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Contesting for power in public performance: hegemonic struggles in the Louisiana Shrimp and Petroleum Festival

Allen Alford

Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, aalfor2@lsu.edu

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CONTESTING FOR POWER IN PUBLIC PERFORMANCE:
HEGEMONIC STRUGGLES IN THE
LOUISIANA SHRIMP AND PETROLEUM FESTIVAL

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 Theatre

By
Allen Alford
B.A., Texas A&M, 1990
M.A., University of Houston, 1993
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ABSTRACT

This study was undertaken to analyze the influence of hegemony on the creation of cultural identity—specifically the cultural identity of Morgan City, Louisiana—through the annual performance of the Louisiana Shrimp and Petroleum Festival of that city. The information utilized in this study was assembled from a variety of sources: newspaper reporting from 1935 to 1999, chronicling the Festival and related subjects; works of several theorists in the area of ritual and performance studies; works that examine the concept of hegemony, principally from a Marxian perspective; anthropological studies of Gulf Coast commercial fishing cultures; reports by official State of Louisiana agencies, particularly in the area of petroleum production; histories of Morgan City and St. Mary Parish, Louisiana; numerous and varied works related to the area of Black history in Louisiana; and studies on ecotourism and the heritage industry.

The principal conclusion derived from this study is that Morgan City has experienced several shifts in economic hegemony, all of which have been reflected through changes within the form and practice of the annual Festival. Firstly, the seafood production industry under the guidance of ownership interests, was able to establish a powerful economic hegemony that manipulated the Festival into a representation of local cultural identity that had the ability to attract outside celebratory interest as well as national advertising—both of which were used in the promotion of Morgan City products.

When the seafood industry suffered a severe economic downturn, the petrochemical industry entered the area and set up an immeasurably more powerful

economic force. Over time the Festival became dominated by destructive participation of transient oil workers; thus severely altering the perception of civic identity to both established local residents and outsiders as well. Local established residents contested for, and won back, control of the Festival and its symbols in an attempt to restore traditional values of civility to the community.

To sum, economic hegemony is not necessarily cultural hegemony. In the absence of economic hegemonic leadership, civic resistance may appropriate the traditions, symbols, and prestige of ritual, thus forging a communally desired cultural identity.

CHAPTER I—INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

Precisely how I came to learn about the Louisiana Shrimp and Petroleum Festival in Morgan City and, from that introduction, become fascinated with ritual studies is a story which is so filled with apparent randomness and coincidence that, should I attempt to trace it, I might as well begin with the miracle of my birth. It is sufficient to state that I was a displaced Texan attending Louisiana State University when I became fascinated with the images of south Louisiana. While examining possible topics that I thought might satisfy my curiosity regarding this geographical region and its various cultural practices I encountered—quite by accident—a reference to the Louisiana Shrimp and Petroleum Festival. My initial response was one of surprise. Suddenly the images of certain outlandish, ritualistic Texan behavior—such as of Texans engaged in a “cow patty throwing contest”—seemed somewhat sane when compared to the image of a community that proudly announced as its primary symbol of existence a mixture of seafood and motor oil. Believing that I had discovered a public performance that could lend itself to a few humorous observations, I began examining the history of this event. That was ten years ago at the time of this writing; and what I discovered carried me far past the desire to engage in a bit of good-natured ridicule of what I believed was an unfortunately titled observance of sacred ritual and secular celebration.

Ethnic background and the attitudes attendant thereto, as well as geographical location with its attendant advantages and disadvantages, obviously have a direct influence on the evolution of any given culture. The area where Morgan City now stands never possessed the dominant French influence of New Orleans, for example, in ethnic

makeup. What became Morgan City was an area that was contested for by a variety of ethnic groups competing for limited resources on the only other waterway in Louisiana that offered access the Gulf of Mexico. Ultimately, it was the descendents of these pioneers that forged an economic hegemony in Morgan City and ultimately created the Louisiana Shrimp and Petroleum Festival as a reflection of local cultural identity. Thus, in order to understand the creation of the Festival, it is helpful to know something of the ancestral informing of traditions necessary to carry on contestation through the most adverse of circumstances. Who the original settlers were, and the problems and benefits of the geography in which they survived, provides necessary background for understanding the ultimate contestations among their descendents.

Modern day Morgan City, Patterson, Bayou Vista, and Berwick all surround what is now known as Berwick Bay—a body of water near the Gulf of Mexico that connects the Gulf with the Atchafalaya River. The land on which Morgan City now stands was earlier known only as Tiger Island, and prior to colonization of this area by Spanish, French, Dutch and “English-speaking” settlers, as well as displaced Africans, it was inhabited by “coastal Indians” who survived by fishing, trapping, and hunting (Morgan City Archives “Morgan City—Past and Present”). These forms of survival, for all those who settled in the area of Berwick Bay, at some point became forms of commerce. It is known that animal pelts were bought for export from the Indians in colonial Louisiana as early as the eighteenth century (Hall 9,11). It is also known that fishing and trapping provided sources of revenue in the early part of the twentieth century (as evidenced by the existence of the Gulf Coast Seafood Producers and Trappers Association). However, south Louisiana was an area poorly suited for the development of highly profitable

commerce in the eighteenth century, and relations with the Indians could range from highly beneficial to deadly (Hall 8-14).

The first significantly successful commercial ventures in what is the modern day Morgan City area were based in the timber industry. The area of south Louisiana had likely been rich with cypress since “prehistoric times.” Serious exploitation of the timber resources in lower Louisiana began in the early nineteenth century. Cypress wood is practically indestructible under water; thus, it was used for construction of anything that required water resistance, particularly boats. It was also used to make railroad ties, as a fuel for steamboats and, ironically, fuel for steam-powered sawmills. The 1876 Timber Act resulted in the sale of millions of acres of cypress swamplands for the purpose of financing Louisiana’s levee system. The sale of this land to speculators, advancements in timber processing technology (bigger, better, and faster working saws), and the lack of any conservation methods led to total deforestation of the Louisiana swamps by the early twentieth century (MCA “Cypress—the Wood Eternal”). By the 1920s only a few sawmills still existed in the Morgan City area, and those were dependent on processing timber primarily from Mississippi. Except for a demand for wooden naval vessels during World War II, the timber and lumber processing businesses were not viable after this time. The last of the sawmills was dismantled in 1950 (MCA “Morgan City—Past and Present”).

Marine commerce began in the Morgan City area in the mid nineteenth century when boats carried sugar cane from Berwick Bay, through the bayous, to New Orleans. This waterway provided an alternate route to the Mississippi River in reaching the Gulf of Mexico. Further marine commerce appeared in the late nineteenth century when

Morgan City became a thriving center of oyster harvesting. In what became something of an economic pattern for the area, a source of revenue from one commercial opportunity appeared just prior to the disappearance of the pre-existing dominant commercial base. The exception to this was the period of the Great Depression, which offered no significant commercial alternatives (MCA “Morgan City—Past and Present”).

Ironically, it was during the period of the Great Depression that the Festival was founded. Morgan City was suffering the same financial deprivation that plagued the rest of the United States during the 1930s. Had this not been the case, there would have been no cause for the communal sense of jubilation that followed the prediction, in 1936, that “Prosperity IS just around the corner” (*MCR* 1937). This prophesy, based on the growing strength of the local seafood industry, created an atmosphere of optimism that ran so counter to the collective sense of fear brought on by years of economic expropriation and uncertainty, that a celebration focused on the change in economic fortunes was virtually inevitable. That celebration was first observed on Labor Day in 1936, and was sponsored by the Gulf Coast Seafood Producers and Trappers Assn., Inc—the local seafood union that incorporated both owners and workers. The first celebration consisted of a street parade, games of beano (bingo with beans), and a dance that night. The following year, a similarly configured celebration merged with a blessing of the shrimp fleet performed by the Catholic clergy. The secular celebration, merged with the ritual of the Church, provided the origins of today’s Louisiana Shrimp and Petroleum Festival.

Thus, the history of Morgan City was one of contesting for resources, and entrepreneurial enterprise, from its first settling. The traditions that powered the early settlement to survive carried through the growth of industry, and were tested during the

Depression. The tradition of contestation emerged at the first sign of prosperity and resulted in the forging of the aforementioned union—The Gulf Coast Seafood Producers and Trappers, Association. The union was responsible for initiating the variety of events that came to be known as the Louisiana Shrimp and Petroleum Festival.

THE PROBLEM

What has come to be known as the Louisiana Shrimp and Petroleum Festival has been observed in some form or fashion every year except one since 1935. The exception was created by Hurricane Andrew, which brought extensive damage to southern Florida and Louisiana in 1992. Even though this damage occurred only a few days before the Festival was to open, the community was strongly divided as to whether the events should proceed as planned. Newspaper reports of the divisions, which will be discussed in detail below, reveal comments that appear not merely of a highly emotional nature, but specifically angry (MCA *Morgan City Daily Review* 1 September 1992). I state this here for the purpose of asserting that during the 67 years of its existence, the Louisiana Shrimp and Petroleum Festival became, and continues to be, the most important annual social event in Morgan City.

In the only other significant scholarly work relating to this event, “The Social Integrative Effect of Fairs and Festivals on Local Communities: A Study of the Shrimp and Petroleum Festival in Morgan City, Louisiana,” Steven Doeren acknowledges that the Festival “constitutes a routinized communal event according to the criteria established by community action theory” (1978 xiv). Through the application of questionnaires that Doeren refers to as interviews (limited to the 1976 Festival), he suggests early on that the Festival “contributes positively to the building and maintenance of community solidarity

or identify-maintenance [sic] for the residents of the Morgan City, Louisiana, community” (16). In his final chapter, however, Doeren points up certain problems with his study. Specifically, he identifies a “lack of race comparisons” that begs his following question: “Why do blacks not attend the Louisiana Shrimp and Petroleum Festival?” (162). This is followed by: “Although the festival appears to be a mechanism of social integration for the local community, does it only serve as such a mechanism for a specific part of the community?” (162). Finally, he warns that his study “should be treated with a certain degree of caution since nonprobability sampling was utilized (164).

Doeren’s questions highlight the dynamics that I will address: (1) The Festival was born amidst contention for dominance at a moment of economic optimism. (2) The “routinized communal event” is not merely individual and community performance—although it includes those components—but is, in fact, a secular celebration that reflects shifts in local economic and political power. (3) The history of the Festival indicates that new elements are variously added (most notably the invitation of Catholic Church participation), and old elements variously appropriated for the purpose of promoting the identities and/or interests of those who possess cultural dominance at given, specific historical moments. (4) The Festival provides a sense of community integration to some; however, that sense provides a veneer under which exist the actual machinations of festival organization, for the promotion of local business interests. (5) As the Festival has been organized and promoted by specific interests, elements of the community are marginalized, thus advancing, to some, an environment of social disintegration. This is to argue that competition for the establishment of local cultural identity is the force that built the Festival. In any such contesting, once dominance has been established, certain

parties will have become inhabitants of a marginalized socioeconomic and political stratum. It is, then, the power of economic hegemony that creates cultural identity, through the influence of the hegemony to project its will on all other social institutions.

None of what I assert is intended as detraction to Doeren's work. His conclusions reflect solidarity with the notions of community cohesiveness that have been existent since Durkheim's work in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (1995). Rather, I take some inspiration from Doeren in that, by his own admission, his theoretical framework is narrowly focused on community action theory, and leaves some questions unanswered. I will apply a broader theoretical framework and apply a variety of types of sources as a means of addressing the assertions enumerated above, all of which bears upon this investigation of the hegemonic aspect of the Festival.

APPROACHES AND INFLUENCES

While the Festival has been described in literally hundreds of newspaper and magazine articles since its inception, and has received attention by numerous organizations such as the Louisiana Association of Fairs and Festivals, Southeast Tourism Society, and the American Business Association, all of whom have recognized the Festival as "outstanding" or "top" in its category (Thomas 2002), the only serious inquiry of the Festival and its function reside in the abovementioned work by Doeren. That his analysis is limited to the 1976 Festival, his conclusions must be limited to that Festival as well. Thus, to date, no one has studied the evolution of the Festival with an eye to the mass of historical documentation that is available through archival collections, nor has anyone applied a broad theoretical examination to that history. The purpose of my dissertation is to accomplish precisely that: to demonstrate the use of the Festival for

building and advertising civic identity through an investigation of hegemony and its power to enforce or to repress.

In order to analyze the Festival from the perspective I described above, certain foundations must be laid. The first matter to be addressed relates to the overall perceptions of Louisiana culture and the curiosity they create. Much, if not most, of the interest has centered either on New Orleans with its sexual and intoxicating excesses, and the bayou culture of Creoles and Cajuns that conjures images of life in the wetlands, living among the reptiles, and practicing voodoo—a kind of secret cult within the State that discourages the presence of outsiders. This colorful sense of strangeness and exoticism is essential in interesting outsiders who desire to travel to a destination in order to partake in Festival activities (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 76). The Festival has fed off of that interest in the exotic nature of Louisiana in order to advertise its cultural identity.

Morgan City specifically has benefited by the appropriation of exotic images by such media as the film industry—an excellent vehicle for the documenting, embellishing, romanticizing, and advertising of cultural history and identity. Inasmuch as the film industry must sell exotic images, just as the tourist industry must (a matter whose importance will become evident below), it has been helpful that many of the images of film have direct connections with Morgan City. *The Toast of New Orleans* (MGM 1950) begins with a celebration in a bayou fishing village during a celebration and a Blessing of the Fishing Boats. *Thunder Bay* (Universal Pictures 1953) romanticizes the conflict between shrimpers and oilmen during the early offshore oil exploration south of Morgan City in the 1940s (an important historical moment, and one that will be dealt with in great detail below). Robert Duvall's film, *The Apostle* (1997) contains a scene of a fleet

Blessing on a bayou and interjects the image of quaint Catholic ritual into the larger backdrop of charismatic Southern, Christian fundamentalist evangelism. These are but a few of many films that point up the interest audiences have in Louisiana topics and settings, particularly as those images can be applied to Morgan City.

My study has also utilized a number of general works on Louisiana festivals and celebrations. There has been much written on the Louisiana's fascination with fairs and festivals. Several publications focus on what are considered the most important such as Betty Morrison's *Louisiana's fairs, festivals, food, and fun* (1985), that lists over 200 festivals and celebrations including Morgan City's. Trent Angers' and Martin Back's *The Top 50 Festivals of Cajun Country* (1999) lists the Shrimp and Petroleum Festival as being one of the most attended in the state, and the "oldest chartered harvest festival in Louisiana." In the *Natchitoches NSU Folk Festival: Celebrating Louisiana's Creoles, Their Communities & Culture* Hatley (1998) offers the following discussion:

At our festival, we use the word celebration a lot, in part, because we agree with many observers of our culture who say we need to revitalize our peculiarly strong American capacity to define who we are and celebrate who we are.

We celebrate people who see themselves as a group connected by cultural marker of some sort—occupation, geography, ethnicity, age, religion. Most of our Natchitoches festivals have celebrated occupations and ethnicity as we are doing this year with our wonderful guests, the Louisiana Creoles.

Hatley's description is well applicable to the Morgan City event in that it combines images of festival, celebration, occupation, revitalization, and ethnicity. All of these concepts will come into play within this dissertation through a discussion of festival celebration as representative of cultural, and ritual restorative. The Morgan City festival

is rooted primarily in occupation, although it certainly acknowledges geography and religion. Ethnicity is another matter, altogether, and will be discussed in detail below.

Other works important to this study have sections that help compile a picture of the shifting cultural milieu relative to Morgan City. While this list is by no means exhaustive, it includes *Louisiana: A Bicentennial History* (Taylor 1976), *Gulf Coast Soundings: People and Policy in the Mississippi Shrimp Industry* (Durrenberger 1996), *Texas Shrimpers: Community, Capitalism, and the Sea* (Maril 1983), *It's All Politics: South Alabama's Seafood Industry* (Durrenberger 1992), and *The Louisiana Shrimp Industry: a preliminary analysis of the industry's sectors* (Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries 2000). These works have been helpful in examining the life of the shrimpers of the Gulf coast—an economic community of which lower Louisiana is a part. As nothing has been discovered that attempts to describe and define the oilfield workers as a separate culture, that information must be assembled from local records of incidences relating to this specific form of labor, and the effects of this economic enterprise.

The compiling of the history of the Louisiana Shrimp and Petroleum Festival from local print media with the mixture of the immediately abovementioned sources offers a view of the lives of the participants of the Morgan City event and the cultural and economic dynamics they create. In analyzing the participation of the Festival as a cultural phenomenon, it is important to apply certain theories of performance. Among the most important sources aiding this dissertation in the area of performance studies are Schechner's *Between Theater and Anthropology* (1985)—a work that leads to an understanding of the significance of the repetition of performance, the work of Victor Turner who focuses on the evolution of community identity through repeated

performance and the issue of what he calls “social drama” in “Are there universals of performance in myth, ritual and drama?” (1982), and Singer’s “Introduction” in *Traditional India: Structure and Change* (1959) that helps in understanding the significance to both insider and outsider of performance as it relates to cultural identity. Again, this list is not exhaustive, but these works provide a foundation from which to work in understanding the forces that shape cultural identity, and the manners in which that identity is perceived by those from within and those from without.

Inasmuch as the Louisiana Shrimp and Petroleum Festival included elements of both religious ritual and secular celebration almost from its inception as an unnamed event/gathering, an examination of ritual studies is required as well. Here I begin with the work of Durkheim in his *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1955). This seminal work illuminates the development of social structure and social institutions based on religious ritual as originating force of all social institutions. This allows for the basic foundation of linking religion through magic to economics. Victor Turner’s *Forrest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndumbu Ritual* (1967) provides insight into the value of symbols in the construction of ritual. The work of Gramsci in *The Modern Prince and other writings* (1957) examines the power of hegemony itself, as it courses through social institutions creating beliefs in a unified code based on that very hegemony. In analyzing the Festival as autonomous business interest, I rely on Hughes-Freeland’s and Crain’s collection of essays, *Recasting Ritual: Performance, Media, Identity* (1998)—a work that suggests “that ritual is most usefully and relevantly theorised as a contested space for social action and identity politics” (2).

Thus, the dissertation will examine the historical evolution of the Festival with specific interest on economic interests and their influence on civic identity. This historical analysis will be enriched through an application of theoretical perspectives relating to performance, community (society), and ritual. The first step is to establish that the Festival, from its earliest form, appropriated ritual practice (most notably, the rites of the Catholic Church) as a means of both adding legitimacy as well as providing an exotic theatrical attraction to the Festival. As the Festival began to take form, it established a condition of specific social interplay that possessed (and possesses) the power to shape and form the culture that it reflects and that reflects it. That is, through the incorporation of cultural symbols and traditions as exhibited through civic performance, the symbols and traditions reflect the identity of the community; in turn, the community projects on the symbols and traditions the values of that community. The point will be discussed below as it reflects the conclusions of such theorists and Turner and Schechner. What is played out in the Morgan City event are the local power dynamics of hegemony and its influence on community identity. I argue that the Festival was born from contention among economic forces, and was created as a means of psychic relief for the community, based on the possibility of economic recovery. I further will argue that with the addition of the Church, contentions between secular festival and religious ritual were evident. From that base I will argue that secular interests began to gain dominance, these secular interests created a social performance that included ritual elements and defined cultural identity, and the interests of the Festival parallel the interests of those who held economic power. Thus, I will demonstrate the manners in which the Festival has been used by those in power to influence the general public (both local and national) towards a

particular means of viewing the community. I will argue that, due to the disintegration of local economic bases, the Festival has become its own hegemonic force, and that the resulting autonomy has created an event in which the Festival origins appear vestigial, distant and exotic. I finally argue that regardless of the intent of current day Festival organizers to create a Festival/product designed for the entertainment of unknown consumers, the historically traditionalized relationship between the Festival and community continues to reflect an accurate representation of the cultural identity of Morgan City. The theoretical focus of this dissertation, then, draws from various sources and theories that combine to illuminate the Festival from a variety of angles.

I feel that I should state here that I am able to find no study that precisely attempts the same outcome as this dissertation. This dissertation aims to examine a specific, ongoing event—The Louisiana Shrimp and Petroleum Festival of Morgan City—at various, significant historical moments of contest and change through the study of historical sources. The picture of cultural identity offered by the reporting of historical events is then analyzed within a theoretical framework that aids in understanding the relationship between these historical events and the art (Festival) that it influences and produces. From this point, the dissertation asserts that the art may be borrowed back by the community in informing cultural practices, thus producing and reproducing cultural identity. My inspiration for analyzing the aforementioned means of producing culture is found in Stephen Greenblatt’s “Shakespeare and the Exorcists” (101-123). While Greenblatt focuses on literary criticism, and I on a Louisiana harvest festival, we share some important issues. Like Greenblatt, I do not contend that theory has use as a purified abstraction that can be divorced from application to some historical context—“social,

ideological, and material” (102). In analysis of any given event, history is as important to the theory that attempts to describe it as the theory is to understanding the historical event. To state this even more simply, without history, theory would have nothing to examine, nor any inspiration for its existence. Just as festivals, celebrations, and rituals are kinds of living texts that tend to self-perpetuate within the context of reciprocal justification (i.e., they survive so long as they serve a useful purpose for the participants—a question of analysis within itself), so theories concerned with such performances perpetuate by claiming justification rooted in the perfecting of the total body of human knowledge through the very act of analyzing. Therefore, this dissertation focuses on the shifting dynamics of power, materiality, and economic relations in Morgan City, and the manner in which these forces inform the configuration of the Festival. My approach then asserts the manners in which the form of the Festival mirrors to the community, for better or worse, its image of cultural identity.

As a major portion of this dissertation focuses on the economic history of Morgan City, I feel that something must be stated about the sense of community as a whole. I agree with Benedict Anderson that communities are “imagined” (1983 6,7). In a quote above relating to the definition of festival offered by Hatley, there is the allusion to the “American capacity to define who we are.” Certainly, this capacity exists in the broadly pluralistic society that we call America; however, such defining is hardly unique to any given nation. If there is a culture that does not ritualistically define itself, I am unaware of its existence. The urgent matter is relative to why certain specific choices are made for the purpose of such identification: “the style in which they are imagined” (6). Anderson’s position that communities are imagined partly because: “regardless of the

actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (7). One may substitute the term “community” in place of “nation” on this point. This dissertation will, in part, focus on a sense of apparent community cohesiveness that the Festival asserts against the backdrop of inequality while it (the Festival) simultaneously establishes itself as an American celebration. These points will be discussed in extensive detail below within the context of identifying hegemony and its control over the formation of cultural identity.

Thus, to reiterate, this dissertation will apply a broad historical and theoretical framework in order to establish that the Louisiana Shrimp and Petroleum Festival had its origins as a spontaneous celebration exclusively for the emotional fulfillment of any and all whose livelihood was aligned with the seafood industry. The Festival was born from struggles regarding economic dominance that, once established, formed a celebration of exclusivity. The Festival appropriated increased power through the addition of Catholic ritual to its other events. The Festival, born and established in hegemony, has continued to reflect hegemonic shifts in the community for the gratification and aggrandizement of those possessed of power—specifically, the petrochemical industry, local business, and the Festival itself as autonomous business entity. Economic dominance in Morgan City has been partly established through the sacrifice of marginalized groups, ranging from the Black population (for several decades) to the established long time citizenry (during the 1970s and 80s). To sum, the Festival illuminates the hegemonic power play and material culture of the community. While the Festival has provided sense of unity through ritual performance, that general sense of unity has historically come at a price to those whose involvement was marginalized or forbidden.

METHODOLOGY

As mentioned above, I came to an interest in the Louisiana Shrimp and Petroleum Festival more because I thought it had a funny name than I believed it might aid in validating certain theoretical notions, while inviting application of others. Once my curiosity was aroused I became interested in the history of Morgan City and the history of the Festival. This led me to the Festival office—and old Masonic lodge donated to the Festival for meeting and organizational purposes, and utilized by both paid employees and volunteer staff. The Festival office houses no significant historical documents; however, the employees directed me to the Morgan City Archives. There I found the basis for further study: hundreds of newspaper articles—mostly from the *Morgan City Review* (and, later, *Morgan City Daily Review*) and spanning nearly 70 years—and other print material relating to Morgan City’s history, and the history of the Festival. The other print material included seafood industry trade magazines, Catholic Church newsletters, copies of various legal documents, in-house archival chronologies, copies and originals of letters sent to and received from Festival organizers and various advertising entities. Both the Morgan City Archives and the St. Mary Parish Chamber of Commerce were helpful in locating statistical data regarding the history of various ethnic groups, economics, religion and tourism—matters essential to understanding the cultural makeup of the area. The Louisiana State Library also supplied historical data of St. Mary Parish in general, and Morgan City in specific. The Hill Memorial Library was a particularly useful area of access for information relating to Louisiana festivals. Scholarly research and theory in the often overlapping, general areas of anthropology, culture, sociology, ethnography, performance, psychology, history, economics, and ritual were located in

several main academic libraries at Louisiana State University, Baylor University, Texas A&M University, and The University of Texas. My methodological problem never centered on a lack of materials from which to examine the Festival, but rather on how and why such a wide range of interests might converge. The answer came partly by accident, and partly through scholarly inquiry.

During the years of 1994 to 2001, I attended some portion of each day's events at the Festival. While performing general and somewhat directionless research, I became acquainted with several residents of the Morgan City area. Among these were: two archivists, one native to the area and one who had relocated to Morgan City; an employee of an global oil company who managed a crew of undersea divers that performed maintenance and repair on offshore oil rigs; a Black female teacher of some years, native to the area, who tells Louisiana folk tales to children at the Festival each year; a shrimp boat captain; a priest; and a highly placed organizer of the Festival. The relationships that I cultivated with these folks were, and are, genuine, and are built on varying degrees of trust. It was through close conversations with these individuals that I first learned that the Festival was not merely a vehicle for the exhibition of social harmony, but had a history of contention. I further learned that not all Morgan City residents were pleased with having the Festival become as geographically sprawling, lengthy, and crowded as it has become; nor were all in agreement with what the Festival reflected about their individual perceptions of what the community represents. Not surprisingly, each of them possessed differing notions of what their community did represent. In keeping with the integrity of my relationships with these folks, I never officially interviewed any of them. I conversed; and I allowed their comments to lead me toward certain points of inquiry.

They will be referred to only within the context of those points, and at the place in the dissertation where those points are discussed. It is quite probable that I would have eventually and inevitably discovered much of the substance to which they introduced me; but I thank them for the contribution they made in helping me to see beneath the surface of the Festival.

Thus I became part insider, part outsider. I could view the Festival as visiting tourist; but, I was also privy to at least some intimate views held by, at least a few, locals. This became my starting point: to analyze the communal economic and social contentions, the history of the resulting hegemonic shifts within the area, and the manner in which these shifts were, and are, reflected through the performance of the Festival. Still, I felt that I needed further justification for the dissertation. I found encouragement in the writings of a variety of theorists/practitioners in a variety of disciplines. From an ethnographic view, the work of Conquergood was useful. In “Performance Theory, Hmong Shamans, and Cultural Politics,” (Reinelt and Roach 42) he describes his approach in doing fieldwork with living Hmong shamans. I will address the obvious problems. While I made frequent visits to Morgan City, and was in contact with the aforementioned persons in various venues (within libraries, in local bars and restaurants, in private homes, and on boats), I cannot claim to have lived with them to the extent that Conquergood did in his field research. Still, I was accepted and taken into confidence. Further, one would not wish to assert any direct parallel between radically displaced Hmongs and the displacement of, let’s say, a Morgan City shrimper by an oilfield worker. But, neither would one be correct in assuming that the sense of displacement is anything more than degree. In either case—Hmong Shaman, or Morgan City shrimper—

cultural identity, and thus individual identity, is threatened by displacement, and can only be restored through the practice of ritual performance that allows what Schechner calls a “rebecoming” (44). The practice of ritual—the core attraction of the Festival—is the restorative according to Schechner, whom Conquergood quotes: “Restored behavior offers to both individuals and groups the chance to rebecome what they once were—or even, and most often, to rebecome what they never were but wish to have been or wish to become” (44). So, I borrow, and somewhat reconfigure, Conquergood’s approach to having a close personal, participating relationship with a group, a true member of which he can never become; and I see in Schechner his notion that ritual is restorative even when it restores an imagined cultural identity. Schechner’s assertion here is much in concert with the abovementioned idea of community as imagined. Finally, as to method, I am informed by the ideas set forth in *The New Historicism*. As Veesper states in his introduction: “the New Historicism has given scholars new opportunities to cross the boundaries separating history, anthropology, art politics, literature, and economics” (ix). It is the freedom to explore across disciplinary lines that allows this dissertation to analyze a particular historical event—the Morgan City Festival—and to work from the local manifestation to broader, more abstract speculation.

ORGANIZATION AND CONTENT OF THE CHAPTERS

The organization of this dissertation will follow a chronological line that will allow the reader to apprehend the evolutionary flow of local, national, and global significant social and economic events, and the manner in which those events were, and are, reflected in the Festival. Obviously, there are times when significant events overlap, and thus this dissertation cannot always simply reflect a year-to-year progression that

clearly delineates one year's hegemonic reflections as opposed to those of the prior, or the subsequent, year. The following explanation of the organization and content of the chapters will clarify the chronological arrangement.

