over New Orleans and the surrounding area, Episcopal ministers continued to offer prayers for Jefferson Davis and the Confederate government during divine worship. This practice soon drew the notice and wrath of Benjamin Butler, Union commander of New Orleans, and others. General G. F. Shepley, military governor of Louisiana, issued an order forbidding pleas “for the destruction of the Union or constitution of the United States, for the success of rebel armies, for the Confederate States, so called, or any officers of the same, civil or military, in their official capacity.” Eventually, Episcopal services no longer contained prayers for the Confederacy, but they did not add any for Abraham Lincoln and the United States government, as Butler demanded. Instead, the ministers substituted a moment of silent devotion. By September of 1862, however, Union officials considered this course no longer acceptable. Shepley issued another order specifically requiring Episcopal ministers to pray for the United States government.\(^ {15} \)
Incensed, Butler took further action. In early October, one of his officers visited St. Paul’s Church and engaged in a tense confrontation with its rector, Charles Goodrich. According to Julia LeGrand, Major George Strong attended the service incognito, and when it became clear that Goodrich would not offer any words for the president and Congress, Strong stood and announced, “in the name of the Government of the United States” that the service could not proceed. He ordered the congregation to disperse immediately. After a brief benediction, the excited crowd left the building. Shortly after this episode, Shepley informed John Fulton of Calvary Church that he considered the omission of prayers for the United States “evidence of hostility to the government of the United States.”

On October 25, 1862, Butler arrested seven Episcopal ministers and the next day sent three of them - William Leacock of Christ Church, Charles Goodrich of St. Paul’s, and John Fulton of Calvary - to Fort Lafayette in New York. Calling them “much more mischievous in this city than they would be as soldiers in arms in the Confederate Service,” Butler ordered them retained, “subject to the orders of the War Department.” Nearly two hundred people assembled at the levee to see them off, and according to Julia LeGrand, the last words of Fulton as the ship left New Orleans were, “When I return the Confederate flag will wave over New Orleans. Hurrah for Jeff Davis!” Union army chaplains replaced the rebellious ministers. At Christ Church, T. E. R. Chubbock, an Episcopal lay reader and Federal chaplain, took over. As Charles Harrod, senior warden at Christ Church related the events, Butler ordered the vestry to surrender the keys to Chubbuck and place the church under military authority.
Nathaniel Banks arrived to replace Butler in December of 1862. Determined to win the support of the local population, Banks opened the churches that Butler had closed. On Christmas Eve, 1862, Banks rescinded Butler’s General Order No. 118—which had closed the institutions—because the state had no power to interfere in ecclesiastical matters. The Episcopal churches of New Orleans reopened on Christmas Day. He also offered to allow the exiled ministers to return if they took an oath of allegiance to the United States government. They sailed from New York and arrived in New Orleans in February of 1863, but Banks would not allow them to land when they refused to take the oath.\(^\text{18}\)

Banks soon discovered that despite his conciliatory gestures, many Episcopal churches continued to omit prayers for the United States government. In reversing Butler’s General Order No. 118, he had warned, “no appeal to the passions or prejudices of the people, or to excite hostility to the Government, whether in the form of prayer, exhortation, counsel or sermon, nor any offensive demonstration, whether open or covert, can be allowed.” On January 19, 1864, he wrote to James Bowen, his provost marshal, “the established order of religious services has been so modified as to give the proceedings... a quasi-political signification. This has occurred for such a length of time as to indicate an intention to make the usage permanent.” Banks ordered Bowen to demand immediate explanations from the Episcopal ministers and notify them that if the practice continued, “the government of the Churches will be at once committed to the care of persons loyal to the United States.” The next day, Bowen sent a letter to a trustee at Trinity Church, asking for both an account of the institution’s practices and a promise that changes would occur at once.\(^\text{19}\) Although most Episcopal
churches eventually reopened, the issue was never settled. As late as March of 1864, Charles Hilton, an Episcopal minister residing in New Orleans, lamented, "I am not permitted to preach in my own Church unless I use the prayer for the President of the United States. What is this but compulsion?" Hilton refused to obey, and later that month the Federal commander sent him into the Confederacy.  

Throughout the controversy, the ministers claimed that the army had no right to control the content of their worship. The city's Episcopal clergy asserted that they could not eliminate the prayer without the permission of their bishop, now a Confederate general. In an October 1862 reply to G. F. Shepley, the military governor of Louisiana, a group of Episcopal ministers stated that they could not go against the stated orders of their bishop to replace prayers for the United States with those for the Confederacy. Furthermore, the ministers "can recognize no interference on the part of either civil or military authority in ecclesiastical matters."  

Some Episcopalians made efforts to resolve the problem. J. W. Champlain — senior warden of Trinity Church — and concerned parishioner Richard Lloyd both wrote to Leonidas Polk explaining that if they had his consent Rev. L. Y. Jessup of Trinity and other clergymen in the diocese would be willing to begin offering prayers for the United States government. They hoped to keep Federal authorities from closing their churches or appointing new rectors. The sympathies of the majority of the New Orleans population lay solidly behind the Episcopal ministers, however. To many, the episode served as yet another example of the tyranny of the occupying force. Julia LeGrand confided to her diary, "The Episcopal clergy are true," and expressed great admiration for the men who stood up to Butler.
Ministers of other denominations also drew the disapproval of Union commanders because of the content of their services. For failing to announce the Federal fast day on April 30, 1863, Banks placed two of his chaplains at the head of the Coliseum Place Baptist Church. The northern branches of the Methodist church persuaded the War Department to assist them in appointing northern ministers, who would preach pro-Union sermons, and at Monroe Street Methodist Church, a Federal chaplain became pastor. Banks appointed a committee to study the Presbyterian and Baptist churches of New Orleans, and upon its recommendation placed northerners in charge of several.24

In New Orleans, locals perceived that neither Banks nor Butler interfered with the Catholic church in Louisiana. Both generals put up with a great deal of resistance from the Catholic priests in occupied territories, especially New Orleans. In an 1864 report to the Episcopal Church’s Domestic Committee, Daniel Shaver stated that Catholic authorities in New Orleans had supported the Confederacy from the beginning, and indeed were increasing their “opposition to loyalty.” Julia LeGrand also observed that “the Catholics are bolder here than the others.” The Catholic church was the only religious body in New Orleans to observe the Confederate fast day on March 27, 1863, and LeGrand believed, “the celebration . . . if held in any other church but the Catholic would be broken in upon.” Outside of the city, however, at least one Catholic priest found himself censured by a Federal officer. Francis Follot of Plaquemine reluctantly agreed to a request from his parishioners to hold a High Mass for the 30th Louisiana. When his request for permission was denied, Follot went ahead, and the officer in command forbade him from holding further services in his church.25
In addition to regular Sunday services, the war also had a profound impact on special events, such as camp meetings. The number of traditional camp meetings and revivals among the general population declined as attention turned to military and political matters, but they did not disappear. Hephzibah Church in East Feliciania Parish held a revival in the fall of 1862 in which nine people were baptized. Two years later, however, the church canceled a planned revival because of a Union raid in the area. In Bossier Parish, a minister tried to organize a meeting during the fall of 1861, but he was unable to attract people, and his efforts failed.26

