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Brewed Awakening: Re-imagining Education in Three Nineteenth-Century New Orleans Coffee Houses

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BREWED AWAKENING: RE-IMAGINING EDUCATION IN THREE NINETEENTH-CENTURY NEW ORLEANS COFFEE HOUSES

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

by
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ABSTRACT

In dominant narratives of the history of education in America, the icon of the American educated citizen has traditionally been rooted in Jeffersonian Democracy, eventually taking shape in the Northern, Anglo-Protestant, Common School Movement in which the availability and acceptance of state-supported public education was a key measure of democratic progress. Within the institution of common schools, individuals were taught how to participate in a democratic society. This dissertation reimagines the dominant narrative by suggesting that the multiethnic and multilingual nature of New Orleans, which some early American leaders had framed as discordant and disorderly, was vital to constructing an alternative understanding of democracy. The transatlantic environment of Louisiana and the creolization process that was a part of that environment were instrumental in fostering a public democratic culture which developed outside of formal schools and which was not contingent upon the political rights of national citizenship. Instead, democracy was a matter of public rights which were nurtured through the transatlantic entanglements and everyday practices in public spaces. Public rights, the right to be treated with dignity and respect in public places, are seen in contrast to political rights, which are guaranteed by law. Tracing the history of three early nineteenth-century coffee-houses in New Orleans, the author argues that the everyday practices within these establishments facilitated a public intellectual culture for everyone who entered. Additionally, the author argues that everyday practices in these coffee-houses made public rights possible for people on the margins of society, most notably, slaves, free people of color, and women. These groups were typically denied their rights to public culture by formal republican institutions. Through the interactions which occurred in these coffee-house spaces, these groups developed tactics to circumvent the government and institutional strategies designed to control them.
In 1671, French artist Sebastien LeClerc produced the above engraving depicting Louis XIV visiting the Royal Academy of Sciences in Paris. The artwork shows eager scholars and natural philosophers meeting with the equally enthusiastic Sun King in a room filled with various objects related to learning. The space is filled with books, maps, instruments, and natural artifacts. A large window behind the men shows the construction site of the new Royal Observatory as well as the formal, geometric Jardin du Roi (king’s garden), which was used by the academy as an outdoor laboratory. In numerous ways the image faithfully captures the values of the Scientific Revolution and early Enlightenment that characterized this point of the French king’s reign. The engraving highlights the growing alliance between science and the government, one that aimed to strengthen the power of the French state. The instruments and specimens speak to human ability to inquire about and to understand the natural world in a rational, scientific way. The symmetrical design of the garden represents attempts at human mastery over that world.
Perhaps most importantly, the learned noblemen surrounding the king suggest the elite, gendered perspective of what knowledge was valued and who could pursue it.

It was in this climate of an “elite Enlightenment” that the Lower Mississippi Valley was explored and colonized by the French in the early eighteenth century. Much has been written about the French government’s attempt to impose early Enlightenment principles on the area that would become New Orleans.¹ The desire for control over a wild new land is immediately evident from early maps of the area. A mid-eighteenth-century plan of New Orleans shows a grid of evenly-spaced, symmetrical city blocks holding back the wilderness along the banks of the Mississippi River.² Early travelers documented the natural world they encountered in words and in drawings, publishing their work in France to feed the upper classes’ curiosity about exotic locations.³ The concept of colonization itself was a manifestation of early Enlightenment values. Colonialism was a scientific and social experiment, and the colonies themselves were viewed as laboratories where modern ideas about statecraft could be imported and tested.⁴

Of course, colonial New Orleans never became the exemplary French city imagined by officials back in France. From the point of view of the French metropole, the colony was a failure, both economically and morally. Early literary descriptions of New Orleans depicted it as

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² Thomas Jefferys, Plan of New Orleans the Capital of Louisiana with the Disposition of its Quarters and Canals, 1759, The Historic New Orleans Collection. New Orleans, LA.
a “dark, primitive, abandoned place, governed by immoral pleasures rather than by rationality and law.” Increasingly, these writings spoke of the failure of the “Enlightenment” (known in French as Les Lumières, or “the lights”) through a discourse of “darkness” and “disorder.” Because the orderly, “enlightened” society like the one depicted in the engraving never took hold, it is not surprising that the colony would be characterized in this manner. By the 1720s, the “darkness,” “disorder,” and “immorality” associated with New Orleans began to accompany descriptions of the populace’s supposed lack of interest in intellectual pursuits. Early on, the dominant image that emerged of colonial New Orleans was one of unenlightened mayhem, a veritable “devil’s empire.”

However, these images do not take into account the transatlantic influences on New Orleans’ intellectual climate. Positioned at a crossroads of the transatlantic trade, New Orleans was a repository for diverse ideas brought by travelers to and through the city. These travelers hailed from Africa, Europe, the Caribbean, as well as from South and North America. The confluence of ideas in New Orleans helped create alternative ways of knowing and being which provide a counter-story to dominant narratives of Louisiana education. New Orleans’ intellectual history only becomes a tale of “darkness” when told from the point of view of those...

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5 Ibid., 26.
7 Powell, 2012; Dawdy, 2008
8 Dawdy, 2008. The title of Dawdy’s book is taken from the letters of Marie Hachard, an Ursuline novice who was a teacher in the first school set up by the Ursuline nuns in New Orleans. Writing to her father in France, she wrote of New Orleans, “the devil has a great empire here,” on April 24, 1728. See Emily Clark, ed. Voices from an Early American Convent: Marie Madeleine Hachard and the New Orleans Ursulines (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 2007).
who tried but failed to impose their ways of knowing and being onto other people, who had their
own ways of making sense of their world. But one story of failure implies another of success.
The stories of how colonial subjects in Louisiana countered or made use of the ideas and
institutions imposed on them by those in power do exist; however, they are often buried under
dominant narratives of a people living in relative mental darkness, waiting for a more “civilized”
Europe or America to bring them to “enlightenment.” These narratives discount the vibrant
teaching and learning and the creative exchange of ideas which occurred as part of everyday
practice- intellectual exchanges made even more dynamic because they took place amid the
colorful chaos of a transatlantic environment. The daily acts of cooking, eating, drinking, and
walking, as well as the observations and conversations which accompanied these activities, are
often overlooked as educational undertakings. Furthermore, the places in which these practices
occurred are overlooked as legitimate spaces of education.

Dominant narratives of education in America argue that democracy depends on the
rational individual citizen who has been appropriately educated for participatory government
within the nation state. The icon of the American educated citizen has traditionally been rooted
in Jeffersonian Democracy, eventually taking shape in the Northern, Anglo-Protestant, Common
School Movement in which the availability of state-supported public education was a key
measure of democratic progress. Within the institutions of common schools, individuals were
expected to learn how to participate in a democratic society. Horace Mann, the architect of the
Common School, worried that with too much freedom, democratic society would devolve into
chaos; however, a “common” education would teach individuals to reign in their passions and to
resist the temptations of excess and greed.\textsuperscript{10} It would also teach people their proper place in society, facilitating order and control.

In addition to common schools, scholarship related to the history of education has traditionally focused on learned societies, academies and salons, which were restricted to the elite. On the other hand “public lectures, coffee houses, lending libraries, art exhibitions, operatic and theatrical performances, were nearly all commercial operations, open to all who could pay, and thus provided ways in which many different social strata could be exposed to the same ideas.”\textsuperscript{11} Consequently, Enlightenment concepts of the citizenship and “democracy” were not only shaped in formal institutions like schools, but as Michel de Certeau suggests, in “everyday practices” that usually “appear as merely the background of social activity.”\textsuperscript{12}

The focus in this dissertation is on the everyday practices as lived in the physical spaces of three nineteenth century New Orleans coffee houses. Jurgen Habermas has specifically noted the role that English coffee houses and French salons historically played in fostering social exchanges in which private individuals “made public use of their reason.”\textsuperscript{13} Many scholars have described how places of public gathering were also historical spaces of intellectual exchange and political debate.\textsuperscript{14} Markman Ellis and W.H. Armytage have both demonstrated how British

\textsuperscript{10} Horace Mann, \textit{Annual Reports on Education}, (ed) Mary Mann, (Boston: Horace B. Fuller, 1868).
\textsuperscript{12} Michel de Certeau, \textit{The Practice of Everyday Life}, 1984: xi.
\textsuperscript{13} Habermas, 1969, 27.
coffee houses in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were sites of learning as well as sites for the formation of republican values. Dena Goodman has done similar work with French literary salons, taking care to emphasize women’s roles in public life. Christine Sismondo specifically focuses on revolutionary activity in bars and taverns in the British American colonies in the seventeenth through twentieth centuries. But no one has yet told those stories from the perspective of the transatlantic world of Louisiana.

A transatlantic understanding of “public” reframes the concept of a “public sphere” as a myth. The structure of a sphere is a closed one. It is elitist and in some ways, not “public” at all because it excludes those who have not been made ready, through status or education, to participate.  

Women, people of color, and the poor and working classes were often denied access to the formal institutions which provided the education and the means to be part of a public sphere. This research shifts from the hegemonic narrative of common schools and “elite” public spaces. In so doing it expands the intellectual history of those most often understood as oppressed or marginalized peoples in colonial and early-American Louisiana (enslaved Africans, Free People of Color, the working classes, and women) as that history developed through the social activity of the public spaces of New Orleans eating and drinking establishments.

The work of post-colonial scholars such as Shannon Dawdy, Daniel Usner, Rebecca Scott, Paul Gilroy, Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, and Caryn Cossé Bell, has done much to refute the perceived anti-intellectualism of all colonial subjects in Louisiana, including French and Spanish Creoles, Native Americans, African Slaves, and Free People of Color. But many narratives specifically devoted to the history of education in Louisiana during this period have not matched

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15 For more criticism on Habermas’ concept of a public sphere see Douglas Kellner, “Habermas, the Public Sphere, and Democracy: A Critical Intervention,” http://www.gseis.ucla.edu.
their groundbreaking scholarship. Narratives that purport to describe the history of education of colonial and early-American Louisiana perpetuate the region as anti-intellectual in part because they hold fast to narrow definitions of education which remain embedded in Enlightenment epistemologies. In the main, these narratives privilege the education which occurs in formal, state-supported schooling. Colonial and early American leaders equated the rejection of this system by segments of the population in Louisiana with a lack of interest in education.

The work of Shannon Dawdy, in particular, has countered the myth of anti-intellectualism by illuminating ways in which colonial Louisiana, in the days well before the American takeover, had a vibrant intellectual history. Drawing on Louisiana’s history as a French colony, Dawdy acknowledges that Louisiana was indeed a recipient of European intellectual traditions associated with the Enlightenment. However, she also points out that distance and neglect by the imperial power necessitated that colonials develop for themselves the practical knowledge and survival skills needed to prosper. Referring to this phenomenon as “rogue colonialism,” Dawdy recognizes the agency of colonial subjects and convincingly demonstrates that Louisiana was also the sight of a counter-flow of Enlightenment thought.16 Dawdy has observed that Louisiana participated in the Republic of Letters through personal and official correspondence, mapmaking, ethnographic descriptions, and histories of the colony. These documents, along with travel accounts made by the many visitors to Louisiana via the global port of New Orleans helped to make the region a “portal of a cross-Atlantic conversation.”17 As a result of this conversation, the people of colonial Louisiana were well versed in the Enlightenment rhetoric of “free trade, the rights of citizens, and the horrors of

17 Dawdy, 2008, 60.
“despotism” that was as relevant to the colonial situation as it was the metropole.\textsuperscript{18} If we consider these ideas in combination with those of the many other groups of people who were part of the transcultural environment of Louisiana, including free and enslaved, of European, Native American, and African descent, then it becomes clear that Louisianans were not merely passive consumers of Enlightenment ideas but were instead active producers of their own ways of knowing and being. These alternative epistemologies and ontologies emerged from the unpredictable, chaotic, cross-cultural entanglements of a transatlantic space.

Gwendolyn Midlo Hall argues it is wrong to assume that there was an all-powerful, static national culture and society brought over by European colonizers into which non-Europeans were socialized and acculturated.\textsuperscript{19} European settlers who arrived were also acculturated by their experiences amid indigenous peoples and Africans. Paul Gilroy argues against the existence of static cultures by reminding us that any culture which interacts with others outside of that culture is changed by those connections. His image of a ship moving continually across Atlantic trade routes is a metaphor for how cultures function. As the ship’s passengers and crew arrive and depart from the ship, they bring with them and take with them ideas collected from myriad ports which are themselves continually exposed to other ideas coming from other ships and across inland trade routes. Each time a ship docks in a particular port, the ideas that it has the potential to engage with have already been altered since the previous voyage. In this way, Gilroy exposes the idea of a fixed national culture as a myth rooted in modernist discourse, while his transatlantic framework is a “counter-culture of modernity” which “transcends both the

\textsuperscript{18} Dawdy, 2008, 61
structures of the nation state and the constraints of ethnicity and national particularity.”

This framework was already well established in Louisiana when American rulers attempted to impose their own institutions onto the colony.

This dissertation builds on the post-colonial scholarship of Louisiana by suggesting that its multiethnic, multi-lingual, and indeed, transatlantic nature, which some framed as discordant and disorderly, was actually a key component in constructing a counter-narrative to dominant discourses of rights, citizenship, and democracy in America, commonly thought to be the intellectual heritage of the European Enlightenment which were then delivered to Louisiana via Anglo-Protestant-American ideas and institutions. A transatlantic approach to this history holds that the Enlightenment and its associated doctrines of rights and democracy cannot be fully understood without considering ways in which non-Europeans, particularly the mass enslavement of Africans on New World Plantations and their resistance, shaped eighteenth and nineteenth-century visions of human nature and human rights. At the heart of this approach is also the assertion that it was not merely the formally educated colonial elite (i.e. Founding Fathers, Constitutional Framers) who gave voice to the political thought of the European Enlightenment in the Americas and to Louisiana in particular, but that it was also defined and practiced by those groups typically placed at the margins of history.

In the decades before and after the American Revolution, Anglo-Protestant Americans, who saw themselves as disciples of the rationalism of the Enlightenment, defined democracy in terms of political equality and national citizenship. In contrast to Anglo-Protestant-American


conceptions of democracy, the transatlantic culture that developed in colonial and antebellum Louisiana, and which was fueled by “the spirit of Catholic universalism and the ideals of the American, French and Haitian revolutions,” envisioned a broader democratic ideology that “transcended the boundaries of individual nations and ultimately transcended racial oppression as well.”22

The historical processes and cross-cultural entanglements specific to colonial sites and moments of world history in the transatlantic world are commonly referred to as creolization.23 Creolization, as I am using it in this dissertation, is a term used to describe creative and dynamic “processes of fusion and syncretism between radically different cultures and ethnicities,”24 which lead to new ways of knowing and being. A transatlantic creolization theory focuses on mapping different relationships, modes of contact, and migration patterns in and among the diverse ethnic and linguistic communities of transatlantic spaces in order to recognize their unique epistemologies and ontologies. This creolization of African, Caribbean, and European philosophical thought resulted not just in an appropriation or extension of the Enlightenment, but in fact disrupted its teleological sense of history in which the nation-state is the organizing trope of subjectivity. I argue that creolization processes speak to more fluid and unpredictable understandings of history. The chaotic and unpredictable nature of creolization was instrumental

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in creating altogether new discourses of rights and citizenship, ultimately leading to new understandings and practices of democracy in the New World.

A transatlantic creolized democracy, addressed public equality as well as political equality. Because political equality was determined by the political body making the laws it posed serious limitations. Whoever is given the power to vote and to influence the laws also has the power to deny the rights of others unless there are certain protections in place to protect those rights. In Anglo-American understandings of democracy, those protections must also be voted on in one way or another. In contrast, public equality or public rights are open to all, regardless of who has political rights. Public rights require that all people be treated with honor, dignity and respect in public places. In addition, public rights include the public liberties of freedom of the press and freedom of assembly and provides a forum from which to argue for political rights. Public rights address the limitations of political equality because it provides access to public spaces where members of a society can be free to debate matters of consequence outside of the eye of the state and the power structure. Because “public rights” were understood to be open to all, it counters the exclusionary properties often associated with the public sphere and political rights. This dissertation traces ways in which public rights, as produced through everyday practices within the public spaces of three coffee houses, provided an alternative to the democratic/republican institutions that, in theory, were supposed to protect rights, but which in practice, could not be counted on.

The questions which guide this research are as follows:

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1) How can creolization theory help us reimagine narratives of the history of colonial, early American, and antebellum education in New Orleans?

2) How does the exploration of everyday practices in coffee houses illuminate ways that people make use of and circumvent structures of power imposed on them?

3) In what ways did the public places of coffee houses and taverns in New Orleans serve as spaces of democracy and education for individuals on the margins of colonial and early-American society?

In Chapter Two of this research, I explore ways that the creolization process which occurred as part of the daily activity in early nineteenth century New Orleans helps us rethink narratives of the history of education of that time period by addressing some of the limitations inherent in Enlightenment assumptions about education and about how we come to know history. I review various ways that scholars have theorized creolization before setting forth my own understanding of the concept and how I will use it as a theoretical lens for my research into a re-imagined history of education in Louisiana. Very little has been written to situate creolization within a context of education. To that end, I draw on the criticism of post-colonial studies by Edouard Glissant, David Scott, and Doris Garraway, as well as from the historiographical theories of Michel de Certeau to frame the creolization process as a creative, situational, and unpredictable epistemological and ontological undertaking. I argue that re-thinking narratives of the history of education through a creolization lens allows us to construct alternative stories about “education” that move beyond “schooling” in order to acknowledge the exchange of ideas which occurred as part of the practices of everyday life.

Chapter Three explores dominant narratives of the history of education in Louisiana. I argue that these narratives overwhelmingly focus on the history of Anglo-American institutions
of formal schooling, and as a result, tell a particular story of education in Louisiana. According to this hegemonic narrative, education in the colonial, early American, and antebellum periods was a failure. The rejection of the forces of Americanization delayed the progress in education that was certain to come. I reimagine the dominant narrative by highlighting the work of historians who, embracing a broader understanding of what is meant by education, paint a more complex overall picture of the subject’s history. By focusing on the learning which occurs through the practice of everyday life, these scholars give voice to groups which have been typically marginalized in colonial situations.

Chapters Four through Six reimagine the history of education in Louisiana through the social activity and everyday practice which occurred in three early nineteenth-century New Orleans coffee houses. Using archival evidence found in the Historic New Orleans Collection, The University of New Orleans, the New Orleans Public Library, and Hill Memorial Library at LSU, I explore how these establishments, designed as places for entertainment, refreshment and social activity, were creolized into spaces of democracy and education. Like coffee houses in England and salons in France, these spaces provided the institutional bases for a democratic “public sphere.” However, unlike coffee houses in England and salons in France, which were in some ways elite and exclusive, and which typically served a homogeneous clientele, taverns and cafes in New Orleans were available to people from a variety of social strata, especially given the fluid nature of race relations. These were sites where Enlightenment ideas about knowledge, rights, and citizenship were reinterpreted and adapted to fit the multi-lingual, multi-ethnic environment of New Orleans. More than merely the institutional bases for a public sphere, I argue that these coffee house/taverns were in fact, spaces of public rights. In Chapter Four, I describe ways in which the Café de la Bourse or Exchange Coffee-House, served as a public
library, a post office, a commercial exchange, and as a place where patrons from all over the world could debate current issues of the day. I discuss the relationship between the café’s role as a commercial exchange and as a center for learning. I also explore how its function was complicated by the fact that it was also a notorious slave exchange. I examine the extent to which it was possible for the enslaved Africans, as they went about their daily practices as waiters, cooks, footmen, and card dealers, to make a space for themselves within the public culture that developed in the café.

In Chapter Five, I argue that the Café des Refugies, which was popular with the large number of emigrants escaping the political unrest in Saint Domingue, was a space of community and public rights - a space where people of all classes and ethnicities, including people of color, could mingle with some degree of frequency and freedom. I frame this particular café as emblematic of many other small neighborhood cafés and grog shops in New Orleans in the early to mid-nineteenth century. Because of fears of slave insurrections and talk of abolition, these cafés were targets of increasingly tighter controls over licensing and operating hours and were subjected to more stringent segregation laws as Americanization took hold in Louisiana. Newspapers from the period confirm that many proprietors as well as patrons frequently broke these laws. I frame this “disobedience” as purposeful tactics designed to circumvent strategies of control. I argue these tactics were democratic acts which ensured that all parties were privy to the public discourse that took place in these establishments.

The final café, which I discuss in Chapter Six, was not a café in the traditional sense but rather an open-air coffee stand owned and operated in the mid-nineteenth century by Rose Nicaud, a free woman of color. I explore how and in what ways transatlantic influences helped women and people of color to gain access to the public space of the market. I determine how
Rose’s role as a female entrepreneur and as a person of color was complicated by the political and social environment in which she worked, namely, the years before and after the Civil War and Reconstruction. I discuss a homicide that took place at her coffee stand in which a white man shot and killed Edward Forrest, a mixed-race man. I situate the incident and the ensuing investigation against a backdrop of debate about the Louisiana State Constitution of 1868 in which “public rights” were guaranteed to all persons, regardless of race.

In titling this dissertation “Brewed Awakening,” I hope to capture the spirit of the open exchange of ideas that I believe flowed through three early nineteenth century coffee houses in New Orleans. The title is also, of course, a nod to coffee itself. But most importantly, I hope to “awaken” the history of education field to the educational significance of these oft-neglected public intellectual spaces.
CHAPTER 2: CREOLIZATION AND EVERYDAY PRACTICE


Louis Hennepin, a French Catholic missionary, created the above map of the Louisiana Territory as he understood it when he explored the region from 1679 to 1681.¹ The map contains some geographical inaccuracies. California is practically an island, and the mouth of the Mississippi is missing because no European had yet traveled the river’s entire length.² Nevertheless, the perspective depicted invites conversation. In the center of the document lie the

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¹ Hennepin had been sent to New France as a missionary by Louis XIV and was a member of the expedition under the leadership of Rene’ Robert, Sieur de La Salle. Hennepin recounted his adventures in *Description of Louisiana*, (Paris, 1683). The above map is from Louis Hennepin, *Description of Louisiana*, trans. John Gilmary Shea (New York, John G. Shea, 1880). http://www.archive.org.

² In 1697, Hennepin claimed that in 1680, he travelled down the Mississippi River to its mouth, two years before La Salle. Historians doubt the veracity of his claim, noting the time constraints of when he made the alleged expedition and when he returned to France. He wrote a second book justifying his “discovery,” but historians believe he may have used descriptions of the lower Mississippi valley written by other missionaries which were circulating in France at the time of his writings. See Edward D. Neill, *The Writings of Louis Hennepin, Recollect Franciscan Missionary*, (Minneapolis, Minnesota Historical Society, 1880).
coastal regions surrounding the Gulf of Mexico and the islands of the Caribbean. The bulk of the two American continents radiates out to the left of this central point fading off into the distance, and at the far right of the map, beyond the Atlantic Ocean lie the westernmost edges of Europe and Africa. The cartographer’s choice to make the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean the central focus disrupts common geographical understandings of Louisiana as the bottom of an Anglo-centric United States, a view which dominates those histories of American education that point to New England origins.\(^3\) Other scholars, particularly those who argue for education histories rooted in the European Enlightenment, might see Louisiana, and especially New Orleans, as positioned on the edge of the French empire.\(^4\) Spitzer describes the region as “south of the South,” distinguishing Louisiana from the rest of the American South in its use of language (French Creole, Cajun French), religion (folk Catholicism, voodoo), and foodways (gumbo, jambalaya).\(^5\) Given its historic, economic, and cultural connections to French and Spanish colonies in the West Indies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, we might also think about Louisiana as the “crown of the Caribbean.”\(^6\)

There is no one way to describe the geographical location of Louisiana. It all depends on which story we want to emphasize. However, by positioning the region in the map’s center, Hennepin’s perspective homes in on Louisiana’s physical links to the rest of the world. The map

visually situates the area as part of a vast transatlantic network connecting people, products, and ideas from the Caribbean, Europe, Africa, as well as from North and South America. This image of a network asks us to look at the process of those interactions, a process which I refer to as creolization. Louisiana was not merely a waypoint, that is, a stopping place through which items passed unchanged on their way to somewhere else. The people, products, and ideas that passed through Louisiana, and in particular through New Orleans, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, were transformed through this process of creolization. I am interested in ways that these creolized people, products, and ideas, and indeed ways in which the creolization process itself, shake up dominant narratives of the history of education, particularly in Louisiana. To accomplish this first requires some clarification of terms, specifically what is meant by “creolization.” Like Louisiana on Hennepin’s map, the concept can be viewed from a variety of perspectives.

My research situates certain aspects of daily life in New Orleans cafes, taverns, and markets in the colonial and early American eras as significant sites of learning and of creolization. The region’s colonial history and its location as a port city necessitated interactions and transactions among a number of disparate cultures (Indigenous, French, Spanish, German, African) as individuals within those cultures negotiated the unfamiliar, thereby contributing to a creolization of languages, customs, products, and philosophies. More than merely an exchange of information, the creolization process involved cultural transformations which created new ways of thinking, knowing, and imagining that diverged from colonialist epistemologies rooted in the European Enlightenment. Enlightenment epistemologies produced exclusionary identity
formations based on fixed understandings of race, language, and nations. In contrast, the creolization process allowed different cultural groups within this transatlantic space to make sense of each other’s world on their own terms by inventing practices which, in complex ways, were able to disrupt the traditional colonial binary of colonizer and colonial subject.

Jean Marie Grassin suggests that to begin to describe creolization and all its complexities, scholars need to reach some kind of consensus on the meaning of its related terms and methodological perspectives. Grassin recommends beginning with an examination of the root term “creole.” However, even this basic step proves problematic. Etymologies of the term concur that the word evolved from the Latin creare, meaning “to create” or “to give birth,” but beyond that there is little agreement on the exact meaning or even the circumstances under which the term was first used. If scholars cannot agree on the meaning of its root term, it seems unlikely that there will be much agreement on its definition as an abstract cultural process. Indeed the meaning of creolization has been wildly and widely debated. Although agreement on a single meaning may not be possible, certain attributes of each perspective can contribute to our overall understanding of the idea. To be sure, the multiplicity can confound us, but perhaps the notion that there is no one definition of creolization serves as a reminder that neither is there only one narrative for the history of education. The creolization process itself allows us to “creolize”

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understandings of any perceived dominant narratives, which typically frame education as what happens in schools. For Louisiana, those narratives also tend to center on the arrival of Anglo-Protestant Americans, who saw themselves as disciples of the rationalism and progress of the Western European Enlightenment. In this chapter, I argue that the creolization process which occurred as part of the daily activity in early nineteenth century New Orleans can help us rethink narratives of the history of education of that time period by addressing some of the limitations inherent in Enlightenment assumptions about education and about how we come to know history.

I review various understandings of creolization before setting forth my own definition of the concept and how I will use it as a theoretical lens for my research into the history of education in Louisiana. Scholars have long written about the creolization process in the context of language and as a form of resistance in the post-colonial context, but much less has been written to situate creolization within a context of education. To that end, I draw on the criticism of post-colonial studies by Edouard Glissant, David Scott, and Doris Garraway, as well as from the historiographical theories of Michel de Certeau to frame the creolization process as a creative, situational, and unpredictable epistemological and ontological undertaking. Re-thinking narratives of the history of education through a creolization lens allows us to construct

alternative stories about “education” that move beyond “schooling” in order to acknowledge the exchange of ideas which occurred as part of the practices of everyday life.

**A Common Grammar in a Transatlantic Space**

The earliest use of the term “creole” is uncertain, but it is generally thought to have come from the Latin *creare* (to create, to give birth) via the Spanish and Portuguese *criar* (to feed, to rear). One historian claims that a Spanish priest first used the term around 1590 to distinguish native-born West Indian children from everyone else. Believing that these individuals were neither Spanish, African, nor Indian, but something entirely new, he called them *criollos* to indicate that they were, in fact, new creations. From the Spanish and Portuguese the term passed into French and English and was used at various times to refer to a slave born and reared in his master’s house as opposed to being purchased elsewhere, to anyone of African descent born in the New World, and eventually to anyone, European or African, who either by experience or birth, became part of the new culture that developed as part of the transatlantic circuits of trade. Despite the seemingly incompatible meanings, the early uses do suggest some overlap. To be “creole” implied someone who was “native born,” as in native to the New World as opposed to the Old. Also, from its earliest uses, the term suggests there was something new or

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distinctive about being a creole. But as Pierre Force reminds us, this distinctiveness was
alternately viewed with both shame and pride.\textsuperscript{15}

Despite ambiguity over early uses of the term “creole,” many scholars agree that
linguistics provides the first formulation of creolization as a process of cultural creativity.\textsuperscript{16} Grassin argues that the linguistics paradigm of creolization comes from the emergence of creole
languages that developed in the sugar islands of the Caribbean in the eighteenth century. Pidgin
and creole languages emerged as a way for enslaved labor to communicate within the colonial
masters’ cultural world. Within that colonial context the creolization process included not only
the actual “grammatical communication systems,” that is, the languages themselves, but also the
cultural and social codes that emerged from the interactions.\textsuperscript{17} After being applied to language
development, “creolization” was then used to describe the persons and products that originated
from those islands. Next it was used to denote the particular cultural spaces where these
languages developed. Grassin refers to these spaces as the “creolosphere.”\textsuperscript{18} He points out that
the creolization process always goes beyond the development of the creolized language.
Linguistic creolization cannot be separated from its cultural aspects. In other words, along with
the creolization of language comes the creolization of culture among the people who speak and
hear the language.

Noting a similar development are Baron and Cara, who assert that the process of
creolization first occurred in colonial situations in the Americas where people who met

\textsuperscript{15} Pierre Force “The House on Bayou Road: Atlantic Creole networks in the eighteenth and
\textsuperscript{16} Baron and Cara, 2011; Barnor Hesse, “Symptomatically Black: A Creolization of the
Political” in (ed) Francoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih, \textit{The Creolization of Theory} (Durham:
\textsuperscript{17} Grassin, 2012, 97.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid, 98.
“speaking mutually unintelligible tongues” eventually developed a common linguistic medium. The emergent languages restructured the existing tongues of the colonizers and the colonized, creating “whole new creole languages with distinctive phonology, morphology, and syntax.”

Along with the new languages emerged corresponding new cultures. These scholars argue that the languages, reflecting elements of the new culture, disrupted traditional power relations in a colonial setting. They argue that creole languages and forms of cultural expression that developed alongside the language emerged out of a need to negotiate cultural differences and served as a way for colonial subjects to resist domination by asserting a new local voice.

Robert Chaudenson also asserts that the initial creole linguistic process can be extended to other components of creole cultural systems, including music, medical practices, religion, cuisine, and oral traditions. Like creole languages, the resulting products are original creations. New Orleans jazz, for example, is neither European nor African, but rather, the creation of something entirely new out of its component parts. It is “an emerging music, as much a phenomenon of creolization as the creole language itself.” Shannon Dawdy uses the language of linguistics when she describes the creolization process as a “syncretism in language, material culture, and religion” out of which emerge “distinct new world practices” in which the participants “reach for a common grammar and vocabulary of social, economic, and political forms.”

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20 Ibid, 5
Baker and Mulhauser’s history of the study of creole languages notes what they believe is the first known use of the word “creolize” as a verb, found in a 1933 textbook for American students of linguistics. The word was specifically used in the context of language development within creole communities in colonial settings. The authors’ study notes that some linguists believe that “creolized” languages emerged out of failed attempts by dominated peoples to speak the European languages of their masters. Other linguists suggest that as non-Europeans’ attempted to retain their traditional languages, they acquired the vocabulary of the language spoken by European colonists but kept the grammatical constructions of their native tongues. The authors point out that in spite of different approaches to creole linguistics, they all agree that creolization involves “major restructuring” of the component languages. What emerge are entirely new languages that differ dramatically from the languages of both the colonizer and colonized. We can think of certain languages as “creole” not only because they come from a self-ascribed creole people, but also because they have undergone a creolization process; they are a new creation resulting from “the encounter, the interference, the shock, the harmonies and the disharmonies among cultures.”

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23 This refers to Leonard Bloomfield’s 1933 text *Language and Linguistics*. London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd. However, the truth of the authors’ claim is debatable. Chris Bongie (1997) argues that the first appearance of the word “creolization” in an English language text is Lafcadio Hearn’s 1890 novel *Youna*.


Power and Resistance in Creolization

A linguistics model of creolization does much to inform us of the power dynamics, which are, according to many theorists of creolization, always at play among the participant communities. Baker and Mulhauser speak to these power relations when they argue that creole languages are not what those who participated in their origin and development wanted to speak. The languages developed out of a need to make their voices heard in a dominant/dominated relationship. Grassin believes that the creolization of languages is triggered by traumatic cultural interactions. He points out that in many cases the trauma is slavery, but that it can also be the result of violent displacement as evidenced by the expulsion of the Acadians from the maritime provinces of Canada and their relocation to South Louisiana or any kind of colonial domination that involves major disorder and upheaval. Creolization is the ongoing attempt for the traumatized to carve a linguistic and cultural space for themselves. Numerous scholars have written about creolization as a form of political resistance. Kaup and Rosenthal, Bongie, Bell, and Garraway have written extensively about the literature of creole communities as forms of resistance. Baron and Cara, Abrahams et al, and Sexton have written about resistance as

manifested in various other forms of creole creative expression, including resistance found in creole music, visual arts, festivals, architecture, and games.\textsuperscript{29}

To grasp the political dimensions of creolization requires some understanding of “creole” identity formation. Stewart argues that, historically, to call someone a creole was largely meant pejoratively. Emigration to distant lands was thought to transform Europeans into a different sort of people. The distinction was not just economic or social, but geographical.\textsuperscript{30} One’s “Europeanness” was a matter of the soil, not blood.\textsuperscript{31} If a Spanish couple had one child born to them in Spain and one in South America, the latter would be referred to as “creole.” The distinction was meant to capture the “astral and climatic influences” of the “inferior” New World settings that were thought to produce creoles who were “lazy, disease ridden, promiscuous… physically denatured and morally degenerate.”\textsuperscript{32} Of course, the supposed “superiority” of the mother country’s environment was also a convenient excuse for continued colonial domination and a convenient justification for importing the supposedly better institutions of the Old World.

However, during the decades before independence from the mother countries in the nineteenth century, societies in the Americas recast their “creoleness” as a more fortunate process that produced a culture that was distinct from, and in their minds, possibly superior to, those found in Europe. Often the leaders of the independence movements were led by local


\textsuperscript{32} Stewart, 2010, 8.
“creoles,” who had distanced themselves from their European heritage. Those participating in the resistance began to define their “creoleness” in terms of an emerging national identity rooted in New World locales. They became “Creoles.” The term began to mean someone who was “local in birth and allegiance.” To be “Creole” was no longer seen as a negative but as a positive attribute. Baron and Cara remind us that “creole” is still a positive, powerful marker of national and cultural identity today in various places in Latin America, in the Caribbean, and in South Louisiana.

Barnor Hesse argues that what primarily entangles creolization with forms of political resistance is race. He notes that the emergence of racial categories such as “Indian” and “Negro” had little meaning outside of a colonial context and that these markers have more to do with politics than with biological concerns. In the Americas, for instance, there was no pre-existing cultural concept of “Indians” before the sixteenth century. Before colonial domination, there would have been no need for Europeans to identify such a group, nor was there a need for the indigenous peoples of the Americas to self-represent themselves in such a manner. The racial categories were developed by the Europeans as a way to distinguish the oppressor from the oppressed. In the case of the “Indians” the label referred to the conquered, and in the case of the

33 Stewart, 2010. 9
34 Shirley Thompson notes when used with a lower-case “c” the word has historically been used to denote New World origin or birth. However, when the “c” is capitalized, the word takes on “an overtly political cast,” referring to a specific political and social community. See Shirley Thompson, *Exiles at Home: The Struggle to Become American in Creole New Orleans.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009):9.
35 Thompson, 2009, 8 (emphasis in original).
36 Baron and Cara, 2011.
“Negroes” it referred to the enslaved. Thus, race was constituted as a colonial category of governance by a “hegemonic Europe over a subaltern non-Europe.”

Jay Edwards argues that as Hispanic and French creoles, that is, individuals born in New World colonies, sought independence from their mother country, racial identity began to factor in to the competition for political control within the colonies themselves. The independence movements contributed to changing demographics in the Latin-Caribbean sphere. Emigration out of Europe slowed as did slave importation. The need to differentiate between types of Europeans or types of Africans (Old World birth or New World birth) ceased to have much meaning. Intermarriage continued, however, and the word “creole” increasingly began to overlap with “mestizo” and “mulatto” and other terms which signified “mixed-blood.” Throughout the creolosphere, who or what was called creole was often a matter of time or place. Sometimes the term designated someone of mixed-race; other times it did not. Nevertheless, Szwed asserts that the concept of mixture frequently led to the characterization of creolized forms of culture by outsiders as impure. He points out that historically, creolization has been viewed, especially by those in dominant positions, as degenerate and incomplete in comparison to the fully formed

40 For example, in Haiti, after they declared independence in 1794 and expelled much of its white population, “creole” could only mean black, but in present day Martinique, creoles can be either black or white (see Stewart, 2010). By the late nineteenth century, competing definitions were used to describe creole communities in New Orleans as either mixed-race descendants of free people of color or all-white descendants of the original French colonists.
41 By the late nineteenth century, competing racialized definitions were used to describe creole communities in New Orleans as either mixed-race descendants of free people of color or all-white descendants of the original French colonists, but even those definitions were not always strictly observed. See Dawdy, 2008.
cultural expressions of a colonial or Westernized elite. Michelle Praeger argues that it was this attitude that contributed to the common portrayal of mixed-race women as being beautiful but also degenerate and overly sexualized. Doris Garraway posits that the existence of mixed-race people reinforced and even produced asymmetrical power relations in the creole world. This was especially true in New Orleans where, for the first half of the nineteenth-century, mixed-race people made up a large percentage of the population. The enactment of segregation laws codified mixed-race peoples’ devaluation as human beings and served to re-inscribe the social order that the white colonial elite had first created and then disrupted. In producing mixed-race children, white elites disturbed the binary racial order that they themselves had perpetrated through colonialism. The effect of whites’ exclusionary legislation was to dispossess and dehumanize the mixed-race products of their own sexual desires, at times making their own relations a part of a subordinate class.

In some ways, mixture is the crux of any definition of creolization. It requires interaction. Some theorists define creolization as the mixing of cultures within certain parts of the world, i.e. the Latin World, Caribbean, and South Louisiana. These scholars insist that creolization can never exist outside of these regions because it undermines the political potency for those who embrace an often hard-won creole national identity against the constraints of colonialism. Grassin reminds us that it would still be unusual to call cultural interactions in cold or temperate climates examples of creolization even if they did involve a colonial paradigm. He believes this

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44 Garraway, 2005.
is related to its origins in New World slavery and plantation society. However, other scholars see a more organic relationship between environment and creolization, one that encourages syncretism rather than culture clashes. They point out that creolization is a product of tropicality as well as oppression. Abrahams et al, note that the tropicality and heat of New Orleans demanded a good deal of socializing in outdoor spaces. These shared spaces fostered the intermingling needed to bring about the adaptation and reinvention of cultural traditions. Outdoor performances of Mardi Gras parades and dances in the Congo Square, for instance, are rendered sharable and “creolizable” in part because they occurred in public places. And because these spaces were indeed public, the traditions that developed were often coded as secret forms of resistance designed to be interpreted by others who could commiserate in the oppressive experience of colonial domination. Baktin describes carnival traditions as coded resistance. He views the outdoor public square where many carnival activities take place as a space in which the old social order is temporarily turned upside down as “all distance between people is suspended” and where the “free and familiar contact among people” allows them to work out new relationships that run counter to the socio-hierarchical inequality of “noncarnival life.” Everything and everyone that was normally kept separate is allowed to unite. Carnivalizations invite participation and interaction, albeit in unexpected and chaotic ways. The disorder produced in carnival spaces is a means to mix and mingle freely, while at the same time escaping from the rules and regulations of ordinary life.