After this brief introductory chapter, Chapter II will discuss the origin of the Morgan City festival, in the 1930s, and the conditions that spawned its inception—principally based on the beginnings of modern economic prosperity in this area. This history will include quotes from the surviving local print media concerning not only the festival, but also, the simultaneous origins of economic organizations whose aim it was to secure financial prosperity for the Morgan City population. The hegemonic shifting in twentieth century Morgan City began amidst this economic struggle. There are offered records of the initial invitation to the Catholic Church into the festivities so that they could perform the “Blessing of the Fleet.” These points will be analyzed through the eyes of those theorists whose work is relevant in the area of hegemonic manipulation; e.g., the invitation of the Church into the festivities was not merely a courtesy to the local Catholic Clergy, but carried broader implications relating to civic power dynamics.

Chapter III will examine the years of World War II and its effect on the community as well as the festival. This chapter will penetrate the fertile area of analysis relating to how economic growth merged with nationalistic sentiment, against the backdrop of national tragedy. Clearly, during World War II there was a need for, and existence of, strong community cohesiveness. However, beneath the sincere concerns and fears of workers, a capitalistic theme of growth and success for the festival coursed through the Morgan City community.

Chapter IV is concerned with the last half of the 1940s. This section will focus on the discovery of technology that allowed for offshore drilling for petrochemical products. This is an important juncture in the history of Morgan City in that it brings about powerful and contentious economic and cultural shifts, creating quite specific rifts within the community that create significant changes in the focus of the Festival.

Chapter V is most difficult to limit to a specific time frame, in that it deals with social and economic upheaval that is rooted in race relations. For the purposes of this dissertation, all of the relevant, various bits and pieces of evidence that help assemble a picture of the relationship between Black and White, on a national, state, and local level are offered to explain the question of why Black participation traditionally has been poor, to limited, as regards Festival events. Inasmuch as such evidence both precedes the Festival, as well as runs through each decade subsequent to its creation, this chapter will not be limited to a specific historical moment (given that such a moment is still in its evolution). The marginalization of groups is an egregious exercise in hegemonic assertion, and arrogance, and demands analysis. Primarily, this chapter will establish the exclusionist practices of racism as a form of cultural identity. Given that the Black community in Morgan City, specifically, had never enjoyed any widespread or official recognition as being necessary to the hegemony thereto, it is not surprising that Blacks were segregated from the image of local cultural identity.

Chapter VI discusses the period of decline in shrimping as well radical shifts in the fortunes of the petrochemical industries of the 1960s through the 1980s. As oil increased in value in the early 80's, it displaced the fishing and shrimping industry as the

most prominent focus of the Morgan City economy. It was during this time that the homogeneity of the community, as reflected in the Festival, began to erode.

Chapter VII will view the Festival from the 90's to the present. Following the failing economic fortunes of both shrimping and petrochemical production, the festival has taken on a new significance by becoming a nationally recognized, autonomous (imbued with its own hegemonic power), exotic tourist attraction based in part on the aforementioned images of Louisiana exoticism. This move away from a recognizably dominant economic power has created a more heterogeneous celebration, and has brought about some confusion relating to the view taken by the local population of “their” annual event. This Chapter will summarize and synthesize the discussions of the previous chapters, and analyze reasonable expectations regarding the perpetuation of this event in the absence of an established economic influence.

SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

At the most superficial level of justification, I posit that no study like this has been performed on the Louisiana Shrimp and Petroleum Festival or the community of Morgan City. Those points, by themselves, likely endow this study with some significance. On a larger scale, however, this study attempts to follow a general theoretical model of “new historicism” that allows for historical facts and artifacts to be examined from a variety of viewpoints: the approach somewhat described in the Methodology section above. I believe that this means of addressing the evolution of a community event with ritual elements has significance for Morgan City, south Louisiana, and any area that imagines that its dominant culture—even though that culture be new, elevated to dominance by hegemonic conquest—comprises a local homogenous culture

in which all members ultimately assimilate. Most importantly, I think, I argue that the ritual process, while yielding some of the community cohesiveness that is its most desirable element, becomes tainted when grounded in capitalistic enterprise, and that in a capitalistic culture, that grounding is inevitable. Certainly, this point has value when it is recognized that the Morgan City Festival is, and has always been, linked to economics.

For most of the twentieth century, the economic hegemony of Morgan City has been clearly defined. However, cultural hegemony may not necessarily shift with the same facility, or at the same moment that economic hegemony seizes power. Historical documentation establishes that this has been the case in ritual performance of the Festival in Morgan City. These, then, are the most compelling issues of significance relating to this study: Since the inception of the Festival, the image of cultural identity in Morgan City has been a reflection of the interests of the ruling economic hegemony. The image of cultural identity as reflected in the Festival has been a site of contestation between established ritual images and practices, and those of the new hegemony. Levels of participation by outsiders in the Festival also have been a reflection on the values of the cultural identity of Morgan City. And, the Festival itself has created the most recent configuration of local cultural identity through the establishment of its own hegemonic power, drawn from the appropriation of past symbols and traditions with their attendant images of exoticism, distance, and indigeneity. To sum, the cultural identity of Morgan City always and inevitably comes to be a reflection of the interests of the local hegemony.

The usurpation and exploitation of traditional symbols and ritual performance as a means of creating cultural identity is not unique to Morgan City. This dissertation

examines the ability of dominant economic interests to create institutions—e.g., the Festival—for the purpose of projecting community images and values that serve the interests of those in power. The packaging and sale of local, regional, and national images of difference, distance, and exoticism is a common marketing technique used to attract tourists and promote local products (both tangible and intangible). The construction of the Festival of Morgan City is one example of the manners in which community identity is formed and sold for the benefit of hegemony. Such promotion, marketing, and selling is most efficaciously carried out within capitalist democracies.

CHAPTER II—THE EARLY FORGING OF HEGEMONY: SHIFTS AMONG ECONOMIC FORCES AND THE MORAL POSITIONING OF THE CHURCH

This chapter focuses upon the sociopolitical positioning of the seafood industry as the local economic hegemony in Morgan City. Once established, this hegemony began to elicit the support of all local social institutions for the purpose of promoting itself and its products. Among the social institutions whose power was brought under control of the power of the local seafood industry was the Church, and the Blessing of the Fleet celebration—that which ultimately became the Louisiana Shrimp and Petroleum Festival. This chapter will examine the manner in which the seafood industry gained control of the local economy, as well as control of the formation of local cultural identity.

Initially, in 1935, mention of the seafood industry in Morgan City referred to often opposing elements of capital and labor. Both sides sought to control the industry as a whole; and through manipulation and contestation a union was forged that included both, but favored capital. The subsequent year saw the beginnings of economic prosperity in the area. Enjoying their newfound economic power, and their ruling position in the union, the owners and operators of Morgan City's seafood businesses—buyers, plant owners, fleet owners, distributors—decided to throw a party.

In 1936 the first celebration was observed. It consisted of a parade, beano games (bingo with beans), and a dance that, no doubt, included the serving of spirits. In 1937, the ritual of the Blessing of the Fleet by the Catholic Church was incorporated into the celebration, having the effect of also adding a water parade of shrimp boats. By 1938, the annual event that now included the street parade, Blessing, water parade, beano and dancing, was being advertised to potential visitors from throughout the state of Louisiana (*MCR* 1937, 22 July 1938). Thus, by the third celebration, the power of capital had

enfolded labor into its sphere of control, and received consent from the Church to offer Blessings on the shrimp fleet. This chapter discusses the historical details and theoretical explanations of the establishment of Morgan City's economic hegemony—a force that was created through the assertion of control over labor.

Additionally, and of equally urgent importance, this chapter is concerned with the appropriation of the power of the Church and its images and symbols, through contestation, by the secular economic hegemony for the purpose of creating a cultural identity sufficiently inviting to attract crowds of celebratory participants. The exertion of the power of business interests over the Church was enacted for the specific purpose of promoting Morgan City and its products. In relation to the dissertation as a whole, this chapter establishes the foundation for subsequent discussion relating to the manner in which various economic powers have functioned as the dictating force in the shaping of Morgan City's cultural identity, both to the community and to outsiders.

In order to better apprehend the relationship between Church and economic hegemony, some theoretical background is helpful. In this undertaking I employ the work of Durkheim, and his *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1995), in helping to understand religion as the founder of social institutions—the original social institution that provides the model on which all other social institutions are built. From this premise, I will demonstrate the manner in which Durkheim finds elements of the power of religion in economics. To this I will add the views of Gramsci—as articulated also by Williams, and Laitin—as these views illuminate a discussion on the ability of the power of hegemony to control all social institutions, including the Church. Ultimately, the discussion of the opposing aims of religion versus economic secular business interests

will aid in understand the forging of the configuration of the Festival as advertised representation of cultural identity.

It is important to note that Durkheim does not separate religion from society; i.e., he does not view society as managed and manipulated by an external force: God. Rather, he equates religion (and God, or god, or the gods) with society through the assertion that components—symbols, rituals, traditions, totems—of any given religion are constructed from the combined social consciousness of any given society (Fields, xxxv). These components are the physical objectifications based on the society’s abstract concepts of “the ideal” (229-230). The function of religion lies in protecting its sacred components from objects of profanation. Religion ensures the definitions of sacred and profane through ritual social action—the repeating of rites that remind and reinvigorate the community regarding sacred ideas or objects. Thus, religion as a social institution is the guardian of society’s highest and best notions of the perfection that society can never achieve, but can imagine. Religion and the sacred, then, exist on a duality of levels: the imagined perfection that exists outside the reach of imperfect humankind (422-23), and the created palpable objects of symbolic, traditional, and ritual power (about which more will be discussed in Chapter III). Once religion has established itself as possessing ownership of the highest and best of societies’ goals and aspirations, then no other social institution may possess the power of religion without, itself, becoming religious.

Religion, through social interaction, first creates then incorporates the power of *mana*: the power of diety (Fields xxxix-xl). *Mana*, however, is a force that is not limited to any given space or type of object (Codrington 217). Durkheim finds the power of *mana* in a variety of locations. Included in the group of social institutions that are

informed by religion, through *mana*, are magic and economics. Durkheim takes great care to examine the similarities between religion and magic, pointing up that both have their own “beliefs,” “rites,” “myths,” “dogmas,” as well as “ceremonies, sacrifices, purifications, prayers, songs, and dances” (39-40). However, he is equally quick to point up the “marked repugnance of religion for magic and the hostility of magic to religion in return. Magic takes a kind of professional pleasure in profaning holy things” (40). Often times, the same forces are invoked in magic as in religion. However, magic is not a philosophically grounded desire for perfection that creates the reality of the sacred. Magic is a technical, utilitarian enterprise that sets out, through the application of various formulae, to manipulate the universe in manners that are indifferent to either the sacred or profane nature of the outcome. Thus, it manipulates beliefs and powers for its own end, and does not concern itself with the specific nature of the ideal that is the exclusive province of religion. Being utilitarian and technical, magic shares characteristics with economics. Durkheim posits:

Only one form of social activity has not as yet been explicitly linked to religion: economic activity. Nevertheless, the techniques that derive from magic turn out, by this very fact, to have indirectly religious origins. Furthermore, economic value is a sort of power or efficacy, and we know the religious origins of the idea of power. Since *mana* can be conferred by wealth, wealth itself has some. From this we see that the idea of economic value and that of religious value cannot be unrelated (421).

Thus, magic and economics share more with each other than either share with religion.

The informing and influencing power of religion on social systems is to Durkheim, in many ways, what the power of hegemony is to Gramsci—and all those informed by his work—on those same systems. Perhaps Laitin, borrowing from Gramsci, best describes the concept of hegemony as:

The political forging—whether through coercion or elite bargaining—and institutionalization of a pattern of group activity in a state and the concurrent idealization of that schema into a dominant symbolic frame work that reigns as common sense (19).

Expanding on Laitin’s interpretation, Gwyn Williams asserts: “Hegemony creates a unified moral order, ‘an order in which a certain way of life and thought is dominant, in which one concept of reality is diffused throughout society.’ This concept of reality infuses all aspects of civil society—for example, the schools, the churches, and trade unions” (105).

Thus, any disagreement between Church and economic power would necessarily be played out through contestation. There is precedent for both to claim authority. The Church asserts its own moral legitimacy with or without Durkheim. Economic power claims that the Church is part of that very civil society over which it holds dominance through the construction of a moral order based on dominance of social institutions.

I have taken some care immediately above to establish a theoretical framework from which the reader may better view the following history of the beginnings of the contesting for economic superiority, and the eventual usurpation of the power of the Church by secular business interests in Morgan City. This framework will also aid the reader in understanding the manner in which the celebration *cum* Festival was configured as a representation of local cultural identity, and the motives of the Festival organizers in creating that form. The following is a discussion and analysis of the historical events that led to the form and function of the beginnings of the Louisiana Shrimp and Petroleum Festival.

As was mentioned above, the Festival grew from economically contentious factions at an historical moment of great financial stress in America—the period of the

Great Depression. The inhabitants of Morgan City were suffering a crippling and frightening lack of economic stability common to the nation in the 1930s. Although lumber mills still existed in the area until the 1950s, the general stoppage of building on any significant scale during this period rendered them useless as an economic base for the community. The fishing industry had replaced timber in economic importance (MCA “Morgan City—Past and Present”); however, it, too, was suffering from the same problems that other areas of agriculture were facing throughout the nation—the cost of production coupled with the inability of an economically strapped society to purchase the very food being produced (Gruver 720-727).

In an attempt to gain some control over wage and working conditions, the Morgan City fishermen and plant workers created a union in 1935 that was affiliated with the American Federation of Labor—“The Seafood Workers Association” (MCA 1935). Since the processing of seafood afforded more employment than any other single enterprise in Morgan City, it was not surprising that the newly formed union attempted to test its strength by striking for better wages in the plants, and higher prices for raw material (seafood). The owners of the Morgan City plants, already aligned in an organization known as the Gulf Coast Shrimpers and Oystermen’s Association, refused to yield to demands of fishermen and plant workers. Thus, the striking of the plants in Morgan City brought a virtual cessation of income to local industry in that year (*MCR* 1937). By all appearances, the idea of a union that could enfold labor into its membership was not unappealing to the owners. The Gulf Coast Shrimpers and Oystermen’s Association called a meeting and invited fishermen and plant workers to attend. On June 26, 1936, the meeting took place, and again fishermen appealed for

higher prices for their product. By the end of the meeting, it had been decided to lower the price asked by the fishermen's organization, The Seafood Workers Association, and to create a new union that included fishermen and plant workers for the purpose of increasing power of the plant owners to bargain nationally for better prices. That same evening, The Gulf Coast Seafood Producers and Trappers Association, Inc. was planned, and ultimately executed (*MCR* 3 July 1936). Arguably, the Seafood Workers Union was formed in order to combat the practices of the already existing union that was made up of ownership. The owners then enticed the fishermen and plant workers to abandon their failed affiliation with the A.F.L. and join in a community effort to aid in the manipulation of market prices. The first officers of the newly founded union were the same gentlemen who had administered the Gulf Coast Shrimpers and Oystermen's Association—Harvey Lewis and P. A. LeBlanc.

It was also at this historical moment that “an editorial told of an optimistic outlook for Morgan City and Berwick in contrast to the depressed spirits and conditions which had been general in the nation since 1930” (*MCR* 1937). By 1936, the Morgan City area was the largest shipper of freshwater fish in the nation, as well as owner to a burgeoning “deepsea” fishing industry based on the large amounts of jumbo shrimp being harvested just south of Morgan City in the Gulf of Mexico (*MCA* “Morgan City—Past and Present”). Based on the early signs of coming prosperity, and in its honor, an unnamed celebration was spontaneously created for “ ‘employes (sic) in every phase of the seafood industry—frog and alligator hunters, oystermen, dock workers, fisherman (sic) and shrimpers’ ” (*MCR* 1937). It was further reported that the celebration was carried out with “quiet dignity befitting the worthiness of those who toil” (*MCR* 1937).

In 1937, as prosperity increased, Morgan City experienced the second annual celebration “for families who shared a common interest—the seafood industry” (*MCR* 1937). It was also in that year that the Catholic clergy was invited to perform a blessing on the boats and prayers for the safety “at sea of the captains, crews and craft engaged in fishing” (*MCR* 1937). The organizer of the celebrations was P. A. LeBlanc, the vice-president of the Gulf Coast Seafood Producers and Trappers Association (*MCR* 10 September 1937).

Within a three-year period, 1935-37, various efforts were advanced to create a base of economic dominance in Morgan City. Firstly there existed the Gulf Coast Shrimpers and Oystermen’s Association that united ownership. In response, the seafood processing workers and fishermen combined to form a union—affiliated with the A.F.L.—that would enable them to bargain for more money with the union that represented ownership, The Gulf Coast Shrimpers and Oystermen’s Association. The strike against plants by the majority number of those who worked in the seafood industry was not only unsuccessful in aiding the fortunes of their union, and bolstering the local economy; it created an economic standstill. The workers’ union was abandoned, and all parties joined in the aforementioned combination of ownership and labor, through the formation of the Gulf Coast Seafood Producers and Trappers Association. That the original Morgan City branch of the A.F.L. did not survive is not surprising. Even to the striking workers, it must have become readily clear—particularly given the brief duration of the A.F.L. backed organization—that company profits were necessary for economic survival to the area as a whole. Thus, the shrimpers and their boats remained a proud symbol of cultural identity; but, economic power was in the hands of the plant owners.

In many ways, the workers union was doomed to failure from the first due to their inability to sustain a strike with no other means of support. At the time of the strike against plants, in 1935, the owners were in a position to begin taking advantage of advances in technology that enabled seafood to be canned, shipped in refrigerated trucks, or stored frozen and sold at a time when the market value was favorable (Durrenburger 1992 55-94). With bargaining power that allowed shrimp and other seafood to be sold on the market at times of short supply, the Morgan City seafood industry began to flourish prior to the end of the Depression. The collective, communal sense of relief made celebration virtually inevitable.

Not everyone prospered, however; and apparently not everyone was welcome to partake in the celebration in its early years. There is evidence that the legislation that created the WPA in 1935 brought to Morgan City “an almost overnight influx of people demanding additional housing and public facilities” (Broussard 1977 97). This certainly points to an explanation for the spirit of exclusivity reported in the local press and quoted above. The celebration was for those whose livelihood was aligned with the seafood industry; and those positions were specified. Sudden increase in population is always a threat to an existing labor force; and this environment favors the interests of business ownership.

In order to have any influence in decisions made by the union, one had to be a union member. As the seafood industry grew, so did the number of union members. In 1936 the newly formed union had a membership of 250, and no person was allowed into union meetings without a union card (*MCR* 3 July 1936). By 1939, the membership had grown to 1200, and was run by the same leadership: P. A. LeBlanc was still vice-

president, and still in charge of the annual celebration (*MCR* 21 July 1939). In Morgan City, in the late 1930s, to be associated with the seafood industry was to be associated with the driving economic engine of Morgan City—if not in high wages, then in cultural identity. Here cultural identity possesses an economic benefit. Unions are closed organizations that vote on their membership, thus giving an advantage to locals and those known to be seafood workers (relocated shrimpers—captains and crews).

The commercial fishing business is, then, its own multileveled culture. Owners are businessmen who look, dress, and function like businessmen. The owners are noticed on the level of their interaction with community economics and the attendant politics. The most recognized symbol of the seafood industry are and the shrimpers themselves, the nature of whose work have also made them the central symbol of culture on the Gulf coast, and Morgan City in particular. Less obvious are the plant workers who are like any plant workers. However, all of these people are part of a homogenous cultural establishment (much in the same manner that land and cattle owners and related to cowboys, blacksmiths, and camp cooks—the cowboy is the symbol, but all are part of the culture). In several of the sources I discovered, shrimping is described in a variety of terms that are all tautological with “dangerous” (Maril; Durrenberger 1992, 1996). This element of danger creates a particular type of individual whose cultural identity is grounded in mental and physical toughness that is required to perform daily battle with the sea. To the shrimper, the sea is anything but romantic; it is nature’s most powerful force, and to be evaluated pragmatically. As Maril states:

Because the sea is the shrimper’s workplace, he must be aware more of how it can hurt him than of whether it possesses any aesthetic values that please him. It can and does kill him. It can and does permanently injure him, cut off a finger or a hand, crush or infect a leg, or

slice an arm. It drowns him. Its sixty-mile-an-hour “northers” scare him, and its seasonal hurricanes drive him to port, where he still cannot be sure of protection (6).

To face such danger for large economic gain appears foolhardy enough. To do so for practically nothing—as the Morgan City shrimpers had done for most of the Depression, until 1936—seems lunatic. Yet, these men, and their boats, provided the raw material—the shrimp—that drove the economy of Morgan City; and the men, and their boats, were cultural icons. These men and boats of Morgan City even became legendary in neighboring states, and were referred to as “The Frenchmen.” One man interviewed by Maril stated that when he was a boy and had seen a Louisiana shrimp trawler he described it as “ ‘the biggest boat I ever saw.’ ” “Many of the owners were Cajuns who came from Louisiana, especially from around the Morgan City area” (79). The shrimpers, therefore, served a variety of uses for business. Firstly, they sold the raw material—for a relatively low price—to businesses, that in turn processed, packed, and shipped the final product. Secondly, they provided an exotic image for advertising the product that they brought in. This is certainly the case regarding the Festival. The iconic shrimper was part of the image that drew the original crowds to Morgan City to celebrate. In a sense, then, the shrimper was an unwitting advertising agent for the very product that was making him a living, and making ownership wealthy.

Therefore, in the mid 1930s we can see the emergence of shrimping as the single most dominating force behind economic prosperity in Morgan City. While owners and workers were both represented by the union, it is obvious that the union favored ownership. As Gruver put it: “wages never rose at anywhere near the same rate as business profits” (707). The new union was created to destroy the earlier A.F.L. backed

union that represented labor against ownership/management. We also see the shrimper and the shrimp boat as cultural icons enjoying a reputation that extended from Morgan City to neighboring states.

Further, we see the expansion of the union's sphere of influence through the incorporation of the Church into the celebration in a way reminiscent of the manner in which the workers became enfolded into the union: they were invited. The acceptance of the Church to join the celebration gave the union influence in yet another social institution. The Church, in turn, merely began to perform its function by blessing the men who braved the natural elements for their own economic need, the good of the community, and the good of all who consumed their product. The Church also placed itself in the position of partaking in an exclusionary practice by blessing some, but not others. This is not to state that the Church denied blessing to any and all. But, there is a clear difference between the Clergy hauling itself out of the sanctuary at the behest of business interests, and Blessing being bestowed on those who seek it within the boundaries of the sanctuary through their own initiative and effort. For purposes of the Festival, the image of the Church merged with the image of the shrimpers and their boats to form an iconic image that, from its inception, held symbols and traditions of ancient ritual practice. The importance of combining the powers of business and religion was not lost on the local print media. In 1938 there was a reference in the *MCR* that the Blessing would be "an inspiring indication of the expansion in the shrimp industry here" (22 July 1938). There can be no question here that the Blessing was seen and described, even by the local press, as an agency for advertising the community to outsiders. This also

illuminates the direction that the union was taking the Festival: it was to be a tourist attraction, with the exotic draw of ancient ritual.

Advertising the images of the community did not stop with the Morgan City newspaper reporting. In the same article there is a reference to the president of the “union organization,” Mr. Harvey J. Lewis, “endeavoring to arrange for the motion picture filming of the events of the day by a newsreel cameraman.” It goes on to explain what events there would be to film: “A program which includes religious rites, a water parade, speech-making, games and dancing,” and “entertainment to thousands of local people and visitors.” The newsreel photographers would, of course, focus on the most spectacular of the Festival events: The Blessing of an enormous shrimp fleet. Using the value of the images of colorful clergy and colorful shrimp boats simultaneously provided powerful advertising images on a national scale, and reduced the Church to becoming a Festival attraction.

Also in 1938, further expansion of the union, and therefore the Festival, in local influence occurred. It was then that other elements of Morgan City business were enfolded in the event through the participation of the Morgan City Young Men’s Business Club. In only the third celebration, and the second Blessing of the Fleet, the sense of exclusivity has disappeared and been replaced by visitors, advertising, and non-seafood-producing enterprises. It is naïve to imagine that the advertising existed for the purpose of displaying community pride only. Newsreels were a uniquely important type of advertising. Firstly, they were likely to be seen, as they were attached to movies; and movies were one of the most important areas of escapism available to the American public during the Depression (Guyver 724). Further, newsreels contained a kind of

legitimacy that other advertising did not, in that it was defined by the notion of “news.” Not all newsreels were advertising, but they could certainly accomplish that end, as well as define and frame the manner in which events were selected and reported (Crane 14; Baughman 5). Newsreel footage would not, then, have merely functioned as a documentation of Morgan City’s civic pride; it would necessarily serve as a propaganda agent for the purpose of economically promoting Morgan City to the outside world. The local hegemony of the seafood industry, therefore, had in a relatively short space of time become the creator of Morgan City’s public cultural image. A newsreel of a quaint religious ceremony, happy visitors, symbols of prosperity, community cohesiveness, and exotic cultural icons certainly could not help but sell the community of Morgan City to the viewer—at least that was the hope. Anyone doubting the motives of advertising the celebration should examine two questions: 1. Why was the celebration expanded to include the many rather than the few? 2. Even if the seafood industry wished to celebrate with the entire community, as well as those from outside, why seek national attention for the event? Ultimately, the promoters of the celebration—who also happened to represent the area business interests—found themselves enjoying the attention of the locals and visitors on a face-to-face basis, and the recognition of the nation through the dissemination of newsreel reporting. Add to this the Blessing of the Church on the festivities, and a stout economic and cultural base was laid; although, at this point, it is difficult to ascertain which group is gaining more from the attention: the Church, or the economic interests.

The 1939 celebration saw all of its components gaining in strength. In that year The *MCR* ran several articles attesting to the growing interest in the annual events, and

the further merging of the influence of the Church and that of local businesses. Among the articles that appeared that year was “Boat Blessing Ceremony Has Early Origin.” This piece reports, vaguely, on the ancient history of the ritual Blessing, likening it to the one held in Morgan City. Part of the report relates to the ancient custom of a crucifix being thrown into the water following the performance of the rite so that the fishermen could compete for its retrieval (21 July 1939). Locals with whom I have discussed this point say that no crucifix was ever thrown into Berwick Bay due to the depth and murkiness of the water. Belief was, it could never have been found. The importance of this article lies in the focus it places on the Church, and the romantic images of ancient ritual ceremony. This image is juxtaposed in local newspaper reporting with articles that chronicle the increasing strength of the seafood industry through “high prices” and “large hauls of shrimp” (*MCR* 21 July 1939). Finally, of interest, is the reporting of increased advertising and promotion of the celebration. In an article entitled “Record Success Expected of Celebration Sun.” there is the report that “Metropolitan Newspaper Men, Photographers And Visitors From Far and Near Will Attend.” Among the companies sending photographers for their own promotional interests, as well as those of Morgan City, was The Coca-Cola Company. Here is the first allusion to multinational corporate attention paid to the celebration. The images of the quaint Church Blessing versus the activity of business, visitors, agents of advertising, and corporate sponsorship, highlight the position enjoyed by the seafood industry of Morgan City, and establish that industry as influencing all social institutions, most importantly power of the Church.

By the end of the decade of the 1930s, the role of the Catholic Church in the celebration was already well established as a symbol of cultural identity, as well as a

tourist draw. The local press mentioned the “Blessing of the Fleet” in 1937, the first year of that occurrence in Morgan City. In 1938, the Blessing received a prominent headline, and the enjoyment of the same publicity that the celebration was afforded as a whole. In 1939 not only was the ritual exoticized in the local press through a discussion of its history and traditions, it also received an official endorsement from local government and business interests, thus attesting to the interest the Church was receiving from political and economic power. The proclamation read:

WHEREAS, the annual Blessing of the Seafoods Fleet is scheduled to take place in Morgan City Sunday, July 23 and
WHEREAS, this occasion is one inspired by religious beliefs and confidence in the Supreme Being, and
WHEREAS, this occasion demands the respect of all citizens for the decorous observation of a dignified ceremony, and
WHEREAS, the seafoods dealers and the citizens of Morgan City and Berwick are directly interested in the welfare and fullest development of this industry which is so vital to the communities, and
WHEREAS, the occasion will not only provide the setting for a historic, religious ceremony but will permit friends and neighbors from throughout Louisiana to mingle in renewal of acquaintanceship and furtherance of friendship,
NOW, THEREFORE I, Maurice D. Shannon, Mayor, and the members of the City Council of Morgan City do hereby proclaim this Blessing of the Fleet worthy of profound and earnest support of all citizens and do hereby urge our people to attend and to do everything within their power to further its success (MCA 1939)

The document was signed by the mayor and city councilmen of Morgan City. It was reprinted in the *MCR* in the format of an advertising flyer. Above the copy of the proclamation is announced, “We, the undersigned citizens and firms fully realize that the Seafoods Industry of Morgan City and Berwick is the most important single contributor to the economic welfare of the twin cities. We welcome this opportunity to pay tribute to a two million dollar a year industry.” Following that in quite bold print is “ ‘Blessing of the Boats’ celebration, here Sunday, July 23.” The “undersigned” include drug stores,

the public utility company, grocery stores, professional consultants, jewelers, optometrists, dry goods and clothing stores, a bank, confectionaries, cafes, shipyards, shoe shops, an ice plant and cold storage company, the *MCR*, and the local high school coach—every kind of business and individual needed to service a small town. Obviously a variety of business interests appreciated the publicity that was being brought to them by the seafood industry via the Church and the shrimp boats. This publication, printed as an advertising flyer and distributed about the area, clearly aligns the Church with the local seafood producers and the millions of dollars brought in by the “Seafoods Industry” (MCA 1939).

