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**“There Was a Tradition Among the Women”:
New Orleans’s Colored Creole Women and the Making of a Community in the
Tremé and Seventh Ward, 1791-1930**

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M.A., Emory University, 2005
B.A., California State University Fullerton, 2001**

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**An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
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Abstract

**“There Was a Tradition Among the Women”:
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This dissertation examines how colored Creole women shaped family and community formation and influenced the development of a Creole ethnic identity in New Orleans between the late-eighteenth century and 1930. Beginning with the arrival of Caribbean Creole émigrés in the aftermath of the Haitian Revolution, I explore women’s role in the growth and expansion of a visible colored Creole community in the antebellum era. I look closely at the way free colored Creole women responded to the loss of their privileged intermediate legal status after the Civil War, and detail their efforts to preserve the Creoles’ antebellum social privilege for fully two generations after the fall of slavery. Although the establishment of Jim Crow segregation finally eliminates the remaining legal distinctions between colored Creoles and non-Creole African Americans, colored Creoles continued to enforce strict cultural boundaries to preserve a separate and distinct Creole community. I examine the ways in which colored Creole women adapted old ways and developed new methods to preserve colored Creole social privilege in the face of Jim Crow segregation.

This project makes three original contributions to the existing scholarship. First, using census records and city directories, I construct a thorough demographic profile of colored Creole women from the late-eighteenth century through the early twentieth century. Next, I explore the ways ordinary women made meaningful contributions to the Creole community. By paying particular attention to women’s roles in marriage and family formation; paid and unpaid labor; and their participation in the sacraments of the Catholic Church, I show that women were remarkably influential in the preservation of Creole status, privilege, and opportunity. Finally, I argue that Creole women did not conform to African American middle-class notions of respectability as a means of preserving status, but rather they adopted a practical morality that placed the obligations of the family and the improvement of the larger Creole community above aspirations for individual morality or respectability. By placing women at the center of this narrative, I contend that women were central to the establishment and development of a visible colored Creole community in New Orleans.

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They say that it takes a village to raise a child, but I have learned that it also takes a village to complete dissertation. This endeavor has been much more than a research project: It has been an adventure in academic inquiry; a test of personal fortitude; an exercise in perseverance; and an incredibly emotional journey. I began this project before Hurricane Katrina and, like many other people, I was forever changed by it. Living and researching in New Orleans in the wake of the storm was certainly challenging; however, witnessing the rebuilding and recovery efforts by locals and visitors alike intensified my love for the city and its people and strengthened my commitment to researching and preserving New Orleans's rich history. The road to completion has been a difficult one and I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge all the support, assistance, love, and inspiration that I have received along the way.

I am grateful to the New Orleans archivists and staff members who assisted me with my research even under the most difficult conditions. When I returned to New Orleans to continue my research in the spring of 2006, few libraries and archival repositories were fully functional. The New Orleans Public Library remained open for just a few hours a day and served as a makeshift FEMA center. While I was researching in the Louisiana Division on the third floor of the library, FEMA was assisting storm victims on the first floor. Despite these trying circumstances, Greg Osborn and Irene Wainwright continued to offer their help as I located documents and records. I would also like to thank Dr. Charles Nolan and the staff (especially Janet Adams) at the Archives of the Archdiocese of New Orleans for welcoming me into the archives even while they

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*This dissertation is dedicated to
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CONTENTS

Introduction	
Chapter One: Roots Women: Laying the Foundation for a Colored Creole Community	1
Chapter Two: Holding on to the Past: Colored Creole Women in a Post-Reconstruction Society	58
Chapter Three: Women and “The Golden Door of Opportunity”	100
Chapter Four: Preserving Privilege Through Practicality	137
Chapter Five: Living in “Splendid Isolation”: Women, Community, and Identity in the Early Twentieth Century	166
Appendix A: Map of Tremé and Seventh Ward	223
Appendix B: Color, Sex, and Age Distribution, 1880-1930	224
Appendix C: Description of Household Types, 1880-1930	225
Appendix D: Seventh Ward Household Composition, 1880-1930	226
Appendix E: Marital Status of Seventh Ward Residents, 1880-1930	229
Bibliography	231

