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## Saint Maló remembered

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SAINT MALÓ REMEMBERED

A Thesis

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  
Master of Arts

in

The Department of Geography and Anthropology

by  
Erin Elizabeth Voisin  
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## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my great aunt Dorothy Champagne Voisin who greatly influenced the first years of my life. You will forever be in my heart.

## **Acknowledgements**

I have many people to whom I am grateful for their aid in composing this thesis. I would like to thank the members of my committee, Dr. Rob Mann and Dr. Miles Richardson, and my major advisor, Dr. Helen Regis, for their constant and enduring patience, encouragement and guidance during this life-altering process. I would also like to thank Dr. Paul Farnsworth, under whose guidance I formulated the original archaeological concept for this thesis. I am also grateful for the staff of the Geography and Anthropology office: Vicki Terry, Nedda Taylor, Linda Strain, and especially Dana Sanders who devote endless hours making sure that the department and the students in it run smoothly and avoid missing deadlines. Further thanks are due to every Departmental Professor, in one way or another you have all inspired me and made my time at LSU as beneficial as possible.

This project would not be possible without the consultants whom I interviewed. I would like to extend my appreciation to Cathy Smith, Jerry Gandolfo, Priestess Miriam Chamani and Brenda Marie Osbey. They were willing to share their expertise and passion for the culture of New Orleans with a virtual stranger and cultural outsider and for that I will be eternally grateful.

The most important acknowledgement I would like to make is to my personal support system. My father Chester P. Voisin, who always encouraged me both financially and intellectually. My mother, Emmadel Voisin whose constant interest and care helped me through many difficult times. My sisters Janelle and Heidi and my most fervent supporter Troy Roddy whose strength and kindness continue to inspire me.

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## Preface

In the anthropology community there is an ongoing discussion of what terms should be used when referring to the African-American religion known in popular culture as Voodoo. Many scholars (Consentino 1988; Courlander 1988) view the word Voodoo as laden with racist and stereotypical undertones. They suggest the use of the term Vodun or Vodou. However, this could present a problem when trying to differentiate the form of this religion which developed in New Orleans from the Haitian and Caribbean form brought to the city by refugees of the Haitian Revolution and the San Domingo Revolution. For the purpose of this thesis the term Voodoo will be used to refer to the version of the religion that originated in New Orleans. This decision was influenced by the common use of this term by writers focusing on the Louisiana religion in the literature that informs this thesis.

## Glossary

Much of this research spans various cultural regions and because of this certain terms from various languages are used to relay political, economic, and social ideas as well as geographic areas. The following list of terms should aid the reader's experience.

*Bas du Fleuve* – area between New Orleans and the mouths of the Mississippi River, primarily east of the river. Area controlled by San Maló's band of maroons (Edwards & Verton 2004: 21).

*Balize* – area at the mouth of the Mississippi River (Hall 1992:212).

*Cimarrón* – Spanish term for runaway slave literally translated as “wild” or “runaway” (Hall 1992:).

*Code Noir* – French slave code (Edwards & Verton 2004:63).

*Creole* – persons descended from Old World settlers but born in the tropical New World (Edwards & Verton 2004:76).

*Cyprières* – a cypress forest or back swamp (Edward & Verton 2004:84).

*Engagés* – French indentured servant (Edwards & Verton 2004:93).

*Grand marronage* – act of running away with the intention of making this a permanent circumstance, what maroon societies engaged in.

*Habitant* – a farmer, settler (Edwards & Verton 2004:114).

*La Côte des Allemands* – name by which the German community called their settlement known as the German Coast, consisting of St. Charles and St. John the Baptist Parishes (Merrill 2005:28).

*Las Siete Partidas* – Spanish slave code by which slaves are seen as human beings, equally deserving of humane conditions.

*Marron* – French term for escaped slave (Edwards & Verton 2004:135).

*Marronage* – French term for the act of becoming a maroon.

*Petit marronage* – temporary stints of desertion in which slaves would usually go visit family members at neighboring plantations.

*Juan San Maló* – Spanish name of the maroon leader who emerged in the 1760s-80s as a threat to the Spanish social system in Southeastern Louisiana. Also: Saint Maló, Saint Marron, Saint Maroon.

*the religion* – term used by members of the African-American religion which developed in New Orleans to refer to their culture of worship, also known as *community of the faithful*. These *members of the faith* typically do not use “Voodoo” or its variants to refer to their faith.

*Ville Gaillarde* – territory controlled by San Maló and his maroons in the southeastern area between New Orleans and the Eastern shore of Lake Borgne (Hall 1992:212).

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## **Abstract**

This research explores the unique process of creolization that occurred in Southern Louisiana through the development of the figure of San Maló over time. His transformation from historic rebel to religious icon takes place through the devices of folklore, poetry, and song. This developmental process of a culture redefining its heroes through oral tradition represents the dynamism of creolization. The transformative process of San Maló serves as an exemplary representation of how a culture negotiates its own history with what is deemed necessary and beneficial to the culture's survival. All information on this transformation was gathered through historic research and personal interviews with members of the Voodoo faith community and scholars in New Orleans and Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The intention of this project is to celebrate the African-American oral tradition and its unique existence and transformation in Southern Louisiana from the colonial era to contemporary Creole society.

## Chapter I

### Introduction

Southern Louisiana has commonly been associated with the romanticized and often sensationalized aspect of creolization known as “Voodoo.” The more popular form of Vodou can be seen by tourists throughout the French Quarter, but this version is made up of Haitian and Caribbean aspects of the Creole religion. Among those who practice the traditional form of “Voodoo” that developed indigenously in New Orleans it is known simply as *the religion*. Saint Maló is portrayed in the literature pertaining to the development of this religion as the patron saint of runaway slaves. Within this religious community he is a particularly intriguing figure whose legacy grew from violent and inspiring origins. He is alternatively called Saint Marron or Saint Maroon and is referred to in historic documents as Juan San Maló. These names recall the deed for which Saint Maló is most famous. He was part of the pantheon of saints at whose altar the famous Voodoo Queen, Marie Laveau, paid her respects. While his usefulness as an advocate for runaway slaves might not seem relevant in contemporary society, the history and transformation of Saint Maló has become an indispensable part of the African-American *community of the faithful* in New Orleans. During his lifetime he was a rebel militant in colonial Louisiana. Over time he developed into a spiritual figure that has become an integral part of African-American identity in this New Orleans religious community (Fandrich 2005; Gaston 2005; Hall 1992; Din 1980; Tallant 1946).

In the Fall of 2006 the idea for this thesis was sparked in my Historical Archaeology Seminar when we covered the site of Fort Mosé Florida, the first free black town in colonial America under Spanish governance (Deagan and Landers 1999). After this introduction to the negotiated race relations in colonial Florida, my interest in the history of this topic in colonial Louisiana grew. The first few mentions I came across of San Maló were in sources on the

historical development of “Voodoo” and the various transformations of this religion in the city of New Orleans. The main sources in this research were Jesse Gaston (2005), Robert Tallant (1946), Ina Fandrich (2005) and Carolyn Morrow Long (2006). Having grown up in Louisiana I became intrigued by the figure of the maroon and by the runaway slaves who formed encampments on the marginal regions of plantation society. I was even more puzzled by the absence of this figure in my Louisiana history education.

## **Methodology**

The primary findings of this thesis rest largely on personal interviews with members of *the faithful* and scholars of the development of the African-American community in New Orleans. The interpretations derived from these interviews were largely informed by the historical research concerning the religious practices of African-Americans as well as African-American folklore, the African oral narrative tradition of the Mandé hero epic and the historic account of San Maló and his band of *Cimarrones* in Louisiana. The level of secrecy desired by some of the sects of the Voodoo community of New Orleans had a direct influence on my access to the community in which I expected to find the information I needed. The research on the figure of Saint Maló did not intend to address a subject that might endanger this important aspect of the religion but to gather information about the transformation this figure has undergone. The information desired focused entirely on one particular, historic figure and his place within the religious community. While the majority of my research relied on the historic record and folk record of San Maló as recorded in the works of George Washington Cable (1886), the trajectory of his legacy within the contemporary *community of the faithful* in New Orleans was drawn out through interviews with members of the Voodoo community of New Orleans and scholars who have made the study of Creole culture history their life’s work. I conducted four interviews and I had specific reasons for choosing the particular individuals I interviewed. The public figures I

have permission to openly cite, but if any consultant's views could be seen as crossing the boundary of secrecy to which they are bound I will respect their anonymity when I quote them so as not to endanger their position within their community.

Being a white, middle-class, French-descended, Catholic, female, native of Southern Louisiana there was no opportunity for me to conduct any participant observation in the researching of this thesis. This obstacle was made explicit to me within the first moments of the interview process. The interviews were tape-recorded and written consent was required of the participants. The questions posed to the participant were designed to encourage a dialogue between the interviewer and participant, not merely a confined question and answer structure.

The strict designation of who can be privileged to certain aspects of the "Voodoo" faith in New Orleans greatly restricted my access to certain information. I was not privileged with information about certain ritualized processes that occur between the members of the faithful and songs that are handed down within the community. Due to this impediment, which has served to keep this particular faith alive in New Orleans, I relied greatly on the interviews I conducted in order to gather information on San Maló's legacy within the contemporary faith community. In order to make the transfer of information as beneficial as possible I interviewed public figures within the New Orleans community who had deep ties to the faith community as well. These connections will be explained in Chapter VI: San Maló Today. These individuals also had experience with the historic research I had conducted as well as experience with communicating information to the public. I did not originally intend to have the academic and insider perspectives combined, but being a cultural outsider exploring a community in which knowledge is a privilege of the insider, the participants I chose were either scholars or public spokespersons who had grown up in or around the *community of the faithful*.

## Literature Review

In order to better understand the contemporary legacy of San Maló, it is important to have as detailed as possible a picture of the physical and cultural landscape from which he emerged as a rebel leader. The sources I used to illustrate the environmental landscape of colonial Louisiana are Shannon Dawdy's 2003 dissertation, Jack Kindinger's 2002 geologic study of Southeastern Louisiana, Joe Taylor's 1963 geologic overview of Louisiana and B. Miles Gilbert's 1973 publication on Mammalian Osteology to review what wildlife would have populated the environment in which the maroons survived. The sources which provided information on the economic and legislative composition of Louisiana are: Danial Usner (1992), Marcel Giraud (1950), Gwedolyn Midlo Hall (1992), Ellen Merrill (2005), Ina Fandrich (2005), Lafcadio Hearn (1924 [1883]), and Gilbert C. Din (1999). Further details can be gained from Jack Holmes' 1962 article which looks at the economic problems encountered by the Spanish Governors of Louisiana during the period from 1766-1799 (Holmes 1962:521). In this article Holmes directly but briefly addresses Governor Miro's troubles concerning the defenses against Saint Maló's band (Holmes 1962:533-534). Thomas Ingersoll's 1995 and 1991 articles respectively address the issues pertaining to both slave codes and the treatment of free blacks in the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century New Orleans.

The literature directly addressing San Maló, whether briefly or substantially, does not portray a detailed connection between San Maló, the historic rebel, and San Maló, the folklore hero and religious figure. Fandrich's 2005 discussion of San Maló, like those found in Gaston's 2005 account of Voodoo in New Orleans, just vaguely touches on his figure as a saint in Voodoo (Fandrich 2005:201; Gaston 2005:135). Most of their comments are based on Tallant's interview with an African-American informant, Raoul Desfrenes (Tallant 1946:77). Most scholars today view Tallant's work as having been tainted by a racist perspective. In my

opinion, the outsider perspective of an observer like Robert Tallant probably tended to sensationalize his findings, perhaps due in part to enthusiasm and not contempt. The desire to paint the portrait of the exotic “other” is a powerful influence, especially as it exists right under our noses. In spite of this, one can appreciate the considerable amount of leg work he conducted in collecting many oral histories from the New Orleanian African-American community of his era, the 1940s, which consisted of a number of formerly enslaved individuals. San Maló transformed in less than a century from a finite, flawed man into a triumphant African-American martyr.

The sources which detail the historic figure of San Maló are Gilbert C. Din’s 1980 article on the Cimarrones of Spanish Colonial Louisiana and Gwendolyn Midlo Hall’s 1992 investigation into San Maló’s establishment of the Bas de Fleuve network of maroon communities in Southeastern Louisiana. Din states that the literature available on San Maló in 1980 was incomplete and at times inaccurate. He calls for someone to look into the Spanish Judicial archives and twelve years later Hall’s publication did just that (Din 1980:237-238; Hall 1992). After the disbanding of San Maló’s maroons, the surviving members of his band who evaded capture fled to Barataria, an area later occupied by Jean Lafitte’s men and explored in Joan Exnicios’ 2006 chapter in *X Marks the Spot*, a publication on the archaeology of pirates. Aptheker (1979 [1939]) makes further mention of problematic maroon activity around the areas previously controlled by San Maló and further South.

Since the topic of this research concerns the leader of a maroon community, literature on maroon societies is a helpful aid with which to compare the historical accounts of San Maló’s band. Literature pertaining to the widely researched maroon communities of the Caribbean include: E. Kofi Agorsah (1994); Thomas Flory (1979); Eugene Genovese (1979); Richard Price (1979); and Stuart Schwartz (1992). Studies of the maroon communities in North America

include Herbert Aptheker's (1979 [1939]) accounts of rebel slave activity in southeastern Louisiana, Kathleen Deagan's (1999) and Jane Lander's (1990) studies of the first maroon community to be fully recognized and endorsed by the Spanish government in Fort Mosé, Florida, and Terry Weik's (1997) investigation into the archaeological record of maroon communities in North America. In their articles on the Great Dismal Swamp of North Carolina and Virginia, Elaine Nichols (1988) and Daniel Sayers, P. Brendan Burke and Aaron Henry (2007) present the intricate workings of the economic and social structure of a well-established maroon settlement. John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger (1999) address not only the establishment of maroon communities but all possible aspects of the lives of runaway slaves. These studies uniformly address the economic, temporal, environmental, social, and political aspects of maroon life.