46 Grassin, 2012
47 Abrahams, et al 2006
48 Ibid.
49 Baron and Cara, 2011.
Baron and Cara note that as forms of cultural expression, creolization employs a diverse repertoire of tactics and schemes designed to “steal power away from ‘top-down’ monolithic impositions” that include “reversals, carnivalization, improvisation, mimicry, obfuscation, double-talk, feigned submission, and many other maneuvers.”\textsuperscript{51} In addition to Mardi Gras, Abrahams et al, use New Orleans Jazz as a means to explore the use of such tactics among creoles of color in New Orleans as a means to resist white hegemony. I would argue that the improvisation and mimicry inherent in the creole foodways of New Orleans is also a form of resistance. Certainly, foodways is more than a mere means of survival. It is also a language that expresses the culture of a community. The words “cuisine” and “community” have related etymologies, both coming from first Greek and then Latin words meaning “to mix together.” Food is one way that individuals create community. Susan Laird reminds us that the basic need for food and drink is instinctual, but our tastes and habits as eaters and drinkers are culturally specific and learned. Recipes handed down and oral and written stories of food preparation and gathering maintain cultural integrity and community.\textsuperscript{52} A major consequence of any colonial domination is what Bonaventura de Sousa Santos calls “epistemicide,” that is, the loss of ways of knowing among the subjugated by those who are in power.\textsuperscript{53} Creolized foodways, like creolized languages and other forms of creative expression, are means for traumatized people to “de-colonize epistemologies”\textsuperscript{54} and create a cultural space for themselves within colonial situations.

\textsuperscript{51} Baron and Cara, 2011: 5.
From Post-Colonial to Post-Structural Understandings of Creolization

Although many theorists of creolization frame the concept primarily as a post-colonial strategy of resistance to colonial oppression, Bongie warns us that the emphasis on resistance alone forces us into accepting Western-created binaries of colonial/decolonized identities. By conflating identities to an “us” and “them” paradigm, scholars who maintain this mindset reify Enlightenment constructs of the nation as an exclusionary space. According to Paul Gilroy, such binary rhetoric results in a cultural nationalism and an ethnic absolutism that is not adequate to describe the complex realities of “our transnational post-contemporary circumstance.”55 Writing specifically about the development of black culture in the Americas, Gilroy posits a theory of a “black Atlantic” that is not specifically African, American, Caribbean, or British, but that is a hybrid mix all at once which transcends both the nation state and ethnicity. He uses the image of a ship in constant motion along Atlantic trade routes to represent the ongoing process of cultural exchange.56 He sees ships as “micro-systems of linguistic and political hybridity” moving to and fro among nations which are themselves in cultural transition from interactions that occur across their own imagined borders.57 Gilroy sees limits to theories of creolization which attempt to articulate fixed identities within discrete national boundaries. But if we borrow his metaphor and we think of creolization as a ship in motion, we expand its potential as a theory and it takes on a fluid, emergent quality grounded in process and becoming rather than in essence and being.

Edouard Glissant’s understanding of creolization embraces these potentialities. Glissant argues that although creolization begins amid the violence of colonial encounters in the New World, it nonetheless gives rise to productive cross-cultural “entanglements,” resulting in an unpredictable and ongoing epistemological diversity that acknowledges the agency of subaltern subjects.\(^{58}\) Glissant’s perspective adds a new dimension to how creolization operates as a poststructural epistemology and ontology. Instead of only highlighting the traumatic “negative survival” of colonial domination, he sees the conflict and tension of colonial situations in terms of possibilities, as a chance to renovate, dynamize, and overcome dominant Western binaries of oppression and resistance as well as Western concepts of foreseeability and knowability.\(^{59}\)

Creolization does not simply occur when one thing opposes another or when one thing converts into some fixed other. It is not a product at all but a *process* which accompanies multiple points of contact between different fragmented communities. It is a process that occurs across time and space and produces a different effect with each set of contacts. Glissant argues that it is helpful to avoid thinking of creolization in terms of having a specific root or cause, but rather to think of it as a “relationality.”\(^{60}\) It has no singular origin or purpose but is instead the result of unpredictable links among different cultures that did not pre-exist these links.

Creole foodways provides an example of the potentialities of creolization as a complex, dynamic, and relational process. The food and drink associated with New Orleans does not merely become a creole cuisine because its provenance is a specific creole community of the region. It is also a *creolized* cuisine because it has mixed and continues to mix different elements

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\(^{59}\) Bongie, 1997.

\(^{60}\) Glissant, 1998.
to produce creations that have no precedent and no opposite. Its “creole” identity is not fixed. Some of the recipes in Lafcadio Hearn’s *Creole Cookbook*, arguably the first published collection of creole recipes in New Orleans, illustrate how classic culinary traditions from France and Spain were reimagined to incorporate techniques and ingredients from Indian groups in Louisiana, as well as those of Africans, Italians, and Germans. But Hearn’s book freezes a particular understanding of creolization within the pages of a book published in 1885. It tells the story of a particular time and place. If we compare Hearn’s recipes with later cookbooks from the region we can see how the creolization process carries on as the cuisine continues to absorb the flavors and preparation methods resulting from cultural encounters with later immigrant groups. Yak-a-mein, for example, is a relatively recent edition to the New Orleans creole culinary canon emerging in part from Africanized interpretations of Chinese and Korean cultures. It is a distinctly New Orleans dish, but one which continues to morph as it engages additional cultural groups (Vietnamese, Mexican), all adding their own culinary traditions to the mix. Hearn’s attempt to codify creole cuisine as a mixture of various core cuisines essentializes its component parts, further fixing the process of creolization to a specific time and place. He assumes there exists such a thing as Spanish or French culinary traditions to be combined. But it

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62 According to Sarah Roehan, Yak-a-mein, a beef noodle soup served largely in Black communities of New Orleans, may be an adaptation from the city’s now defunct Chinatown, or it may have been brought by African American soldiers fighting in the Korean War. Whatever its origin, it is prominently served at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage festival, known for its tribute to iconic New Orleans food and drink. See Sarah Roahan, *Gumbo Tales: Finding My Place at the New Orleans Table*: New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008).
can also be argued that all cultures are in fact, a mix of earlier cultures. Thus, there can be no fixed understanding of what “culture-cores” or roots make up a creolized cuisine.\textsuperscript{63}

Rather than cultural roots and fixed outcomes, Glissant differentiates between “\textit{creolité}” and “creolization.” He argues that the notion of “creolité” or “creoleness” is place-bound. It is the outcome of creolization in the Caribbean World. Creolization is the process which has brought about different outcomes of “creolenesses” in each place it occurs.\textsuperscript{64} I would argue that “creoleness” is also time bound. Natalie Dessens reminds us that in the early nineteenth century, immigrants from Saint Domingue infused New Orleans with its own brand of creole culture. She points out that the refugees had not only been influenced by their common experience in Saint Domingue, but also by their individual birthplaces and by those of their ancestors across time. Despite having elements of a common culture, each new wave of immigrants to New Orleans brought with them a different “\textit{creolité}” which then helped to re-creolize the culture of New Orleans.\textsuperscript{65} And because New Orleans had long been a transatlantic space, we can infer that the Haitian contribution energized what was already a dynamic process of cultural reinvention. Because of its processual nature then, creolization is not an essence, but a fluid, continual, phenomenon that has implications beyond cultural transformations within a particular time and place.

\textsuperscript{63} In Bongie, 1997, Martinican poet Aime’ Cesaire and his Barbadian contemporary Kamau Brathwaite have been criticized for their efforts to preserve a somewhat static understanding of creolization by looking upon Africa as a singular, founding “culture-core” of Creole/Caribbean identity.


\textsuperscript{65} Nathalie Dessens, \textit{From Saint-Domingue to New Orleans: Migration and Influences}, (Gainesville; University Press of Florida, 2007).
History as Creolization and Everyday Practice

Creolization takes on different definitions in different historical contexts. Its meaning depends on the perspective of the time and circumstance in which the concept is being applied. The individual definitions themselves are examples of “creolités” whose meanings change as the knowledges and identities which produced those meanings in the first place change. For my research I borrow Glissant’s idea of “creolité versus creolization” as well as his notions of creolization as a “relationality” and a messy process of fluid, unpredictable, cross-cultural entanglements to reimagine the history of education in Louisiana. I link the dominant narrative of that history with Glissant’s concept of a “creolité” to highlight the fact that it is merely one of many manifestations of stories of human interaction, a circumstance of a particular place and time. Of course, the narrative I imagine in its stead is also only one of many narratives, another “creolité.” My inclusion of some forms of evidence and exclusion of others tells a very specific story. The interaction of the texts I use produces a new way of knowing, and like some understandings of creolization, it is a form of resistance to the dominant narrative. But it also illuminates a new relationship between the past and the present. Creolization as a process of historiography assumes no fixed, straight line to a transcendental truth, only creative projects which set out to tell stories adapted for a specific moment in time and set of circumstances. The creolized histories are not necessarily better, just different.

Walter Mignolo posits that one consequence of European colonialism beginning as far back as the mid-sixteenth century was the recasting of its own scientific, linear thinking, the thinking of the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment, as the only way of producing knowledge. Imperial dominance allowed Europe to project globally what was essentially a local epistemology of scientific rationalism, resulting in the “disavowal of the potential of non-
European languages and knowledges."66 The presumed universal validity of Western epistemologies, then, is a form of imperialism. Garroway asserts that “history,” as it is typically conceived, is one such structure of knowledge. History becomes a form of domination when presented as a “unifying, totalizing discourse that assimilated non-European peoples and forms of difference into one universal story, whose beginning, center, and endpoint was the West.”67

David Scott reminds us that most post-colonial histories tend not to consider the ways in which the desire for particular future “truths” helped to shape the kind of problems addressed to lead to those futures. Colonial history was largely taught in terms of a progressive, cosmopolitan Europe bringing civilization to a backwards, uninformed non-Europe. That narrative was written from a point of view in which European military and commercial might made a future of continued European colonial domination possible and plausible. In post-colonial histories, colonialism has largely been conceived of “as a totalizing structure of brutality, violence, objectification, racism, and exclusion that the anticolonial revolution was supposed to overcome.”68 This narrative of vindication also envisions a particular future - a “certain utopian horizon toward which the emancipationist history is imagined to be moving.”69 The narrative becomes one of forward motion – a string of cause and effects leading toward some future ideal. This mindset speaks to an epistemology that remains embedded in a Western, modernist worldview – not altogether useful because the “ideal” proved to be a myth. The ideal future imagined by the post-colonial scholars never came. Scott notes that the myth emerged from a vantage point when such a future was still possible. But the longing for a certain future is merely

66 Mignolo, 2011.
67 Garraway, 2005.
69 Scott, 2004:8
a product of specific historical circumstances. Michel de Certeau reminds us that “the past is the fiction of the present.” If we agree with him, then the dominant narrative is also just a fiction of the present, written with a particular future in mind.

If we think of the dominant narrative as just one possible history among many histories, it loses its power. But of course, any attempt to create a narrative relies on exclusion, silences and marginalizations. The historian does not simply record events, and history is not a faithful method of truth. It is writing. The words themselves manufacture history, and some words are always left out. Noting that “we never write on a blank page, but always on one that has already been written on,” de Certeau argues that the evidence selected, the object of study, even the author herself are all products of historical circumstances from which they cannot be isolated. He points out that “authors” of history often attempt to get at the “real” story, and they forget that the objects of inquiry are part of a network. Doris Garraway acknowledges these networks when she notes that historical discourse builds narratives by deducing from the stories of contemporary actors what they consider to be the “truest or most plausible stories about the events they describe.” In other words, histories are narratives constructed out of other constructed narratives. This does not mean that there are no “events, materialities, or feelings in human experience, but rather that they are constructed and mediated through language.” This way of thinking about history recalls Glissant’s ideas about creolization as a “relationality.” A new language (or narrative) is constructed out of component parts which are themselves

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74 Ibid: 15
embedded in a set of relationships, and the language changes as it engages in new relationships. In thinking about history in creolization terms, we are reminded, as Garraway suggests, to maintain some humility before the past and to understand the tenuousness of our conclusions.  

It is not surprising that historians often hold fast to certain conclusions. In post-colonial history, quite often the only remaining evidence of the past are the same texts that make up the discourse of the dominant narrative. The policies, laws, newspapers, and legal records of any given time often privilege the voice of the creators of those documents. In my research on nineteenth-century New Orleans, I know what message was intended by those documents, but what sense did people make of the laws, policies, and other “structures of power”? These “structures of power” influence how history is interpreted because it is commonly assumed that the recipients of those structures are passive and are guided by the established rules. In other words, it is assumed that the “language” of those in charge, that is, of the elite in society, is the language spoken by all of society. This totalizing discourse can then point to certain “truths” or conclusions about that society.

To circumvent this problem, we need to think about the evidence provided in a new way and to looks at alternative forms of evidence. De Certeau recommends that “everyday practices” be a part of this inquiry. “Everyday practice” is his term for the “ways of operating” within a given structure of society, and he asserts, they should “no longer appear as merely the obscure background of social activity.” He reminds us that structures of power never act in isolation but instead are part of “systems of operational combinations.” To understand the representations of a

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75 Ibid.
76 I borrow this term from De Certeau.
77 De Certeau, 1984.
78 Ibid, xi.
past society, we need to study not just the people or institutions which produced the society, but to study how individuals and groups make use of those institutions. De Certeau maintains that with every production of the dominant economic and social order corresponds another “production” related to the society as the “consumers” (the common people) develop ways of using the “products” imposed on them.\(^7^9\)

De Certeau refers to these “ways of using” as tactics designed to, silently and nearly invisibly, negotiate the strategies of power enforced from above. In this sense the “everyday” is in contrast to the “official.” And although it may seem that de Certeau’s theory about strategies and tactics reverts society to the “us” and “them” binary of which Bongie warned, his ideas are really more complex. The “tactics” are not merely resistance to power, but instead are a use of power in new ways. De Certeau argues that everyday practices develop their own rhetoric, their own power, which ends up being quite different from what was intended by the dominant group.

His famous example involves walking in the city. He starts the example from the point of view of a skyscraper above the city. From this vantage point, the city can be studied and observed. This represents the dominant or hegemonic point of view. The city is generated from the strategies of government or institutions which produce things like maps to illustrate the city as a synoptic, unified whole. The maps may even mark recommended routes to get from one point to another. But, of course, like the map at the beginning of this chapter, it offers but a singular perspective. There are alternative ways to view the city. The walker at street level moves in tactical ways that are unpredictable and never fully determined by the organizing entities. The walker might take a short cut, ignore a street sign, or meander along a path of his own choosing. In this way the walker represents the “common people.” The walker’s choices

\(^7^9\) Ibid, xii-xiii.
represent the people’s agency and the new “language” they create as they make use of “the culture disseminated and imposed by the ‘elites’ producing the language.”

Although he never uses the term, de Certeau speaks to elements of creolization with his walking metaphor. People engage in cross-cultural entanglements between themselves and those in charge and manage to reinvent their world despite asymmetrical power arrangements. In this way people make use of everyday practice to figure out how to exist within the system without completely escaping it. How these things occur is messy, according to de Certeau. A tactic is not pre-planned but rather insinuates itself into the imposed order when possible and must “constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into opportunities.”

The element of unpredictability serves to further align de Certeau’s theory with my understanding of creolization. The practices are both unpredictable in that people must wait for opportunities to make use of the imposed order and unpredictable in the sense that the new ways of operating cannot be foretold by the governing bodies. Through the practices of everyday living, the people at street level use the rules and institutions of the superstructure to reinvent its component parts in unpredictable ways. They create their own ways of making sense of the world. Tactics take place within the gaps of power structures. The difference between the tactics and the strategies involved is a new way of knowing and being and deserves to be included in inquiries about how people teach and learn. These processes are not merely a matter of institutionalized schooling in which students are primarily told what to know.

In my research on the history of education in colonial and early nineteenth-century New Orleans, I start from the assumption that Enlightenment thought, as imposed by first the French

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80 Ibid, xiii. Also see Chapter VII, “Walking in the City,” 91-100.
81 Ibid: xix.
and Spanish Empires and later by the American Republic, was part of the structure of power. It was a
gendered and elite structure that did not make space for the lived experiences of all colonial subjects. My dissertation
interrogates how the daily practices in markets, taverns, and coffee houses operated as tactics to circumvent those
structures of power. How were these spaces experienced by those who were not the official “producers” of the society in which they lived? I understand the tactics they developed to be a form of creolization. Through a process of creolization, people at the margins of New Orleans society used places of daily business to create space for their own ways of thinking and doing. The stories of the experiences of these men and women have not been adequately told. Nor have the tactics they developed through processes of creolization been appropriately situated as part of the history of education in Louisiana.
CHAPTER 3: THE HISTORY OF EDUCATION IN LOUISIANA: EXPANDING POSSIBILITIES

Lawrence A. Cremin, who is arguably the most prominent education historian of the last fifty years, defines education more broadly than do most other scholars in the field by including in his analysis spaces and processes outside of traditional schools. His major three-volume work, *American Education*, examines networks and patterns of educative influences which include families, churches, museums, libraries, mass media, settlement houses, and plantations. Cremin believed that all these institutions were critical to shaping and transmitting culture and that formal schools played only a small role in shaping how Americans learn, study, think, and believe. Despite his work’s many accolades, Cremin’s critics complain that his broad definition led him to sacrifice many important stories related to formal education and the development of the American school system. They argue that the work is best read as a cultural history of America as opposed to a history of education. I disagree with his critics. Not only do Cremin’s critics reinforce the false notion that education is synonymous with schooling, but their insistence on separating cultural history from education history speaks to ways that the Enlightenment’s preoccupation with hierarchy and categorization continues to influence people’s thinking.

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1 His biographer Diane Ravitch is one scholar who describes Cremin in this manner.
5 In Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, *Race and the Enlightenment* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007); 5, the author argues that Enlightenment desires to put the natural world in order gave rise to assigning objects and people to certain hierarchies or categories. This led to
Although I applaud Cremin’s expansive understanding of education, I do agree with his critics that he left out important stories. In nearly two thousand pages of text, there is virtually no mention of education in colonial, early American, or antebellum Louisiana, formal or otherwise. Although he does pay attention to regional differences, they are constructed in terms of a national framework. For instance, when he describes the informal educational processes that occurred in the “South,” his focus is on Virginia, South Carolina, and, to a lesser extent, Georgia. His discussion of plantation life, slave society, and of the education that occurred between and among the communities that were a part of that life are rooted in the original thirteen colonies of America. Non-English colonies, like Louisiana, which also make up part of the story of “American” education, are given short shrift. He pays little attention to the global influences on education in the colonial, early American, and antebellum years except to describe Anglo-Protestant influences on the various institutions of informal learning. His main thesis is that these institutions channeled Anglo-Protestant values into a deliberate and sustained effort to create and transmit a unified American culture. His only mention of Louisiana in the entire first volume of his work is a single sentence describing attempts by Louisianans of French descent to keep the English and Spanish out of their territory.\textsuperscript{6}

Michel De Certeau reminds us that when we think about history, we need to ascertain why certain elements were included and others were not, why this conclusion was reached instead of another equally acceptable one. He argues that “the act of producing the text itself

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amounts to making a theory.” Cremin generates a particular theory about the history of education in his work. In focusing on the original thirteen English colonies in North America, Cremin forwards the theory that all colonial culture in America is essentially English. He suggests that the history of all education in America has been characterized by various attempts to adapt Anglo culture to its new American setting. But Cremin is not alone. Other prominent historians of education in early Louisiana generate a singular message. This message is that the failure of public education and the on-going anti-intellectual climate in Louisiana resulted from the rejection of the “redeeming” values of Americanization. According to this dominant narrative, there was virtually no lasting, effective education in Louisiana, nor was there any real understanding of democracy until the Americans stepped in bringing Enlightenment and progress.

Milton Gaither argues that the historiography of American education is “woefully deficient” in the colonial and early national periods and is virtually nonexistent in terms of pre-contact Native American societies. Gaither limited his study solely to articles and book reviews published in the journal History of Education Quarterly. The limited data set essentially guarantees a limited conclusion. As this chapter will show, the work of some historians of Louisiana education has been strangled by that limitation. But this chapter also shows that when scholars pay attention to the informal exchanges of teaching and learning outside of schools, they

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give an intellectual voice to people who have not otherwise been heard. By expanding the meaning of education, they disrupt the idea that Louisiana was an anti-intellectual space.

The seminal work on the history of education in Louisiana in the last twenty years is *Education in Louisiana*, which was part of the Louisiana Purchase Bicentennial Series in Louisiana History. This particular volume focuses on education in the region from colonial times to the Civil Rights Era of the 1960s. Its goal was to capture broader interpretations of Louisiana history than had previously been published.  

In that regard, the book succeeded. Whereas Cremin had very little to say about education in Louisiana, the Bicentennial Series was able to fill a 600-plus-page volume. And even at that length, the book is not comprehensive, nor was it ever intended to be. Nevertheless, the editorial choices that were made tell a particular story of Louisiana education, one that becomes evident from the book’s very design. The photographs on the book’s inside covers depict the edifice of four historic Louisiana public school buildings. This editorial decision visually equates education with systematized, government-sponsored institutions. The brick and mortar structures of the schools suggest a meaning of education delimited by the formal instruction that occurs in classrooms within the buildings’ solid walls.

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11 The photographs depict the Collegiate Gothic edifice of Ouachita Parish High School, Harahan Elementary School, and Baton Rouge High School. A fourth photograph depicts the Art Deco facade of Ruston High School. The bold, geometric lines of the Art Deco style have been said to be evocative of the Machine Age and the mass production associated with industrialization, which is especially interesting if we think of public schools as institutions which “mass produce” a certain type of student.

12 Collegiate Gothic was a reinterpretation of the Gothic style buildings in Europe and was chosen specifically for some universities and school buildings in the United States as a way to emulate the prestige of Oxford and Cambridge Universities. See Deborah Robinson and Edmund P. Meade. “Tradition Becomes Modern: the Rise of Collegiate Gothic Architecture at American Universities.” Accessed Aug. 2, 2016. www.arct.cam.ac.uk. With its elaborate use of stone masonry, the Collegiate Gothic style, a common choice for early twentieth century school
The physical book itself speaks to its focus on education as formal schooling, leaving us to wonder what possibilities were left out.

**Beyond Schools in Colonial Louisiana**

*Education in Louisiana’s* only article on colonial education focuses overwhelmingly on physical schools even at a time when few existed in Louisiana. The author, Adam Otis Hebert, Jr., credits the Jesuits and the Ursulines with bringing education to Louisiana. He acknowledges that a Jesuit priest, Father Beauboys, played a key role in bringing Ursuline nuns from France to instruct young girls, but he expresses surprise that, given the Jesuits’ international reputation as educators, they established “not one school in Louisiana” during the French colonial period.\(^{13}\) Perhaps he describes the Jesuits in this manner because the Ursulines operated a formal school, but the Jesuits did not until the mid-nineteenth century, well after the colonial period. He describes the Ursuline educational efforts to some extent, but he does not include in his narrative the education that occurred as part of Jesuit missionary activities during the colonial period. However, evidence from the *Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, a source that Hebert does not use, suggests not only did education occur, but that it was also a cornerstone of the Jesuit mission in colonial Louisiana. In a 1708 letter from the Louisiana Territory to his superior back in France, Father Jacques Gravier admonishes several priests stationed in Louisiana because they had not bothered to learn the native languages. The priests had administered communion, heard confessions, and performed baptisms and marriage ceremonies “without understanding the

savages” under their care. For Gravier, education of the Indians, particularly education in the Catholic faith, was important, but it could not successfully occur without the priests first learning the native tongues.

Hebert’s conventional understanding of education becomes apparent in his explication of the role that the Capuchin monks played in the process. His evidence regarding the school for boys they founded in 1725 on St. Ann Street in New Orleans highlights the traditional European, institutions that were a part of the school. That the Brothers were happy to find a teacher who knew “Latin, mathematics, drawing, and singing” suggests a model of education not far removed from dominant paradigms of Hebert’s own era - a classroom of pupils who received knowledge from a teacher competent in the desired academic disciplines. This instruction typically took place inside a structure built especially for that purpose. Hebert describes the specific building plans for a new school the Capuchins hoped to construct in 1740. He provides his reader with details of the types of building materials to be used, the length of walls to be built, the number of windows, and the design of the gates for the future schoolyard. His inclusion of this evidence creates for his readers a vivid picture of the intended space, but it also highlights his preoccupation with the physical entity of a school building. The fact that it was never built leads him to conclude that some Louisiana officials worked to prevent education from keeping up with the growth of the colony. The success of colonial education is linked both literally and figuratively to the physical structure of the school.

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The fact that *Education in Louisiana* includes only one article about colonial history leaves readers with the impression that there was very little education, formal or otherwise, in colonial Louisiana. And in that one article, what formal education did exist was ultimately credited to male efforts for the benefit of male settlers. Hebert certainly goes further than Cremin did. He acknowledges that the Ursuline nuns operated “the first girls’ school in the present day United States,” and he points out that in addition to instructing the daughters of French colonists, the nuns also held classes for “Negro and Indian girls.”16 However, Hebert describes the Ursulines achievements through a gendered lens. He argues that Bienville’s desire to encourage permanent settlement in Louisiana set him on a mission to find a way to educate girls in the colony. Bienville worked with Father Beaubois of the Jesuit order to persuade the Ursulines to come to New Orleans to oversee a hospital and a school.17 For Bienville, a girls’ school was tied to the colony’s stability and prosperity because it would encourage married men to stay. In telling the history of the Ursulines in this manner, it marginalizes the important role the nuns played in colonial Louisiana and undermines their place in the larger narrative of education in America.

Emily Clark’s research on the Ursulines, though still dealing with formal education, emphasizes a different story. She places the agency with the Ursuline nuns themselves. She notes that they had long searched for a way to take their mission of educating girls to the new colony. Father Beaubois’ request was a way to fulfill that dream. In Clark’s version of the Ursuline history, the nuns were shrewd businesswomen who manipulated the terms of their contract with the men who ran the Company of the Indies to make sure that their goal of running a school on

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17 Ibid, 17.
their own terms came to fruition. Furthermore, the nuns did not view girls’ education as merely a means of creating a supporting backdrop for colonial prosperity. Instead, the Ursulines desired to expand the “basis and scope of women’s authority and action within the formal structures of French Catholicism.”

They saw formal schooling as a way to empower women and thus committed themselves to teaching basic academics and the tenets of the Catholic faith to “women and girls of European, Indian, and African descent, enslaved and free, throughout Louisiana’s colonial period.”

Shannon Dawdy’s history of the colonial period demonstrates that there was a great deal of formal education in Louisiana, but that not all of it occurred in schools. Dawdy situates colonial New Orleans as a “frontier of the Republic of Letters” stemming from the European Enlightenment. The city itself was Louisiana’s port for importing “books, ideas, letters, news, and learned people” which then circulated among the city’s residents and traveled back and forth across the Atlantic. The writing of letters and reports formed one of the most important infrastructures of colonialism. It was the way people stayed informed on both sides of the Atlantic. If we consider that the practice of reading and writing contributes to literacy as well as to the acquisition and exchange of knowledge and ideas, then it is clear that “formal” educational processes were prevalent beyond the classroom. She uses the number of copies of a manifesto printed and distributed throughout New Orleans and signatures on baptismal records and marriage contracts to point to a population whose literacy rate “compare[d] quite favorably to

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18 Emily Clark, Masterless Mistresses: The New Orleans Ursulines and the Development of A New World Society, 1727-1834 (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); 2. The Ursuline Nuns continue to operate a school for girls in New Orleans to this day (2016).
19 Clark, 2007; 1.
20 Dawdy, 2008; 32.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
Ancien Regime France and to other Catholic communities of the world.”23 She notes that by the 1760s, the literacy rate for creole 24 women in New Orleans was 72 percent and that of men was 70 percent, making them twice as literate as their parents and grandparents born in France.25 Dawdy’s statistics do much to disrupt the supposed anti-intellectualism of Louisiana; however, she also notes that the contents of the letters and reports themselves helped to perpetuate the negative image. She argues that “titillating narratives of disorder” seeped into the colonial literature, helping to fulfill the fantasies of some colonial settlers that they were living out some great adventure in a wild place.26

In Dawdy’s alternative reading of colonial history, she complicates the dominant narrative of Louisiana ignorance by using pieces of evidence that were not the official statements of the colonial government. Combining methods used in anthropology as well as history, she considers details related to the ordinary activities of the colonists’ daily lives, that is, their marriage and baptismal records, to tell a different story. In addition to interpreting the evidence in new ways, she is also willing to paint a picture of education using broad strokes, considering not just physical schools and the activities surrounding their operation and development, but the entire intellectual climate of colonial Louisiana. Furthermore, she does not limit her narrative to the geographical space of Louisiana. She situates colonial education as part of a vast, ongoing transatlantic network of ideas. Her scholarship presents a more complex view of education than what is typically presented by traditional education historians.

23 Ibid.
24 See Dawdy, 2008:5; Dawdy defines “creoles” as anyone of European or African descent born in Louisiana. They could be free, enslaved, black, white or any combination.
26 Dawdy, 2008: 32.
Adam Hebert’s article on colonial education does attempt some history of informal education in Louisiana, but this occurs only in his final pages, as though it were an afterthought. By “informal” he largely means the apprenticeship system designed to provide practical training for boys from families of modest means. Using labor contracts as evidence, he describes the terms of the agreement, which sometimes involved the teaching of rudimentary reading and writing skills to apprentices. Hebert calls this education “informal,” but in some ways it was still a formal means of education in that it was legally sanctioned by a contract. Furthermore, the paradigm of a younger, less knowledgeable student receiving instruction from a more learned, more experienced “teacher” hired specifically for the task is still at play. His only consideration of education outside of common teacher/pupil models occurs when he points out “from nature and experience [the colonists] learned to master their environment and to overcome the hardships and difficulties of a frontier existence.”27 This is where his thesis ends, and he leaves it for other researchers to explore the topic further. But his conclusions about the nature of education in Louisiana are clear. There simply was not much of it. Where informal education existed, he saw it in terms of Louisiana’s European colonials. They learned to negotiate the unfamiliar territory thanks to their “natural genius” and “uncommon facility of learning anything they apply to.”28 Hebert does not consider the possibility of the “natural genius” of any non-Europeans in colonial Louisiana, male or female. Any education that they participated in was a gift from their European colonizers.

27 Hebert, 1958/1999: 45.
28 Ibid.
Given the history of neglect of the Louisiana colony, especially by French rulers, there is merit to Hebert’s assumption about the perseverance which characterized European colonials. But this orientation disregards how non-Europeans educated European settlers as well as each other. In his 1758 *History of Louisiana*, Antoine Simon Le Page du Pratz, who traveled extensively in the Louisiana territory during the French colonial period, describes the myriad ways that he learned from Natchez Indians. He not only documented ethnographic information about the tribes he encountered to satisfy a curious reading public back in France, he also learned crucial survival information - knowledge about the environment and medicine and foodways that he personally used - which he then recorded in his history. His account relates not only his own educational encounters with the Natchez but also those of other colonists, thus informing readers that the learning he experienced was not an unusual, isolated event. He describes in elaborate detail a corn recipe that he learned to prepare from the Natchez called “Parched Meal,” which he claimed was so appealing that “there is nobody who does not eat of this with pleasure” and when “mixed with milk and a little sugar, may be served up at the best tables.” That so many people enjoyed the corn dish suggests that numerous colonists from a variety of social strata were using and adapting food preparations they learned from the Indians. The fact that Du Pratz’s history was published during his own lifetime meant that other colonists likely read the work and benefitted from his first-hand accounts. Through Du Pratz’s descriptions of everyday practices, we learn how the Indians become teachers not only to DuPratz, but to DuPratz’ readers as well.

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29 Dawdy, 2008, demonstrates how neglect by the French opened space for settlers in Louisiana to develop a “rogue colonialism” in which they used their own ingenuity and the circumstances in which they were placed to figure out a way not just to survive, but prosper. Her theory of “rogue colonialism” disrupts the discourse of New Orleans as a passive recipient of Enlightenment thought.

Other memoirs written during the colonial period tell of similar informal educational interactions involving everyday practices.31 Jean-François-Benjamin Dumont de Montigny left France for Louisiana in 1719 to take up his new commission as a lieutenant and engineering officer. His 1747 memoir of his time in the French colony provides detailed descriptions and illustrations of the peoples and environments he encountered over a twenty-year period. Like DuPratz, Dumont relays numerous observations in which he and other European settlers learned from the Indians. Also like DuPratz, he credits the Indians with teaching them multiple ways to use corn, which he says is basically what the inhabitants of French colonial Louisiana lived on. But he does not stop there. His account of slaves making bread from corn reveals knowledge exchanges among Indians, Europeans, and Africans as well. He writes:

The inhabitants live on bread made from rice or corn, which is the kind that is called Turkish wheat...The negro men or women pour out the grain onto a table, after which they pound it in wooden mortars. The many blows from the pestle reduce it to flour, which they pass through fine sieves made from slivers of cane, the work of Indian women of the country...But because this flour is course like sand between the fingers and cannot by itself hold the form of a loaf, it has to be mixed as it cooks with husked rice, put in half rice flour or half French flour, and you will have excellent bread.32

Dumont points out that “negro” men or women used corn to make the bread, indicating that they also learned the ways of the Indians. They fact that they used kitchen tools made from Indian women is further evidence that knowledge of everyday practice had passed from one group to

31 See Jean Francois Benjamin Dumont de Montigny, Mémoire de Lxx Dxx Officier Ingénieur, Contenant les Evenements qui se sont passé à la Louisiane depeus 1715 jusqu à present. Journal, 1747 Newberry Library, Chicago, IL; Marc-Antoine Caillot, Relation du Voyage de la Louisiane ou Nouvelle France fait par Sr. Caillot en l’Annee 1730. Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans, LA; and Marie Madeleine Harchard, Voices from an Early American Convent, 1727-1760, ed. Emily Clark.
32 Dumont de Montigny, 1747:382-383.
another. The sharing of resources produced a product that was superior to that which none of the
groups would have had on their own. Adding rice flour, a product with which Africans would
have been familiar, or “French” flour, that is, wheat flour from Europe, produced a food which
was far lighter in texture than bread made from corn flour alone. The mixing of different
practices created a food product that was entirely new and far more palatable. In other words, the
process of creolization improved the experience for all. Eurocentric historians might view the
creativity that was needed to develop the bread as in keeping with the spirit of the human
ingenuity of the Enlightenment. As Hebert points out, European settlers did use their own
“natural genius” to learn how to survive in an unfamiliar land. But we might also view this
creativity at the result of unpredictable cross-cultural entanglements among Indians, Europeans,
and Africans. The everyday practices that involved these entanglements were learning
experiences for all who participated.33

I have described only two incidents of the intercultural learning that fills the pages of the
historical memoirs. We may wonder, though, how many additional informal educational
experiences went unrecorded. But given that the informal education which was documented was
essential to the business of everyday life, we can infer that the exchanges were widespread
throughout the French and later the Spanish and finally the American colony of Louisiana. I
pause here, however, to acknowledge the limitations of my own argument. I am attempting to
discern how colonial subjects acted as teachers and learners using colonial accounts of history.
Unfortunately, primary evidence of these interactions is limited from the non-European point of

33 This is not to say that all cross-cultural entanglements described in colonial memoirs were
positive in nature. Both Du Pratz and Dumont de Montigny describe the bloody Natchez
rebellion of 1729 as well as other unfortunate encounters. Dumont also blames French ships for
bringing smallpox to the Indians, nothing that “they were almost all stricken with it,” and that
“there were a great number who died.” See Dumont de Montigny, p. 369.
view, at least at this time. Epstein reminds us that different social groups have unequal access to the power and means of discourse. If this is true, then it becomes all the more important to consider the everyday practices of all groups described in a given text. The daily acts of cooking, eating, cleaning, and drinking give us a sense of the meaning that is made by those who are not producers of the text. It helps to fill in the gaps of what the text does not explicitly state.

Undoubtedly, alternative forms of education occurred among all groups of colonial subjects. Analysis of their everyday practice makes it clear the ways in which various groups of colonial subjects were competent teachers and learners. However, we may not easily recognize these patterns because they disrupt our preconceived notions of what education is.

Modern historians have written about cultural exchanges between and among peoples, but it may be that because they were not written specifically as a form of learning, they are not always included in narratives about the history of education. Jerah Johnson points out that the economic situation in colonial Louisiana necessitated that European, Indians, and Africans interact with each other. The lack of profits in the colony and persistent food shortages forced both European and slave populations into closer ties with Indians. Unlike the English, the French did not “encroach on Indian lands, rupture their societies, or push them further and further afield.” And because the ratio of European settlers to Indians was much lower in French Louisiana than in most English American colonies, the Indians were threatened less and took

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36 McCulloch and Richardson argue that from the 1990s on, a “post-revisionist” or “post-modern” tradition has become part of the historiography of education. This tradition includes looking at types of evidence not typically including in historical study, such an ethnographic and anthropological data.
37 Johnson, 1992; 39
advantage of their interactions. For example, they participated in the market economy in New Orleans, selling their wares, including medicinal herbs and foodstuffs, from colonial times until the early twentieth century.\textsuperscript{38} In addition, runaway slaves often banded together with Indians, forming mixed maroon communities. Although Johnson does not use any form of the word “education” to describe the encounters, it is clear he is describing a learning process. Not only were the inhabitants of the regions developing a livelihood, they were also learning about each other and about how to represent themselves. The items they traded were more than objects of exchange; they represented a pedagogy of survival and identity.

Lomawaima raises concern that when education historians write about Indians, they write far more frequently about education for Indians, rather than about education by Indians.\textsuperscript{39} Too often, she argues, dominant narratives frame Indian education and that of other marginalized groups in terms of their experience in colonial schools and not in terms of their own self-education or of their education of others. Lomawaima attributes this to the phenomenon of academic “silo-ization,” in which scholars remain isolated within the confines of their own disciplines, leading to a “disciplinary tunnel vision blocking [their] views of useful – even necessary sources, archives, methods, evidence, and analytic frameworks.”\textsuperscript{40} For education historians this has meant overwhelmingly clinging to a narrow vision of education as formal schooling. Lomawaima points out anthropologists have long accepted broader definitions of education, allowing them to root “Native epistemologies and individual cognitive development”

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid, 40. Johnson notes that the Indian markets stopped not because the Indians died out, but because they “melted away into mulattoes” - further evidence of the groups’ association. The work of Daniel Usner provides a comprehensive analysis of the economic interactions among Indians, settlers, and slaves.


\textsuperscript{40} Lomawaima, 2014, 349.
in ceremonialism, in spiritual practices, and in centuries of oral histories. But anthropologists do not have everything right either. Lomawaima observes that one is far more likely to find studies of indigenous peoples claimed within the field of anthropology rather than within history, suggesting that their stories are outside of legitimate historical study. She calls on scholars to “knock down the silos” between academic disciplines and embrace “interdisciplinarity” in order to pursue more insightful analysis. Keeping the silos promotes a “willful ignorance” that means “purposeful erasure.” Disregard for the breadth and depth of these indigenous stories is tantamount to a perpetuation of colonialism.