At the same time, significant revivals occurred in both the Confederate and Union armies. Near Monroe, Frank Adams and his comrades rode several miles to a protracted meeting, where Adams had “never heard so much shouting and crying.” The regiment left the area before the close of the meeting, otherwise, Adams believed, “several of our boys would have joined the church.” When John Walker’s Division was stationed near Alexandria in 1864, a revival began and lasted for three weeks. At least twenty-nine men were baptized, and “as many more have professed the Christian’s hope.” A member of the division believed that soldiers were so receptive to religious awakenings because of the danger they faced. This event took place in the last year of the war, as the strength of the Confederate forces waned, and it helped assure the men “that the race is not to the swift nor the battle to the strong.”27

Although it encouraged religious feelings among soldiers the war put a damper on celebrations of religious holidays. For those who remained at home, the absence of loved ones and shortages of food and other supplies eliminated any holiday spirit. Christmas of 1861 passed quietly in the Stone household in Madison Parish. Kate
Stone and the rest of her relatives did not exchange gifts, and they had to borrow whiskey in order to make eggnog. According to Stone, “this is the first Christmas in our recollection that was not a time of fun and feasting” because they missed the company of the family’s oldest son. In 1862, Stone and her siblings invited officers from the local camp to celebrate with them, and decorated the house with greenery. They treated the men to eggnog, but had to use the brandy sparingly because it cost sixty dollars per gallon. Christmas day was ruined, however, when word came that Stone’s brother had been killed at Fredericksburg. Even though the report turned out to be a mistake, no one felt like celebrating any longer. The Fremaux family attempted to celebrate Christmas in 1863. The children made gifts for each other and their mother, and they “anticipated some kind of joy.” On Christmas morning, however, the absence of their father overwhelmed the family, and “the day was spoiled, as every day was that we attempted to make gay, in those terrible years.” Celine Fremaux and her siblings put the presents away and went to mass. The next year, their town had not priest, so the Fremaux family did not even observe the holiday in church. Instead, it passed like any other day. Although Sarah Morgan, her mother, and her sisters celebrated Christmas of 1863 in New Orleans with their Unionist brother, their festivities were dampened by the remembrance of “Lilly in Macon, Miss., Sis in San Francisco, Gibbes a prisoner on Johnson’s Island, George somewhere between Richmond and the Rappahannock, Jimmy at Cherbourg, father and Hal in the graveyard.”

In the Confederate army, Christmas celebrations were generally non-religious. As in antebellum times, men saw the day primarily as a time for entertainment and for soldiers to enjoy eggnog and elaborate dinners. According to Silas Grisamore, Christ-
mas of 1861 passed happily because “our kind friends at home had sent us so many good things.” The men set off fireworks and gave speeches in addition to enjoying the delicacies from home. Reuben Pierson also enjoyed that Christmas because “our kind Lieut gave a nogg to the company which the boys appreciated highly indeed.” Some of the officers even treated their men to dinner. Later in the war, however, even this became impossible, and many failed to mark the arrival of Christmas at all.29

Other religious holidays also suffered during the war. Clara Solomon recorded her experience of 1861’s Yom Kippur in her diary. Describing the day as one especially important for families, she mourned the fact that her father was absent. Although the Solomon family did not attend synagogue each week or follow all Jewish laws, they did keep the major Jewish holidays. In April of 1862, however, the blockade made their traditional celebration of Passover nearly impossible. Emma Solomon, Clara’s mother, began her search for matzos in March, and finally succeeding in obtaining some in mid-April, just before the beginning of Passover. As Clara pointed out, however, the matzos available in New Orleans were “of very inferior quality.” Rather than eat the “miserably sour” bread, Clara Solomon ate cornbread, a violation of Passover custom.30

Both the Confederate and United States governments set aside certain days throughout the year for religious reflection, continuing an antebellum tradition. After South Carolina left the Union, James Buchanan declared that January 4th, 1861 would be a day for “solemn fasting and Prayer for the Salvation of the Union.” In Cheneyville, several members of the Wright family went to church on that day and ate nothing but “homing, bread & butter & coffee.” Sarah Wright, the family matriarch, took
no food at all. In New Orleans, John Ellis described closed businesses, banks, and
schools on Buchanan’s fast day, although he himself did not attend devotions.31

Once southern states formed the Confederacy, Louisianians began to observe
its holidays. On June 13, 1861, Hephzibah Church in East Feliciana Parish held a spe­
cial service because Jefferson Davis had set aside the day for fasting and prayer. Ac­
cording to church records, the event was “a solemn occasion in view of the fiery trial
through which we are passing, as an infant Republic and was observed with due so­
lemnity.” Kate Stone’s local church had “a large congregation and a heartfelt service”
that day, and Stone believed that most people in the area kept the holiday. In Novem­
ber of 1861, William Palfrey suspended work on his plantation in order to observe the
fast day that Jefferson Davis had declared. Palfrey chose to attend worship, as did
many other Louisianians. Later fast days were celebrated in a similar manner. On
January 4, 1862, Mary Wright reported, “all the family went to Church,” where their
preacher gave “a very good sermon, on fasting and prayer.” Wright herself ate nothing
that day, “but I do not know if I am any better for it.” Nearly four months later, on an­
other Confederate fast day, Mary Wright found a “rather full congregation” at
church.32

As the war stretched on, fast days continued to arrive at frequent intervals.
Kate Stone and her family observed the May 16, 1862 fast day by going to devotions
and not eating, although “the boys find it hard.” Sereno Taylor preached at Clinton
Methodist Church on May 16, 1863 and on August 21 of the same year. At the latter
service, prominent local citizens, including Judge McVea, also spoke. In December of
1864, the Shreveport Semi-Weekly News notified residents that, because news of
Davis' November 16 fast day had not reached the area on time, General Kirby Smith had appointed December 16 as "a day to be solely devoted to the worship of Almighty God." The same newspaper also informed its readership of perhaps the final Confederate fast day, March 10, 1865.33

The Confederate government also set aside certain days for thanksgiving, especially after important victories. Hephzibah Church celebrated the fourth Sunday in July of 1861 "in accordance with the request of the President of the Confederate States, in commemoration of the blessing of God, in the preservation of our armies, in the great battles of 'Bull Run' and 'Manassas Plains.'" In northern Louisiana, Kate Stone and her family also observed the day of thanksgiving for the victory at Manassas.34