In order to achieve a more substantial knowledge of the complexities of the African Mandé hero epic and its use in viewing the legacy of San Maló, a number of sources concerning this literary oral tradition were used. These can be divided into categories based on what they directly address. Numerous studies have examined the Mandé epic of *Soundiata* and its narrative account of the manipulation of power in society (Conrad 1994; Bird and Kendall 1980; Diawara 1992; Keita 1990; Kesteloot et al. 1991). The works of Daniel Biebuyck (1976) and John William Johnson (1980) perform more general research in studying the African Hero Epic as a whole.

An invaluable resource for this research is found in the study of folklore. Various schools of thought can be examined within this field. For example, John Smith's 1984 article on folklore seems to reserve more praise for the academics who research African-American folk culture than for those individuals who actually participate in it. Conversely, Tolagbe Ogunleye's 1997 research places the action of creating folklore back into the hands of the African-American

community. Hurston's study published in 1991 on folklore and music contemplates the poetic and anthropological nature of folklore while Gavin Jones' 1997 study of George Washington Cable's ethnographic work attempts to more clearly express Cable's dialect-centered method of explication.

The resulting nature of San Maló's legacy within the Voodoo community requires an understanding of the traditional Voodoo community and how it developed in New Orleans, as opposed to the transposed Haitian Vodun community. The sources concerning the African-American religion provide a large chronological range of studies from Newell's 1889 historic perspective to Rucker's more recent 2001 evaluation of the way that this belief system and its religious leaders held sway over rebellious factions of the slave communities. Zora Neale Hurston (1931) presents the practices of Hoodoo, an aspect within Voodoo which pertains to the making of charms and the manipulation of magic, from an anthropological perspective. One of the problems with Hurston's material is that there seems to be an existing opinion among both member of the religion and scholars of New Orleans Voodoo that she was taken in by Hoodoo conmen and not legitimately affiliated practitioners. This is an opinion shared by three of my consultants: Cathy Smith, Jerry Gandolfo and Brenda Marie Osbey. In view of this perspective her research will not be used as directly representative of the traditional Voodoo community. By traditional, I am referring to the African-American community of the faithful who distinguish their faith from "Haitian" or "Yoruba" religious practitioners and who consider their faith to be indigenous to New Orleans.

Perez y Mena (1998) unravels the popular simplification of Voodoo and syncretism. Claude Jacobs (1989) investigates the historic beginning of another faction of African-American worship, the spiritual churches of Southern Louisiana. In addition to these views of the various aspects and overall development of Voodoo, Wilkie's (1997) study on the development of



creolized and syncretic religious transformations provides a useful model to apply to the research of San Maló's transformation. Past observations on public events associated with the Voodoo culture are analyzed in Gary Donaldson's (1984) article on the dances at Congo square in which he uses George Washington Cable's 1886 account "Dances at Place Congo." Cable's collection entitled "Creole Slave Songs" and Gwendolyn Midlo Hall's (1992) study of African life in Colonial Louisiana further explore the development of Afro-Creole culture within Louisiana.

The problem with the references currently available on San Maló is that they isolate him as either a religious figure or an historic rebel. The space between these two manifestations and the transfiguration occurring in that space are never brought into the discussion. The problematic nature of this material seems to be resolved in "The Business of Pursuit: San Maló's Prayer" (Osbey 1997:108-114). In this poem by Brenda Marie Osbey, the two aspects of San Maló - as religious figure and historic rebel - are interwoven in a way that manifests the active, living legacy of Juan San Maló. The same can be said of the earlier "Dirge of St. Malo" as collected by George Washington Cable in his "Creole Slave Songs" published in *The Century Magazine* in April of 1886 and later reprinted in edited publications (Cable 1886: 814-815; Cable 1959:418-419). In Gavin Jones' (1997) article he notes that Cable was viewed by New Orleans society as a nuisance who constantly challenged the fabric of racially structured society with his investigations on black dialect and practices and his use of the term Creole (Jones 1997:245-246). I believe, in the tradition of Cable, that within the prose and verse of the African-American community of *the religion* the current manifestation of San Maló lives.

The purpose of this thesis is threefold. The first and most important goal was to discover how San Maló is viewed by the contemporary descendants of the community in which his legacy grew. Does his legacy still live on in the practices of the "Voodoo" faith communities of New Orleans? Is there more to the story of his transformation than what has been presented in the

historic literature? How did he transform from folk hero to religious icon? Through these questions I hoped to gain a better understanding of the transfiguration of San Maló and present it within the broader scope of the African and African-American narrative traditions. These questions will be addressed in Chapter 3: “History of Juan San Maló and His Band of Maroons” and Chapter 6: “San Maló Today.”

The second intent of this thesis is to view San Maló’s legacy in the light of the Mandé Hero tradition set forth in the folklore of the Mali Empire of Africa (Bird and Kendall 1980: 13-26). Does the perception of San Maló in the *community of the faithful* coincide with the legacy of the Mandé hero, a connection set forth in Gwendolyn Midlo Hall’s *Africans in Colonial Louisiana* (1992). This tradition presents an intriguing parallel that can be drawn between the hero figure of the Mandé and San Maló’s role in African-American folklore. Just how well this tradition of San Maló’s legacy coincides with the role of the heroic African epic is the question at hand. This thesis will explore this relationship further with reference to San Maló’s role in the maroon community of southeastern Louisiana and the resulting heroic figure of folklore and religious figure. All of this material will be explored further in Chapter 4 entitled “From Rebel to Martyred Hero.”

The final focus of this thesis is to explore the aspect of immortality achieved by San Maló through the prose and verse dedicated to him. I noticed a remarkable similarity in the martyred figure of San Maló and the hero figure Soundiata of the West African Mandé epic. Through the tradition of the hero song the interplay of religious icon, historic figure, and folk hero present a holistic entity of San Maló. In Mandé folklore, the hero achieves immortality through his journeys and deeds rather than through his triumphs (Bird and Kendall 1980:21). This is the emphasis described in the oral traditions of the Mandé people of Western Africa, such as the epic of *Soundiata* (Condé 2004). The contemporary perspective of San Maló’s legacy will either

support or disprove the similarity originally perceived by the author. Through this comparison the role of San Maló as the true African-American hero figure will become apparent.

The time span of research involved in this thesis ranges from the 1780 Spanish records as analyzed by contemporary scholars to the contemporary interviews conducted in New Orleans by the author. In the 1780s the socioeconomic structure was directly influenced by the cultural concept of race. In the collection of George Washington Cable's slave songs in 1886 the record of San Maló emerges again in a period in which race is at the center of attention, the post-Reconstruction South in the wake of Civil War. The record of San Maló again emerges in the 1940s in the work of Robert Tallant in an era that was saturated with the racism of Jim Crow. In the contemporary interviews there is a reclaiming of and performance of power by the consultants in their participation as authorities on the legacy of Saint Maló.

The inspiration for this thesis came from so many slight mentions and quick glances of an historic figure in literature that seemed so mysterious and intriguing. The need for such mystery I could not understand at first so I have provided sections to aid the reader in achieving this understanding. Chapter 2 entitled "Historic Context" and Chapter 5 entitled "'Voodoo' in New Orleans" serves the purpose of exploring the context in which this faith community developed and the history behind this contemporary need for secrecy.

## **Chapter II**

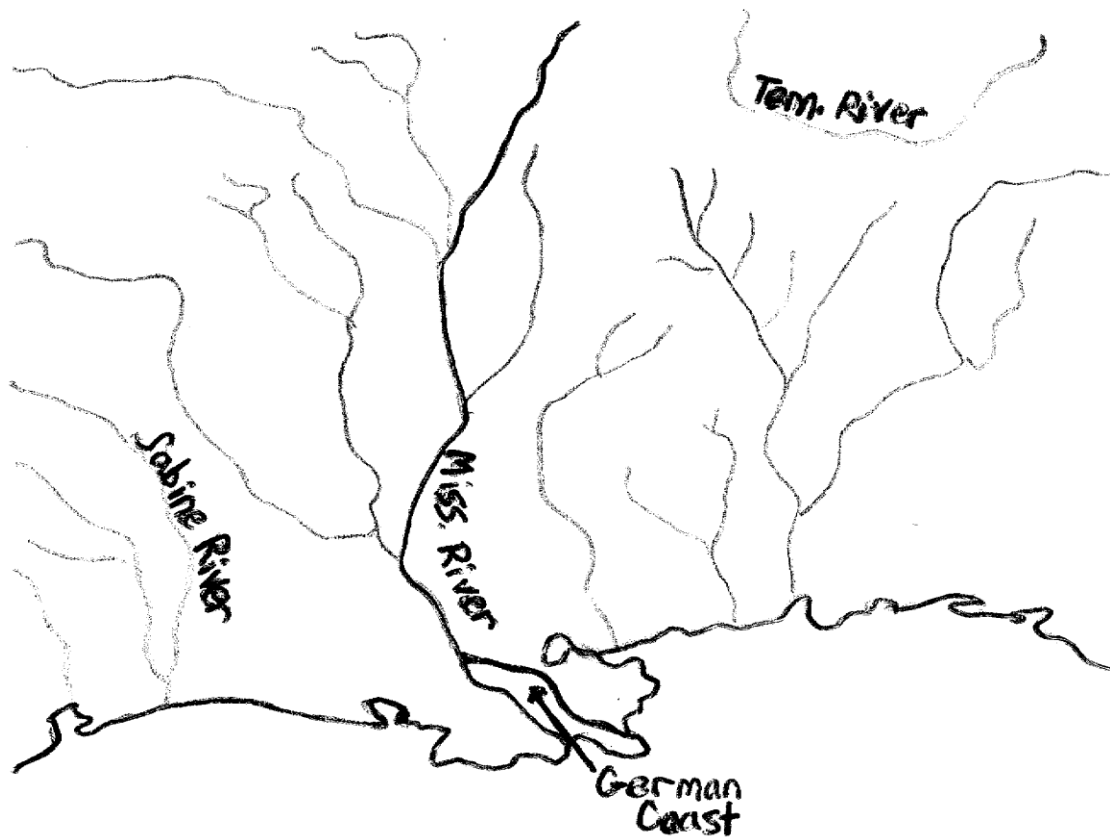
### **Historic Context**

#### **Landscape and Environment**

When one speaks of the colony of Louisiana it is easy to make the mistake of confusing the contemporary limits of the state of Louisiana with the original limits to which the colony extended, all the way up through Indiana. For the purpose of this thesis the area of interest will be limited to the southeastern region of modern Louisiana as it pertained to the Colonial time period. This area extends from the Florida Parishes down through to the far reaches of the coastline and flowing out to the Gulf of Mexico.

The most influential natural feature of this region is the Mississippi River and its tributary systems, which to this day still deposits sediment but has been confined to the same course for the past 1,000 years (Dawdy 2003: 56). This region is known geologically as the Mississippi River Deltaic Plain (Kindinger 2002: 539). It stretches about 190 miles and is composed of sediments deposited from the alluvial processes which have persisted over the past 4,800 to 8,000 years (Dawdy 2003: 56; Kindinger 2002: 539). This composition is familiar to a large number of Louisianians as according to Taylor, “alluvial soil makes up one-third of the area of the state” (Taylor 1963: ix). Due to the deltaic deposition of the soil, the land of Louisiana is a very fertile mixture of black and red soils and would eventually become an ideal environment for sugarcane, cotton and tobacco production in the plantation system of Colonial Louisiana (Taylor 1963: ix).

The climate of Southeastern Louisiana is subtropical. According to Shannon Dawdy this describes an area, “characterized by a long hot season with high temperatures (mean high in July is 84 degrees F), high humidity (greater than 70%), and heavy rainfall (average annual rainfall of



**Figure 1. The Lower Mississippi Valley in the 1770s. (Adapted from Usner 1992:113).**

64 inches)” (Dawdy 2003: 57). The drastic difference between this subtropical climate and the temperate climate of Europe brought with it various and sometimes life-threatening difficulties. Disease festered in the sweltering heat, claiming the lives of numerous settlers and leaving the Native population less able to fight off the European diseases which accompanied the colonists. Human diseases were not the only naturally occurring threat in Colonial Louisiana; the area was and is often the target of hurricanes and annual flooding. Despite these obstacles many saw the colony as a promising endeavor.

The floral environment of Louisiana is quite varied and collectively composed of subtropical species. In the eastern border expanse on the Gulf Plain there are a number of “pine barrens” which served as a protective environment for white settlers (Taylor 1963: x). The Indian villages grew fig and peach trees, European plants which had diffused to the area through

trade (Dawdy 2003: 55). The land running to the coast is composed, on the inland side, of freshwater marshes and cypress swamps populated with, “Spanish moss, swamp iris, and stands of native canes” (Dawdy 2003: 57). Upon the arrival of the first colonists some of these areas had been built up by Native American occupation, specifically on the banks of the rivers and tributaries creating a lowland, bowl effect in the lands between the waterways (Dawdy 2003: 55-56). Portions were previously drained and populated by, “sweet gum, hickory, cottonwood, magnolia, red maple, hackberry, pecan, and a variety of oak species” (Dawdy 2003: 57).