The economic growth was also driving the growth of the Festival and the numbers of participants, many from outside Morgan City. This was due in part, I do not doubt, to the advertising the Festival was receiving from local and state newspapers, posters and flyers, as well as newsreel footage sponsored by national companies. Not surprisingly, the numbers of outsiders made for a less homogenous gathering of individuals who came to Festival to revel in the party atmosphere, and view the events. Ultimately, this was to create an environment of contestation between the Church, and secular interests that formed the shape of the Festival.

The problem with the growth of the Festival did not relate to the atmosphere of revelry; that had always existed. As early as 1937, the first year of the Blessing ceremony, the *MCR* carried an article that read, “TRAPPERS AND FISHERMEN PLAN BIG CELEBRATION” and referred to free dancing “from 9 P. M. until ‘late that night.’ The music will be furnished by Toot Barrow’s 10-piece orchestra” (27 August 1937). Given that the dance did not begin until 9 P. M., I can only imagine what was meant by

“ ‘late that night.’ ” Each year of the Festival during the 1930s has reporting of some similar event (*MCR* 22 July, 29 July 1938, 21 July 1939).

The problem resided in the shifting of public attitudes toward the Church, as the Church related to the Festival. The perception of the Church, and its function within the Festival, became articulated and began to leak into the local rhetoric via the local press. In 1939, terms such as “solemn benediction” (*MCR* 21 July 1939), and the references to “respect” and “decorous observance” in the “proclamation” quoted above indicated that the Church had a voice within the local homogenous community, rendering it unnecessary to speak out in its own behalf on these issues. By the 1940s, however, the Blessing was frequently referred to as existing in a secondary role to the celebration, or as a curiosity. In 1940, the *MCR* reported carried the following headline, “JULY 28 SET AS DATE FOR BIG CELEBRATION” with the subtitle, “Plans Now Being Formulated for 1940 Blessing Of The Fleet Ceremony” (July 5). The prominence of “BIG CELEBRATION” juxtaposed to a less boldly printed “Ceremony” is a subtle indication of how the Church was beginning to be perceived as existing within the milieu of the festival events. In this particular article a scant few lines of the six paragraphs are devoted to “The picturesque benediction,” while the rest of the text gives thanks to the union for organizing the event, the Boy Scouts of America Troop No. 3 for sponsoring beano games, and descriptions of the magnificence of the water parade. On July 24, 1940, appeared an article headlined “Blessing of Shrimp Fleet Colorful Local Custom” (*MCA* 1940). Later that month was printed “ANNUAL BLESSING OF THE FLEET TO TAKE PLACE HERE THIS SUNDAY” with the subtitle “Full Day’s Program of Events

Will Entertain Crowds Expected to Arrive by Train, Cars, and Boats for the Occasion.”

Here, the Blessing receives top billing, but the text begins:

The increasing significance of the seafoods industry to Morgan City and Berwick is best told in a single unique occasion, the “blessing of the fleet”, when thousands of spectators gather to pay tribute in the industry by joining in prayer with the priest as he asks for the protection and success of the fleet for the coming year.

The article goes on to describe the various events including “climbing the greased pole and surf riding,” the excursion train bringing celebrants from New Orleans, the newsreel photographers (primarily those from Coca-Cola), and ends by pronouncing that “the blessing is one of the biggest civic occasions of this region” (*MCR* 26 July 1940). Other such indications of growth of the festival refer to national coverage by Fox News (*MCR* 8 May 1942), and “BLESSING OF THE BOATS WILL INTEREST CROWDS, Many New Features Added to All Day Program Planned For Sunday June 19” (*MCR* 3 July 1942). All of these articles have the effect of reducing the prominence of the Church and/or the Blessing as a Festival event, a matter of interest, or a civic occasion. In reporting the Church gets lost among the enthusiasm for an influx of visitors, and greased poles. Further, the Church, when spoken of, was inevitably linked to the interests of business success.

There is no discoverable evidence to indicate that contention existed between the Church and the secular festival events during the 1930s. And, I have found nothing to indicate that the Church would not take in good humor, and with all humility, the lack of print it received compared to that of other festival attractions. However, in 1943, the Church began to resist the profanation of sacred rites by the Festival participants. In a short series of articles written by the priests of Sacred Heart Catholic Church (responsible

for the Blessing), and published in the *MCR*, the clergy took a stance against the profanation, both through admonitions and explanations relating to the sanctity of the Blessing.

Early in this chapter, I took some trouble to establish a background for discussing the profanation of the sacred as viewed by Durkheim, and the power of hegemony as articulated by Gramsci, et al. In recognizing religion as the legitimate owner of the sacred—and hegemony as the power to control all social institutions—I believe the reader of the following excerpts from articles by Fathers Toups and Mistretta will understand that the clergy was attempting to wrest the sacred portion of the Festival from the power of the Festival organizers and the revelers they invited. The struggle between the Church and secular interests within the Festival is a significant point of contest. The initiation of this struggle marks the moment when economic force was confronted publicly by a social institution (the Church) over the content and form of the Festival and its celebration. The content and form of the Festival was, and is, the specific expression and display of Morgan City's cultural identity. No less than that specific identity was at stake. As these articles are focused as to intent, and, at times, quite pointed, much of the actual text must be reproduced here. The first article, written by Father Toups reads:

Again the time has come to implore the blessing of Almighty God upon our fishing fleet and those who man the boats. Despite the restrictions occasioned by war, Morgan City is preparing to stage a bigger and better celebration than ever.

It is my purpose, in this article, to explain shortly to our readers, especially the strangers and new citizens of Morgan City, something about the blessing of the fleet. The civic part of the celebration will be treated elsewhere.

The essence of this ceremony is the faith of the people who participate in the blessing; in other words, it would be mere mockery for anyone to have a boat blessed if the owner and crew did not believe in Almighty God and His Divine Providence.

He finishes the article with the prayer that he offers at the end of the Blessing ceremony:

Hear, O Lord, our supplications and bless these boats, and all those whom they carry, with Thy holy Right Hand; as Thou didst deign to bless the Ark of Noah, floating on the flood—Extend to them, O Lord, Thy Right Hand; as Thou didst extend it to blessed Peter, walking over the waves, and send Thy Holy Angel from heaven to free and guard them ever, together with all those aboard, from every danger. And may thy servants, after all obstacles have been overcome, reach a port of safety and having pursued a tranquil course and successfully completed their trip, may they in good time return joyfully to their own port—who liveth and reigneth in unity with the Holy Ghost world without end. Amen (Toups 1943).

That such an article needed to be published should be of some surprise.

Catholicism is not foreign to south Louisiana. In the 1990s Catholics numbered almost one half of the total church membership in Louisiana (*Louisiana Almanac* 1997-1998). In 1967 it was reported that Catholics made up over 35% of the total population of Louisiana (Dufour 4); and Catholicism was almost completely dominant in south Louisiana (7). In the latter part of the nineteenth century, it is known that in St. Mary Parish, while competing with several other denominations' missionaries for membership within the Christian community, Catholicism owned one half the churches and had over one half of the church membership (Broussard 1955 5). According to these numbers, Catholicism appears to have gained in power from the nineteenth century to the recent past. Further, given that the invitation to perform a Blessing was extended only to the Catholic Church certainly speaks to its level of influence in Morgan City in 1937. One would imagine, under the general codes of etiquette, and under normal circumstances, even the "strangers and new citizens" to whom Father Toups refers would have looked to the long time residents for some guidance in their actions, just as one would be expected to do in any unfamiliar setting. Regardless, Father Toups again felt the need to argue his

case to the public, this time in 1945. In this year the celebration had been expanded to a two-day affair in order to accommodate all of the celebratory events. That the Festival had expanded to the point where this was necessary indicates that the promotional elements were working in bringing in increasingly larger numbers of outside participants. Again, Toups feels the need to remind the public that they were profaning a holy rite. He begins the article with the same prayer with which he ended the earlier one. The following are salient points from the publication:

The words of the prayers offered up by the clergy are not heard by the people who throng the boats and wharves during the Blessing of the Fleet. But every thinking person is mindful of the deep significance buried in all the pomp and ceremony of the occasion.

The Blessing ritual is as old as the Catholic Church, in fact, since it is conferred with a sign of the Cross, it is one of the Sacramentals of the Church. A sacramental is defined as anything set apart or blessed by the church to excite good thoughts. The effects of the sacramentals depend almost entirely upon the faith of the person who receives them. Thus, it is evident, that a ritual, such as “The Blessing of the Fleet” can be productive of much good, both temporal and spiritual, provided the recipients are favorable disposed. This disposition would suppose, primarily, faith in God and in His Divine Providence and Protection. To receive this blessing as a mere formality, would, of course, be productive of no good. It would, in fact, be a hypocritical display.

The history of these “Blessings” whether they were of fleets, crops, herds or any other material things and their owners, shows that these religious manifestations were always the outpouring or even the overflowing of deep religious conviction. At first these spontaneous rites were simple and mostly of a private nature. Later, the ritual became more solemn and the exercises more public but fundamentally the idea of manifesting internal conviction and faith, by some external pomp, has been preserved in all the “Blessing” rites.

So, it should not be strange even to those who are not of our faith, that the Catholic Church is anxious to preserve the true meaning of her “Blessing Ceremonies” and not permit them to deteriorate into mere formalities or, in other words, to preserve the reality and not the shadow (Toups 1945).

The tone is clear that Father Toups believes that a sacred service is in progress, and that service demands reverence.

In 1946, a different tone was taken in a publication that, apparently, hoped to achieve the reverence for the sacred ceremony that had been attempted by Father Toups. In a more poetic offering Father Bernard Mistretta gave the following description of Catholicism and its rites, including the “Blessing of the Fleet.” This is a lengthy excerpt and excludes only liturgical and Biblical quotes; however, it describes the theatrical nature of the Catholic ritual, and implies that reverence be paid through a discussion of the drama that is inherent in the rites of the Catholic Church:

The Catholic Religion is a religion with a ritual. There is a flare of finery in her externals, pageantry, even drama, in her ceremonies and splendor in her psychological approaches to the soul. She is colorful to arrest men’s minds and to captivate their hearts. She hits at the senses and imagination by means of a skillfully prepared ritual built up through the centuries. And this, everyone admits, is one of the reasons for her never-ending success under God.

From the spectacular ceremonies of a coronation or canonization, thru the sublime ritual of the sacraments and Holy Mass, down to even the simplest blessings, the Church appeals to the minds and hearts of men, lifts them up palpably from the mire of earth, and sets them down gently and lovingly in an antechamber of heaven.

Much has been said and written on past occasions of the Blessing of the Fleet about the vestments, use of Holy Water and incense, and the great profit, especially spiritual profit, to be had from this ceremony. This year we will lend special emphasis to the prayers that are said by the officiating Priest and his attendants. From these prayers we can learn most effectively the nature and benefits of the Blessing, which is a rite of ceremonies (which we can all see for ourselves) and prayers (which we can hardly hear) by which an authorized representative of God and the people invokes the Divine favor on the objects of the blessing.

As soon as the Priest and his attendants have assumed their stations, the Litany of the Saints is intoned. In this prayer the intercession of the Heroes and Heroines of God is invoked to lend strength and power to our own feeble requests. We are members all of the same body, which is Christ, and certainly they will plead our cause with God. And which of God’s Saints are invoked? All of them; no less that fifty by name, the rest in groups: Angels and Archangels, Apostles, Evangelists, Martyrs, the Holy Innocents, Bishops and Confessors, Doctors, Priests and Levites, Monks and Hermits, Virgins and Widows, the innocent and the repentant, and all the saints of God. What a group of friends to have praying to God for you. And the fishermen are there too. Remember Peter, and Thomas,

and Nathanael, and the sons of Zebedee and the other disciples of the Lord who earned their livelihood by fishing? How readily must they assent to intercede with God for this generation of fishermen!

After the Litany is concluded the Priest begins the special prayers of blessing for the boats and their crews, proper responses being made from time to time by his attendants in the name of all (*MCR* 23 August 1946)

What is important to Fathers Toups and Mistretta is the very sanctity of the Church and its rituals. Father Toups moves from explanation to admonition. Father Mistretta adds description. Toups never condemns the Festival; in fact he seems complimentary in his reference to “bigger and better celebration than ever.” However, given subsequent comments, his wording might just as easily be taken to refer to a crassness of increasing size and importance of the secular celebration against the backdrop of national tragedy: World War II. I assert that his unwillingness to discuss the “civic part of the celebration” as well as the dismissive “will be treated elsewhere” is telling of his attitude. He does not state where this matter will be treated, or when. He does not have to. Any copy of the *MCR* from this period—generally for a few months prior, and for some weeks afterward—inevitably speak glowingly of the celebrations’ successes. Further, his references to “strangers and new citizens” indicate that the visitors that attend the celebration, as well as those who have migrated to Morgan City for economic gain, are the principal culprits in the profanation. This is the first critique (complaint) that alludes to the insider/outsider, dual nature into which Morgan City’s Festival was evolving. Attacking the non-faithful who received the Blessing as performing a “mockery” is tautological to accusing them of profanation.

In his second public explanation/admonition Father Toups speaks even more forcefully regarding the profanation of those who are not reverent during the performance

of the religious rite. How much sarcasm might there be hidden in the term “every thinking person”? And, he clearly defines and delineates the sacred elements that are to be revered, in opposition to the profane, unfaithful acts of “hypocrisy.” Most importantly, I think, is his express desire that, in referring to the “ ‘Blessing Ceremonies,’ ” that they are not permitted “to deteriorate into mere formalities or, in other words, to preserve the reality and not the shadow.” This last comment contains an essential concept within the realm of ritual studies, and an underlying focus of this dissertation: the deterioration of meaning within ritual over time.

The very reasons that Toups and Mistretta believed that the Blessing was becoming lost among Festival events relates directly to the growth of the Festival and its numbers of participants. This growth was essential in order to keep a sense of exoticism and newness within the Festival. New and additional events were planned by the Festival organizers—the local seafood industry—for the express purpose of promoting the local products. Therefore, the sanctity of the Blessing was originally profaned by the desire of the seafood industry to increase its popularity through advertising and public exhibition—the Festival participants were merely a byproduct of that desire.

In fact, the deterioration of the Blessing, from a sacred *versus* profane standpoint, is directly related to the enfolding of the Church into a larger secular ritual. Both Church and Festival had by the 1940s their own sets of symbols and traditions—albeit those of the Church were much older. However, the Church had placed itself in the position of returning each year to observe the Blessing. Not to do so would be not to perform its function. Additionally, Mistretta undermines his own argument by describing a dramatic event so eloquently that it proposes additional motive for visitors to wish to view the

Blessing. I am inclined to believe Father Mistretta when he discusses the efficacy of the Blessing and the ritual of the Catholic Church. Indeed, if not on the spiritual level, on the performance level it cannot fail. But, it is the spiritual level that is of concern to him and Toups.

Ultimately, the problem for the Church in battling local business interests over issues of decorum, solemnity, sanctity, faith, and correct observance, resides in the inability to separate the economics from the Festival, and the Festival from the actions of the participants. More simply, the Church owned the Blessing, a colorful, picturesque ritual that attracted Festival participants. But from the standpoint of local business and the celebrants, the economic power of the seafood industry owned the Blessing and everything else. Why did this profanity exist? Possibly because (perceived) moral decline often accompanies upward movements in personal wealth (Havilland 712). The rising economic tide had made the Church a matter of less necessity than the celebration of newfound prosperity.

A final part of the problem for the Church also resided (and resides) in the tolerance it has for carnival atmosphere (Durrenburger 1992 98). And yet, the carnival atmosphere was the very matter that degraded the solemnity of the Blessing. Roach, discussing Schechner expresses, “Carnival supposedly turns the world upside down, but, more often in Schechner’s reckoning, the world (or its politically dominant institutions) is turning carnival right side up” (1992 14). Certainly one could argue that the Catholic Church is a dominant organization in Morgan City, and elsewhere. But, Morgan City was a place to celebrate—it had undergone ten years of rapid economic growth, with World War II as a backdrop. And, in a sense the carnival turned the Church on its head.

That a carnival atmosphere would emerge from the juxtapositions of poverty and prosperity, and peace and war is, at least, not unreasonable. That the carnival atmosphere was sufficiently seductive to create an environment of profanation of the Church is a matter for the theoretical speculation that Schechner invites.

Without digressing too far from the intended direction of this chapter—the discussion of the relationship between church and economic power and how that played out in the first decade of the Festival—let me state that the Church could never have appropriated the carnival of the Morgan City Festival. To do so would have been to embrace the profane rather than, as Durkheim reminds, separate the sacred *from* the profane. Secular business interests exist under no such constraints. The unified moral order of hegemony is not the same moral order as ordained by a strict set of religious rules. The unified moral order of economic power is merely that which the economic hierarchy embraces, that which pervades every aspect of civil society, and that which civil society will not contest unless it is beneficial for them to do so—and benefits, in the practical world of capitalism, are based on what they cost and what one receives in return.

Whatever the explanation, it is clear that there was a struggle for decorum in Morgan City in the 1940s, during the annual celebration, between secular and religious interests—a battle lost by the Church, although that could not be known from some time. The battle was rooted in the Church's ethical and moral obligation to bless the believers when asked, and the capitalist tendency to view even social institutions as objects of exploitation (Marx and Engels 1975 409-410). Since 1946, no priest has published an article admonishing the crowd for its behavior. Reverence for the Blessing has been

supported in editorial comments, and occasional blurb reminders in the local press; however, the Catholic clergy has remained silent in the media on this issue. The celebration has flourished; and The Blessing of the Fleet has remained a picturesque attraction. But, measured against the allure of financial gain, the Church, at least as it is related to the Morgan City Festival, served a secondary social need. Thus, even a force as powerful as the Church can be marginalized and exploited.

Finally, if Toups and Mistretta could have taken any consolation, it might have come from this quote by Durkheim:

Every festival has certain characteristics of a religious ceremony, even if it is of purely secular origin. In every case, its effect is to bring individuals together, to put the masses into motion, and thus induce a state of effervescence—sometimes even delirium—which is not without kinship to the religious state. Man is carried outside himself, pulled away from his ordinary occupations and preoccupations. We observe the same manifestations in both cases: cries, songs, music, violent movements, dances, the search for stimulants that increase vitality, and others. It has often been observed that popular festivals lead to excesses, causing people to lose sight of the boundary between the licit and the illicit. (386-7)

Thus, if the Church could not win the battle for decorous treatment of the sacred, at least it could take comfort in knowing that religion had informed the very institutions that profaned it.

CHAPTER III—MORGAN CITY, 1940-1945: CONSTRUCTING CULTURAL IDENTITY THROUGH THE EXPANSION OF FESTIVAL

Much of America entered the period of World War II still reeling from the Great Depression. As Americans moved into the wartime economy, more money and jobs were available due to demands for provisioning the troops. However, provisioning the troops required that raw materials be appropriated for the War effort. Thus, the raw materials that would have gone toward the manufacture of goods capable of providing the trappings of a (more or less) normal middle class life were going to manufacture the goods needed to wage war. When there was no money there were goods; when there was money there were no goods. Thus, where self-denial was a forced condition of the Depression, self-denial became a national virtue during the War through the practice of conservation. “Pamphlets from the Office of Civilian Defense proclaimed that ‘conservation is a war weapon in the hands of every man, woman, and child’ ” (Gruver 780). For example, in order to promote “car pooling” for the purpose of conserving fuel, the same Office warned, “ ‘The empty seat is a gift to Hitler’ ” (780). But while the rest of America was practicing self-denial (as that term relates to the consumption of tangible goods), the Morgan City seafood industries union was advertising its prosperous community identity to the state, the nation, and to itself, through the exhibition of the ever-growing, increasingly affluent Festival.

The aim of this chapter is to examine the growth and evolution of the Morgan City celebration during the years of World War II. I posit that it was during these years that the celebration became firmly established as a routinized community event with a ritual core. Not surprisingly, the Festival saw increased celebratory participation and growth in numbers of entertainment attractions, run concurrently with the rise in fortunes

of the of the seafood industry. My argument that the celebration became fixed during the years of World War II is twofold: Firstly, as I discussed in Chapter II, the economic force of Morgan City enfolded the established ritual of the Blessing of the Fleet by the Catholic Church into the Festival as one of the principal attractions to both community residents and outside visitors. The Blessing provided ritual iconic images of clergy and fishing boats. Secondly, the Festival organizers appropriated a variety of additional images, designed to promote the symbols and traditions of a particularly American way of life, and added those to the Festival events as well. Thus, the Festival was able to combine regional images for the purpose of providing an exotic background, as well as a variety of typically American images, events, and entertainments for the immediate gratification of the Festival celebrants. In combining these images and events, the Festival organizers also successfully combined the symbols, traditions, and prestige that the images and events intrinsically carried. In appropriating the symbols, traditions, and prestige the ruling powers of the local seafood industry appropriated the very building blocks of ritual (Sangren 207-215; Turner 1967 28). Thus, not only did the local economic hegemony institutionalize a pattern of group activity that reigned as common sense, and create a unified moral order in which a certain way of life was thought of as dominant (see Laitin and Williams above), it gained dominance over a ritual celebration for the purpose of publicly exhibiting and perpetuating its own legitimacy. The fact that this Festival could be forged during a period of national tragedy (the War), and amidst the atmosphere of national self-denial, further attests to the strength of the ruling elite of the Morgan City seafood industries union, who were also the organizers of the Festival, who were also the hegemony.

In order to discuss fully the rise in importance of the Festival within the context of establishing cultural identity and serving the interests of the seafoods union, the following will need illumination: the continued application of Gramscian theory as it is germane to the period and conditions covered in this chapter, a review of the history of the growth and prestige of the Morgan City seafood industry of this period, and an examination of the expansion in number and types of events that became popular within the Festival.

As I alluded above to above, alignment with the Morgan City seafood industry during the period of the late 1930s and the 1940s, was to be aligned with both the economically and culturally privileged. This is not to state that everyone who worked in the seafood industry in Morgan City was economically well off, but those who were not were one degree of separation closer to the economically powerful than someone making similar wages in another industry. Furthermore, the seafood industry provided the material and images on which community and cultural identity was based. The seafood industry in Morgan City during the early 1940s was not merely a significant business concern; it was the largest commercial fishing and processing port in the United States. Thus, I begin with a discussion of the power of the Morgan City seafood industry of this period.

In 1941, an article in the *New Orleans Item-Tribune* referred to the Morgan City shrimp fleet as “the largest of any in the Louisiana tidal waters—the fleet that brings in approximately one-fourth of the entire country’s annual shrimp harvest” (MCA 27 July 1941).

One must keep in mind that the Gulf coast shrimping industry runs from Brownsville, Texas to South Florida. That one port's shrimping fleet would account for that percentage of the national harvest attests to its economic significance, and aids in explaining the boom-town atmosphere that Morgan City had acquired. It is known that the union was still being controlled by ownership as Harvey Lewis and P. A. LeBlanc ran unopposed for their respective seats in the 1940 election, and Mr. LeBlanc was kept on as head of the arrangements for the annual celebration (*MCR* 14 June 1940). This news was repeated in 1942 (*MCR* 12 June), and is alluded to in a Morgan City Archives memo from 1944. Also from 1944 is an Archive's list of headlines from the August 25th edition of the *MCR* that includes: "Shrimp Catch of This Port During Past 12 Months Brought a Cash Return Here of at Least \$3,725,540," and "Expect Fish and Shellfish Production to Exceed Four Billion Pounds." So, from 1939 to 1944, the cash return on seafood harvests had nearly doubled. Nearly four million dollars in 1944 was an impressive amount of money. The ease with which shrimp were being harvested near Morgan City, and the management/negotiation power of the union had made Morgan City the largest port for seafood harvesting and processing in America. This certainly would have aided this industry in enjoying local economic hegemony and national notice.

I have asserted above that it was during the period of the War that the Festival celebration became an established routine based on ritual practice. The forging of ritual was made possible by the force that the seafood industry and its owners could exert on the community. We have already seen the manner in which the economic power of Morgan City influenced the Church. That same power extended into politics, private community institutions, and even into the creation of secular myth and legend. The

appropriation of the image of the shrimper as cultural icon for Morgan City is a case in point.

The shrimpers had the most dangerous job of anyone in the Morgan City seafood industry. During the 1940s, they were earning a reasonable living for the first time in years, but that had more to do with the magnitude of the migration of shrimp to local waters—where large quantities could be harvested easily and close to home—than it did with any advantages offered to them by ownership. Generally, the owners of processing plants also owned cold storage facilities, packing and canning factories, and shipping companies. The shrimpers were independent contractors, unless they worked for one of the companies that also owned its own shrimping fleet. The owners were entrepreneurs who were taking advantage of a good market.

Earlier I alluded to the legendary status of Louisiana shrimpers merely due to the size of their boats. Even this condition was partly accidental. The Morgan City shrimp boats were large because they were deep-sea trawlers. Prior to the migration of shrimp to the Morgan City waters, the trawlers would travel far into the Gulf in order to harvest enough to earn a living for their owners. The fact that they could fill those same boats with shrimp caught close to home was merely a fortuitous natural occurrence. Also, and what I did not mention above, was that the Louisiana, deep-sea, trawlers of this period had virtually no comforts such as bathroom facilities, bedding for the crew, or heaters to warm the men in winter. Thus, the size of boats, the physically demanding work and the dangers inherent in their jobs, and the lack of any creature comforts, gave the shrimpers a status of economic and cultural heroes and the same time that they were inevitably being

exploited by those who purchased the raw material from them. This legendary status was well earned, as well as exploited for advertising purposes.

This status grew as the inevitability of war, and the War itself came closer to Morgan City. In honor of the men—most of whom were employed in the seafood industry—who had volunteered for military duty, the festival was held early in 1941 so that all could attend prior to reporting to their respective branches of the service. After the War began, the Gulf of Mexico was filled with German U-boats that routinely torpedoed and sank commercial shipping vessels. On at least three occasions in 1942, members of the Morgan shrimp fleet rescued survivors of torpedoed ships (*MCR* 5 June 1942, 19 June 1942). These newspaper accounts referred to the men of the fleet as “valiant” as they “picked men out of shark infested waters.” The heroes of local industry had now added to their status by behaving heroically in a real, life and death, ultimate and immediate, manner. Inasmuch as the shrimpers were an essential component of the seafood industry, their gain in stature was passed on to the industry as a whole. This was also exploited as advertising. On June 5th, 1942, the report of the Morgan City shrimpers rescuing survivors of a Norwegian Craft, shared front-page headlines relating to the race for the “Queen of the Boat Blessing” (*MCR*).

Apparently, there was nothing that the organizers of the Festival would not do to gain attention. At the 1944 festival a reenactment of the D-Day invasion was staged on Berwick Bay. “Crash boats and state troops enacted the landing of Americans on enemy-held beaches. Simulated attack carried out in realistic fashion with smoke to cloak troop movements and harmless gun fire for sound effects” (*MCA* 1944). This spectacle coincided with the moving of the Festival from its usual time in July (before the opening

of shrimping season) to Labor Day weekend, a time it had not been held since 1937. Personally, I would be less suspicious of the motives of the festival organizers had it not been for the fact that in 1944 the Festival was moved in order to accommodate the “seafoods union conference.” Union representatives from Florida, Texas, Mississippi and Alabama in addition to St. Bernard Parish, New Orleans, and Bayou La Batre” attended (MCA 1944). The added spectacle was, undoubtedly, impressive to those business interests.

During the 1940s other events were in motion designed to perpetuate and expand, the ritual events, and thus, cultural identity under the supervision of the Festival organizers. These included the allusion in the introduction to this chapter relating to the appropriation of American images and typical American entertainments. By 1940, the local Boy Scouts of America Troop #3 have been given charge of the operating and organizing the beano games. Also, a dance for children was held on Sunday night from “4-7 p. m. with music by Doc’s Versatillians.” (*MCR* 5 July 1940). This addition of children aiding in the management, and enjoying the entertainment, is of significance in regards to the perpetuation of the ritual celebration. I will not make any more of an issue of this than is necessary. I merely refer to social learning theory: that a behavioral model, particularly one who possesses authority, is highly influential to the impressionable young minds that perceive the model’s actions. Thus, youth being afforded the opportunity to participate in a ritual celebration in somewhat the same manner that the authority figures behave (and these include cultural icons, such as the shrimpers) encompasses activities that are likely to be repeated. I should state here, as well, that for a child to be allowed into the adult world is generally viewed by the child as

a reward; thus both social learning, and operant conditioning are at work in such situations as the Boy Scouts being trusted with adult responsibilities, such as beano (Dworetzky 175, 190, 191).

By 1942 other attractions were being adopted as annual, or frequent, events for the continued aim of Americanizing the Festival against the backdrop of local exoticism. Among these was the introduction of “royalty” into the ritual. It was announced: “A contest between young ladies for the honor of reigning as Queen of the Blessing of the Boats will provide interest and excitement during the weeks leading up to the big day” (MCR 8 May 1942). Before I proceed, I would like to state that even though I am not of the Church, it occurs to me that the Queen of a Catholic Blessing inevitably would have to be *Mary, the Mother of God!* This point having been overlooked, however, every “girl between 15 and 20 years of age” was invited to enter the “contest.” As race relations in the Morgan City area comprises an entire chapter of this dissertation, I will attempt not to overstress the point, here, that “every girl” meant every White girl.