Histories and memoirs written during the colonial period suggest that some of the most significant educational experiences, particularly by those on the margins of colonial society, occurred outside the confines of the brick and mortar structures of formal schools. However, these experiences are often missing from traditional history of education narratives. Unless education historians writing today expand their understanding of where education occurs and consider more fully how all people educate and how all are educated, they continue to authenticate dominant paradigms of the educational process and perpetuate the notion that places without “formal” education were spaces of ignorance.

**Education in the Early American Period: A Transatlantic Alternative**

In an oft-told narrative New Orleans remained, by and large, a disorderly, ignorant backwater until the Louisiana Territory was sold by France to the United States in 1804. The people’s best hope to combat the prevailing anti-intellectualism that had percolated throughout

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41 Ibid, 353.
42 Ibid, 355.
43 Ibid, 352.
the colonial period was to embrace Anglo-American democracy based on Enlightenment principles as they were now defined by their new American leaders. By the early nineteenth century, the rationality, progress, and order which had long been associated with the Enlightenment was still part of the colonial project, but these values had been re-interpreted through an Anglo-Protestant-American lens. The Americanization process expanded on the earlier French Enlightenment of the ancient regime and now also embraced the concepts of republicanism, liberalism, and nationalism, which had developed in the later part of the eighteenth century. Louisiana’s new American leaders argued that a common, state-supported education would bring progress, order, enlightenment, and democracy to the region.

Adhering to that viewpoint, some historians of education situate William Claiborne as the new American leader tasked with readying Louisiana for participatory democracy. They cast the native Virginian, whom Thomas Jefferson appointed to be the first American governor of the Territory of Louisiana, as a flawed hero of early public education in the area. Often, they point out that he failed in getting Louisianans to widely accept the free, state-supported education during his tenure. But they also argue that he was not to blame. His “noble” efforts to implement public education were thwarted by people who were naturally hostile to American democratic

44 Shannon Lee Dawdy, Building the Devil’s Empire: French Colonial New Orleans. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2008. Dawdy distinguishes the Early Enlightenment from the Late Enlightenment. She links the rational scientific thinking of the Scientific Revolution with the Enlightenment of Louis XIV. She argues that the Late Enlightenment associated with the French Revolution expanded on those ideas to include the concepts of republicanism and nationalism.

ideals. Stuart Noble argues that Claiborne believed a system of free schools supported by the government, offered “the only safeguard to democracy.”46 However, the governor faced tremendous challenges in Louisiana that included a heterogeneous population rooted in French and Spanish traditions, and who were not used to free public schools, nor used to democracy. It is clear that by “democracy,” Noble is referring to Anglo-American understandings of the term in which unified national citizens were loyal to the laws and institutions imported by the American nation-state. He writes that the “unruly” population in Louisiana included “Frenchmen of both liberal and conservative dispositions, Spaniards accustomed to the rule of a dictator, rough frontiersmen accustomed only to the law of the wilds, and a small number of more or less intelligent immigrants from the eastern states.”47 Claiborne’s plan was to marry these disparate elements into a “homogeneous American citizenry, a feat he failed to accomplish.”48

Raleigh A. Suarez’s attitude about the intellectual climate in Louisiana is evident in the very title of his piece. In “Chronicle of a Failure: Public Education in Antebellum Louisiana,” the author observes that Governor Claiborne called for the public funding of schools because of the dire need to "educate, indoctrinate, and Americanize a largely foreign, partly hostile population."49 He attributes the lack of support for public education primarily to the people’s lack of interest in education and to a lack of support for public funding.

DeVore and Logsdon argue that Claiborne saw public education as a way to unify the “polyglot population of Louisiana.”50 Like Noble and Suarez before them, they saw Claiborne’s ideas as conflicting with the values of the people in Louisiana, particularly the large Creole

46 Noble, 1928: 51.
47 Noble, 1928: 59.
48 Ibid.
community. Whereas Claiborne saw his vision for public education as one that would assimilate the disparate peoples of Louisiana into American ways of thinking and being, the Creoles saw the Americans as the interlopers and the ones in need of assimilation.\(^{51}\) DeVore and Logsdon point out that “ethnic dilemmas” and the rejection of Americanization stalled improvements in education in the early American period, implying that the success of public education could only come about when people moved beyond their cultural differences and embraced similar values.\(^{52}\)

There is significant primary evidence to support these historians’ pessimistic claims. My own analysis of Claiborne’s correspondence confirms that he did indeed believe that Louisiana’s diverse population, including their French language, Catholic religion, and fluid racial order militated against the establishment of “American democracy.” To Secretary of State James Madison, he wrote:

> The population of the district is composed of a very heterogeneous mass, and their political principles and opinions are as different as the customs and prejudices which prevail in the different States or Nations from whence they emigrated…there are persons here…favorable to Monarchy, and inimical to every Government that recognizes the Rights of Man.\(^{53}\)

Claiborne clearly believed differences worked against democracy and that “public” education was the means to changes people’s attitudes. They needed to be “taught” that they had rights. In another letter to James Madison, Claiborne complained that the people were “deplorably uninformed” and that the “principles of popular Government” were beyond their comprehension.\(^{54}\) He argued their ignorance was due to a lack of knowledge of the English

\(^{52}\) DeVore and Logsdon, 1991:92.  
language, and he professed a need to introduce “some Public system of Education” to bring the people out of their “mental darkness.”  

Claiborne was a protégé of Thomas Jefferson and his beliefs reflected that of his mentor. Both men were steeped in the Anglo-Protestant democratic ideology which emerged from the European Enlightenment via their native Virginia. According to Thomas Jefferson, as the nation expanded, it became an “empire of liberty” spreading the virtues of republican “civilization” to its natural borders, causing “barbarism” to recede. In other words, political equality and citizenship accompanied the expansion of the American nation through the republican institutions implemented in the new areas brought under control. As the American nation progressed, so too did democracy, leading to mankind’s enlightenment and improvement. This line of reasoning suggests that democracy is something that those who are in the know have and then teach or bring to those who do not have the knowledge.

The region’s cultural diversity, which Claiborne and Jefferson saw as problematic, is indeed part of the reason the state’s history evolved outside of the Anglo-American experience. Instead of seeing the possibilities inherent in a diverse community, the dominant narrative holds fast to the idea that this diversity was a source of conflict and an impediment to democracy. But this narrative is constructed primarily from the viewpoint of the American officials in control and the sources they left behind. This is their story. There is another story which explains how all of these diverse peoples negotiated their own understandings of democracy and education. In the

55 Ibid.
transatlantic environment of New Orleans, there emerged alternative frameworks of democracy which *depended* on the region’s long history of unpredictable, cross-cultural entanglements of disparate peoples. Although these interactions occurred amid the chaos, violence, and hardship of frontier life, they nevertheless contributed to a mentality embracing a global “citizenship” which transcended both the nation state and one’s ethnicity and which encouraged the free exchange of ideas. Democracy then, was not a form of government as much as it was a mode of associated living.  

In Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*, the author notes the importance of association to democratic public life. He refers to public association as “free schools” where citizens go to learn the benefits of free association in a democratic society. He notes that when people associate with each other on rare occasions, they regard those meetings as strange; however, when they are allowed to meet freely for all purposes, it becomes a universal practice and the main means by which to make their views known. Tocqueville saw American society as a place where unrestricted free association was practiced and saw it as a positive feature of democratic life. However, Tocqueville does not discuss the ways that American constructions of citizenship (white, propertied, male members of the nation state) served to place limits on the freedom of association.

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60 Tocqueville did observe racial inequality in America, but he evidently did not include them within the framework of the American democracy he came to observe. For more on Tocqueville’s ideas of race in America see Curtis Stokes, “Tocqueville and the Problem of Racial Inequality,” in *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol, 75, No.1 / 2 (Winter-Spring, 1992); 1-15.
For Jefferson and Claiborne, education was necessary to produce democratic citizens. However, the very concept of citizenship implies exclusions. In some ways it is the antithesis of free association. To be a citizen is to have membership within a certain political entity. If some people are members, then it follows that others are not. Jefferson’s own political philosophy indicates the parameters of “membership” into American citizenship. While he believed that everyone possessed rudimentary political abilities, he thought that more complex questions should be left to those with superior virtue, education, and talent, in other words, to a “natural aristocracy.” It was clear that people of color were not destined to be part of that “natural aristocracy” within the legal constructs of the American nation. In a letter he wrote to the Secretary of the Treasury, Jefferson proclaimed that only Louisiana’s white inhabitants would be granted citizenship “on the same footing with other citizens of the U.S.” Moreover, the national constitution that applied to the Louisiana territory once it fell under the jurisdiction of the United States largely left definitions of political equality, that is, who could vote and make the laws of the government, largely up to the local authority. White Louisianans used their new American law-making powers in the early nineteenth century to pursue a political agenda organized around white supremacy. One of the first acts of the territorial legislature was the adoption of a new Code Noir which limited the rights of slaves and free people of color.

There were other French traditions in Louisiana that encouraged democracy as a form of associated living. Latin Catholicism, which arrived with the first French settlers and which continued to play a vital role in the daily lives of Louisianans even after the Americans came,
helped facilitate these associations. Not only did early Catholic missionaries’ attempts at conversion of the Indians encourage interaction but so too did their role as explorers of the Lower Mississippi Valley, since they often relied on Indians as guides. The universalist ethic promoted by Catholicism recognized “the spiritual equality of all Catholics,” and worked as an agency for bringing Christianity to all people, regardless of race. Because all were equal before God, it was possible to see both whites and people of color worshiping together in the same Church. Baptismal records also reveal that people of color could become godparents to whites they had catechized and vice versa. This openness and interaction among races was not part of Anglo-Protestant traditions, particularly those rooted in Puritanism. Puritans’ existence as a society was based on their image of themselves as “elect,” that is, as preordained by God to be saved. Thus, even if Indians or Africans desired to accept Christianity as defined by Puritans, the rigorous Puritan requirements for proof of visible sainthood worked against gaining a large number of converts. Puritans emphasized their exclusiveness to protect them from the sinfulness of others. Separating themselves from “nonwhites” further allowed Puritans to see themselves as God’s chosen.

The universalism of the Catholic faith encouraged interaction in other ways that Anglo-Protestant-American ideology did not. For example, the Anglo-Protestant-American tradition of the separation of church and state is widely regarded as an inalienable right and as promoting

liberty by providing for religious freedom from state control. However, Caryn Cossé Bell shows how this tradition, held sacrosanct by most Anglo-Americans, served to restrict liberty in Catholic, French Louisiana. The Code Noir that developed as part of French Catholic law acknowledged “the moral personality of the slave.” It required that slaves receive oral religious instruction, necessitating interaction between Europeans and African slaves. Furthermore, because marriage was a sacrament, it forbade the separation of married slave couples and families. In this way religion served to formalize relationships and to guarantee certain human rights. Bell notes that government support for religious policies designed to ensure slaves’ moral and emotional well-being and to secure their family ties ended with the transfer of Louisiana to the United States in 1803. Also arriving with Americanization were laws prohibiting the teaching of slaves to read and write. Emily Clark notes that as Americanization became entrenched, segregation along racial lines became more solidified than it had been under the French and Spanish regimes. She notes that the Ursulines “accommodated themselves somewhat to the changed racial culture of New Orleans.” By 1839, when they moved to their new convent, the nuns appeared to have abandoned their century-old mission to educate girls of color, suggesting that in some ways American education discouraged interaction and brought less democracy, not more.

Gwendolyn Midlo Hall notes that in French colonial Louisiana, soldiers and sailors were frequently sent to live in Indian villages in Louisiana to learn their languages and to act as interpreters. While there, they learned Indian ways and sought and received their loyalty, to some

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71 Ibid, 256.
extent.\textsuperscript{72} Intermarriage was quite common despite government prohibitions against it.\textsuperscript{73} The dearth of white women in colonial Louisiana also encouraged liaisons between colonial men and enslaved African women. Though the Code Noir and church doctrine forbade interracial marriage and concubinage, colonists largely ignored these rules, and eventually the Church accepted it. Bell observes that by the end of the Spanish period in 1799, military officers lived openly with their mulatto partners and were not ashamed to name the children from these relationships in the church register.\textsuperscript{74} The white emigres arriving from French Saint Domingue in the early nineteenth century also brought with them a long tradition of consensual unions with free women of color.\textsuperscript{75} These relationships involved more than just sexual interaction. Often, they developed into quasi-legal relationships of \textit{plaçage} in which a free women of color was financially supported by her partner. The children from such relationships were often cared for as well, with some of them even being sent to France for their education.\textsuperscript{76} For American observers of this custom, this proved the moral depravity of the creole people and was further evidence that they were not prepared to understand the mechanisms of the republican process. How could such a people so entrenched in “old colonial customs” be expected to readily embrace new ideas?\textsuperscript{77}

What the Americans may not have realized was that some of the old colonial customs they distained were not merely French or Catholic, but rather a fusion of understandings born of

\textsuperscript{72} This is not to suggest there were always peaceful relations between Indians and settlers. Hall reminds us that colonial Louisiana was a violent, brutal place.
\textsuperscript{73} Hall 1992; 15.
\textsuperscript{74} Bell, 1997, 13.
\textsuperscript{75} Nathalie Dessens, \textit{From Saint-Domingue to New Orleans: Migration and Influences}, (Gainesville; University Press of Florida, 2007).
\textsuperscript{76} Dessens, 2007.
a century of interactions among people who were already experienced with cross-cultural entanglements. Gwendolyn Midlo Hall and Paul Gilroy remind us, for example, that the Africans who came to the New World came from places that were themselves crossroads of culture, and that the new arrivals already had plenty of experience interacting with a diverse array of peoples.78 This was especially true of the Senegambia region of Africa, from where, according to Hall, two-thirds of the slaves brought to Louisiana as part of the French slave trade came.79 Senegambia was located at a crossroads of the trans-Saharan trade, which had linked the West African, Mediterranean, and Arabic worlds for centuries. Thus, the Senegambian Africans had a long, rich history of diverse cultural traditions which they then brought with them to Louisiana. Many of these traditions, such as those in foodways, religion, and music survive to this day.80

Some of those traditions involved their own understanding of democracy and rights, which eventually played a role in the development of Afro-Creole identity. Unlike other African groups, the Senegambians, especially the Bambara people among them, came with a high degree of sovereignty based on control of peoples rather than territory.81 Although they had a rigidly hierarchical social organization, within each group of that organization they enjoyed a “high level of participatory democracy,” with leadership within each group being elected by its members.82 Women had property rights and slavery was not associated with powerlessness or

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79 Hall, 1992; 35.
81 Hall argues that the Bambara subculture of Senegambia was highly concentrated in Louisiana.
82 Hall 1992; 52.
race.\textsuperscript{83} It was not uncommon for prestigious members of society to be captured and enslaved. Hall claims that Bambara slaves who came to Louisiana may have had more rights in Africa that did poor whites in Louisiana.\textsuperscript{84}

Hall posits that the Bambara understanding of rights may have been a crucial influence on the development of Afro-creole culture in Louisiana. As Afro-creole society developed, slaves demonstrated that they were aware of their rights, even within the framework of slavery. Runaway slaves who were recaptured explained that they left because they had been “overworked, underfed, threatened, assaulted, and maimed by their masters.”\textsuperscript{85} Some of them even referenced their rights as spelled out in the Code Noir, such as their right to be given Sundays off for rest and worship. Many slaves produced foods and goods during this time, which they then sold at Sunday markets in New Orleans. In this manner, some slaves were able to purchase their own freedom, a practice which became harder to do under the American regime. The inclusion of African and Afro-creole stories in the history of education make it clear that democratic practices were not something that had to be taught as part of the Americanization process, but which instead resulted from the interactions of a transatlantic population and the creolization of ideas which results from those interactions.

One of the most important Afro-creole stories that must be included in the history of education in early American Louisiana involves the large number of free people of color who arrived from Saint Domingue about the same time as the American takeover. The émigrés were numerous enough to infuse New Orleans communities of color with their own understanding of

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\textsuperscript{83} Ibid, 53.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid, 128.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid, 198.
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democracy that was independent of the American experience.\textsuperscript{86} Rebecca Scott notes that the free men and women of color who came from Saint-Domingue in the aftermath of revolution brought with them a strong knowledge of public rights.\textsuperscript{87} The cosmopolitan world of colonial society in the Caribbean had long enjoyed traditions of “honor-based rights to respect in public places.”\textsuperscript{88} At first only certain members of society were afforded this respect, but when Saint-Domingue became the free republic of Haiti, free and freed people of color claimed such honor for themselves by invoking the egalitarian language of the 1789 French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, which declared that all citizens were “eligible for all public honors (\textit{toutes dignités})”\textsuperscript{89} Although the document did not directly address race or the issue of public accommodation, it did affirm the “dignitary dimension of public rights” as essential to what it meant to be human.\textsuperscript{90} Public rights were in many ways more significant than political rights. Saint-Domingan slaves who had arrived with waves of other émigrés had technically been freed, at least temporarily, on the Caribbean island as a result of both the Haitian and French revolutions, only to be re-enslaved when they emigrated to other slave-holding regimes, including Louisiana.\textsuperscript{91} To be granted freedom by law left slaves in a precarious situation because

\textsuperscript{86} Nathalie Dessens, \textit{From Saint-Domingue to New Orleans: Migration and Influences}, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007); 35. In 1791 before the first migrants started arriving, New Orleans had a total population of slightly of 5,000 (2,386 whites, 862 free people of color, and 1,789 slaves). By 1805, the population was over 8000 (3,551 whites, 1,566 people of color, and 2,883 slaves).


\textsuperscript{88} Ibid, 783.

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid, 784.

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{91} Rebecca Scott and Jean M Hebrard, \textit{Freedom Papers: An Atlantic Odyssey in the Age of Emancipation}. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012). Scott and Hebrard argue that not only former slaves, but also free people of color had difficulty asserting their freedom as a result of the turmoil and subsequent emigration from Saint-Domingue. Legally, all emigrants from Saint-Domingue were free after 1794, but some refugees set about claiming other refugees,
emancipation depended on the politics of the polity making the laws. Free people of color were hardly better off because the law placed the burden on them to prove their freedom. Whereas political rights could be problematic, public rights were open to all.

This public rights discourse was nurtured by the complex networks of communication which circulated across the transatlantic world. Part of that network involved intersection with notions of African rights that long existed in Louisiana. The concept was further creolized with ideologies taken from understandings of the American and French Revolutions as well as from the European democratic revolutionary movements of 1830 and 1848. The discourse of public rights became a practice of education as ideas were discussed, debated, and re-interpreted in the Afro-Creole produced literature, journals, and newspapers. as well as in the public spaces of New Orleans markets, taverns, and coffee houses.

**Creolizing “Public” Education in Antebellum Louisiana**

Donald Devore and Joseph Logsdon assert that as a result of creole resistance to Americanization, true improvements in the education system in New Orleans only came after the city was divided into three semi-independent municipalities in 1836. While education in the First Municipality, the original French part of the city, stalled as a result of ethnic dilemmas, that in the Second Municipality, the new “American” section upriver from the old part, prospered. They attribute the prosperity in the Second Municipality to its willingness to embrace the

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including those who had been free prior to 1794, as their property. This was relatively easy to enforce as they entered the slave holding regimes of Cuba and Louisiana, where people of color needed legal documents proving their freedom.


93 By 1836, ethnic and economic rivalries between Americans and French Creoles had grown so bitter that the city was divided into three separate “municipalities,” essentially three quasi-autonomous cities, each with its own city council, police force, library, and school system. See Lawrence Powell, *The Accidental City*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012); 357
“celebrated” model for common schools developed by Horace Mann in Boston in the 1830s. A common education was thought to be necessary to produce the “public” on which democratic participation depended. For some scholars then, a common *American* education was the measure of democratic progress.

To replicate Mann’s common school system, leaders of the Second Municipality imported a superintendent, teachers, textbooks, and even furniture from the Northeast. They also found “suitable locations” for the schools in Protestant churches. Quite literally were the schools in the Second Municipality tied to Protestant Anglo-American understandings of education. People with French, Spanish, and Italian backgrounds, including people of color, tended to live outside of the Second Municipality. However, some immigrants new to New Orleans in the mid-nineteenth century, particularly Protestant Germans, and English-speaking Irish actually preferred the American style of education to what they saw as outmoded Catholic traditions such as single sex classrooms and the French language. They *wanted* to assimilate to notions of democracy as defined by the new American leaders in Louisiana and not to democracy as defined by Franco-Afro-Creole traditions.

According to DeVore and Logsdon, as French speakers grew fewer in number by the mid-nineteenth century, Mann’s system spread from the Second Municipality in New Orleans, where most Americans were concentrated, to the First and Third Municipalities, where French Creoles, French-Afro-Creoles and immigrants largely lived, thereby “improving” the education situation. They note that by the 1850’s “even creole leaders had begun to speak in glowing terms

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94 DeVore and Logsdon, 1991/1999
95 Ibid.
of Northern systems of public education,” and they urged the Louisiana legislature to apply “the system of education now prevailing in Massachusetts to the whole state of Louisiana.”96

DeVore and Logsdon do acknowledge that the “glowing” public education system praised by many actually denied educational opportunity for “half the population of the state who were black Louisianians.”97 But again they use notions of progress to explain changes to come. They note that slave ordinances in the nineteenth century prevented blacks from openly participating in the public system, but that “regular sweeps in the creole districts of all those with any trace of African ancestry” hinted that free public education had “awakened aspirations for knowledge” among some black New Orleanians.98 The authors’ acknowledgement of the slave ordinances reveal that by the mid-nineteenth century, New Orleans was indeed becoming a more segregated society. As they suggest, many people of color developed tactics, such as passing as white, to gain access to formal education.99 The Afro-Creole editors of the Tribune, the first black daily newspaper in the United States, openly argued for the inclusion of children of color in the public-school system. They saw integrated education as a weapon to change people’s thinking about racial oppression. They also saw it as essential to democracy, not because it taught assimilation through a common set of values, but because it would create a “united brotherhood” of one nation and one people and heal divisions that had been caused by the Civil War.100

96 DeVore &Logsdon, 1991;105.
97 Ibid, 107.
98 Ibid.
The way that DeVore and Logsdon word their argument about the black population’s desire for education suggests that this yearning only came to the forefront when they witnessed the progress of formal public schooling brought about by the Americanization process. It also links the idea of progress with the development of the American nation state. Such viewpoints discount other evidence that suggests the large free black community in New Orleans were significant participants and creators of educational communities that predated and transcended the development of the nation state. These Afro-Creole intellectuals took concrete measures to promote learning among themselves as well as to assure that all black children in New Orleans received an education.

When formal schooling was limited in Louisiana, French Creoles from prominent families often went to France to be educated. Some prominent Afro-Creoles from New Orleans, such as the artist Julien Hudson and the poet Pierre Dalcour, followed the same path. Dessens argues that it was common practice for white fathers in Saint Domingue to provide for the education of their sons, and that they brought that tradition with them to Louisiana. And of course, the Ursulines had begun educating girls of color in the first half of the eighteenth century, well before Louisiana was part of the American nation. But when Louisiana was ceded to the United States in 1803, the Catholic Church in New Orleans lost its royal base of financial support as well as some of its followers. In addition, the arrival of Americans also meant the arrival of more and more Protestants who freely practiced their religion about the city.

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large influx of Afro-Creole refugees from Saint Domingue helped to re-catholicize the city, but their arrival also led to stricter segregation laws between whites and people of color as fears of additional slave insurrection, such as that which occurred in the former French colony, spread.\textsuperscript{104} Despite these challenges, the large Catholic Afro-Creole community worked to maintain the Church’s long held commitment to the education of people of color.

At the request of the Ursulines, a priest with family connections to Saint Domingue persuaded a French nun, Sister St. Marthe Fontièr, to take over the education of girls of African descent at the Ursuline convent. When the Ursulines moved to a new convent downriver, Sister St. Marthe established a separate school for girls of color in 1823, nearly twenty years before the first state-supported schools for whites were established. One of the pupils at this school was Henriette DeLille, a mixed-race young woman who had shunned the life of plaçage for which she had been prepared, to devote herself to the Catholic education of slaves and free girls of color. DeLille’s interest in education resulted from her devotion to Catholicism and its ethic of evangelization and not as a result of witnessing the “progress” of Americanization.\textsuperscript{105} She was the founder and first mother superior of the Sisters of the Holy Family, an order of nuns composed of free women of color. In 1852, her order founded a school which educated free women of color as well as slaves. To be sure, only girls from “elite families” were entitled to the full benefits of the liberal arts education they offered while slaves only received basic religious instruction. However, Virginia Meecham Gould believes there is evidence to support that the nuns’ true mission of universal education was curtailed by American laws preventing the education of slaves and that, in fact, they had always embraced an anti-slavery ethic. Gould notes

\textsuperscript{104} Bell, 1997.
\textsuperscript{105} Gould, 2001; 5
that immediately after the Civil War, the nuns eliminated the school’s restrictions to only educate girls from elite families, meaning that freed slaves could attend their school and take advantage of the full program.\footnote{Gould, 2001; 6.}

When a prominent Afro-Creole widow died in 1837, she left a will providing for the creation of a free school for poor orphans of color in New Orleans. Madame Marie Couvent, a former slave, had been appalled by the illiteracy of these orphans, many of whom were the illegitimate offspring of interracial liaisons. But white public officials opposed expansion of educational opportunities for black students and worked to prevent the school’s establishment. Although the Afro-Creole community paid some of the property taxes devoted to the creation of the new free public school system, which opened in 1841, black children were not allowed to attend. It took a group of prominent Afro-Creole intellectuals, one of whom was the Afro-Creole writer Armand Lanusse, over a decade to get the state legislature to pass a law to carry out the provisions of the widow’s will. Finally, in 1847, the \textit{Ecole des Orphelins Indigents}, or Catholic Institute, was established in the Fauborg Marigny district of New Orleans specifically for the purpose of providing a free education to black orphans.\footnote{Sybil Klein, \textit{Creole: The History and Legacy of Louisiana's Free People of Color}. Baton Rouge, LA: LSU Press, 2000).} Lanusse was the headmaster of the Institute from 1852 until his death in 1867. The Institute was a clear indication of the ongoing dedication of Afro-Creoles to education and is part of a long tradition of their attempts to be part of public intellectual life \textit{in spite of} American efforts.

Throughout the antebellum period, free schools were made available to some children of color, mostly thanks to the charity of the Catholic Church or the philanthropy of wealthy Afro-Creoles. But numerous scholars have described Franco-Afro-Creole contributions to the
intellectual life of Louisiana that have origins beyond formal schools in that same era. Many of these Lousianans left an educational legacy which emerged largely outside of the American experience. Caryn Cossé Bell situates the intellectual life of free people of color in Louisiana as a reflection of the idealism associated with Romanticism and the Age of Revolution in the early nineteenth century. Alfred Hunt and Nathalie Dessens write about the intellectual impact of Saint-Domingan refugees. Hunt points out that newspapers were filled with advertisements placed by individuals (both black and white) offering their services as private tutors. He also believes that conversations and writings about the successful revolutionaries in Haiti influenced slave revolts and abolitionist movements both in Louisiana and beyond. He credits slaves from Saint Domingue with playing a role in the 1811 slave uprising on the German Coast of Louisiana. Also, at John Brown’s trial for the raid at Harper’s Ferry, the abolitionist admitted that he read widely about militant blacks such as Toussaint Louverture. Dessens reminds us that many of the free people of color who arrived from Saint Domingue were highly educated. Being, on the whole, more educated than Afro-creoles in Louisiana, they transmitted their knowledge to their comparatively less-educated hosts in various ways. In addition to being tutors, people of color monopolized certain trades such as cigar-making, carpentry, and leatherwork, and because they often shared neighborhoods and social spaces, they were poised to readily share ideas. The sheer number of people of color arriving from Saint Domingue

110 Ibid, 181.
improved the overall status of their New Orleans counterparts, who had had less economic, social, and political power before their arrival.\textsuperscript{111}

The press was another instrument of informal education. Dessens points out that when the newspaper \textit{L’Abeille} was founded by white refugees in 1827, several free blacks, using pen names, contributed to the paper’s columns.\textsuperscript{112} The short-lived newspaper \textit{L’Union}, founded in 1862 by creoles of color openly criticized racial oppression. The antagonism of the white community forced the paper to shut down, but it was replaced almost immediately by \textit{La Tribune de la Nouvelle Orleans}. The \textit{Tribune} was established in 1864 by an Afro-creole doctor, Charles Roudanez, to express the opinions of and support the interests of the black community, especially with regard to civil rights. Well before they had their own newspapers, Afro-creoles had published poetry and stories in other French language Louisiana newspapers such as \textit{Le Courrier de la Louisiane}.\textsuperscript{113}

Afro-creole poetry and other forms of literature provide more evidence of black interest in education in the antebellum period. M. Lynn Weiss argues that the first short story published by an American of African descent was Louisiana’s Victor Sejour, who wrote “The Mulatto” in 1837.\textsuperscript{114} Sejour was also the first American man of color to publish a play. \textit{The Jew of Seville} was first published and performed in 1844. In 1845, eighty-two poems by creoles of color were collected and edited by Armand Lanusse in the first anthology of francophone literature in the United States. The anthology, called \textit{Les Cenelles} after a local hawthorn berry, contains poems by fifteen Louisiana Afro-creoles. The topics range from nature (Louis Boise’s “To Spring”) to

\begin{footnotes}
\item[112] Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
expressions of love (B. Valcour’s “For Hermina”) to a scathing commentary of plaçage (Lanusse’s “Epigram”). The poems reflect the typical themes prevalent in other Romantic Era poetry from the time, such as natural beauty, love, and references to Roman philosophers and Greek mythology. However, it infuses those poems with Native American and African influences, further revealing the rich intellectual heritage of a people raised in a region of vibrant diversity. Weiss laments that these poems are seldom included in anthologies of nineteenth-century American literature, which she notes, perhaps unsurprisingly, concentrates on writers of Anglo-American origins. But it may help to remember that the word “publish” derives from a Latin word meaning “to make public.” The fact that the poems were at least published in the francophone world of Louisiana, makes them a form of “public” education.

Clearly there is much evidence to expose as a myth the dominant narrative of an anti-intellectual Louisiana. Education in the region was not a failure, and democracy did exist before Americans arrived and transplanted their own notions of public education. This becomes particularly evident when scholars look beyond formal institutions of schooling to make their case. But despite all of their research, there are still stories left to be told. This dissertation attempts to tell the stories of the observations, conversations, and activities which took place within three coffee houses that existed in the transatlantic port of early nineteenth-century New Orleans. Two of these coffee houses were also taverns. The city has been famous for its drinking establishments for much of the twentieth century, and in fact, the sheer number of bars for a city its size is part of what perpetuates its modern reputation of anti-intellectualism. But the coffee

115 Ibid.
116 Richard Campanella, Bourbon Street: A History, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014). Although Campanella concedes that New Orleans’ reputation as a sinful place dates back to colonial times, he claims its reputation for drunken debauchery gained national fame with the rise of leisure tourism in the mid twentieth century.
houses, taverns, grog shops, and bars of New Orleans have also historically been places where all members of society could associate and where everyone had access to the ideas that were discussed and exchanged. The next three chapters explore the extent to which the everyday practices which occurred in the Café de la Bourse, the Cafe des Refugies, and the Café of Rose Nicaud encouraged the exercise of public rights and the extent to which these public places were indeed spaces of democratic and “public” education.
CHAPTER 4: THE CAFÉ DE LA BOURSE

No city perhaps on the globe, in an equal number of human beings, presents a greater contrast of national manners, language, and complexion, than does New Orleans.¹

When Pennsylvania-born geographer William Darby wrote these words, he was not the first traveler nor the last to comment on the diversity of people in New Orleans in the early nineteenth century. Historian Joseph Logsdon wrote that almost from the beginning, “South Louisiana had a diverse population of Frenchmen, Germans, Italians, Indians, Africans, and Spaniards.”² This diversity amazed early travelers, who found comparisons “only in such crossroads of the world as Venice and Vienna.”³ In a conversation with Alexis de Toqueville in 1832, Etienne Mazureau, a French businessman in New Orleans, referred to the city as one in which “[n]ot a country in America or Europe has but sent us some representatives.”⁴ It was, he said, a “patchwork of peoples.”⁵ Noting not just the sights, but the sounds of New Orleans, architect Benjamin Latrobe wrote “A sound more strange than any that is heard anywhere else in the world astonishes a stranger. It is a most incessant, loud, rapid and various gabble of tongues of all tones that were ever heard at Babel.”⁶

¹ William Darby, Geographical Description of the State of Louisiana. (Philadelphia, PA: John Melish, 1816); 186
³ Ibid.
⁴ Etienne Mazureau, interview by Alexis de Tocqueville, 1832 in George Wilson Pierson, Tocqueville in America (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1938)627-628.
⁵ Ibid.
By invoking the biblical Tower of Babel, Latrobe evokes images of disorder and confusion, traits that had been associated with New Orleans since its early French colonial days. But his metaphor was likely appropriate because throughout the antebellum era, New Orleans was the nation’s second largest immigrant port, “ahead of Boston and behind only New York.”

But unlike Boston and New York, its compact size meant that different ethnic groups speaking different languages were continually thrust into contact with one another as they practiced the daily business of the city. New Orleans was unique in its geographic location in the Atlantic world, even for a port. It was situated at the intersection of three major trading circuits that encompassed the entire Mississippi-Caribbean world. Transatlantic ships carried goods, people, and ideas from Europe and Africa. Frontier exchange networks throughout the Mississippi Valley facilitated interaction with various Indian groups and American settlers. A robust trade also thrived between New Orleans and the Caribbean islands. To offset its isolation from the Old World (and abandonment by the French government), Louisiana developed intercolonial relations with the Caribbean basin, which greatly influenced its development. Furthermore, the city had been founded at the junction of three rival European empires (Spanish, British, French) that had established colonies in the Western Hemisphere. The city itself had experienced a

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8 Ibid.
succession of sovereignties (French, Spanish, American) in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and had been exposed to three distinct socio-economic and cultural systems. Tensions between the metropole and the colony, between the local and national government, and among the colonial empires themselves complicated the lived realities of the city’s inhabitants. These transatlantic entanglements contributed to a mix of ideas, attitudes, and ideologies that did not flow through other North or South American port cities in the same manner. Early nineteenth century New Orleans brought together the intellectual legacies of the Enlightenment, Anglo-Protestantism, French Catholicism, and the democratic philosophies associated with the Age of Revolution and entangled them with daily practices that were also shaped by the thinking of Native Americans, Africans, and Caribbeans.

The goal of imperial rulers, be they French, Spanish, or American, had been to transmit their own political, economic, and cultural ideals to New Orleans as a colonial experiment in service to the empire or nation-state. But colonial knowledge did not flow one way. As Linebaugh and Rediker remind us, “the planetary currents of the North Atlantic are circular.” The same ships that brought royal officials, merchants, planters, and manufacturers from Europe to Africa, to the Americas, and back again, also brought felons, sailors, indentured servants, pirates, urban laborers, and African slaves. Although these “commoners” may have been intended to support the imperial/national enterprise, they made use of the movement and connections they encountered in the “new” world to develop their own forms of cooperation and resistance against colonial rulers. The ideas transmitted by the imperial powers were thus

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14 Dawdy, 2008.
changed in significant ways. Linebaugh and Rediker use the image of a many-headed hydra to suggest the disorder, resistance, and adaptation which resulted from these encounters. When the hydra loses a head, two new ones emerge to take its place. The new “heads” represent the creolization process that occurs as colonial subjects develop new ways of negotiating their colonial experience.\textsuperscript{16} The circulation of human experience produced unpredictable, ongoing entanglements that were themselves a form of education, an education that was not transmitted from above, but rather one that emerged from below.

Markets, docks, taverns, and cafes were public meeting places where ideas circulating around the Atlantic could converge, creolizing understandings of those ideas into new forms that did not preexist the contact. Thus, these public meeting places were spaces of education. But how did that education take place? What kind of intellectual exchanges occurred? And to what extent were these spaces truly public in that they granted access to all participants capable of creating new ways of knowing? To answer these questions, this chapter explores the history and intellectual culture of one public meeting place, a New Orleans coffee house known in French as the Café de la Bourse or in English as the Exchange Coffee House. It was in operation from 1806 until 1837 under various proprietors, including, most notably, Pierre Maspero.\textsuperscript{17} As the pre-eminent commercial exchange in New Orleans, the café was the site of numerous social, intellectual, and business encounters of the diverse population which characterized the city.

In narratives of Western history, the association of coffee houses with intellectual and political activity is most closely linked to the Enlightenment of Western Europe, especially

\textsuperscript{16} Linebaugh and Rediker, 2000; 4
\textsuperscript{17} There are currently two restaurants in the New Orleans French Quarter that use “Maspero” in the name. Neither of these businesses is located at the original location of “Maspero’s” Exchange Coffee House.
England. One scholar frames English coffee-houses from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as "penny universities," where, for the price of a cup of coffee, one could participate in the intellectual discussions of the day. They served as clearinghouses for information, they "incubated insurance companies, news-letters, and scientific societies" and they also operated as post offices and informal public libraries. Western European coffee houses are also closely linked to the Enlightenment notion of a democratic public sphere, first theorized by Jurgen Habermas in the 1960s. Habermas argued that the emergence of a public sphere in the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century required the development of institutional bases to encourage social interaction and rational critical debate. He specifically notes the role that English coffee houses and French salons played in fostering “convivial exchange” in which private individuals “made public use of their reason.”

The physical spaces where issues were discussed led to the development of “public” opinions, which could influence political authority. Thus, coffee houses were, in some ways, sites of participatory democracy. The chapter explores the history of the Café de la Bourse to determine the extent to which it was, like the coffee houses, cafes, and salons of Western Europe, a space of education and intellectual exchange. I interrogate ways in which the café’s location at an international crossroads may have altered those intellectual activities. Finally, I consider the extent to which the café functioned as a

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18 Tom Standage, A History of the World in Six Glasses (New York: Walker Publishing, 2005)133-172. Coffee has been called the the “great soberer” and the “drink of reason.” Europeans who drank coffee in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were aware that it made them feel more alert. They began to link alertness of mind with rational, reasonable thought without the loss of self-control associated with alcohol consumption.


20 Jurgen Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: an inquiry into a category of bourgeois society. Trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989); 27.
“public” sphere by analyzing daily practices to determine who had access to the space and to the ideas discussed within. In particular, I consider how its role as a slave exchange pre-empted any possibility that the café could be a public, democratic space.