Further out to the Gulf the freshwater marsh changes into saltwater marshland. Palmettos were a numerous species of vegetation which could be and were used to make protective shelters from the heat and rain while still providing ventilation in the humid climate. Dawdy describes the land viewed by the first Colonial settlers as “no passive canvas” and rightly so (Dawdy 2003: 55). One can certainly imagine the difficulties these metropolitan-minded Frenchmen faced when trying to fit a Parisian-influenced plan onto such an undulating, lively environment.

The faunal composition of the environment was just as dynamic and as varied as its floral counterparts. Some native species of mammal included: opossum, armadillo, Eastern cottontail, swamp rabbit, fox squirrel, river otter, bobcat, whitetail deer, muskrat and raccoon (Gilbert 1973: 68-97). Some other native species of fauna include: songbirds, waterfowl, snakes, alligators, fish, crustaceans, shellfish and mollusks (Dawdy 2003: 57). This multitude of game would be the deciding aid for the Colonial settlers and Africans in their most neglected times.

For thousands of years prior to colonization the indigenous populations of Louisiana survived and flourished relying on this bountiful environment full of seafood, wild game, and hearty vegetation. As a fact, the colonists were not entreating on an unpopulated territory, as it was often portrayed to the European populations in order to entice settlement, but on the home of

generations of Native tribes who had worked the wild land of the Mississippi Deltaic Plain into their homeland.

### **French Colonial Rule (1699-1766)**

According to Daniel Usner (1992) many American historians typically view the history of Louisiana not as the unique process of Creolization it has come to exemplify but as a region aiding in the bigger picture “drama of American development” (Usner 1992:3). The scope of history in historic retellings relies heavily on the perspective of the author. In the words of Trouillot, “each historical narrative renews a claim to truth” (Trouillot 1995:6). Each time, place and people possess a set of unique circumstances which cannot be duplicated and often would not even be attempted. This illustration of the historical creative process provides a perfect backdrop against which to view Louisiana’s colonial development. The governmental composition of Louisiana was formed by three different economic and legislative traditions: French, Spanish and early American (Ingersoll 1995:24). In addition various groups influenced the cultural composition of Louisiana society largely including: French, Native American, African, Spanish, German and Philippine. In the early drama of Louisiana history this multitude of players can claim important roles, the first of which is the expanding French empire.

At the establishment of the colony, the French government was in an economic slump, influenced by the excesses of the reign of Louis XIV and the wear of ongoing war (Giraud 1950). The War of Spanish Succession raged from 1702 until the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 and dramatically drained the French treasury leaving little support for France’s newest and least favored settlement (Giraud 1950; Hall 1992). The government could not afford to maintain any amount of order at home much less establish such order in an expansive fledgling colony half a world away (Giraud 1950:657-659). The colonists and military went unpaid for months to years and received little to no provisions (Giraud 1950). Whatever perishable supplies they were able

to obtain from France quite infrequently would generally arrive spoiled due to the harsh conditions of the foreign climate (Giraud 1950:663).

In the wake of economic and moral depreciation in France, in 1712 Louis XIV offered a 15-year trade monopoly in Louisiana to Antoine Crozat and his company (Usner 1992:27). Although a brilliant financier, Crozat knew little of settling frontiers and the colony by no means flourished under his management (Giraud 1950:664-669, Merrill 2005:19). France could not provide settlers to the colony during the conflict and after the establishment of peace the country struggled to repopulate its own provinces after years of devastation (Giraud 1950:664, 670). The draw of moving to what was essentially a hinterland did not appeal to many of the French bourgeoisie so the resulting settlers in the Crozat years were generally youths from the hospitals of France (Giraud 1950: 672). Crozat had little interest in the development of the Louisiana colony and under his control there were also no slave shipments from Africa to the colony, but a small trade in African and Indian slaves went on between the colony and the French Caribbean (Taylor 1963: 5). Needless to say a financially drained Crozat did not finish out his charter and returned the control of Louisiana to France in 1717 (Merrill 2005:19). At this time the Louisiana colony was in much the same state as before as far as settlement and no worse for the wear.

The development of Louisiana was up for grabs and soon drew the attention of the notorious John Law who convinced Louis XIV's successor, the duke of Orléans, to entrust him the future of this colony whose potential had so far been unrealized (Merrill 2005:19). John Law and his Company of the Indies received a twenty-five year charter for Louisiana in which he maintained, "the right to lease and sell the land, to control the forts, ships, and weapons already existing in Louisiana" (Merrill 2005: 20). With this degree of power came great expectations for the future of the colony and in less than five years the Company of the Indies increased the population by 7,000 colonists and 2,000 slaves (Usner 1992:32). This charter played a large role



in the development of Louisiana, particularly in the immigration of German laborers (Merrill 2005:21). Among these German immigrants was Karl Friederich Darensbourg of Stockholm, Sweden, who would later become the leader of the German Coast in Louisiana and from whose holdings San Maló would emerge as a fugitive (Merrill 2005:22).

The German immigrants were a vital contribution to the developing colony of Louisiana, particularly in the area of southeastern Louisiana. Many of the shipments of German *engagés* were left stranded in various ports in the New World due to weak management by the ruling French regent and an uncertainty of the role these foreigners would play in the French colony (Merrill 2005: 23). Bienville and Darensbourg took on the responsibility of leadership and established the German Coast of Louisiana (Merrill 2005:24). With the establishment of Nouvelle Orléans in 1718 the German settlers were set up in communities around the French planter settlements in order to supply staples to the tobacco plantations, mannered after the greatly successful tobacco plantations of Virginia (Ingersoll 1991:175).

Darensbourg was entrusted with the position of commander of the Germans, which he would maintain for forty-eight years, and set up his homestead on the West bank of the Mississippi River just upstream from New Orleans (Merrill 2005:22, 24-25). The German Coast stretches through the parishes of St. Charles and St. John the Baptist running from the contemporary towns of Lucy to Hahnville (Merrill 2005:24). The settlers of 1722 were upgraded from *engagés*, indentured workers under French governance, to *habitants*, free settlers who received concessions from John Law and his Company of the Indies (Merrill 2005:20-24). These settlements were known as *La Côte des Allemands*, or the German Coast (Merrill 2005:99). Darensbourg's settlement was known as Karlstein and was one of the first that would experience massive flooding immediately after establishment (Merrill 2005: 25). They bounced back and were soon selling their crops to the population of New Orleans, providing a great

service to the developing community under the encouragement and financial aid of Bienville and John Law (Merrill 2005: 25-27). Although at times the trading policies of the Company of the Indies put the Germans at a disadvantage, when the Company went bankrupt in 1730 they were the community who most benefitted from the charter's return to France as they were free of the companies strict policies (Merrill 2005: 29-30).

Under French rule two codes were drawn up and applied to the Louisiana colony's enslaved populations. The first was the *Code Noir* of 1685 and the second was a revised version in 1724 of the same legislation followed by a 1751 supplemental code to amend the Sunday freedoms of the free black and enslaved populations to sell their extra supplies at market provided by the 1724 code (Ingersoll 1995: 27, 40; Dawdy 2003: 104). The first version of the *Code Noir* was not intended manage the slave population, considering that there were very few slaves in the colony during the first formative years, but was inspired by Louis XIV's desire to impress the Roman Catholic church with his fidelity and aimed at discouraging non-Catholics from settling in French territories (Ingersoll 1995: 27). The revised version in 1724 dealt specifically with "race relations and slave production" (Ingersoll 1995: 28).

The biggest concerns the French found in the escalation of the number of Africans transported to the blossoming colony of Louisiana were twofold. First, the increase in Mulattoes, people of white and black parentage, inspired the fear of this mixture of "race" expanding to a point where physical recognition of racial differences would be unattainable and the established social hierarchy, which was based on racial categorization, would be undermined (Ingersoll 1995: 34). For this reason, interracial marriage and irreversible inheritance were forbidden. Secondly, the purpose of the articles of the code which pertained specifically to managing master and slave relations were intended to discourage both extreme kinds of masters: those who greatly encouraged camaraderie and laxity on the plantation while blurring the line of

social hierarchy and those who greatly abused and even tortured their enslaved victims (Ingersoll 1995: 28). The reasoning behind these articles was to discourage acts of the masters which might encourage the enslaved populations to rebel and rise up against the planter population (Ingersoll 1995: 28). The intent of the supplemental code in 1751 was to discourage enslaved persons from making their own profits in order to buy their freedom (Ingersoll 1995: 38).

The *Code Noir* was intended to be upheld by the Superior Council, “an appointed body of officials who were local slaveholders” (Ingersoll 1995: 30). The extent to which these codes were upheld by this judicial body did not live up to the intent of the codes and Ingersoll sites no known cases of the Superior Council enforcing the rights of a slave in French Louisiana over the rights of a plantation’s master (Ingersoll 1995:31-32). Another issue with the code was that while the Superior Council was obligated to publish this legislation, it did not demand any such thing of the masters and essentially many enslaved people were unaware of the protective clauses under which they could bring their complaints to the Superior Council (Ingersoll 1995:30).

The race relations of the Louisiana colony could not be simply described as pitting black and native against white. At times the white ruling population would hire militias of free African-Americans and Native Americans to form hunting parties in search of maroons. At the same time maroons were often aided not only by fellow slaves but by the indigenous populations and other socially marginalized colonists such as the Manilla men of Baratavia, a Philipino settlement, and alienated white settlers (Usner 1992, Fandrich 2005:88, 92, Ingersoll 1991:177, Hearn 1924 [1883]).

For a better illustration of the complexity of race relations under French rule one can look to the Natchez Uprising of 1729 and the resulting actions of the French government. In 1728 the French governor Périer sought the help of the Indian nations in capturing runaway slaves (Hall 1992:98-99). A year later the Natchez aided by African slaves attacked a French settlement.

The Natchez were induced into this act by the encroaching presence of French in their territory (Hall 1992:100-101; Ingersoll 1991:177). This uprising drove the French governor to enlist the aid of Africans in raiding a nearby Indian village as retaliation with the purpose of increasing tensions between the Africans and the Indians for fear of a future conspiracy and revolt against the white planter class (Ingersoll 1991:177).

### **Spanish Colonial Rule (1766-1799)**

Though seemingly successful in certain endeavors, the Louisiana colony had become a financial burden on France, particularly since the fall of John Law's Company of the Indies and was not nearly as profitable as the favored West Indies colony (Merrill 2005:32-33). At the conclusion of the Seven Years War between France and England, Louis XV and his cousin Carlos III of Spain conspired to transfer the colony to Spanish holdings in the Treaty of Fontainebleau in 1762 (Merrill 2005:33). The official transfer took place when Don Antonio de Ulloa arrived in the colony to exercise his position as the new Governor under Spanish command (Merrill 2005:33). He was not well accepted upon his arrival and spent some time in hiding in the Balize, the area at the mouth of the Mississippi. He commanded by proxy through a French counterpart, Captain Charles-Phillippe Aubry, in order to issue legislation attempting to bring the colony into accordance with Spanish policy (Merrill 2005:34; Din 1999:36). His economic policies and trade restrictions, particularly with the French West Indies, sent the colony into rebellion and in 1768 French conspirators, Acadian refugees and the German community, under the command of Darenbourg, revolted against the Spanish governor and persuaded the Superior Council to command him to leave the colony (Merrill 2005:33-35; Holmes 1962:524).

Ulloa fled to Havana, Cuba and the armada was dispatched to Louisiana under the command of Alejandro O'Reilly to take control and punish the conspirators (Holmes 1962:524; Merrill 2005:35). Upon his arrival he sentenced six of the conspirators to death and exiled the

other six to Havana (Din 1999:42). To Darensbourg he was more lenient only requiring him to give up his holdings and sentencing him to exile in New Orleans and his sons to Opelousas in order to reduce the probability of further conspiracies (Merrill 2005:36).

After punishing the leaders of the uprising, O'Reilly took command of the colony from 1769 to 1770 (Holmes 1962:524). During that time he implanted decrees to free Indian slaves and forbid trade with slaves without the permission of their masters but neither of these were followed (Holmes 1962:526). He also increased the economic standing of the colony with more lenient trade policies in the hopes of winning the rebellious population over for Spain but could still not gain control over the smugglers (Ingersoll 1990:180; Holmes 1962:526).

O'Reilly's most influential act as governor of the Louisiana colony was to transfer the colony's slave laws from the French *Code Noir*, which provided protection mainly for the master, to the slave codes of Castile known as *Las Siete Partidas* established between 1263 and 1265 by King Alfonso el Sabio (Din 1999:43). These codes "held that slavery was against natural reason and that slaves were human beings who possessed rights as well as obligations" (Din 1999:43). The Spanish were known for their leniency in slavery and it was assumed that these codes would be fully implemented in Louisiana as they had been throughout Spain's other territorial holdings. One policy which the Spanish government implemented was the support of manumission, allowing for slaves to purchase their freedom without obstacle, a feat which had been near impossible under the rule of the Superior Council (Ingersoll 1991:180). They did this unofficially, enforcing the codes but never actually publishing them to avoid seeming too lenient and angering the French planter population (Ingersoll 1991:180).

Although the treatment of free blacks would seem benevolent to the authorities of the Spanish government, the circumstances under which a freed slave lived were not of equal status to the white population as many would assume. Nor was the status of a free black an irreversible

one. According to Ingersoll, “The increasing numbers of free blacks provoked whites to discriminate against them whenever possible. Free blacks could be reduced to slavery for felonies or indebtedness, and a slaveowner might re-enslave a freed person and sell him or her in a distant colony” (Ingersoll 1991:189). Also the price by which a slave could purchase his or her freedom was set by the slave’s master sometimes being more of a punishment than an enticement (Ingersoll 1995:45). Due to the new purchase policy the slave trade increased to counteract the loss, bringing many new Africans to the colony (Ingersoll 1995:44). Traditional emancipation, rewarding a slave with his/her freedom for whatever reason, also increased during the Spanish regime (Ingersoll 1995:39). This added to the number of free blacks in the colony and under Spanish economic policies free blacks had the opportunity to build their own financial standing in the community. According to Ingersoll, “They became a dynamic group that grew to about one-seventh of the whole population of New Orleans by 1803” (Ingersoll 1991:188).