Once the Union army arrived in Louisiana, portions of the population came under the jurisdiction of Federal fast days. In April of 1863, Abraham Lincoln set aside the 30th as a day of "Humiliation, Fasting and Prayer." The Baton Rouge provost marshal decreed that businesses close "and that appropriate exercises be held in all places of public worship." Later that year, Lincoln designated November 26th as a day of "Thanksgiving and Prayer" in the northern states and all Union occupied areas. In Baton Rouge, all shops remained shuttered and all churches offered services. In January of 1865, the Unionist governor of Louisiana declared a holiday to celebrate the abolition of slavery in Missouri and Tennessee. Charles Hilton described the New Orleans celebrations as "a great booming of cannon and ringing of bells." In addition, businesses and the public schools closed for the day.35
At the same time, Federal authorities prohibited the celebration of Confederate holidays. Calvin Hendrick, a Baton Rouge minister, reported in 1862 that General Butler had issued an order forbidding observance of the fast day set for May 18, 1862. Butler did not close churches in the area he occupied, but he did order, “no religious exercises are to be had.” Although Hendrick did not openly advise his parishioners to disobey, he told them to participate “so far as they thought proper.” Hendrick himself “preached a sermon appropriate to the occasion.” According to Clara Solomon, her teachers had planned to close the school for the Confederate fast day, but reconsidered after Butler’s decree. Instead, they dismissed class early. Most of the churches in New Orleans canceled their services, although Julia LeGrand reported that some Catholic churches defied the order.36

In addition to celebrations of government holidays, churches also created their own services. During the first summer of the war, a correspondent of the Alexandria Constitutional reported, “throughout the South Christians are holding prayer meetings for the special object of praying for our country and its defenders.” As part of this movement, the Methodist Episcopal church in Alexandria opened every Thursday evening for a prayer service open to all Christians regardless of denomination. In New Orleans in 1863, the archbishop declared, “in all the churches of this city and Diocese there shall be performed the exercises of the Forty Hours’ Devotion . . . in supplication for Peace.”37

Although most churches continued to operate as before, ceremonies such as baptism and confirmation, were sometimes put on hold as family members went off to war or fled from advancing Union armies. Celine Fremaux’s brother, for example, was
born in November of 1861 while his father served in the Confederate army. Mrs. Fremaux named the child Henry, "pending Father’s ratification or rejection of the name," and his baptism did not take place until after the war when the entire family could attend. In April of 1861, Leonidas Polk confirmed thirty-five young people at Christ Church in New Orleans. This service served as the last Episcopal confirmation rite during the war, however. Confirmation requires the bishop to perform the rites, and Polk left for the war two months later. He died in June of 1864, and the Diocese of Louisiana did not have a new bishop until 1866, when Joseph Wilmer began his administration. Episcopalians therefore could not be confirmed during the war. More often, however, ceremonies went on as before, especially in the early years. Celine Fremaux made her First Communion in June 1861 as scheduled, and the Catholic bishop confirmed her several months later. In north Louisiana, Catholic priest Yves-Marie le Conniat continued to perform baptisms, and students at the convent of the Daughters of the Cross made their First Communions. Among Protestants, despite lower church attendance as men went to war and families moved west to escape the Union army, church life continued. At Hephzibah Church, nine people were received baptism in the fall of 1862, for example.

The Civil War had a significant impact on marriage in Louisiana. During the secession crisis and the first months of the war, many young people rushed to marry before men left for the front. According the Dora Richardson, the winter of 1860-1861 was full of weddings in New Orleans, including that of her close friend Edith. Up the river in Baton Rouge Celine Fremaux also recalled that Estelle DeRussy and Trevanion Lewis were in a great hurry to get married in early 1861.
Parents and friends often tried to discourage young people from marrying because of the war, but they rarely succeeded. Fremaux remembered that the universal reaction to the wedding of DeRussy and Lewis was, “Poor Estelle, she should have waited.” When her friend became engaged to a soldier after a short acquaintance, Abigail Amacker disapproved because “a person always runs a great risk in marrying a stranger especially from the army,” but she had no impact upon the bride’s choice. A year later, on the occasion of another friend’s wedding, Amacker prophesized, “the destiny of the Bride is not the one I would choose for her,” but again her fears made no difference. Dora Richardson felt that wartime was “a sad time to wed, when one knew not how long the expected conscription would spare the bridegroom.” Despite the worries of family and friends that wartime, when men could be called away at any moment, was not the appropriate time for a wedding, young people continued to take that step.41

Military weddings became commonplace. Frank Babin, for example, described the marriage of his friends Ernest and Mary Eliza, “the former in his suit of Grey and the latter in lily whiteness.” Annie Jeter became engaged to Emile Carmouche while he served in the Confederate army, and their wedding took place after his capture by Union troops. In 1863, Adda Thompson married a soldier from Alabama who had been stationed in Louisiana, and Fanny Green’s fiancé wore “his dingy Confederate gray, the only suit he had,” for their ceremony.42

As the war stretched on, young girls often declared their unwillingness to marry any man who had not served in the Confederate army. Henriette Lauzin and Amelia Faulkner both held this conviction, and lamented that all young ladies did not
feel the same. In New Orleans, William Vaught’s mother reported that his sister “has quit speaking to her young gentlemen friends here, because they have not gone to the war.” They hoped that by withholding their affections, they could spur even more young men into Confederate service.43

Some males, on the other hand, tried to use marriage as a way to avoid entering the army. In the spring of 1862, Yves-Marie le Conniat reported that men in Avoyelles and other parishes had requested exemptions from the Confederate army because they planned to enter the bonds of matrimony. Le Conniat rejoiced that the men of his parish, although married, had not shirked their duty. In Alexandria, Silas Grisamore observed the wedding of a teenaged boy to “a lady of about 35.” After the ceremony, the bride remarked, “a year would have to glide away . . . before the conscript law would catch her darling boy.” Despite the widespread belief that marriage could earn a reprieve from the draft law, matrimony was not among any of the Confederate government’s exemption categories.44

At the same time, many girls began to worry that they would never marry. By the beginning of 1862, Nancy Willard reported that in Bossier Parish, “there could not be many Weddings here young men is too scarse.” As more and more young men were killed and maimed, women saw their chances for matrimony dwindle. When Emma Walton celebrated her birthday in 1863, she could “see the shadows of an old maid . . . but you know it’s no fault of hers but of the war.” By 1865, a young New Orleans girl complained, “of all changes, that of name is least inevitable” because only old men and teenaged boys remained in the city. For women raised to believe that marriage was their only option in life, the inability to fulfill their destiny was difficult
to bear. According to Sarah Morgan, a number of her friends declared, “they would rather be wretched married, than happy as old maids.”

Some young people did not want to marry during wartime. According to one Pointe Coupee woman, “the girls are all afraid to get married for fear of being left widows.” Joanna Fox and her fiancé Dan Waddill met while serving in Confederate hospitals but planned to wait “until this war was over” to hold their wedding. They wanted to have their families present at the ceremony and to be able to settle down together without worrying about troop movements and battles. Annie Jeter’s fiancé felt anxious to get married when he was a Federal prisoner in New Orleans, but Jeter wanted her brother to attend the ceremony and would not consent to the ceremony. Mary Watson’s young cousin Mittie hoped to marry at sixteen, but only “if the war then should be over.” If the conflict lasted past her seventeenth birthday, however, she planned to find a husband “whether our national troubles have closed or not.”