Now we see the addition of a queen of the ritual celebration, replete with attendants, coronation gown and crown, coronation, coronation ball—coronation and coronation ball held at the Hub Club, a local, upscale, bar. The manner of choosing the queen was somewhat unorthodox as beauty pageants go; the girls were required to sell votes to local businesses and private citizens. Thus the contest was not only for most beautiful, but for most popular. And, given that in the 1940s, most businesses were owned and operated by men, and men generally controlled the money in the family, it is likely that the winner of the queen contest represented the consensus of opinions of the local male population regarding both beauty and popularity. Plans were made for the

first coronation to be filmed by Fox News, and disseminated in usual the manner of newsreel footage. The first queen of the ritual celebration was a young lady named Dorothy Vining. The Morgan City Archives is in possession of photographs of Ms. Vining at the time of the coronation, and she is strikingly beautiful, with a Doris Day type of wholesome sexual radiance. The youth and sexuality of the queen of the Festival has carried through to this day.

The manner of choosing a king for the ritual celebration was less dependable. It would seem natural to pair, with a sexually vibrant woman, a heroic, virile male representative of the community, such as a successful shrimper—perhaps one who had assisted in rescuing survivors of sunken commercial vessels. Such a pairing would have had pagan connotations, but the Church was under control of the local economic hierarchy so that would not have been an issue. In fact the idea of choosing a shrimper for the king did not occur until years later. At the moment that the idea of adding royalty to the Festival events was conceived, it was decided that the king be directly tied to the power elite or the Morgan City seafood industry; and shrimpers were of a lower socioeconomic stratum. In 1943, the queen was Zelma Grabert, a local girl who, as I mentioned immediately above, also possessed attractiveness representative of typical notions relating to the image of American feminine beauty of that era. As to the king, I can find no written explanation describing the selection process. But, clearly on record in the *MCR*, and in photographic evidence in the Morgan City Archives, is the description and picture image of the first male royalty of the ritual: twelve-year-old Elfrey LeBlanc, son of P. A. LeBlanc. It would be dishonest of me not to point up that the image of the sexually radiant Miss Grabert being escorted by a large-eared, elementary school boy is

the first truly ridiculous image that my research has revealed relating to the Morgan City festival. In a ritual event that has produced many absurd images, and juxtapositions of images—an issue that will be discussed throughout this dissertation—not many can rival young Elfrey and Ms. Grabert (MCA 1944). One can only speculate on the possibility of Elfrey's father, being the principal organizer of the ritual celebration, having influenced his son's being chosen as king

In 1944, the Festival attempted to place a more conventional looking couple together: they allowed the queen to choose her own king. Therefore, in this year, Betty Williams chose her boyfriend, B. F. Skinner (no relationship to the psychologist, so far as I can determine). The photographic record of this festival royalty indicates nothing exceptional—only a youthful couple that resembles a homecoming king and queen of virtually any high school in America. As a matter of interest, the person who was not selected as king that year was Joe Webster who, in 1944, brought in the single largest, one-day catch of shrimp recorded to that date. Again, I assert that given the iconography of the Festival, the shrimper appears to have been used, and then excluded except when it suited business interests to behave otherwise.

In 1945, the hand of economic power was seen again when the king of the ritual was chosen from among the ranks of the economically privileged. This young man was the son of the owner of the Morgan City Packing Co. This enterprise owned eight seafood processing plants throughout southwest Louisiana. The father of the 1945 king was a business associate of Harvey Lewis and Mr. LeBlanc. That year's ritual was celebrated just over one week after V-J Day, although the king and queen had already

been selected. By archival accounts, the king spared no expense in preparing for the celebration, including the gift of a strand of pearls given to the queen (MCA 1945).

In a desire to increase outside participation in the Festival, the historical and traditional base of the Festival was constantly being augmented. Also, the Festival organizers, had always been interested in national publicity—a point that was evidenced by the early attempts to receive newsreel coverage. Another means of promotion was to become aligned with national organizations. Towards the end of national alignment, in 1942 the addition of boat racing on Berwick Bay was added to the list of events. The boat races were organized by the “Speed Boat Association of New Orleans” and were scheduled to be filmed by Fox News (*MCR* 8 May 1942). This organization—referred to in a subsequent edition of the *MCR* as the “New Orleans Power Boat Assn., Inc.—was not only prominent within the boundaries of Louisiana, but also held broad national membership, and were considered of national importance in the world of speed boat racing (*MCR* 3 July 1942). Through this affiliation, the Festival received national mention in communities where speed boat racing was popular, as well as newsreel coverage from a prominent film company. The film coverage was capable of juxtaposing images of the ancient ritual blessing, as well as the new exciting American entertainments.

Thus, in reviewing the images from the year of the Festival’s inception through the years of World War II, sufficient evidence may be assembled to formulate assertions relating to the types of information that the local business interests wished to project to the world concerning the personality of Morgan City. The first celebration, in 1936, was restricted to members of the seafood industry. 1937 saw the beginnings of the

appropriation of the power and pageantry of the Church. By the end of World War II, the Festival organizers had appropriated and/or manufactured the symbols and traditions necessary to form a ritual event. In addition to ancient rites and shrimp boats, the Festival could exhibit genuine heroes from home and abroad, youth groups engaged in wholesome community activity, greased pole climbers, surf riders, royalty, speed boat races, and spectacular reproductions of battle. All the expansion in events was necessary for the purpose of attracting national advertising and increasing the tourist interest. Curiously, Morgan City in the period of World War II did not need tourist dollars; and the Festival paid for the entertainment. The desire to attract visitors was to promote the cultural identity and the seafood industry; and, in those days, the two were inseparable.

When Festival organizers decided that they desired to discard the small homogenous celebration for the larger nationally recognized Festival, they must have been aware of the apparent cultural inaccessibility that Morgan City might pose to outsiders. Firstly, the community of Morgan City was seen as a fishing community. Only a very small percentage of the national population has ever made their living working, in any capacity, in the seafood industry. Even coastal inhabitants, if not seafaring, are culturally different from shrimpers. Secondly, the majority of Morgan City inhabitants in the mid 1930s were Catholic. Neither commercial fishing nor Catholicism exists as a national majority. In fact, Catholics were viewed with suspicion within the national, and even the state, political arena, as is evidenced by the fact that by the 1940s the United States had never had a Catholic President and Louisiana had never had a Catholic Governor (Gruver 860; Dufour 4). Therefore, in order to attract national

participation in the Festival, cultural barriers had to be simultaneously exploited and set aside.

The early organizers of the Festival fortuitously decided to advertise a *de facto* folk festival that focused on the exotic nature of nautical life and quaint, but colorful, religious ritual. What has become a matter of contemporary theoretical analysis was apparently already suspected, if not known, by the festival organizers in Morgan City in the late 1930s. This matter is accurately presented by Kirshenblatt-Gimblett:

A key to the appeal of many festivals, with their promise of sensory saturation and thrilling strangeness, is the insatiable and promiscuous human appetite for wonder. The irreducibility of strangeness, a feature of tourist discourse more generally, inscribes on the geography of the exotic a history of receding thresholds of wonder: as exposure exhausts novelty, new ways to raise the threshold of wonder must be found (72).

One of the most obvious means of establishing exoticism within a festival event is to focus that event on some type of diversity. Celebrating the traditions of a single ethnic group is a common approach in many folk festivals (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998 76).

The problem that Morgan City faced with an ethnic focus is that in the period we are discussing, the only clear line dividing ethnicity was the broad line that separated Black (including Creole) and White. Morgan City had been settled in the eighteenth century by the displaced Acadians (of course), as well as Irish, English and Spanish. In 1810, nearly half the White inhabitants were of Anglo-Saxon origin. By the middle of the nineteenth century, immigrants to Morgan City were arriving primarily from France, Germany, and the British Isles (Broussard 1977 10-11). This racial dominance was further supported by migrations of shrimpers (almost invariably of White European stock) to the area during the industry boom of the 1930s and 40s. Blacks were generally excluded from social participation with Whites; thus, for almost two centuries the socioeconomic life of the

area had been represented by stock from Western and Northern Europe. Thus, regarding exoticism in Morgan City, the only images that the early organizers of the Festival could advertise in hopes of attracting outside audiences was the merging of occupation, location, and sacred Catholic ritual. Once growth in tourism became essential to the aims of the Festival—the end of the 1930s and the 1940s—the organizers begin to construct an American Festival.

First they exploited the exotic regional images of the ritual Blessing. To this they added entertainments that had the typically American themes of God and Country. All of this was played out against a picturesque nautical background.

Within the Festival in the 1940s, God was represented by the ritual Blessing; Country was represented by the host of new entertainments—all of which are competitive in nature. The importance of bringing competition into the Festival events was that competition—while not uniquely—is certainly American. Also, the spirit of competition and winning was a projection of the hegemonic values onto community values in general.

The hegemony in Morgan City was, and is, built on capitalistic enterprise. “Capitalism is an economic system based on the principles of market competition, private property and the pursuit of profit.” “The capitalist basis of society in the United States shapes the character of the nation’s other institutions” (Andersen and Taylor 2000 455). Like capitalism as an institution, and with capitalism as the driving force, the seafood industry of Morgan City shaped all other institutions in its community. Among the values they instilled in those institutions was the natural capitalistic inclination towards competition. Thus, the concepts of competition and capitalism (which also drove the economic hegemony) were inseparable. Competition is also very American. Haviland

points up that the norm in American society is to foster competition from an early age through “independence training.” He goes on to explain that the result of this training creates a social culture where:

Displays of aggression and sexuality are encouraged, or at least tolerated to a greater degree than where dependence training is the rule. In schools, and even in the family, competition is emphasized. In schools, considerable resources are devoted to competitive sports, but competition is fostered within the classroom as well: overtly through such devices as spelling bees and competition for prizes. Thus, by the time one has grown up in U.S. society, regardless of what one may think about it, one has received a clear message: Success is something that comes at someone else’s expense (409-10).

This highly competitive nature of American society prompted Turnbull to observe: “Even the team spirit, so loudly touted is merely a more efficient way, through limited cooperation, to ‘beat’ a greater number of people more efficiently” (1983 74). Thus it is normal in America—and therefore in Morgan City—to be competitive and capitalistic. To support that competition is traditional to Morgan City, Broussard states:

Athletics, here as elsewhere in America, is a vital part of community life. In the “old days” when the tempo of life was much slower, Sunday baseball was king. Parks in Morgan City, Patterson, Franklin and elsewhere were filled with cheering spectators quaffing beer and soda water, and castigating the umpires.

In the ‘40’s competition was so rife among parish teams, that players came from as far as New Orleans and Lake Charles to fill positions on local teams. Fisticuffs, on and off the field, was no unusual occasion, and a homerun by one of the local heroes always prompted a spontaneous passing of the hat among the jubilant fans (1977 164).

Thus, competition is consistent with capitalism, is consistent with Americanism—and the economic force that drove the Morgan City Festival embraced them all as a tool of self-promotion. Through the infusing of its presence throughout all other social institutions in Morgan City, the seafood industry held the power to imbue the Festival with the symbols

and traditions necessary to forge a ritual celebration, and turn the ritual to their advantage by using it as a means to focus on their products.

But it wasn't all hard work. The organizers of the Morgan City festival were, in part, fortunate that they were positioned geographically on a picturesque bay that could be filled with colorfully decorated boats, an equally colorful Clergy that already owned the oldest religious rites in Christendom (a valuable aid in promoting the secular ritual), and a surging economy. Obviously, there are some industries that could not have so easily attracted visitors nor have readily allowed for religious participation (imagine if Texas City, Texas attempted a refinery festival with a blessing of the fumes, or Chicago a slaughterhouse festival with a blessing of the bovines—I could go on). So, there was something of serendipity in the fact that people were interested in what was happening in Morgan City—an interest largely focused on the increasing economic activity. It is also of importance that the organizers of the festival were knowledgeable entrepreneurs. They had succeeded in forging a union that was paying impressive dividends to both the community and to themselves. This business savvy is what created the success of the seafood industry in Morgan City, and what drove the growth of the Festival. Being economically astute, the organizers did what businessmen do; they employed means to engage the public. Their focus was Americanism with Louisiana regionalism as an exotic draw.

Essential to their mission of festival growth was the adoption of typically American images. This was accomplished by enfolding such organizations as the Young Men's Business Club, the Boy Scouts into the organizational mix. Add to this a beauty pageant with attendant "royalty," boat races sponsored by a national organization, various

entertainments such as “greased pole,” drinking and dancing until “late that night.” While none of the immediately abovementioned components of the ritual event can be claimed as originally American, certainly America has placed its stamp on them. No one would argue that Americans vigorously pursue business, hence, the Young Men’s Business Club. The Boy Scouts, in spite of their inception in England, are based on the “Sons of Daniel Boone”—an American organization—and certainly embody the spirit of American pioneers. America did not invent the beauty contest, but the Miss America contest became its archetype. Royalty is particularly un-American; but the imitation of it is not, and occasionally some authority is conveyed in the achievement of becoming a mock king or queen. Nautical racing has likely existed since a few moments past the production of the world’s second boat; but the fascination with making anything mechanical move faster, no matter the cost, is a specifically American characteristic. As for the enthusiasm with which Americans approach excess in drinking and sexual energy in dancing, one should merely view popular images from the 1920s to the present. I cannot speculate on the origin of the “greased pole”; however, if there were an international competition, Americans would likely claim that American poles were greasier.

To revive an earlier concept: Each of the immediately abovementioned events, entertainments, and pursuits can claim a basis in competition. The purpose of the Young Men’s Business Club is obvious: to promote the business interests of young men. And to promote business interests is to place businesses in competition with one another for the limited amount of money that is available to spend. The Boy Scouts compete for the hierarchical positions within their organization, and numbers of merit badges.

Achievement within the Boy Scouts can carry significant social currency and respect from mainstream, self-achieving adults. Festival royalty is, by definition, a contest based on local tastes and prejudices. Boat racing is, obviously, a contest; and a dangerous one. “Displays of aggression and sexuality” can be found in drinking and dancing. Drinking is an enterprise that has a tendency to escalate into various forms of competition ranging from drinking contests, to the aforementioned “fisticuffs”—quite likely an entertainment encouraged by alcohol—at the baseball games. Sexual expression is often a component of American dance styles, and is a competition for attention and certain sorts of popularity. And, given the proper encouragement, people can even be induced to compete in climbing a greased pole.

Thus, within this context of competition, we can locate another characteristic of economic power: its magnetic draw. Given that hegemony pervades all social systems, and is a visible, apparently accessible force, then any who desire to become part of hegemony must compete for position within it. Whether these persons actually hold any reasonable probability of achieving such a goal can be known only to the hegemony. What can be known is that if the prevailing power elite states that there is a contest for position, those who are not part of that force have nothing to lose by competing. The invitation of groups into the circle of organizers, then, gives the appearance of the opening of position for which such a contest can exist. Dangling the carrot of power is an efficacious manipulative tactic. The organizers of the Morgan City festival had merely to invite those who wished for a portion of the power that radiated from the emerging Festival in order to achieve a positive response for those in power. It is a matter of great interest that in capitalist societies those with the greatest economic—and therefore

political, social, and cultural—influence and assets, generally receive more through the consent of the exploited than the rest of the society is able to purchase. This is due to the level of desire that individuals possess to achieve highly in any or all of the areas that are controlled by capital. Femia strongly hints at this notion in summarizing Gramsci:

“political and social preferences . . . reflect a man’s assumptions about how society is and should be run, and in capitalist societies these assumptions are largely set by the ruling class through its highly developed agencies of political socialization” (1975 34). Thus, not only economic gain, but also the prestige that can be granted—through political and social affiliations—by those possessed of economic control has an allure to those who exist outside the ruling stratum.

It is important, here, to point up that the economic power base of Morgan City was constructed, not inherited. That is to say that the successful administrators of the seafoods union were those who sought power and gained it. The creation of the Festival was a hegemonic manipulation to traditionalize its own power—to make that power appear historical. While the ritual celebration was a combination of traditional regional exoticism and brash American events and entertainments, the Festival maintained fixity in annually honoring the local economic base.

The merging of ritual structure, and prestige of tradition is what Sangren refers to as the “cultural construction of history” (1987 207-215). The idea of such a construction threads through Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* in his work on the relatively modern construction of nations and nationalism (1991 1-7, 47-65, 187-206). Importantly, Anderson points up that constructions of national history could not have been accomplished without the ability of the print media to suddenly establish that history’s

characteristics. Such notions as those of Sangren and Anderson are important in understanding the ability of festival celebrations to spring from traditions that may only give the appearance of antiquity, the history having been invented to serve the agents of whatever power controls them.

That a way of life may be recorded in history, and the characteristics of that way of life socialized into the next generation as historical fact capable of grounding tradition, is the power of tradition and the performances it engenders. Such is further evidence that the enfolding of youth into the Morgan City festival had the effect of perpetuating the Festival celebration. Thus, we are who we are partly because, not only do we “imagine” our recollections; but, many of our recollections have been imagined for us through the production of historical data.

This is not to state that, in the 1940s, real shrimp were not being caught in the Gulf just south of Morgan City, or that a real war was not being fought throughout the world, or that people’s emotions were (and are) insincere; it means simply that our notions of those events are viewed within the context that we have been taught and conditioned to view them. Thus, the direction of the Morgan City Festival was inclined toward activities that were and are defined as American. But even while the Festival celebrated the robust economic growth of Morgan City with new robust competitive events, it was still the quaint exotic aspect of the ritual Blessing that sold it to the public.

To conclude, by the early 1940s the ruling economic power in Morgan City was the seafood union—owned and operated by large companies run by successful entrepreneurs. This power arrived accidentally when enormous shrimp catches became readily available due to a migration of these shrimp to an area just south of Morgan City

in the Gulf of Mexico. Building on economic success and the legendary status of the Louisiana shrimpers, the economic hegemony of Morgan City began to augment a previously exclusive celebration into a community celebration based on the economic boom brought about by the rising fortunes of the seafood industry. At the moment that the exclusivity was abandoned, and the festival celebration became a device for the perpetuation and aggrandizement of the cultural identity of the seafood industry, local individuals, businesses, and organizations were enfolded into the image inasmuch as doing so projected the desired community image.

That the seafood industry, and its union and representatives, truly possessed the power of hegemony is exhibited in these adoptions. It is clear that the seafood industry possessed influence over the Church, the press, civic organizations, private business owners, and local citizens in general. Representatives of each of these groups publicly endorsed the Festival and its message of cultural identity. A certain amount of the power attributed to the local seafood industry was statistically legitimate. Morgan City was, in fact, supplying one fourth of the nation's consumption of shrimp. The fact that part of the success of this port was due to the normal, occasional migration of shrimp in a manner fortuitous to Morgan City industry, was somewhat overlooked by the attention given the leaders of the union whose efforts were efficacious in manipulating market price for their product. This ability increased the prestige of certain individuals within the seafood industry and its union. Those individuals were also the founders, and organizers, of the Festival—an instrument for the celebration of their efforts through their visibility as both economic leaders and sponsors of the celebration. Thus, the Festival,

created by economic hegemony, celebrated and legitimized the very power of that hegemony.

I have asserted above that it was during the period of the War that the festival became traditionalized. I believe this for two reasons: that the Church had already established a ritual component rich with tradition and prestige; and that the War provided an intensity of feeling within the population of Morgan City such that the appropriation of American themes and traditions could be enfolded in the Festival, thus imbuing the Festival not only with ritual power but also with exuberant celebration. That the Church was already related to the local hegemony is supported through application of the definition of hegemony that has been established. Thus, it appears that in Morgan City, the people were inclined to embrace the burgeoning economic base, its ritual celebration, the increasing size and number of entertainments, and trust those who possessed the expertise in technology and organization.

The need for some exotic attraction was essential for the festival to initially possess a popular base of participants. This was provided by the fortuitous combination of geography and theatrical Clergy. In 1949, Carl Carmer was struck by the “Catholicness” of fleet blessings in Biloxi that had a “spirit of fiesta” (98-105). These can be compared to the 1951 “solemn religious service rather than a gala civic celebration” described by a Baptist minister who prayed for the fleet at Bon Secour (*Mississippi Register* 1951). I suspect that even if the Fathers Toups and Mistretta had received the solemnity they had requested, that still would not have satisfied the Baptist definition of that term (solemnity). Had there been no picturesque bay with “gaily decorated boats” and the presence of the Church, it is likely that the celebration would

have remained exclusive due to lack of interest by outside participants. However, the setting seems to have been sufficiently interesting to draw a wide range of members of the news media within the first three to four years of the festival's existence. The expanding of events on an annual basis was necessary to keep that interest alive and growing (see Kirshenblatt-Gimblett above). To use as a base the closest images to exotic that were available (Gulf coast, and Catholic clergy), and then build a festival based on typical American pursuits (the visibility of Boy Scouts, festival royalty, racing) seems possibly to be a statement against the usual perceptions of exoticism related to Louisiana—once referred to by Jonathan Daniels as “a Caribbean country” (Dufour 6). Thus, the establishment of a ritual celebration celebrating American capitalism, and exuberant expansion of American entertainments, was adopted rather than a festival that focused on native or ethnic identity; however, the celebration required the presence of the exotic icons of shrimpers and Church theatricality to sell the Festival.

Another reason for the success of the celebration came from the economic astuteness of the organizers. The growth of the popularity of the Festival paralleled the strength and success of the seafood industry. This dominant industry had become accustomed, in a short period of time, to supplying an enormous demand. As interest grew, serendipitously, in the annual Festival, the forces of the seafood industry began not only to supply the demand for interesting entertainment; they also helped to create the demand that the religious ritual supplied. This was accomplished through the typical American means of advertising. The War, inadvertently, aided in the success of advertising during this period due to the fact that “people found themselves unusually dependent on mass-produced diversion and information. They bought more newspapers

and magazines, listened to more radio broadcasts, and attended more films” (Baughman 1). The local news media was certainly supportive of the local events. It is also known that by 1939 the celebration was already known in New Orleans (later in the 1940s, letters requesting advertising on WWL radio in New Orleans were discovered), and that newsreel footage was disseminated through distribution that accompanied the presentation of feature films. All of these advertising forces that sold the community image, the icons, and the Festival advanced the cause of the seafood industry.

The dominant economic interests of Morgan City had forged the Festival that celebrated the dominant economic interests of Morgan City. By applying the power of prestige found in the traditions of Church, American capitalism, entertainment, commercial advertising and self-promotion, the Festival organizers created a cultural construction of its history and laid the groundwork for its perpetuation. It would require a force that was real, palpable, and material to dislodge the hegemony of the Morgan City seafood industry from its position.

CHAPTER IV—FISH AND OIL: THE STRUGGLE TO MAINTAIN CULTURAL HEGEMONY WITHIN ECONOMIC SHIFTS

I can think of no phenomenon that is more devastating than the loss of identity—no matter how that loss is packaged. There is literary and historical precedent for my assertion. In classical tragedy the most fortunate of heroes—those who fall from the highest of mortal positions—are the ones who die. The others must live out their lives displaced from, and dispossessed of, all they have come to know and love. In the modern world, identity sought is dignity sought; and identity lost is the humiliation of dignity. The feeling of alienation that accompanies loss of identity incites radical response from crushing depression, to outrageous acts of attempted, and sometimes realized, retaliation. Loss of identity is also loss of certainty. For one to lose dignity and certainty is for one to grieve; and grieve until memory is mercilessly lost, or the condition and circumstances of identity can be restored.

Individual identity and cultural identity are inextricably linked. In America, those identities are frequently tied to economics and occupation. And so it was, and is, in Morgan City. Beginning in the late 1940s, the local economic base of the seafood industry began to disappear, thus dismantling, to some extent, the local hegemony. The new economic base for the community resided in a force so potent that it literally rearranged the landscape of Morgan City. That force was the petrochemical industry. Under the best of circumstances the seafood industry could never have successfully contested the oil industry for economic superiority. But economics was not the only matter at stake. The identity of the community, constructed by the pervasive power of the seafood industry, was vulnerable to degradation due to the indifference of the oil industry toward the behavior of its employees. By the late 1940s the Festival was well

established as the traditional, advertised representative of Morgan City's community identity. Thus, while the seafood industry could no longer boast control of the economic base, it could contest the configuration of community identity within the Festival. That it did so is a matter of record. Thus, the contestation was set up along cultural lines, with tradition battling change against a virtually irresistible economic force whose *only* interest was profit. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the evolution of that contest with an eye toward the maintenance of cultural identity amidst hegemonic shifts. Key, also, is the assertion that economic power can pervade all social institutions, even when that power displays indifference toward the community

This chapter relies primarily on archival sources that report actual events in the evolution of the Festival, including its official naming. The line of evidence and analysis follows the actual chronology of events as closely as possible. The analysis of the events relies also on some fairly extensive personal experience, examination of artistic representations that depict the oil industry, and exploration of theory that relates to the power of tradition in sustaining cultural identity.

In Morgan City, at the end of the War, there seemed to be a general sense of contentment with the still unnamed ritual celebration. An article appeared in 1946 that praised Mr. LeBlanc for his work since the celebration's inception. In this article Mr. LeBlanc makes clear the economic foundation of the festival and its growth: "I started it 11 years ago and it has grown so big I hardly recognize it. However, it doesn't matter how much work it is as long as the community benefits from all the publicity" (MCA *MCR* 6 September 1946). This sense of community homogeneity and unified moral order was soon to become disrupted.

Almost from the first movements of the petrochemical business into the Morgan City area there was contention. Kerr-McGee opened its first office in Morgan City in June of 1947, and began offshore oil exploration immediately (MCA *MCR* 1949). The issue of offshore drilling had the effect of dividing the community. Traditionalists saw the threat to the shrimping business—a business that had existed in Morgan City since before the Depression, and was perceived to have more vested in the community (MCA 1947). Mostly, however, the community saw the opportunity to increase its already substantial economic base. While the community was beginning to respond in various manners, the Festival was growing larger as a civic event, but with some reduction in shrimping participation.

In 1947, the festival was permanently expanded to 2 day affair filled with an even larger variety of events and entertainments. Again the Blessing was advertised as the principal attraction; however, participation by numbers of boats was significantly reduced, and other features of the festival had vanished. The lower number of participants in the Blessing and subsequent water parade was accounted for in the *Southern Fisherman*: “The smaller than usual number of boats was to be expected. Many of Louisiana’s boats, formerly fishing out of Berwick Bay, are now in Texas waters.” This article also alluded to the abandonment of the annual practice of giving away large amounts of free boiled shrimp to the festival participants. Summing up the general atmosphere among shrimpers, this piece states:

And as the past couple of years have not been overly profitable for shrimp fishermen in spite of the high prices involved, the free and generous spirit prevailing at former ceremonies was somewhat lacking. Especially notable by its absence was the feast of boiled shrimp which used to decorate long tables placed on the waterfront (August 1947).

Simply put, shrimping was not sufficiently profitable in 1947 for shrimpers to feel as though they could donate their inventory for the good of the Festival. An earlier edition of the same publication spoke of the history of jumbo shrimp sold through the port of Morgan City but added that those shrimp were not being caught, the smaller shrimp being caught were harder to sell, and the general cost of post-War living had made the high priced seafood difficult to afford (*MCR* January 1947). Thus, supply and demand were both down. The migration of boats from Morgan City could only be explained by a migration of shrimp from the area (*MCA* 1947). Naturally, this migration was blamed on the business of oil exploration operating seismographic testing in the waters just south of Morgan City in the Gulf of Mexico (a matter discussed immediately below).

The migration of shrimp away from Morgan City stirred public sentiment. Even though a new economic base was establishing itself, the new base did not have the traditions of dependability that the shrimping business had afforded. Community attitudes took a variety of forms from invoking and thanking God for shrimping, to angry protests against the oil industry. These points are evidenced as follows.

An editorial submitted by the local news media of Morgan City praised the local shrimping community for its hard work and reverence:

For a dozen years, Morgan City has held a Blessing of the Fleet ceremony bordering on spectacle. For years, each succeeding year showed more and more boats in line, as well as larger, more costly vessels. The tasty jumbo shrimp, king of Louisiana's choice seafoods, was climbing rapidly in national popularity; the supply seemed inexhaustible and the prices constantly increasing. So more boats were built, adding to Morgan City's blessing spectacle until by their numbers this annual pageant almost appeared to present a bay literally paved with trawlers (*MCA MCR* 1947).

The same editorial directly credited God with economic prosperity and yearly good weather for the Blessing. I have found no article condemning God for the lack of economic prosperity in the seafood industry; however, the following piece did directly condemn the oil companies for driving away the shrimp:

All over the country, it's a serious matter for any irresponsible poacher to toss a piece of dynamite into a creek to kill a few fish; the jails are ready for such, and the minute the Isaac Walton League or any group of sportsmen hears of any dynamiting complaints are made in a hurry and action is taken or else. Yet in Louisiana's coastal waters, full of shrimp and fish and shellfish, dynamite is exploded by the hundreds of tons by oil exploration companies. Individual charges of explosives run from a few pounds to hundreds and it is the height of idiocy to insist that such explosions do not harm the fisheries. One Louisiana scientist explains weakly that such shots are harmful only in the immediate vicinity—pleasantly overlooking the fact that the whole coastal area is plastered with shots, each “harmful only in the immediate vicinity” (MCA 1947).

This was an early example of ecological activism that has accompanied offshore drilling since its inception. Areas along the Gulf Coast have constantly battled with petroleum companies over the impact on local fishing and aquatic life in general (Durrenberger 1992 164-168). Such was also the tone of the aforementioned film, *Thunder Bay*. While some locals with whom I have spoken of this period do not remember severe contentiousness between shrimpers and oil companies—a social and economic battle that had been waged fifty years prior to my questioning about the matter—this editorial and the Archive records suggest that the film contained a level of accuracy regarding animosity between the two industries. It is also known that shrimpers who did not wish to relocate their operations refitted their boats for leasing to the oil exploration business, further attesting to the belief in the likelihood that the oil business was more profitable (*Southern Fisherman* August, 1947). Kerr-McGee developed the

first producing offshore oil rig forty-three miles south of Morgan City in November, 1947.