A “New” Exchange

Architectural historian Samuel Wilson, Jr. argues that the practice of combining business activities with the social functions of a coffee house first occurred in New Orleans in 1806 with the opening of the Café de la Bourse (Exchange Coffee House) on the uptown side of Conti Street between Levee (Decatur) and Chartres Streets.21 Commenting on that same establishment in an 1806 letter to Congress, Jeremiah Brown noted that until the recent opening of this “first commercial exchange,” trade had largely been restricted “to the late gloomy midnight traffic in which all was contraband.”22 He opined that this new business was one of the “particulars” which helped New Orleans “assume the appearance of a real American city” because now commercial activity could be “a pleasing approximation of our commercial habits to those of the parent states.”23 Visiting from Pennsylvania, Brown likely associated the apparent “progress” of New Orleans with the recent takeover by the American government. His paternalistic tone suggests he was aware of the city’s long-held reputation as an economic failure under the mercantilist practices of colonial rule.24 For Brown, the 1806 opening of the Café de la Bourse represented the implementation of a legitimate and successful economic system based on “enlightened” American policies of free market capitalism. However, what Brown may not have

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23Ibid.
realized was that the Conti Street operation was hardly the first exchange-oriented coffee house in the area. Although Brown was aware of the contraband and smuggling in New Orleans, he may not have known that these business activities had long been part of the daily practices in New Orleans cafes, cabarets, and taverns under the French and later Spanish occupation.\(^{25}\) This “rogue” economy depended on intimate relationships with pirates, marons, slaves, and local Indian groups.\(^{26}\) New Orleans was not dependent on American intervention for its prosperity. It had long enjoyed a certain amount of economic success by implementing its own version of free market practices with actors who operated outside of the confines of official Atlantic trade routes.\(^{27}\) Coffee houses, taverns and grog shops were especially favored as meeting spots because the business transactions could be conducted under the guise of sociability. Local authorities took little action to shut down these underground operations because they would have been disrupting a trade in which they themselves were key participants for much of the colonial period.\(^{28}\)

However, by the time Brown made his observations about the “first” exchange, the Café de la Bourse was probably a new type of coffee house operation for the city.\(^{29}\) In the years immediately following the American takeover, the increase in population and the accompanying increase in economic activity demanded the development of more formal commercial institutions.


\(^{26}\) Dawdy, 2008.

\(^{27}\) Dawdy, 2008; 130-135. See also Usner, 1992.

\(^{28}\) Powell, 2012; 104.

\(^{29}\) New Orleans newspapers from 1804 refer to an establishment called the “Commercial Coffee House,” which was located on Royal Street. Despite the name, there is no evidence that this café was a formal commercial exchange. However, like many other cafes, including the Café de la Bourse, it contained a reading room where subscribers could read the available newspapers. See Orleans Gazette and Commercial Advertiser, January 9, 1804 (New Orleans, LA).
to facilitate the exchange of goods, services, and information. Unlike much of the activity in colonial Louisiana coffee houses, the transactions which occurred in this new kind of space were legal, resulting in city records, newspaper advertisements, and other archival material for historians to analyze. This paper trail of primary evidence allows us to get behind official government policy to explore the day-to-day activities of people who interacted in the café. Thus, the significance of the Café de la Bourse as a part of the commercial and intellectual development of New Orleans is hard to dismiss.

Newspaper ads make it clear that from its first years of operation, the Café de la Bourse, was a place for both commercial and social activity. The name itself is not a trademarked name, but rather a designation that speaks to its multi-purpose public function. It was indeed a bourse, or commercial exchange, but it was also a “café” or coffee house, where customers could purchase and consume coffee and other refreshments. A public notice in an 1807 issue of The Moniteur announced that one could find café au lait on offer every morning and café à l’eau (black coffee), every afternoon. The same article notes the café offered dinner and desserts each day, provided by an “excellent traiteur and confectioner, recently arrived from Paris.” The proprietor promised that his patrons will “without a doubt be satisfied with all the goodness” that he is prepared to give them. An 1809 advertisement reads “GREEN TURTLE - a few Turtle will be cooked this day at the Exchange Coffee House. Families can be supplied.”

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30. Although Americans were part of the increase in population, many of the new arrivals came from the Caribbean, especially from Saint Domingue/Haiti and Cuba. The impact of the Saint Domingan emigres will be covered in more detail in the next chapter.


32. In France in the 17th and 18th centuries, a traiteur was someone who was licensed by a guild to prepare certain foods to sell. The word is roughly equivalent to “caterer” today.


Each of these ads helps to situate the daily social activities of the café within a transatlantic space. The coffee that was served each morning and afternoon is itself a reminder of the city’s links to international trade routes, particularly the Caribbean. In 1806, the year the café opened, ships arrived with bags of coffee from Havana, Martinique, Marigalante, and Santo Domingo. Within twenty years ships would also regularly bring coffee from Jamaica and Brazil so that in the years before the Civil War, New Orleans was the major entry point for coffee in the United States. When ships arrived in port, newspapers routinely listed the items for sale in the vessels’ cargo holds, and bags of green coffee were commonly on offer. Although it is unknown how much coffee houses charged their patrons for a cup of coffee, price lists from those same newspapers reveal that a pound of coffee was significantly cheaper than a pound of tea, which came from farther away in East Asia and India. Coffee was also considerably cheaper than wine, brandy, and even locally produced rum and whiskey. Its affordable price was the first step to setting the café up as a “penny university,” a claim some scholars have made about early English coffee houses. At the very least, the price and availability of coffee would have made it an affordable refreshment, making the café where it was served attractive to both rich and poor alike.

By the early nineteenth century, the nouvelle cuisine of France was widely regarded as a mark of sophistication and elegance and had been since the mid-1700s. Some biographers of

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35 From shipping notices found in the Orleans Gazette, March 23, 1806, May 3, 1806, and July 26, 1806. Marigalante is a Caribbean island near Guadeloupe.
37 A commodities price list in the Orleans Gazette, October 20, 1086, a pound of coffee cost 35 cents a pound while a pound of tea cost $1.42 for the same amount.
38 Spang, 2000; 48-49. The “new” cuisine, which developed in mid-18th century France, emphasized the natural flavors of delicately prepared food as a reaction against the heavily spiced foods of the Middle Ages and the over-the-top preparations of Louis XIV’s court. See
Thomas Jefferson claim that his own admiration for French culture contributed to widespread American interest in French food. 39 The recent purchase of Louisiana from France also enhanced its popularity among Americans.40 A Paris-trained traiteur and confectioner, as opposed to a local chef or cook, would have been attractive not only to the large French-speaking population of Louisiana but to Americans and other travelers as well, at least to those in the upper classes. In papers from a city that saw many well-travelled visitors, the ads speak to a desire by the owners of the Café de la Bourse to capture customers’ interests by emphasizing the space’s worldly elegance.

The offering of turtle was not especially unusual nor was it particularly French nor unique to New Orleans. However, the fact that green turtles were available for sale in New Orleans results from its location on the Caribbean-transatlantic trade routes. Turtle soup had been served in London since the early 1700s, and throughout the century, its popularity spread to North American seaports. Ships sailing from the western Atlantic or the Caribbean would often bring in their holds live green turtles, which they then auctioned to tavern and inn keepers right at the docks of port cities.41 Since café owners took out ads for the sole purpose of informing potential patrons that turtle soup was available, it was clearly a popular product despite its

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40 *The Oxford Companion to American Food and Drink*, (ed) Andrew F. Smith (New York, NY: Oxford University Press USA, 2007); 238
reputation as an expensive luxury.\textsuperscript{42} Weighing up to 500 pounds, green turtle took considerable skill to dress, and it contained a generous amount of meat. When the soup was prepared it typically took place in the commercial kitchens of cafes and taverns and not in private homes.\textsuperscript{43} Thus, turtle soup was to some extent, a public endeavor in that large groups of people were invited to come together to take part in the feast.\textsuperscript{44} Of course, that “public” was almost exclusively male since women did not patronize coffee houses and taverns on either side of the Atlantic.\textsuperscript{45} However, the ad also informs readers that “families can be supplied.” In other words, for those families who could pay, dressed green turtle meat or soup could be delivered to private homes, possibly by one of the slaves who worked there. The offer to supply families with turtle frequently appears in early nineteenth century advertisements, suggesting residents made regular use of this delivery service. One ad offered to deliver the product to families “in all parts of the city.”\textsuperscript{46} In this way, the services of the café extended beyond the walls of its physical space, allowing people who were not physically present some access to what it had to offer. Of course, if food could be passed along to all parts of the city, it is likely that the ideas which flowed through the café could be transmitted in the same manner.

The Café de la Bourse was not just a source of sustenance and refreshment. This particular café was also, for a time, the official “bourse,” or commercial exchange, for New

\textsuperscript{42} In the coffee-house ads that I researched, which dated from primarily from 1790 to 1830, there were few references to specific food items prepared by coffee house kitchens, with the exception of turtle.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{44} Food historian Jack Hitt argues that massive parties called “turtle frolics” were 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} century equivalents of an upscale pig roast that might be held today. See Jack Hitt, “Whatever Happened to Turtle Soup: On the Hunt for a Lost American Delicacy.” \textit{Saveur Magazine}, October 14, 2015 http://www.saveur.com.
\textsuperscript{45} Ellis, 2004.
\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Orleans Gazette and Commercial Advertiser}, Advertisement, August 25, 1819 (New Orleans, LA).
Orleans. This meant that the café was an auction house, a place where merchants could bid on large quantities of goods for resale and also where private individuals could bid on large ticket items such as land, livestock, furniture, and slaves. On August 19, 1806, a notice was published in the *Louisiana Gazette* stating that the coffee house would be open for business the following Thursday. One of the first tasks planned at its opening was to “appoint a committee of five persons to manage the business of the institution for the current year.”\(^{47}\) The secretary of that committee, P. F. Dubourg, announced in that same paper that he and his business partner, C. B. Dufau, were relocating their brokerage firm to the back buildings of the house “now taken for the exchange.”\(^{48}\) Within a few months other brokers had begun to add “Exchange Coffee House” to their advertisements to indicate that the café, and not their private residence or office, was now the site for the sale of their wares. One of the earliest of these ads appeared in the April 23, 1807 issue of the *Orleans Gazette and Commercial Advertiser*. Joseph Faurie announced “For Sale, For Cash on the 20\(^{th}\) of May at the Exchange Coffee House….A house now occupied by Mr. Forstal, situated in Magazin Street, in the Suburb St. Mary.”\(^{49}\) Other early ads list for sale at the café “the fast sailing registered schooner *Sukey & Polly*,”\(^{50}\) 10,000 pieces of “pine pickets,”\(^{51}\) a plantation,\(^{52}\) and more ominously, “a negro man named Joseph.”\(^{53}\) These ads rarely provided an address for the café because there was no need; the exchange quickly became a well-known

\(^{47}\) P.F. DuBourg, “Exchange Coffee House.” Public Notice, *Louisiana Gazette*, August 19, 1806 (New Orleans, LA). This chamber de commerce was appointed by the counseil de ville.

\(^{48}\) Ibid.

\(^{49}\) *Orleans Gazette and Commercial Advertiser*, April 23, 1807 (New Orleans, LA)

\(^{50}\) *Orleans Gazette and Commercial Advertiser*, July 27, 1807 (New Orleans, LA)

\(^{51}\) *Orleans Gazette and Commercial Advertiser*, September 21, 1807 (New Orleans, LA)

\(^{52}\) *Orleans Gazette and Commercial Advertiser*, June 6, 1810 (New Orleans, LA).

\(^{53}\) Ibid.
landmark in the city.\footnote{Wilson, 1989; 193. There were no standard numbered street addresses at that time; however, merchants would frequently list cross streets in order to direct customers.} The fact that other merchants used the exchange to direct potential customers to their own places of business gives us a sense of the café’s importance. In 1810, Mrs. Van Pradelles announced the opening of her boarding house, “in Conti street, almost directly opposite the Exchange Coffee-House, where gentlemen can be accommodated in a style equal to any boarding house in the city.”\footnote{Louisiana Gazette, May 30, 1810 (New Orleans, LA). According to the Vieux Carre Digital Survey at the Historic New Orleans Collection, the Van Pradelles mansion house was located near the uptown-lake corner of Conti and Chartres, which would put it across the street from the 1810 location of the Café de la Bourse.}

By 1811, the commercial activity of the city outgrew the Conti Street location, and a larger exchange café opened in a building that had been recently constructed by architects Claude Gurlie and Joseph Guillot at the northwest, or downtown-lake corner of St. Louis and Chartres Streets.\footnote{Wilson, 1989. 195.} Bernard Tremoulet, who operated an inn on Levee Street across from the French Market, became proprietor of the business, which he called the Commercial Coffee House. At first Tremoulet had unofficially referred to his coffee house as the “new exchange,”\footnote{See Louisiana Courier, June 28, 1811 (New Orleans, LA).} but on August 14, 1811, a notice in the \textit{Louisiana Courier} formally announced that the merchants of the city had met and decided that “the Exchange Coffee-House has been transferred from the former place to the Commercial Coffee-House corner of Chartres and St. Louis streets.”\footnote{Louisiana Courier, August 14, 1811 (New Orleans, LA).} Tremoulet managed the “new exchange” until 1814, when his financial difficulties forced the building’s owners to cancel his lease.

After he was ousted from the Gurlie and Guillot building, Tremoulet ran another café in the city and claimed that this new business was now \textit{the} Exchange Coffee House. This caused
concern for Pierre Maspero, who had taken over Tremoulet’s old lease for the building at Chartres and St. Louis and who believed that he, not Tremoulet, now operated the New Exchange. On September 14, 1814, Maspero published a notice in the *Louisiana Courier* making public his objection to Tremoulet’s claim:

I have been somewhat surprised at seeing in the newspapers an advertisement announcing that Mr. Tremoulet has removed his Exchange Coffee House; I take the liberty to inform the public that the Exchange Coffee House formerly kept by him is always at the same place and has not been removed, and that the said establishment now under my care is known under the name of the New Exchange Coffee House. Mr. Tremoulet has only removed his private business and coffee-house to another place.

P. Maspero

Maspero’s squabble with Tremoulet was well-warranted. To be known as the official exchange coffee house was important for the commercial opportunities the designation would bring. When Maspero died in 1822, Harvey Elkins took over the Exchange for two years, and then James Hewlett became the proprietor. Hewlett held that position for the remainder of the time that the *Café de la Bourse* was in operation. Under Hewlett, the coffee house remained the primary commercial exchange for the city until the St. Louis Hotel and Exchange replaced it in 1838.

To be sure, customers and brokers often used the surname of the current proprietor when referring to the café. It is quite common to find primary documents pertaining to the Chartres and St. Louis Street building describing it as “Maspero’s Exchange” or, after 1825, as “Hewlett’s Exchange” or “Hewlett’s Coffee House.”

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59 *Louisiana Courier*, September 14, 1814 (New Orleans, LA). The story of Maspero’s objections to Tremoulet as well as the translation of the notice comes from Wilson, 1989: 204-205.
60 The 1823 and 1824 City Directories of New Orleans list “Harvey Elkins, New Exchange, 129 Chartres cor. St. Louis.”
61 Wilson, 1989.
However, as late as 1834, the café was also still known as the “New Exchange.” In November of that year, John H.B. Latrobe wrote in his journal, “From the Theatre we went to the French coffee house or as the sign over the door proclaims it to be the New Exchange.” Three years later in 1837, the building that had housed the café was torn down. Only then was the café referred to as “old.” In December 1837, New Orleans resident Jean Boze wrote to his employer Henri de Ste. Gme in France and informed him that “the old exchange at Chartres and St. Louis” was being torn down and replaced by a three-story building. But even in its final years, with other auction houses and brokerage firms in operation, the exchange component of the café remained a crucial part of its daily business. A notice in the *New Orleans Argus* from March 26, 1834 announced that “a certain square of ground with all its improvements thereon, situated in the faubourg Annunciation, above the city” would be sold on “Monday, 28th April next, at 1 o’clock PM, at the New Exchange coffee house, corner of Chartres and St Louis streets.”

Campanella notes that in the early nineteenth century, the area surrounding the Exchange was the commercial nucleus of New Orleans. One historian of the slave

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63 Jean Boze to Henri de Ste Gme, personal letter December 18, 1837, Folder 280, Sainte-Geme Family Papers, MSS 100, Historic New Orleans Collection. This three-story building housed the much larger St. Louis Hotel and Exchange, and it eventually occupied the entire block along St. Louis Street, from Royal to Chartres. A remnant of the old St. Louis Hotel on Chartres Street still has part of the word “Exchange” painted on it. This is approximately the sight of the Exchange Café operated by Tremoulet, Maspero, and Hewlett. The “three-story building” that stands today (2017) is currently the site of the Omni Royal Orleans Hotel.

64 “Sheriff’s Sale” *New Orleans Argus*, March 26, 1834. New Orleans, LA.

65 Campanella, 2008, 174. Specifically, Campanella describes the nucleus as “around the upper Royal and Chartres intersections to Canal Street.” Both locations of the Café de la Bourse fell within this area.
trade argues that in 1819, it was hard for anyone to come to New Orleans without being taken to Maspero’s.\textsuperscript{66} Although the sale of real estate and slaves dominated the business transactions which occurred in the café, it was not unusual to find other common objects of daily life on offer there as well. Contemporary newspapers are filled with ads promoting the sale of these goods. J. Lecarpentier offered flour “in lots of 50 barrels, now on board the ship Speculation.”\textsuperscript{67} Another gentleman advertised “a gold watch and seal.”\textsuperscript{68} The inventory taken of the contents of the café shortly after Maspero’s sudden death in 1822 indicates that two different merchants had tasked him with selling “about thirty boxes of refined loaf sugar”\textsuperscript{69} as well as “forty-eight maps of Mexico, sent on from Philadelphia.”\textsuperscript{70} Maspero also owned a “picture and looking glass store” on the first floor of the building next door to the Café de La Bourse along Chartres Street.\textsuperscript{71}

According to an 1819 ad in the Courrier, “Maspero & Co” sold, in addition to pictures frames and mirrors, forte-pianos, paint boxes, pencil cases, ladies’ dresses, thermometers, barometers, spectacles, knives and forks, compasses, writing desks, hair brushes, pocket books, and a host of other items.\textsuperscript{72}

Clearly, a variety of household wares were sold as part of the daily business of the Exchange Café, either through Maspero’s adjacent shop or by way of the café’s daily auctions. When Pierre Maspero was the proprietor, the cafe was the only one of the four

\textsuperscript{67} \textit{Orleans Gazette and Commercial Advertiser}, March 21, 1818 (New Orleans, LA).
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{69} Petition of Henry W. Palfrey, Sept. 11, 1822 in Petition Papers of Peter Maspero, Court of Probates, M Surnames, 1822, New Orleans Public Library, p. 210
\textsuperscript{70} Petition of Edward Turner, Nov. 19, 1822 in Petition Papers of Peter Maspero, Court of Probates, M Surnames, 1822, New Orleans Public Library, p. 213.
\textsuperscript{71} Paxton’s City Directory of New Orleans, 1822.
\textsuperscript{72} “Maspero & Co” \textit{La Courrier de la Louisiane}, October 1, 1819 (New Orleans, LA).
auction houses in the city to conduct public sales seven days a week. According to the City Directory of 1822, the other three auction houses in New Orleans were open only two or three days a week.73 The more extensive auction times of Maspero’s Exchange Café suggest that the volume of business transactions that passed through his establishment was probably greater than that of other commercial auction spaces. That local newspapers from 1810 to 1830 contained more ads for the Exchange Coffee House than for any other auction house seems to support this claim. More business activity likely meant more customers occupying the space of the café more regularly and for longer periods of time. The café’s location in a city on the transatlantic and Mississippi-Caribbean trade routes contributed to the variety of commodities available for trade just as those same trade routes contributed to the diversity of people who bought and sold those same goods. Buyers and sellers with a wide range of needs would have been attracted to the mix of goods offered. This mix is significant because the exchange of physical commodities was accompanied by a significant exchange of information. In fact, it was in large part because of its function as a commercial exchange that the café was well-situated to be a source of intellectual exchange as well.

**The Coffee House as Creolized Classroom**

Like similar exchange coffee houses in the major cities of Europe, Lloyd’s of London, for example, the *Café de la Bourse*, both the Conti and Chartres Street locations, served as a clearing-house for shipping information forwarded by captains and directors of other exchange coffee houses in other transatlantic ports. Early New Orleans

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73 *Paxton’s City Directory of New Orleans, 1822.* The other auction houses included that of F. Dutillet, who operated on Wednesday and Sunday; McCoy and Scallan, open on Monday, Thursday, and Saturday; and Mossy and Alpuente, open on Tuesdays.
newspapers regularly featured a column entitled “From the Coffee House Books” which provided news of ships’ arrivals and departures in ports from all along the transatlantic trade routes – not just those at the Port of New Orleans. In one column from July 23, 1807, readers in New Orleans were advised that the *Savage Rosanna* was due to arrive in Liverpool on July 22. They also learned that the ship *Hazard* “sailed from Bordeaux for New Orleans about April 30.”

To be sure, shipping and commercial news was not limited to the “Coffee House” column of these New Orleans newspapers. Indeed, a large portion of these early nineteenth-century publications was taken up with such details – either to timetables of ships at the Port of New Orleans or to price lists of recently arrived cargo. Merchants and brokers who owned the cargo also regularly posted ads in these papers about the goods they had for sale – the names of ships the goods had arrived on and when and where the items would be sold (many of them up for auction at the Exchange Coffee House). But that column title – *From the Coffee House Books* – makes evident that newspaper editors collected certain intelligence about shipping, particularly information regarding vessels outside of the Port of New Orleans from documents or ledgers kept at coffee houses that were also commercial exchanges, or from the patrons themselves. Merchants obtained some of this information at the docks as they met with the crews who transported their goods. They then transmitted this information to news editors, often via the café.

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75 I have not yet been able to locate the original ledgers, only the reprints of the information in newspapers.

Moreover, people travelling to New Orleans on these very ships (either crew or passengers) would bring the knowledge with them from ports afar and then share it with others at the coffee house.

The name of the column itself speaks to newspaper editors’ reliance on coffee houses to provide information for their papers. Their dependence on coffee houses was so profound that editors endeavored to get as close as possible to their news source. In May of 1812, the editors of the *Orleans Gazette* announced that their printing and publishing office was “now established in the buildings at the rear of the Exchange Coffee House, where Advertisements, Ship News, and Commercial Information will be respectfully solicited and punctually attended to.” This close physical connection between the Café de la Bourse and newspapers continued for the entire lifespan of the coffee house. In the mid-1830s the offices of the newspaper *The Bee* were located at the corner of Chartres and St. Louis Streets, directly across the street from the Exchange Coffee-House.

Because so much information about shipping and commercial activity was centered around the Exchange Coffee House, it naturally attracted individuals who desired that specific kind of knowledge. The March 20, 1807 issue of the *Louisiana Gazette* informed readers that the brig Franklin along with “her guns, ammunition, tackle, etc.” would be up for auction at the Exchange Coffee House on the following

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Coffee House. In his memoirs, he described his experiences at the docks as he oversaw the loading and sale of cotton. He wrote of sometimes accompanying the loads to market. He also described several meetings he had with various bankers and merchants at the “Exchange.” Nolte directly supplied news to the press on at least one occasion. In 1814, he published an unflattering letter in the *Friends of the Laws* regarding an American general. The letter led to a duel between Nolte and a family member of the offended general. Both parties survived the duel.


78 City Directory of New Orleans 1834.
Saturday. An individual interested in purchasing the *Franklin* would have then appeared at the auction alongside others who had read the same advertisement – others who were also interested in the brig or in something else advertised for sale in the same paper, perhaps the “130 puncheons high proof rum from Demerara.” But when coffee houses circulated information about ships, prices, and commodities, they circulated other kinds of information as well. The placement of newspaper offices on site helped to situate the coffee house as an important source of all types of news and information. The same page that contained the ads for the brig and the rum also included a wedding announcement of a prominent newspaper editor as well as the text of several court depositions, and a reprint of a letter to Congress from the Orleans Legislature regarding the recent arrest of Aaron Burr. Customers would go to the Exchange and encounter others who had access to the same news stories. They would then come in contact with additional café patrons who had read similar stories as well as altogether different accounts in other newspapers in other places. Thus, long distance trade meant a traffic in news almost as immediately as a traffic in commodities. Because the *Café de La Bourse* was the primary source of daily shipping information, it also became a key location to obtain other news each day as well.

Benedict Anderson argues that in the colonial period throughout the Americas, the print office often emerged as the key to the communication and intellectual life of a community in part because the printer was usually the journalist who collected and wrote the news. These early colonial gazettes actually began as appendages of the market. But

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80 Ibid.
81 Ibid.
then they became something more; alongside the commercial news they had always
carried, they began to include other news from the metropole – colonial appointments,
marriages of the wealthy, as well as additional snippets of daily life. This commercial
news/daily life association created “an imagined community among a specific
assemblage of fellow readers” to whom these ships, these weddings, those prices, and
those stories belonged. 82 Over time, the papers also began to include world events and
political commentary, and naturally the “assemblage of readers” developed opinions
about those topics. But the printer-journalists’ main problem was figuring out how to
reach readers. To combat this, Anderson notes, printers often developed an alliance with
the post-master. In many cases the post-master and printer in a community were one and
the same.83 The Café de la Bourse illustrates Anderson’s claim to some extent. Although
there is no evidence that the on-site editor of the Orleans Gazette was also the post
master, the daily activities at the café did include postal services. Early in Tremoulet’s
proprietorship he promised that he would “pay the greatest attention to letter bags which
merchants or captains may leave at the Exchange Coffee-House, and will take charge of
said letter bags with expense or compensation.” 84

But in New Orleans, journalists had no need to rely solely on the mail to
disseminate the news they wrote about. In addition to the Orleans Gazette, customers had
access to a variety of other newspapers and reading material right in the café. From its
earliest days on Conti Street, the Café de la Bourse offered a reading room for its

2006); 62-64.
83 Anderson, 2006; 61
84 Louisiana Courrier August 14, 1811 (New Orleans, LA).
customers. At the Conti Street location, both the reading room and the café occupied the ground floor of a two-story building, giving patrons fairly easy access to the reading material. They could easily pop in off the street to check the news and discuss their findings as they enjoyed refreshments and conducted their business. Although this arrangement may have encouraged reading, access to the material was, perhaps, too easy because in October 1810, someone walked off with the café’s files of the newspaper *Friend of the Laws*. A notice published in the *Louisiana Gazette* asked that whoever “borrowed” the files should please return them because “the papers were filed with the intention of accommodating the gentlemen who frequent the Coffee Room, but not to be taken out of doors.” In describing the theft of “files” of the paper, the notice indicates the café kept back issues or perhaps more than one copy, allowing multiple readers to pore over the information at the same time in the same space. Clearly the café was busy with readers and activity because no one witnessed the theft, and the owners had to resort to a public appeal for the papers’ return.

In the larger Café de la Bourse on Chartres and St. Louis, the reading room was moved upstairs in 1814, and it became less public because this time a subscription fee of five dollars was required for access. After a certain number of subscriptions were obtained, no one else would be admitted without an introduction by a previous subscriber. Maspero advised that in the room “will be preserved files of the principal Gazettes in the United States, also charts, maps, and books relating to Geography,

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85 Wilson, 1989.
86 *Louisiana Gazette*, October 9, 1810 (New Orleans, LA).
commerce, &c &c."\(^8^8\) The inventory taken at Maspero’s death does not describe the
details of the publications in the room, but in 1822, New Orleans published six daily
newspapers: the *Louisiana Courier*, the *Orleans Gazette and Commercial Advertiser*, the
*Louisiana Advertiser*, the *Friend of the Laws*, the *Louisiana Gazette*, and one weekly
paper, the *Commercial Report*.\(^8^9\) We can assume at the very least, that these six
publications were included in the reading room’s offering. Ads for activities taking place
at the Exchange appeared in each of these papers, suggesting that their readers could be
counted on as potential customers and reading room subscribers. How much reading was
going on is difficult to say, but coffee house operating hours indicate it could have been a
considerable amount. According to an 1831 city ordinance, coffee houses could be open
in winter from 5 o’clock in the morning until 8 o’clock at night.\(^9^0\) Those hours were
extended in the summer to 9 o’clock. In contrast, the hours for the reading room of the
New Orleans Library Society were far more limited. It was opened only from 10:00 AM
until 1:00 PM.\(^9^1\)

The coffee house reading room, perhaps even more than the library, undoubtedly
helped to engender both a more widespread literacy and an approach to the printed word
as a source of information that was currently significant, in other words, “news.” That
information was then debated in the public space of the coffee house. This then led to the
development of a “public” opinion about the ideas generated by that debate.\(^9^2\) Anderson

\(^8^8\) Ibid.
\(^8^9\) Paxton’s City Directory of New Orleans, 1822.
\(^9^0\) Ordinances and Resolutions of City of New Orleans, (New Orleans, LA: Jerome Bayon,
1831).
\(^9^1\) Paxton’s City Directory of New Orleans, 1822.
asserts that, in the Americas, the communities which developed as a result of these reading “publics” help to explain the “creole” nationalisms of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These “creole pioneers,” as he calls them, helped transform European colonies in the Americas into independent nation-states. United by language, economic interests, and distance from the metropole, they formed opinions based largely on the print-journalism that was available to them – opinions which often took shape as anti-metropolitan resistance. The community then began to imagine itself as its own national entity separate from the imperial power.\footnote{93} We may wonder, though, how the situation in early nineteenth century New Orleans complicated this process. Nourished by diverse points of view spoken in multiple languages, the public culture that developed in New Orleans coffee houses was undoubtedly different. The epistemic diversity which accompanied the transatlantic population of the café paved the way for a “public” that was not defined solely in terms of creole colonial resistance. Many of the patrons may have considered themselves to be “Creole” in that they were locally born but with French or Spanish blood. But the day-to-day business of the coffee house brought together ideas which changed with the arrival and departure of each new passenger from each new ship. These entanglements made possible not merely a static “Creole” community, but a fluid “creolized” community as well – one which incorporated ongoing, transnational circuits of public opinion that were not dependent upon a single language or a bounded political territory.

\footnote{93} See the Chapter “Creole Pioneers” in \textit{Imagined Communities}. Anderson refers to all of the European and part European settlers in the Americas as “creoles,” including those in British North America.
Limitations of the “Public”

Just how these transatlantic intellectual exchanges defined what was and was not “public” is the subject of the last section of this chapter. If we consider that the gathering, dissemination and exchange of news is an intellectual endeavor, then the Café de la Bourse was a center of significant educational activity paralleling the intellectualism of the early coffee houses of England and of salons in France. When Habermas describes English coffee houses and French salons as sites where the emergence of a democratic public sphere took place, he points to the fact that it was through these spaces that private individuals had access to information that they decided was of public concern. Like English coffee houses, French salons were also places for news-gathering and critical debate. But they were also known for the dissemination of good manners and sociability among “polite society” in an elegant setting. In other words, the salon was not a space for the common man or woman. And because they were held primarily in the private homes of upper class women, and one had to be invited to participate, salons may have lacked the “public” element inherent in English coffee houses. In the transatlantic environment of New Orleans, these two functions could intersect to some degree in local cafes.

The Café de la Bourse combined elements of the English coffee house and the French salon. It embraced the news gathering and exchange function of the coffee house, as well as the elegant setting and exclusiveness of the French salon. Like its English and French counterparts, the establishment helped to situate New Orleans as part of the Republic of Letters. Ideas were discussed in at least two languages (French and English) and probably more (Spanish, Italian, German). In 1822, three of the six papers published in New Orleans were printed in French as

well as in English. Auction notices in both languages often appeared side-by-side in these papers, making it clear that it welcomed both Anglo and Creole customers. Like an English coffee-house, it provided a subscription-based reading room and mail services. Like a French café, the Exchange traded in a variety of libations, both alcoholic and non-alcoholic. Like a French salon, it served up information and sociability in a sumptuous setting, encouraging customers to linger over their conversations and business dealings. In 1830, James Hewlett made a special point to upgrade the interior of the building to incorporate French décor, perhaps as a Creole protest to the drifting of the city’s business upriver to the American section of the city.

But located in New Orleans, the café was not merely an amalgamation of English and French traditions. It also offered its patrons a new experience interpreted through a transatlantic lens. John H.B. Latrobe’s 1834 description of the “New Exchange” café speaks to this unique blend:

> It is a very large room with two columns in the center aiding to support the ceiling. From the last are suspended four splendid chandeliers that make a blaze of light in the apartment. Around the walls are the usual notices of an exchange, sales, arrival departure, &c, &c. .. The Coffee house has always a crowd of frequenters who lounge and get and relate the news, and comprising people from every quarter of the globe who are here gathered together in the commercial bustle of a great mart.

The elegant French furnishings recall the environment of French salons. However, the interactions in the café were not private affairs. In New Orleans, a café like the Café de la Bourse

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95 Like most “coffee houses” in New Orleans, the Café de la Bourse was also what we might today think of as a bar or tavern. This blended use of space is examined more fully in the next chapter on the Café des Refugies.


may have been a way to bring the private exclusivity of the salon to the public. The men came
together temporarily as a public to debate matters of common concern and then returned to their
private lives, the planter to his plantation, the tailor to his shop, the sailor to his ship.

Corroborating Latrobe’s experience was American traveler Joseph Holt Ingraham, whose
1835 travel diary also recalls the opulent French furnishings as well as the English-style
camaraderie of the coffee house. Ingraham’s writings, in particular, speak to its complex
environment. This was not just a place for serious business and basic refreshment, but also a
place to relax and enjoy others’ company in comfort. In fact, Ingraham was so struck by the
blending of business and pleasure that occurred at the café, that he saw this as a key trait of the
Creole community that he came to observe. He writes:

Some were alternately sipping negus98 and puffing their segars, which are as
indispensable necessaries to a Creole at all times…Others were reading
newspapers, and occasionally assisting their comprehension of abstruse
paragraphs, by hot “coffee,” alias warm punch and slings….the active
attendants were flying in all directions through the spacious room, at the beck
and call of customers, who continued their conversations as intently and as
comfortably as in their homes.99

Perhaps Ingraham’s lack of familiarity with New Orleans-style cafes leads him to
conclude patrons had to disguise their consumption of alcohol. Nevertheless, he was
clearly impressed with the multipurpose functionality of the space, and he recognized
how different it was from the coffee houses he knew in the Northeast.

Ingraham noted a marked difference between attitudes of the staid Bostonians he
knew back home and the Creoles of New Orleans who “do not, like those of Boston,

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98 A warm drink made from wine, lemon, sugar, and spices.
1835); 114.
attach any disapprobation to the [coffee] houses or their visiters [sic].” Ingraham observes that there was “no clique or aristocracy” among the patrons of the cafe and no “fixed criterion of what is and what is not respectable.” Unlike in Boston, there were no laws of a long established society regulating men’s movements. In New Orleans, each man was able to mind his own affairs, pursue his own business or amusement, and let his neighbors and fellow-citizens do the same, “without the fear of the moral lash”

Ingraham notes a certain degree of freedom and equality in the cafes and taverns of New Orleans. That it was not found in Boston, a city far closer to English traditions than Creole New Orleans, and a traditional locus of American democracy is surprising. But New Orleans is not English, and in the early nineteenth century, it was not yet American. It was a transatlantic space that drew from the diverse array of traditions that this designation implies. There were other forces at play that contributed to the unique civic nature of these spaces. It is possible that notions of freedom and democracy were creolized by the influence of transatlantic constructions of these terms. Informed not just by the Western European Enlightenment, but also by the ongoing influx of African, Indian, Caribbean, and Latin influences, these concepts differed from those which predominated in the largely protestant, Anglo-American culture of Ingraham’s Boston.

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100 Ingraham, 115.
101 Women did not provide custom to New Orleans cafes or English coffee-houses. However, there are records in both places of female ownership of some of these establishments.
102 Ingraham, 116.
103 Ibid.
But the Café de la Bourse was a complex space that limited who could participate in its public function. In addition to the free exchange of ideas among customers also occurred the exchange of money for human chattel. Indeed, in the second and third decades of the nineteenth century, the Café de la Bourse was the primary site for slave auctions in New Orleans. As a place where human beings were bought and sold, the café was, in a significant way, the antithesis of a democratic public space. Newspaper listings reveal how common slave auctions were for the Exchange under Tremoulet, Maspero, and Hewlett. Ironically, the same trait that helped to stimulate the free exchange of diverse ideas, that is, the café’s role as a transatlantic trading center, also made possible its pre-eminence as a slave exchange. Baptist observes that the concentration of merchants buying and selling the wide variety of goods that were available at Maspero’s created a market for slaves. Along with cotton, or silk, or flour, or a building, one could buy people. The entrenched networks of trade at the Café de la Bourse “established access to supply, stimulated demand, and created a place where a purchaser could count on finding what he wanted.” A merchant might come to Maspero’s to auction his cotton. He might then trade his bill of exchange to another merchant for land. The seller of the land could then use this resulting bill of exchange to purchase slaves. Often the slaves themselves were not physically present; often, papers detailing the sale simply changed hands over a game of dominoes and a rum punch. In this way, the physical space of the Café de la Bourse made the sale of human beings nearly as easy as exchanging cards in a game of poker.

The U.S. Constitution had banned the transatlantic slave trade in 1808, yet the transatlantic trade itself encouraged the sale of slaves nonetheless. Many of the goods which

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104 Wilson, 1989.
105 Baptist, 2014; 87.
arrived via the transatlantic routes, goods which were part of the entrepreneurial activity at the coffee house, were used to generate funds to purchase slaves. These slaves were then taken along other trade routes and across state lines to buyers elsewhere. Thus, in spite of federal restrictions on slavery, spaces such as the Café de la Bourse, helped the institution remain a viable part of the global economy.

Of course, slaves were bought and sold in places other than in the Café de la Bourse, and in that regard, we might frame any location where slave transactions took place as detrimental to democracy. However, there exists another curious irony in the specific connection between coffee houses and slavery. In some ways, all coffee houses owed their very existence to human bondage. Coffee, more than any other beverage, has been most closely associated with the Enlightenment. Tom Standage argues that the diffusion of rationalism throughout Europe in the Age of Reason was mirrored by the spread of coffee, a drink “that promoted sharpness and clarity of thought.” William Ukers once said of coffee, “It has been the world’s most radical drink in that its function has always been to make people think. And when people begin to think, they become dangerous to tyrants.” It is significant that Habermas theorized that the democratic public sphere developed in seventeenth century English coffee houses, not ale houses. Yet coffee’s reputation as a thinking man’s beverage, one that encouraged the democratic exchange of ideas, is tempered by the fact that the people who did all the drinking and thinking were rarely the same ones who labored to produce the beverage. Coffee requires intensive labor to grow and harvest, and in the Caribbean and in South America, from where much of the coffee that landed in New Orleans originated, that meant slaves. Furthermore, the history of sugar is

107 Ibid, 134.
intimately tied to that of coffee. It was this readily available sweetener that made the bitter boiled brew palatable to consumers in the first place. Again, slaves were relied on to help cheaply and efficiently produce the needed sugar— which in turn drove up demand for coffee. And in New Orleans coffee houses, that sugar also made possible the rum that flowed as freely as the ideas and the coffee.

But it was within the complex space of the coffee house that slaves were able to circumvent some of the restrictions placed upon them. They were not without agency. The daily practices of the café enabled slaves to have a certain degree of “freedom,” which perhaps gave them some access to the café’s public culture. Marcus Christian argues that many early New Orleans coffee houses, such as Maspero’s, often used slaves as waiters.\textsuperscript{109} The 1822 inventory of the estate of Pierre Maspero gives names to some of the slaves who attended the coffee house patrons. We have John and Romain, who were both cooks; Gilbert, William, and Davis, who were all coachmen; Adam, a house servant, and Ferdinand, a billiard servant. A successful coffee house business would have needed people with each of these skills.\textsuperscript{110} Christian notes that demand in New Orleans for slaves with skills used in taverns and coffee houses was quite high. In particular, demand for slaves with skills as waiters, who circulated among the patrons, was especially great, and masters who hired out their slaves for such work could command an even higher price in this service if they could read or write.\textsuperscript{111} Since some degree of literacy was desirable for coffee house workers, we can assume that those who worked in such establishments had at least some form of education. Those who spoke multiple languages were especially


\textsuperscript{110} Inventory of the Estate of Peter Maspero, 1822.