As the example of young Mittie shows, many who hoped to wait out the war eventually changed their minds. Joanna Fox, who had planned to delay her wedding until the close of hostilities, had a change of heart in late 1864. Although she was stationed far from home at a Confederate hospital, her brother was visiting and a family friend held a chaplain’s post at the hospital. Deeming these conditions the best that the circumstances would afford, Fox decided to go ahead with the ceremony. The war was lasting too long to wait. Similarly, Annie Jeter finally gave in to her Emile Carmouche’s entreaties and allowed the marriage to take place, despite the absence of her brother.
Parents and other relatives deplored the effect that the war had on young people, especially girls. Clement Watson reported to his wife that her cousin Mittie "is completely taken up with the gay young officers . . . and her life is a continual whirl of pleasure." Watson felt that the girl was "not sufficiently restrained either by her own sense of duty or the presence of proper protectors." In northern Louisiana, Kate Stone reported that the attendance of soldiers at the local church caused quite a sensation because "six feet of soldier with brass buttons is irresistible, and all the girls capitulated." Amanda Stone disapproved of her daughter's flirtation with Lieutenant Henry Holmes, but Kate believed "one must not distress a soldier by saying No while he is on furlough," and felt sure that the fun she had with Holmes and several other soldiers would not lead to marriage. Men also took advantage of the breakdown of societal restraints. Frank Adams told his sister about a Confederate officer who married a young girl in Winnsboro. Shortly after the wedding he died, and his bride's family discovered that he had several wives scattered around the state. The man had exploited the changed in wartime society, as families became used to marriages based on short acquaintance and difficulties in communication lessened the chance that news of another wife would reach his present sweetheart. According to Adams, "I have heard of at least a dozen of the same kind."

As armies moved across the South, the traditional controls on marriage broke down. Parents had less and less control over the choices young people made about whom to wed. In many families, the father went off to war, removing a significant check on partner choice. When Emma Walton became engaged, for example, her father was in Virginia with the Confederate army. Although Emma wrote to ask his
permission for the wedding, he had never met Edmund Glenny, and “deprived of the means of satisfactory communication,” left the decision to Emma. Some young people like Emma Walton continued the tradition of asking their parents for permission to wed, but others did not. In August of 1864, Jimmy Morgan became engaged to a woman he met while serving in Virginia, and his family did not hear about it until November.49

In many cases, young people married after a brief acquaintance, with barely enough time to get to know each other. Mary Gustine, for example, had known Captain Buckner only six weeks before she consented to marry him, and the ceremony took place two weeks after the engagement. Abigail Amacker despaired over her friend’s marriage to “a stranger,” whom she had known only a short time. According to Kate Stone, the war made “people live so fast now,” and they rushed to cement relationships before troop movements or battles could separate them.50

At the same time, thousands of Louisiana men joined the Confederate army, which often took them to serve in other states. In towns across the South, these youths met women who showered them with praise and attention as the Confederacy’s saviors. While recuperating at a hospital in Clinton, Louisiana, Jefferson Lee decided that the students at a nearby girls’ school were “the prettiest I ever saw.” According to Reuben Pierson, “the ladies do appreciate the gallantry of the brave boys.” As his regiment traveled across the South to Virginia in the summer of 1861, he found, “we are saluted at every house by the Ladies.” William Owen also remembered the enthusiastic welcome members of the Washington Artillery received as they made their way to Virginia, and he believed, “many a heart was left behind with the fair maidens of
dear old Lynchburg.” Naturally, courtships and marriages resulted, and often the bridegroom’s family did not know until word of an engagement or wedding reached them, as in the case of Jimmy Morgan. 51

In contrast, the arrival of the Union army brought thousands of young men to the state, and, despite often-strong political feelings, flirtations began. When she observed several handsome and well-mannered Federal officers, Clara Solomon – an ardent Confederate supporter – cautioned herself to “take care of my heart,” lest she succumb to their charms. According to Jared Sanders, Bell Edwards of Pointe Coupee Parish began a romance with an adjutant in the Second New York Cavalry while his regiment conducted raids in the area. 52

Many Louisiana women wed Union soldiers, much to the dismay of their family and friends. E. A. Trulan reported that a friend of his had courted and married a New Iberia woman in just one week. In New Orleans, Emma Shaw, Emma Winburn, Addie White, and Isabella Hyatt all married Federal officers, as did Belle Otway. Mary Dickinson reported in 1863 that a friend had become engaged to “a corporal from New York,” and another friend had entered into a union with a northern private. Dickinson felt extremely shocked, asking her correspondent, “did you ever hear the like!?” Emma Walton’s friend was joined with a Federal soldier shortly after the occupation of New Orleans, and although she and her sister received invitations, “we did not attend the wedding circumstances . . . being such that we could not conscientiously do so.” 53 It is of course difficult to determine all of a woman’s reasons for marrying one of the enemy. Many contemporaries, however, believed that the lure of money, goods, and power played a central role. According to Mary Dickinson, “flour enough
to make one thousand loaves of bread” helped Emily Bereaud make her decision to marry a New York soldier.54

Among white Louisianians, the war also made gathering family members for a wedding difficult, and this often caused a great deal of pain, both to the family at home and to those who could not be at the event. When Leonidas Polk’s daughter married, he was in Georgia and unable to return to Louisiana. While he greatly appreciated receiving descriptions of the ceremony and rejoiced in his daughter’s happiness, Polk felt extremely sorry that he could not be present to perform the rites. In order to console himself and his daughter, Polk wrote, “I was with you in Spirit and read over the ceremony in the Prayer book.” Maria Inskeep felt excited about the 1864 wedding of her granddaughter but also stated that the absence of relatives who served in the army was “our only regret.” When his cousin John Richardson got married in early 1864, Hampden Randolph was on furlough and able to attend. By the time Richardson’s sister wed a week later, however, Randolph’s furlough had ended and he had returned to camp. Randolph “was almost tempted to overstay my time” in order to witness Lou Richardson’s wedding, but he knew that grave consequences would follow. Joanna Fox was a Confederate nurse stationed in Mississippi when she met her future husband. Despite some misgivings, they married while Fox’s brother was with them on leave. Fox’s mother and Waddill’s family could not be present, however. As Fox wrote her mother, “the only thing worries me is that you did not see us married.” Annie Jeter had hoped that her brother could be at her wedding to Emile Carmouche, but he was away in the army. After the ceremony, therefore, she saved a piece of the
wedding cake and a small bottle of wine for her brother as mementoes of the occasion.55