In May 1948, just 6 months after the first producing offshore well was brought in, the community of Morgan City replied with a change to the Festival. The ritual event that had, from its inception, been referred to as “celebration,” and “Blessing of the Boats,” and “Celebration of the Blessing of the Boats,” and a variety of configurations of “celebration,” “Blessing,” “boats,” “fleet,” “shrimp fleet,” etcetera, became the first chartered harvest festival in the state of Louisiana, under the name of the Louisiana Shrimp Festival and Fair Association. It was chartered, without need for renewal for 99 years (“Articles of Incorporation” Book 3 St. Mary Parish Records 592). The newly formed association, headed by P. A. LeBlanc, began to refer to the annual ritual as the Louisiana Shrimp Festival. The timing of this official move to incorporate, and charter a festival with an official name, appears to be a direct attempt by the seafood industry and its representatives to hold their cultural prestige.

Further, the organizers of the ritual/celebration mobilized to include contributions by every element of local business volunteers for the purpose of immediately making the Festival larger and more systematized. Committees were created to deal with the following problems in organizing the Festival: policing, free act, beauty contest, safety, street parade, games, distinguished guests boat, welcome, fireworks, hospitality, press boat, Louisiana products display, water parade, registration and information, marine exhibition, free shrimp, court, and court ball (MCA 1947). It was the position of the seafood union and its hierarchy to maintain interest in the Festival for perpetuity, and for the Festival to forever retain its cultural identity. This was to be accomplished not only

by an expansion of the organizational system in Morgan City, but an embracing of the other communities on Berwick Bay, as well. In an interview with *Southern Fisherman* magazine, C. E. King, chairman of the board of the Louisiana Shrimp Festival and Fair Association articulated the “attempt to bring the efforts together of the leaders of all our communities nearby,” and to “have something to offer to the public, and that next year—and the many years thereafter—this annual festival and fair will constantly grow in appeal and popularity into one of the great events of the South” (MCA 1947).

This sudden flurry of civic activity—creating a corporation, employing the volunteer efforts of hundred of members of the community, publicly acknowledging contributions of communities other than Morgan City, naming the ritual event—can easily be understood within the context of a reaction to the threat by the presence of oil companies and offshore workers against community cohesiveness and cultural identity.

In the early 1980s I had reason to be close to two communities that were experiencing a boom in oil exploration and development: my hometown of Caldwell, Texas, and Wichita Falls, Texas where I owned a business. I have never experienced any force more powerful than oil companies possess in rearranging cultural and, literally, geographical landscapes. In Caldwell, the population doubled almost over night. Housing of all kinds sprang up anywhere there was space. Businesses augmented their inventories to meet the needs and desires of oilfield workers. Major oil companies and support services for oilfield operations built offices if no existing real estate was available. There was the constant smell of crude oil and diesel fumes. And, being a largely agricultural area where everyone owned at least some land, virtually everyone I knew believed that they were about to become wealthy. In Wichita Falls, it was worse,

for Wichita Falls lies in the center of the old Texas-Oklahoma “oil patch.” The early petroleum development of this area was the focus of the film, *The Stars Fell On Henrietta* (Warner Brothers 1996). The revival of oil activity in this area attracted a transient group of oilfield workers that completely disrupted the non-growth oriented community. The overall effect of this migration of a large group of rowdy individuals who had no roots in the community, suddenly being economically dominant, was to create an environment where these transient workers were tolerated by the same people who were disgusted by their activities. If one wished for a drink of alcohol, some bar or other was open twenty-four hours a day. Prostitutes walked the streets in packs with the limited police force looking on. It was in Wichita Falls, after devoting a difficult day to repossessing televisions and stereos—mostly from the very folk I have described—I visited one of the local drinking establishments, owned by a fifty year old man, also a newcomer to the area, who had spent seventeen years of his life in prison. There, at the age of thirty, an unsolicited prophecy was offered to me seven years prior to my ever seeing the inside of a university classroom. The man, covered with oil from working on a rig all day, stared at me for some time; and when my eyes met his he announced, “you look like a goddam college professor.” I suspect that he thought that would stimulate a fight of some sort. My point is that I have seen, firsthand, the manner and rapidity with which oil exploration and development can alter the image of community. Evidence of similar behavior can be found in an account from the mayor of Morgan City in the mid-1980s. Referring to the early oil boom in Morgan City, he referred to the “carefree days” after “the 1947 discovery of offshore oil. Those were the days when the mayor had to order the bars to close at 2 a.m. because workers kept reporting for work drunk and silly,

the days when the oil boats crowded out the shrimp boats because they made more money, and everyone had a job” (LaFleur *Laurence Times* 1986).

Even while the hegemony of the seafood industry battled against its usurpation by the petroleum industry, it utilized the petroleum industry to advance its goal of further establishing the Festival. This action began at almost the same moment that Kerr-McGee moved its office into Morgan City. In July and August of 1947, the festival organizers had received advertising on the Esso Reporter, a radio program that was broadcast by the Esso Standard Oil Company from WWL radio in New Orleans. There is evidence that Esso did not charge the Festival for this service. The advertising was repeated in 1948, after the Festival had incorporated (MCA “Letter from Esso Standard Oil Company Advertising and Sales Department” 15 July 1948).

Another obvious approach was to invite oil boats to participate in the Blessing. This point could almost be overlooked when viewing a schedule of events from the 1948 Festival. The events included, boxing, a magician, greasy pig contest, greased pole contest, ladies nail driving, fire works, football game, high school bands, boys’ bicycle race, another fight, men’s race, jitterbug dance contest, coronation and ball, street parade, beauty contest, speed boat races, and blessing of fishing and work boats of all kinds. These events were expanded to a three-day celebration (MCA “Louisiana Shrimp Festival, Schedule of Events” 1948). The only other types of work boats in the area at that time that would fit into Berwick Bay were oil equipment boats. To aid in the financing of the Festival, the corporation was able to receive a grant of \$5,000 per year from the Louisiana Department of Agriculture—a grant “only given to communities which have some agricultural product to advertise and capitalize on” (MCA 1948). No

mention, whatsoever, is given to the petroleum industry in a seven-page article in the *Southern Fisherman*; however it is noted that the “blessing program has been an affair of the fishermen (September 1948). To reinvigorate the notion of seafood at the Festival, the tradition of giving away free shrimp was returned in 1948—2750 pounds. Newspaper advertising and reporting ranged from Morgan City, to Shreveport (*Shreveport Times* 12 September 1948), to Washington D. C. (*Washington Evening Star* 20 September 1948). After the Festival the *MCR* proclaimed, “1948 Shrimp Festival is Greatest in History” (24 September 1948). Technically it was the first Shrimp Festival in history. That aside, the crowd was estimated that year at 30,000—a number greater than that claimed by most of the popular Louisiana festivals today (Angers and Back 1999).

Publicly, the Shrimp Festival was open to any and all; but officially it had retreated back to exclusivity with its renaming. This image was further entrenched in the choosing of Festival royalty. I have already commented on the continued manner of choosing a queen. Since the first queen was chosen in 1942, she has been required to be young and beautiful. The selection of king did not settle onto any particular process during the 1940s; however, every king in the last half of this decade was either a shrimp boat captain, in the seafood processing business, or the son of owners of both boats and processing plants. The image of seafood and the power of that industry not only remained prominent in the festival, the festival growth gave the illusion that the traditional hegemony loomed larger than ever.

The relationship between the organizers of the Festival and the oil companies, while remaining limited, was quietly and insidiously expanding. The State of Louisiana was partially funding the Louisiana Shrimp Festival each year, based on shrimp being an

agricultural product. Anything dealing with the planting, harvesting, or managing agricultural resources was considered the legitimate focus of the Festival from those granting monies for Festival promotion. Even machinery, such as boats, marine engines, and any commercial fishing equipment could legitimately be displayed as part of the Festival events, inasmuch as they could be directly linked to the agricultural development. As early as 1947, the festival had set aside space for displays of marine equipment. By 1949, the space was expanded to include those who wished to showcase other products. Letters from General Seafoods, Inc., and Evangeline Pepper and Food Products, Inc. evidence that display space was being offered to other areas of the general agricultural industry (MCA 19 July 1949, 12 August 1949). Also discovered among these letters is a response from Kerr-McGee, thanking the Morgan City-Berwick Chamber of Commerce for their offer of space for an “oil display during the shrimp festival” (15 August 1949). It will be a matter of importance below that oil is not considered an agricultural product.

The link to the oil companies through advertising continued in 1949, as well. In a letter to Esso Standard Oil, Co. the “LA. SHRIMP FESTIVAL & FAIR ASS’N., INC.” requested what appears to be complimentary advertising time from the oil company. The question is asked if the Esso Reporter “will give us some publicity over WWL” (MCA 16 July 1949). This letter goes on to inquire as to how much might the Festival expect to receive. All things considered—the “Blessing of Work Boats of All Kinds”, one oil display, and a few advertisements apparently received gratis from Esso Standard Oil—the Louisiana Shrimp Festival had only a peripheral, and very marginal, relationship with oil. The limited relationship seemed to favor the strength of the seafood industry, which must

have been viewed as merely being a good host—offering display space to Kerr-McGee and Blessing oil boats (though there is a likelihood that boats other than shrimp boats were being blessed because their captains had previously been the captains of shrimp boats who had refitted their vessels for offshore service).

If there appeared to be any ongoing relationship between the seafood industry, and the oil companies in Morgan City, that relationship would seem to have been inconsequential. From the public standpoint, oil got a grudging mention in an article the 1949 “Annual Seafoods Edition” of the *MCR*, entitled “Why a Seafood Festival”? Given the support that this article gives to what I have asserted thus far, I reproduce the greater part of it here. The article answers:

The past, present and future prosperity of the coastal area of Louisiana is closely allied with the capture, handling marketing and conservation of fresh and salt water seafoods.

The value of these seafoods to the fishermen alone is greater than the largest agricultural crop or any other local industry built on natural resources, with the possible exception of minerals.

Recognizing the need for a program of sound and safe promotion for this great industry, the law-making bodies of Louisiana decided that the Blessing of the Fleet on Berwick Bay each year for 14 years including 1949 is a “natural” for publicity to reflect benefit on the commercial fisheries of the state. Because of its picturesque features, this annual event results in national and international advertising and increased consumption of that major crop—SHRIMP—and the other millions of pounds of Louisiana seafoods.

The celebration at Morgan City and Berwick has brought visitors here from every state in the union. The name and fame of Louisiana seafoods have been spread by newspapers, periodicals, radio and newsreels. All this was accomplished for years with practically no money, and practically no cost to the industry.

Shrimp trawlers in local waters multiplied to a dangerous point but 75% of the increase was by established dealers. The remaining increase was due to investors, most of them local, who bought boats to share in what was believed to be an endless harvest. The situation is adjusting itself. Emphasis today is on the promotion of the sale of seafoods.

The great State of Louisiana has seen fit to take a part in the promotional work in behalf of seafoods just as it has for years helped to encourage agriculture, livestock, poultry, etc.

The appropriation granted the Shrimp Festival Ass'n. last year and again this year has permitted a group of loyal, patriotic, unselfish workers to stage a celebration which is recognized everywhere as outstanding among such occasions along the entire Gulf coast.

While the benefits of the fisheries industry are far-reaching and continuous, there is also a splendid benefit to local business and the communities as a whole as it provides an opportunity to show the culture, the wealth and resources and present facilities and unlimited potentialities of Morgan City and Berwick, St. Mary Parish and the coastal section of Louisiana.

Everything that has been discussed thus far regarding the powerful hold of the seafoods industry—reasons to increase the size of the Festival, the exploitation of the Blessing as a “natural” tool for advertising and promotion, and the showcasing of the cultural identity of the region—is discussed in some form or fashion in this article. The issues of economics, the use of the Church as a means, and the plan for perpetuation of the seafood industry whether through catching/processing or promotion/sale, and attracting an international audience to the Morgan City culture are all statements of a dying hegemony attempting to entrench its cultural position. It also attests to the extent that private business and individual citizens had gone for the public advertising of community image.

Indeed, the 1949 Festival was even larger and more grandiose than the 1948 “Greatest in History” Festival. So well attended was this three-day celebration that accommodations for all of the visitors could not be found. The demand was such that people were offering rooms in their private homes; and requests to find a place on a trawler to better witness the Blessing and ride in the water parade also exceeded supply. And again, the legislators “sniffed the scent of good promotion for the state’s commercial fisheries and offered to help pay the check” (Lehmann 10 September 1949). Not only

was the rise in interest in the Blessing of benefit to the prestige of the church; once again the fishing boats—although fishing in 1949 mostly in Mexican waters—were returning to Morgan City with record tonnage of catches. These factors—in addition to all of the promotion and advertising—aided in shoring up the visibility and prestige of the seafood industry in Morgan City and surrounds, as well as continuing to place focus on the theatricality of the Church.

The rise in catches offered an illusion that the Morgan City seafood industry was reviving itself to compete for hegemony with the petroleum industry. If so that illusion was fleeting. The shrimping and seafood industry measured their income in millions of dollars. In 1949 there appeared an article in the *MCR* that shook the economic prestige of the seafood industry. The article was entitled “BILLION DOLLAR OIL POTENTIAL” with a subtitle of “Great Investment, Huge Payrolls Boon To Area Prosperity.” The article began:

This port is in the center of a billion dollar off-shore oil potential. Thousands of dollars in payrolls are distributed here each week, and millions in construction and in drilling have been spent by major oil and construction companies here and off-shore.

Morgan City’s and Berwick’s locations on the Intracoastal so near to the Gulf offer convenient bases for operations (MCA *MCR* 1949).

The *Review* presented the names of the oil companies operating out of the Morgan City area: “Magnolia Petroleum Company, Atlantic Refining Company, Sun Oil Company, Kerr-McGee Oil Industries, Inc., and Pure Oil Company.”

The mere fact that so many oil companies were already moving into Morgan City had profound implications for the seafood industry and for the community. The oil companies would draw from the local labor pool (or worse, attract undesirables), use up dock space, disturb the ecosystem, and force shrimpers elsewhere.

Regardless of how much tonnage the seafood industry could produce, it would never be competitive with an industry that brought in billions of dollars. Only five years before the article on the oil industry ran, the Morgan City seafood industry was excited to have a shrimp catch bring in less than four million dollars. Still, the image of the community, and the seafood industry, was reflected in the Festival. However, a last interesting image of foreshadowing should be remembered from the 1949 Festival. That year, cash prizes were given to the owners of the “best decorated” boats—all shrimp trawlers. The judges of the contest stood on the deck of the “Robert S. Kerr”—an offshore oil equipment boat belonging to Kerr-McGee. Here was the establishment of a new icon: oil providing the platform by which shrimping is judged.

The prestige of the Festival was still felt through the Berwick Bay area, despite the obvious, ubiquitous presence of the petroleum industry. In fact, as the Festival grew, the contesting carried over to include communities, not just seafood company owners and oilmen. This contesting among the communities on the Bay concerned the housing of certain of the Festival events in their respective towns. Even though the seafood industry was less economically powerful than the oil industry, the Festival still had an enormous advertising and promotion value. In Berwick, the Junior Chamber of Commerce took the lead in a movement to demand that more events be shared by Morgan City, specifically with Berwick (*MCR* 5 May 1950). With an unusually unenthusiastic tone, the *MCR* reported that the 1950 Festival was well attended, but “the crowd was apparently not so large as in the past two years.” It went on to state, “it was especially difficult to gauge the crowd this year since attractions were spread over a wide area encompassing both Morgan City and Berwick. From this we can see that the Junior Chamber of Commerce

was successful in wresting some of the Festival events from the Morgan City organizers. One need not look to complicated theories of performance to understand what an elementary knowledge of stagecraft would tell us: to spread out the audience destroys the sense of communion attendant with crowds all engaged in the same pursuit, and when one must drive across a bridge and find another parking space to see the rest of the events, one might not wish to bother.

While the Festival continued to grow to the point of inviting contestation over which community could appropriate what site for what performance, the shrimping industry continued to decline. Returning to traditional enthusiasm, the 1951 Festival was again predicted to be the “Greatest Festival Celebration Ever Staged at This Port” (*MCR* 24 August 1951). This article lists the largest ever variety of events—with additions of vaudeville acts, model airplane races, marksmanship matches, and a horse show—but none of the events are actually mentioned as taking place in Berwick (*MCR* 24 August 1951). In fact, in examining articles from the 1951 Festival, Berwick is named in all, but no events were to be scheduled there. Outside the expansion in Festival events, there appears to be no particular reason for the “greatness” that was predicted. Economic problems pervaded the shrimping industry all along the Gulf coast. Shrimpers in some of the areas struck for higher prices; and during a period of the summer of 1951, several clashes were reported between union and independent shrimpers. Prices had plunged to the point where a pound of jumbo shrimp was being sold off of the boat for 18 cents. Smaller shrimp were going for as low as \$8.50 per a 210 pound barrel. Threats of violence abounded (*Times Picayune* 1951). Also, the \$5,000 annual grant for the Festival from the Louisiana Department of Agriculture arrived in 1951 with a reminder that it was

to be used “for the sole purpose of funding competitive awards and prizes to promote the state’s fishing industry” (MCA 1951). To reiterate, oil displays are not related to the fishing industry.

So far as the Festival was concerned, there is no discoverable documentation that the seafood industry, in spite of its economic problems, had lost control or prestige. In fact, the selection of Festival royalty finally settled on a stable system in 1952, when it was decided that the king of Festival would be based on production records: the shrimper who was responsible for bring in the largest catch. This tradition of selecting the king of Festival remained until 1968, and gave the shrimper a place in the elite aspect of the Festival that he had never previously known. Would this have happened had shrimping not been contesting oil as the representative of local identity? It had never been an issue before. This manner of selection had the effect of strengthening the influence of the seafood industry within the public performance by reasserting the icon of the shrimper in a more prominent place than he had ever enjoyed. It was also in 1952 that the Festival was permanently moved to Labor Day weekend to allow for an increasingly larger number of events and entertainments to be added (MCA 1950-59, 1960-69).

In Morgan City, the oil industry is not mentioned prominently in any reporting that I have discovered, other than those already mentioned. This is not particularly unusual. Offshore workers, because of their schedules—often times alternating lengthy durations of work with equal time off; e.g., two weeks on, two weeks off—are not always residents of the nearest port. That coupled with the fact that oilfield workers of any sort tend to be transient within an industry that possesses a high turnover rate at the basic entry level, implies a lack of commitment, or rooting, within the community. Thus, it is

highly likely that many of the aforementioned Morgan City residents who had refitted boats to service the offshore industry, or had taken jobs within the petroleum industry, were still mainstays of the community, and those most likely to be involved with Festival events.

The social (*versus* the economic) visibility of the petroleum industry changed somewhat in 1957 when, just prior to the Festival, Hurricane Audrey made landfall near Berwick Bay, most notably threatening the town of Berwick with high winds and rising tides:

But coming to their aid—voluntarily—were oil companies, oil field, service companies, construction companies and the shell plant’s trucks and other heavy equipment and crews. There came bags of cement, timbers, technical help of experienced personnel. There came the volunteer firemen and seafoods industries equipment and men (*MCR “Thank You Very Much” 1957*).

Here is the first truly human, altruistic face of the petroleum industry reported on in the local press.

The Festival that had become the Louisiana Shrimp Festival was moving toward becoming the Louisiana Shrimp and Petroleum Festival. This merging came insidiously, generally accompanied with some celebration other than the Festival that placed the seafood industry and the oil industry together. In 1959, the images of oil and shrimp first merged during the year of the Oil Centennial. I confess to having many inefficient hours attempting to determine why Morgan City would have an oil centennial celebration, given that the earliest recorded efforts to discover oil in the area are from the early nineteenth century. Finally, I discovered that this was a national affair celebrated by all oil producing areas relating to the drilling of the first producing well in Pennsylvania in 1859. In Louisiana, each parish had been given to choice of selecting the dates for

celebrating the oil industry. In Morgan City, the Oil Centennial Committee chairman, and the Louisiana Shrimp Festival president decided to combine the celebrations into a weeklong festival that promoted both industries. This vast expansion of events, displays, and participation required the hiring of a festival manager—the first such paid position, and the first sharing of expenses for the Shrimp Festival with the oil companies (MCA “Matters of Tradition” 1959). This was another foreshadowing of the eventual usurpation of the shrimping industry by petroleum.

The following year a ten-day affair was planned to celebrate Morgan City’s Centennial. This was planned to be the largest Festival ever with the purpose “to insure that the port would maintain its identity as home of the famous Labor Day fete (*MCR* 11 February 1960). The festival organization contained 35 committees that year. This Festival coincided with further decline in the shrimping industry. This time, it was not the migration of shrimp away from the area that presented the problem; the problem was imports. At the time, any other country that produced shrimp could process it and sell it on the American market without and legal restrictions. The glut of inexpensive, imported shrimp had once again driven the price of shrimp down to a point where Morgan City shrimpers were not able to operate profitably (*MCR* 4 February 1960).

This downturn in the fortunes of shrimpers, however, seemed to have been overlooked due to the continued success of the petroleum business. Nowhere was the support of oil as the emergent, hegemonic economic base for Morgan City more telling than in the “Ode to Morgan City” written by Father Henry W. Helleman. For the sake of brevity as well as aesthetics, I will not reproduce the work in its entirety. However it ends with:

The gold of shrimp, the black
of oil, hurray
The boats, the wharves, the
rigs, the soil, hurray
Brought money in the kitty.
With plants and industries galore
Up the bayous and also offshore
One hundred years we thank God
for (1960).

This was not the only immortalizing of oil in literature. Part of the Festival that year was a commissioned play in 18 episodes that told the celebrated the Morgan City history from “The Early Indian” to “A Salute to Shrimp and Oil” (Rogers 1960). By 1960, oil was part of the literature of Morgan City.

The history of the power of the seafood industry was celebrated in 1961 with the 25th annual celebration that had become the Louisiana Shrimp Festival. The *MCR* ran a nine page special edition celebrating the Festival’s longevity. Most of what is important in that article has already been discussed above. However, I take issue with one point made in the article: that being that the local celebration “just grew” (27 August 1961). By all accounts, the Festival grew out of planning for its growth, and therefore, the growth was a successful outcome of intentional action. That it continued to grow without the continued economic power of the seafood industry is a matter that will be discussed below.

By the 1960s, to refer to the seafood industry as hegemony in any economic sense would have been erroneous at best, ludicrous at worst. In 1961 the catch of shrimp brought into the Morgan City port for processing was the lowest it had been since the 1930s. Most of the shrimp fleet had relocated to other ports that were more convenient to local migrations of shrimp, or closer to Mexican waters. By the end of the decade, the

shrimp fleet had dwindled in numbers from several hundred to 37 (*MCR* “Shrimp Landings Down From 1968” 1969). By the same time, oil was firmly entrenched in Morgan City. “Kerr-McGee, Shell, Gulf, Phillips, Pure, Sinclair, Sun, Texaco, California, Continental, Mobil, and Humble” had “all put down roots.” In some cases it was only be an area office but in most instances these companies invested in their own office buildings and marine bases (Broussard 1977 96-106).

By 1967, a new charter had been drawn up by a new corporation, the Louisiana Shrimp and Petroleum Festival Association Inc., and changing the name of the celebration to the Louisiana Shrimp and Petroleum Festival. In keeping with the spirit of cooperation of the two industries, a logo was created for the annual celebration: a jumbo shrimp (it would have to be) wearing a hardhat, wrapped around an oil derrick of approximately the same size. The icon, if not the economic reality, displayed the industries as being of equal size.

The final symbol of the dominance of the seafood industry disappeared in 1972 when the king of the Festival was selected from the ranks of oilmen. The CEO of Transworld Drilling companies, wholly owned subsidiaries of Kerr-McGee Corporation was selected. This was the first year that an Oklahoma oilman had to fly to Morgan City to serve in this capacity. Thus, twenty five years after the first producing offshore oil rig had been constructed in the fishing grounds south of Morgan City, the erosion of the power of the seafood industry was complete, literally through the economic dominance of oil, and symbolically through the installation of an oilman as king.

The question most begged by the statement immediately above relates to why the lengthy duration of time before the seafood industry, and the community, acknowledged

the economic hegemony of the oil industry. The answer to this question resides within a discussion that relates to the seafood industry's ability to appropriate traditional symbolic power, even in the absence of economic power, through ruling the configuration of the Festival.

Without the presence of religious ritual and the momentum annual celebration, it is likely that the image of the seafood industry's dominance in Morgan City would not have lasted until the end of the 1940s. Again, I should state that the organizers of the original Morgan City celebration appeared to know what social theorists have come to assert: that tradition holds enormous value in cultural construction. From historical records, we know that the seafood industry held economic hegemony due to a lengthy period of prosperity to the region based primarily on the ease of harvesting jumbo shrimp. From that we can see the manner in which the power of the seafood industry not only informed all other social institutions, but also had the power to create institutions. Thus, the creation of the celebration was the beginning of such an institution. By incorporating the Church into the celebration, the original organizers injected into a local, cultural performance an established ritual bent toward the acknowledgement of their industry as worthy of God's Blessing. The mixture of economics and religious affirmation had the effect of creating the beginnings of tradition. That tradition was well established by the time that shrimping was seriously weakening as an economic force, and that petroleum was becoming its replacement. Thus, the fact that the Louisiana Shrimp Festival was established during a time of economic downturn for the seafood industry was a stroke of manipulative genius worthy of the ownership interest in the Morgan City seafoods union. The official renaming of the Festival legitimized and

solidified the image of the seafood industry as the hegemonic force, even while that force was disintegrating.

The ability of hegemony to create history offers hegemony the ability to appear to self-perpetuate. History is constructed through the appropriation and exploitation of traditions, symbols and prestige. These elements can then be forged into institutions. Once tradition is established, it is difficult to dislodge. The issue of tradition has been a popular topic for many social theorists. For my purposes here, Hobsbawn's work is useful. Principally of value is his notion that "traditions are most effectively invented by appropriating elements that are already closely associated with collective images of the past and the values at stake (280). Once traditions are enfolded into routinized public performance, the traditions become imbued with the force of prestige attendant with the power of the organization or group with whom the performance is associated. This organization would necessarily be aligned with, or under control of, local cultural dominance. Ritual (such as that found in religious ceremony) shares an important commonality with secular tradition: neither can be left merely to be self-perpetuating, but must be constantly produced and reproduced. Here, again, we find in the Festival the merging of ritual, tradition, and prestige involved in the creation of culture, through the assertion of established values within the playing out of public performance.

To sum, the Louisiana Shrimp Festival was built on tradition of Church and economic hegemony. The combination of the two, displayed through secular celebration and religious ritual performance, established the Festival as representative of community values and image. By traditionalizing the power of ritual and celebration, the Festival advertised the image of Morgan City as a seafood industry based community. Visitors to

the Festival would have had no reason to believe that the images and allusions to the seafood industry were anything but an accurate representation of the community identity and its attendant values.

As I stated earlier, to dislodge hegemony requires a force that is real, palpable, and material. One would be hard pressed to imagine a local, national, and global force more powerful than the petrochemical industry. Curiously, however, while the oil industry successfully crushed the seafood industry as an economic base, when oil had the opportunity to construct the local cultural identity it met with resistance (a matter that will be discussed in detail below). The introduction of the influence of the oil industry into the Festival was gradual and insidious. So much was that the case, that without realizing the implications, the Church put itself in the position of Blessing multinational business conglomerates against the quaint background of a fishing village.

CHAPTER V—RACE AND HEGEMONY: THE MARGINALIZATION OF BLACKS IN MORGAN CITY AND ITS FESTIVAL

Thus far I have discussed Morgan City as having a powerful economic base that sought to celebrate its success while establishing a specific cultural identity for the community through the public performance of the celebration that ultimately came to be known as The Louisiana Shrimp and Petroleum Festival. That identity, as I have indicated, has been grounded in a merging of the exotic images of shrimp boats and Catholic ritual, typical American events and entertainments, and, finally, the vastness and power of the petrochemical industry. The mergers and appropriations of images have provided the Festival, and thus the community, with an identity that is certainly unique and exotic, while, at times seeming incongruous—such as the Church granting its Blessing on the oil business, or the mixture of shrimping, and petrochemical exploration and development in the same waters. What has not been discussed is the image of racial exclusion—or, at best, marginalization—of the Black community from Festival events. Even today, in the age of multiculturalism, Black participation within the Festival is most noticeable due to its limited, or marginalized presence.

Much of what follows relates to the general conditions of Blacks in Louisiana in general. Such information is germane to the Blacks of Morgan City in that much of what informed behavior toward Blacks by Whites had been institutionalized by the Louisiana State Government during the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and represented an attitude of White backlash against the policies that ruled the South under Reconstruction. All history offered here is submitted in support of the reader understanding the marginalized position of the Black community in Louisiana generally, and in Morgan City specifically. This chapter also functions to illuminate—inasmuch as

it is possible—the lives of those for whom contesting for a place in the Festival was never an option. Blacks have historically, in all parts of Louisiana, both suffered and benefited from segregationist policies: on the one hand segregation kept them apart from the Whites, on the other it made them dependent on each other.