### **A Neighboring White Revolution**

During the American Revolution in the 1770s-80s the biggest obstacle to Spanish colonial peace formed on the outskirts of plantation life. Spain utilized the free black militia which had been created in order to increase the commitment of the free black population to the flourishing community putting them in a difficult racial predicament when they were given the duty of hunting down maroons. This was not their only duty as the free black militia was sent with the white militia to aid the American troops in Spanish West Florida during the war of Independence (Ingersoll 1991:180). Both France and Spain had always encountered difficulty dealing with English expansion into their territories and having their economic policies undermined by the continuous flow of British smugglers into the colonies (Holmes 1962:526). With the support of the Louisiana militia, American independence from England would finally rid the colony of a serious and constant threat to their economic future.

As illustrated by the preceding sections the history of Louisiana and the resulting Creole culture have been influence by a number of forces, including varied economic, legislative and cultural policies and practices. In Chapter V, this thesis will look at the religious and cultural traditions which also influenced the formative years of Creole society. Now that the historic development of the colony has been explored the enormity of the effect runaway slave encampments had on this formative period of Creole culture can be further explored.

## Chapter III

### History of Juan San Maló and His Band of Maroons

#### San Maló and His *Cimarrones*

San Maló hailed from an area populated by German immigrants, just north of New Orleans, referred to as *the German Coast* (Hall 1992: 212). He was the runaway slave of Darensbourg, leader of the German community (Hall 1992: 212). To my knowledge, the German coast in Louisiana refers to the area just to the south of Lake Pontchartrain and encompasses the parishes of St. Charles and St. John the Baptist. Nothing is known of his African place of origin prior to his enslavement.

The origins of San Maló's name are even more tenuous. Hall notes three possible derivations. She notes that Malo in Spanish is translated as "bad," while the French term refers to the port of St. Malo which was a French port that was actively involved in the slave trade (Hall 1992:213). The more likely origin of the name, according to Hall, comes from the Mali language of Bambara, in which Malo "refers to the charismatic leader who defies the social order, whose special powers and means to act may have beneficial consequences for all his people when social conventions paralyze others" (Hall 1992:213). This speaks to the role that San Maló played in the rebellious, contagious spirit found throughout these maroon societies. Simultaneously this was a role often taken up by the Obeahmen, conjurers, and root doctors who played major roles in some of the more widely known insurrections (Genovese 1979; Holloway 2005; Rucker 2001; Sidbury 1997). San Maló's existence before being a slave under the ownership of Darensbourg is uncertain according to the historic sources used in this research. His origin and the date of his becoming a maroon are never mentioned. Eventually, the figure of Juan San Maló would be passed down in oral tradition among the Afro-Creole community of Louisiana under the name of Saint Marron or Saint Maló (Hall 1992:212, 226). The stories



relating his actions vary in perspective, portraying him as brutal murderer or rebellious freedom-fighter, depending on which source is used (Hall 1992:226).

During the Spanish colonial governorship of Don Esteban Miró, the runaway slave known as Juan San Maló established a community of *maroons*, runaway slaves, who wreaked havoc on the local plantations surrounding New Orleans between 1773 and 1784 (Din 1980:262). This maroon community occupied the *cyprières*, or cypress swamps, behind the various plantations of New Orleans known as the Bas du Fleuve which translates as *downriver*. According to both Din and Hall this area encompassed the land “from Chef Menteur to the Desprès plantation” (Din 1980:248; Hall 1992:202). San Maló also maintained control of the Rigolets, narrow passages of swamps and marshes between Lake Pontchartrain and the Gulf of Mexico, as well as the area between Lake Borgne and the Mississippi River known as Ville Gaillarde (Din 1980:248; Hall 1992:213). Ville Gaillarde would be the site where Miró’s men would finally overtake San Maló and approximately forty to sixty runaway slaves, not all of whom were directly associated with his band (Din 1980:254-255; Hall 1992:230).

Hall describes the maroon societies of the Bas de Fleuve as “an extension of creole slave society” implying that they had successfully taken control of their own existence back from the slave owners (Hall 1992:212). Maló and his associates maintained close contact with the enslaved populations of the plantations. During the *cimmarones* occupancy of the cypress swamps there were numerous complaints of stolen or slaughtered livestock for which they bore the blame. San Maló’s band was often aided by the enslaved populations of the plantations in these endeavors (Din 1980:245; Hall 1992:212). Not all of their endeavors were so covert. This settlement of maroons participated in a small-scale trade economy with the local lumber mills by which they made their livelihood (Hall 1992: 207). The societies associated with San Maló’s band were short-lived and, despite being on the periphery of plantation culture, were subject to

raids by the authorities once the rumors of violence and the insurrection that they promoted spread throughout the region (Hall 1992:225-227).

The slaves of the plantations used the known presence of the maroons to their advantage, often bartering for better treatment with the threat of and sometimes feigning marronage (Hall 1992:203). This sort of psychological warfare had a direct effect on the already strained relations between slaves and slaveowners. This tension, part of which was derived from the recent regime change from French rule to Spanish, may have enabled a band such as San Maló's to form. Legislative decrees of the new Spanish government sought to lessen the likeliness of an insurrection among slaves, free blacks, and French colonists (Ingersoll 1991: 179-181). However, in the presence of the neighboring American Revolution the opportunity could not be passed up for the *cimarrones* to establish their own community while the attentions of the new Spanish government were otherwise engaged (Ingersoll 1991: 190, 1995: 52).

In May of 1784, at the time of San Maló's most active resistance, the most recent Governor of the Louisiana colony was called away to the "Indian congresses in Pensacola and Mobile" (Din 1980:247). In the absence of Governor Miró, the acting governor in command of the military was Lieutenant Colonel Francisco Bouligny (Din 1980: 247). Bouligny accepted the responsibility for dealing with the band of maroons at the insistence of the white plantation owners (Din 1980:245). He gathered forces to pursue the band through the swamps of Ville Gaillarde. At one point San Maló and his band were reported to have killed a group of Americans in Bay St. Louis who captured his men. In their fight for freedom they turned on and killed their captors (Din 1980: 249; Hall 1992: 217). Din has this act occurring in May of 1784 but Hall portrays it as much earlier since it was part of the testimony of Juan Pedro who was captured in March of 1783 (Din 1980: 249; Hall 1992: 217). In either case this act made San Maló a reputed killer of whites and bolstered the determination of the Spanish officials in their

desire to apprehend San Maló and bring order back to the colony (Hall 1992: 227). The news of this violent turn, and some information provided by a spy within the maroon community, led to the capture of a number of the maroon leaders, including a seriously wounded San Maló, in June of 1784 by Captain Don Gilberto Guillemard under Bouligny's command (Hall 1992:221-233).

Within two short months San Maló was captured by Bouligny's men and on June 12, 1784, was brought to trial at the Cabildo (Din 1980:255). He and his associates were put to death by hanging on June 19, 1784 (Din 1980:255). After the dispersal of the Ville Gaillarde community, a number of San Maló's followers were believed to have set up camp at Barataria, a barrier island on the southeastern coast of Louisiana on which there was an already established Manilla fishing village, the remnants of which were identified in 1883 by Lafcadio Hearn, and where Jean Lafitte's band had also settled in the early nineteenth century (Hall 1992:346; Hearn 1924; Exnicios 2006:39). Although the story of San Maló's historic existence ended tragically, his posthumous legacy became the unofficial backbone of a unique cultural identity within the Creole society of Louisiana.

### **Marronage: Ideology of Resistance**

The figure of the maroon in African-American history is set apart from that of abolitionists and civil rights activists - more widely known in the U. S. for their struggles for freedom. The maroon was the comprehensive embodiment of resistance and self-preservation and the development of maroon societies throughout Colonial America is one of the most elusive and intriguing aspects of the development of African-American culture. The independent establishment, no matter how temporary, of these fugitive slave communities illustrates the act of *marronage* as the most direct reaction of an oppressed population that has been transplanted into a hostile culture and an alien environment. This is not to say that these settlements were developed with the sole overarching purpose of rebellion, but the act of *marronage* is defined by

Singleton as an “overt” form of resistance (Singleton 1999:5). There is a deeper aspect of this action which speaks to the nature of all humans who inherently desire to assert control over their own destinies.

The term *maroon* finds its origin in the French *marron*, a term thought to be derived from the Spanish-American *cimarrón*, meaning wild or runaway, referring initially to livestock but later associated specifically with fugitive slaves (Price 1979:1-2). The act of marronage could be divided into two categories: *petit marronage* and *grand marronage* (Price 1979:3; Weik 1997:82). Price defines *petit marronage* as “periodic slave truancy,” often being merely a temporary, yet unapproved excursion to visit fellow slaves, loved ones, and friends on other plantations (Price 1979:149). *Grand marronage* is the topic presently addressed, which pertains to independent, self-contained communities of run-away slaves (Weik 1997:82).

Maroon societies developed in various regions of the Americas and went by a number of names (Weik 1997). They were *palenques*, *mambises*, *quilombos*, *magotes*, and *mocambos* (Weik 1997:81). They were also known as *pasajes* in Louisiana, defined by Hall as, “an escape route or maroon settlement behind the various plantations,” and literally meaning “passage” (Hall 1992:212). *Marronage* is the general term for the action of an enslaved person deserting his or her forced status of oppression in pursuit of life independent of being at the mercy of another person’s will.

Although maroon societies have been typically associated with the Spanish West Indies and Latin America (Price 1979), the convoluted wilderness of Colonial Louisiana was itself as an ideal setting for such settlements (Hall 1992). In order for a maroon society to survive for any extended period of time, certain conditions had to be met. The environment of a promising maroon settlement needed to be located in, “inaccessible or marginal areas,” (Weik 1997:82) of which southeastern Louisiana had many. The maroon community of Bas de

Fleuve, under the leadership of Juan San Maló, or Saint Maló, established their territory in this swampy landscape (Hall 1992:212). These communities were able to form in the swamps due to the rise of the Cypress lumber industry, beneficial to the maroons because the money earned in lumbering allowed them to increase the state of their independence and support their newfound and increasingly sedentary lifestyle (Hall 1992:202). Along with this occupation, maroons participated in agricultural endeavors and small-scale animal husbandry (Hall 1992:203). They persisted due to their marginal existence to the rest of colonial slave society.

Among the material that has been covered in the study of maroon societies, aspects of size and the duration of occupancy of settlements are important characteristics of a successful maroon community (Weik 1997:82). The documented societies range from small encampments, consisting of fewer than one hundred inhabitants, to large-scale societies, containing thousands or even tens of thousands (Weik 1997:82; Schwartz 1992:106-107). According to Franklin and Schweninger (1999:86), “in virtually every state there were gangs of ten to twenty outlying slaves.”

The largest and most successful example of a maroon community in North America was the community of the Great Dismal Swamp located on the edge of Virginia and North Carolina (Sayers et al. 2007). This community of “exiles” endured for over two centuries and at times consisted of thousands of maroons (Sayers et al. 2007:60). Although Saint Maló’s band did not endure as long as some his fugitive counterparts, they certainly left their mark on the wilderness of Louisiana. They matriculated between the encampments of Ville Gaillarde and Chef Menteur (shown in Figure 1) in the mid to late eighteenth century, scouting the Mississippi delta for slaves desirous of emancipation and causing the local authorities great anxiety in the process (Hall 1992:212-224).

In his preface to *From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World*, Eugene Genovese speaks of the palpable irony inherent in the foundation of a nation, which so greatly prides itself on the virtue of freedom from oppression, having been poured over the crumbled remains of enslaved populations (Genovese 1979:xiii). The slave experience varied by region and situation but in all cases marronage was considered to be the most effective and direct form of resistance. Genovese (1979:1-3) depicts the chronological escalation of the path of marronage over time, starting from the individual and immediate perspective of freeing one's self, and developing into a more holistic intention of overthrowing an oppressive system, and then sequentially coming to terms with willingly becoming a part of the alien society into which one was thrust.

Maroon societies aided the transformation of African-American cultural identity. They were an unseen yet omnipresent facet of everyday plantation existence, often not so far removed from the typical setting of slave life (Hall 1992:202). They spanned the backwater bayous and Cypress swamps, or *cipriéres*, of Southern Louisiana (Hall 1992:203). Whether or not the establishment of runaway slave societies was intended to encourage insurrection, their mere existence undermined the established regime (Genovese 1979:40-41; Singleton 1999:5). The continuous interaction between fugitive slaves and the still enslaved inflamed the tension between the enslaved population and the slaveholders (Hall 1992:203). Some slaves used the threat of marronage to negotiate a better lifestyle, although not always successfully as the punishment endured by captured maroons was quite severe (Aptheker 1979:151-152; Hall 1992:213; Genovese 1979:106).