Shortages of goods made holding what many thought a proper wedding difficult. For the marriage of Celestine Dubroca to a Confederate soldier shortly after the Battle of Baton Rouge, the family gave a dinner, although they faced a shortage of flour for cakes and other dishes. When planning her 1862 wedding, Dora Richardson felt overwhelmed by the task of pulling the event together “in three days, in a blockaded city.” In the same year, Clara Solomon reported that a friend’s matrimonial supper featured “bread and molasses,” everyday fare before the war but now “delicacies.” Some items formerly considered necessary were simply unavailable. When Fanny Green wed in 1863, she managed to dig up a white gown and stockings but did not wear the traditional white gloves because “they were of the past, as completely as a thousand other necessities we had learned to do without.”56

This problem sparked a great deal of community solidarity as neighbors and friends pulled together in order to supply the bridal pair and their families with the necessary goods. Dora Richardson’s friends “sewed, shopped, mended, and packed, as if sewing soldier’s clothes” in order to prepared the clothes for her wedding in January of 1862. At the same time, they decorated both the church and Richardson’s house with flowers for the occasion. When Fanny Green began planning her wedding as Federal forces approached Baton Rouge, both time and materials were scarce. Green’s fiancé was a wounded Confederate officer, and the family feared he might be taken prisoner. They therefore rushed to solemnize the union and move to their plantation on the Amite River. Friends of the family flocked to the house to help both with prepara-
tions for the ceremony and with packing. The bride wore an old white dress that had been packed away since before the war, and a neighbor supplied white stockings. Someone cleared the parlor for the ceremony, and at the last minute, another neighbor supplied the only refreshments available: cornmeal cake and brown sugar lemonade.

The bride borrowed a ring for the ceremony. Although Eliza Ripley, one of the friends who pitched in to help, called the wedding “a painful and pitiful episode,” it represented strong family and community solidarity in a time of great stress and hardship.57

When at all possible, families tried to create wedding celebrations that resembled the antebellum events, with numerous guests, lavish refreshments, and many parties in honor of the bridal pair. According to Kate Stone, her friend’s family was determined to have “a real, grand, old-fashioned merry-making” when she married. Relatives gathered from all over northern Louisiana to attend the ceremony and help with the cooking and sewing. In 1864, Frank Babin described a wedding that could have taken place a decade before as “there were a great many present” along with “a most sumptuous supper.” The same year, Franklin Pugh attended a local wedding and then opened his home for the reception. According to Pugh, the guests had “a right merry time,” which included enough brandy to give him a hangover. Lou Richardson’s marriage celebration featured a trousseau and “many other . . . very necessary articles” purchased in New Orleans. Nearly one hundred guests attended the ceremony. When Dora Newell’s friend married, Newell and a neighbor each gave suppers for the bride and groom. Thomas Batchelor and Mary Griffin “had a large wedding & very nice supper.” As Batchelor was a widower marrying a young woman, the community even put on a charivari, an old antebellum tradition. Before the war, weddings
had been a time for the entire community to celebrate the union of two families, and Louisianians were determined to do so despite the circumstances.58

While white Louisianians hoped to preserve the meaning and form of antebellum weddings, many former slaves took advantage of the presence of Union troops to solemnize their unions in churches. Thomas Howard, an army chaplain, recorded the weddings of eight couples in one day. Most were longtime partners “whose marriage had never been solemnized.” In Concordia Parish, 478 couples entered the bonds of matrimony when the Federal army arrived. In May of 1864, twelve marriages occurred in St. Landry Parish, and the following month saw fifty-six in Iberville. In St. Mary Parish, twenty-eight pairs legalized their unions during the first month of 1865. Clearly, the war had a profound impact on marriage among African Americans.59

Although the war touched nearly every aspect of life, most fundamentally, thousands of families faced the death of a husband, brother, father, or son. As Kate Stone observed in December 1863, “nearly every household mourns some loved one lost.” She also noted that “never a letter but brings the death of someone we knew.” The changes that the war brought would affect the entire population of the state.60

The loss seemed especially painful when a man died far from home. The family and friends of Lt. Davis lamented his 1862 death “among strangers,” and Sarah Morgan mourned the passing of her brother George “far away in desolated Virginia.” She felt the fact that he expired surrounded by strangers was one of the most difficult aspects of his loss to handle. According to Kate Stone, many people had a hard time dealing with casualties that occurred several states away and seemed “to live only in the present – just from day to day – otherwise I fancy many would go crazy.” In New
Orleans, Dora Richardson observed All Saints Day in 1861. As family members gathered at the tombs of their loved ones to offer prayers, "those who had no graves to deck were weeping silently as they walked through the scented avenues" of the cemetery. 61

This feeling of devastation affected soldiers as well. Men whose relatives passed away at home often bemoaned their inability to attend the funerals. James Corkern and his brother Cornelius both endeavored to travel to the service when their sister died in early 1862, but it simply was not possible for them to leave camp. The Corkern brothers were stationed in Louisiana and had at least believed that they might be able to obtain a furlough. Most Louisiana men, serving in other states, had no such hope. 62

In the early months of the war, families could sometimes retrieve bodies for burial. The corpse of Charles H. Dreux arrived in New Orleans in July 1861 and was interred there with an elaborate funeral, which was of some "consolation to his family." In the same month, Joshua Reynolds' body arrived in New Orleans accompanied by a friend. J. Bunyan Taylor died in Oxford, Mississippi in May of 1862, and his family also managed to bring his remains back to St. Helena for burial in the family graveyard. When Confederate Private Onesippe Baille succumbed to measles in a New Orleans hospital, two of his friends were able to take his body home to Thibodaux. Baille, however, died in the early months of the war, before his regiment had left the state. Families who lost loved ones in other states had a much more difficult time retrieving bodies. 63
As the war stretched on, most soldiers were buried where they died. As Father James Sheeran of the Fourteenth Louisiana recounted, the battlefield also served as a grave for the majority of those who fell. Mary Wright's brother-in-law and cousin both perished in battle in Virginia and were interred there. In July of 1864, Philip Collins of Iverson reported that his cousin had been ambushed and fatally wounded by Union sharpshooters in Virginia. Collins could not send Reuben A. Pierson's remains back to Louisiana, so he persuaded a Clark County farmer to bury Pierson in his family's graveyard. When Paul Lauzin died a skirmish with Union soldiers on Bayou Lafourche, his relatives could not recover the body. Friends of the family oversaw the burial, however, and requested that the grave be shallow so that the Lauzins could disinter him later.64

Chaplains in the Confederate army endeavored to provide dead and dying soldiers with the customary rites. James B. Sheeran, a Catholic chaplain, visited army hospitals and "prepared some of our Catholic soldiers for death" in the days following the battle of Manassas and other battles. This duty included not only administering the Rite of Extreme Unction, but also baptizing and hearing confession. He also oversaw the burial of dead Confederates after various engagements in Virginia. Many regiments, however, did not have their own chaplain and could not furnish religious funerals for fallen soldiers.65