Any discussion concerning the relationship between the Black and White communities in America is difficult. This is due, in part, to the fact that such relationships differ from place to place; i.e., the relationship between Blacks and Whites is not the same in Berkeley, California as it is in Manhattan, New York, as it is in Atlanta, Georgia, as it is in Morgan City, Louisiana. However, a discussion of the historical evolution of the relationship between Blacks and Whites in Morgan City will inevitably, on occasion, find itself referring to larger national and regional issues and attitudes concerning race. Regardless of the geographical area, therefore, the contention between Blacks and Whites has never been completely resolved in the United States; and some would argue, even today, that the inequalities based on racial hatred and resentment have left America in an untenable position in arguing that other nations need to pay more heed to the issue of human rights (James 116-118). That is to state that capitalist economy building, such as that of the United States, must have a base of free to inordinately inexpensive labor. For much of this nation's history and within the boundaries of its borders, that base has been made up, more than any other group, from Black Americans who labored under White political, economic, and social dominance.

At issue for this chapter of this dissertation is the manner in which Morgan City's economic structure has marginalized Blacks as a means of manipulating the very image of White power it has historically held. Inasmuch as the Festival has been constructed to

represent typically American images and aspirations of White economic and cultural domination—as interpreted through the eyes of the Morgan City Festival organizers—the discussion of race relationships in Morgan City is necessarily a discussion of the manner in which the Festival displays the domination and marginalization of its Black participants.

The absence of Black participation in the Festival was an area of concern in Doeren’s aforementioned work when he performed his research in 1976. While there is, no doubt, a greater Black presence at the Festival at this historical moment, the manner in which it is displayed supports the very assertion of White economic and cultural dominance. Thus, this chapter examines the history of Black experience and cultural practices in Louisiana generally, and Morgan City specifically through the period of segregation, both legalized and *de facto*, and the continuing of segregationist images through marginalization within Festival events. As with previous chapters, historical background and evidence, as well as theoretical analyses, will be applied as a means to understanding the narrow cultural phenomenon that has become the celebration of The Louisiana Shrimp and Petroleum Festival.

Generally, the specific problem of examining the issue of Black *versus* White in Louisiana is compounded by the presence of Creoles of Color. This is a particularly difficult issue to address in a study of race in various areas of Louisiana—particularly in, but certainly not limited to, New Orleans—due to the existence of racial discrimination between light skinned Creoles who have some Black ancestry, and the dark skinned Blacks who are seen as being of a more-or-less pure African genealogy. In areas where such discrimination exists, the lighter skinned Creoles possess a higher social standing

than the dark skinned of an apparent more pure African descent (Fairclough 14-18). In Morgan City, one is either Black or White. If one looks White then that is his or her race; if there are physical features generally related to the Black race, then one is Black. The creation of the Creole as Black is a construction of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The history of the legalities that executed that creation will follow.

In the area that became St. Mary parish, at the time the Louisiana Purchase (1803), the population was 1447, “half of whom were white.” By 1830, there were “1,912 White, 4304 Slaves, and 226 free Colored.” These numbers increased in 1850 to “3,420 White 9,850 Slaves, and 424 free Colored” (Report St. Mary Parish Resources and Facilities 1949). Thus in the decade just prior to the Civil War, Blacks outnumbered White by a ratio of approximately 3 to 1—a large population base on which to found future generations.

Following the Civil War, the population variances still existed, only without slavery as a legal institution. Before the war “white Louisianans—Creoles, Acadians, and Anglo-Americans alike—had put aside their cultural differences to defend” slavery (Fairclough 5). After the war, reconstruction and its consequences created an environment where old distinctions between White and Black, Creole and White or Black, or American born or immigrant, diminished in importance. Creoles and Acadians stood on common ground with Anglo-Americans in a struggle to reestablish White dominance. Free Blacks joined with liberated slaves in an attempt to garner racial and political equality through affiliation with the Republican Party. At the end of Reconstruction in the 1870s the social structure of the antebellum Louisiana—slaves, free people of color, and whites—gave way to a social system with only two strata: Black

and White (Dominguez 134-37). In 1890, the Louisiana legislature paved the way for the now famous (or infamous) *Plessy v. Ferguson* by creating a separate by equal law regarding rail travel on Louisiana trains. In 1896 Louisiana adopted a new constitution that disfranchised the Black population. In 1910, the Louisiana legislature erased the distinction between Black and Free People of Color. This had the effect of reducing anyone of any amount of African heritage to Black; and, rather than elevating Blacks to the former status of the Free People of Color, or Creoles with African genealogy, the Free People of Color and Creoles with Black ancestry were lowered to the social level of Blacks. In 1908, the Louisiana legislature enacted a law that made it a felony for Blacks and Whites to engage in concubinage (Dominguez 26-31; Woodward 212-33).

The racist atmosphere in the early decades of the twentieth century in Louisiana did not abate. During World War I, every able-bodied man in the state ages 17 to 55 was legally bound to fight in the war or be employed in an occupation that supported the war effort. Local sheriffs were empowered to seek out those individuals not in compliance. In 1918 a Black St. Mary Parish, restaurant owner was confronted by the sheriff who told him that his employees would have to report to work at a local factory. When he protested, the sheriff forced the man close his restaurant and join his employees (de Jong 75). Such occurrences apparently were not uncommon and provided quick and easy access to cheap labor. Such actions were, no doubt, partly responsible for the migration of Blacks away from Louisiana during the years of World War I. In 1910 there were 21,266 African Americans reported in St. Mary Parish. By 1920, that number had shrunk to 15,174 (de Jong 73).

Conditions in the South were bad in general for Blacks, but perhaps only a degree less bad in areas of south Louisiana. Some of the difference seemed to reside in the practices and influence of the Catholic Church. In statistics on numbers of lynchings that occurred between 1889 and 1922—peak years for these murders—the north Louisiana parishes of Caddo Ouachita, and Morehouse, all Protestant, had more lynchings than any other counties in the nation. Over half the lynchings that occurred in Louisiana between 1900 and 1931 took place in seven parishes, all of them mainly Protestant and all but one in the northern part of Louisiana. Additionally, all of parishes that had lynchings also had Black majority populations (McCulley 75, 89-90, 114; White 246-7). That parishes containing Black majorities would suffer this high number of lynchings while the predominately south Louisiana Catholic parishes had only one does not appear to be a coincidence.

This is not to state that Catholicism maintained an antiracist posture. Black Catholics had been accustomed to integrated services until 1895 when the Archbishop of New Orleans established the first “National” (Negro) parish in Catholic Louisiana. Blacks resisted further segregation, but in 1916 Archbishop Blenk of New Orleans established the first segregated parish in the downtown area of that city. Also, no Black priests served in Louisiana until 1934. Under pressure from the Vatican, four Black priests were assigned to the diocese of Lafayette, but they served under the strict guidelines of Southern racial protocol: they were not allowed to shake hands with White priests. There were no Black priests in the Archdiocese of New Orleans until 1950. These policies had the effect of eroding the active church membership of Black Catholics, so that by 1930—at least in New Orleans—only one fourth of the Black

population was overtly aligned with the Catholic Church (Ochs 3-5, 164-74, 324-41). It is not likely that the loss of Black allegiance to the Catholic Church was restricted to New Orleans.

While segregated parishes had alienated a large number of Black Catholics, there were some advantages. One such advantage was the possibility of acquiring a school along with the Black Church. Public and Protestant schools taught only in English which had the effect of eroding the Creole French spoken by many Black Catholics. Learning English was a powerful instrument of Americanization that many Blacks and Creoles of Color resisted. Another advantage was no having to endure the segregated atmosphere that had most Black members either standing, or sitting in the rear pews (Alberts 6-24).

Like Blacks in other parts of Louisiana, Blacks in Morgan City forged their own social institutions. As early as 1908, the Black Catholics of Morgan City enjoyed their own benevolent society that became chartered in 1910—about the same time that segregation and disfranchisement of Blacks and Creoles of Color was being legally woven into Louisiana institutions. The original name of the society was probably St. Anthony Colored Catholic Society. When it celebrated its 50th anniversary in 1958 it was referred to as the St. Anthony Society. The purpose of this organization was to provide for relief of its members who suffered financial difficulty. This was accomplished through the arranging for medical care, medicine, and should it be required, funeral expenses (MCA Black History 1958). All evidence indicates that in Morgan City, the Black Catholics attended Mass with the Whites. Apparently suffering the same sense of segregationist resentment that their counterparts had felt in other parts of Louisiana, the Black Catholics of Morgan decided to build their own church. The plans for Holy

Eucharist Church began in 1934 through the founding of the Sacred Heart Club. This organization was to accumulate monies and control them for the building of the church. Only after the intervention of the White priest of Morgan City, Father Grootens, did the White population aid in seeing the Black church erected. Even before the church was finished, the Black Catholic population had moved out of the White Catholic Church—Sacred Heart.

Our first Mass was held in a building formerly occupied as a macaroni factory. We next moved to the hall. Today, thro' the generosity of our good benefactors and the public, as well as the members of the order of Knights of Peter Claver, and the untiring efforts of Fathers Souby and Grootens we have a beautiful, well built church on spacious grounds, with its great steeple and cross pointing high to the Heavens giving thanks and glory to God.

Formerly the colored Catholics attended the Sacred Heart Catholic church where Rev. A. Souby is pastor. There we were accorded courtesy from the Ushers Society and the congregation, and nothing but kindness from our good pastor, who has labored many long years among us (A Layman *The Louisiana Weekly, The South's Leading Negro Newspaper* 13 March 1938).

Once cannot overlook the juxtaposition between the notions of “courtesy” and “kindness.” Their wording harks back to the resentment of treatment that New Orleans Blacks had expressed, and that was chronicled above.

This same publication addresses the issue of Black education in Morgan City. It claims that the parish has a favorable Black public school system in comparison to those found in the rest of the state. It points up the existence of about “four and a half thousand Negro educables and a total school enrollment of 2,835.” The article goes on to state the need for more “industrial training which is so much in demand in everyday life and so necessary to the thousands of them who will have to earn their living through domestic service and manual labor” (*Louisiana Weekly*). No doubt, unknowingly, the writer of this

article plays into the racists' hands by calling for training for domestic service and manual labor. Apparently these stereotypes were so imbued into all of society that no one could escape them. Such information is helpful in understanding the distance Between Blacks and Whites in the development of the Festival.

Benevolent societies, Church affiliation, and education were of particular importance to Blacks during this period, as was their general sense of (segregated) community. Blacks incorporated financial aid from a variety of sources into an existing tradition of self-help and fund-raising to provide for their own education (Anderson 156). Struggling for education, as well as survival, shored up the sense of community found in their families, churches, benevolent societies, and fraternal orders. Greta de Jong, quoting Palmer, reveals:

These institutions offered valuable support networks and black Louisianans relied on for survival. Sugar workers in Pointe Coupee Parish recalled that when people became ill and unable to work, friends and relatives "took up orders" for them at plantation stores, charging food and other necessities to their own accounts so that families who had fallen on difficult times did not starve (53).

These approaches to community and generosity often came under attack by Whites. Bradford Laws, a White investigator studying Black workers in St. Mary Parish during this period stated that his subjects had "an unfortunate notion of generosity, which enables the more worthless to borrow fuel, food, and what not on all hands from the more thrifty" (117). However, fighting against White hegemony of the most powerful type, Blacks responded with such attitudes as that of Ruth Cherry who stated, "What you have, I have. What would hurt one, would hurt the other. Hospitality they call it, but it was the only way we made it through" (138). Thus, the Blacks of 1930s Louisiana, and in

Morgan City specifically, relied heavily on family, church, organizations, and societies in order to survive.

This was the state of Black existence at the moment of inception of the first Morgan City celebration in 1936. That their presence would not have been welcome is consistent with the attitudes of the general White population of Louisiana. It is known that the Black community held their own private segregated celebrations—most notably, Mardi Gras. A 1933 article from the *MCR* records the first Black Mardi Gras celebration. It names the king and queen of the Black Mardi Gras that year who:

reigned over Carnival on Tuesday night at the Odd Fellows Hall. The E. G. U. A. Club No. 1 presented its first Mardi Gras celebration here Tuesday and the observance partook of the nature a brilliant affair. Mr. Leonard Wright had entire charge of the program and he staged as beautiful an affair as has ever been witnessed in Morgan City by the colored people (“Local Colored People Hold High Revel” 4 March 1933).

The following year there was a similar article that described the masquerade ball and parade celebrated by the “colored citizenry of Morgan City” and led by the members of the “Evergreen United Aid Club.” Describing the festivities it states:

The Queen was dressed in an elaborate white satin gown with all accessories to match and wore a rhinestone crown. Her Maid was dressed in a gold colored gown. The King in his bright colored robes accompanied his Queen and attendants to the old ferry landing to meet the “Zulu” King who arrived at 4:30 o’clock on this “yacht”, a gas boat disguised with palmettos and Carnival colors. Then the Parade formed, with members of the “Evergreen United Aid Club” marching in front, followed by the gaily decorated float for the King and Queen and their attendants, and then the Zulu King and his attendant made up in the height of barbaric fashion. “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” was another float in the parade. The committee in charge was comprised of Jake Johnson, pres., Earl Tarver, Alonzo Williams, Will Evans and Leonard Wright, who “wish to thank Mayor Shannon, the City Officials, and other white citizens for prize donations.” This was the second annual Carnival staged by the Evergreen United Aid Club of Morgan City (*MCA MCR* 16 February 1934).

Given what we know of conditions relating to race relations at that time, there are some telling comments within these texts that I discuss below.

Prominent are references to the social club, the E.U.A.C., without whose support this event, no doubt, could not have occurred. Of further interest are allusions to the elaborate costumes of the women, the barbaric fashion of the Zulu King, “Uncle Tom’s Cabin,” and the combined gratitude paid to the mayor of Morgan City and the White citizens. Except for the reference to the United Aid Club, the other images are shrouded in suggestion and irony. The attractively dressed women and the barbaric king are sexual allusions that hark back to the jungle and the days of slavery with the seductiveness of the Black woman, and the seductive threat of the Black male. The float with the theme of “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” is a clear celebration of emancipation from slavery. The larger picture here is the play between Black and White, and Black and Black. Producing the public performance that costumes the Blacks, the Blacks become stereotypes of themselves. The Black community is the only one that gets the joke. That the mayor and the white citizenry helped to pay for these images is most certainly an irony. These celebrations came at a time when there was little of economic substance to celebrate.

The Morgan City Archives holds such records as those above relating to the segregated Mardi Gras. There are no early records of attempts to coordinate a Black celebration aligned with the early celebration of the seafood industry. In fact, there is only one report of anyone Black working at a level above a production line. Joseph “Toad” Clay worked as a truck driver for a large seafood producing company that also owned shrimp boats. He never worked as a shrimper, but drove trucks instead. He had worked for the same family since he was 12 (*MCR* 1 September 1978). At the time the

article came out he was 70. He makes no mention of the Festival. Since the earliest festivals were exclusively for the shrimpers and other members of the union, it is unlikely that any parallel Black participation was expected from either side. It is unlikely that any Blacks were members of the union during the period of segregation.

The next important bit of evidence regarding the relationship between Blacks and Whites in Morgan City relates to the years of World War II. With the need for war supplies, Morgan City was a likely port for shipbuilding. It still possessed the sawmills from the days when the timber industry was still viable; and those were used for building wooden naval vessels. It was also a port that had ship and boat building capabilities of other kinds. Such industry requires skilled labor. As a result of the need for war materials, Blacks were called into service and trained as, among other things, welders. Xavier and Southern Universities held welding classes for Blacks, but the problem of employment remained. Backed by the Fair Employment Practice Committee, a state official placed Black welders in the Morgan City shipyard to build minesweepers. The White workers were sufficiently hostile that the state official removed them, likely to avoid the violence that had occurred in similar situations at other Gulf coast ports (Fairclough 86). Thus, at the time that local Morgan City economy was peaking in power due to increased catches from the seafood industry, employment from the War, and increasing revenues from visitors to the festival, Blacks were still shunned socially, economically, and politically. Also, during this period, the migration of Blacks from St. Mary Parish continued. In 1940 the Black population was 14,242; and by 1950 that number had shrunk 13,644 (de Jong 120). The clear signal was that more Blacks were not wanted in the area. This point is made obvious by the fact that workers performing

the most essential of tasks in support of the war effort would be willing to let troops do without necessary vehicular support if it meant working alongside Blacks. That Blacks were not welcomed in local industry is also evidenced by the fact that their population numbers were shrinking. They were migrating from the area.

The paucity of records make it impossible to trace on an annual basis the progress made by the Black citizens of Louisiana, and particularly the Black community of St. Mary Parish and Morgan City. Thus, it is not known at what point the Black community of Morgan City was able to join in integrated Festival events. Through piecing together what evidence there is, it can be assumed that Black participation in the festival would not have preceded the integration of schools in St. Mary Parish, given that the integration of schools was met with hostility as well. Prior to school integration in Morgan City, there is a reference to a “black street parade” in 1957; and in 1958, there is a reference to growing interest in the “black festival” with the addition of a dance, and a “picnic on Festival weekend at the Negro Park at Lake Palourde” (MCA 1957, 1958). During the 1960 Morgan City Centennial celebration, the Black community celebrated a segregated festival that included much participation from the Black women of the community. A list of the “Colored Centennial Belles” that year contains over 230 names (MCA “1960 Centennial Booklet”). It did not matter if there were equal facilities; they were still separate.

The first break from segregationist policies in Morgan City, in any form, was attempted in 1962. The important issue of school integration was not met with overt overall hostility in Louisiana, but the two most notable areas of resistance came from Plaquemines and St. Mary Parishes. In Plaquemines several black parents applied to

have their children enrolled in the Catholic elementary school in Buras, Our Lady of Good Harbor. There was a subsequent school boycott call by the local political leader, Leander Perez, who eventually had the effect of driving Black children from integrating the Catholic school. Perez had threatened that if the school were integrated, state funding for books and lunch funds would be cut off. Acts of violence followed culminating with the Plaquemine police force using force to break up Black crowds who were protesting the segregationist policies. James Farmer, leader of the Congress of Racial Equality referred to Plaquemine as a “city under siege,” where treatment of Blacks was so horrific that he “had never seen such police treatment in Mississippi or Alabama.” Our Lady of Good Harbor School was finally, permanently closed after it was damaged by a bomb in 1963” (*MCR* 3 September; *New Orleans Times Picayune* 1, 5, 7 September 1963).

In fact, Morgan City had led the way with racist retaliation against school integration. In 1962, a single Black fourth grader enrolled in Sacred Heart School apparently without incident. However, this was followed by a bomb threat to the school, and the child’s father immediately lost his job (*MCR* 5 September 1962). White economic and political hegemony ran its tentacles through society in a manner that would punish Blacks for any attempts toward upward mobility. If the laws were not favorable to the White power structure, then more subtle coercive means could be applied.

In the 1960s, Morgan City had been thriving for over a decade due to the wealth of oil production. In 1967, the Louisiana Shrimp Festival became the Louisiana Shrimp and Petroleum Festival, but there are no records of the local Black community gaining in social status as the city progressed economically. Blacks were on the lowest stratum of socioeconomic hierarchy. The stasis of Black advancement continued in spite of school

integration (finally achieved in Morgan City), and the Civil Rights Bill of 1964. In all of the Festival records, there is no mention of integrating the events that have been chronicled as segregated as late as 1960. Even by 1976, Doeren noticed a lack of participation of Black participants in the Festival events. All available records indicate that Black integration of the Festival, and its attendant public display of cultural identity, ran concurrently with the Black struggle for equality in all areas of Morgan City life.

In 1977, the meeting of the Third Congressional District Black Caucus of the Louisiana Black Assembly meeting was held in Morgan City. Issues of concern included the fact that even though the barriers of “segregation in public places” and the “prohibition against voting” had been struck down, Blacks still “had problems.” These included the inability of Black elected representatives to get legislation passed against the obstructionist efforts of their White counterparts, and the difficulty that potential Black entrepreneurs encountered in attempting to gain financing for business ventures. All of this was blamed on the fact that “blacks are new to the vote.” The thrust of the principal speakers of the convention was that Blacks were still in a position of needing to band together to battle the economic hegemony of the Whites. As the keynote speaker put it, “Black Power” is now in decline and is being replaced by “Green Power.” He said, “Green Power, money, is negotiable, you can bank it” (*MCDR* 11 July 1977).

Further attempts by the Black community in Morgan City to struggle against White hegemony through political influence surfaced through a renewing of the charter of the local branch of the N.A.A.C.P. Apparently, the local chapter had been chartered twice, but both times had the charter revoked for actions “inimical to the interest” of the national organization. The specific reason given was that the Morgan City Branch had

“splintered into two groups,” and that they had not been faithful in participating in annual state conventions. These transgressions were rectified in 1982 (MCA “History of the Morgan City Branch of The N.A.A.C.P” 1982). However, that fact that the local chapter had been rendered ineffective by infighting and fragmentation attests to the power of the White power structure to frustrate efforts for justice in a manner that divides dissenting groups based on levels of commitment, beliefs in the efficacy of struggle, and varied approaches to revolution: How much would one give up for the struggle to overcome White dominance? Would the struggle replace the old White power with a new Black version? Should struggle be approached peacefully, or militantly? In Louisiana, the history of Black struggle is one of division (Wilkins 295-96; *Times Picayune* 16 September 1970). However, that the Black citizenry of Morgan City felt the need to politically mobilize in the early 1980s is evidence that political action was needed—i.e., people rarely react against what they believe to be nonexistent, and tend to react, rightly or wrongly, against what they perceive to be a threat. Black political mobilization in the 1980s indicates a continuation of racist attitudes and *de facto* segregationist policies.

There is a scattering of additional bits of information that further evidence segregationist social attitudes in Morgan City long past the outlawing of racial discrimination. In 1980, Morgan City held a beauty pageant for White girls, and one for Black girls. However, this is not an altogether uncommon phenomenon. The Miss America Pageant allows for all ethnic and racial representation, while there is still a Miss Black America contest that is exclusive. Most notable of the local records, and perhaps the most troubling, is a report from as recently as 1997. In that year, the Morgan City Council planned naming one of the streets after Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.

Originally the plan was to name one of the prominent downtown streets after King, a matter that was discussed between the Morgan City mayor and a prominent Black clergyman. Both men agreed and considered that the matter of a vote on the matter would be a formality. Instead, the city council meeting where the vote was discussed turned into a shouting match when it was suggested that, instead of a prominent street, the name be given to a previously unnamed “driveway” around the Black swimming pool in east Morgan City (a rather dilapidated area of town). Thus, no other popular name, such as “Myrtle” or “9th” or “East” (three possibilities that were discussed during the council meeting), could be displaced in honor of King; the street named had to be hitherto unnamed. Finally, the White political establishment prevailed, thus creating the conditions for the naming of a local one-lane road, that surrounded a park and swimming pool used by Blacks, to be named for King. The meeting ended with a proposal that a bi-racial committee be formed to further discuss other racial problems in Morgan City (*Baton Rouge Advocate* 30 May 1996). I have been informed by an acquaintance who lives in Morgan City that after the naming of the street, the Black community refused to continue to use the pool, until it became more cost effective simply to fill it in and make it part of the park landscape. My acquaintance is still confused as to the reasons that the Black community would let a perfectly good swimming pool go to waste. I suspect that she is not the only citizen of Morgan City to hold with this view.

Most of this chapter up until now has focused on the history of the Black social and economic condition from its early days in Louisiana, St. Mary Parish, and Morgan City. Through a study of this history, and the variety and types of sources that comprise it, it is clear that Blacks have had to be engaged in a dualistic political process. On the

one hand, the desirability of integration was to make Blacks and Whites social, economic, and political equals through eradication of segregationist policies such as those that became legally institutionalized on either side of the turn of the twentieth century. Segregation, through its explicitly stated, legally exclusionary practices where Whites were privileged over Blacks regardless of ability or any other consideration, was socially, politically and economically “genocidal” to anyone non-White (Patterson xi). On the other hand, the legally enforced privacy brought about by segregation provided the necessary motive and opportunity for Blacks to cooperate in order to survive, through the establishment of organizations, societies, churches, and community.

Of course, Blacks could not have hoped to survive the genocidal policies of segregation had there been racist unanimity within the White community. The Catholic Church stood against segregationist policies as a matter of religious philosophy; however, it acquiesced to political pressure in order to address “temporal concerns” of Louisiana law (Ochs 327). More practically, the Catholic Church stood against losing membership; and one means of retaining Black members who were disillusioned and humiliated by their treatment in White Catholic churches was to aid them in creating their own houses of worship. In addition to the intervention of the Church (which could take the form of either segregationist or integrationist leanings, depending on the political atmosphere), secular movements beginning in the 1950s gave Blacks some hope in knowing that the entire nation did not share the general racist, segregationist policies of the South. Federal legislation such as *Brown v. Board of Education*, the forced desegregation of Central High School of Little Rock, Arkansas enforced by the United States Army, and the aforementioned Civil Rights Bill supplied legal foundation for the Civil Rights

Movement. However, the Civil Rights Movement that began to grow in the 1950s required great risk and sacrifice. I cannot list all the heroes, heroines, and martyrs here. Anyone reading this paper will know the most prominent names, and know as well that the list will continue to grow in numbers.

So, to repeat Doeren's concern: Why do Blacks not participate in the Festival? The answer to this lies in the very defining characteristics of traditional White power, merged with the images of Black struggle for social and economic, equality and justice. I will attempt to avoid sounding like a classical Marxist here; however, the answer to Doeren's question may reside in a simple analysis of costs and benefits. It was not to the benefit of Whites to use Blacks as anything other than cheap labor when such was needed. The White hegemony had nothing to gain by disturbing the social order. For Morgan City, until quite recently, to disturb the social order would be to invite uncertainty into a certain world. Again, the Festival was a representation of the Morgan City cultural identity. If the Festival had included Blacks they would have been at the Festival—tautological though it be.

For the first almost 30 years of its existence the celebration was held under a legal system that mandated segregation. Thus, for most of these first three decades of Festival celebration, the hegemony of Morgan City legally owned the right to exclude Blacks from participation. During the period of legalized segregation, the festival became the symbol of the cultural identity of Morgan City through the appropriation and invention of images, tradition, and prestige that were played out in its public performance; and the Black community was not part of any of these elements. By the time racial discrimination was outlawed through Federal legislation, as well as being struck down by

the courts, the cultural history of Morgan City had successfully been constructed. The outcome of this construction was the establishment of a traditional White hegemony that no amount of laws could erase from the cultural consciousness of the Morgan City inhabitants both Black and White. The history, then, created by the public performance of the Festival according to Staal had the effect of clearly “identifying groups and distinguishing them from one another” (Bell 121-122). One group was established as power elite, the other lower strata—White and Black, respectively.

Such are the means available to economic and political power. As an elite group (or historical bloc) moves to achieve domination over society, the least costly manner of accomplishing that aim resides in the development of an ideology of its own legitimacy. The most efficient manner in developing such an ideology is to establish the view within the social institutions that the line of contest will be dictated by the dominant power. In the case of Black *versus* White that power was White, and the line of contest was along the lines of race. Cultural hegemony has been accomplished when members of all social strata interpret politics and choose strategies of participation in terms of the division favored by the elite group. If there is conflict, a generally inevitable result of hegemonic power over the lower strata, it takes place along the line already established by the elite group. Whether the line exists in law is irrelevant when the line exists in culture and cultural performance. Thus political and economic resources can be mobilized to establish a strict line of contestation that will favor the elite in a manner in which the elite have already established dominance.

In the 1970s we still see the political struggle of Blacks in Morgan City in the abovementioned reports of the Black Caucus convention. In the 1980s we see the

mobilization of the Black community in the reestablishment of the local Chapter of the N.A.A.C.P. In the late 1990s we see a struggle for honoring Martin Luther King, Jr., 29 years after his assassination, and 33 years after his winning the Nobel Peace Prize.

Why do Blacks not participate in the Festival? They do—some. After reviewing all that I can discover in print relating to Black participation, I have turned to photographic evidence owned by the MCA. After viewing literally hundreds of photographs I have located a Black child in a 1977 carnival ride, three Black children in a group of over twenty at a Children’s Court celebration (the rest are White, including the children’s king and queen of Festival), and one Black (more Creole of Color) man working on weaving a basket during the 1985 crafts exhibit. In 1990, the Shrimp and Petroleum Festival began to offer a culturally specific “event” to Blacks: the “Fellowship of Love Gospel Tent,” where one could “enjoy one of the South’s most loved and heartfelt forms of music” (1990 “Louisiana Shrimp and Petroleum Festival Schedule of Events”). The tent was located several blocks from the main Festival events. In my experience of several years attending the Festival it is celebrated almost exclusively by the Black community, and is seen as a curiosity by most Whites who sometime stop for a moment and look—occasionally taking photographs—but rarely enter and participate for any significant duration.

Other Black participation is most visible in the “Cajun Culinary Classic,” initiated in 1989. This amounts to a row of booths that can be rented, generally by organizations, for the sale of food to Festival participants. Some of these booths are run by Black organizations and serve a variety of foods, most notably in my experience, West Indies stew and Barbeque. Mostly, the booths are operated by White organizations. Perhaps the

most important Black contribution to the Festival has come through the “Children’s Storytelling” event begun in 1989. A local Black teacher with a deep knowledge of Louisiana folklore has performed this entertainment/lesson since its inception. I have met her and visited her home. I am as captivated as the children. The bringing together of Black and White children to hear the stories is the one true positive interracial activity that I can point to within the Festival events. But the children receive mixed signals. The storyteller is costumed in colorful Creole finery that has an historical significance. However, the image of the Black nanny telling stories to mostly White children is inescapably one of traditional Black subservience. Further, the storytelling takes place in the “Children’s Village,” a playground area that employs a large sign that announces its sponsorship by Kerr-McGee, McDermott, and British Petroleum—all oil, or oil equipment companies. When I last visited the Festival in 2001, the most popular attraction in the playground was a large inflatable slide in the form of a sinking ship. Thus, in the 67 years of its existence, the Festival has encouraged Black participation only in recent years, and only marginally then.