Maroon studies tend to emphasize the accounts of Latin American maroon communities, some of which persist to the current era. A few studies on fugitive slave societies of Florida, North Carolina, and Virginia (Nichols 1988; Mulroy 1983, Sayers et al. 2007), provide useful



**Figure 2. Location of San Maló Maroon Communities, 1780s. Adapted from Hall 1992:212. This map shows the areas that Saint Maló's band controlled. The places of interest pointed out in this map are Chef Menteur, the Rigolets between Lake Pontchartrain and Lake Borgne, the eastern shore of Lake Borgne where Bayou St. Malo and Bayou Marron are denoted, and the Barataria Islands where the remnants of Saint Maló's band fled after his capture and execution. The location of Ville Gaillarde is in the southeastern area between New Orleans and the Eastern shore of Lake Borgne (Hall 1992:212).**

information on what the maroon experience was in the contiguous United States. More information on all of these maroon societies can be found in: Deagan and Landers (1999), Flory (1979), Landers (1990), Mulroy (1993), Price (1979), Schwartz (1992), and Weik (1997). However, the circumstances surrounding the Louisiana uprisings promoted, in large part, by the

local maroon societies are still not well studied. In Genovese's observation, "The revolt in southern Louisiana in 1811, although the biggest in American history, remains obscure" (Genovese 1979:43). The insurrection of enslaved people in Point Coupeé, Louisiana took place only ten years after the capture of San Maló and the dispersal of his band. There is a direct connection between *marronage* and insurrection as it can be seen as the most overt form of resistance. This rebellion provides evidence that the model of resistance established by San Maló was neither isolated nor entirely demolished. Louisiana, in fact, became a growing center for maroon activity as made evident by the rebellion in 1811 (Genovese 1979:17). Genovese (1979) compares North American maroon settlements to Latin American and Caribbean maroon settlements in ideology as well as terrain and the limitations and advantages ascribed to both. Herbert Aptheker's findings note reported confrontations published in the newspapers of Terrebonne, St. Landry, and Orleans Parishes associated with the bands of maroons (Aptheker 1979[1939]:162).

The literature pertaining to the Caribbean, and the revolution resulting there, provides an example of how these revolts and the wave of refugees influenced the enslaved populations of the Southern colonies (Rucker 2001; Sidbury 1997; Weik 1997). After the Haitian War of Independence (1789-1804), a large wave of Haitians sought refuge in Louisiana (Fandrich 2005: 5). The influx of refugees from Haiti and St. Domingue brought a new wave of ambition to the slaves, inspiring new sects with the purpose of achieving freedom through organization (Genovese 1979). The weathered slave communities of Louisiana were bolstered and reinvigorated by this wave of morale. Much of this bolstering was contributed by the various new methodologies and ideas from slaves who had been through the rebellion in Haiti and knew how it could be manipulated to better one's conditions in life. Much of the other Caribbean literature illustrates the most evident differences in the various regions of *marronage* (Agorsah 1994; Flory



1979; Price 1979; Schwartz 1992). From his maroon origins the historic rebel, Juan San Maló's transformation into a religious figure takes shape through the folklore tradition of Afro-Creole southern Louisiana, as explored in the following chapter.

## Chapter IV

### From Hunted Rebel to Martyred Hero

After his death Juan San Maló begins to appear in folksongs of slave society (Cable 1886: 814-815). As seen in the account of Robert Tallant, at some point the legacy of Juan San Maló the folk hero transformed into the veneration of San Maló within the Voodoo community. He is perceived as different from the Catholic icons which, within Voodoo, are subsumed by an African interpreter spirit (Perez y Mena 1998). He is an African-American conglomeration of strength, stealth, resilience, and persistence of will, all qualities over which the dominant population can manifest no control. His purpose is direct and appropriately derived from what he represented through his life and deeds; he is referred to in Fandrich (2005), Gaston (2005), and Long (2006) as the patron saint of runaway slaves and with his historic reputation as a rebel leader this position appears to fit. This is the legacy which has been portrayed through the literature on Saint Maroon, or San Maló, as he has existed in the Voodoo community since the nineteenth century. His present-day legacy has changed considerably as will be shown in the Chapter VI: San Maló Today. First we will look at the role of the African and African-American hero in order to more fully view this aspect of San Maló's legacy in contemporary Louisiana.

In order to comprehensively view the trajectory of San Maló's transformation the intention of this chapter is to present an analysis of three topics that have significant implications in the analysis of his legacy. Within the epic of *Soundiata* handed down through oral narrative tradition in the contemporary cultures of West Africa who claim descent from the Mandé there are a number of examples which can be seen similarly in the San Maló narrative. Secondly, analysis of the development and social intent of African-American folklore in the South illustrates how the tool of storytelling can be used to the advantage and preservation of a marginalized and seemingly powerless cultural identity. By exploring the way in which oral

performance has transformed in the South, one can better understand the model which San Maló presents as an African-American hero figure. Within all the traditions covered there is a constant theme of reaffirming cultural standards and passing along a shared value system through the generations. Within this process exists the true legacy of San Maló and how he developed into a figure representative of the identity shared by the *community of the faithful* in New Orleans (Anonymous Personal Communication January 30, 2008).

### **The African Hero Epic**

When Americans consider the literary category known as the epic, the African epic is not usually the first to come to mind. Many North Americans identify this form of literature with works such as the Iliad, the Odyssey, Beowulf, and Gilgamesh. All of these are ancient stories that were handed down in similar ways, through oral narrative traditions. The best known epic of the Mali Empire has been handed down in a similar fashion within the Mandé culture of West Africa. The difference is that these classic epics are not commonly performed in their original languages. The Epic of *Soundiata* is still performed by the bards of the Mandé peoples (Conrad 2004:ix-xii).

The purpose of exploring a West African epic is to show how this tradition can be drawn on to better understand the legacy of San Maló, a legacy that has persisted in the African-American folk culture of Louisiana since his death. Another reason to use a West African epic is that a large portion of the slaves transported to Louisiana originated in West Africa and many of these were Bambara, who descended from the Mandé, making this an influential world-view within the African-American culture of the region (Hall 1992:35). The comparison between the transformation of *Soundiata* and that of San Maló is not meant to be an exact analogy. For example, the *Soundiata* epic is one of the most widely known and studied of all African epics while the story of San Maló is only familiar to a handful of historians and members of the

faithful in New Orleans. During my research of the *Soundiata* epic I perceived that the important similarities between this tradition and the San Maló tradition lie not within their transformations as heroes but in the cultural ideals that are transmitted through their stories across generations. Through this act of transferal they attain immortality after death. But their importance is not as a static figure of heroism but as a transmitted cultural worldview, which in itself will transform over time within its community of influence.

The intent of this section is to view San Maló's legacy in the light of the Mandé Hero tradition set forth in the folklore of the medieval Mali Empire in West Africa (Bird and Kendall 1980:13-26). This link was first noted in Hall's (1992:213) *Africans in Colonial Louisiana* in reference to the boom of the slave trade between the Louisiana Colony and Africa in 1782 (Hall 1992:213). She briefly addresses the possible origins of Juan San Maló's name. One theory she presents directly addresses the Mandé hero epic of *Soundiata*. A confusing point found in Hall's interpretation involves how this term is used within the Mandé tradition. She explains that *malo* in Bambara, a modern African language whose speakers can trace their ancestry to the Mandé, means "shame" which is true, according to Bird and Kendall's research. She then implies that this term refers to the Mandé hero directly when in fact he is characterized by the term *malobali* meaning "shameless" (Bird and Kendall 1980:24, notes).

The tenet of *malo* is an instrument pertaining to one branch of a dichotomous social structure. This "shame" refers to the hero figure who is presented as a representative of the aspect of society known as *fadenya* or "father-childness" (Bird and Kendall 1980:14). This aspect of the society focuses on the creation of the individual character within the society and stresses the importance of reputation and personal achievement through competition in surpassing one's ancestral predecessors (Bird and Kendall 1980:14-15; Keita 1990:105). Within this social order a man is given an ascribed status by his progenitors and must through his own



**Figure 3. Map of Mande ethnic groups and modern political boundaries of West Africa (identified by all capital letters). Adapted from Austen (2000).**

deeds overcome this status to create an even more accomplished reputation for future generations to strive to surpass (Bird and Kendall 1980:14-15). This practice encourages the strengthening of the whole of society through individual efforts of self-promotion.

The other aspect of this society pertains to *badenya* or “mother-childness” (Bird and Kendall 1980:14). This societal principle requires certain duties of all within Mandé culture in order to aid the whole community. It promotes stability and security keeping the structure of the society intact for the benefit of all who participate in the culture (Bird and Kendall 1980:14-15). Through their deeds these social actors participate in a dichotomous structure in which the combination of *fadenya* and *badenya* represent self-promotion for the preservation of the culture. In the narrative tradition, the Mandé hero’s purpose is to be the hero/rebel who brings order back

to society by possessing the unique tool of “shamelessness” with which to battle the “shame” aspects that threatens the societal balance (Bird and Kendall 1980:16). This tradition presents an intriguing parallel that can be drawn between the hero figure of the Mandé and San Maló’s role in the African-American community of Louisiana.

Through the oral narrative tradition of African culture many aspects of these power dynamics and social structures are created and continuously reinforced through the process of retelling. This linguistic concept participates in continuously structuring the collective memory of certain African societies. As Manthia Diawara, in her article on Mandé literature puts it, “These works embody the communal ethos, the flavor of African life and experience, the cultural inheritance from the past” (Diawara 1992:154). Within the contemporary communities of the Malinke, the storyteller or singer is seen as so integral to the maintenance of society that his subsistence is taken care of by the community so that he does not have to worry about farming to make a living but can distribute his time to what is required of his role in society (Keita 1990:106).

The narrative tradition in the various culture communities descended from the Mali Empire of West Africa serves to instruct each culture community on how their society is to be structured as well as to how the roles within society are to be distributed according to the ancient tradition handed down in these retellings. Kesteloot et al. (1991:17) divide this concept, within the royal Mandé narratives, into three subcategories: epics, myths, and chronicles. They address similar themes of power manipulation and the creation of social order that can be found throughout these subcategories (Kesteloot et al. 1991). Through themes in power Kesteloot and his colleagues are able to discern strategic places within the narratives that serve to combine the material and immaterial worlds. For example, the place of *tié so* is a secluded location that only the epic king may enter in order to commune with the divine (Kesteloot et al. 1991:18). The

location of *pintch* is reserved for those closest to the king, while *jamana* is representative of the country, a concept constantly in flux due to spirit of conquest (Kesteloot et al. 1991:18-19). These ideas of power and space relationships set precedence for the structuring of Mandé society.

We can further see how this form of the oral narrative shapes Mandé society in the *Soundiata* epic. Within the societal classifications of *badenya* and *fadenya* one can observe within the society how these concepts reaffirm and participate in reshaping the social structure and reinforce what is expected of individuals who participate in that structure. Not only does this epic narrative illustrate the impact that oral tradition has on African society but the story of *Soundiata* really reflects what aspects of the hero figure are valued. Through the epic of *Soundiata* there is a great emphasis on the journey of the hero and his persistence, which ensures his immortality through oral retellings, rather than praise for his battle prowess (Bird and Kendall 1980:21).

There is an aspect of disconnectedness found in the study of these translated versions of African oral narratives. Conducting an ethnographic study on African oral narratives is difficult, according to Kesteloot et al. (1991), due to the way in which outsiders are viewed by the storytellers. A similar but not identical situation can be seen within the Voodoo community of New Orleans.

Having presented an example of the source from which African-American folklore originated, the process of how the oral tradition developed in the New World can be explored with a better perception of the different trajectory this tradition has found while maintaining the a similar underlying intent.

## **African-American Folklore and the Trickster Figure**

The folklore of a culture provides insight into that culture's historic development. In Louisiana, African-American folklore emerged from a highly charged historical context. While a comprehensive review of this topic is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is possible to highlight some of the themes which apply directly to the transformation of San Maló. Typically, folklore is associated with oral history and the same can be said of the origins of African-American folklore. The stories created in the New World and passed down through the generations were originally believed to be modeled after the European culture but have since come to be viewed as actively maintaining their African-based influences (Smith 1984:50).

Through the perspective of folklore one can view in the subtext African-American history without the dominant population's biased historic slant. Yet some of the most widely circulated figures of African-American folklore have been seen as crude stereotypes of an inferior and unwitting enslaved population, presented through the eyes of the domineering white perspective (Smith 1984:50). For example the Uncle Remus stories have a reputation for presenting the African-American as "undignified, immature, and incapable of independent judgment" (Smith 1984:50). While these particular figures may not be the truest representation of African-Americans, they serve the purpose of presenting the African-American worldview within their historic context. Zora Neale Hurston speaks of the humor found in African-American folklore as being a sort of social commentary. Through Hurston's (1991) studies of folklore and music in Florida we can view the creation of folklore within a diverse culture area much like that of Louisiana. She notes that, "folklore is the first thing that man makes out of the natural laws that he finds around him- beyond the necessity of making a living" (Hurston 1991:184). She describes this art as the as the capturing of moments which seem too large to fully understand. Although her comment did not refer directly to the era of slavery, it seems to appropriately



illustrate the enormity of the situation in which this population found themselves, transported by force into an alien environment with humor as tool to create some sort of mental stability. In the study of African-American history the perspective of the enslaved person was often neglected by historians in favor of the perspective of the white master and his view of the master/slave relationship, despite the influential position the white population held over the creation of history (Drimmer 1975:127). This makes folklore the area over which the marginalized and exploited population maintained control. By looking beyond the stereotypes and biases of the trickster figures one can observe the historic context and social interplay of African-American culture.