The resting place of many Federal soldiers in New Orleans was a hastily constructed army cemetery, and like antebellum paupers, they had in-ground graves. In the summer of 1862, Charles Blake recorded that the burial plots in the Union cemetery "are so shallow that the top of the coffins are level with the surface of the ground
& when the coffins are put in they float on the water with which the grave is half filled." Several months later, Samuel Gault also reported that soldiers' graves in New Orleans were full of water. Marianne Edwards called the New Orleans army cemetery "a shocking sight." In describing it to her daughters, she explained, "they bury them in the ground. a thing no one does here . . . so the poor men are buried in water." According to Henry Sampson, the final abodes of Federal soldiers in New Orleans had no marker other than a board with a number and the name of the hospital in which the soldier died. By contrast, Confederate prisoners who expired in Federal custody had "nicely kept graves" and a monument "to our Southern brothers, by the ladies of New Orleans." Union soldiers, like the antebellum poor, stood outside accepted Louisiana society. As both strangers and enemies, they had neither family vaults in local cemeteries nor friends who would allow the use of their tombs. The army was too busy prosecuting a war to erect elaborate buildings for corpses, and those dying men who possessed sufficient means to build a tomb instead paid to have their bodies to return home.66

The movement of troops around Louisiana also disrupted the rituals of death for civilians. When Tom Sprague's child died in Assumption Parish, the family tried to bring an Episcopal minister from Donaldsonville to conduct the burial. According to Franklin Pugh, however, Federal authorities would not give Reverend Phillips a pass, so Pugh read the service. Francis Richardson recalled in his autobiography that the presence of the Union army in the Teche region so worried him that he had the bodies of his relatives removed from the family tomb. Richardson had heard rumors that northern soldiers desecrated graves when searching for valuables, so he had the
corpses buried in a less conspicuous location. In the same area, the family of Mary Moore faced a dilemma upon her death. Federal troops had taken down all of the fences in the New Iberia cemetery, and her relatives feared that the exposed condition of the graveyard would lead to damage if her grave were located there. Although Mary Moore’s children and grandchildren lay in the New Iberia cemetery, her surviving children decided to bury her in the garden of her home. Despite the less than ideal resting place, Moore’s son believed “all was done that could be to show the respect of the living for the dead.” Even in the midst of war, families tried to pay proper tribute to their loved ones.  

Wartime shortages of goods in the Confederacy made following the proper funeral rituals difficult. In early 1862, Celine Fremaux Garcia reported that most female Baton Rougeans wore black for relatives who had died in the war. In later years, however, most women could not find enough black cloth or dye to prepare a mourning ensemble. According to Garcia, “many families, having not been able to get mourning for their soldier loved ones, have never put it on for any of their mourned ones to this day.” Annie Jeter Carmouche recalled that when a friend’s mother died in 1863, she had to borrow a black bonnet and dress for the funeral and could not wear mourning at all afterward. Similarly, Kate Stone, her mother, and her sister felt “black should be our only wear” after the deaths of several family members. In northern Louisiana in the spring of 1863, however, Stone did not think they could procure the necessary attire. By the following autumn, none of the Stone women wore mourning because they “can get nothing black to wear.” The following year, she lamented, “people do not
mourn their dead as they used to," both because of the difficulty obtaining necessary supplies and the psychological stress of so many deaths.68

The war also caused problems for families who hoped to issue funeral announcements. In the early years of the war, Louisianians tried to carry on the custom as usual. The relatives of John Baptiste Kleinpeter distributed announcements for his funeral in March of 1861, as did Felonice Landry’s family in July of that year and John Taylor’s kin in May of 1862.69 As the war went on, however, printing death notices became less common. Severe paper shortages affected many towns. Even in areas where Union occupation brought an end to the blockade and greater availability of goods, residents often could no longer afford the cost. Many mourners therefore published a short notice in the local newspapers rather than sending announcements to all of their relatives and friends. The family of Innocente Montegut placed the news of her death in the newspaper, adding that their acquaintances should attend the funeral “without further invitation.” Other funerals, including those of Mary Brott, Henry Leaumon, Michel Moore, and Thomas Condon were announced in the same manner.70

Funerals of military and political leaders took on special significance during the war. In the Confederacy, funerals for military leaders were designed to celebrate those fighting for southern independence - not only to encourage more men to volunteer, but also to galvanize the home front in support of the war effort. They began as early as the summer of 1861. Charles H. Dreux was the first New Orleans native to fall in the Civil War, and Clara Solomon recorded that when his body reached that city, “he will have an immense funeral.” At the ceremony, a friend and fellow soldier eulogized Dreux and “made the death of the young hero a source of inspiration by
which thousands will yet be warmed into valor’s fever.” In April of 1862, shortly before the Union takeover of New Orleans, General Johnston’s remains were buried there. According to Clara Solomon, “at an early hour, crowds gathered . . . in order to witness the remains.” Solomon, chose not to attend because she felt the most people attended primarily out of curiosity and would not show proper feeling for the fallen hero. Clearly, however, many citizens felt that Louisiana’s Confederate soldiers deserved a hero’s honors, and these ceremonies paid tribute not only to the individual men, but also to the cause for which they fought. 71

Louisiana soldiers serving a way from home also celebrated the lives and deaths of Confederate leaders with public services. In May of 1863, Reuben Pierson, a member of the Ninth Louisiana Infantry stationed in northern Virginia, attended a funeral sermon in honor of General Thomas J. Jackson, who had died after the battle of Chancellorsville. Although the men of Pierson’s regiment seemed devastated by the loss of Jackson, venerated across the South as the Confederacy’s greatest hero, Pierson felt that the ceremony “somewhat revives my drooping spirits.” At the same time, he believed that the general’s death and moving funeral would spur the army to “fight with much greater desperation in next battle on account of the death of their idolized leader.” 72

As the war stretched on and both men and resources became scarce, the inspirational aspects of public funerals took on even greater importance. In 1864, many residents of Grand Coteau attended a mass for General Alfred Mouton. Gustave Breaux described the event as “a fine exhibition of the spirit of patriotism that animates our people.” The formal mass, conducted with great solemnity and featuring
lavish tributes to the "departed and honoured hero," served to remind Louisianians of the nobility of their cause, and the example of Mouton could spur volunteers for service. 73

The public funerals organized for Confederate officers were not merely ceremonies designed to celebrate and pay respect to heroes, although these functions were significant parts. They brought the population together during a time of great stress and inspired southerners to even greater sacrifices of goods and manpower. Early in the war, when victories outnumbered defeats and the blockade seemed a trivial matter, public funerals reflected the optimism and enthusiasm that pervaded the South. The first men who fell were seen as brave members of a founding generation that would secure the future of the Confederacy, and although they had died, their cause would succeed. Later in the war, however, as losses mounted and the population grew progressively more discontented with both the war and the Confederate government, the need for inspiration also grew.