The more Doeren’s question resounds in my mind, the more I wonder why he asked it? The mere fact that he saw little, if any, Black participation in 1976 should have suggest one of two answers. Either the Black community did not feel welcome or interested in the Festival, or there was no Black community. The latter answer is preposterous, as Doeren, himself, admitted by asking the question in the first place. The answer to Doeren’s question, at the time he asked it, was that segregationist policies existed outside the law. Further, there was no traditional construct to act as precedent for Black participation. There was the opposite. Everything that has been discussed thus far

concerning hegemony relates to the subjugation of all social institutions to the will of the dominant power. The organizers of the original celebration operated from a position of economic hegemony that dictated broad social and cultural response to its will. By the time the economic hegemony passed from the seafood industry to the oil industry, the Festival was already established as the symbol of local cultural identity. That identity had historically, traditionally, and ritually excluded Black participation; and in that sense it might as well have been waving a Confederate flag. As the historical study here has demonstrated, the Black population has generally concerned its struggle with moving straight to the economic forefront—a natural direction to take for a people who had been traditionally viewed as a source of cheap labor, and as culturally inferior. The Black response is nothing more or less than the typical response to the cultural (American) notion that once economic independence is achieved, all other forms of independence will follow. With control of the economy, as demonstrated in the case of Morgan City, comes control of the “unified moral order” that courses throughout the sociocultural construction; i.e., with a powerful hegemonic base the political, religious, social, and cultural institutions can be purchased either directly, or through consent and coercion.

The issue for the Black community resided, and resides, in the cost of contesting that will of established economic and cultural hegemony. The mere existence of hegemony does not necessarily guarantee political action on the part of the lower strata. If there is nothing to be gained by organizing along the established line of contestation, there is no reason to mobilize. To take issue with the culturally established identity of Morgan City would have been to attack the established social framework and accomplish

little, if anything. As was stressed above at the Black Caucus meeting: “Green Power” was the important objective.

And, it was not merely the image of White wealth that aided in Black subjugation. The trusted moral guardians of spiritual being—the Catholic Church—played both sides of the street. The Church was blessing White fishermen while building a segregated Black Catholic church. The Church blessed the oil boats during the Civil Rights Movement. The Church maintained its visibility as part of the culturally constructed history and identity of Morgan City through its performance of religious ritual, and by not protesting too much. Thus, the Church retained its portion of the power of local cultural identity.

To conclude: The relationship of Blacks with the hegemony of Morgan City and the Festival was this—while the Festival was becoming traditionalized, the Blacks were being traditionalized out of it. Traditions of racial superiority on the part of Whites were supported by the post-Reconstruction legislation that identified anyone of Color to be classified as Black, and then separated Blacks and Whites in the social and political arenas. Obviously, the exclusion from social and political institutions excluded Blacks from the mainstream economic system. Legalized, forced segregation functioned as a process of legitimization—thus energizing support for the racist attitudes already in existence in Morgan City, and Louisiana and the South in general. Given that the laws that forced segregation date back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, traditions of legalized racism had time to be cultivated over several generations. The challenge to the state laws by federal action in the 1950s and 60s served to solidify

resentment against outside interference and promote regional defensiveness, further entrenching racist attitudes.

Forced segregation accomplished the construction of two conditions: one intended, one not. What was intended was to cull Blacks out of the institutions of power, thus causing them to become totally dependant on Whites, thus returning them to the *de facto* conditions of slavery. That was, in many ways, accomplished. What was not intended, however, was that the segregation of Blacks forced a strengthening of the ties within the Black community and the creating of organizations and societies to further the cause of Black equality at all levels of society.

If someone had told me a few years ago, when I began doing research for this project, that I would ever view the historical period of post-Reconstruction, legally forced segregation to have been a tool of Black liberation I would have denied the possibility. I no longer feel that way. Being denied access to White society forced the individuals within the Black community to rely on each other. From this attitude of community self-reliance Blacks created their own society with its own institutions. Black society took from White society the tools that it needed most—the models for establishing and sustaining organizational power. These models were applied to Black church, Black church organizations and societies, and Black secular organizations and societies. The difference was that the Black organizations were not founded on the spirit of cooperation as found in White societies; Black societies were founded on an ultimate and immediate need for cooperation.

Thus a parallel society was created—separate and unequal. During the early years of the Morgan City Festival, Blacks were legally denied access to every significant

social institution—with the exception of the Church, and there they did not feel welcome. This separation became traditionalized—on both sides. If ritual studies teaches anything—and it does—it teaches that traditions carry symbols with them. And with symbols and traditions comes prestige. And with symbols, tradition, and prestige one—or one group, or one nation—owns the building blocks for ritual. And with the practice of ritual comes tradition.

Thus the Black community in Morgan City built their own, separate, society. The White community had a Festival; the Black community had a Festival. And if the two could not exist in an integrated manner, they would exist on opposite sides of the street where each one could view the other. Obviously, the White community was aware of the activities of the Black community—the Morgan City newspaper carried the reports of Black events. I wonder what the response would have been if the Black newspaper had published an article entitled “White People Hold High Revel.”

Why did, and do, Blacks not participate in the Festival? And, if they do, why is it only marginally? Firstly, Blacks did not participate because the law and tradition would not allow Black participation. After that, tradition itself was sufficient to keep Blacks away. Nowadays, if Blacks do not participate in the Festival events, it is because Black traditions have been evolving for as long as those of Whites.

CHAPTER VI—THE SHIFTING OF CULTURAL IMAGE: THE HEGEMONY OF OIL AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

At the moment of the Festival's inception the community of Morgan City was, more than less, homogenous: it was a coastal community supported by maritime commerce. Of course, there was a whole separate community of Black citizens in the area whose interests were dismissed by the White community due to legal mandate, and attitudes of tradition. Evidence indicates (covered in the next chapter) that attitudes towards integrating the Festival events did not alter until the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 90s. Thus, the term Morgan City community as that term relates to the Festival, inevitably refers to the White community unless otherwise specifically indicated.

Virtually every resident of Morgan City in the mid 1930s and 40s—both Black and White—earned his or her living through employment in some area of the seafood producing industry. Those who were not directly employed by the seafood industry were employed by some business that existed due to the presence of the seafood industry. In the absence of any other significant business interests, the seafood industry and its images inevitably provided the cultural identity of Morgan City. That identity included the omission of Blacks.

From the growth in the power of the seafood producers, economic hegemony was created. This creation was made possible by the enfolding of labor interests into a union that was controlled by the interests of seafood industry ownership. Once this hegemony was established, the local seafood producers union possessed the power to create the local cultural identity that was projected through the performance of the Festival.

I have asserted above the collection of events that became the Festival were originally planned to project typical American images against the backdrop of the exoticism of the Gulf coast region and the theatricality of the Catholic Church. I further assert that after the fall of economic wherewithal within the shrimping industry, and the simultaneous rise in power of the petroleum industry, the Festival became a hodgepodge of cultural images constructed as much by accident, guesswork, and the rising population of oil workers, as anything. I further assert that this hodgepodge was equally representative of the true cultural identity of Morgan City in the 1970s and 1980s, as had been the celebration from the 1930s through the 1950s. I base this last assertion on the fact that Morgan City had lost its sense of homogeneity through the massive infusion of oil equipment, oil workers, and oil money.

This chapter will examine the disintegration in local cultural identity and the manner in which that decline was reflected in the Festival planning, execution, and participation. This atmosphere for decline in the manner in which Morgan City advertised itself through Festival performance was created by the indifferent attitude of the oil industry—an industry that held economic dominance, but had no permanent connection with the community other than to exploit its natural and human resources. The primary thrust here is to compare the manners in which the seafood industry carefully constructed a community identity for Morgan City, the usurpation of that identity by the oil industry for its own promotional purposes, the ultimate destruction of any clear sense of economic leadership, and the effect of all of these forces on the configuration of, and reaction to, the Festival. I will demonstrate that cultural identity may be constructed either of two ways: through the deliberate assertion of a specific will

that is defined and dictated by the local economic power; or through the deterioration of social institutions that exist under economic rule, but lack planning and leadership. I further assert that in the absence of leadership by the dominant economic power, members of the established community possess the ability to reassert traditional symbols and traditions for the purpose of contesting for, and winning back, control of cultural identity. All of these conditions can be seen in the evolution of the Festival as it is discussed below.

I do not assert that the original hegemony of Morgan City that organized and manipulated the festival through the Gulf Coast Seafood Producers and Trappers Association—generally referred to as the union—was not born of struggle. In fact, it was partly made up of fishermen and plant workers who had earlier attempted to form their own organizational affiliate with the A. F. L. This enfolding of labor into the union created an organization that was more favorable to capital than to labor. However, the workers in Morgan City seemed not to notice the conditions of their subjugation to ownership interests, once prosperity appeared to be real. The workers were also prospering to varying degrees as well, although not to the extent that the owners were prospering. Further, there appears to have been no objection to the portrayal of community cultural identity as exhibited by the seafood industry through the performance of the Festival.

The displacement of the seafood industry as hegemony by the oil industry was a much more culturally devastating phenomenon. The initial contesting for economic and civic position in 1935 between workers and capital was kept within a homogenous culture of seafood producers. The contesting participants were not transient workers, but,

rather, long time residents with deep cultural roots. And, while there was eventually migration to Morgan City due to the increase in ease of harvesting shrimp, the cultural values of the community were not severely altered by the addition of more Anglo American shrimpers from the Gulf coast.

The initial intrusion by the oil industry into the Morgan City area was economically, socially, and culturally jarring. In 1947 the first producing offshore oil rig was brought in. At almost the same moment that the offshore rig began producing, shrimp began to migrate away from the waters just south of Morgan City in the Gulf. This was viewed by the seafood industry as being “causal.” Two years later the insidious usurpation of established local performative power was in motion. For over a decade, the advertised symbols of both economic dominance and cultural identity in Morgan City were shrimp boats and Catholic theatricality. In 1949, the oil industry began to alter that image by prominently displaying one of its large equipment boats as a site from which the shrimp boats were judged in a festival decoration contest. This had the effect of inserting a new symbol into the milieu from which Morgan City culture was constructed.

One should not dismiss the power of symbols in maintaining traditional power structures. That which is meant by power, justice, or authority is unavoidably symbolic. Symbols are important in that they provide the individual with a sense of meaning, and thus symbols constitute “culture” (Geertz 5). Victor Turner viewed symbols as the smallest unit of ritual (1967 28). I have already discussed ritual as owning the power of tradition and prestige (above in Sangren). Therefore, if symbols help constitute culture as Geertz states, and are the smallest unit of ritual, as Turner asserts, then culture and ritual are inevitably inseparable. If ritual holds the power of tradition and prestige, then to own

the symbols of ritual is to own the ritual itself. If economic dominance owns the ritual, as it did in Morgan City, then economic dominance possesses the power to project ritual performance as cultural identity. Thus hegemony (be that the seafood industry or the oil business), owning ritual, owns the power to construct culture. Let us then view the evolution of the dominance of the oil industry through an examination of symbolic images.

Chronologically, the next important symbol indicating that oil was gaining economic and cultural control came in 1967. It was then that the seafood industry acquiesced to the oil industry the sharing of cultural identity. This occurred through the discarding of the title, Louisiana Shrimp Festival and Fair Association, in favor of the Louisiana Shrimp and Petroleum Festival Association, Inc. In 1972, the first years that an oil executive was requested to act as king of the Festival, a special program was published to celebrate his presence. On the cover of these pages are photographs of the Festival logo—the shrimp wrapped around the oil derrick—and a photograph of the first producing offshore drilling rig. This cover announces: “Welcome! To the 37th annual Shrimp and Petroleum Festival” (MCA 1972). Of course, it was not the 37th; it was the 6th. Through the renaming of the Festival, and the enthusiastic reporting of an oilman as Festival king, we can see the oil industry gaining significant cultural influence in addition to is already locally dominating economic power. As was discussed above, hegemony possesses the power to create historical tradition, even where it has not existed, for the purpose of creating culture. By the 1970s, oil had a firm hold on economic dominance in Morgan City, even though the Festival continued to display the icons of shrimpers and

the Catholic ritual. During that historical period, however, the icon of the shrimper was becoming tarnished.

Two years after the first oilman served as the king of Festival, the plight of Louisiana shrimpers became a matter of statewide, as well as national, attention. Headlines read: “LA. SHRIMPERS STAND IN LINE,” Catch Poor; Now Food Stamps Are Sought” (*TP* 18 July 1974); “Shrimp Industry Aid Seen” (Poe *TP* 1974); “Shrimpers Ask Partial Subsidy” (*MCDR* 31 July 1974); “Shrimp Delegates Ask for ‘State of Emergency’” (Puncky *TP* 28 July 1974); “Fish Disaster Ruling Sought” (*TP* 1974). In an article that explained in detail the problems of shrimpers, a curious irony emerged for the Morgan City residents. Part of the problem for Morgan City shrimpers was due to the flooding of the Atchafalaya River system—a destruction of the ecosystem that would take years, if ever, for nature to correct (*MCDR* 15 August 1974). The other problem was that the cost of diesel—produced by petroleum companies—had doubled in one year’s time (*MCDR* 15 August 1974). Thus the shrimpers were paying their Festival partners twice as much to catch fewer shrimp. This condition would explain the headline: “Shrimpers in Less Than Festive Mood as Celebration Nears” (*TP* 11 August 1974). Finally, in 1974, the Small Business Association received permission to grant loans to shrimpers (*MCDR* August 1974), so that they could not only catch less for more money, but they could go into debt in the enterprise. These newspaper headlines dramatize the plight of the shrimpers, caught between rising costs of operation and falling prices for product. This dramatization is also a symbol of the falling status of the shrimper, particularly in relation to the financial power of the oilman. The headlines were accompanied by predictions of, at least, temporary doom for the Morgan City shrimping

industry—the precise opposite that had been predicted almost 40 years earlier. The image of shrimpers lining up for food stamps conjures an ironic reminiscence of the welfare lines of the Depression era.

In 1975, one year after the disastrous flooding that completed the destruction of the Morgan City shrimp fleet, oil further wove itself into the construction of local tradition and history. The Continental Oil Company celebrated its 100th birthday. The Festival president stated that: “Since Conoco is one of the major oil companies of the world, and it has been in operation in Louisiana since 1935, we think it is quite fitting that they be invited to join us in Morgan City’s big, four-day celebration.” Conoco’s Western Hemisphere President responded:

Morgan City has played a major role for many years in the development of this nation’s energy resources, especially those in the outer continental shelf. The city’s location, its manpower resources, and the attitude of its people toward energy development and the oil and gas industry have been a major factor in Conoco and other major producers selecting Morgan City as their base of operations (MCA “Louisiana Shrimp and Petroleum Festival Souvenir Program” 1975).

There seems to be a rather forced mutual politeness in the tone of both of these messages. Inviting oil into the Shrimp and Petroleum Festival appears superfluous. That an executive so highly placed would assert to having any real sense of the attitude of Morgan City’s people appears fatuous. Additionally, any good capitalist would understand that Morgan City was chosen for its cost effectiveness, and available dock space—made available by the absence of shrimp boats. As for Morgan City’s “manpower resources,” as we will see, the oil companies would bring their own. That aside, Conoco sent several boats to create a more impressive water parade that year, and the oil business continued to accumulate symbols of an increasing presence of power.

Photographic evidence from the 1970s Morgan City archives collection indicates an increasing participation by oil boats in the Blessing event. The 1978 Festival photographs show a new image at the water parade—the king and queen “toast,” and the “kissing of the boats.” By this year both the king and queen of Festival have been given use of their own respective party boats—large oil equipment boats with flat beds. I have been a guest on one of these boats (1994), and was told by a crewman that the tip of the bow rises anywhere from 25-30 feet above the waterline. In the “kiss” the king and queen stand at the extreme front of the bow of their respective boats as the vessels move close enough to each other for the king and queen to kiss. This image combines the symbols of the powers of oil, danger, and sexuality. The 1978 photos also indicate an almost exclusive participation on the part of oil boats in the Blessing and water parade. On the boat on which I was a guest, a loud country band played while we ate shrimp and drank beer at 10 A.M on a Sunday. This was precisely the same time that the priest was blessing the boats (further evidence of the disappearance of protestations on the part of the Church regarding decorous conduct).

In 1978, the established community residents of Morgan City aggressively demonstrated—through political action and personal confrontation—against the cultural practices and identity that the oil companies were encouraging. Transient workers, moving to Morgan City to supply the demand for increased activity in offshore drilling, were viewed by the Morgan City population as creating deterioration in the demographic makeup of the community. To combat this influx of undesirables, St. Mary Parish passed a law requiring all transient workers to be “mugged and fingerprinted.” There was, of course, a general outcry from the A.C.L.U. that called the tactics “reminiscent of Nazi

Germany” (*Baton Rouge States Item* 13 December 1978). The law was a result of public reaction to the kidnappings and murders of five teenagers in 1977, and had the support of most area residents. Police blamed the murders on a drifter from California who had fled the state before committing suicide. ““The townspeople were almost on the verge of vigilantism trying to find out who did these things and it was obvious normal law and order techniques didn’t work,”” stated Louisiana legislator Anthony Guarisco of Morgan City. In the end Guarisco related:

registration was the only way to discourage drifters from fading into the cheap bars and hotels that serve as temporary homes for many of the 7,000 workers who shuttle daily by helicopter and crew boats to offshore oil rigs in the Gulf of Mexico.

Morgan City is a transient community. You can come down here with no skill and work offshore and drop out of sight. So when the FBI began looking into the first kidnapping we found what we had suspected all along—that we had an overconcentration of fugitives for a community this size (*BRST* 13 December 1978).

This law was contested in the courts for nearly two years and was struck down by the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals in 1980 (*BRST* December 1980).

By 1982, the changes in the economic, social, and cultural fabric had also damaged the public’s view of the Festival. No longer was it a quaint picturesque celebration, or even a raucous but relatively harmless carnival. In the view of the community, it had become infested with criminals. This condition created the existence of a local “counter hegemony, a war for position on the cultural front” (Laitin 105). This resulted in a permanent full time manager being hired to “revamp” the Festival organization, and acquire funding for the purpose of expanding the variety of events and reviving outside tourist interest. The number of various event directors was reduced from 35 to 12. Nine board members were elected, and the other three seats were reserved for a

representative from the shrimping industry, the petroleum industry, and one at-large. This was the first show of support by the established (*v.* transient) community to wrest the Festival from both industries, although to remove power from shrimping at this point was irrelevant. Still, oil asserted a powerful influence in its role owner of the local economy. In 1982 oil companies contributed \$33,000 toward the Festival budget (*MCDR* 27 April 1982). This was approximately one-third of the total working capital now needed to support the annual event. In 1982, the oil industry was able to afford to be generous. The price for oil in that year had risen to over \$34.00 per barrel, up from just over \$13.00 in 1980. 1982 was the most profitable year ever for the petroleum industry, and its greatest year of growth in exploration. This extraordinary rise in fortunes further appeared to concretize the position of the oil industry and its influence on the local economic, social, and cultural fabric. Oil had become wealthy beyond even its own expectations. And, if it did not ingratiate itself to the local minority of established Morgan City residents through the symbols that created its public image, it could literally purchase influence in the Festival events, and dominate Festival participation. The hegemony of the petroleum industry was clearly not as popular with, nor as accessible to, the long time residents of Morgan City as the comparatively innocent shrimping industry had been; however, it owned Morgan City's economic base (Shirley 1982).

A number of new events were added to the Festival in the 1980s that give the appearance of attempting to return some community trust and enthusiasm for the wholesomeness of the Festival (events that likely would not appeal to roughnecks and roustabouts). In 1982 the Artists Guild Unlimited became a sanctioned event. Also a puppet show was arranged for that year. The year 1983 saw a "Shrimp and Petroleum

Baby Competition.” Also in 1983 (an election year) an editorial was published announcing that the Morgan City Festival would be visited by politicians, and urging enthusiastic participation. The same editorial mentioned that: “National news coverage about labor camps, the crime and other disadvantages the heavy industry brings is not easily overcome. But we must realize one of our best opportunities to use one of our best weapons will soon present itself—the throng of visitors.” (*MCDR* 9 July 1982, 11 August 1982, 16 August 1983, 24 August 1983). This last statement clearly indicates that the Festival was perceived as projecting an unfavorable (but likely accurate), description of the newly established cultural identity of the community under the oil regime.

In 1984, national unemployment was reported at 9.5%; but the price of oil was still hovering near \$30.00 per barrel (*Louisiana Almanac* 1997-98 647). Economic hegemony of oil was holding, but the established cultural base was resisting the image of the Festival. Even businesses that could profit from Festival participation began to protest. In 1984 the carnival/fair portion of the Festival (that portion heavily frequented at night, and more likely to be attended by throngs of oilfield and offshore workers) had to be relocated. The initial plan by Festival organizers was to move the fair to the downtown area. However, downtown businessmen rejected the idea of moving the fair into their area. They protested in spite of the possibility that they might gain economically from the numbers of people the fair would attract. The downtown businessmen were attempting to “improve the image of the downtown area” in concert with plans by the Army Corps of Engineers to landscape a new floodwall with palm trees. One of the complaints cited was that:

Last year after downtown merchants went to a lot of trouble to acquire American flags that have been flying in front of their businesses, the fair attracted an undesirable element which destroyed some of the flags. Subsequently, the merchants are now not only worried about their flags but their future palm trees (*MCDR* 18 July 1984).

The locating of a site for the fair had seriously split the community, as is evidenced in a number of articles relating to that topic. It was finally moved to a spot away from downtown (“Louisiana Shrimp and Petroleum Festival Schedule of Events” 1984; *MCDR* August 1984).

In 1985, the price of oil was just under \$29.00 per barrel—off of its all time highs, but holding. Again that year, the American Petroleum Institute contributed \$30,000 of the \$90,000 budget (*MCDR* 21 June 1985). Still there was evidence of eroding community support for the Festival. In an editorial written by Steve Shirley, the sentiment of local ambivalence was stated:

In about 10 days the area will be completely absorbed by the golden anniversary celebration of the Louisiana Shrimp and Petroleum Festival. Ten days doesn’t leave a whole lot of time to do any extra planning so whatever is set in motion today to happen Labor Day weekend will be it.

But there is one new idea that was related to me by someone who just returned from another community out of state which was celebrating an event on a scale similar to that of the local festival.

There was a large difference, though. In this other community, the whereabouts of which make little difference, the immediate impression received by visitors was that a celebration was in progress and that the community was darned proud to be hosting it (*MCDR* 21 August 1985).

In 1986, with oil dropping below \$25.00 per barrel for the first time in five years, the oil companies began moving out of exploration and capping some of its less productive wells. The migration away from Morgan City by the oil companies and their workers coincided with reports of “excellent Festival” and “best observance yet.” It was the first year in the 1980s that no mention was made of contentions for Festival

dominance among various local factions. Also, it was noted that the crowds were “well behaved, courteous and considerate of other people” (*MCDR* 4 September 1986).

By 1987, oil had dropped to below \$15.00 per barrel, and the oil companies’ presence was limited to maintenance of existing wells. With a worldwide oil glut, prices were not set to rise for some years. Morgan City was left without a recognizable economic base. Ironically, this appears to have had a positive effect on the Festival participation. Inasmuch as oil funding was gone, the communities surrounding Berwick Bay were back to supporting the Festival with a spirit of volunteerism. Budget cuts, created largely by diminishing population and loss of tax revenues, created an atmosphere that threatened to bring the Festival’s demise. Morgan City, accustomed to purchasing whatever it wished for the Festival with the backing of oil money, suddenly could not raise the \$10,000 needed for overtime pay to city employees such as police, electricians, and sanitation workers. The Berwick City Council called a special meeting to debate whether to cancel the rental of a parade float that cost only \$500 (*MCDR* 5 August 1986, 13 August 1986, 3 September 1986). Thus, even without the availability of funding, the Festival survived through ritual community action based on established traditional symbols of identity and prestige.

The above historical accounts of the displacement of the shrimping industry by the oil industry as hegemony, and the deterioration of the Festival as representative of the deterioration of community identity, begs certain questions. Most prominent of these relates to what went wrong. The answers lie in examining the interests and concerns of the seafood producing industry, as it possessed economic and cultural hegemony, *vs.* the interests and concerns of the oil industry as it possessed economic hegemony and cultural

indifference. Two key points to this discussion, and mentioned early in this chapter, relate to the homogenous nature of established inhabitants of a coastal community, and the ability of any established community to resurrect traditions and symbols for the construction of civic identity.

The economic power of the seafood industry in Morgan City only lasted approximately one year less than the amount of time it took to name the celebration the Louisiana Shrimp Festival—about 12 years. The overwhelming economic power of oil was established by 1950, after shrimpers were having to leave Morgan City in order to harvest a profitable catch, and did not begin to disappear until around 1985—about 35 years. Given only these two facts, one would reasonably assume that the interests of the oil industry would be more reflected in the Shrimp and Petroleum Festival than the interests of the seafood industry, and they would be correct. The difference in what the festival reflected as community identity until the 1960s through its official relationship with the seafood industry, as opposed to what the Festival reflected as community identity after 1967 with the official recognition of the petroleum industry, is the difference between the two industries and the respective hegemonies they possessed. Thus, the apparent failure of the dominance of the petroleum industry to reflect the characteristics of the local culture through the performance of the Festival was not, in fact, a failure. Permit me to explain.

I have already asserted that the success of the early festival/celebration ran concurrently with the growth of power within the seafood industry, and that the seafood industry in Morgan City flourished due to the capitalistic manipulative skill of the union hierarchy. I also assert that the same organizational skills of the early organizers, and the

attention that they paid to the construction of a cultural identity to be advertised to any and all who were reachable, were also of critical importance in both forging the community image and attracting visitors to view that image as it was played out in the Festival. The seafood producers union, then, by manipulating the consent of the community, as well as the social institutions that both inform and are informed by the community, was able to create a cultural image based not only on actual tradition, but also on the traditions that the union constructed for public consumption. The consent of the community appears to have been readily available to the local economic hierarchy, probably due to the homogeneity of the local culture of Morgan City (the citizenry at large being dependent on nautical commerce), as well as the fact that the local culture and the festival had evolved simultaneously.

Whether the festival would have survived the first migration of shrimp away from Morgan City in the late 1940s, and the damage that caused to the seafood producing industry, is a matter for conjecture. I am inclined to suggest that by the late 1940s the Festival had become sufficiently imbued with tradition, symbols, and prestige that it was virtually self-perpetuating. It should be remembered that there was a struggling shrimp fleet in Morgan City before prosperity serendipitously appeared. The images and icons of shrimping were already existent. The Church was in place. It merely took economic prosperity acting as a catalyst, to bring the two together. Between the Church and the shrimpers, there existed an already rich and ancient history. Thus, as long as there were boats to bless, it is likely that the clergy would have continued to discharge its ritual obligation so long as the community held to some belief in the efficacy of the ritual act

and continued to participate. Efficacy in ritual is important to this dissertation, and requires some treatment here.

Ritual efficacy can be measured on a variety of levels. Bell, discussing Malinowski, raises the question of rituals that “yield no practical result,” and concludes that these practices probably exist for this purpose of reducing anxiety (71). Thus, it can be argued that ritual need not have a practical, utilitarian purpose in order for people to perform it. Yet, I argue against this notion and assert that the reduction of anxiety through the negation of fear, or the garnering of hope, contains an implicit practical outcome. For some time, as was commented on above, God was credited with the economic success of the shrimping industry—a notion that would render the ritual Blessing practical. However, in subsequent years, shrimp boats continued to receive the Blessing with no visible positive economic results. Arguably, then, when nothing occurs as the result of ritual practice or performance—such as the Blessing a Fleet but not catching shrimp, or praying but not finding results—then that ritual could be called non-*efficacious*, and thus, *impractical*. This would be the case unless there was a belief that the practice of the ritual would restore certainty. The hope for a better future through the practice of ritual, therefore, is not necessarily *nonutilitarian*, in that it possesses the practical outcome of reducing anxiety. Thus, in the 1970s and 1980s, when Morgan City saw both the deterioration of its cultural identity, and the abandonment of its economy by the oil industry, the Festival did not disappear due to lack of efficacy. The efficacy resided in the reappropriation by the established community of traditions, symbols, and prestige—i.e., the reappropriation of ritual Blessing *and* Festival performance as community identity. This notion of efficacy as anxiety reduction would account for the

continued participation by the community, and by the shrimp fleet even in their worst economic times.

For most participants other than shrimpers, the ritual seems to have held the practical application of celebration and perpetuation of prosperity. It must be reiterated that for almost half a century, from 1936 to until the mid 1980s, Morgan City experienced a constant yearly increase in economic fortunes. It would have seemed illogical, at least to the Western mind, for any group to alter the momentum of its good fortune by changing ritual practices. How could the ritual celebration not seem efficacious during a period of constant economic growth? And who cared who held what hegemony so long as that prosperity continued?