While American culture has its folk heroes, like Johnny Appleseed, to demonstrate the ideal American characteristics, the folklore in which the African-American appears is representative of their historic perspective. Ogunleye puts it best when he notes, “the ultimate strength of folklore resides in its power to communicate the social and cultural identities of the eras” (Ogunleye 1997:436). The subject matter of African-American folklore typically portrays the enslaved individual as tricksters who triumph over those who possess power over them, placing the agency of the African-American fates back into their own hands (Hurstun 1991). An example of the transferal of agency can also be seen in the figure of Big John De Conquer, whom Hurston identifies as a hero figure in her studies (Hurstun 1991:191-194). His tales of heroics amount to exploration of even Heaven and Hell (Hurstun 1991:191-194). This figure can be identified as the African-American trickster and is a strongly established character in folklore. Like Brer Rabbit, he slyly and stealthily maneuvers his way out of hostile predicaments using his cunning to turn the tables on his oppressor (Hurstun 1991:191-194; Smith 1984:51). The African-American trickster figure is not intended to be cute or demeaning but according to Smith (1984) expresses the malevolence of the enslaved population toward their oppressors through the guise of storytelling (Smith 1984:51).

African-American folklore also has strong ties to the development of music in the South, particularly through the form of slave songs, which are not dissimilar to the “praise-songs” of the Mandé singers (Piersen 1976:166-167). The satirical stories of such figures as John De Conquer follow this tradition of praising the wit and accomplishments of the hero figure, known as the African trickster. These stories illustrate the race relations as viewed by the African-American figure making musical folklore the tool by which the disenfranchised community could make insightful cultural observations about their present predicament. Given the previous example of the Mandé singers, perhaps the oral tradition which emerged in the South acted in much the same way it had in West Africa, as a cultural tool by which the community could propel the intended ideals of the present generation into the hearts and minds of the next until one day they would have the strength and unity to stand against their given situation in life. As Piersen states, “Afro-American ridicule and censure gained force through musical presentation” (Piersen 1976:171). This force may be the underlying need for a figure like San Maló, a strong figure with whom the enslaved and oppressed members of Louisiana society could identify and from whom they could also draw the perseverance they would need in order to endure and overcome their assigned status within that society.

### **A New African-American Hero: San Maló in Folk Literature**

As the previous discussion shows, folklore could be used as both a weapon and a cultural bond. Now that we have an understanding of the amount of influence this narrative can project onto society we can further explore the origins of San Maló in folklore and see how the literary device of storytelling transformed this figure from criminal to martyr and finally into a spiritual figure of cultural influence. Through the vehicle of folk literature one can view the aspect of immortality achieved by San Maló within the prose and verse dedicated to him. Through the tradition of the hero song the interplay of religious icon, historic figure, and folk hero present a

holistic entity of San Maló. In Mandé folklore the Mandé Hero achieves immortality through his journeys and deeds rather than through his triumphs (Bird and Kendall 1980:21). This is the emphasis described in the oral traditions of the Mandé people of Western Africa in the epic of *Soundiata* (Condé 2004). One could argue that the tale of San Maló holds a similar legacy, although to a lesser known degree. Even though the narrative of San Maló is confined to the cultural sphere of the New Orleans *community of the faithful* he still achieves immortality through the verse in which his story is shared.

Many slave songs of Louisiana were taken down by a notable journalist and writer who led the way in the study of the African-American population of New Orleans. George Washington Cable made a reputation for himself in mid to late nineteenth-century New Orleans for observing African-American rituals and collecting their stories but presenting them in a way by which he garnered the criticism of the white population of New Orleans. In his efforts to document the Creole culture of Louisiana he addressed both white and black Creoles, a fact which angered more than a few white Creoles who did not want their reputations to be sullied by any suggestion of mixed race ancestry (Jordan and De Caro 1996:41). Race is a cultural concept that was extremely structured in the era of San Maló, one which was bolstered by law. The observations of George Washington Cable in the 1880s threatened this structure in much the same way that San Maló did in the 1780s, so it was not unpredictable when Cable migrated from Louisiana and its racially charged climate to New England (Jordan and De Caro 1996:41).

With San Maló's appearance in the folksongs of slave society he attained a notability even through death (Cable 1886:814-815). One such example can be found in "The Dirge of St. Malo" included in George Washington Cable's collection of Creole Slave Songs, taken down by a Creole acquaintance from an elderly woman in St. Bernard Parish:

Alas! Young men, come, make lament  
For poor St. Malo in distress!

They chased, they hunted him with dogs,  
They fired at him with a gun,  
They hauled him from the cypress swamp.  
His arms they tied behind his back,  
They tied his hands in front of him;  
They tied him to a horse's tail,  
They dragged him up into the town.  
Before those grand Cabildo men  
They charged that he had made a plot  
To cut the throats of all the whites.  
They asked him who his comrades were;  
Poor St. Malo said not a word!  
The judge his sentence read to him,  
And then they raised the gallows-tree.  
They drew the horse - the cart moved off -  
And left St. Malo hanging there.  
The sun was up an hour high  
When on the Levee he was hung;  
They left his body swinging there,  
For carrion crows to feed upon (Cable 1886:814-815).

The event in this sorrowful song ushered in a new African-American hero figure. Through his actions, San Maló took back the control of his fate, whether it would end in freedom or in death. In this category San Maló stands as a stronger figure in comparison to the Big Johns of folklore, African-American tricksters who rely on guile alone to get out of dangerous situations but never actually confront the opposition. The figure of San Maló in folklore endures physical trials and tribulations which originate from documented historical episodes giving his folklore legacy a greater depth than the jovial figure of the African-American trickster could convey.

A striking similarity occurs between the two figures of Big John and San Maló through the importance of each figure's legacy in Hoodoo charms. While I have noticed in my perusals of the Voodoo shops of New Orleans that the ingredient "Big John De Conquer root" is a commonly available ingredient, three of my consultants reported that at one time the remains of San Maló possessed a similar importance. The use of grave dust or bone dust is a long-standing important ingredient in Hoodoo charms, so perhaps this is what was meant by Martha Ward (2004) when she referred to Marie Laveau using a representation of Saint Maroon. Perhaps Laveau possessed a relic of the martyr from which she drew strength and confidence, a practice

that many in the Catholic faith would be familiar with. From my experience as a Catholic in Louisiana, there is a similar practice in the Catholic churches and culture in which I grew up. Relics of holy people or important persons in both of these cultures possess similar attributes in that they are viewed as powerful spiritual items.

San Maló also persists in the contemporary literary community of New Orleans, specifically through the writings of New Orleans poet and scholar Brenda Marie Osbey. In her collection of poetry entitled *All Saints*, Osbey includes the poem “The Business of Pursuit: San Maló’s Prayer” (Osbey 1997:108-114). The poem places the reader in the desperate mindset of the fugitive San Maló as he and his comrades flee from their pursuers. In the poem Osbey develops a fictive relationship between San Maló and Louis Congo, a slave freed by the French government in order to serve as public executioner (Ingersoll 1991:176; Osbey 1997:108). These two figures could not have been further from one another in character and reputation, one the manifestation of resistance and the other the representation of betrayal. Osbey mentions an altar dedicated to San Maló in the final verses of the poem:

one other small thing:  
i have never been to the chapelroom at ms. timotea’s.  
but when I go  
i set my light on the altar of san malo (Osbey 1997:114).

Is this a figurative altar or does San Maló receive ritual veneration in the contemporary Voodoo community of New Orleans? This is the premise upon which I conducted my research and interviews with a few of New Orleans’ local spiritual leaders and scholars familiar with the study of San Maló and his band of maroons.

## **Chapter V**

### **“Voodoo” in New Orleans**

The purpose of this section is to provide a little background on the community in which I sought to discover San Maló’s contemporary legacy. In the sources in which San Maló appeared, he did so for but a brief moment and was soon glossed over without further explanation except for the arbitrary portrayal of this mysterious figure as a protective spirit for runaway slaves about whom the white population was kept in the dark. The idea of Marie Laveau, a name synonymous with “Voodoo” in New Orleans, praying to him for help led me to wonder if he still maintained this role in the community of today’s New Orleans. This is the reason why the contemporary “Voodoo” community of New Orleans has been the focus of research within this thesis.

#### **African-American Religion in the New World**

Voodoo has typically been portrayed as a religion of slaves brought to New Orleans by Haitian refugees (Fandrich 2005:118-119). New light has been shed on this perspective through recent publications (Fandrich 2005; Hall 1992; Long 2006). One of these studies follows the charted routes employed by slave-traders, allowing a more comprehensive examination of the regional networks which existed between Africa and the Americas (Hall 1992:28-95). The majority of the enslaved population in Haiti originated from the Dahomean region of Africa with a moderate amount of Congolese from the Congo region of Africa (Fandrich 2005:38). The slave population of New Orleans, although more varied due to New Orleans’ position as a center of commerce and trade, originally consisted of a primarily Senegambian community with a percentage of Congolese far more significant than what was found in Haiti (Fandrich 2005:38-42). Based on these patterns of population trading and observations of practices within certain areas of New Orleans, some scholars argue that the sect of Voodoo which has developed in New

Orleans is primarily Congo-originated (Anonymous Personal Communication, January 30, 2008).

Voodoo is an independent religion, developed in America, existing as an already developed culture of African-influenced worship prior to the influx of Haitian refugees (Fandrich 2005:119). Tallant's (1946) investigation of Voodoo in New Orleans, the very widely cited work on the topic prior to the newest wave of interest, portrayed this religion as inextricably intertwined with all other forms of African religion represented in the New World. The various African-originated religions found in the New World have typically been portrayed as mysterious and savage creating the exotic other in a culture which cannot be easily understood (Tallant 1946). Even so, the academic record of Louisiana Voodoo has come a long way in the past few decades. Anthropologists such as Long (2006), Singleton (1999), Wilkie (1997), and Fandrich (2005) and historians like Hall (1992) are making herculean attempts to explore this complex, cultural creation even outside of the field of folklore.

From the first reports of this religious practice in New Orleans, anthropologists and writers alike have been enthralled by and intensely drawn to the study of Voodoo. Early writers who took immense interest in the chronicling of Creole culture, such as George Washington Cable, and local journalists were drawn to the organized dances at Congo Square. These reports often sensationalize the extent to which Voodoo practitioners would partake in grotesque exaggerations of the carnal practices said to have been witnessed but at least accurately speak of the circumstances under which these events took place (Donaldson 1984). From accounts like these one can better understand the tendency for some sects of Voodoo to desire a certain amount of secrecy and protection from outside observers and authorities. New Orleans Voodoo has traditionally been a religion of concealment finding elusiveness more of a blessing than a hindrance to its perpetuation.

## **Voodoo Dances at Congo Square**

There are a number of public references to the white populations' experience of Voodoo in New Orleans. One example of historical eye-witness accounts of these African cultural practices can be found in the documentation of slave dances held at Congo Square between 1800 and 1862 (Cable 1886). Many of the accounts claim that the dances were gatherings where the "Voodoos" danced wildly and performed magical rituals (Donaldson 1984). Originally the site of the Spanish Fort San Fernando, today Congo Square is a portion of Louis Armstrong Park. Beginning in 1817 an ordinance limiting these gatherings of hundreds of slaves across the city to Sunday afternoons in Congo Square was passed in response to local complaints about the disruptive nature of these gatherings (Donaldson 1984:63). This is one of the first examples of government regulation of African cultural practices. Donaldson claims, "The situation in New Orleans was unique" (Donaldson 1984:63).

In African-American studies, researchers often combine "Africans" into one large group, rarely emphasizing the various tribes to which they belonged. As Samford notes, "Despite a growing awareness of the cultural diversity of African and African-American slaves, archaeologists seeking cultural survivals have often tended to treat the enslaved group as a single group (Samford 1996:105)." Donaldson brings this to the forefront with his collection of eye-witness accounts of the dances held at Congo Square and the physical separateness between tribes expressed in the segmented groupings of dancers (Donaldson 1984:66). Certain tribes would not dance near one another, implying intertribal conflicts, something rarely addressed in the historical record on African slaves.

Overall historical accounts about these gatherings prove too often to be contradictory and sometimes sensationalist, especially when referring to Voodoo practices (Donaldson 1984:67). The amount of disruption caused by the dances is vague. Some sources refer to them as an



annoyance to the neighboring residences while others testify that they were quite orderly and safe (Donaldson 1984:67). The dances were suspended in the 1830s due to residential complaints but were reinstated in 1845 at the requesting of a petition from the slaves to the city (Donaldson 1984:68).

### **Voodoo and Anthropology**

Until recent times, the study of New Orleans Voodoo has been a sensationalized topic or has been confined only to the fields of folklore and myth rather than the holistic study of a cultural creation. One of the best known and highly debated studies of Voodoo was undertaken by Zora Neale Hurston, writer and anthropologist. Hurston's 1931 ethnography on Voodoo in the 1920s and 1930s brought a new level of intimacy to this religion in the scholarly field. Hurston and other writers, such as W. W. Newell in the late nineteenth century, made it a point in their writings to note that the Voodoo participants they encountered referred to their religious practice as Hoodoo. Some current anthropologists, such as Jesse Gaston, view Hoodoo as "the negative component of Voodoo," but others view Hoodoo as pertaining to the use of magical charms (Gaston 2005:113). Others use the term to refer to the beliefs and practices of conjurers outside Louisiana's Creole coast.

A large portion of Hurston's findings contradict what has been presented in more contemporary writings on the practice of Voodoo in New Orleans as well as the folklore of the Laveau Voodoo Queens (Hurston 1931:326). Zora Neale Hurston writes of her initiation under the guidance of Samuel Thompson, a New Orleans Voodoo practitioner who was presented in her study as a traditional Voodooist. In three interviews conducted a recurring opinion on the matter seems to be that Hurston was conned by a group of individuals who took advantage of the anthropologist's eagerness to experience the religion. In Andres Perez y Mena's 1998 critique of syncretism in Afro-Latin religions he argues that members of the religion often lied and gave

misleading representations to outsiders due to an inherent mistrust of outsiders interested in their practice (Mena 1998:17). The aspect of secrecy has become integral to the faction of “Voodoo” in which I hoped to find San Maló’s legacy. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Hollywood began to villainize and sensationalize this religion, turning a unique manifestation of creolization into the exotic “other” and essentially forcing members of this faith community underground to avoid ridicule. Also the Hoodoo conmen such as those who took in Hurston and took advantage of this belief system in order to turn a profit added to the level of caution. From the interviews I have conducted it has often been mentioned that there is no conversion or initiation rite into the religion. In order to be a member of *the faithful* one must be born into the tradition. Today unless one is born into the religion or has grown up around it, there is a minimal amount of knowledge to which the typical outsider is allowed access.