In occupied areas, occasions of public mourning served as a way for the population to express their support for the Confederacy and defy Union control. In 1863, for example, Julia LeGrand recorded in her journal that the funeral of Major Prados, a Confederate officer, drew a huge crowd of New Orleans citizens. General Nathaniel Banks, Union commander of the city, "sent word to the crowd that it must disperse, and that only the friends of Major Prados should attend him to the grave." According to LeGrand, the people sent back an answer "that we are all his friends" and continued the procession in defiance of Banks. 74
Even ostensibly private funerals could carry strong political messages. When the wife of Confederate General P. G. T. Beauregard died in 1864, a crowd of more than six thousand New Orleanians participated in the funeral ceremony. According to newspaper accounts, “a larger throng was never assembled at any private funeral in this city.” The archbishop and several priests performed the rites, and her procession stretched for over a mile. Beauregard was the scion of a prominent Creole family and wildly popular in his native New Orleans. Although his wife Marguerite Caroline Déslondes was an invalid who rarely appeared in public with her husband, to many she signified the long-suffering southern woman, who stayed on the home front and waited patiently for her hero to return. Some even went so far as to compare her to Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi in ancient Rome, who nurtured her sons to be heroes and kept their memories alive following their deaths. 

Similarly, when a black Union soldier killed James Davis, a New Orleans civilian, in March of 1865, Charles Hilton reported that his funeral turned into an occasion for public mourning as “a large concourse of firemen and others followed the body to the grave.” Davis had been drafted into the Union army, and an altercation broke out at the conscription office. During the scuffle, a soldier shot him. Again, his funeral was ostensibly a private one. In the politically charged atmosphere of occupied New Orleans, however, it became a public event as word of the incident spread.

Although neither Marguerite Beauregard nor James Davis had fought for the Confederacy, each touched a chord with New Orleans citizens. By showing respect to Beauregard, people could also honor her husband, and Davis represented the suffering and persecution that many felt Union troops had brought with them. The death of these
two people, along with the funeral of Major Prados, sparked spontaneous outpourings of grief that also carried profound political implications. Unlike other ceremonies, which local civil or military authorities organized, each of these funeral processions arose out of the population's need to express solidarity with the Confederate cause - something residents could no do in the censored newspapers of New Orleans.

The final public funeral of the Civil War period was held for Abraham Lincoln. In this case, Union leaders of New Orleans and other towns organized the ceremonies, often against the wishes of the citizenry. As soon as news of the assassination reached New Orleans, the newspapers put out editions with thick black borders around the columns, and the city was plunged into mourning. According to J. Diboll, buildings lining the largest streets in the city were covered with black crape, and April 22 became a special day of mourning, with offices closed and flags at half-mast. Services took place in both Lafayette Square and the First Presbyterian Church, and, as Diboll noted, many of those who offered prayers and speeches were connected with the Federal rulers of New Orleans, including General Nathaniel Banks. Christian Roselius also offered a eulogy to Lincoln. A prominent lawyer in antebellum New Orleans, Roselius was also a staunch Unionist. The following weekend, several other churches and a Jewish synagogue featured sermons addressing "the national calamity."  

Sarah Morgan, a young girl whose brothers fought for the Confederacy, described preparations for the services in New Orleans. She believed that Union officers must live in the house across the street from hers because "immense streamers of black and white hand from the balcony." Others who did not support the United States also became involved, however. According to Morgan, many Confederate sympathiz-
ers decorated their homes in mourning because they feared imprisonment or confiscation of property if they did not. The general feeling among Morgan’s acquaintances was “not sorry for him, but dreadfully grieved to be forced into this demonstration,” especially when so many of their friends and relatives had died fighting for the Confederate cause. Despite her political leanings, Morgan could not help but see the event, with so many buildings draped in black, as “an imposing spectacle.”

In other parts of occupied Louisiana, Lincoln’s death also inspired elaborate public ceremonies. As in New Orleans, Union leaders planned the events, but local citizens took part as well. In Thibodaux, the officers of the Sixteenth Indiana Veteran Volunteers and the Third Rhode Island Cavalry organized a service. Businesses closed for the day, and the sounds of minute guns and church bells served as backdrops for the several eulogies, including one by General R. A. Cameron, commander of the post.

All of these ceremonies in honor of Lincoln carried profound meanings, not only for the Federal authorities who planned them, but also for Unionists who participated and Confederate sympathizers who witnessed the events. In Thibodaux, Théophile Harangue “spoke especially for the people of Thibodaux and Lafourche parish, that whatever might be their political views they must condemn the dagger of the midnight assassin.” Confederate sympathizer Sarah Morgan felt sorry for Lincoln’s family, but contrasted their grief with that of southern families who lost several sons in the war. She also asked the question, “Where does patriotism end, and murder begin?” Although she deplored the assassination, she could no help thinking of Charlotte Corday and Biblical women who became heroines for political assassinations.
While white Louisianians grieved for their lost cause and fallen heroes at the end of the war, the arrival of freedom sparked widespread rejoicing among emancipated slaves. In many communities, giving praise and thanks to God figured prominently in the celebrations. During the antebellum era, many Christian slaves had seen God as a liberator who would eventually bring them freedom. The outcome of the war, therefore, seemed a fulfillment of that promise. George Hepworth, a Union chaplain, recorded that as his army made its way through the Teche region and other parts of Louisiana, African-Americans "crowded to the highway to see us pass; and clapped their hands, and sang and prayed, as banner after banner, beneath whose folds to-day there are no slaves, went by." According to Elizabeth Ross Hite, when word of their freedom reached the slaves on her master's plantation, "dere was singin', prayin'. and everythin'." Lafayette Price and J. W. Terrill also recalled singing as a way to rejoice and give thanks for freedom. In New Orleans, an African-American minister led a service celebrating freedom with the words, "I thank God, I thank God, that I am a free-man."81

When society's institutions came under the extreme stress of wartime, individuals attempted to continue as before. They went to church on Sundays, celebrated holidays, baptized, married, and buried. Despite the best efforts of Louisianians, however, matters could not go on as they had during the antebellum era. Regular church attendance suffered as men went into the army and families fled Union troops. Religious holidays lacked the family members and foodstuffs that had made them special, while civil holidays revolved exclusively around the war. Family controls over marriage lessened. Finally, funerals became at the same time more frequent and less com-
forting as men died and were buried far from home. No aspect of religious life remained untouched, although Louisianians attempted to preserve the antebellum meaning and forms of both weddings and funerals throughout the war.

Religion has always carried the potential for political activity. The Civil War realized that potential in several important ways. Both native Louisianians and their occupiers recognized that a church service or a funeral could have many different meanings. By refusing to pray for the United States and continuing to honor both Confederate holidays and heroes, residents showed their unwillingness to accept Federal control. As the reactions of Butler and Banks showed, Union leaders understood the meanings of these events and were equally determined to restore loyalty in the state. That the battles were fought in part through religious institutions illustrates the central place that religion had in the lives of Louisiana's inhabitants.