These questions were answered in an article that stated that “few noticed when shrimping began to dwindle. There was too much going on in the oil patch for anyone to care a whole lot” (Shirley 1982). Shirley’s statement resonates the community attitude that forced a rupture in the Festival and its ability to represent the community identity as a whole. The attitude toward shrimping as the displaced cultural symbol is representative of the temporary loss in community identity that Morgan City suffered during the economic hegemony of the oil industry. Shrimping provided both economic and cultural identity to the area through its application of newfound wealth and ancient traditions. Oil never presented a set of ritual symbols that was embraced by the public.

Morgan City shrimpers were part of that group that enjoyed legendary status on the Gulf coast. During the 1930s and 40s they provided the raw material that fueled the largest seafood industry in the United States—at one time supplying one fourth of the nation’s shrimp consumption. During World War II they were heralded as heroes for

rescuing survivors of several torpedoed ships that sank in the Gulf. By the 1950s they were no longer part of the dominant economic power of Morgan City, and many had abandoned the ranks of shrimping in order to gain more profitable employment in the petroleum industry. By the 1970s they were reduced to receiving government welfare due to the disintegration of their industry on both a local and national scale. For years the local press had been filled with articles concerning the wealth of shrimping, or at least the condition of the shrimping industry. No articles appear after the 1970s. By the 1980s it was stated that no one noticed they were gone (see Shirley above). Why, then, did the shrimpers continue to participate in the Festival for over 20 years after they were economically irrelevant and the hegemony of the seafood industry had long been replaced? Why did they continue to advertise themselves as part of the cultural identity of Morgan City?

Part of the answer lies in the discussion above concerning efficacy of ritual, inasmuch as ritual is linked directly to cultural identity. I have asserted that commercial fishing carries within it its own ritual traditions. This explains, in part, why shrimp boats and the Blessing exist as iconographic compliments—they are both grounded in ritual pursuits. The fact that the image of the shrimp boats continued to be a force in the Festival is grounded in these traditions. Unlike the petroleum industry, commercial fishing can be traced back to Biblical times (that is part of its ritual base in the Festival), and certainly it existed before that.

The shrimpers of Morgan City provided not only a picturesque exoticism to the Festival, but also, for years, provided one of the important images of the community. It is the image of the shrimpers that has been the focus of the films listed above that either

address, in some form or fashion, the colorfulness of the shrimpers, or the Blessing of the boats, or the plight of the shrimpers against the oil interests. It was the Church and the shrimpers who were seen on early newsreel footage that enticed outsiders to begin to visit Morgan City. One cannot overestimate the advertising power of the iconographic image of the shrimp fleet as an attraction. Even the Church gave up on attempting to quiet crowd noise during the Blessing, and it is unlikely that the crowd was cheering and commenting on the clergy. Most importantly, the shrimper was seen as I indicated above: the icon of heroism, cunning, virility, and exoticism. He was in his element. He looked as though he belonged to the coast and to the harvest and to the Festival. He was an integral part of the construct of Morgan City's cultural image. And even though exploited by every power that owned the Festival, his image always harks back both to antiquity and to the early days of the Festival. And when seafood owned hegemony, the cultural image possessed innocence, and the community believed the image. The image informed the community, and the community informed the image. The community, the festival, and the seafood industry—like childhood friends who have occasional tiffs—had all grown up together. Ultimately, they would not let oil butt in.

I stated earlier that the failure of the economic hegemony of oil to maintain the image of cultural identity was not, in fact, a failure. I state this because the oil industry also, through economic power, influenced all other social institutions mostly through an infusion of cash and its influence in population growth. The infusion of cash was the most notable tool of power. When the title of the Festival was first changed, the new President of the Louisiana Shrimp and Petroleum Festival Inc. stated that the naming was long overdue, and that the joining together of the two industries “gives us a new lease on

life on the Festival circuit” (*TP* 1967). The last comment was no doubt aimed at the financial resources of the petroleum industry. As has been documented above, the petroleum industry was responsible for donating large amounts of money to a large budget for the Festival. These donations were seductive to Festival organizers who apparently intended to form Morgan City into a genuine tourist destination. But money is not equivalent to cultural value unless it exists in a culture that is focused solely on money.

As an economic force indifferent to its effect on local culture, the petroleum industry was responsible for bringing thousands of migrant workers to the area, many of them criminals. It was no coincidence that the social fabric of Morgan City began to noticeably unravel at the same moment that oil was enjoying its most enormous profits in history. It is also no coincidence that Morgan City, a town of currently with a population of slightly over 16,000 had a population of 63,000 in 1978—with some of the offshore workers reported literally to live in bars (*BRST* 13 December 1978). The established community of Morgan City felt sufficiently threatened by the employees of the oil companies that they attempted to enact a law that was clearly unconstitutional requiring all transient workers to be mugged and fingerprinted before they could work in the area. On any given day, the transient population of Morgan City outnumbered the established citizens.

The animosity between established citizens, and their resentment toward the newly constructed community identity, was reflected in the Festival and is documented in their records. In 1978, the year that Morgan City attempted to enact the law against transient labor, a child of unidentifiable gender marched in the children’s parade, dressed

in a costume that appears to have been made of Spanish moss, carrying a sign that announces “Oil Field Trash” (MCA Photo 1978). This child won a prize for “best costume.” In 1982, when oil hit its highest price per barrel ever, another child, hidden among its costume—a trash can—carried a sign announcing “Oil Field Trash and proud of it” (MCA Photo 1982). Neither of these children, nor their parents, invented these terms to describe themselves. Add to these images the complete domination of oil boats in the Blessing and water parade event, and one can see the manner in which the power and influence of the oil industry constructed the public view of cultural identity through public performance. The oil industry had brought to Morgan City: thousands of transient workers, at least one murderer, vandals and unruly crowds, nondescript nautical vessels, and a lot of money. And all of these (with the possible exception of the murderer) *became* the image of the Festival during the 1970s and 80s.

Among the other factors that caused the established community to call for a reorganization of the Festival in 1982 resided in the perception that fewer out of town visitors were coming to the Festival (*MCDR 27 April 1982*). Complaints of rudeness, and vandalism were addressed in the local press, along with gentle requests for the citizens—now largely employees of oil companies—to show hospitality to the out of town guests. Such requests had never been necessary under the hegemony of the seafood industry. Also, the local press, that prior to the 1970s had always lauded praise on the Festival, began to offer such criticisms as, “the festival is, by no stretch of the imagination, the most positive thing that can be tagged to this community by anyone” (*MCDR 27 August 1982*). In 1984, when renovation to the flood wall in Morgan City prevented the fair/carnival portion of the Festival from being held downtown—its

previous location—no one wanted it near their property (*MCDR* 18 July 1984, 7 August 1984).

In 1983, the State of Louisiana was promoting the 1984 Worlds Fair. The hope was to attract enormous crowds from the national and international community to New Orleans where Louisiana products and services could be displayed and advertised. The perception of the cultural identity of Morgan City by the World's Fair Committee was exposed when Morgan City was invited to display an oil and gas exhibit. This is important in that they did not invite a shrimp boat and a priest. The advertising for the World's Fair was managed by a variety of the news media from throughout the state. Advertising was arranged for the Morgan City community by McDermott International, an oilfield equipment supply company, (*MCDR* 24 August 1983). In this lies another example of the manner in which, and by whom, Morgan City was being depicted to the outside world. Of interest: except for the year, 1983, I can discover no outside advertising being purchased by the Festival.

The petroleum industry did not fail to influence every area of civic society. It did not fail to create a unified moral order in the sense that Gwyn Williams described it: an order in which a certain way of life and thought is dominant, in which one concept of reality is diffused throughout society. The certain way of life was described as typified by roughnecks and roustabouts with “high-paying jobs and wild lifestyle MCA *Laurence Times* 1986). The unraveling of the Festival through its lack of local, core support was directly attributable to the actions of Festival participants; and the Festival participants were directly representative of what had become the visible cultural identity of Morgan City. Thus, the oil industry dominated the local economy, overwhelmed—by nearly

quadrupling—the local population, infused transience into civic institutions, and established and advertised the form of the new cultural identity. That there was contestation fought along cultural lines between the established population of Morgan City, and the oil industry does not in any way negate oil as economically hegemonic during the period discussed.

Nothing in the model of hegemony that has been applied in this dissertation rules out the contestation between community subsystems (counter hegemonies) and economic power. In fact, several such contestations have been discussed: the original struggle between the two branches of the seafood industry, the crushing dominance of White over Black so that the contesting never entered Festival identity, the usurpation of hegemony of seafood by oil, and the rebellion of the established citizenry against the petroleum industry's construction of cultural identity.

One can only speculate on the form the cultural identity of Morgan City would have taken had oil remained at its peak demand and price. That is a moot point. The oil industry knew from the its earliest penetration into the Morgan City area that the oil industry would be there for as long as it was profitable to be there. Anyone doubting this assertion needs merely to view the rapid manner in which the oil companies, and their attendant populations of transient workers disappeared when offshore exploration ceased due to the crash in oil prices. It was only then that the Morgan City press announced that the Festival was “better than ever.”

Even if oil would have stayed, it could never have functioned as an adequate cultural replacement for the seafood industry. What made the celebration attractive from the moment of its inception, and thus set it in motion, was the quaintness and exotic

nature of its images. These images, as I have asserted above, held within them deeply rooted traditions of antiquity; and such traditions are part and parcel of ritual. The history of the oil industry is much more difficult to romanticize, although efforts have been made. Films such as *Giant* (1956), *The Stars Fell on Henrietta* (1996), and *Thunder Bay* (1953)—a work that focuses on the sometimes violent contentions between the shrimping and oil interests in Morgan City—to list but a very few, all carry the same metaphorical images regardless of the idiosyncrasies of their plotlines: money handled by oily hands is necessarily filthy. Also, those familiar with American history are aware of the practice Standard Oil Company to monopolize the petroleum industry in the United States. While greed certainly may be linked to ritual dramatic practice as a tragic flaw, it would likely not be advertised as cultural characteristic even in cases where that were true. Thus, the petroleum industry carries with it no traditions that easily adapt to ritual public performance.

The reasons for the differences between the image of local culture under the influence of the seafood industry, and that same image under the economic power of the petroleum industry, resides in the care with which these two economic hegemonies attended to social practices. Once visitors were encouraged to attend the celebration in the late 1930s, the seafood industry carefully constructed the image they wanted to project to the public. Attending the festival in the 1930s and 1940s was to acknowledge interest of the cultural identity of Morgan City as an exotic, enjoyable destination; to continue to attend was to be engaged by the images: rituals of Blessing, shrimp boats, and a host of American entertainments.

The last element is true of the petroleum industry as well: that to desire to participate in the Festival, one would need be engaged by the idea of doing so. However, the petroleum industry usurped the ritual celebration. It did not experience the evolution of a symbiotic relationship with the Festival; it overwhelmed the Festival. Thus, deterioration in politeness and decorum, recorded on only sparsely and likely rarely seen during the 1930s and 1940s, was reflective of the values of the homogenous culture represented by the seafood industry. The behavior would not have been noticed had there been no basis for comparison. However, permanent residents of Morgan City, who had grown up with the Festival, recognized the indecorum attendant with the abrupt cultural shifting, and countered to the point where it was reported and recorded in the local press. In the earlier days, indecorousness was identified by a lack of reverence during the Blessing. Under the oil administration, behavior became reduced to acts, at least, of violence against property.

Therefore, the respective hegemonies projected their respective constructed cultural identities. The seafood industry carefully configured a Festival that would reflect its aforementioned values and sense of identity. The oil industry constructed a Festival where the transient hordes of oil workers could display their indifference to the community in which they temporarily lived; i.e., both the oil companies and their employees were transient and indifferent to the community. Both attracted crowds that were engaged by the respective cultural identities, advertised and projected. To the extent that events were scripted, those events were acted on by the personalities who were attracted to the community image.

The playing out of the Festival is, then, a true representation of the cultural identity of the values of a given economic and/or social power at a given time, be that the hegemony of the seafood industry, the oil industry, of the established citizenry. To conclude this chapter, I turn to Turner's discussion of aesthetic or stage drama and its relationship to social processes:

The stage drama, when it is meant to do more than entertain—though entertainment is always one of its vital aims—is a metacommentary, explicit or implicit, witting or unwitting, on the major social dramas of its social context (wars, revolutions, scandals, institutional changes). Not only that, but its message and its rhetoric feed back into the *latent* processual structure of the social drama and partly account for its ready ritualization. Life itself now becomes a mirror held up to art, and the living now *perform* their lives, for the protagonists of a social drama, a “drama of living,” have been equipped by aesthetic drama with some of their most salient opinions, imageries, tropes, and ideological perspectives (16-17).

Thus, for our purposes here, the performance of the Festival—and its entertainments and lessons—informs the social rhetorical structure that feeds the overt performance of daily life, that implies the social processes that become manifest in stage drama, and so on. Turner is careful to point up that the mutual mirroring—life by art, art by life—is not exact, and that “at each exchange something new is added and something old is lost or discarded. Human beings learn through experience” (17). All this goes to say that the Festival is a representation of the cultural/social identity of Morgan City, that the cultural identity is informed by the community and its values (even when those values are limited to economic interests), that the festival both informs and is informed by that identity, that the process is inevitably subject to evolutionary forces so that elements of the community may experience subtle changes, and if so the changes will be played out in the next go round.

CHAPTER VII—CONCLUSION: THE FESTIVAL AS HEGEMONY

In 1999, I was sitting in the Morgan City Library reading one of the hundreds of newspaper articles that chronicled the Shrimp and Petroleum Festival over the years, when I was introduced to a gentleman whose wife worked there and was about to get off work. We struck up a conversation through which I learned that he managed a crew of undersea welders and technicians who did maintenance and repair work on offshore rigs. I would have been interested in his life had I not been writing about Morgan City. We shared some good humor about our respective backgrounds—his being a lifetime growing up on the coast, and working in some or other area of marine commerce, mine being a central Texas cowboy turned entrepreneur turned student/teacher. We are about the same age, and both of us had spent some portion of our lives—he more than I—doing “hard work.” I told him I was writing about the Shrimp and Petroleum Festival and his mood turned cold and suspicious. After a moment’s pause he asked, “What are you going to say about it”? I told him I didn’t know yet, I hadn’t finished reading up on it. After another pause, and with a tone that sounded like a savvy local giving common sense advice to tourist who might roam off into a swamp one night, he stated, “We don’t like being laughed at.” I assured him that such was not my intention; however it was some several minutes before his mood was receptive to sharing stories.

We agreed to meet later, and did so. Over several drinks in a local bar I heard the story of Morgan from the time he was young child in the early 1950s. His father had been a shrimper, and he told of a fleet that was sometime stacked ten boats deep at the dock—the last man in had to walk across everyone else’s boat to get to land. He had fond memories of going out with his father when they were the last boat in. “Shrimpers

would be talking and drinking and repairing their nets,” he recalled, “and you had to stop on every boat, and visit.” We talked about the oil boom and bust. He told me that there were still jobs off shore, and occasionally a new rig would be erected, but it wasn’t often—not the solid wave of activity of the 1970s and 1980s. When I asked about shrimping he asked me if I had been to the Festival. I told him I had gone every year since 1994. He asked me how many shrimp boats I saw at the Blessing. I told him “a few.” “That’s all that we’ve had since the 70s, except for the Vietnamese, and they stay to themselves,” he said. At least that’s how I remember it. You don’t go drinking with a man who is suspicious of your motives and pull out a tape recorder.

The point of all of this is that I was able to elicit credible testimony to what all other forms of evidence had already told me: the Festival itself has established itself as the new economic hegemony. The one force that still brings in a large infusion of cash each year is the Louisiana Shrimp and Petroleum Festival. The Festival draws approximately 100,000 persons each Labor Day Weekend to Morgan City—a town with a population just over 16,000 (Angers 1999; U.S. Census, Louisiana, Table 2). Many of these persons are, no doubt, from the area. But, I know from personal experience, that renting a hotel room of any quality at the last minute during the Festival is extremely difficult, and at times, impossible. Restaurants benefit, as well, although many close for the Festival, and several of those that do not close, are not open on Sunday.

No one will tell me how much money gets spent, and I doubt if anyone knows. Much of the money is spent on arts and crafts, and/or food and drink. In 2000, the Festival director did tell me that some of the more popular food concession stands—often rented by church or school organizations—make “several thousand dollars” over the four

day event. I do not doubt it, although I do not know what she meant by “several”. On one particularly hot and humid day, I personally spent over \$30 on lemonade. The Festival itself, including employee expense (the Festival office is open year round) is supported by renting space for booths—arts, crafts, food, drink. The space is donated by the city of Morgan City to the Festival to promote the event and attract outsiders for the benefit of local businesses.

In addition to the arts and crafts, and food, there are a variety of entertainments. In 2002, the Festival presented fifteen different musical acts, many of them nationally known. Other regular events include the Street Fair, Cajun Culinary Classic (the food booths), Arts and Crafts (over 100 booths), Gospel of Love Tent, a 2-day Bass Tournament, Road Race, Horseshoe Tournament, Children’s Games, Champagne Breakfast and Style Show, Tour of Coast Guard Boat, Children’s Storytelling, Children’s Street Parade, Adult Street Parade, The McDermott/British Petroleum/Kerr-McGee Children’s Village, King and Queen Coronation and Ball, Baptist Church Service, Mass in the Park, Blessing, Water Parade, Fireworks, and Shrimp Cook-off and Judging (“Louisiana Shrimp and Petroleum Schedule of Events 2002). As the Festival Director told me in 2000, “We try to have something for everyone.” This schedule has remained approximately the same since 1982, when a full time manager was hired to run the Festival (“Louisiana Shrimp and Petroleum Festival Schedule of Events” 1982, 3, 4, 8, 9, 90, 1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 2001, 02). The notable exception is the addition of the gospel tent.

The purpose of the Festival today is, ostensibly, to celebrate those industries that helped to establish the economic base of Morgan City. The purpose is, in fact, to draw tourists to Morgan City to spend money. The Louisiana Shrimp and Petroleum Festival

is “the oldest chartered harvest festival in the state.” The curious irony here is that nothing much has been harvested in Morgan City for almost two decades except tourists. The Festival actually functions more as a heritage festival that brings in people to view the new exoticism: what was.

Heritage viewing is a marketing technique that renders useful the images of the past that have vanished, or have ceased to become economically viable. According to Kirshenblatt-Gimblett “Heritage organizations ensure that places and practices in danger of disappearing because they are no longer occupied or functioning or valued will survive. It does this by adding the value of pastness, exhibition, difference, and where possible indigeneity (130). While the Shrimp and Petroleum Festival does not call itself a heritage organization, it functions as one. The industries of commercial fishing, and oil and gas exploration are not in danger of disappearing on a national or international level; however they have all but disappeared in Morgan City. To a visitor—and I have been one—the Festival sells the images of the shrimping fleet and the oil business through the sale of items that carry the icons of those businesses. The sale is not necessarily of tangible objects, although those items are available, but also of images, memories, nostalgia, and ritual restoration. The attractiveness of purchasing heritage is that one may acquire what was, in the here and now. In fact, the sense of immediacy in such purchases is grounded in the desire to make actual the experience of the past, even though that past can never truly materialize. It is this very ability of making the past become real and now that explains the urgency of the established residents of Morgan City in wresting the Festival from the power of oil. The here-and-now reproduction of images and events are charged with meaning through the very ritual reproduction that renders the images and

events both artificial (as opposed to the original), and genuine (as the first time *this* reproduction has been produced).

People pay to come to Morgan City to see The Blessing of the Fleet, and that is what they see. Boats are still in the water—a few of them shrimp boats—and the clergy still sprinkles Holy Water and offers Benedictions for their safety. The Blessing is a genuine icon, and artifact. It has been celebrated for 66 years of the Festival. Is it any less urgent now as then? And even if the entire performance were only an image played out by actors trained to drive boats, and imitate the clergy, the effect would be the same on those desiring to experience the real past, because the real past—all the Blessings that have every taken place in Morgan City—is happening right now. Walking into the Shrimp and Petroleum Festival is to experience a life that no longer exists, but is restored by its ritual restaging. If Turner is to be believed—and he is—the repetition of the ritual performance has always been both representative of the community identity (through the ritual staging of the Festival), and the actual identity itself (informed by the ritual). And, also according to Turner, if each mirroring of the life by art, and art by life changes a bit, there are still the fragments of the original within the reproduction of the ritual. Thus the replaying of the ritual event really brings back what has gone before, only differently each time.

Enfolded within the ritual reproduction are the vestiges of the culture and the people who produced it. This distance in time, the absence of the original, is sought through the fragments left behind: the indigenous peoples, the descendants of the founders who forged the culture from the raw material of swamp and river and trees and

oil. A problem in Morgan City in the exhibition of indigenous culture resides in the fact that tourists would not know what to look for.

Morgan City has never been a dominantly Cajun or Creole culture, but visitors to swampland are unaware of this. There are certainly some colorful characters that live in the area and frequent the Festival, but the best chance of being exposed to the Cajun or Creole culture is at the music events where the musicians are more likely to be of these ethnicities than a local resident Festival/participant. To a visitor, however, if a Cajun is not available, any local with a memory and a willingness to talk will suffice. Among the local population, those that I have spoken with who were alive during the first festivals remember them nostalgically, and report their memories. They even remember the era of the oil boom nostalgically. I spoke to one of these older folks within the last few days, and questioned her about the past. She reports everything as positive: there was never any trouble at the Festival, there was never any contention between shrimpers and oil interests, and there was never any racial animosity. Such is the construction of her sense of history, perhaps. Also, not unlike the gentleman I spoke of at the first of this chapter, she is suspicious of outsiders asking questions.

There is another problem with selling indigeneity. When tourists visit a site for the purpose of seeing the indigenous people, frequently it does not occur to them that the indigenous do not appreciate being thought of as exotic. They do not think of themselves as exotic, and often are offended by tourists roaming about looking for some living artifact—a common attitude for tourists and locals, alike. I have a close friend in Texas who is from Brooklyn, New York. He always introduces me to his family, when they visit, as his friend from Caldwell, Texas. If I refuse to wear a cowboy hat and boots, and

twang my voice even more than is normal, he is disappointed and becomes sullen. I understand how the citizens of Morgan City feel. The irony in this, of course, is that Morgan City has always been predominantly Anglo American, originally settled by Western and Northern European stock. As one of my acquaintances living in Morgan City—but who refuses to have anything to do with the Festival—put it, “tourists come down here looking for Cajuns and mostly just see other tourists. People in Morgan City look just like everyone else.” They really do. But the perception that one is seeing something different is important in the construction of the memory of the experience.

In a sense, the selling of the exotic living artifact is what the Church complained about decades ago. Tourists would come to see the quaint ritual, viewing it as an exhibition for their entertainment. The view that an artifact contains no real value for the indigenous people can in some areas likely be a dangerous proposition. In Morgan City, bad manners during the Blessing have become so commonplace that no one seems to notice any longer. In 1999, I was privileged to ride on the Priest’s boat, the Festival flagship and one of the few remaining shrimping vessels that works out of Morgan City. As the Priest stood on the side of the shrimp boat, the larger boats would pass as closely as was safe and he would sling Holy Water toward them (all of it falling into Berwick Bay). Several smaller personal craft such as ski boats and recreational speed boats rushed up to the side and quickly turned away, stopping only a few feet from the Priest’s boat. In several of the boats, revelers were shirtless, and drinking beer while they were being Blessed. Afterwards, I asked the Priest if he would reveal to me the precise language he applied during his performance of the Blessing. He grinned and told me that he was new to the parish, and that he was just making it up as he went along. I thought it

humorously ironic that those standing at a distance, and believing that were viewing a sincere, ritual Blessing had no idea of the lack of solemnity on either side of the aspergillum. But, at a distance, it is still a performance of ritual, and an important representation of cultural identity

Ecological difference is an important marketing tool as well. Certain areas of Morgan City contain a natural, geographical charm that would be enticing aesthetically to anyone not overly familiar with the coastal regions. Thus the difference in view would contain appeal. Also, the Louisiana Shrimp and Petroleum Festival is set apart from other Festivals—a necessity when competing with other events in other places—by the fact that its name conjures such a variety of ironic images. In 2000, the Festival director told me that she gets several phone calls a year, mostly from the Northeast, from radio stations who want to ask her about the “shrimp and oil” festival. She laughs at this, and takes that established view common to conmen, hucksters, and promoters of all types: there is no such thing as bad publicity.

Tourism is important because one accomplishes merely by being there, what most companies must accomplish through the difficult and costly process of exporting goods. Where other industries must develop their product through some means (mining, manufacturing, etc), package it, distribute it, and sell it, heritage tourism must merely take existing resources and make them appear sufficiently exotic for people to pay to see them. In a sense, however, the exotic is not the problem. Exoticism can be conjured through the exhibition of the past, a constructed history, a fragment left over from a lost world, the spirits of ancestors.

The problem arises with balancing exoticism against sameness. In order for people to want to go to any destination, they must have some idea of what they are going to encounter when they get there. Often times, people who have unhappy surprises on vacations refuse to repeat the same mistake. This is something that the original organizers of the Festival knew in the late 1930s and 1940s: that entertainment was key to getting people to stay and spend money. It is what Festival organizers know today: something for everyone. The test, then, resides in simultaneously maintaining a sense of the exotic alongside the certainty of sameness.

In order to have something for everyone, the Festival combines the nostalgia of what was, with the entertainment of here and now. The fair presents a carnival like atmosphere that offers a few low-grade thrill rides. The arts and crafts show is generally filled with people purchasing anything from the aesthetically sublime, to the tawdry and base; and who knows which is which? The music acts range in variety from local zydeco, to country, to rock, to swing, to fusions of all of any variety of styles. The Children's storytelling is as interesting for adults with a sense of curiosity as it is for children. The King and Queen Coronation and Ball represents local spectacle. Merely walking about the park invites a desire to be there. When I was alone, I never failed to find someone to speak with—not everyone is outgoing, but some are. The beer stands are useful places to strike up conversations—merely look for a frequently repeating customer. All this goes to say that, at the Festival, one may move with facility from the here and now, to what was, and back again.

And it is all an illusion, and it is real, for it is all ritual restoration. The Festival is a constant representation of itself. It can never be what it claims because it slips back and

forth between the textual past, and the improvised now. The history that informs it cannot be recreated. Nor can history be completely understood by reading a limited number of accounts, no matter how large that limited number; although, that is a manner in which one may know *something* of the Festival. But the history is only imagined, anyway—altered over time through changes in perception. The knowledge of its history is an important element in understanding the Festival, but the Festival cannot be apprehended without also performing the ritual, and thus becoming part of the community. And can a tourist do that? No, a tourist must go home, eventually; and so a tourist generally does not possess the duration of time that is required to become part of the process of living community rituals, and having life inform ritual performance, and that ritual performance inform life.

The Festival still stands as the representative of the cultural identity of the community. This is made possible due to the importance that the community places on the ritual practice of performing and living, living and performing. It is also the one event per year that is guaranteed to bring large numbers of people and dollars to the town. And, that indicates that it is still the tool of the economic hegemony. And that may have come to mean that it is the tool of itself. The Festival has become its own self-perpetuating ritual—a community sponsored and supported event that each year exhibits a performance that was forged from the contestations of economic struggle and came to its present form.

Perhaps the Festival has built hegemony from the bottom up instead of the top down. Perhaps by informing all elements of civil society in the support of ritual practice the ritual itself has become hegemony. The Festival certainly sets up a unified moral

order—a concept of reality diffused throughout society—by becoming the most important civic event in Morgan City. Civic identity, played out at the Festival, reflects obvious assumptions about how life is and should be run. The day-to-day pervasiveness of the Festival is evident in social institutions that contribute to it, and that is every social institution in Morgan City. The perpetuation of the Festival is a yearlong process that ceases when the last Festival begins, and begins when the last Festival ends. The organization that directs it, and the community that embraces it are all part of the same ritual process of life, and reflection of life, through the playing out of the Festival.

The great difference between the Festival in the 1930s and 40s, and the later Festivals under the hegemony of oil during the 1970s and 1980s, is that no force other than profit drives its existence, and thus profit holds hegemony. The hegemony of a profit motive that must cater to all elements of society has built a much more democratic Festival. The Gulf Coast Seafood and Trappers Association had wrested power from labor in the seafood industry to create their union—that included labor, but was more beneficial to owner/management. Thus, the Festival, under union supervision, expressed the identity and interests of the union. When oil took over, there was no particular interest shown in embracing anything except the crass interests of the oil industry and the excesses of its employees. Now, the “something for everyone” approach has at least invited participation from the Black community. Shrimpers are still vestigially involved. Oil, anxious to repair its image as indifferent to ecological concerns, sponsors the Children’s village. This is the current cultural identity of Morgan City. And so long as it exists, the Festival will function both as the reflection and the reality of that cultural identity.

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VITA

The author of this dissertation was born September 11, 1949, in Ft. Worth, Texas, and attended parochial and public schools in Austin and Caldwell, Texas, graduating from Caldwell High School in May 1967. After several years in business, he entered Temple Junior College. After transferring to Texas A&M, he earned a Bachelor of Arts in Drama in 1990. Upon graduation from Texas A&M, he immediately enrolled in the Drama Department of the University of Houston where he had the opportunity of working under such luminaries as Jose Quintero and Edward Albee. He received his Master of Arts degree from the University of Houston in 1993.

While engaged in his doctoral work at Louisiana State University, he worked as a teaching assistant in various classes, and as the assistant to Dr. Les Wade. Since June of 1996 he has been employed at Temple College as a Speech and Theatre instructor, where he has directed over 20 plays and performed in several others.

The author is currently married to Leah Farrelly. She is a practitioner in every area of theatre.