\textsuperscript{111} Christian (n.d).
desirable. An early ad for waiters for the Exchange Coffee House on Conti Street stated that “preference will be given to those who speak English and French.”

Although these waiters would not have been able to sit and converse with the patrons of Maspero’s, they would have had access to the dialogues taking place as they worked. They could have actively listened to the intellectual exchanges around them, which they then may have discussed and debated among themselves and with others outside of the cafe. If they were literate, they could have further engaged with the many sources of printed information that circulated throughout the space. Although frowned on, teaching slaves to read and write was not officially illegal in Louisiana until 1830, so for the years that the Café de la Bourse was in existence, it was possible to find slaves with some degree of literacy. Even after anti-literacy laws were passed, some slaves learned basic reading and writing skills from their owners, from owners’ children or from other slaves even though there were penalties for both teacher and student if they were caught.

We may wonder what conversations they overheard. Undoubtedly, they learned of national and international events as customers discussed the topics covered in the reading room papers, perhaps topics related to the Napoleonic Wars, the Congress of Vienna, and the Revolutions of 1830. They most likely got an earful of local news as well, although that was not likely to be a result of newspaper discussions. Crete argues that early nineteenth century newspapers in New Orleans rarely commented on much local news, with the exception of the occasional editorial. She asserts that editors did not need to talk about local occurrences since people were talking about them at the docks and in the cafes anyway. There was no need to

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112 “Wanted to Hire” *Louisiana Gazette*, September 29, 1809 (New Orleans, LA)
publish what was already widely known.\footnote{Liliane Crete, \textit{Daily Life in Louisiana 1815-1830}. Trans. Patrick Gregory (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1981).} The richness of the coffee house conversations may have been further augmented by the fact that the merchants controlled what went in and what was left out of the newspapers. Because they paid for the ads, they controlled the content.\footnote{Benjamin H. Latrobe October 7, 1819 \textit{The Journals of Benjamin Henry Latrobe, 1799-1820}. Edited by John C. Van Horne and Lee W. Formwalk. (New Haven, CN; Yale University Press, 1980); 312. In this entry, Latrobe was surprised to learn that the merchants had enough power to keep the papers from reporting an outbreak of yellow fever. He was told by an editor that the merchants did not want any news published that might interfere with commercial activity.} Therefore, if one truly wanted to know what was going on in the city, one often needed to get the information from the merchants themselves. The Café de la Bourse, with its concentration of merchants gathering seven days a week, was the best place to obtain this knowledge.

The actual space of the coffee house may have also influenced how enslaved persons navigated the public culture. The inventory of Maspero’s estate lists that on the wall of the coffee house hung a copy of the United States Declaration of Independence, a picture of George Washington, and a large portrait of Napoleon. Perhaps these images, combined with newspapers and gazettes that surely brought news of affairs in Haiti, in France, in Washington, and elsewhere around the globe inspired patrons of the coffee house to talk about rights and revolution. The first two decades of the nineteenth century also brought immigrants from France and elsewhere in Europe, places from which people were fleeing the turmoil of the Reign of Terror and the Napoleonic Wars. Perhaps the café’s waiters interpreted these same images and the conversations they inspired through their own multi-ethnic perspective. The waiters themselves were part of the transatlantic environment of the café. John, the cook, and Ferdinand, the billiard
servant, were from Guinea. Romain was from Senegal. Adam was born in New Orleans, and William, Gilbert, and Davis were “American-born.”

We may wonder if they caught the irony of being slaves surrounded by images associated with democracy, freedom, and revolution. We may also wonder to what extent they saw themselves as complicit with slavery as their waiter tasks put them in proximity to customers who were actively engaged in the slave auctions that took place within the café. Coming from so many different locations, the waiters likely had very different experiences with slavery. How did a Senegalese man like Romain, who may have known freedom in his home country, make sense of the slavery of which he was now a part and which, in a way, he helped to perpetuate as he poured a perspective slave buyer a cup of coffee or a brandy? How did that compare to the opinions and ideas held by Adam, who was likely born enslaved? Finally, we may wonder the extent to which these slave waiters, and others like them, shared the ideas they encountered with other slaves. For instance, did Romain help Adam to imagine his freedom? And did Gilbert, the coachmen, transport ideas about freedom to other slaves as he transported customers to and from the café, or perhaps on his way to transport turtle soup to various parts of the city?

Moreover, to what extent did any thoughts of rights and freedom translate to action? In October 1819, two brothers named Roman offered a twenty-dollar reward for the return of a woman named Maria, “a good washer, born in this state, aged 25 years, middle-sized, having a very dark complexion and projecting eyes.” They had purchased Maria at Maspero’s Exchange a few weeks earlier and had left her locked in an upstairs meeting room while they finished their business about the city. When they returned for her a few hours later, she was

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117 New Orleans Public Library. Probate Court Records, Inventory of Pierre Maspero, October 1, 1822.
118 “Twenty Dollars Reward.” _Courier de la Louisiane_ October 19, 1819 (New Orleans, LA).
Maspero’s inventory indicates that the second floor of the building contained several borders’ rooms, storage rooms, a dining room, and several meeting rooms. There were numerous places where she could have hidden. The ad noted that she spoke both English and French, giving her access to more information to plan her escape. Her “owners” worried that she had found out about departing ships and warned “Masters of vessels and Others” to be on the lookout for her. Although there is no documentary evidence, it is plausible that Maria even received assistance in her getaway from one or more of Maspero’s slave workers, who went about their everyday tasks in the café, unobserved by most of the patrons, but with their own political opinions nonetheless. They could have helped to hide Maria in one of the many rooms until they deemed it safe for her to flee.

Although numerous early nineteenth century travelers to New Orleans visited the Café de la Bourse and left vivid descriptions of their experiences, few of these writers concerned themselves with the intellectual exchanges and political agency of the slaves who worked there. However, it is clear that observers did wonder about potential subversive activity among the café’s workers. In 1839, a few years after James Hewlett had taken over the ownership of the café, one newspaper devoted an entire editorial to dispel rumors of discontent among “Hewlett’s Negroes.” The author points out that Hewlett used nearly a dozen “negroes” as waiters and that “happier mortals do not exist on this earth.” The author claimed that the “negroes” did not care about politics or current events or anything else going on around them. They were content to “frisk, play, and sport about like young colts in a meadow” That the author had to go to such trouble to attest to the waiters’ “happiness” and their indifference to political matters is testament

119 Ibid
120 Inventory of Peter Maspero, 1822.
to increasing concern about what the waiters might have overheard in coffee houses and about how they might use that information. The author goes to great lengths to reassure readers of the workers’ political apathy. But the author’s vehemence in denying the waiters’ interest in the political discussions going on around them reveals that they were indeed not just aware of but also responsive to the ideas in their midst. Within the social space of the coffee house, even private conversations became public and the very action of serving coffee contributed to the flow of ideas within the space.

Habermas’ concept of the public sphere has been criticized for being elitist and in some ways, *not* democratic because it excludes those who have not been made ready, through status or education, to participate.122 Women, people of color, and the poor and working classes were often denied access to the formal institutions which provided the education and the means to be part of a public culture. To some extent the transatlantic interactions in early nineteenth century New Orleans resulted in daily practices which disrupted this pattern. However, the Café de la Bourse was first and foremost a commercial exchange. By and large, the customers would have had some connection with the commercial activity of the city. Although Tremoulet, Maspero, Elkins, and Hewlett played host to a wide range of visitors, both local and tourist, there is little evidence to suggest that free people of color, women, and common laborers visited the space with any frequency. But this is not the story of all coffee house culture in New Orleans. The next chapter interrogates ways in which emigres from Saint Domingue, bringing with them another layer of transatlantic influences, affected coffee house spaces. Among these emigres was a large, articulate free black community who expected to be part of public culture in New Orleans and

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who took actions to make sure this happened. The story of their experiences suggests that in some coffee houses, the “public” which made up the public sphere did indeed include people of color, both enslaved and free.
CHAPTER 5: THE CAFÉ DES RÉFUGIÉS

Notice

Forced by the fire on November 1st to temporarily close the establishment that has been known these last 12 years by the name of the Café des Réfugiés, I declare that the said title is my property, and I do not intend to relinquish it. On the contrary, as soon as the house is rebuilt, or as soon as I can find another suitable location, I will resume my business.

THIOT

On the morning of November 2, 1821, Jean Baptiste Hyacinthe Thiot gazed upon the building that housed his Café des Réfugiés on Rue St. Philippe, just below Levee Street, and he breathed a sigh of relief. A fire had broken out on the previous evening in the officers’ quarters of the navy barracks and had quickly spread to the nearby glass and pottery shop of Joseph Authement. Monsieur Authement’s store was located on the downtown lakeside corner of Levee and St. Philippe, next to Thiot’s café. Thiot was undoubtedly worried as he watched the fire eat away at the wooden structures that were so near his own place of business. By the wee hours of the next morning, both the officers’ quarters and Monsieur Authement’s shop had been completely consumed by the flames. But thanks to the calm weather and the quick action of a

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1 “Avis” Gazette de la Louisiane, January 1, 1822, Chris Tayeh, Trans. (New Orleans, LA).
2 The New Orleans City Directory of 1822, lists Jean Baptiste Thiot as a keeper of a coffee house at 6 Rue St. Philip between Old Levee and Conde Streets (Decatur and Chartres Streets). This corresponds to the modern 500 block of St. Philip Street, according to the Alphabetical and Numerical Index of Changes in Street Names and Numbers in the City Archives, New Orleans Public Library.
3 Because of the curvature of the Mississippi River, it is misleading to describe directions in New Orleans in terms of the four cardinal points. Local residents often prefer to express direction in terms of the four corners of the city: Uptown, Downtown, Riverside, Lakeside. I have used that convention in this dissertation.
4 According to the Vieux Carre Digital Survey at the Historic New Orleans Collection, Joseph Authement owned a building on the 500 block of St. Philip (using the modern street numbering system) from 1812 until 1827 when it was sold in a sheriff’s sale. His lot was at the corner of Old Levee (Decatur Street) and St. Phillip.
few local townspeople, the fire was contained before the Café des Réfugiés, Thiot’s home and livelihood, could be destroyed.\(^5\) To be sure, the building had been badly damaged, and Thiot would have to close temporarily, but he vowed he would reopen.\(^6\) On January 1, 1822, he published the above notice in the *Gazette de la Louisiane* assuring his patrons that he would soon resume his business.\(^7\)

Thiot had been the keeper of the Café des Réfugiés for twelve years. Born in Nantes, France, he had gone to Saint Domingue as a young man, settling near Petit Goave, a town on the southern peninsula about thirty-five miles west of Port au Prince. He lived there as a *petit blanc*\(^8\) until revolutionary turmoil on the island forced him to flee to Cuba with his family in the late 1790s.\(^9\) It is unclear exactly when Thiot left Saint Domingue. He stayed there at least until 1798

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\(^5\) "Marine Barracks; Mr. Authement." *Courier de la Louisiane*, November 5, 1821. (New Orleans, LA).

\(^6\) The New Orleans City Directory of 1822, lists Jean Baptiste Thiot as a keeper of a coffee house at 6 Rue St. Philip between Old Levee and Conde Streets (Decatur and Chartres Streets). This corresponds to the modern 500 block of St. Philip Street, according to the *Alphabetical and Numerical Index of Changes in Street Names and Numbers* in the City Archives, New Orleans Public Library.


\(^8\) The refugees from Saint Domingue were a complex and heterogenous community. Among them were the *grand blancs* (white owners of large plantations, the elite), *petit blancs* (white middle class merchants and tradespeople), slaves, and *gens de couleur* (free and freed mulattos and blacks who often owned property and slaves themselves. They enjoyed certain freedoms compared to free blacks in other parts of the world, but they did not share all of the privileges of their white planter parents.) For more on this complex division see *The Road to Louisiana: The Saint Domingue Refugees, 1792-1809*, Carl A. Brasseaux and Glenn R. Conrad, eds (Lafayette, University of Louisiana Press, 1992).

when he fathered a son, who was born there in 1799.\textsuperscript{10} He already had a daughter, who had been born about 1796.\textsuperscript{11} The late 1790s were pivotal years in the Haitian Revolution timeline, especially for people living on the southern part of the island. In the summer of 1798, British forces retreated from the French colony, resulting in a violent clash between Toussaint Louverture’s army of former slaves from the North and Andre’ Rigaud”s mixed raced forces in the South. After Rigaud’s defeat by Louverture, many settlers, especially those from the south, left their homes and headed to Cuba.\textsuperscript{12} The southern refugees included a large number of free people of color who feared a loss of status in a Saint Domingue governed by Louverture, a former slave.\textsuperscript{13} Thiot was white, but his family was mixed race. Undoubtedly, concern for all of their safety prompted his decision to leave. Little is known about Thiot’s life in Cuba, but when the Napoleonic Wars caused the Spanish government to exile French nationals from its Caribbean colonies, Thiot was one of thousands of other Saint Domingan refugees who migrated to Louisiana from their temporary Cuban homes.\textsuperscript{14} When Thiot arrived in New Orleans in 1809, he was accompanied by at least two slaves, as well as his mixed-race children, his ten-year-old son, Jean Baptiste Valmont Thiot, and a fourteen-year-old daughter named Marie Elizabeth, but

\textsuperscript{10} Death of Jean Baptiste Valmont Thiot, Sacramental Records of Archdiocese of New Orleans, 1832. East Baton Rouge Public Library. The entry states the Thiot was born in Petit Goave in 1799 and that his father was Jean Baptiste Hyacinthe Thiot.

\textsuperscript{11} Estate of Marie Elizabeth Thiot, f.w.c., April 1836, Orleans Parish Estate Files: New Orleans, L.A. City Archives, New Orleans Parish Library.

\textsuperscript{12} Alfred N. Hunt. \textit{Haiti’s Influence on Antebellum America: Slumbering Volcano in the Caribbean} (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1988); 48.


known to her family as Zelie. Thiot’s mistress and the children’s mother, a women of color from Saint Domingue named Annette Dumongis, may not have made this latest voyage. The sacramental records of her son suggest that she was deceased by the time the Thiots arrived in New Orleans.

By the time of the fire in 1821, Thiot’s daughter was grown and living on Ursulines Street. His son was working as a cabinetmaker a few blocks away on St. Ann. A bachelor, Thiot lived in the rooms above the café, and probably viewed his regular patrons, many of whom lived nearby and were also Saint Domingan refugees, as extended family. The urgent desire to reopen the café is hard to miss in the public notice that Thiot published. To some extent, the fifty-six-year-old proprietor may have been taking precautions to protect his livelihood before his customers could find other coffee houses to patronize. However, his reassurance that the business would remain the coffee house of the refugees says much about its importance to the

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15 Zelie Thiot is listed as Thiot’s natural daughter in his succession papers. Zelie Thiot died in 1836 at the age of 40 according to the Louisiana State Archives Death Index, Orleans Parish, retrieved from the USGenWeb Archives Project, usgwarchives.net. I located Thiot’s son in the Sacramental Records of the Archdiocese of Orleans Parish. He died at the age of 33 in 1832. The record indicates he was a native of Petit Goave in Saint Domingue. The record lists Jean Baptiste Hyancinthe Thiot, native of Nantes, as his father. According to the Sacramental records of the Archdiocese of New Orleans, Thiot had another daughter, Marie Antoinette, in New Orleans in 1825 with Rosa Armande De Loge. Marie died in 1868. It is also possible that Thiot had another mixed-race daughter named Francis, who was born in Cuba in 1802.

16 Funeral of Jean Baptiste Valmont Thiot, Sacramental Records of Archdiocese of New Orleans, 1832. East Baton Rouge Public Library. The record states that his mother was deceased. I could not locate a death record for Annette Dumongis in the New Orleans records. She may have died in Cuba.

17 According to Paxton’s City Directory of New Orleans, 1822, Zelie was residing at 11 Ursulines.

18 Paxton’s City Directory of New Orleans, 1822. JBV Thiot lived at the corner of St. Ann and Royal St.

19 Thiot’s will states that he never married. He did, however, have a relationship with Annette Dumongis, a woman of color from Saint Domingue. She is listed as the mother of Thiot’s son.

20 The inventory of Thiot’s possessions indicated that he lived above the café.
large community of Saint-Domingan émigrés it served, a community of which Thiot was very much a part.

The public notice suggests that Thiot was aware of his café’s significance in helping his fellow Saint Domingans maintain a sense of community, even though more than a decade had passed since the majority of them had arrived in Louisiana. However, he may not have been aware that in keeping that community intact through his café, he also helped to both invigorate and alter French creole ways of life in New Orleans. In the early nineteenth century, American migration to Louisiana was increasing and could have easily overwhelmed the complex creole culture of the territory. However, the Saint Domingan émigrés were numerous enough to infuse New Orleans society with their version of French Catholic creole culture, delaying, to some extent, its usurpation by American ideas and institutions. Thus, Thiot’s café helped to “creolize” a Creole city in the face of Americanization.

This chapter seeks to illuminate ways in which ideas and practices of the Saint Domingan refugees may have complicated understandings of democracy and education as they were interpreted by the new American leaders. Of course, the Saint Domingan émigrés were not a monolithic group; they were multi-class and multi-race and included whites, free people of color, and slaves. Some had been born in Saint Domingue, some in France, some in Africa, and some, elsewhere. But this diverse population had some traits in common. They were all primarily French Catholics. They had all experienced some fallout from the Haitian revolution, albeit in various ways and to varying degrees. They were all used to a society that included a large number of educated mixed-race people. They had all come from a place that was itself a key port

22 Hunt, 1988; 48.
in the Atlantic World. The refugees brought with them elements of this common culture, adding another layer of complexity to traits that were already a part of New Orleans’ transatlantic identity and history. Drawing on the universalist ethic inherent in Catholicism, a fluid racial structure resulting from centuries of racial interaction, and a sense of egalitarianism born of recent democratic revolutions on both sides of the Atlantic, the Saint Domingan émigrés encouraged an understanding of democracy based on exercising public rights within a shared public intellectual culture. This chapter explores how and in what ways the Café des Réfugiés, as well as other similar neighborhood eating and drinking establishments in early nineteenth century New Orleans, helped to shape that culture as one that embodied public rights, that is, the right to dignity and respect in public places.

I argue that the Café des Réfugiés facilitated the development of a public sphere in which access to the café was open to all men. I focus on the Café des Réfugiés because it was a different kind of space from the coffee house described in the previous chapter. Unlike Maspero’s, this was not a business exchange, and it did not involve the kind of formal commercial activity that was prevalent at that establishment. Unlike Maspero’s, there was no reading room and no newspaper office on site. The Café des Réfugiés was not a public auction house, and there is no evidence that it was ever the regular meeting site of any formal political organization. Instead, this small neighborhood coffee house, like many others in New Orleans

both then and now, was an extension of the community which surrounded it. This particular community was quite used to living and working among a diverse population. As a neighborhood café, it served primarily as a social space where people gathered to informally discuss local news, legal matters, religious issues, and national and international politics. This informality encouraged the public nature of the space. By “public,” I mean that travelers and locals of all classes, occupations, and ethnicities (including slaves, free people of color, and the working classes) had some freedom to associate as part of the daily activity of the café, making possible a public sphere that was in some ways more egalitarian than what could be cultivated at Maspero’s.

In this chapter, I construct the history of the Café des Réfugiés as a multiracial, multinational, and multiclass space. I demonstrate how patrons made use of the physical space of the café and how this facilitated a shared public culture for anyone who entered. I analyze city council meeting notes and city ordinances from the early and mid-nineteenth century to show that there was growing concern about the people and the ideas which were thought to circulate through these spaces. This concern led to laws limiting access for certain populations, particularly people of color. My research shows that official policies limiting racial interaction were often circumvented through everyday practices by both coffee house proprietors and their customers. Michel de Certeau reminds us that to understand the past, we need to consider the tactics, that is, the everyday practices that people develop from below to resist strategies

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26 Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 1997). Oldenburg does not write specifically about New Orleans but more generally about ways in which public places such as coffee houses and taverns operate as the “heart of a community’s social vitality” (back cover).
designed to control from above.\textsuperscript{27} The ordinances which attempted to impose a certain kind of racial order were the structures of power. The widespread disregard for those ordinances was a tactic of resistance. It was a form of democratic action which helped to underscore small neighborhood cafes such as the \textit{Cafe des Réfugiés}, as multi-national, multi-class, and multi-racial spaces. I argue that these shared public spaces contributed to a larger notion of the public sphere in which public rights, rather than civil or political rights, was critical.

The overall concept of the public sphere is quite simple; anyone who entered the space could, theoretically, become part of civil society.\textsuperscript{28} But to be truly “public” the “sphere” had to be open to all people who had a stake in that society. Of course, an “open sphere” seems somewhat oxymoronic; therefore, it might be more useful to think in terms of a public “space,” which suggests something less enclosed and potentially more inclusive. In the next section, I describe how the café served as a refuge for émigrés from the Saint Domingan community yet remained a welcoming and open social and intellectual space for the many other international travelers who passed through New Orleans, regardless of class, race, nationality, or economic status.

\textbf{A Café of Open Doors}

The next evening Galahad Shaughnessy and Manuel Mazaro met at that ‘very different’ place, the Café des Réfugiés. There was much free talk going on about Texan annexation, about chances of war with Mexico, about San Domingan affairs, about Cuba and many et-ceteras. Galahad was in his usual

\textsuperscript{27} Michel de Certeau, \textit{The Practice of Everyday Life}, trans. Steven Rendall, (Berkeley; University of California Press, 1984).

\textsuperscript{28} Habermas’ notion of the public sphere has often been criticized because these spaces have historically excluded women, people of color, and the poor and working classes. See Douglas Kellner, “Habermas, the Public Sphere, and Democracy: A Critical Intervention,” Retrieved from ww.gseis.ucla.edu. Accessed Aug. 30, 2016.
gay mood. He strode about among a mixed company of Louisianians, Cubans, and Americains, keeping them in a great laugh.\textsuperscript{29}

The above excerpt from George Washington Cable’s short story “Café Des Exiles,” written in 1879 but set in the 1830s, provides readers with a vivid, though highly romanticized, portrait of the clientele and their conversations at the legendary Café des Réfugiés. Cable’s story portrays the café as a place of togetherness and shared memories in which locals as well as a displaced international community could pass the evening hours with political talk and “oft-repeated tales of home.”\textsuperscript{30} The passage references some of the many nationalities who supposedly frequented the café. Elsewhere in the story we learn that Shaughnessy is an Irishman and Mazaro is Spanish Creole. In addition, Cable makes it clear that Louisianans still considered themselves separate from Americans, even though from the perspective of the story, the American takeover had happened three decades earlier. However, they had all come together, with people from other nations in this public place to discuss matters of common concern. Though Cable’s characters and their conversations were fictional, his words and images speak to the very real use of neighborhood cafés as not merely places for refreshment and sociability, but also as spaces to gather news and form opinions about events that were of immediate relevance to all who entered. These cafés (or coffee houses) provided a forum for the exchange of ideas which circulated among the diverse population in the transatlantic world of New Orleans.

Although Cable’s short story may have contributed to a romantic mythology surrounding the Café des Réfugiés, it was indeed a real place and it was indeed popular with the Saint

\textsuperscript{29} George Washington Cable “Café des Exiles” in \textit{Old Creole Days}. 1879 (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing, 2009); 94.
\textsuperscript{30} Cable, 90-94.
Domingan refugees who had arrived in Louisiana in the first part of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{31} The opening of the Café des Réfugiés in 1809 coincides with the arrival in Louisiana of the largest wave of refugees fleeing the disruption caused by two decades of political unrest in Saint-Domingue. \textsuperscript{32} Official figures put the total number of refugees arriving from Saint Domingue via Cuba at around 10,000 people over a nine-month period. The group was composed of roughly equal numbers of whites, free persons of color, and slaves.\textsuperscript{33} As some historians point out, this number was enough to double the French speaking population of New Orleans.\textsuperscript{34} The community of French-speaking free people of color was particularly strengthened, increasing by 134\%.\textsuperscript{35}

The large number of people descending upon New Orleans in a relatively short time strained the resources of the host city and contributed to a temporary housing crisis.\textsuperscript{36} Some refugees looked to local officials for aid. Madame Bayon, for instance, a widow from Saint-

\textsuperscript{31} In the 1936 Mardi Gras, the children’s Krewe of Nor rode on floats depicting romanticized episodes from the history of New Orleans. One float depicted the Café des Réfugiés. One newspaper described the float this way: “The excited refugees, the stamp of recent travail deep in their faces recline in the ‘Café des Réfugiés’ sipping the exotic ‘petit goave’.” From “Children’s Parade to Show Romance of Vieux Carre.” \textit{Times Picayune.} February 22, 1936. (New Orleans, LA).


\textsuperscript{34} Paul La Chance, “The 1809 Immigration of Saint-Domingue Refugees”Carl Brasseaux \textit{Road to Louisiana Get Complete Citation in The Road to Louisiana: The Saint-Domingue Refugees 1792-1809}, Carl A. Brasseaux and Glenn R. Conrad (eds), (Lafayette, LA: University of Louisiana Press); 248

\textsuperscript{35} Dessens, 2007.

Domingue, petitioned the mayor on February 18, 1812, for his assistance in finding lodging for herself, her four children, and her elderly mother. Because so many refugees from the Caribbean, along with the sailors who got them there, needed places to rest and eat, Thiot’s opening of his café in 1809 must have been a welcome event. In addition to having their basic needs met, many of the émigrés without permanent, stable homes looked for ways to re-establish a sense of community with others who had shared their recent experiences. In a short time, the café cultivated a group of regulars from the Saint Domingan community who were looking for food and drink as well as for a sense of belonging. Writing from New Orleans to his employer Henri de Ste. Gême in France, refugee Jean Boze reports the death of a close mutual friend, Monsieur Rochard, “formerly of the Café des Réfugiés.” In writing of Rochard in this manner, Boze suggests that the three knew each other from their shared time at the café, indicating that they were all regular visitors. Pierre Rochard, also a refugee, operated a shop on Levee Street not far from the coffee house. That Thiot was listed as the godfather to Rochard’s daughter, who was born in New Orleans in 1812, further suggests that Rochard was part of a group of regular Saint Domingan customers.

Natalie Dessens argues that strong bonds developed among the refugees and that they nurtured these bonds not only through private communications but also through socializing in

37 Petition to Mayor James Mather, February 18, 1812 in Box 6, Folder 1, John Minor Wisdom collection, Manuscripts collection 230. Louisiana Research Collection, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University.
39 Jean Boze to Henri de Ste-Gême, May 1, 1819, in Ste-Gême Family Papers, MSS 100, Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans, LA.
40 Whitney’s New Orleans Directory and Louisiana and Mississippi Almanac, 1811; 46
public places, like the Café des Réfugiés. In these spaces they were able to meet for a drink and a meal and to share their losses and hopes and plans for the future. In 1822, when Thiot vowed that he would reopen, his café was one of over 350 licensed coffee houses and taverns operating in New Orleans. Like other port cities, New Orleans drinking establishments had long quenched the thirsts of a transient population of soldiers, sailors and travelers. Kimberly Hanger asserts that by the late eighteenth century, New Orleans had more coffee house and tavern keepers than any other city in North America. The dramatic increase in population from Saint Domingue refugees in such a short time made the need for these public social spaces all the more important.

The use of space in Thiot’s café provides insight into the public nature of the establishment. One source identifies the Café des Réfugiés as one of the earliest eateries in New Orleans. Although food may have been served, the space was not a “restaurant.” Restaurants as we know them today, which cater to the tastes of individual diners at separate tables, were rare in New Orleans until later in the century. Far more common in the first decades of the 1800s were “cafes” or coffee houses, in which hungry travelers could partake of the daily “ordinary” served a la table d’hote (at the host’s table). This style of dining referred to a set menu which

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42 Dessens, 2007; 49.
43 Ibid, 48.
44 Paxton’s City Directory of New Orleans, 1822. The directory notes that the population of the city was roughly 29,000. Females were typically not allowed in coffee houses; however, as this research will show, free men of color and male slaves did enter with some frequency.
46 Peggy Scott Laborde and Tom Fitzmorris, Lost Restaurants of New Orleans (Gretna, LA: Pelican, 2011).
47 In the April 14, 1825 issue of L’Argus, the owner of the Café Cosmopolitan announced that his café was also a restaurant. He made a point to note that he was now offering repas particuliers (individual meals) and NOT a table d’hote, which suggests that individual meals were still somewhat rare at that time.
would be served at the same time every day around one large or several large common tables.48 The act of eating in this manner invited hospitality in the sense that the “host’s table” was “open to all those without tables of their own.”49 These ordinaries were advertised in local newspapers, often next to shipping news and hotel advertisements, suggesting that not only regulars, but also people passing through the city were welcome.50 By the time of Thiot’s death in 1840, the Café des Réfugiés had been relocated to 137 Levee Street.51 The café’s final location directly across from the river docks and the city market would have put it in clear view of the multi-ethnic population travelling to and through the port city of New Orleans. It would have made a convenient gathering space where a public sphere that reflected the varied perspectives of its transatlantic patrons could emerge. The table d’hôte service would have encouraged visitors, both friends and strangers alike, to converse with the other people around them.

It is interesting to note that by the 1840s, as direct Saint Domingan influence on Louisiana began to wane and as Americanization took hold, “restaurant” service, with its individual menus, began to replace the table d’hôte of coffee houses. According to Rebecca Spang, early “restaurants” typically consisted of small rooms arranged in such a way that there was no need for communication among the groups. These new spaces emphasized the private and the intimate and were characterized by “a world of dividing partitions and individual isolation.”52 In contrast, cafes were typically organized as large open spaces. They “necessitated

49 For example, Le Veau Qui Tete, a café located around the corner from the Cafes des Réfugiés, specifically welcomed all travelers to its table d’hote in the Gazette de la Louisiane, March 4, 1822. The ad also noted that the café was located next door to a hotel. The ad’s writer observed the convenience that travelers would also be able to enjoy the services of the nearby hotel.
51 Spang, 2000; 69.
interaction with, and awareness of, one’s fellow diners,” emphasizing “commonwealth and not compartmentalization.”

Although not a uniquely American invention, the restaurant and its defining characteristics seem more in line with Anglo-American notions of individualism rather than with a Latin-Afro-Creole ethos of community.

The inventory of the contents of the Café des Réfugiés, which was prepared shortly after Thiot’s death, indicates that the café, at least once it had moved to Levee Street around 1837, consisted of one large open room, a small adjoining courtyard, and a mezzanine level used primarily to store liquor and serving ware. The main space was large enough to hold seven gaming tables (for cards and dice), nine regular tables, thirty-four chairs, and some cabinets. There is nothing in the inventory to indicate the existence of private meeting rooms, such as those found at Maspero’s, where political and business meetings formally and routinely took place. It is clear that the emphasis in Thiot’s place was on informal socialization, and the conversations which took place occurred within full view, if not full earshot, of all other patrons present.

No primary records have emerged of any specific conversation that occurred at the Café des Réfugiés, but we can assume that many of its earliest customers, united by a shared trauma, were anxious to hear news of family and friends and of developments in Saint Domingue as well as in other parts of the world. Lyle Saxon notes that visitors would congregate at the Café des

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53 Spang, 2000; 68-69.
54 The term “restaurant” originally referred to an eighteenth-century French custom of receiving an individually-prepared “restorative” boullion. The establishments which supplied these “restoratives” were called restaurants. See Spang, 2000.
55 For more on the transnationalism and universalism in early Louisiana see Caryn Cosse Bell Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana, 1718-1868. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1997.
56 Succession and Inventory of JBH Thiot, November 1840.
57 An earlier chapter of my dissertation describes the use of space at Café de la Bourse.
Réfugiés in the afternoons for talk, and by evenings there was often music on a stage at the back of a courtyard filled with tropical fruit trees, a setting which would have been particularly comforting to people coming from the Caribbean. To cater specifically to his French West Indian customers, Thiot reproduced a recipe he brought from the Caribbean for petit goave, a cordial made from the fermented juice of the tropical agave plant. Although some modern historians claim that Saxon’s work is overly romanticized, and they question its veracity, “bottles of fruit liqueur” are listed among the items in the 1840 café inventory, which was taken at the time of Thiot’s death that same year. What kind of fruit liqueur is unspecified, so this very well could be the renowned “petit goave.” Thiot lived in a part of Saint Domingue called Petit Goave, and empty bottles, kettles, and large amounts of loaf sugar are listed in the café’s inventory, suggesting that Thiot did indeed have the makings for a house-made cordial in addition to a personal connection to the name “petit goave.”

Because the drink was made in a style and from ingredients with which the refugees would have been familiar, it probably attracted many followers. As an alcoholic beverage, it likely loosened tongues and inhibitions, encouraging patrons to linger at the café consuming liberal quantities of the drink, over which heady conversations of politics, economics, arts, and gossip likely took place. The exact nature of these conversations may never be known. An analysis of contemporary newspapers as well as the correspondence between refugees might reveal some of what was on the minds and tongues of café customers. Many of the early

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60 Succession and inventory of J.B.H Thiot, 1840. New Orleans Public Library
62 Nathalie Dessens argues that her analysis of Jean Boze’s letters to Ste-Geme is not only useful as the narrative of two individuals, but also as the narrative history of Saint-Domingue refugees.
nineteenth century newspapers in Louisiana were published by refugees from Saint Domingue and would have reflected their specific interests. The *Moniteur de la Louisiane* was founded by Louis Declot of Saint Domingue in 1794. It was New Orleans’ only newspaper until Saint Domingan printers Jean Renard and Claudius Beleurgey started *Le Telegraphe* in 1803. Hunt argues that these French language newspapers devoted more pages to international affairs, especially to those in Europe and the Caribbean, than did American newspapers.63 In the early 1830s, Saint Domingan refugee Jerome Bayon was the publisher of *The Bee*. Although his printing office was located across the street from Hewlett’s Exchange, his home was located a few blocks north on Esplanade.64 He would have passed close to the *Café des Réfugiés* on his way home each day. It is quite plausible that he often stopped in the café to talk over the news from the latest issue of his paper. With such strong links between newspaper publishers and Saint Domingan refugees, café patrons could have easily become knowledgeable about world events even without having the benefit of a formal reading room like that found at the Café de la Bourse.

Liliane Crete points out that until the 1830s, New Orleans newspapers contained little to nothing in the way of local news except for what people were looking to buy or sell.65 But those omissions are not really all that silent because they speak to the way the café was used as a hub of local information. As noted in the previous chapter, coffee houses were often where

as well as the historical narrative of Louisiana in the early American period. See Dessens, 2015; 2-3. Dessens’ analysis of the Ste. Gme letters is useful in determining what was on the minds of St. Domingan refugees. A thorough analysis of the topics in early New Orleans newspapers is a subject for further research.

63 Hunt, 1988; 52.
64 In the 1834 City Directory of New Orleans, Jerome Bayon lived at 31 Esplanade.
journalists went to collect the news they wished to print. According to Crete, priority was given
to news from Washington or Europe. 66 Local news, such as crimes or acts of violence in the city
often went unreported because there was no need to waste space on stories that people were
already talking about “or could quickly discover for themselves at the market or in the midtown cafes.”67 Some historians have claimed that local news involving crime or death was not reported
in New Orleans papers because it was so commonplace.68 But the letters from refugees Jean
Boze to Henri Ste. Gème tell a different story. The letters are filled with observations of local,
seemingly commonplace, incidents. Boze writes Ste. Gème about the number of deaths from an
outbreak of yellow fever, the damage from a recent hurricane, the outcome of a duel, and the
murder of a local child.69 Boze would hardly take the time to communicate these incidents to Ste.
Gème in France if they were not newsworthy. And had they both been in New Orleans, they
likely would have discussed these topics at one of the neighborhood coffee houses because this
was where one went to stay abreast of the local news. It is not hard to imagine Boze and Ste.
Gème sitting at one of the tables at the Café des Réfugiés, catching up on local events, perhaps
over a game of dice and several glasses of petit goave.

Because it was founded by a Frenchman from Saint Domingue, the Café des Réfugiés
was undoubtedly closer in style to French cafes than to English coffee houses. The latter focused

66 My own analysis of the city’s early nineteenth century newspapers supports Crete’s findings to
some degree: the first page was largely devoted to shipping news and public announcements, the
second page often contained one or two articles of a national or international nature, and a third
section typically contained editorials and advertisements for various goods and services. In my
analysis, I reviewed issues of the Moniteur de la Louisiane, the Gazette de la Louisiane, The
Friends of the Laws, and the Louisiana Courier from 1804 to 1865.
67 Crete, 1981;56.
68 Asbury, 1936.
more on coffee, conversation, and selling the occasional draft of ale. Scholars often make much of the relationship between coffee and the intellectual activity that went on inside early English coffee houses. They point out that coffee is often called “the drink of reason,” and its capacity to make one feel more alert allowed consumers to more readily grapple with complex ideas. In this way, coffee itself was said to facilitate the Enlightenment. As a French-style “coffee-house,” however, the Café des Réfugiés would have been more appealing and more familiar to patrons with French backgrounds, particularly those looking to maintain their French Creole identity and culture. Refugees from Saint Domingue were particularly attracted to small drinking establishments where coffee, cards, cordials, and conversation could all be had in the same space. Dessens observes that no matter where the refugees settled - other islands in the Caribbean, northeastern cities, Charleston, or New Orleans - they encouraged socialization by opening small neighborhood drinking places and coffee houses.

Of course, the term “café” or “coffee house” is somewhat misleading. City ordinances in New Orleans appear to use the terms “coffee house,” “cabaret,” “tavern,” and “billiard hall” interchangeably in their licensing regulations, indicating that these were all similar establishments which sold alcoholic beverages. There do appear to be some differences as to what could be served in each type of place. A “tavern” could serve spirits but not liqueurs or

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72 Dessens, 2007, 145. Dessens posits that one of the many lasting influences of Saint Domingan refugees is the tradition of small neighborhood drinking establishments all over New Orleans.
73 It is possible that not all “coffee houses” in early Louisiana sold alcohol. The Café de Aguila, opened during the Spanish period, apparently served only “coffee, tea, and chocolate to its sober clientele.” See Gilbert C. Din and John E. Harkins, “Spanish New Orleans” in The New Orleans Cabildo: Colonial Louisiana’s First City Government, 1769-1803. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996); 1-37.
cooked food. A “billiard hall” could serve beer and cider. A coffee house, however, was free to serve not only coffee, but also spirits, beer, wine, cordials, as well as prepared food. Moreover, it is possible that calling one’s business a “coffee house” instead of a “tavern” gave it an air of respectability. A tavern was a place for “low-lifes” to get drunk, but a “coffee house” was a place for reflection, insight, and companionship. But despite their differences from taverns (real or imagined), cafes and coffee houses in New Orleans were places where, according to Asbury, people of all classes, that is, soldiers, sailors, pirates, as well as wealthy American and Creole merchants and business men gathered each evening “to argue politics or discuss commercial affairs over aperitifs or after dinner cordials.” Clearly, then, it was not so much coffee itself which promoted “enlightened” conversation and the exchange of ideas, but rather the space where it might be consumed.