End Notes

2 Sarah Ker Butler to Margaret Butler, 16 April 1861, Margaret Butler Correspondence, LLMVC; W. H. Pearce to John W. Gurley, 3 December 1860, John W. Gurley Papers, LLMVC; E. John Ellis to Emily Ellis, 31 November 1860, E. John and Thomas C. W. Ellis and Family Papers, LLMVC.

3 Dora Richardson Miller Civil War Diary, December 1860, 28 January 1861, Special Collections Library, Tulane University (hereafter TU).


12 Samuel Gault Diary, 8 February 1863, Historic New Orleans Collection (hereafter HNOC); Charles H. Blake Diary, HNOC, 24 August 1862; S. F. Snell to his wife, 26 April 1863; S. F. Snell Letter, LLMVC; New Orleans Times, 3 January 1865. See Winters, The Civil War in Louisiana, 404.


14 Leonidas Polk to the Clergy and Laity of the Diocese of Louisiana, 30 January 1861, Church of the Nativity Parish Register, LLMVC. See Robert Campbell Witcher, “The Episcopal Church in Louisiana, 1805-1861” (Ph.D. diss, Louisiana State University, 1969), 356-360.


16 Roland and Croxall, eds., Journal, 121-122; G. F. Shepley to John Fulton, 29 September 1862, New Orleans Civil War Papers, TU. For discussion of Major Strong’s visit to St. Paul’s Church, see Johnson, “New Orleans Under General Butler,” 71; Chester G. Hearn, When the Devil Came Down to Dixie: Ben Butler in New Orleans (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 173. See also Capers, Occupied City, 182.


20 Diary of Charles Hilton, 17 March 1865, TU.

21 Ministers to G. F. Shepley, 2 October 1862, New Orleans Civil War Papers, TU.

22 J. W. Champlain to Leonidas Polk, 19 April 1864, Leonidas Polk Papers, SHC; Richard Lloyd to Leonidas Polk, 15 April 1864, Polk Papers, SHC.


25 Daniel Shaver to Domestic Committee, 10 August 1864, Daniel Shaver Papers, DU; Roland and Croxall, eds., *Journal*, 269; Francis Follet to Jean Marie Odin, 21 December 1864, Archdiocese of New Orleans Archives. See also Baudier, *Catholic Church in Louisiana*, 427; Capers, *Occupied City*, 184-185.


28 Anderson, ed., *Brokenburn*, 77, 164-165; Patrick J. Geary, ed., *Celine: Remembering Louisiana, 1850-1871* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 124, 136; Dawson, *Civil War Diary*, 585. Although George Rable asserts that a number of families used Christmas as a way to forget their troubles, my research indicates that many more could not bring themselves to celebrate the day. See Rable, *Civil Wars*, 99-100.


31 Mary Cornelia Wright Journal, 1, 4 January 1861, Wright-Boyd Family Papers, LLMVC; John Ellis to Emily Ellis, 4 January 1861, E. P. Ellis and Family Papers, LLMVC. See also Snay, *Gospel of Disunion*, 162-163.


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Religious rituals illuminated a great deal about antebellum and Civil War Louisiana. Each of the ceremonies examined in this study had its own special elements and meanings, but all of them served as staging grounds for both sacred and secular experiences. In addition to the spiritual meanings attached to them, religious rites such as weekly services, holidays, revivals, baptisms, weddings, and funerals also had social and political significance that expose the values and beliefs that Louisianians cherished.

During the antebellum and Civil War periods, the state was an ethnically, culturally, and religiously diverse place. Still, a general religious tolerance existed in Louisiana, despite conflicts that flared up over specific issues. While conversion was a prominent goal of many denominations and arguments arose over observance of the Christian Sabbath, most people seemed able to tolerate, if not accept, the religious diversity that existed in the state. Many Louisianians attended more than one denomination’s church for a wide variety of reasons. Although individuals might express derogatory opinions of religious groups privately or in the press and the Know Nothing party obtained modest success during the 1850s, extensive or violent campaigns against any religious body did not occur. At the same time, intermarriage was common both between members of various Christian denominations – including Catholic-Protestant matches – and between Christians and Jews. Based on the religious events
that marked significant parts of people's lives, widespread support for faith-based in-
tolerance did not exist.

Through an examination of Louisiana religion, one can easily discern the pri-
mary importance placed on family. Family members often worshipped and converted
together, and the family unit formed the base for many rituals and celebrations. A
gathering of relatives marked religious events such as baptisms, weddings, and funer-
als. In many cases, family members served as godparents or witnessed marriages, thus
placing their stamp of approval on the proceedings. A wedding not sanctioned by the
family was considered shameful, and many marriage ceremonies took place at home
because the participants viewed the occasion primarily as a family event, rather than
as a religious sacrament. At the same time, holiday observances — for the most part —
revolved around the family. During the Civil War, much of the depression that over-
took many people during times like holidays and weddings was directly related to their
separation from loved ones. Religious events reinforced family ties by bringing them
together, not only for the major stages of life such as birth, marriage, and death, but
also for regular church services and for special holidays scattered throughout the year.

The opinions of members of the wider community were also considered sig-
nificant. Families hosting weddings, baptisms, or funerals were expected to included
community members from similar social ranks in the events or suffer a loss of good
opinion. Including friends, neighbors, and acquaintances in ostensibly private religious
celebrations was a way of soliciting their approval. Even those evangelical denomina-
tions that desired to isolate their members from the corrupting influences of the out-
side world created a community of believers that served the same function as society at large.

At the same time, Louisianians expected religious expression to conform to societal norms. Society required women to worship quietly, under the direction of male ministers, except at special events like camp meetings. Slaves, too, were expected to let whites control their devotions. While these groups managed to order their own worship experiences, most notably in the secret slave churches that existed on many plantations, such efforts had to remain covert. Religious movements like voodoo that placed participants outside of society's accepted roles existed only on the outer fringes of community life.

Also, religion taught Louisianians how they were expected to behave, not only through morality-based rules, but also through the rituals in which they participated. These ceremonies showed people that their priorities and loyalties should lie primarily with their families. At the same time, they also served to instruct citizens in the significance of the community and the need to secure society's approval in matters such as marriage, death, and at other important points in life. In this way, religious services brought family and society together in the minds and behavior of the people. Louisianians were expected to support the family, and the family had to conform to society's rules. Each institution reinforced and sustained the other in a complex interaction that both maintained the significance of religious institutions at the same time that it demanded support from those institutions.

Finally, these events show the importance of religion to Louisiana society. Despite many protestations that the state's citizens were irreligious and preferred fun to
worship, religion held a significant place in the state's culture. Of course, not all Louisianians participated in organized religion or considered religious events important, but society in general valued both the spiritual and the social and political aspects of religious rituals. No ceremony considered in this study carried a purely religious meaning, and participants often recognized this fact. They accepted the larger implications that religious activity had for their lives. Throughout the rapid geographic and religious expansion of the antebellum period and the upheavals of the Civil War, religion and its ceremonies retained a central place in the experiences and actions of many men and women in Louisiana.
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