The structure of the Voodoo religion is not openly accessible to the outsider but this research has obtained a few certain aspects of the faith. Within the community there is a perceived creator spirit, what Christians would consider God, who is the focus of general worship. The practice of what is popularly known as Voodoo is more of a complementary, personal practice of the individual who maintains ancestor altars within the home, not unlike those reflected in the Catholic community. In many of the stories of the secretive practice of Voodoo in New Orleans the members are closely linked to the church-going Catholic masses. Examples can be found in the history of Catholicism in Louisiana in figures such as Pere Antoine who was known to be sympathetic to the plight of the Voodoo community and viewed acceptance of their outside practices as a necessary strategy in order to welcome them into the Catholic fold. In the academic sphere this structure has been noted by such anthropologists as Laurie Wilkie, who defines the African-American religious practices of plantation slaves in Louisiana as being a two-part system of religion and magic (Wilkie 1997).

To see an example of one of these altars one has only to visit the Voodoo Museum on Dumaine Street which is the site of a public, living altar room. The significance of this room is that members of *the faithful* are encouraged to come into the museum and continue the maintenance of altars to various spirits, both traditional and ancestral. They do this with the assurance that they need not be identified by outsiders or critics. This is representative of the aspect of secrecy synonymous with the traditionalist sect of Voodoo.

### **Female Empowerment**

New Orleans Voodoo is carried out under the leadership of powerful female figures, often referred to as *Voodoo Queens* or within the religion as *Mothers* (Fandrich 2005:2-3). The most famous of these figures was Marie Laveau. The dominance of the female leader in New Orleans Voodoo is portrayed by Fandrich as no mere coincidence, but stretches over ages and continents in its origins (Fandrich 2005:2-3). Although female leaders have been documented in Haitian Vodun, the overwhelming trend of male leadership throughout that religion's history denotes a divide on this aspect between the two faiths (Fandrich 2005:39). Even among those who claim leadership in the contemporary Voodoo community there is a tendency towards dominant female figures. This can be seen in the self-proclaiming of Voodoo Queens in contemporary New Orleans and does not entirely require that these figures be female. There is, according to Jerry Gandolfo in an interview on February 24, 2007, a homosexual tendency in the prominent male figures of Voodoo today, just as within the Haitian form of Vodun it is not unusual for a male worshipper to be possessed by a female spirit. From the immigration of African enslaved peoples into the wild swamplands of south Louisiana emerged a vibrant and complex religion in which the feminine half of society possessed the highest position of power, the figure of *Mother* or *Queen*.

## **Hoodoo and “Mail Order Magic”**

Typically the term Hoodoo refers to magical manipulation for various purposes. Some view Hoodoo as synonymous with negative manipulations of magic (Gaston 2003:137). What is traditionally viewed as Hoodoo is only one aspect of this complex religion, but looking at this aspect can aid in explaining the worldview held by those who practice this folk belief. Wilkie (1997) defines magic as “a means of manipulating supernatural forces, be they deities, ancestral spirits, witches, or ghosts (Wilkie 1997:82).” By this definition there are a number of religions whose practice falls into this category, specifically that of Catholicism in which many participants in southern Louisiana “Voodoo” could find sanctuary for their beliefs. Some European religious beliefs did not greatly differ from those shared by their African and African-American counterparts and because of this that influence as can be seen in a number of the saints shared by both “Voodoo” and Catholicism. This similarity is not such an unusual result when one considers how closely related in practice these two religions are. To some, specifically the Protestants, intercession and magic might seem like interchangeable rituals. This similarity of faiths added a unique aspect to the creolization process in southeastern Louisiana. Some of the literature on the subject further suggests that magic is not merely a formulaic practice but requires an amount of psychological participation on the part of all parties involved in order for the practice to have any true value (Wilkie 1997; Fennell 2000; Samford 1996).

As demonstrated by witch hunts in early colonial New England, similar fears of supernatural deviants were shared by European settlers, indicating that if such a force in the slave population were brought to the attention of those in charge they would at least understand its implications, even if they did not overtly express similar beliefs. Sometimes members of the white population would participate in magical practices themselves, seeking out spiritual leaders to aid them (Wilkie 1997:83). The practice of magic was identifiable to the individual more so

than formal religious rites. One did not necessarily require a practitioner in order to perform rituals as long as the knowledge was there (Wilkie 1997:86).

Members of this faith have been categorized as root doctors, mid wives, conjurers, treaters, and in *the religion* found in New Orleans today are known as *mothers* (Wilkie 1997:84). Midwives, root doctors and treaters were positions associated with the health and well-being of the physical body, often concerned with the healing of illnesses caused either naturally or by magic through medicinal knowledge of plants aided by prayer (Wilkie 1997:84). Root doctors dispensed medicines to relieve physical ailments while conjurers dealt in the trade of purely magical charms (Wilkie 1997:84). Some accounts of practitioners site a specific revelation or epiphany of being called to conjure while others naturally did so from childhood (Wilkie 1997:84).

Various magical practices pertain to different aspects of life. Some charms intend to harm while the more common charm is intended to protect one's self, family and property (Wilkie 1996:88). Some rituals specifically use body fluids seen as harmful to members of the opposite sex in an attempt to control one's own fate or the fate of a loved one. Some examples include: a mother ensuring that her children will never abandon her, a woman ensuring that her husband will remain faithful to her, a man protecting himself from contracting a disease from a lover (Wilkie 1997:90-92). Charms could also help to ensure protection from ghosts and counter any harmful magic (Wilkie 1997:88-90). While these charms may seem just superstitious to some contemporary observers it is important to view these practices in the context of a population adapting to an alien environment which they may or may not have chosen to inhabit. This perspective shows a marginalized community striving to control their direction in the world, an example reminiscent of the plight of San Maló.

The psychological aspect of magic was often the defining feature of the practice. The purpose of a charm used to harm another illustrates this point. These charms were often left in strategic places in order to make it known to the victim that someone had an issue with them (Wilkie 1997:88-90; Fennell 2000). Similarly some rituals, once performed, played out as mere common sense rather than a magical charm to control an outcome (Wilkie 1997). Magic to harm, however ineffective it may have been, was taken quite seriously by all involved. Often the only release from such a charm would be a counter curse or the destruction of the charm itself (Wilkie 1997:88). In cases like these one could easily take advantage of a person's fear and desire for protection against forces beyond his or her control.

The above paragraphs pertain to what is meant by Hoodoo and magic in this thesis. From these beginnings in folk culture a large and questionable industry grew which exists to this day in the French Quarter. Throughout history magic has been used in populations, "whose members are socially, politically and economically powerless" (Snow 1979:44). The psychological control which this practice provides plays an important role in the composition of a culture's worldview. This "superstitious" perspective has historically been taken advantage of by conmen and tricksters seeking to increase their wealth through the manipulation of another's belief system (Snow 1979:4; Gaston 2003:139-140).

### **Voodoo in Resistance and Rebellion**

In Wilkie's article on the archaeology of magico-religious practices she keeps the focus on how magic and religion can be explored as a representation of the enslaved worldview (Wilkie 1997). The secrecy of this belief system implies that a counter-cultural and possibly reactionary perspective comprised this particular section of society (Wilkie 1997). Many examples of this can be seen in a number of uprisings. Sidbury (1997:532) attributes the resistances in Virginia with the influx of Haitian slaves into the country along with their own

variety of conjurer, inciting the passions of their fellow Africans for freedom. Rucker (2001:86) notes the importance of conjurers in the Haitian rebellions where they held positions as powerful leaders. The impact of the covert and adaptive nature of African religion lends itself to the ideology of resistance as a core of the cultural aspect rather than on the periphery, due in no small part to the masters' fear and suppression of these cultural practices. This sort of fear prompted the final ending of the dances at Congo Square in New Orleans in the 1830s. The amount of organization and the liveliness of gatherings mingled with recent surges of abolitionists and the timing of the Nat Turner rebellion struck a fearful note with the observing multitude of slave owners (Donaldson 1984:67).

Certain accounts mentioned in Rucker's article site specific instances where a religious leader in the African-American community took on this role of power and extended it to lead the community in rebellion. Conjurers, in their position as a wielder of cultural power, may have played the important role of tribal unifier among the varied groups of Africans (Rucker 2001:92). These figures could inspire fear in both enemy and subordinate alike as explained in the testimony of a man who, having betrayed Gullah Jack in the Charlottesville uprising, feared for his life from the threat of this man's vengeance (Rucker 2001:92). Even educated members of the elite free black abolitionist sect, such as Frederick Douglas, would seek out the conjurer's aid in difficult disputes against the dominant population (Rucker 2001:95). Others would look to this figure of power when the fear of families being separated became a possibility (Rucker 2001:96).

While the role of the spiritual leader did not inherently always coincide with rebellion and resistance there is a great deal of similarity between the responsibilities and duties these roles required within the community. This strong and powerful character in Louisiana combined with the role of the free black female, exemplified by Marie Saloppe and the Maries Laveau

(Fandrich 2005:40). In a colonial social environment the existence of such figures were intimidating and could pose a serious threat to the hierarchical racial structure which the dominant population was imposing on society. The fear of that structure being destroyed and leading to the downfall of the dominant population, who were generally outnumbered by the African and African-American population, influenced the way in which this community was viewed and how they attempted to keep them under control. From these beginnings the secrecy of the contemporary community of Voodoo emerged as a necessity to keep the community of the faithful from open persecution and endangerment. In the contemporary era the sensational way in which this concealed practice has been represented in the media only adds further validation for why this community has remained self-contained throughout its development in Louisiana and why the study of this religion is so difficult for an outside figure to pursue.



## Chapter VI

### San Maló Today

The key point of my research is to address how Saint Maló is perceived and what he represents within the contemporary New Orleans Voodoo religious community. In order to accomplish this I held interview sessions with individuals who are affiliated with the Voodoo community of New Orleans through birth, academic research, or both. What I have learned is that he is not so much thought of, in the experience of my sources, as a saint but rather as an ancestor spirit who is a part of all members of the faithful. The name by which he was known as a slave of Darenbourg translates from San to Saint, but that is where the confusion seems to have occurred to some extent. If he was at one time the source of a Hoodoo ingredient this information cannot be corroborated. Through the interviews conducted during this research it seems that he has not been established an understood saint figure within the Voodoo tradition.

San Maló's historic legacy is known within the community but in a unique way, as one of my sources put it, "he is part of who we are when we are our best selves. He is part of our best self and part of our communal identity and how we recognize one another." Through this description we see that as a spiritual figure he takes on more than the position of saint encompasses, he is an essential piece of each individual's identity in that he represents the strength of will from which the New Orleans Creole spirit emerged. With a legacy such as this, one does not have to try too hard to visualize San Maló as the African-American hero figure. This is how I have heard him described by two members of the New Orleans Voodoo community I interviewed, as a hero who paved the way for future generations of people of African-descent. He is a source of inspiration upon which the contemporary African-American community can look with pride, or as one of my sources put it, "He represents something in New Orleans

cultural identity and in New Orleans cultural identity he represents the spirit of rebellion and resistance against slavery and racism.”

### **Lack of Physical Representation**

Through the interviews I have conducted with those associated with the Voodoo community of New Orleans the fact that there is no physical representation of Saint Maló reoccurs. In Robert Tallant’s (1946:77) attempt to illustrate “Voodoo” in New Orleans one of his informants, Raoul Desfrene, mentions a statue of Saint Marron when recollecting an altar seen in the front room of Marie Laveau I. However, if he has no physical representation then how should one interpret the observations of Raoul Desfrene? That his physical representation changed through time? So this begs the question of San Maló’s physical representation.

In Martha Ward’s book *Voodoo Queen* (2004) at the opening of Chapter 8: “At the Altar of Love and Luck” she portrays Marie Laveau II as setting up an altar in Congo Square, upon which she placed a statue of Saint Maroon (Ward 2004:108). Did San Maló, represented by the figure of Saint Maroon, at one point in time have a physical representation? If so why does he not have one today? Was it merely a temporally-confined figure of intercession or does this practice fall under the area which the Voodoo community denies to outsiders? The answers to these questions seem as elusive as the figure of San Maló. What I drew from this discovery was to adjust my perception of what I expected to find. With no clearly-defined devotion to San Maló as what one would normally imagine in saint intercession, the act of asking for favors from a spiritual figure who serves as a mediator between the human and spirit world, does he still receive any attention at all within the community other than the knowledge of his story?

One assumption I had initially made was that if Saint Maroon did have a place within the Voodoo community’s collection of saint figures, he must have been a figure of purely African-American construction with no counterpart in the Catholic pantheon of saints as many of the

other African deity figures had. However, in Martha Ward's book *Voodoo Queen: The Spirited Lives of Marie Laveau* she notes that Saint Raymond acts as the Catholic counterpart to Saint Maroon (Ward 2004:53). I have come across the figure of Saint Raymond numerous times throughout my research, but he has always been portrayed as a patron saint to which people could pray to for favors. I have not come across him in reference to Saint Maroon or San Maló apart from the correlation portrayed by Ward. Martha Ward explains that Saint Raymond was used to keep the authorities away when they may have been participating in any illegal activities (Ward 2004:53).