Some scholars question the reliability of Asbury’s work, but there is evidence to support his claim that New Orleans’ coffee houses were multi-class spaces. The Café des Réfugiés certainly welcomed people from across the economic and social spectrum. Henri de Ste. Gême was a wealthy planter. Jean Boze was his overseer. Pierre Rochard and Joseph Autheament were both shopkeepers. A biographer of Jean and Pierre Lafitte states that the brothers could often be found talking and tippling at the Café des Réfugiés, along with an entourage of

76 Ellis, 2004. Jean Boze, a regular at Thiot’s coffee house, showed disdain for the many “taverns” recently opened in New Orleans, noting that for the lower classes, there would soon be as many taverns as chimneys. Jean Boze to Henri de Ste-Gême, July 20, 1829, in Ste-Gême Family Papers, MSS 100, Folder 143, Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans, LA.
78 Emily Clark, personal communication, March 17, 2017.
additional pirates and smugglers. New Orleans was not a large city area-wise in the early nineteenth century, but when we examine who lived just in the immediate block around the café, we get a sense of the multi-class population it may have served. Wealthy planters Jacques Livaudais and Etienne de Bore’ had town residences near the café and may have well been customers. There were also teachers, physicians, blacksmiths, victuallers, grocers, cigar makers, actors, musicians, and a judge in the vicinity. The café’s location in 1822 also put the business just around the corner from the army barracks and the Navy Hotel, meaning that soldiers and sailors, as Asbury suggests, were also likely part of the mix. Its second location on Levee Street between St. Philip and Ursulines was directly across from the public market, which was itself a space that attracted a diverse work force and clientele.

Coffee was undoubtedly served to this mixed group at the Café des Réfugiés, especially given its overall popularity among refugees, many of whom had been coffee growers in the Caribbean – both in Saint Domingue and in Cuba. But coffee is not listed in the 1840 inventory of the café. What is listed in abundance are various distilled spirits and other alcoholic beverages from all over the world, making it evident that the Café des Réfugiés, like many other “coffee houses” in early nineteenth century New Orleans, was what we would today call a “bar.” The list includes two barrels of rum (including Jamaican rum and New England rum), one barrel of whiskey, 80 jugs of Dutch-style gin, 80 bottles of Madeira, two cases of absinthe, 285 bottles of

81 Paxton’s 1822 Directory of New Orleans.
82 I discuss the diversity of the public market in the next chapter.
83 Gabriel Debien “The Saint-Domingue Refugees in Cuba, 1793-1815.” Translated by David Cheramie in The Road to Louisiana: The Saint Domingue Refugees, 1792-1809, Edited by Carl Brasseau and Glenn R. Conrad (Lafayette; University of Louisiana Press, 1992); 31- 112.
red wine, 35 bottles of Italian *amaro*, three cases of German *kirschwasser*, and various fruit liqueurs and bitters.\(^{84}\) Thiot’s varied offerings almost certainly appealed to a diversity of palates, expanding his customer base of refugees and neighbors to draw from the wider transatlantic community that was part of the city. In the early nineteenth century, French Creoles were known to favor coffee, wines, and cordials. Many considered gin and whiskey to be vulgar.\(^{85}\) Yet, Thiot had quite a lot of these spirits on hand, which suggests that despite its name, the café included much drinking and socializing by customers other than refugees from the French Caribbean.

Traditional English coffee houses, drawing largely from local middle-class merchants and tradespeople, typically did not enjoy such diversity in their clientele. When the first coffee houses opened in England in the mid-seventeenth century, they had enjoyed a reputation for welcoming anyone who could afford the price of a cup of coffee.\(^{86}\) But by the early nineteenth century, the clientele had become more exclusive and was often delineated by profession. For example, financiers frequented Lloyd’s Coffee-House; political radicals hung out at Will’s Coffee-House.\(^{87}\) Furthermore, a customer in the English version of these establishments had to make do with coffee. If someone wanted something stronger, they typically had to visit a separate public house or tavern.\(^{88}\) Ray Oldenburg asserts that English *pubs* welcomed a more diverse crowd than did the country’s coffee houses; however, even in pubs different social classes were not welcomed in the same rooms. While the lower classes were free to drink and

\(^{84}\) Succession and Inventory of JBH Thiot, November 1840.

\(^{85}\) Williams and McMillan, 2016; 11 and Crete, 1981:103. This is not to say that French Creoles never drank gin or whiskey. In fact, as brandy and wine became more expensive and harder to obtain as the nineteenth century wore on, whiskey became more popular and began to replace brandy in certain drink combinations, most notably the julep and the Sazerac.

\(^{86}\) The first coffee house outside of the Middle East opened in Oxford, England in 1650. See Ellis, 2004 for more on the history of English Coffee Houses.

\(^{87}\) Sismundo, 2011; 47.

\(^{88}\) Ellis, 2004.
socialize in the “public” bar of the tavern, they would never enter the more elegant “saloon” side,\textsuperscript{89} which was reserved for middle-class patrons. Though members of the English upper classes might visit a coffee house, they rarely appeared in pubs, preferring to imbibe their alcoholic beverages with other members of their class in private clubs or in their own homes.\textsuperscript{90} In fact, Oldenburg posits that as private clubs gained favor in England in the nineteenth century, the nation’s coffee houses went into decline in part because of the clubs’ exclusivity and control over membership.\textsuperscript{91} At the same time, a similar fate befell many of the well-known coffee houses of New England. Not wanting to associate with “the local riff-raff,” elite members of society eventually retreated behind the closed doors of their private associations.\textsuperscript{92}

Thiot’s doors remained open, however. His coffee house, like many others in the city, was a creolized space that offered both coffee and various forms of alcohol, and all visitors, no matter their place of origin or social status, could find a refreshment which would make them feel at home. This welcoming and convivial atmosphere almost certainly encouraged “spirited” debate among a cosmopolitan clientele. There is evidence to suggest that the cosmopolitanism of the Café des Réfugiés included racial diversity as well. However, the doors that welcomed white Saint Domingan emigres and other international visitors did not open quite so freely for people of color. When the Café des Réfugiés opened in 1809, local policies regarding race had begun to place restrictions on the activities of the colored population – not just on slaves but on free

\textsuperscript{89} According to Oldenburg, the “saloon” side of the pub developed along with the emergence of a stratified middle class in the nineteenth century. It was differentiated from the “public” bar in its use of fancier décor and more comfortable “salon” style seating. See Oldenburg, 1997, 131.

\textsuperscript{90} Oldenburg, 1997; 131-132.

\textsuperscript{91} Oldenburg, 1997; 192.

\textsuperscript{92} Sismundo, 2011; 48.
people of color as well. Restrictions to public places grew more and more severe throughout the antebellum period, meaning whatever access they had to the public spaces of coffee houses increasingly came by way of the proverbial back door.

**Strategies of Control**

Numerous scholars have described the interaction which was possible among whites, slaves, and free people of color during New Orleans’ colonial and early American periods. The Code Noir of 1724 required that slaves be given Sundays off, and many used that time to sell their wares in the public market. Free people of color, as shopkeepers and skilled tradesmen, regularly interacted with whites as they conducted their daily business activities. This interaction increased as the free black community gained strength with the arrival of Saint Domingan refugees in the early nineteenth century. Women of color were very much a part of this interaction because their skills were also critical to the daily business of the city. Domestic servants were trusted with the household marketing, and free women of color were often employed as cooks, laundresses, seamstresses, peddlers, and even coffee house keepers.

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97 Hanger, 1990; 263. In a subsequent chapter of this dissertation, I analyze the interaction which occurred at the coffee stand of Rose Nicaud, a free woman of color.
Though interracial marriage was prevented by the Code Noir, informal consensual unions were not uncommon and were openly practiced.98 These interracial relationships were especially high among people from Saint Domingue. In the first two decades of the nineteenth century, almost fifty percent of the women and fifteen percent of the men involved in these unions were from Saint Domingue.99 Thiot himself was involved in such a union.100 So too were Thiot’s regular customers Pierre Rochard and Henri Ste. Geme.101 Some of these men clearly cared about the children from these relationships. Jean Boze wrote frequently to Ste. Geme in France informing him of the well-being of his mixed-race children, who remained in New Orleans. Thiot’s deep affection for his own children, two of whom predeceased him, is revealed by his decision to bring them with him when he left Cuba. They remained close to him until their deaths in the 1830s. Thiot’s son died in his father’s own rooms above the coffee house in 1832.102 Thiot served as godfather to Zelie’s daughter Marie, and after Zelie died in 1836, he petitioned to become the legal tutor to her four minor children, his grand-children.103 In 1837, he still lived above the café, but the city directory lists Francis Thiot, a free woman of color and perhaps

99 Kenneth R. Aslakson, Making Race in the Courtroom: The Legal Construction of Three Races in Early New Orleans (New York; NYU Press, 2014); 106. Aslakson points out that French-born men composed the largest group of men involved in interracial unions during this time; however, many of those men had lived in Saint Domingue before coming to Louisiana. This would make the percentage of male St. Domingan refugees in these relationships much higher than 15 percent.
100 The partner is not named in his succession papers, but he does name Zelie Thiot, f.w.c, as his “natural daughter.” Upon Zelie’s death in 1836, he became the tutor of her four minor children.
101 Rochard had a daughter, Adelaide Elizabeth, in 1812 with his colored mistress, Victoire Bonvalet of Saint Domingue. J BH Thiot is the listed godfather, Sacramental Records of 1812, Archdiocese of New Orleans.
103 Thiot refers to the four children as his “natural grandchildren” in the Oath of Tutorship for Zelie Thiot, May 1836.
another daughter, as the coffee house keeper.104 Dessens observes that “most respected public figures of New Orleans had lifelong relationships with Creoles of color, from New Orleans or Saint Domingue.”105

Whites, slaves, and free people of color lived side by side and in some of the same households on every street in the old city.106 In particular, a Creole, Francophone population that was white or mixed in race was prevalent in the northern riverside section of the Vieux Carre,107 the area of both known locations of the Cafés des Réfugiés. Just before his death in 1840, Jean Baptiste Thiot claimed a total of sixteen members in his household – one free white male (Thiot himself), ten free colored persons, and five slaves. Three of the free colored persons were children under ten, most likely his own grandchildren.108 Furthermore, as Catholics, both slaves and free people of color had long been able to worship alongside whites in the same church. And in addition to sharing the same sacred space, these groups were able to “share the same recreational spaces of ballroom, tavern, and billiard hall.”109

The interaction that was evident in no way implies political or even social equality. The vast majority of white refugees from Saint Domingue saw free people of color as “worthy of consideration and sympathy,” but nevertheless as an intermediate class that had rights and duties somewhere between slaves and whites, whatever their degree of social mixing.110 The free black

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104 The New Orleans Death Index at the New Orleans Public Library states that Francis Thiot was born in Cuba in 1802. This coincides with the time that JBH Thiot would have been in Cuba.


106 Aslakson, 2014. See also LaChance, 1992 and Hanger, 1997; 139.

107 Campanella, 2008; 174.

108 1840 United States Federal Census. The young children were likely Thiot’s daughter Zelie’s children. She predeceased him by four years and he became their legal tutor.

109 Emily Clark and Virginia Meacham Gould, “The Feminine Face of Afro-Catholicism in New Orleans, 1727-1852” William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd Ser, 59 (2002); 409-448

110 Dessens, 2015; 159.
community had looked to the new American leadership after 1803 to safeguard their political rights. Indeed, they expected protection of their rights in the face of an increasingly hostile white planter aristocracy, who were intent on pushing non-whites further to the margins of society. In January 1804, the officer corps of the free colored militia presented Governor William Claiborne with a letter in which they described themselves as “free Citizens of Louisiana.” They professed their loyalty to the United States and expressed their hope that, in return for that loyalty, the government would assure free people their “personal and political freedom.”

But the national constitution that applied to the Louisiana territory once it fell under the jurisdiction of the United States largely left definitions of political equality, that is, who could vote and make the laws of the government up to the local authority. White Louisianans used their new American law-making powers to pursue a political agenda organized around white supremacy. Despite a significant amount of interaction in everyday life, white civic leaders had no intention of assuring colored persons of their political rights. In July of 1804, the city council drafted a letter to Congress to express their expectations under the new American system. When the council refused to allow members of the free colored community to participate in the message, a small group of that community decided to draft their own message to Congress. A “mulatto man” attempted to print a flyer calling for a meeting of the colored population to draft the letter. However, none of the city’s printers (who were all white) would agree to publish the document. Instead, it was turned over to the city council, who described the call to meet as

112 Address from the Free People of Color to Governor Claiborne, January 1804, 174-175.
113 Wainwright, 2016.
114 Wainwright, 2016; 20. According to Wainwright, the printer described the man as a “mulatto man,” and his identity was not known.
a “provocation to rebellion to demand equal citizenship rights with the white.”115 The council turned the letter over to Claiborne and demanded that he punish the author of the “incendiary address” and banish him from the province. 116

Claiborne’s correspondence shows that he was aware of the “great dislike between the “white Natives of Louisiana and the free men of color.”117 Therefore, he decided to proceed cautiously. In a letter from July 12, 1804 to Secretary of State James Madison, he explained, “It seemed to me that in a Country where the negro population was so great the Less noise that was made about this occurrence (sic) the better.” He told Madison that he had not followed through with the requested punishment, and he assured the Secretary of the colored community’s “friendly pacific disposition and devoted attachment to the present government.” However, he also informed the Secretary that he had convinced leaders of the Afro-Creole community of their “error,” and that they had agreed to cancel their meeting. He recalled in the letter that the bloodshed of Saint Domingue had originated in a dispute “between the white and Mulatto inhabitants.” It was, therefore, necessary to handle the “Mulatto community” with the utmost care so as not to encourage them to “seek the support and assistance of the Negroes” in achieving their political goals.118

Claiborne’s decision to squelch the opportunity of the free black community to associate for official political purposes was reflected in the practices of the newly installed “democratic” institution – the Territorial Legislature. One of their first acts was to adopt a new Black Code in

115 Proceedings of City Council Meetings from July 7, 1804. George LeGrand and A. Stetter (trans). City Archives of New Orleans Project of the WPA, 1936. See also W.C.C. Claiborne to James Madison, New Orleans, 12 July 1804, in OLB, 2:244-245
116 Ibid.
118 W.C.C. Claiborne to James Madison, New Orleans, 12 July 1804, in OLB, 2:244-245.
1806, which scaled back some of the rights that slaves and free people of color had had under the French and Spanish governments.\textsuperscript{119} The Code Noir of 1724 had promised that freed slaves would receive full citizenship and the same equality of rights that persons born free had enjoyed.\textsuperscript{120} But the new code under the Territorial Legislature made it more difficult for slaves to be manumitted. It also required free blacks to carry certificates with them attesting to their status and required public officers to include the words “free man of color” or “free woman of color” when referring to them on public documents.\textsuperscript{121} Moreover, despite their efforts to gain full rights as citizens in the American republic, free people of color were denied participation in government.\textsuperscript{122} In one city council memorandum from 1805, an election commissioner from the Third District of New Orleans asked if the phrase “free and white” in the district’s law of incorporation meant that the free colored population could vote in an upcoming election for council members. He wanted clarification because the phrase could be interpreted to mean the “free” population and the “white” population. The city council responded that “there was no ambiguity in these expressions, and that the Legislative Council, without doubt, had no intention of affording the right to vote to free people of color.”\textsuperscript{123} Unrestrained by direction from the Crown, the new government was now able to translate racial fears and sentiment directly into law. Under the 1812 Constitution, Louisiana was the only state which specifically required that a legislator or an elector be a “free white male citizen of the United States.”\textsuperscript{124}

\textsuperscript{119} Askelson, 2014; 63. This refers to the Louisiana Black Code of 1806.
\textsuperscript{120} Vernon Valentine Palmer, Through the Codes Darkly: Slave Law and Civil Law in Louisiana (Clark, NJ; The Lawbook Exchange, 2012); 120.
\textsuperscript{121} Section 21 of Black Code of 1806 adopted by the Orleans Territorial Legislature.
\textsuperscript{122} Title II, Article 10 of the Louisiana Constitution of 1812 limited voters to free, white males who paid taxes.
\textsuperscript{123} City Council Proceedings of City Council Meetings, March 1805, Council Meetings November 30, 1803 to March 29, 1805. New Orleans Public Library.
\textsuperscript{124} Palmer, 2012; 121.
The failure of the black community to secure political rights meant that public rights were all the more important. Section 40 of the 1806 Black Code forbade free people of color from presuming to “conceive of themselves equal to whites.”\textsuperscript{125} The intention of the Code was clearly to openly declare the subordination of all persons of color; however, it did little to limit the ability of free people of color to informally assemble as part of everyday practices. These were freedoms that they had long enjoyed under the French and Spanish colonial periods. Shannon Dawdy notes that a 1751 ordinance adopted by the Superior Council attempted to prevent canteen owners from selling drinks to “sailors, Indians, or Negroes,” but this had had negligible effects. She contends that the petit gens, that is, “slaves, Indians, soldiers, and poor freemen continued to drink, gamble, socialize, and conduct business in the city’s cabarets” throughout the French period.\textsuperscript{126} The commercial activity that went on in these canteens, albeit most of it “rogue,” was too important to the French economy to really crack down on the interactions inside them.\textsuperscript{127} Kimberly Hanger details a series of raids in the 1780s and 90s in which local police patrols barged into coffee houses, taverns, and billiard halls, finding “people of all classes and colors drinking or playing prohibited card games or participating in raffles.”\textsuperscript{128} To be sure, some of these people were arrested, but their violations resulted from engaging in illegal gambling rather than for accessing the same public space, which was not illegal at the time.\textsuperscript{129}

The arrival of large numbers of black Saint Domingans from the 1790s to the 1820s prompted city authorities to question some of those long-held freedoms. The black refugees

\textsuperscript{125} Louis Moreau-Lislet, General Digest of the Acts of the Legislature of Louisiana: Passed from the Year 1804-1827, Inclusive and in Force at this Last Period (New Orleans, 1828).
\textsuperscript{126} Dawdy, 2008; 182.
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid, 185.
\textsuperscript{128} Hanger, 1997; 148-149.
\textsuperscript{129} Ibid.
provided a numerical, cultural, and economic boost to French Creole communities in South Louisiana. However, they also brought with them a radical political ideology of racial equality stemming from the European Enlightenment but which had been adapted to fit their own needs. They arrived with ideas about citizenship, democracy, and human rights that had been interpreted through a transatlantic lens to fit their unique situations. In 1794, the First French Republic banned slavery in all of its colonies. Thus, Saint-Domingan slaves who had arrived in Louisiana after 1794 had technically been freed, at least temporarily, on the Caribbean island, only to be re-enslaved when they emigrated to other slave-holding regimes. The French National Convention had freed the slaves, in part to give lived expression to the principles of the *Declaration*, but also as a political strategy to get former slaves to support the new Republic in France. Nevertheless, Saint Domingan slaves who arrived in Louisiana after 1794 brought with them the knowledge that they had been French citizens. This information then spread along the complex networks of communication that circulated around the New Orleans port, markets, and public meeting spaces, including cabarets, taverns and coffee houses, and then travelled up and down the river along trade routes to the plantations.

132 Rebecca Scott and Jean M Hebrard, *Freedom Papers: An Atlantic Odyssey in the Age of Emancipation*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012). Scott and Hebrard argue that not only former slaves, but also free people of color had difficulty asserting their freedom as a result of the turmoil and subsequent emigration from Saint-Domingue. Legally, all emigrants from Saint-Domingue were free after 1794, but some refugees set about claiming other refugees, including those who had been free prior to 1794, as their property. This was relatively easy to enforce as they entered the slave holding regimes of Cuba and Louisiana, where people of color needed legal documents proving their freedom.
In 1795, slaves from Pointe Coupee, about a hundred miles northwest of New Orleans planned a massive uprising. Though the plot was effectively thwarted by Spanish officials, it was clear that the participants were well-informed about revolutionary ideals. Travelers coming up the Mississippi River had spread the word about the recent abolition of slavery in France and its colonies, including St. Domingue.\textsuperscript{134} According to testimony at the ensuing trial, some of the 1795 conspirators noted that Joseph Bouyavel, a white schoolteacher from Belgium working on one of the plantations, had read parts of the \textit{Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen} to some of the Pointe Coupee slaves.\textsuperscript{135} They had come to understand that their ability to secure freedom was in their own hands.

Bouyavel’s actions demonstrate that whites as well as blacks were involved in the revolt. However, it would be wrong to assume, as some early historians of the incident have argued, that slaves in Louisiana had been informed of their rights by a few white sympathizers.\textsuperscript{136} Hall contends that to understand the complexity of the 1795 conspiracy, it is necessary to view it as part of a wider international movement supported by a large segment of the dispossessed of all races in Louisiana and throughout the Caribbean. Located at the crossroads of transatlantic trade routes, South Louisiana was well placed to be a hotbed of revolutionary ideology. The 1795 conspiracy took place during the most radical phase of the French Revolution when lower classes throughout Europe and the Americas had risen up against social tyranny. Hall argues that the working classes among Louisiana’s multinational population – slaves, free people of color, as well as sailors, dock workers, indentured servants, and soldiers of all races and ethnicities -

\textsuperscript{134} Hall, 1992; 349.
\textsuperscript{135} Hall, 1992; 349-350.
identified with their counterparts in Europe and with slaves in Saint Domingue and responded by supporting equality and the full rights of citizenship for all people. Armed with this knowledge, the Pointe Coupee slaves had then used public gatherings at slave dances, church services, and the marketplaces to communicate and to plan the conspiracy.

Fears of additional slave revolts remained very much on the minds of government officials, and it is clear that they believed those revolts had connections to refugees from Saint Domingue as well as to the freedom of association enjoyed by people of color, both slave and free. On June 30, 1804, the New Orleans City Council discussed a citizens’ petition informing the municipal body of their apprehension about free people of color and slaves coming from Saint Domingue as well as “the daily arrival from the above named country of persons known for their revolutionary principles.” In 1806, the Territorial Legislature banned the admittance of “free people of color from Hispaniola and the other French Islands of America.” Although the overall territorial ban was unsuccessful, this did not stop the city council from developing other strategies to regulate their activity. In addition to requiring that free people of color who entered the city declare themselves before the Mayoralty and provide proof of their freedom, the city council also required that proprietors of cafes, taverns, and inns register all “strangers” who sought their services and to inform the Mayoralty of “their name, first name, color, age, profession, place they come from, and if they intend to reside in the City.” Proprietors who failed to comply would be fined twenty-five dollars for each “stranger” who was not declared.

137 Hall, 1992.
138 Ibid
139 Sessions of the Counseil de Ville, New Orleans, June 30, 1804. Louisiana Division, New Orleans Public Library.
140 Chapter XXX, Acts Passed by the First Legislature of the Territory of Orleans, 1806.
141 Foreigners, people new to the city.
142 Resolution of the Counseil de Ville, February 15, 1807.
If the council wanted to maintain control over who entered the city, it makes sense that they looked to places of public accommodation. Cafes, taverns, and inns would likely be the first places these travelers would congregate, especially if they were new to the city and had no relations in the area. But the council also understood that it was in these public places that the “revolutionary principles” which they tried to control were spread about, quite probably because it was in these same public spaces that they themselves learned what was going on in town and what ideas were being discussed. It is also quite probable that the citizens who warned the council of their fears of Saint Domingan emigres planned their petition in some of these same cafes and taverns, perhaps even at the Café des Réfugiés.

The American governor of the Territory, William C. C. Claiborne, understood public drinking spaces as sites where rebellious ideas could spread. When he received word of revolt by a group of German Coast slaves on January 9, 1811, he ordered “all the Cabarets in the City and Suburbs of New Orleans” to be “immediately closed.” He worried that stories of the rebels’ actions would reach the large black population of New Orleans and would spur insurrection within the city before he could prepare a military response. Although Claiborne’s personal papers do not describe any subversive activity which actually occurred within the city at the time of the 1811 Revolt, his letters do indicate his fears of potential disorder stemming from the German Coast uprising. In addition to closing the “cabarets,” Claiborne ordered a guard to be posted on the bridge leading into New Orleans with orders “to permit no Negroes to pass or repass.” He knew that communication was central to the slaves’ success.

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143 Rasmussen, 2011.
144 General Orders of William C.C. Claiborne issued January 9, 1811, from Le Moniteur de la Louisiane, January 12, 1811 (New Orleans, LA).
It is not clear how long Claiborne kept the cabarets and bar-rooms\textsuperscript{146} closed in January 1811, but in a letter to the city council, Mayor James Mather agreed to support the closure. However, he also worried that communication of rebellious ideas would continue if the city did not correct the “notorious abuse” which had been overlooked in previous ordinances. He was writing of the “liberty that a great number of masters give their slaves to live and go where they please.”\textsuperscript{147} He was referring primarily to slaves who had been hired out by their owners for work in the city. To correct the “abuse” he urged the passing of ordinances which fined not only the landlords who rented rooms to slaves but also the masters who gave their slaves such permission. In 1813, the new mayor, Nicolas Girod, also feared “that slaves might plot against the public safety,” and he recognized that their freedom to associate with others was a necessary step to this end.\textsuperscript{148} To control that association, Girod urged the council to repeal a recently adopted order prohibiting dances given by slaves. He deemed it “a form of tyranny” to “deprive slaves of a privilege which they had enjoyed under all other governments of the colonies.”\textsuperscript{149} However, he also warned the council that preventing slaves from meeting for public dances would only drive them to meet in other places – places which might “instill in their minds certain ideas which they would probably might not have had but for this.”\textsuperscript{150}

Girod’s words acknowledge the freedom of association which people of color had enjoyed during the colonial period, but in 1813, New Orleans was no longer “neglected” by

\textsuperscript{146} In a letter to the City Council from January 12, 1811, Mayor James Mather used the term “bar-rooms” to refer to Claiborne’s orders, further suggesting that some of these terms were used interchangeably. 
\textsuperscript{147} James Mather, letter to city council, January 12, 1811, Proceedings of City Council of New Orleans.
\textsuperscript{148} Nicholas Girod, letter to city council, December 30, 1813.
\textsuperscript{149} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{150} Ibid.
distant colonial governments. New American-backed lawmakers now had the power to take matters into their own hands. Given the ongoing fears of slave rebellion, the influx of Saint Domingan refugees, and a corresponding increase in the number of public drinking establishments, it is not surprising that city officials attempted to regulate who could interact in public drinking places by passing increasingly strict laws. In 1816, the council passed an ordinance which forbade whites and free people of color from “gaming” or gambling together in coffee houses, taverns, and cabarets. It also banned free people of color from gambling with slaves, and it banned slaves from gambling altogether.\(^{151}\) What is perhaps surprising about this ordinance is that the council only placed restrictions on gambling; it did little to prevent people from drinking together. There were no restrictions on serving alcohol to free people of color, provided they could prove they were free. However, that same year the council made it unlawful “for any white person to occupy any of the places set apart for people of color” and for any person of color “to occupy any of those reserved for white persons, at any public exhibition or theatre.”\(^{152}\) Although this second ordinance did not specifically mention drinking establishments, it does speak to a growing desire by government authorities to control the behavior of people of color in public spaces. In 1817, the city council adopted an ordinance forbidding keepers of cabarets, taverns, and coffee houses from selling liquor to slaves “without the written permission of their master or owner.”\(^{153}\) The council also banned, that same year, slaves from meeting

\(^{151}\) Article 11 of An Ordinance Concerning Gaming Houses within the city of New Orleans, Approved October 21, 1816 in General Digest of the Ordinances and Resolutions of the Corporation of New Orleans. (New Orleans; Jerome Bayon, 1831); 261.

\(^{152}\) Article 9 of An Ordinance Concerning the Public Exhibition and Theatres of New Orleans. Approved June 8, 1816 in General Digest of the Ordinances and Resolutions of the Corporation of New Orleans. (New Orleans; Jerome Bayon, 1831); 371.

together “in any street, public square, the meat-market, or in any house, building, tavern, or lot...except when attending divine worship, within churches and temples.” No doubt these ordinances made it more difficult for slaves to inhabit the public space of the coffee house, but it did not make it impossible. That the ordinance required slaves to have their owners’ permission to purchase alcohol suggests that even they maintained some access to these public spaces - access as customers and not just as workers. The fact that they could no longer legally assemble does not seem to have stopped them either. Shocked complaints in the newspapers, as will be discussed in the next section, suggest that illegal gathering was commonplace. Furthermore, the segregation system that was emerging in the early nineteenth century was virtually powerless to prevent whites who so desired from mixing freely with people of color in taverns, cafes, and dance halls.

To be sure, there were unspoken and understood traditions of how people from different racial groups behaved within certain establishments and with whom they interacted. However, the fact that the city council saw a need for the ordinances at all suggests that whites, free people of color, and slaves continued to be found in association with some degree of frequency, much as they had during the colonial period. This association created a public space that signified equality. For Americans who understood a binary construct of race as central to a plantation slave society, notions of equality were indeed dangerous. The law was a strategy to control the

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154 Art. 4 An Ordinance in Relation to Slaves in the City and Suburbs of New Orleans. City Council of New Orleans, Approved August 10, 1817. General Digest of the Ordinances and Resolutions of the Corporation of New Orleans. (New Orleans; Jerome Bayon, 1831); 216.

observed behavior and to limit the spread of revolutionary fervor that was thought to circulate among slaves and their white or free black “allies,” especially among those with Saint Domingan affiliations.

**Tactics of Resistance**

Whether motivated by profit, thirst, greed, or political zeal, both café proprietors and their customers would not be bound by the laws dictating the terms under which people could interact in the café. In this regard, Nicholas Girod’s earlier concern that people would get around the laws was quite prescient. Newspaper accounts from the first half of the nineteenth century reveal that many gaming halls, cabarets, taverns, and cafes, catered illegally but openly to free people of color as well as to slaves.\(^{156}\) Marcus Christian identified hundreds of examples where coffee house and tavern owners broke gaming and liquor laws with regard to race.\(^{157}\) Most of these “offences” involved cabaret and coffee house keepers selling liquor to slaves or allowing the unlawful congregation of free people of color and slaves. Some of the proprietors even had multiple arrests, suggesting that the penalty was not stiff enough to deter owners from denying people of color the services of their establishments. Regarding coffee house owner Domingo Herrera’s second arrest for selling liquor to slaves, *The Bee* reported, “If he should be proved guilty again, no punishment in our humble opinion, short of the gallows would be too severe.”\(^{158}\) Many of the complaints in the newspapers involved editors’ insistence that police officers

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\(^{156}\) See *New Orleans Picayune* Dec. 24, 1849, Jan 3, Feb 3 1850, and *New Orleans Bee*, July 2, 1836 as well as many others transcribed as part of the WPA Project of the Marcus Christian Collection, Louisiana and Special Collections Department. Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans.


\(^{158}\) “Liquor to Slaves” *The Bee*, February 20, 1854. (New Orleans, LA).
repeatedly failed to enforce the laws, in spite of a provision in the ordinance that in the event any fines were collected, “one half the said fines shall be for the person procuring the conviction of the offender.” The prospect of payment to policemen was evidently not as compelling as the rewards they could get from ignoring the illegal actions. By mid-century, complaints about disregard for the law were rampant. As one editor wrote:

> Both laws and lawmakers are laughed at by coffee house keepers. For every honest policeman they keep a watch, and the ringing of a bell gives note of his coming, and of course, for the time being all traffic is dropped. With dishonest watchmen their course is no different, for free drink and cigars with them occasion a strange obliviousness. They never discern anything wrong, or if they do, it is through a brandy glass “darkly.”

Newspapers wrote ardently about the need for stronger law enforcement. Sometimes concerned residents took matters in their own hands, even tarring and feathering “a white man named Jabelle” for selling liquor to slaves and buying stolen property from them.

> It is interesting to note that the papers placed much of the blame for the illegalities on people in positions of power, that is, the city council, the police, and even the café owners. Although slaves who broke the liquor law were arrested, they were seldom blamed in the papers. After the arrest of two slaves, the *New Orleans Daily Delta* pointed out that the coffee house keeper had *not* been arrested. The paper accused the keeper, who was not named in the article, of operating a disorderly house. It blamed him for encouraging slaves “to congregate in unlawful assemblages to drink and gamble and

161 *Daily Delta*, August 10, 1858 (New Orleans, LA).
make night hideous with their bacchanalian orgies.” The article urged the police to “declare a war of extermination against the cabarets.” As the quotes indicate, there was some concern about the immorality that was thought to fester among the slaves in the drinking establishments. But, for the most part, the concern was not so much what the slaves would do by themselves. Rather, the concern was mainly what they could learn through their interactions with others in these spaces, as though the slaves were without any type of agency. But De Certeau argues that the tactics which people develop from below to make use of institutions of power develop unpredictably between the gaps in those structures. In the gap between city ordinances and the police failure to enforce those ordinances lay a back door of opportunity. Through that gap slaves were able to exercise their agency and gain access to that which the producers of society tried to deny them, the public discourse in the café.

Both whites and free people of color were seen as “teachers” in these “unlawful assemblages.” One writer opined that better enforcement of the liquor laws would “destroy the power of dishonest free blacks and depraved white men over this class of our population and save us from a wide-spread demoralization and greater evil.” The writer blamed the influx of free people of color coming as hands on ships from distant lands for bringing with them “wild ideas.” The writer argued that their freedom in the city granted them easy access to the cabarets and cafes, where “the means of evil communication are here perfected, and the organization existing to our detriment fathers

163 Ibid.
164 “Demoralization of Servants.” *The Daily Picayune*, October 6, 1858.
165 Ibid.
new power for wrong.” He bemoaned the fact the mayors of New Orleans had never enforced laws limiting free people of color from entering the city and that the current consequence was now “a considerable number of free colored persons of the most dangerous character thus added to our population forming secret associations and spreading discontent among our servants”.  

Askelson argues there is little evidence to suggest that Louisiana’s free colored population ever supported outright rebellion and revolution. His analysis of the free black militia suggests that what they really wanted was respect and treatment equal to that of white members. The arrival of several thousand Saint Domingan blacks who desired the same respect as citizens reinforced their zeal. Part of that respect came through their efforts to occupy the same public spaces as did their white counterparts. If political rights were to be denied to them, they would see to it that public rights were not. But clearly for members of the white community in New Orleans whose opinions are reflected via the newspapers, access to those spaces and the interaction that resulted from that access was a form of radical rebellion. There is no actual evidence that any of these associations among free people of color and slaves ever occurred at the Café des Réfugiés and there is no evidence that Jean Baptiste Thiot actually broke the law. However, free people of color may have been part of his clientele because service to this group was not illegal during the time he owned the café. The segregation that existed in restaurants and saloons was largely through local custom and individual management policies. Given the fact that many of his customers came from a part of the

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166 Ibid.
167 Askelson, 2014; 73.
world where free people of color had a tradition of public rights and given the fact that the café welcomed people (at least men) from various social strata, it is not unlikely that Thiot was one of those individual managers who openly entertained free people of color, perhaps some of the many ship hands that so angered the writer of the editorial. At the very least, Thiot had free persons of color and slaves working at his coffee house. At one point there were ten free persons of color in his household. Based on my analysis of his family records, not all those people were immediate family. In addition to his own family members, he had other close ties to the free colored community. A few days before his death in 1840, seventy-four years old and in failing health, Thiot added a codicil to his will stating that Francois Felix Montplaisir, a free man of color, would become his grandchildren’s tutor after he died. The relationship of Montplaisir to the Thiot family is unclear, and no father is named in any of the documents related to the children. However, Zelie named her youngest child Felix Francois Hyacinthe Thiot, suggesting that this man was close to and respected by the family.169

The extent to which Thiot welcomed a colored clientele is not clear; however, it is clear that people of color, both free and enslaved, were customers in other neighborhood coffee houses. There was concern by the white population about what they thought was going on when different racial groups interacted in these public spaces. By the 1850s, as Saint Domingan influence waned in New Orleans and sectionalism took hold, the discourse was less about revolutionary ideas from Haiti and more about the spread of ideas about abolition supposedly brought by white Northerners who had begun infiltrating the city.170 One editorial observed that “the slaves and free negroes are daily growing more impudent and rebellious” as they congregate

169 Succession and inventory of JBH Thiot.
170 Slaves and Liquor Laws, box 37; Marcus Christian Collection, University of New Orleans Special Collections.
together over drink, and that “treason is nightly talked of.” The *Daily Picayune* warned of the possibility that cafes helped to foster an underground railroad of sorts. The paper reported that a forged “certificate of free birth” had been turned in to the mayors’ office. The document had been found with a cache of contraband liquor in a “negro barbershop next to a café.” An investigation uncovered a secret door between the coffee house and the barber shop. It was further discovered that the certificate had been left there by a slave who had used it to prove his freedom and move to Chicago. According to the paper, the slave then sent the form back along with instructions to return it to its hiding place in the barber shop so that another slave could use it to gain his freedom. Whether the incident was true or merely a propaganda piece is uncertain. But whether real or imagined, newspapers fueled fears of the “dangers” of coffee houses and the comingling of whites, free people of color, and slaves.

City authorities were swayed by these newspaper editorials. Their response indicates that they saw drinking establishments and the socialization that occurred within those spaces as loci of rebellious activity. In 1870, an ordinance was passed which forbade all coffee houses, cabarets, and taverns from installing “any screens, shutters, or any obstruction whatever, that might, at any time, prevent or hinder a full view or sight of the bar or counter.” City officials obviously worried about the kind of activities that might be taking place behind the “shuttered” doors of those establishments. They feared the intermingling and the secrets that might be brewing in these public spaces. That the city did not ban the sale of liquor, nor did it ban gambling altogether, suggests that officials were not merely trying to promote virtuous behavior among individuals. Instead, officials were attempting to thwart the effects of the combination of

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172 “The Demoralization of Servants” *The Daily Picayune*, October 6, 1858.
173 Article 89 of Ordinances of Coffee Houses and Taverns, 1870.
drinking, gambling, and free association, which they linked to a disruption of the imposed racial order. The need for surveillance and other laws limiting what went on in these public drinking establishments speak to the government’s fear of potential subversive activity among whites, free people of color, and slaves. The rejection of such laws enacted through the everyday practices of people who made use of these spaces speaks to their ability to circumvent elements of control.

In ignoring the ordinances that government officials imposed on the cafes to limit the extent of free association, both patrons and customers engaged in tactics of resistance to produce a public space. The public nature of the conversations which took part in these coffee houses invited input from regulars and visitors, those there legally and those who were not. Each one of these participants had been influenced by the particulars of his or her own experiences. The ideas which emerged from these encounters often produced new ways of thinking which did not pre-exist the interactions. We cannot know the patrons’ positions on the issues discussed, but the very fact that they were talking and debating constitutes a form of democratic activity. Private individuals were coming together from diverse backgrounds in a shared space to form a public sphere.

A voice is still missing, however. No matter how public the coffee house culture was, the discourse involved rarely included meaningful participation by women. It was possible for women to own coffee houses. In its final years the Café des Réfugiés was, if not owned, at least operated by a woman. The history of the Café de la Bourse tells us that female slaves were present as workers in the establishment, workers who could have heard the conversations going

174 Mostly “his” perspectives would be considered since women were typically not customers in New Orleans coffee houses. However, women were present in the form of owners, servants, prostitutes, and as members of the household from which the coffee house was operated.
on about them, which they may have then discussed among themselves in other situations. But to uncover a space that truly welcomed participation by women - white, free, and enslaved - we must look at another kind of coffee house, the French Market coffee “stand” of Rose Nicaud.
CHAPTER 6: ROSE NICAUD’S FRENCH MARKET COFFEE STAND

Here or hereabouts, “Old Rose,” whose memory is embalmed in the amber of many a song and picture and story, kept the most famous coffee stall of the Old French Market. She was a little negress who had earned the money to buy her freedom from slavery. Her coffee was like the benediction that follows after prayer, or if you prefer it, like the benedictine after dinner.1

In this chapter, I focus on the “café” of Rose Nicaud, a free woman of color who operated her coffee-selling business in the New Orleans French Market from the 1850s to the 1870s.2 Much of what is known about Rose and her coffee stall truly does come from “song and picture and story,” because few primary sources have emerged about her as an individual or about her specific business. But enough evidence does exist about daily life in the French Market to suggest that like the Café de la Bourse and the Café des Refugies, Nicaud’s café was an example of a public, transatlantic space in which opportunities for the exchange and creolization of ideas emerged as part of the everyday practices of the business. Nicaud’s café differs in significant ways from those examined in the earlier chapters, however. It was not an enclosed coffee house/tavern dominated by the male population of the city. It did not serve alcohol or supply gaming tables. It was not a formal commercial exchange and auction house, nor was it an informal gathering place for displaced political refugees. Rather, it was an open-air stall in the Halle des Legumes3 section of the French Market complex. In this space, customers and vendors, both men and women of all races and classes, could purchase and consume a cup of coffee,

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2 The Daily Picayune, June 9, 1854. The paper names Rose Nicaud, f.w.c, a coffee seller, in a list of delinquent tax payers in the city. The City Directory of New Orleans, 1871 contains a listing for Mrs. Rose Nicaud (col’d) as having a coffee stand in the French Market.
3 Vegetable market
standing or sitting and conversing with others at the stall, often as a break from the necessary daily business of buying and selling foodstuffs and household goods. The ordinances that pertained to public coffee houses where liquor was served, those limiting who could enter and who could be served, did not apply in the market stalls. To be sure, the market operated according to its own set of ordinances, but by and large, people were free to move about and to associate with whomever they pleased. Because of that freedom of association, I consider Nicaud’s business to be a “coffee house” with the potential, like the other establishments, to nurture a public sphere. But it was a different kind of coffee house space in that it operated in conjunction with the public function of the market. Because the market played such a vital role to the daily life of New Orleans, it was especially open to the exchange of ideas flowing among the diverse population of the city.

Moreover, this coffee business existed a generation after the Café de la Bourse and the Café des Refugies, and, therefore, offers a unique historical perspective. Nicaud operated her coffee stall in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, a time span which saw not only increasing restrictions for people of color in the years leading up to the Civil War, but also unprecedented hope for political and social equality with the policies of Radical Reconstruction. More specifically, Nicaud’s café was in operation in the years before and after the ratification of the 1868 Louisiana State Constitution, which guaranteed that all persons be granted “the same civil, political, and public rights and privileges, and be subject to the same pains and punishments.” The explicit inclusion of public rights in a legal document was a strategy developed by a mixed-race delegation intended to redress the “multiple humiliations heaped on

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free people of color in the years prior to the Civil War," especially with regards to racial
discrimination in places of public accommodation.\(^5\) However, in spite of this ambitious
constitutional proviso, reactionary white supremacists, in order to restore their political power,
developed their own tactics to ensure that all people of African ancestry, not just freed slaves,
were consigned to a subordinate class.\(^6\) Nicaud’s coffee stand, a place where slaves, mixed-race
shopkeepers, middle class housewives, wealthy planters, and international tourists could occupy
the same space, offers an opportunity to examine how that proviso played out.

The first section of this chapter explores ways in which transatlantic influences in New
Orleans helped to situate the French Market as a public space in ways that were not experienced
in markets in other American cities. These influences helped women, especially, to gain access
to the public space of the market, an experience largely denied them in traditional coffee houses
and taverns, even those in New Orleans. This was certainly true for Rose Nicaud, but also for
other women of color, both enslaved and free African, as well as indigenous Americans. In the
second section, I describe what is known about Nicaud and her specific coffee business. I
determine how her role as an entrepreneur was complicated by the tumultuous political and
social environment in which she lived. Next, I focus on a homicide that took place in the market
at Rose Nicaud’s coffee stand. On September 25, 1868, a white man named Arthur Guerin shot
and killed a mixed-race man named Edward Forrest. I mine this incident for insights into ways
that public rights were understood and practiced amid the pressures of Reconstruction-era New
Orleans and a groundbreaking new state constitution.

\(^5\) Rebecca Scott, Degrees of Freedom: Louisiana and Cuba After Slavery (Cambridge, MA:
Belknap Press, 2005); 44.
\(^6\) Michael A. Ross, The Great New Orleans Kidnapping Case: Race, Law, and Justice in the
A Marketplace of Public Rights

Upon arriving in New Orleans in 1819, Benjamin Latrobe was struck by the “odd look” of the city, especially the public market. In his diary he recorded the following impression:

Along the Levee, as far as the eye could reach to the West, and to the Market house to the East were ranged two rows of Market people, some having stalls or tables with a Tilt or awning of Canvass, but the Majority having their wares lying on the ground, perhaps on a piece of canvass, or a parcel of Palmetto leaves. The articles to be sold were not more various than the sellers. White men and women, and of all hues of brown, and of all Classes of faces, from round Yankees, to grisly and lean Spaniards, black Negroes and negroresses, filthy Indians half naked, Mulattoes, curly and straight haired, Quarteroons of all shades long haired and frizzled; the women dressed in the most flaring yellow, and scarlet gowns, the men capped and hatted. Their wares consisted of as many kinds as their faces. Innumerable wild ducks, Oysters, poultry of all kinds, fish, bananas, piles of Oranges, Sugar Cane, sweet and Irish potatoes, corn in the Ear and husked, apples, carrots, and all sorts of other roots, eggs, trinkets, tin ware, dry goods, in fact of more and odder things to be sold in that manner and place, than I can enumerate.⁷

Although not always flattering to the people he observed, Latrobe, nevertheless, recognized that the French Market was a place where men and women of all races and classes could gather. Some might find the diversity and din that caught his attention suitable to describe public markets in any number of busy port cities in the early nineteenth century. However, Richard Campanella reminds us that travelers who chronicled their journeys tended to be erudite and worldly. If they saw fit to comment on the chaotic diversity of the New Orleans market, then there must have been something unique about it.⁸ Latrobe himself admits to his own worldliness, yet he still found it “impossible not to stare at a sight wholly new even to me who has travelled

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⁸ Richard Campanella, *Bienville’s Dilemma: A Historical Geography of New Orleans* (Lafayette, LA; Center for Louisiana Studies, 2008); 168.
much in Europe and America.” 9 The French Market in New Orleans was a popular tourist destination for travelers throughout the nineteenth century, much as it is today.10 Like Latrobe, many of those travelers commented specifically on the multiethnic nature of the market, referring to both the people and the products. Writing of her trip in 1851, Swedish traveler Frederika Bremer observed:

The French Market is one of the most lively and picturesque scenes of New Orleans…. One feels as if transported at once to a great Paris marché except that one here meets with various races of people, hears many different languages spoken and sees the productions of various zones. Here are English, Irish, Germans, French, Spanish, Mexicans. Here are negroes and Indians. Most who sell are black Creoles, or natives, who have the French animation and gayety, who speak French fluently… 11

Bremer compares New Orleans to Paris, then the third largest city in the world.12 But even that great metropolis could not rival the diversity in New Orleans. Although the unexpected mix of people and products may have surprised these world travelers, Usner reminds us that what they were witnessing in the 1800s was actually a more than century-old legacy of cross-cultural exchange in the Lower Mississippi Valley.13 The market house that Latrobe described had been built in 1813, but the land on which it stood, on the levee just downriver from the Plaza des Armas, had been the site of an informal marketplace where European colonial settlers, Indians,
and slaves had been bartering their foodstuffs and wares in a fluid and flexible system of exchanges since the city’s founding. Both Latrobe and Bremer write of the presence of Indians and people of African descent. Bremer even notices that these are the people who are doing most of the selling. The diversity that Latrobe and Bremer found so remarkable was evidence of a long history of interactions among disparate groups that had been born of necessity but which then became normalized as Indians, settlers, and slaves developed tactics to remain relevant in the food market, even as a transatlantic trade came to dominate the Louisiana economy.

Because of a sparse colonial population and a marginal place in the French Empire, New Orleans once depended on foodstuffs produced by Indians and slaves for its very survival. Usner argues that these exchanges actually formed the roots of Louisiana’s distinctive creole cuisine. Linking together different ethnic groups “in an environment rich in fish, fowl, game, and seasonings,” the regional food market informed local culinary tastes and cooking methods. ¹⁴ However, the creolization process that created new foods also led to new ways of thinking. He writes, “By trading in particular food items, Indians, Africans, and Europeans interacted closely and influenced each other culturally.”¹⁵ The food was not just an object of exchange, but also a means of exchange, a way to learn about each other as well as a method of presenting themselves as members of distinct groups. The social interaction generated a unique creole diet, forging connections among the groups, while at the same time serving as a source of autonomy for the parties involved. Certain foodstuffs, like filé powder and bear oil, were enjoyed by Europeans and became part of a new culinary canon but remained associated with the specific Indian groups who provided it, helping them to maintain their identity even as they began to be outnumbered

¹⁴ Usner, 1992; 204
¹⁵ Ibid, 192.
by European settlers.\textsuperscript{16} Planters from the countryside often sent slaves into New Orleans to sell meat and dairy products on their owner’s behalf. Some slaves took advantage of this opportunity to peddle independently food items that they had grown or caught themselves. In this way, they also maintained some independence, with some slaves even managing to save enough money to purchase their own freedom.\textsuperscript{17} In addition to helping the colony to prosper, petty trading, Usner argues, was a means “for avoiding complete encirclement by the dominant society.”\textsuperscript{18}

The development of trade among Louisiana, Europe, Africa, and the Caribbean during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries undoubtedly contributed to the oft-noted diversity of people and products in New Orleans. But Shannon Dawdy reminds us that this transatlantic trade was actually part of a more complex system of trade relationships of which New Orleans was the center. Also included in the network was a trading circuit between Louisiana and Dutch, English, and Spanish colonies, trade between the Lower Mississippi Valley and the Illinois farm country upriver, and finally the informal local-urban-rural exchanges between Indians, settlers, and slaves that has already been discussed.\textsuperscript{19} With New Orleans as the entrepot of the four tiers of this interconnected trade, it is no wonder then that visitors wrote of a diversity there that had not been observed in other port cities. New Orleans was unique in this regard, at least in the Western hemisphere. That diversity flourished over the years as more groups connected with the various circuits of this Atlantic-Caribbean-Mississippi trade settled in and around New Orleans.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{16} Usner, 192-197
\textsuperscript{17} Hall, 1992.
\textsuperscript{18} Usner; 213.
\textsuperscript{20} Dawdy, 2008; 107.
Despite the growing importance of New Orleans as a transatlantic port, everyday food products continued to be traded informally on the levee (and in the streets) in an ad-hoc manner until the late eighteenth century when Spanish colonial authorities grew concerned about the difficulties of inspecting and regulating the quality of food in such a decentralized way. For these reasons (and the potential revenue they could obtain from licenses and rents), the Cabildo, in 1784, authorized the construction of a wooden pavilion at the corner of St. Ann and Levee Streets that was to be the city’s first permanent public market.\(^{21}\) The original building primarily housed meat vendors, but it was destroyed by a hurricane in 1812. The following year a new “Butcher’s Market” was built, and this is the “market house” to which Latrobe referred. In 1823 a covered vegetable market, or Halles des Legumes, was added along the levee between St. Philip and Ursulines Street. Rose Nicaud’s stand would eventually be under this structure. The cost of licenses and stall rentals undoubtedly placed economic limitations on who could officially sell in the market, and increasingly, slaves had to have their owners’ permission to pursue such enterprises.\(^{22}\) Slaves had originally been exempt from market regulations. According to one 1784 Cabildo ordinance, slaves were permitted to “continue to enjoy the liberty to sell their commodities in the City as they did before.”\(^{23}\) However, as discussed in the previous chapter, fears of slave unrest developed among the white population of New Orleans in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and this fear led to ordinances curtailing slave

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\(^{21}\) Richard Campanella, *Bienville’s Dilemma: A Historical Geography of New Orleans* (Lafayette, LA: Center for Louisiana Studies, 2008); 243-244.

\(^{22}\) Usner, 214-218.

freedoms. In 1817, a city ordinance prohibited slaves from obtaining peddlers licenses, which had allowed them to hawk their wares freely anywhere along the levee and in the streets.24

The formation of an institutionalized marketplace made it more difficult for Indians and slaves to trade openly, but city ordinances never completely eliminated them from the food marketing system. Indians and Africans found ways to maintain a place in the food economy.25 They often ignored legalities and simply set up their wares on a mat or blanket, or as Latrobe observed, on a palmetto leaf, outside of the market pavilions and awaited willing buyers, much as they had done since early colonial times. Usner argues that, by and large, city inhabitants had no qualms about buying goods from people who lacked the proper permissions and licensing because it had been customary practice to buy goods from Indians and slaves long before the ordinances were ever enacted.26 The associations had a long history and were commonplace.

There is, perhaps, another reason why the tactic of ignoring city ordinances was so effective. In continuing their patterns of trade, both buyers and sellers were negotiating the fulfilment of a basic human need – the need to eat. That need made it possible for both parties to bend the rules and to find their way around the restrictions designed to control their actions. In their quest to feed themselves, both buyers and sellers adapted to the situation at hand and learned new ways of doing things. This arrangement brings the complexity of the interaction between colonizers and colonized into focus. The laws regulating the market suggest subordination of colonial subjects, but the actual daily practice speaks to a more symbiotic relationship, in which each group benefited from the tactics of the other. Because of this mutual

24 Johnson, 638.
25 Usner describes in more detail the specific tactics used by Indians and slaves to continue their system of trade.
26 Usner, 215.
dependency in the food economy, Indians and people of African descent maintained their agency and helped facilitate the public nature of the market environment. They wanted to sell their products and city residents wanted to buy them. Through this process of adaptation and creolization, the market and the levee on which it was located remained a public space and a site of cross-cultural interaction even as racial tensions mounted throughout the early American and antebellum period.

The long history of understanding the levee as a public space may explain why a French creole-dominated city government demanded the continued openness of the levee and its batture when Americans who flocked to the city after the Purchase attempted to privatize the area.27 The contrasting attitudes of creoles and Americans regarding public space and private interest are evident in a series of legal battles that took place beginning in 1807 between former New York mayor Edward Livingston and the New Orleans city council.28 The case was viewed by the French creoles of Louisiana as a test for what kind of treatment they could expect in the American courts system, and what they witnessed was cause for concern.29 After moving to New Orleans, Livingston tried to purchase the right to the batture in the Faubourg St. Mary from the heirs of creole resident, Bertrand Gravier. The French creoles of the city council took issue with the transaction, arguing that in addition to its commercial function, the levee was used in a number of public ways – as a boat landing, as a source of dirt, as a pathway to access the fresh water of the river, and even a recreational spot where city residents often met and talked and

27 The batture is the alluvial land between a river at low-water stage and the levee, the place where the shore is “battered” by the water.
walked, escaping the heat of the city.\textsuperscript{30} The city argued that because the batture had been “set apart for public use from time immemorial,” it should remain commonly “owned.”\textsuperscript{31} In contrast, Livingston argued that in denying him his fairly-purchased property, the city was infringing on his “personal liberty.” Upton contends that Americans (as Livingston was) had historically viewed waterfront land near ports as a source of revenue, as a commodity to be sold by the city to individuals as private property. They recognized no common claim to the land; virtually all land was available for private purchase. Government’s function was to protect private property.\textsuperscript{32} The case was essentially a matter of individual interest versus public good, but American opinions may have also been informed by British conceptions of the waterfront. According to British custom, neither respectable ladies nor respectable gentlemen used the area around wharves for recreational purposes. Instead they chose to take in the air in public parks and gardens.\textsuperscript{33} But in the first decade of the nineteenth century, New Orleans could boast of no such parks or gardens.\textsuperscript{34} All they had was the levee. Ultimately, the parties reached a compromise. Livingston was able to purchase the batture, but he had to allow the public to continue to use it as they traditionally had.\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{30} Julien Poydras, \textit{Speech of Julien Poydras, Esq, Delegate from the Territory of Orleans in Support of The Right of the Public to The Batture in Front of the Suburb of St. Mary}, Friday February 9, 1810 (City of Washington: A&G Way Printers, 1810); 21-23. In his speech, Poydras gives an eloquent description of nine different ways the levee and batture are used in a public manner.
\textsuperscript{31} Poydras, 1810, 17-18.
\textsuperscript{32} Upton, 1994
\textsuperscript{33} Marise Bachand, "Gendered Mobility and the Geography of Respectability in Charleston and New Orleans, 1790-1861." \textit{Journal of Southern History} 81, no. 1: 41-78 2015
\textsuperscript{34} Upton, 1994, 278.
The tradition of public use (and lack of other suitable public outdoor space) helps to explain why the New Orleans waterfront appeared quite different from most other commercial ports in both America and Europe in the early American and antebellum eras. Upton notes that the densely built wharves, warehouses, and large waterfront homes that characterized most American port cities, were absent from the waterfront of New Orleans.36 There were the market houses near the Plaza des Armas, but other than that there were few fixed structures. Instead, the levee and waterfront were places of movement where people and goods streamed in and out of steamboats and flatboats from upriver and oceangoing ships from downriver in a largely open space. It was not uncommon to see boats and ships “berthed four or five vessels deep the length of the city.”37

Historians often focus on the importance of the river to New Orleans. Without the river, there would have been no New Orleans.38 Its commercial importance is unquestioned, but it was the levee that connected the oceanic and river trade with the inland communities who were also part of the complex network of economic activity. The openness of the levee is thus significant both literally and figuratively. Its openness literally made possible the exchange of goods from around the Atlantic World with local products from rural hinterlands. And as a public space, the levee was open to all the people who were part of the commercial enterprise as well as to the knowledge and ideas they brought with them. Open access to public spaces might also be a legacy of Parisian influences on New Orleans. The French city embraced a much more inclusive attitude toward its public spaces than did London in the nineteenth century.39

36 Upton, 1994, 277
37 Upton, 1994; 277, 279.
39 Bachand, 2015, 71.
We might also view the openness of the levee as reflective of the porous nature of racial boundaries found in the creole world of Louisiana in the colonial and early American periods. According to Shirley Thompson, in francophone Louisiana, the *gens de couleurs libres* negotiated a fluid position “between black and white and between French and American.”

Although the Code Noir of 1806 had included legal language suggesting the “inferiority” of free people of color to whites, the laws directing slave behavior had clearly not applied to them. Thompson argues that racial boundaries grew more rigid with the process of Americanization. She does caution us to be wary of essentialist understandings of the terms “Creole” and “American.” Much like the term “Creole,” to be “American” also demands mixture and involves identities that are fluid and in flux. However, she notes that by the mid-nineteenth century some “Creoles,” particularly wealthy “white” ones, accommodated themselves to American concerns and ideologies in an effort to defend their status against a host of “outsiders,” which included “immigrants, Reconstruction-era carpetbaggers, and activists campaigning for black civil and political rights.”

As Creole elites allied themselves with the elites of American society, a once dynamic three-tiered society became a static two-tiered society.

Many scholars have described how American policies and institutions facilitated this transformation. Americans brought an end to government support for Catholic policies that had ensured the spiritual equality of all people, including slaves and free people of color. An Anglo-Puritan view of sexuality undermined old creole traditions of quadroon balls and plaçage,

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41 Thompson, 2009, 9.
42 Bell, 1997, 88.
a practice which had helped to perpetuate a free colored population.43 Beginning in the 1840s, the children of free people of color were denied admission to the new public schools, a system modelled after the schools Horace Mann had developed in the northeastern United States.44 An influx of white European immigrants who came to support the commercial boom taking place primarily in the American section of the city eroded the economic status of free people of color. Immigrants from Ireland and Germany took over many of the jobs they had traditionally held, especially as hotel, restaurant, and dock workers.45 Furthermore, as an increasingly militant abolitionist movement from the North migrated south, local legislatures developed stricter laws to protect the institution of slavery. In 1857, slave emancipations were entirely prohibited, and in 1858, city officials prevented both free blacks and slaves from gathering for any purpose, including religious worship, without white supervision.46

The 1850s ordinances described above were strategies devised by planter-dominated local legislatures to counter the influx of American ideas; however, there were times when, as Thompson suggests, they used those ideas to their advantage. When black residents had protested the segregated streetcar system in the 1860s, a local judge sided with the streetcar company to uphold segregation. Although there had been no law banning blacks from riding in the same cars as whites, the “star” system was a matter of company policy.47 The judge decided that ending segregation was an encroachment on a private company’s basic right to refuse

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46 Bell, 1997, 84.
47 Streetcars with a black painted star on them were open to black riders.
service to anyone it chose. In other words, the decision was not about civil rights but about private property. Fifty years, earlier, during the batture controversy, the Creole elite had associated government protection of private property with Americanization, and they had opposed it. However, they developed a different attitude to the concept when it worked in their favor, that is, to shore up the structures of power designed to restrict the activity of the city’s black population.

But the Creole elite were not the only ones to be blamed for the new restrictions. Some of the policies were directly carried out by the American government. During the Union occupation in the Civil War, for example, General Nathan Banks ordered all blacks to carry passes, regardless of whether they were free or enslaved, ostensibly as a means to control the spread of smallpox. But this had the effect, of course, of limiting the movement of all members of New Orleans colored population, regardless of education or status. Free colored men complained in the black press that the policy was an outrage, and it deprived them of rights and the freedom of mobility that they had long enjoyed. According to Thompson, it was clear to these men that “racial distinctions of black and white were beginning to trump cultural and linguistic distinctions.” As a result of the erosion of their in-between status, now they were all “Negroes.” The special privileges that free people of color had enjoyed as part of the transatlantic, creole tradition dissipated under a more simplified construction of race. But even as some doors were closing, the market remained largely open. Although immigrants were increasingly taking over many jobs traditionally held by free people of color, they retained a hold

48 Fischer, 1974, 32
49 Thompson, 2009; 232.
50 Ibid.
as market sellers. In the next section, I explain how and in what ways Rose Nicaud, a free woman of color, made use of the “openness” of the market even as rights for people of color dwindled elsewhere in the city.

**Rose Nicaud’s Market World**

One of the most famous and most popular tourist destinations in the French Market district of New Orleans today is a coffee shop known as the Café du Monde. According to the shop’s website, the business has been “the original French Market coffee stand since 1862.” That it was the “original” coffee stand is doubtful. In 1840, a vendor could obtain a license specifically for a coffee stand in the vegetable market for twenty-five cents, making it evident that coffee selling was part of the market’s daily practices well before the claim made by the current owners of Café du Monde. Mary Gehman claims that Rose Nicaud herself set up the first coffee stand in the French Market in the “early” 1800s. Because her business was so popular, other coffee vendors, soon followed suit. It is uncertain exactly when Nicaud, who was born about 1812, first opened her stand, but according to one city directory, she was a “coffee-seller” at least by 1851, a decade before the Café du Monde claimed to have opened. She probably began selling her coffee from a portable cart in the city streets, and at some point she obtained a stationary stand in the market. Catherine Cole asserts that she was a former slave who managed to buy her freedom through the profits from her coffee cart. I have not found primary evidence to support that claim, although it was certainly possible, especially before

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51 Reinders, 1965, 274.
55 City Directory of New Orleans, 1851. (New Orleans, LA).
stricter manumission laws were passed in the 1850s. Enslaved women, if they were between the ages of 16 and 49 were far more likely than enslaved men were to purchase their own freedom. Because they were deemed less valuable than men, and also because they had more opportunity for selling goods and services, women could more easily acquire the necessary funds. ⁵⁷

It is known, that in 1840, at age 28, Rose Nicaud was free, the head of her own household, and living with two other young free women, a girl under ten and another between ten and twenty. ⁵⁸ These could very well have been her own daughters or sisters, but Sacramental records are silent on their identity. With young people in the household to support, she took advantage of the opportunity that had long been open to women of color in New Orleans to peddle food products in the public market. Her coffee business may not necessarily have been the means to her personal freedom, but it did provide her with some economic independence.

Nicaud would have witnessed the erosion of rights for people of color during her lifetime. When she was born in 1812, it was possible for a free woman of color to own a coffee house. However, in 1859, the Louisiana Legislature voted to forbid any free person of color, male or female, from owning a coffee house, billiard hall, or retail store where liquor was sold. Three years earlier the city had been banned all people of color from obtaining liquor licenses. ⁵⁹ As discussed in the previous chapter, local authorities associated liquor drinking and the places where it was sold with the spread of ideas that could promote abolition and disrupt the dominant social-political order. But even if Rose had wanted to operate a coffee house, the cost of

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⁵⁸ 1840 United States Federal Census, New Orleans Ward 1
obtaining a license for such a venture would have likely been an obstacle. In 1831, that cost was 150 dollars per year. It cost another 60 dollars a year for a liquor license. A license for a market stall was much more affordable.

Women of African descent had a tradition of selling a variety of food items both in the streets and in the markets of New Orleans, but the fact that Rose Nicaud specifically chose to sell coffee over some other commodity is unsurprising. For one thing, she could be sure of high demand because its eye-opening properties appealed to market workers, who opened their stalls in the wee hours of the morning. One journalist wrote in 1859 that among the first signs of life in the market each morning were the coffee tables “decorated with their array of cups of steaming Mocha, and visited by many for business or amusement…” In 1859, Rose’s stall was likely one of those tables, but visitors to New Orleans had observed women of color selling coffee well before Rose’s time. In 1828, Scottish visitor Basil Hall remarked, “Close to every second or third pillar sat one or more black women, chattering in French, selling coffee and chocolate.” That the market could support multiple coffee vendors attests to its prevalence and popularity. Hall’s 1828 observation is also further evidence that coffee stalls existed in the French Market more than thirty years before Café du Monde was supposed to have appeared as the “original” stand.

Still, the Café du Monde’s claim to such a long history speaks to the importance of coffee to New Orleans’ own past and to that of the market, in particular. The overall relevance of coffee helps to underscore the significance of Nicaud’s own stand to daily life in the market. A coffee stand or shop may have existed in the Café du Monde’s current location, at the upriver end of the old Butcher’s Market, since 1862, but it was not always called the Café du Monde. Nevertheless, the name of the current shop, “café of the world,” deserves some commentary. The name is a modern reflection on the market’s historic reputation as a unique transatlantic space.

The café itself enjoyed the same renown. A guidebook from 1885, describing what was then called the Café Rapide, pointed out that while seated at the marble stand enjoying a cup of coffee or chocolate, “[a] man might here see the world. Every race that the world boasts is here, and a good many races that are nowhere else.” With its location at the market’s entrance and next to the batture where boats docked, the café was naturally a good place to witness the market’s well-documented diversity. Because the seating was out in the open, a feature common to all nineteenth century French Market coffee stands, including Rose Nicaud’s, café patrons not only had a good view of what was going on, they could also easily call-out to passing market-goers as they wound their way through various stalls, inviting them to join in on the coffee and conversation.

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64 “The French Market,” 1885; 258.

65 Old photographs of the café at the entrance to the Butcher’s Market with small tables and chairs outside at the very entrance to the market.
In my theory chapter, I discussed the link between open spaces and creolization. The heat of New Orleans demanded that much social activity take place outdoors. Because coffee stands, and indeed all market stalls, were out in the open and public, they encouraged unpredictable encounters among consumers, vendors, and tourists. Everything and everyone that was normally kept separate in the socio-cultural order of antebellum New Orleans either by ordinance or by tradition was able to unite in these spaces in unexpected, chaotic ways and often as forms of coded resistance. For example, even after slaves were prohibited from obtaining market licenses themselves, they maintained responsibility for cooking and marketing on behalf of their owners. Not only did this everyday practice ignite and reinforce relationships with other slaves who were out marketing for their owner’s households, it also helped them to develop a world and an identity outside of their master’s control. As open spaces, Café du Monde, Morning Call, Rose Nicaud’s stand, as well as the numerous other coffee stands throughout the market complex invited participation and interaction among people who would not otherwise have much opportunity to connect.

In his 1862 article on the French Market, English writer Thomas Butler Gunn observed the interaction among different groups. He noted that everyone, whether buyers or sellers, were always pleasant and civil to each other. He wrote, “the demeanor of all present – white, black or parti-colored -struck me as being less brusque and more democratic than the observances of a

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66 See Baron, Robert and Ana C. Cara, eds. Creolization as Cultural Creativity. Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 2011
68 Morning Call was a well-known coffee stand in the Vegetable Market that was in business from the 1860s until the 1970s.
similar scene in the North.” Of course, by “democratic” Gunn in no way meant to imply a social or political equality of all people. As he observed a servant attend to his mistress, Gunn made it clear that he was fully aware of the man’s inferior status. Gunn also had his own ideas about people’s place in society. In that same article he wrote disparagingly of French women compared to their American counterparts, and he declared that he regarded the “negro as infinitely more agreeable” than either Indians or “dirty” Sicilians. Rather, the “democracy” that Gunn wrote of was the market participants’ recognition of each other’s humanity, at least as they interacted in the market setting. In the market, people treated each other with dignity and respect as they went about the daily business of buying and selling food, drink, and household items.

The civility he observed was especially evident in the coffee stalls. Gunn noted that some of the stalls were “frequented exclusively by negroes, by women, by white people – all…paying the same price.” And no matter who the customer was, each one received an excellent cup of coffee that could rival those served in New Orleans restaurants. The quality product and the good treatment offered by proprietors encouraged customers to hang around – and of course buy more coffee. He writes, “No wonder that he who sits down to drink but one cup, orders another; that she who meditated two, lingers over her fifth.” Coffee, it seems, encouraged not just socialization, but contemplation. The coffee encouraged Gunn himself to linger and to connect with others. He commented that as he was writing the article about a Sunday at the French Market, he was seated at a French Market coffee stall, observing and talking with others and contemplating their actions.  

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70 Gunn, 1863. All quotes.
Like so many others, Gunn wrote of the multiethnic nature of the market due to its proximity to a transatlantic port. As a social beverage, coffee helped to bring together many of those different groups in one space. Furthermore, New Orleans’ position on the transatlantic trading circuit helped to secure the product’s economic importance to the city in the nineteenth century. When European traders disseminated coffee cultivation from the Middle East to the Caribbean and South America, the port at the mouth of the Mississippi River became a logical entry point for coffee into North America. By the 1840s, when Nicaud was head of her household, the port at New Orleans was the second largest importer of coffee in the United States, behind only New York. In 1857 over 530,000 bags of green coffee arrived at the port.\footnote{“New Orleans and Coffee” Louisiana State Museum Online Exhibits Coffee Trade and the Port of New Orleans. Retrieved from www.crt.state.la.us. Accessed February 11, 2018. Its excellent location to receive coffee imports earned New Orleans the nickname “the Logical Port.”}

Some of this coffee was destined for other national and international ports, but many of the beans found their way into one of the many commercial or private roasters in New Orleans. Nineteenth century newspapers are filled with ads for locally roasted coffee, attesting to the beverage’s popularity.\footnote{I found ads dating from the second half of the nineteenth century for the following brands: Café du Monde Coffee, French Market Coffee, Luziane Coffee.} It is no wonder then, that Nicaud made a living for herself and her family with coffee. Some coffee companies, such as Luziane, prominently featured black “mammy” caricatures in their advertisements in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although those ads would be considered inappropriate by today’s standards, they were likely designed to appeal to the nostalgia of the day by getting consumers to recall earlier times when they purchased coffee from one of the many women of color in the French Market, perhaps from a favorite vendor such as Rose Nicaud.
One writer who clearly favored Nicaud’s product and her stand was Martha Reinhard Smallwood Field, a New Orleans journalist. In the mid-1880s, the producers of the brand French Market Coffee commissioned Field, who wrote under the pen name, Catharine Cole, to write an extended advertisement for their product. Cole’s piece was published by the company in 1916 as the *Story of the Old French Market*. In the small booklet, Cole takes readers on a virtual tour through the market buildings, telling its story and history. She situates the reader as a customer perusing vendors’ stalls and wares and other market patrons. As the reader “walks” through the market, Cole takes special notice of each coffee stand they will encounter, starting with the Café Rapide in the Butcher’s Market and finishing with the stall of Rose Nicaud, at the market’s other end. Like many other New Orleans writers of her era, Cole creates a world of exotic exceptionalism of the people and products she encounters, particularly of the coffee and its buyers and sellers. I opened this chapter with her rather lyrical description of Nicaud. Elsewhere in her booklet she writes:

> Here, from the beginning, all the small cuisiniers set up on the black cozy flagstones their braziers of charcoal and brewed over them that all but immortal decoction, fit to be bottled and sold as perfume from Araby the blest...French Market Coffee. It was and always will be the libation poured by poets and romancers who would tell the story of the old French Market, or paint the bizarre pictures of this historic old place of sales...And so we stroll on through the dim ashes of the old market...But here is a coffee stall, dropped down in this cozy corner for just such passers-by as we two...At another coffee stall, a beautiful young Creole belle has seated herself with her mamma.  

Of course, as an advertisement for a coffee company, one would expect her to emphasize the market’s coffee and its coffee stalls. But Cole wrote the piece at least three decades before its

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73 Flo Field, Personal letter to Mrs. O’Keefe, 1934. Alton Ochsner Papers. Historic New Orleans Collection. Field, Cole’s daughter tells her friend that her mother’s “little book” was written “about fifty years ago” as an advertisement. This would date the writing of the book about 1884. However, it was not published until 1916.

74 Cole, 1916, no pagination.
publication. She could very well have had a first-hand memory of the market scenes she describes, including the stand of Rose Nicaud. Cole was born in 1855, when Rose already had her stand. Because Nicaud died in 1880, Cole’s memories of her must refer to sometime in the late 1860s to 1870s. In spite of some of the stereotypes she presents and her glamorization of the market as a whole, her prose makes a number of points besides memories of “Old Rose” that ring true. In the above passage, she highlights coffee’s Middle Eastern origins, reminding us that the coffee trade itself helped to situate New Orleans as a cosmopolitan space. She links coffee with story-telling, speaking to the beverage’s long-held reputation as a facilitator of conversation and communication. Finally, she informs us that coffee drinking at the stalls in the French Market was an acceptable activity for women. Women could not only be vendors like Nicaud; they could also be public consumers.

Women were largely prohibited from entering coffee houses where politics were discussed and where business was conducted. What participation women did have in the discourse within those spaces would have come largely through their role as owners, workers, or perhaps, prostitutes. When coffee had first reached Europe in the seventeenth century, it was seldom prepared in homes. It was specifically a public drink to be consumed in the public sphere of coffee houses. A male-dominated society believed that coffee houses, in part because of their political, business, and indeed, public nature, were of little concern to women. This was as true of the coffee houses in seventeenth-century London as they were in nineteenth-century New Orleans.

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75 Flo Field Letter, 1934.
76 New Orleans Death Index 1880, New Orleans Parish Library.
Orleans. And because coffee houses in New Orleans were also taverns and could be rough places of gambling and drinking, they seldom welcomed as customers women who wished to preserve their respectability. Although there were no official ordinances forbidding women from entering coffee houses in New Orleans, it was the custom for them to avoid places that were deemed male spaces. This held especially true for upper-class white women. In fact, the rampant crime and disorder associated with New Orleans in the early American and antebellum periods (as well as the lack of appropriate “female” spaces such as public gardens) helped to ensure that “elite” women were largely contained to private spaces.

Upper-class women may not have been welcome in traditional coffee houses, but Bachand points out that their everyday practices reveal that they were indeed eager to experience urban public spaces. By the mid-nineteenth century, the daily practice of shopping was a means for these women to circumvent their traditional confinement. In the colonial and early American periods elite white women had waited for the goods they desired to come to them. In 1819 Benjamin Latrobe wrote, “It was not then, nor is it now, the fashion for Ladies to go shopping.” He noted instead that “[i]n every street during the whole day women, chiefly black women, are met, carrying baskets upon their heads calling at the doors of houses.” Latrobe himself does not point out the irony, but it is interesting to note that in the early American period, the daily practice of peddling gave women of color, both enslaved and free, more mobility than that of upper-class white women. But by mid-century things had changed and even elite white women seized the opportunity to become part of public life. As merchants moved inland away

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79 Bachand, 2015, 42.
80 Ibid. 55.
81 Latrobe, 1819.
from the port, and elite women were no longer threatened “by the presence of improper people, such as vagrants and prostitutes, who inhabited the wharves,” they began to do their own shopping. Although their shopping excursions may not have extended to them picking out a Sunday roast or Friday fish, it is clear from local observers that even upper-class women inhabited the market, in spite of its proximity to the port. They looked at the merchandise and were part of the public culture even if their servants were the ones who actually purchased the goods. One local journalist writing in 1859 provides evidence that the market was experienced by women from various strata of society:

Daylight appears and the crowd of visitors keeps increasing; servants with their baskets, gentlemen enjoying an early smoke…fine ladies out for an early walk; and good housewives who do their own marketing…squatted on this side, the Indian squaw looks calm and indifferent, with the bunches of sassafras roots, aromatic plants from the forest, and the small bag of gombo powder.

The women themselves added to the overall diversity of the market, a characteristic of the space for the entire time that Rose had her stall. In 1879, a year before Nicaud’s death, another visitor observed “the brisk French madame with her dainty stall…the mild-eyed Louisiana Indian woman with her sack of gumbo…the dark-haired Creole lady with her servant gliding here and there…the graceful French dame in her graceful toilet.” Adhering to the typical exotic tone of the day, the visitor also wrote of dark Hebrew women and “negroes” in every shape and shade, from the “irrepressible pickaninny to his rotund and inky grandmother.”

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82 Bachand, 2015, 62.
Claiming a right to urban public space was, for any subordinated group, as important as claiming economic or political rights. Economic independence only became a reality for some groups through their access to the public space of the market. Furthermore, by claiming space in public, marginalized groups themselves became public, that is, they became visible to society, and society became visible to them. Men, even free men of color and, to a lesser extent, male slaves had long enjoyed access to the transatlantic newspapers, global conversations, and public dialogue in tavern-style coffee houses. The market, which included women of all races and classes, provided this segment of the population with their own opportunity to socialize and connect with the world beyond New Orleans. We might argue that because of these gender differences, the market was a more democratic public space because it comprised a broader “public” by encouraging interactions and welcoming perspectives that were not possible in tavern-style coffee houses.

The immediate space surrounding Rose Nicaud’s market world was also part of the diversity. Her stand was in the middle of the Vegetable Market, between St. Philip Street and Ursulines. In 1868, next to Nicaud’s stand were two vegetable stalls, that of Mrs. Simon, a mixed-race woman, and Mr. Fox, a white man. Two women of color, Mrs. Christian and Mrs. LaCaze sold cream cheese and other dairy products nearby. Nicaud counted numerous other people, both black and white, among her regular market companions and customers. The location of Nicaud’s stand was mere yards from where the Café des Refugies had been located a few

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85 Bachand, 2015, 78.
87 I used the testimony of eyewitness accounts from court documents related to Arthur Guerin’s Grand Jury indictment for the shooting death of Edward Forrest. Since the shooting took place at Nicaud’s stand, various witnesses were called to explain their relative location to the event.
decades earlier. Like the Café des Refugies, Nicaud’s stand was conveniently located next to the levee, and probably drew customers from the lively river traffic. When Rose brewed and sold her coffee each morning, she put into circulation a cadre of people who knew each other and who interacted daily, with an unpredictable assortment of other visitors, some who might be at the market on business, some simply visiting as tourists. As a female and as a person of color, her options for making a living were limited. But through her daily coffee business she was able to manipulate the resources available to her to obtain economic freedom and to exercise her public rights. And beginning in 1868 until about the time she gave up her business, those public rights were supposedly guaranteed by Article 13 of the state constitution. This did not extend to her political rights. She would not have been able to vote. Still, her coffee house business was a form of democratic praxis made possible by a long history of interaction among diverse peoples. Just a few months after the new constitution was adopted, a mixed-race man was shot and killed at Rose Nicaud’s stand, putting the constitutional provision for public rights to the test.