When contacted, Martha Ward indicated that the connection was intended as a "poetic connection" and did not come from any historical documentation. Much of her work concerning maroons was based on the Caribbean manifestation of marronage, which has an altogether different historic background than my research. Her sources for Saint Raymond also came from the Caribbean identification of him (Personal Communication with Ward June 9, 2008). The connection between Saint Raymond and the Louisiana version of Saint Marron, at least, is probably non-existent or at least I have not found any mention of such a connection to corroborate its existence.

Cathy Smith is the owner and curator for the House of the Seven Sisters Voodoo shop and Museum in Algiers, across the river from the Crescent City. This shop is as elusive as its subject matter and rightly representative of the secretive nature of the religion. The streets in this area lack signs to give direction but the shop itself is quite conspicuous as long as you are looking for it. The Seven Sisters claimed to be descendants of Marie Laveau and according to the museum's brochure they, "held meetings in Algiers for the Hoodoos and Herb Doctors from around the country." In an interview on June 3, 2008, Cathy Smith brought up a point which I believe is the key to San Maló's legacy. She states, "dead bones in Voodoo and African

religions, the dust, the graveyard dirt is what they started calling it here, all of those things carry magical powers to the Africans.” This theme comes up a number of times in my other interviews as well. She goes on to say, “Death is how they speak, you know? The body after death brings this or that.” Another of my sources addresses this same topic saying first, “because he is a murky figure San Malo is a kind of an ideal topic or an ideal subject or an ideal representation of the city and its culture and its history because he represents conflict and resistance and an absence of resolution.” In this sense the figure of San Maló seems to symbolize not only the city of New Orleans but the underground existence of the Voodoo spiritual community.

This source goes on to speak of the Congo religion and the origin of “goofy dust,” a term for grave dust in New Orleans (Anonymous Personal Communication January 30, 2008). We know from Hall (1992:35) that at least 294 slaves were transported to Louisiana from the Congo in 1721. Today, within at least one Voodoo community in New Orleans many of these rituals are identical to those of the Congo religion and so the origin of many words within this religious community comes from the Congo language. “In the Congo tradition the ashes and the dust of the dead are holy.” This theme concerning the spiritual power that the remains of the dead hold for the living, no matter what their position in life, brings to light the possibility that the remains of a figure like San Maló, who represented so much in life, only increased his influence through his death, not just on a spiritual and folk level but through the inheritance of his remains in the African-American community.

Prior to my interview with Priestess Miriam on June 2, 2008, I was able to sit in on a tour at the Voo Doo Spiritual Temple and Cultural Center located on North Rampart Street across from Congo Square in New Orleans. Tour groups often come through this location to get a taste of the spiritual life of New Orleans. Priestess Miriam is very welcoming to all guests. She began by asking where the guests originated from as we all sat on the iron patio furniture in the

open courtyard behind the shop and temple room. She compares Voodoo to a hospital, not the first time I have heard this analogy. Just as a hospital is not about the doctors and nurses but about the people they help so too is Voodoo. As we walked into the temple I observed that every inch of wall space was taken up with a living altar. This altar contained not only African figures but a massive conglomeration of religious figures and images from every imaginable form of worship. She speaks for a while of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux whose almost life-size statue stands in the midst of the temple room next to a similar-sized likeness of Pope John Paul II. Strewn on the different altars are offerings of money, charms, Mardi Gras beads, food, and different sorts of personal tokens placed on these altars by numerous individuals over the years. Candles and incense burn throughout the temple. Wreaths of dried flowers hang from the walls as other bouquets thrive at the feet of Saint Thérèse. The Priestess explains to the tour group that when one is making prayer these items serve the purpose of dissipating the current of energy when it hits at full force.

Given the enormity of the temple and the living altars that filled it I was certain that I would find a representation of Saint Maroon there. Disappointment soon took the place of anxious hope. While she was very familiar with the figures of Saint Raymond, of whom there were numerous statues throughout the shop and temple area, San Maló was nowhere to be found. There were a few representations of Black Hawk, an Indian Chief resistance figure from eighteenth-century Illinois who followed much the same path as the historic San Malo and fought for the freedom of his people, later becoming a religious figure in the spiritual churches of New Orleans (Costonie 2004:62). Although not a native of New Orleans, Priestess Miriam is considered a genuine Voodoo spiritual authority in New Orleans but she was not familiar



**Figure 4: Artistic representation of a warning stump (artist Herbert Singleton). Photo taken by author, February 27, 2008.**

with the legacy of San Maló. This has lead me to believe that the knowledge of such a figure is confined to those who were brought up in the New Orleans community and is kept secret from all outsiders, whether part of the Voodoo community or not. When questioned about any relationship which may exist between San Maló and Saint Raymond she did not acknowledge any such connection but pointed out the various Saint Raymond figures present in the temple. Although there were many individual African Saint figures throughout the temple she could not point out any that were specifically identified as Saint Maló. There is the possibility that I just

was not privy to this information since I am not a part of the religious community. As Cathy Smith said, “we’re only gonna give you the information we want you to know. You’re not gonna be privileged to the whole.”

Something I noticed while I was conducting my research was that there is a definite lack of information openly present in the everyday tourist scene of New Orleans on such things as maroon communities. One tourist draw that is providing information on this topic to the visitors of New Orleans is the New Orleans Historic Voodoo Museum on Dumaine Street run by Jerry Gandolfo. In the Voodoo Museum there are a number of examples of warning stumps created by the late Herbert Singleton, a local artist (Figure 3). These are artistic representations of the kind of boundary markers used by maroon encampments, much like the ax which San Maló used to mark the territory of Gaillardeland in 1784 (Hall 1992:213). The rest of the museum serves, much in the same way as the Voo Doo Spiritual Temple does, as a living altar which the community is free to add to and maintain without fear of condemnation or intrusion.

Another project to increase the popular knowledge of the city’s history of African-American culture is being created across the river in Algiers. During my interview with Cathy Smith, I learned that a new establishment was being put into place to share the story of Creole society with the rest of New Orleans. She is in the process of putting together an extraordinary project called “The Village: A Riverfront Folk Life Village.” She explains the history of the site in this way, “Right here on this spot where we are, these were market gardens where the Africans grew things to feed themselves because the French couldn’t feed them after a while.”

In the area described by Smith, there is now a fenced in field just before the levee where they have built a number of market stands, an example of an African hut, a Caribbean house, and some gardens in which are grown a number of the typical crops that the enslaved population grew to sell to the colonists such as: tobacco, sugarcane, okra, tomatoes, rice and so on. All

along the fence partition are murals and signs containing information regarding the slave trade, maroon encampments, Voodoo in New Orleans, and the history of Creole society as it developed in the community of New Orleans. This market area is so close to the river that as we talk you can hear the Calliope music from the Riverboat Natchez as it rolls by. The goal of this location is to provide information to the public on the history of African-Americans in New Orleans and they will also open the market stands to local artists to encourage a community exchange of wares. The next phase of the project is the building of a Native American encampment to promote discussion of the cultural interactions that occurred between the newly arrived Africans and the indigenous population of Louisiana. Soon the legacy of San Maló and his ilk will be shared with the general populace who visit this future tourist destination.

### **Saint Maló's Literary Legacy**

As noted in Chapter IV the New Orleans poet and LSU professor Brenda Marie Osbey has dedicated at least two narrative poems in her work *All Saints* to the legacy of San Maló. These poems are "The Business of Pursuit: San Maló's Prayer" and "The Head of Louis Congo Speaks" (Osbey 1997:98,108). When interviewed about the poems she revealed that the title of the book was inspired by San Maló and even sets this forth in the invocation at the beginning of the collection as she calls on, "Hoodoo saints and their little Catholic cousins..." (Osbey 1997). She has dedicated twelve years of research to the study of San Maló and is still working on a collection of poems about him which she refers to as her "San Maló Cycle." Over the years Osbey has developed an evolving relationship with the figure of San Maló which she describes as, "figures like San Maló and the morphing of people into these kinds of figures, as I get older those kinds of people become more and more significant. They come to symbolize something that, although I've always been aware of them they could not possibly have meant to me what they mean to me now."



Although the lack of general knowledge of San Maló indicated by the interviewees would seem to be an impediment to the research of this figure's contemporary legacy it might be best to say that this absence of public knowability is one of the most important aspects of his legacy. Osbey commented on this same lack of research concerning this section of Voodoo as it developed in New Orleans saying, "In some ways I think that with the absence of study of this religion it's something that allowed it to continue, that's the thing that's preserved it." This is not to imply that scholarship of a subject is destructive but given the past abuses this religion has undergone it is easy to see why such seclusion would be considered necessary to its survival.

## **Chapter VII**

### **Conclusion**

#### **Future Possibilities for Research**

I believe that the possibility for future research of San Maló's transformation lies in the area of cultural hybridity. Within the discussions of this relatively recent term there is conflict concerning the validity of the term in reference to describing the process of cultural development and transformation (Stross 1999; Thomas 1996; Werbner 2001). Some try to bridge the gap between biological and cultural definitions of this term (Stross 1999) while others consider the term too general to really be able to address the specific agents of change (Thomas 1996). There are a number of different ways to look at the possible hybridity of a figure like San Maló, but the preferential one would be from a member of the community of the faithful.

Another path which could be pursued is the collection of hero stories like that of San Maló throughout south Louisiana. The stories passed down through the Afro-Creole families of the region may contain some figures with whom San Maló could be compared. Or perhaps after Brenda Marie Osbey publishes her *San Maló Cycle* a new literary critique and analysis can be created.

The origins of this thesis were in the field of archaeology. The original interest of this thesis was in the excavation of the maroon encampments of San Maló in St. Bernard Parish and the Barataria barrier islands. During the interview process I have come across a number of references to still-standing maroon encampments. These leads would make a remarkable future project, especially since the archaeological material on maroon society in Louisiana is has not really been explored to date.

Further ethnographic studies for this research could pertain to the Folk Life Village which is currently in its formative period. This project is always looking for volunteers to aid in

its construction and maintenance and the on-site experience of working with Cathy Smith in this context would provide a wealth of information on the daily processes of this culture. Also the experience of participating in a project that so closely deals with the transferal of information to the public about the development of the African-American community in New Orleans would provide knowledge of how the community of New Orleans views its own history.

### **Summary**

Within the complex cultural amalgamation that makes up Creole existence, there is a distinct sense of pride and appreciation for all that has influenced this community. A significant portion of the literature pertaining to Louisiana denotes the process of that cultural development as Creolization. The problematic nature of the word Creolization as it applies to the academic sphere stems from the racial tensions it stirs in those who wish to claim it.

Leland Ferguson describes creolization as a process that “emphasizes the creative character of early American, including African-American, culture. In creating their American subculture, African Americans drew elements from African, European, and Native American culture and combined these into a new and unique way of life” (Ferguson 1999:116-117). This term tries to avoid the problems caused by the use of the Eurocentric term acculturation. All involved in the process are active participants in their cultural transformation. Having said this, I find it appropriate to describe the process through which the figure of San Maló transformed over the generations as Creolization. I believe his transformation exemplifies the most genuine form of this term.

Through the discussions on the historic context out of which San Maló emerged it is evident that the tumultuous economic and governmental circumstances under which the colony developed had a direct impact on the ability of a resistance figure like this to arise. In the historic record concerning the existence and actions of San Maló and his band there is a

noticeable slanted perspective which speaks of the group as a problematic force that threatened the safety of the settlement of New Orleans as opposed to looking at their actions as a defensive strategy. The result of this bias ended in the martyrdom and sanctification of San Maló throughout the African and Creole community of south Louisiana.

San Maló appears as a hero figure within the community and his remains and everything associated with his death took on a powerful symbolic identity for the African and Creole community of New Orleans in the 1800s. He was revered as a spiritual figure of power in the Hoodoo aspect of the religion but has since then developed into a symbolic representation of the strength which the contemporary African-American community of the faithful originated. He is a figure whose legacy is appreciated most through a perspective of maturity, despite his volatile origins. He has gained immortality through the legacy of his endeavors and death, but that immortal existence is culturally confined to those who claim his spiritual descent.

While the legacy of San Malo does not extend outside the Afro-Creole culture of New Orleans, to my knowledge, that is not to say that his legacy does not continue. It is at least alive in the writings of New Orleans poet and scholar Brenda Marie Osbey. In any sense, the legacy of San Maló has proven to be an ideal parallel to the hero songs of the Mali Empire but transforms through a new trajectory of the narrative tradition in the New World found in the satire of the African-American trickster. Similarly just as he lives through his literary legacy his story and martyrdom reaffirms the cultural identity of strength and resistance identified with the Afro-Creole spirit of New Orleans.

Although I have not been informed of any formal veneration this does not exclude the possibility that he is a figure who can receive ancestral veneration, a practice I have experienced within my own cultural background as a Louisiana French Catholic. Even with no clearly defined devotion to San Malo as what one would normally imagine in saint intercession he still

represents a powerful cultural concept within the faith community as a figure of resistance and strength with which the cultural identity of the community of the faithful identifies. Within the New Orleans of today and among the community of the faithful his name still resounds in song and two published narrative poems, ensuring that his legacy will continue to transform through and with future generations.

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## **Vita**

Erin Voisin received her Bachelor of Arts in history with a double major in classical studies from Loyola University of New Orleans in 2004. After two years in the auction business she enrolled in the master's program in anthropology at Louisiana State University in 2006 and hopes to receive her degree in August of 2008. She is currently employed at Tesla Offshore and plans to continue to pursue her interests in archaeology.