A Coffee Stand Homicide

The delegation that met in the fall of 1867 to draft a new constitution for Louisiana under Congress’s Reconstruction program included ninety-eight men, forty-nine who were white and forty-nine who were black. To a man, the black delegation agreed that they would settle for nothing less than a constitution guaranteeing full political and civil rights to all people, without regard to race. The issue of racial discrimination in places of public accommodation was one of their foremost concerns.88 P.B.S. Pinchback, a leader of the black delegation, drafted a proposal that was adopted into the constitution as Article 13. The article forbade racial discrimination in any places of a public character. Aware that past attempts to integrate public facilities through

88 Fischer, 1974, 52.
the legal system had been overruled because they had violated the sanctity of private property (such as in the case of the streetcars), Pinchback devised a clever tactic to define “public” facilities as any that required a license by a state or local authority. When the constitution was adopted in March 1868, Article 13, as Pinchback had drafted it, was included. Because coffee houses, taverns, and coffee stalls required licenses to operate, they were defined, according to the language of Article 13, as public spaces. When the constitution was adopted, those spaces became, theoretically at least, legally open to anyone. When licenses had first been required for eating and drinking establishments, they served as mechanisms of control by the city, because without the license, the business could not legally operate. Now Pinchback was making use of that very mechanism to legally expand access to those spaces to people of color.

But no constitution has much meaning without a way to enforce its principles. In July of 1868, R.H. Isabelle, a black Republican from New Orleans introduced a bill in the state legislature which made racial discrimination in public places a crime and which subjected violators to steep fines and jail time for as long as one year. Both the house and senate passed the bill, and it went to the desk of Republican Governor Henry Clay Warmoth for his signature. The bill was a problem for the governor. On the one hand, he had been elected largely by newly enfranchised black voters, and he owed his political success to them. But on the other hand, he feared the bill’s passage would not only alienate white voters but also provoke racial violence, which had been intensifying across the state.\(^89\) Local newspapers did much to exacerbate public opinion of the white population and to fuel their fears regarding black equality. One article argued the bill was “an outrage upon conscience and the freedom of opinion.”\(^90\) Another article

\(^{89}\) Fischer, 1974, 65.
\(^{90}\) *The New Orleans Times*, August 14, 1868.
argued that the bill would bring about “a revulsion of feeling throughout the country against negro pretensions.” The papers were filled with similar rhetoric for the entire two months that Warmoth pondered the bill, but one incident that they reported was particularly noteworthy. On September 23, “two colored clubs” marched from Congo Square to Canal Street. One white man’s taunting of the men in the procession, which the paper reported as being “2000 strong,” led to rioting and the storming of a restaurant on Canal Street as members of the clubs pursued the heckler. The paper reported that the “negroes,” dashed about like madmen, breaking doors and smashing windows and engaging in hand to hand combat with the “gentlemen” of the restaurant, who were trying to protect their ladies. One black man was killed and several other people were injured. The paper warned that no one should be surprised at the fear that now gripped the city because “the causeless and unjustifiable nature of the attack might well excite the gravest apprehensions.” Two days later, the New Orleans Times, using similar incendiary rhetoric to remind readers of the riot, openly called on Warmoth to veto Isabelle’s bill at once.

Amid this tumultuous political climate Warmoth had to proceed cautiously. The bill was clearly unpopular with much of the white population, but without it, the public accommodations provision of the constitution had no teeth. The bill sat on Warmoth’s desk until the late afternoon of September 25, 1868, when he finally made his decision. But it was the events of that day, and not the riot of the 23rd, that finally prompted him to action.

By 6:30 in the morning on September 25, 1868, Rose Nicaud had already been preparing coffee and filling her customers’ cups for a few hours. The market typically came to life shortly

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91 The New Orleans Times, Sept. 9, 1868.
92 The Times-Picayune, Sept. 23, 1868.
93 The New Orleans Times, Sept. 25, 1868.
94 Fischer, 1974, 65.
after midnight each day, including Sunday, and by noon most of the vegetable sellers and meat vendors had packed up and gone home. On this particular morning, Rose chatted with her friend, Mrs. Simon, who was taking a coffee break from her own busy morning selling vegetables at a stand across from Rose’s.95 Also seated at Rose’s stall that morning was a forty-year-old white man named Arthur Guerin. Rose knew the man because he frequently stopped by for coffee in the morning after he had stayed out all night in the city. This was one of those mornings. Over his coffee he told Rose he was on his way home to bathe and dress because he had not been to bed yet. He had just come from the fish market, which was located just down from the vegetable sellers and Rose’s stand, and he was taking his purchase home to his mother. After their brief exchange, Rose resumed working at her stand and talking to Mrs. Simon, while Guerin finished his coffee.

What happened next differs according to the person giving the account, but according to Rose, Edward Forrest, a 38-year-old “mulatto” man, whom she knew because he kept a soda stand at the other end of the market, passed by and engaged Guerin in conversation “in a friendly manner.” She did not pay much attention to the conversation until it suddenly became heated. She heard Guerin tell Forrest, “Go away from me. I don’t want to have anything to do with you.” As Forrest passed by her stand to move on, Rose pulled him aside and said, “Don’t mind Mr. Guerin; he is probably drunk.” (She would later admit in her testimony that Guerin seemed perfectly sober, but she had been trying to diffuse the tension.) Guerin left a moment later, heading in the same direction as Forrest, but he soon came back. He reminded Rose that she had

95 To set the scene of the crime, I have used the Rose Nicaud’s witness statement from the official court documents of State of Louisiana v. Arthur Guerin, No. 571. (October 28, 1868). Louisiana Second District Court (Orleans Parish). Records, 1846-1880. New Orleans Public Library.
not given him his change. She gave him a dime, and as he turned toward the Levee and the streetcars, Rose saw Forrest approaching fast with two other men and a police officer following behind. As the three men reached Guerin, he stopped. At this point Rose ran away because she was afraid. She heard a gun shot and turned back to see Guerin standing quietly between her stall and the vegetable stand of Charles Fox. Guerin was holding a gun, but Forrest and his two companions were no longer around.96

Witnesses later confirmed that Guerin had shot Forrest, who walked away holding his side. Mortally wounded, he had collapsed a few yards away in the front of the Fish Market located at the head of Ursulines Street. By the time he was taken in a carriage to his home on Love Street, he was dead.97 Guerin had also walked away from the fracas but in the opposite direction. Before walking away, he threatened to shoot the young police officer who tried to arrest him. For a day and a half no one could find Guerin for questioning until he turned himself in late the next night.98 On these matters, the basic facts of the incident, the witnesses interviewed for the coroner’s inquest and the grand jury hearing largely concurred; however, they disagreed significantly on what Guerin and Forrest had quarreled about at Rose’s stand, and they disagreed on the possible motivation for the shooting. But given the volatile nature of the immediate political circumstances of the time, the discrepancies are hardly surprising.

The main line of questioning in the court documents centered on figuring out the extent to which the homicide was racially motivated and if it was a case of self-defense. There was also an attempt to find out if the killing was related to the riot that occurred earlier in the week.

97 Testimony of Manuel De Avila, Coroner, Parish of Orleans, Louisiana v. Guerin.
98 Testimony of Police Officers Gregory Young and Gustave Marigny, Louisiana v. Guerin.
Guerin was white and Edward Forrest was mixed-race. Guerin was a member of the Red Warriors, a nativist organization, and Forrest, at least according to some testimony, had been one of the marchers who participated in the Canal Street riot. The court interviewed sixteen witnesses, nine of whom the documents and newspapers referred to as “colored.” Not all of these “witnesses” had actually seen the incident, but four who did (three female and one male – all persons of color) claimed to have heard Guerin make racially charged remarks before he shot Forrest. Pauline Victorin, who was seated having coffee, and Joseph Byrd, a market customer passing by Rose’s stall, both said they heard Guerin say that he “wanted to kill a nigger this morning.” According to the witnesses, he said this even before Forrest arrived, suggesting that he was looking for a fight. Emily Jacob and Mrs. Barrasiere, two customers who were shopping at stands nearby, claimed that when Forrest asked Rose for a cup of coffee, Guerin told Forrest that he hoped he did not intend to sit down because “that coffee stand was not made for niggers.” Both witnesses remarked that Forrest had rebutted with something along the lines of “I may be black, but my money is not.” The witnesses claimed that this exchange was the beginning of a quarrel which resulted in Forrest going to look for a police officer.

Two white men who overheard the quarrel did not hear any racial remarks. Mr. Fox, the vegetable seller, said he heard some arguing but because it was in French, he could not understand what they said. He also said he heard the shot but did not see a gun or who shot whom. His friend, Mr. Kenny, a steamship steward in town temporarily, heard Guerin tell Forrest to go away; he did not want to hurt him because he was armed. Guerin supposedly told Forrest to go get a weapon and then he would fight him. When Mr. Kenny saw Forrest return with the two “colored” men and Officer Young, he walked away because he “sensed there would

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99 Witness statements of Emily Jacob and Mrs. Barrasiere, *Louisiana v. Guerin.*
be trouble.”100 Many of the other witnesses interviewed, both black and white, could not offer much help. Either they truly did not see anything that would have a bearing on the case or they did not want to get involved. Then there were “character witnesses” of sorts. One witness claimed to have heard Edward tell a group of friends about two months back that they needed to beware of Guerin. However, the witness had not overheard the reason. Another man said that he had heard and seen Forrest taunt Guerin in the face with a torchlight at the recent Radical march.101 No one else could corroborate whether or not Forrest or Guerin had been at the protest. The witnesses disagreed over whether or not Forrest and his two companions surrounded Guerin or ganged up on him in some way causing Guerin to shoot in self-defense. E.M. Crozat, a white customer, claimed he saw Forrest putting a pistol behind his back before going back to where Guerin was standing. Emily Jacob, however, said that although Forrest and his companions did walk toward Guerin, none of them was armed and no one had made a move to strike him. Mrs. Barrasiere maintained that Forrest was shot in cold blood, “like a dog.”

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the testimony came from Mrs. Simon and Rose Nicaud, two of the people who were actually at the coffee stand when the incident occurred. Neither Mrs. Simon nor Rose reported hearing any racial remarks. Neither Mrs. Simon nor Rose could be sure that Emily Jacob or Mrs. Barrasiere, who both claimed to have heard the conversation, were anywhere around the coffee stand when everything happened. In fact, Rose claimed that although she knew Mrs. Barrasiere well, she had not been at the market that day. She also was quite certain that she had never seen Emily Jacob before in her life. Rose, who was called to give testimony multiple times, repeatedly stated that although she knew Edward Forrest

100 Witness statements of Charles Fox and G. Kenny, *Louisiana v. Guerin*

from the market, he had never sat down at her stand, nor had he ever ordered a cup of coffee from her. But she also claimed that the entire business about the racial remarks was nonsense; she even accused Mrs. Barrasiere of lying. Nothing of the kind was ever said, she emphatically proclaimed, because “everybody takes coffee at my stand.”

Word spread quickly about Forrest’s death, and newspapers jumped to their own conclusions. The Daily Picayune reported, less than a day after the shooting, that it “has been proved” that the killing was in self-defense, but that has not stopped “excited and threatening crowds of negroes,” from assembling in the streets with arms in their hands “to avenge the death of a man of color.” Public schools were closed at ten o’clock that morning after gun shots were fired into a school building, and children were urged to go straight home to avoid the mobs. Undoubtedly some violence occurred, but the New Orleans Republican published a piece admonishing the “sensation reporters” for fueling the fears, going so far as to argue that the Democrats were surely behind the exaggerations. The Republican’s reports of the riots were indeed more moderate, but if the paper’s readers had hoped that its moderate view would influence how Warmoth would treat Isabelle’s bill, they would be disappointed. When the governor got word of the unrest that had broken out in the wake of Edward Forrest’s death, he quickly acted. He returned the bill to the legislature without his signature on the same afternoon of the shooting, explaining in his veto message that it would be impossible to enforce. Racial discrimination in places of public accommodation could not be legally called a crime.

102 Witness statement of Rose Nicaud, Louisiana v. Guerin.
103 The Daily Picayune, September 26, 1868.
104 Ibid.
106 Fischer, 1974.
Shortly after the shooting, a grand jury met to consider charging Arthur Guerin for murder. A jury consisting of two white and three colored men concluded that there were too many inconsistencies in the testimonies and that there was not enough evidence to put Guerin on trial.\footnote{New Orleans Crescent, September 26, 1868, New Orleans Republican, October 29, 1868.} However, in February 1869, Guerin would be back in court again, this time for the shooting death of an Irish immigrant named David Hennessy in a coffee house on St. Ann Street. Once again, he would not be charged with a crime.\footnote{Report of Coroner’s Inquest, Parish of Orleans, February 27, 1869. First District Court of New Orleans, City Records, New Orleans Parish Library.}

It is difficult to discern with any certainty just who was telling the truth in the shooting death of Edward Forrest. Each witness may have believed that he or she was being factual in what was said in their testimony. The discrepancies can be chalked up to human error. It is possible to speculate why each witness made certain claims, but for the purposes of this dissertation, I will limit those speculations to only a few. Given the political turmoil of the time, it was likely risky for Mrs. Jacob and Mrs. Barrasiere to speak up and insist that the killing was racially motivated, especially if that is not what they heard. But perhaps they had felt buoyed by the new constitution and the impending public accommodations bill that guaranteed all people equal access. The transcripts of the constitutional convention had been published in the newspapers. Although the lack of signatures in the court documents suggest that both Mrs. Jacob and Mrs. Barrasiere were illiterate, they would have heard about the debates in the public spaces that they frequented. Indeed, it may be because they learned what was going on in town from their own interactions at the market that they felt compelled to speak out against Guerin’s attempt to deny that right for another person of color.
Rose could have been mistaken, of course, when she claimed she did not overhear the racial remarks or see Emily Jacob and Mrs. Barrasiere. It is also possible that Rose herself heard the statements but consciously chose not to disclose this. She had a business to run, and by verifying the racial motive of the killer, she ran the risk of alienating part of her clientele. She counted on the patronage of both black and white customers. This is evident from the very morning of the shooting. Mrs. Simon, and Ms. Victorin, two women of color, and Arthur Guerin, a white man, were all seated at her stand, having coffee, talking to Rose and to each other, all at the same time. It is tempting to think of Rose Nicaud’s announcement that “everyone” drinks coffee at her stand as a conscious, noble gesture of welcome and hospitality in a city that was characterized in the mid-nineteenth century by fear and racial oppression. More likely, however, her statement was born of economic practicality. For her coffee stand to be a success, she had to offer a quality product to anyone who was willing to buy it. Her long-held freedom to serve coffee to a mixed clientele emerged from the daily practices of her business, which drew from the organic diversity and interactions in the public space of the French market. That “freedom” was not a gift granted by the institutions of government or by the enactment and enforcement of laws and policies.

The issue of racial discrimination in public coffee houses would soon have another day in court, however. In January 1869, Pinchback submitted another bill to enforce Article 13, this time making it a civil offence for violations. This time, the governor signed it into law. On January 20, 1871, Charles Sauvinet, the mixed-race civil Sheriff of Orleans Parish joined two white friends for a drink at Bank’s Coffee House. The two white men received their drinks, but the waiter refused to serve Sauvinet because of his race. Sauvinet promptly sued the owner, J.A. Walker, asking for $10,000 in damages. The judge found in favor of Sauvinet but only granted
him one thousand dollars. He appealed the decision and at the same time, Walker countersued, demanding a jury trial. The case wound up in the Louisiana Supreme Court. In the court brief, Sauvinet claimed that before the Civil War, he had known his place as a black man. He had never tried to vote, nor had he ever tried to hold public office. But when he went into the bars and coffee houses of the city, he was received, not as a colored man or a white man, but as a gentleman. He noted that he had been going to the bars and coffee houses of New Orleans without incident for the past twenty-five years. In other words, according to the laws of the government before the Civil War, he had not been a citizen. But amid the quotidian practices in city drinking places, he had been treated as a human being.

In the brief that he wrote on behalf of his client, Sauvinet’s attorney wrote that the law was necessary to uphold in civil society what should have been a state of nature, that is, a recognition of a man’s humanity. The Louisiana Supreme Court recognized that natural state when it upheld the lower court’s ruling in favor of Sauvinet in 1872. Although he did not get all the money he wanted, Sauvinet’s case helped to affirm the constitutionality of Pinchback’s law. But the legal enforcement of the public rights provision of the Constitution of 1868 was only temporary. Indeed, the Constitution itself was short-lived. The end of Reconstruction in 1877 brought into power “Redeemer” politicians eager to “redeem” the South and restore antebellum racial traditions. They redrafted the state constitution and passed new laws to achieve their goal of white supremacy. The Comité des Citoyens, a group of prominent black, white, and mixed-race New Orleans residents, fought against the new laws which limited public rights for

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110 Filleul, 1872, 2.
people of color. Despite the committee’s efforts, however, the United States Supreme Court, in its infamous *Plessy v Ferguson* decision of 1896, confirmed separate but equal facilities as legal realities for the next half century.\textsuperscript{112}

Clearly, there is nothing inherently just about the law, even in democratic societies. Laws are products of a particular time and circumstance, and they often serve the interests of those who produce them. Public rights to the French Market had long been open to anyone who desired to provide or to partake of its services. Those rights remained part of the everyday practice of the space even as the laws and circumstances regarding those rights changed over time. The practices surrounding the daily business of the French Market ensured that it remained a democratic, public space. People were free to associate and to interact with one another over the course of their market day. Thus, everyday practice, not the law, ensured that everyone was indeed free to drink coffee at Rose Nicaud’s stand.

\textsuperscript{111} One of the committee’s most famous acts was to persuade a mixed-race man named Homer Plessy to sit in the “whites-only” railroad passenger car, in open violation of Louisiana’s Separate Car Act of 1890.

\textsuperscript{112} The Plessy decision was overturned by *Brown v Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (1954).
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION – SPIRITED CONVERSATIONS ON COMMON GROUNDS

The refusal of a drink in a place of public resort seems to be a matter of little concern to that remnant of prejudiced men who still cling to the idea that a colored man has no rights which a white man is bound to respect; but Liberty is the reward of eternal vigilance and if you suffer a man to rob you of the smallest of your rights, you will soon be robbed of all your rights.¹

When attorney Edward Filleul made this appeal to the Louisiana Supreme Court on behalf of Charles Sauvinet, he recognized that much more was at stake than his client’s legal right to have a drink with a “white” friend in public. It was a matter of human dignity. The spaces created at the Café de la Bourse, the Café des Réfugiés, and Rose Nicaud’s market coffee stand were much more than places to buy spirits or coffee. They were sites of public learning and of “public” rights that signified human dignity and human equality.

Cafes Were Public Spaces of Democracy and Education

The Café de la Bourse was quite literally a public intellectual space. Its reading room, its postal services, and the onsite newspaper office firmly situated the coffee house in the Republic of Letters. The daily shipping business brought printed materials from around the globe. It also brought passengers and crew, who came carrying knowledge and ideas from other ports. These papers and this knowledge were then circulated as part of the exchange function of the café. The exchange of opinions about these ideas facilitated a democratic public sphere. Of course, the coffee house’s role as a slave exchange undermined the democracy that was possible in the space. For the large number of enslaved Africans, the “public” function of the Café de la Bourse, meant that they were quite literally put on display for public sale. As slaves, they were also

¹ Edward Filleul, *Supreme Court of Louisiana, No. 3513; C.S. Sauvinet v Walker: A Brief on Behalf of Plaintiff & Appellee*, 1872 (Leopold Classic Library, n.d)
formally excluded from the public dialogue in the space. But given the desire for literate, multilingual workers to help facilitate the everyday practices of a busy commercial exchange, it was possible even for slaves to gain access to the ideas that were circulated. The Café de la Bourse was in operation before the most rigid of the slave restrictions were enacted in the nineteenth-century. The slaves who worked in the café as cooks, waiters, billiard table attendants, and coachmen would have had liberties and responsibilities that were unknown to rural slaves as well as to some urban slaves toward the middle of the century. Through the daily business of the café, these slave workers would have had contact with whites who were not masters and other people of African descent who were not slaves. Early nineteenth century ordinances make it clear that city officials increasingly worried about ports, ships, and outsiders who might encourage slave rebellion or escape. But in the Café de la Bourse, slaves had access to shipping timetables and news, information that may have helped some to imagine and plan for their own freedom. In this way, the Café de la Bourse was a space of democracy and education even for some individuals who were on the margins of New Orleans society in the early nineteenth century.

The public rights that were enjoyed in the Café des Réfugiés were nourished by a large community of Saint Domingan émigrés who brought some idea of those rights with them when they arrived in New Orleans. The open space of the coffee house did much to facilitate a freedom of association. Anyone who entered had the right to talk to and to interact with whomever he pleased. In fact, because of the open design of the space, it was expected that individuals would come in, take the first available seat, and be part of the public discussions. The space itself was simply not conducive to private conversation. Furthermore, by offering a variety of liquid

\[2\] Fischer, 1974, 18.\]
refreshments and social activities in a location that was convenient to the nearby port and levee, the Café des Refugies was ideally situated to put together in this open space people and ideas with diverse points of view. The socialization in the Café des Réfugiés represents that of many other small neighborhood drinking establishments in New Orleans. When civil authorities attempted to curtail the diversity in those spaces through restrictive city ordinances, the owners, along with their customers and even some members of law enforcement, simply ignored the laws. This tactic enabled slaves, whites, and free people of color to do more than drink and gamble together. Through their unpredictable, chaotic, even “rogue” interactions, they developed new ways of thinking about the world around them. Thus, neighborhood taverns such as the Café des Refugies were not only public spaces, but also sites of creolization.

Rose Nicaud’s customer base was the multiethnic, multilingual, multiclass market community. Women and people of color remained a vital part of that community when other elements of public life were denied to them. Rose’s statement that everyone drinks coffee at her stand may have reflected the economic reality of her business in a busy port market, but it also served to situate her coffee stall as a space of public rights that was open to anyone. The seemingly mundane practices of choosing vegetables or sipping coffee in the market helped to drive away prejudice and break down social barriers by building trust among the participants. Because of the accessibility of the public space of the market, one could expect to encounter and hear from those whose perspectives and experiences were different. Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, people of color were increasingly subjected to restrictions on their behavior. But once they obtained political rights as part of Reconstruction, leaders in the Franco-Afro-Creole community in Louisiana had been able to insist that the 1868 State Constitution include a written provision for “public” rights, in which equal access to public transportation,
education, and all places of public accommodation was required. The delegates at the constitutional convention understood that the communication which results from public interaction removed the mystery and fear about people and ideas which appeared to be different. Caryn Cossé Bell has argued that the public rights provision of the 1868 Constitution was a century ahead of its time. The concept of de jure public rights may have represented a certain amount of forward thinking. However, Rose’s coffee stand made it clear that public rights were constructed through everyday practices, well before that concept was written into law. De facto public rights had long been part of the short cuts, meanderings, and unplanned paths that people “walking in the city” at “street level” developed to negotiate their way around government institutions designed to control them.

A Reimagined Narrative of Education History Accounts for Creolization

Dominant understandings of education in America remain rooted in the rational, linear thinking of the Western European Enlightenment. The categorization of subject matter into disciplines, the assortment of students into grade levels, and the standardization of assessment are all reflective of those old epistemologies. So too is the assumption that there is a certain body of knowledge “out there” to be taught to those who do not have that information. In the grand narrative of the history of American education, schools were necessary to teach individuals the principles of democracy, and laws were necessary to protect those principles. But as the activities in the coffee houses have suggested, democracy is also constructed through social interactions. Creolization as a learning process accounts for and, in fact, depends on those social interactions. Despite its colonial origins, creolization speaks to a reciprocal learning process. It illuminates the

3 Bell, 1997.
4 DeCerteau, 1988.
equality of the intellectual capacities and agencies of its participants, even as those participants remain embedded in stratified social and political relationships. The white society which dominated the political landscape of nineteenth century New Orleans eroded the social and economic status of all people of color. Each new law or policy that placed limits on where they could go, what jobs they could pursue, or with whom they could interact was an attempt to dehumanize this population. But creolization occurs amid the gaps and fissures of these laws and policies as people find ways around them to pursue their own goals. And because creolization requires human participation and interaction, it recognizes and even honors one’s humanity. In other words, although strategies of control serve to dehumanize certain members of society, tactics of creolization can help re-humanize them. Everyday practices are indeed a form of creolization - a way for people to learn about each other as well as a way to co-exist within a transformed political and cultural landscape which all participants helped to create.

Creolization enables us, as Walter Mignolo suggests, to “democratize epistemologies” by reclaiming as valid other, more local, ways of educating and being educated. It transforms the Cartesian dictum “I think therefore I am” to “I am where I think.” This redirection “exposes the pretensions of the universality of Western thought” by framing its dominance as one historical moment in time and place. Given its temporary status then, the dominant narrative of any subject or culture is nothing more than a temporary illusion. Colonial and early American New Orleans had a reputation for anti-intellectualism that continues to this day in some ways and was built layer by layer over the years. Shannon Dawdy argues that because the people of New Orleans were so engaged with the pleasures of the body, it was natural to suppose a lack of

6 Mignolo, 2011; 162.
7 Ibid, 168.
interest in the mind. However, this is merely the story of the “illusory” dominant culture, which needed to situate New Orleans as a place of darkness and disorder to highlight the linear “progress” that would come from its own superior worldviews.

A reimagined history of education includes other ways of thinking and being and doing. In my rethinking of history, democracy is not merely a form of government or a set of principles to be taught. It is also a mode of association embodied in the unpredictable, chaotic, transatlantic entanglements which occurred in eating and drinking establishments, that is, in places “engaged with pleasures of the body.” In these public spaces, spirited conversation undoubtedly brewed alongside the beverages imbibed. In other words, because of the pleasurable activities pursued within coffee houses (as well as in taverns, grog-shops, cabarets, and market stands), a vibrant cross-pollination of ideas was able to flourish. The lived experiences of all the people who interacted within the public coffee houses cannot be discounted as important sites of education. The exploration of this oft-neglected source of “public” education reminds us that the daily acts of brewing coffee, pouring a drink, and eating a meal together are not merely the minutiae of everyday life. They are indeed significant factors in producing a creolized understanding of democracy grounded in “public” rights.

Limitations of this Research

It is all too easy to get caught up in Romantic notions of “public” and “rights” when historicizing coffee houses and taverns as public spaces. And while I believe that these were, as Claiborne’s temporary closure of the bars and taverns in New Orleans indicates, places where people had an opportunity to agitate for social change, it is helpful to remember that not

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8 Dawdy, 2008.
9 Ibid, 56.
everything that happened in a tavern or coffee house was rights-affirming. Christine Sismundo reminds us that the Nazi Party was organized in a Munich beer hall and Lincoln’s assassination was planned in a tavern. In my research, I came across numerous brawls, stabbings, shootings, and nefarious deal-making in New Orleans “coffee-houses.” After Arthur Guerin killed Edward Forrest but before he shot David Hennessy, he was arrested for assault and battery for slicing off the tip of the finger of a fellow bar patron. In other words, unsavory actions are just as likely to happen as are noble endeavors when talking and drinking are put in combination.

New Orleans does not have a monopoly on either the virtuous or the vile in public spaces. Emily Clark has argued that the frequent depiction in histories of New Orleans as a diverse, exceptional place makes it possible to imagine Anglo-Protestant cities such as Philadelphia and Boston as “cradles of American identity and culture.” In framing New Orleans as a unique and complicated space, it relieves other cities of the burden of embracing their own complex entanglements with the Atlantic World. She cautions us to keep in mind that messy Atlantic legacies do not belong solely to the French colonial spaces south of the Mississippi River. Clark’s warning has given me much to think about in my own attempt to narrate the “strange history” of New Orleans coffee houses. What is strange about coffee houses is also what is strange about much historical inquiry. Any choice that is made leaves other alternatives unchosen. Some coffee houses are the focus of my study, but many are left out. I have framed coffee houses (and the market) as public spaces but so too are beauty shops, ice cream parlors,

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10 Sismundo, 2011, xiii.
12 Clark, 2013.
and bookstores. We might also think of social media outlets as a more contemporary form of public space.

Why did I choose to focus on coffee houses? I suppose my decision reveals my own grounding in Enlightenment epistemologies. Coffee has been called the drink of the Enlightenment, the so-called drink of reason. It is the beverage that I, too, most closely associate with education. Yet, neither the beverage nor the institution of coffee houses is Western. The scant research I have done on Eastern coffee houses (and tea houses) reveal they served a similar public function. In privileging the Western and transatlantic nature of coffee houses, I placed an artificial limitation on my framework. The idea of “transatlantic” suggests that there is no movement beyond those circuits of trade. But coffee itself is said to come to New Orleans via Paris via London via Venice via Istanbul via Yemen and so on. Because I understand the creolization process as fluid and ongoing and changing with each new contact, it is hard to know where to stop my inquiry. And when I think I have found some of the answers I sought, I realize I have only ended up with more questions.
EPILOGUE

As I conclude this dissertation in the spring of 2018, I ask myself how this research on public rights in nineteenth-century New Orleans coffee houses might add to current conversations about the public nature of education in formal schools. When I began this work, I was initially disdainful of historical narratives that only focused on formal education. However, my quest to expand the narrative to look beyond formal schools has made me think more critically about my initial wariness. As I have developed my own understanding of public rights, I have found parallels with Horace Mann’s vision of common schools as he initially conceived it in the early nineteenth century. Mann believed that a common, public education would break down social barriers and teach social cooperation in a time when social tensions were increasing amid the complexities of urbanization and industrialization. By “common,” Mann meant that all students would have the same access, and by “public,” he meant that not only would it be state-supported, but that it would also be a public good. In other words, the goal of the schools was to improve society, that is, to produce human beings who were better able to live and work together.13

In some ways, the coffee houses in nineteenth century New Orleans share some of the traits that Mann hoped to achieve in school settings. As public spaces, they were generally open to everyone in spite of laws trying to prevent that access. They were also cooperative spaces in which diverse groups of people worked together civilly and who treated each other humanely, again, in spite of laws and policies that tried to limit that humanity. But there are also key differences with Mann’s vison. Although Mann was opposed to slavery, his vision for public

education did not extend to a mixed-race student body. In this regard, the public spaces in New Orleans embraced a larger notion of the “public” because they welcomed not only a multi-class but also a multi-race population. The greater diversity that made up this “public” produced a more tolerant society whose members were used to associating with one another as they went about their daily business. That freedom of association led the people of color in that society to expect access to the free public education that developed in the middle part of the 1800s, even as those same people were denied full rights as citizens.

In the 1954 Brown Decision, the United States Supreme Court seemed to recognize the benefits of an expanded “public” in education. In addition to teaching students about democracy, the schools were also to become sites of democracy as students from all classes and races were welcomed as part of the educational communities. Going to school with a broad swathe of human beings was one way to experience democracy. But by the 1980s, the “public” nature of education was undermined as the federal government turned away from its active pursuit of desegregation. According to John Rury, as national priorities changed so too did the purpose of state-sponsored schooling. A Nation at Risk, a report on public education commissioned in 1983 by the Reagan Administration, warned that the United States had fallen economically behind other global competitors, and schools were to blame. Less than a decade later, the dissolution of the communist Soviet Union ushered in “a new world order based on trade and capitalist development.” The purpose of education became less about producing more democratic citizens and a more tolerant society, and more about treating students as a form of economic

14 Ibid.
15 Bell, 1997.
capital that could be used to further the goals of the nation state.\textsuperscript{17} That redirection of purpose spurred a reform movement characterized by accountability for both teachers and students, who became increasingly subject to standardization and measurement, much like output in a factory to ensure the production of uniform products. Public schools, which at least in theory, had historically embraced a mission of socializing students in a diverse society, had now begun to reduce human subjects to little more than numerical data. In pursuing reforms based on uniformity and in treating students as data, the structures of power behind the current educational reforms have had a dehumanizing effect on students in public education.

Furthermore, a conservative political ethos that advocated market-based reforms in education has undermined the public nature of the schools themselves, further dehumanizing the student population. Using a rhetoric of school choice and privatization, proponents of charter schools and vouchers promised higher standardized test scores and college admissions for students who chose to attend. Although the concept of school “choice” has a democratic ring to it, these promises have allowed charter schools to compete for public school dollars, leaving traditional public schools increasingly underfunded and the students in them underserved.\textsuperscript{18} Students from families of economic means could escape to private schools where the curriculum was less controlled. But the most vulnerable students, those from poor, mostly minority families were left concentrated in traditional public schools or in charters schools. This calls into question the “public” nature of what is now considered public education, because, in the main, those schools do not include the diversity which comprises a true public. In my research, I have come to understand public spaces as those in which all human beings have access to the space. In

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid, 201.

addition, they have a chance to come in contact with all other members of the population who might frequent that space, enabling people to share ideas and resources with one another. The public nature of the space is thus defined by the chance nature of the encounters as well as by the diversity within the spaces.

The nation’s first all-charter school district was developed in New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Kristen Buras argues that in privatizing most public schools in New Orleans, white “education entrepreneurs” dispossessed black communities in the city of their control of public education. The charter school movement was a strategy of racial oppression. Buras argues that the uniform, college preparatory curriculum taught in these charter schools was ahistorical, impersonal, and did not recognize the stories and the humanity of the communities the schools were supposed to serve.\footnote{Buras, 2015.} If what Buras says is true, then the charter school movement is a twenty-first century continuation of the dehumanization that occurred for people of color in nineteenth century New Orleans. The legal restrictions placed on people of color within the public spaces of New Orleans was in effect, an attempt to dispossess them of their agency. But in the coffee houses and especially in the market of New Orleans, everyone who had business there was welcome and was free to interact with anyone else as the need or desire dictated. The evidence shows that the market population did indeed draw from the rich diversity of the city, making it clear that it was truly a public space. Through the daily business in these spaces, people of color developed methods to bypass restrictions on them. These tactics allowed them to continue their interactions, thereby recapturing their humanity.

In \textit{Reign of Error}, Diane Ravitch argues that by returning control of schools to local communities and by ending poverty and segregated neighborhoods, we can eliminate many of
the problems that plague public schools in many urban areas.\textsuperscript{20} Her ideas are laudable, but I fear they are little more than cold comfort since the changes she urges cannot happen overnight. But like the people who occupied the public spaces in early nineteenth century New Orleans, the teachers, students, and parents who are dissatisfied with the state of public education may be able to find gaps in the bureaucratic controls which attempt to strangle them. Kristen Buras writes how the community surrounding one elementary school in the Lower 9\textsuperscript{th} Ward of New Orleans found a way around the market-based policies that have guided New Orleans school reform. Meeting in public spaces around New Orleans to draft and refine their own charter proposal, the community refused to give up its rights to a quality education equal to that received by many white students in the city. The community fought for and received the only state-approved charter by a grassroots group. Although King Elementary, the school which emerged from the group’s activism, is technically a charter school, it does not subscribe to the vacuous, data-driven curriculum of corporate-run charters. Instead, the teachers and staff at King Elementary draw on the rich cultural resources of the Lower 9\textsuperscript{th} Ward to facilitate a place-based curriculum that celebrates the stories and the lives of people in the community.\textsuperscript{21}

The tactics used by the King Elementary community helped to secure their access to education, democracy, and public rights. They made use of the very system that restricted their rights, that is, the corporate charter school movement, to win their version of a charter that suited their own needs. But this is only one example. What other tactics similar communities develop to negotiate their way around the bureaucratic controls of public education is a subject for additional research. However, given the long history in which people of color in New Orleans

\textsuperscript{21} Buras, 2015.
developed for themselves tactics to circumvent structures of power, there is clearly hope that there will be more.
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APPENDIX A: MAP OF NEW ORLEANS SHOWING LOCATION OF COFFEE HOUSES

Approximate Locations of Coffee Houses on Present-Day Map of New Orleans French Quarter

- Café de la Bourse (1814-1838)
- Café des Réfugiés (1809-1840)
- Rose Nicaud’s Coffee Stand (1850s-1870s)
APPENDIX B: TIMELINE OF LEGAL DECISIONS REGARDING PUBLIC RIGHTS IN LOUISIANA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1806</td>
<td>State Legislature adopts new Code Noir. Forbids free people of color from presuming themselves equal to whites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1811</td>
<td>William Claiborne temporarily closes coffee houses and taverns in wake of the 1811 slave revolt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1816</td>
<td>Free people of color are forbidden to occupy areas reserved for whites in theatres and public exhibition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1817</td>
<td>Slaves are prevented from obtaining peddlers licenses in market</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1856</td>
<td>Free people of color are forbidden from obtaining liquor licenses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1857</td>
<td>Slave emancipations are prohibited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1858</td>
<td>Slaves and free people of color are forbidden to assemble without white supervision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1859</td>
<td>State prohibits free people of color from owning coffee houses or taverns where liquor is sold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 1868</td>
<td>Louisiana State Constitution ratified, including Article 13, which guarantees public rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 1868</td>
<td>Governor Warmoth vetoes bill making racial discrimination in public places a crime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1869</td>
<td>State law passed to enforce Article 13 of 1868 Constitution defining legal process and punishment for violators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1871</td>
<td>State court fines Walker for denying service to Charles Sauvinet at Bank’s Coffee House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1872</td>
<td>Louisiana Supreme Court upholds decision of lower court in <em>Sauvinet v. Walker.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1875</td>
<td><em>Walker v. Sauvinet</em> – U.S. Supreme Court upholds decision of Louisiana Court as well as the legality of Article 13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C: PUBLIC RIGHTS PROVISIONS IN THE LOUISIANA STATE CONSTITUTION OF 1868

Article 2
(excerpt)

All persons, without regard to race, color, or previous condition…are citizens of this state…They shall enjoy the same civil, political, and public rights and privileges, and be subject to the same pains and penalties.

Article 13

All persons shall enjoy equal rights and privileges upon any conveyance of public character; and all places of business, or of public resort, or for which a license is required by either State, parish or municipal authority, shall be deemed places of a public character, and shall be opened to the accommodation and patronage of all persons, without distraction or discrimination on account of race or color.

Article 135

The General Assembly shall establish at least one free public school in every parish throughout the State, and shall provide for its support by taxation or otherwise. All children of this State between the ages of six (6) and twenty-one (21) shall be admitted to the public schools or other institutions of learning sustained or established by the State in common without distinction of race, color, or previous condition.
VITA
Robyn Andermann, a native of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, received her Bachelor of Arts in history from Vanderbilt University. After participating in an after-school tutoring program in the Cabrini Green neighborhood of Chicago, she decided to pursue a full-time teaching career. She earned a Master of Education degree, along with secondary teacher certification in history and social studies education from Loyola University Chicago. Robyn taught in secondary school settings for a total of seventeen years. In addition to social studies, she has also taught English, religion, and drama, in both private and public-school settings. She spent five years teaching in international schools and has taught students in Peru, in Taiwan, and in Trinidad. Her experience as a world history teacher facilitated an interest in foodways as curriculum and international influences on education. As her interest in these areas grew, she decided to pursue a doctorate in curriculum and instruction. She entered the graduate school in the College of Human Science and Education at Louisiana State University and plans to receive her Ph.D. in May 2018.