Chapter One: Roots Women: Laying the Foundation for a Colored Creole Community

New Orleans's colored Creole community emerged at the turn of the nineteenth century between the cracks and fissures of a rapidly changing society. Although free people of color appeared in city records as early as the 1720s, it was not until 1791, when thousands of white and free colored Creole émigrés fleeing the uprising in St. Domingue took refuge in New Orleans, that a visible colored Creole community emerged. Around the same time, the city also received French citizens escaping the aftermath of the French Revolution. By 1803, the United States had purchased the Louisiana Territory from France, prompting many entrepreneurial young Americans to relocate to Louisiana and stake their claim. As New Orleans began the transformation from a provincial colonial outpost to a cosmopolitan American port city, the free population of colored Creoles found themselves in a unique position to gain a foothold in New Orleans society by allying themselves with other French-speaking residents who were vying to maintain their power in the burgeoning city. The colored Creoles' social, political, and commercial ties within the francophone population contributed to the growth and development of the colored Creole community in the early nineteenth century; however, the enduring bonds between colored Creoles and whites depended heavily on colored Creole women's ability to maintain intimate relationships across the color line. By sustaining old connections and continuing to form new ones, colored Creole women cemented the union between New

Orleans's colored Creole population and the larger French-speaking community through blood and kinship.

In order to understand the emergence of a colored Creole community in New Orleans it is necessary to first consider the meaning of the word, "creole." The French word *créole* comes from the Spanish verb *criar*, which literally means to breed or to rear. Early Spanish and Portuguese colonial settlers used the word creole (*criollo* in Spanish and *crioulo* in Portuguese) to indicate that someone or something was born and naturalized in the New World rather than on foreign soil. When colonial settlers in Louisiana referred to creole cows, creole tomatoes, creole slaves, or creole people, they were indicating that the persons or objects were products of that place, locally born and bred. Therefore, the term "creole" is inextricably linked to one's place of origin. Throughout the Americas, early colonists used the term creole to distinguish native-born and foreign-born persons—black, white, and colored. In Louisiana, amidst the political instability of the eighteenth century and the growing tension between the colonists and the French and Spanish Empires, the term creole also assumed cultural and political meaning. The descendants of the early European settlers began to identify themselves as Creoles¹ in opposition to the foreign-born French and Spanish newcomers who were largely unfamiliar with chattel slavery and provincial life in Louisiana yet still competed for control over colonial affairs.

Following the 1791 slave uprising in Saint Domingue, Creole émigrés, white and colored, integrated fairly easily with Louisiana Creoles and within a

¹I have capitalized the word Creoles here because it is not just an adjectival modifier as in *creole* cows or *creole* tomatoes but rather a cultural distinction indicating a shared group identity.

few years, they had caused the Creole population in Louisiana to increase exponentially. In a one-year period between 1809 and 1810, during the last wave of immigration, approximately 10,000 émigrés arrived in Louisiana.² The rapid growth of the Creole population only strengthened and renewed their resolve to oppose American intervention. By the early nineteenth century, the descendants of French and Spanish settlers began identifying themselves as Creole in opposition to the influx of Americans arriving after the Louisiana Purchase. The Creoles viewed the arrival of the Americans as yet another attempt at colonization by a group of powerful and ill-intentioned outsiders. In resisting American hegemony, the Creoles also revitalized Francophone culture in southern Louisiana. Colored Creoles whose white fathers descended from the early European settlers began to actively align themselves socially and politically with French-speaking white Creoles and identified themselves as Creoles of color. New Orleans' Creoles—both white and colored—rooted themselves in downtown neighborhoods, in the so-called “Creole” section of town, which ultimately linked their Creole ethnic identity to a historical and geographical “homeland” located below Canal Street.³

² The refugees arrived via Cuba. Paul F LaChance, “The Foreign French,” in *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization*, ed. Arnold R. Hirsch Logsdon and Joseph (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 105; Paul F. Lachance, “The 1809 Immigration of Saint-Domingue Refugees to New Orleans: Reception, Integration and Impact,” *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 29, no. 2 (Spring 1988): 109-141.

³ Gwendolyn M. Hall, “The Formation of Afro-Creole Culture,” and Joseph G. Tregle Jr., “Creoles and Americans,” in *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization*, ed. Arnold Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 58-65, 131-185; Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness* (Harvard University Press, 1993), 1-40; Virginia R Dominguez, *White By Definition: Social Classification in Creole Louisiana* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 150-166; Nicole King, *C.L.R. James and Creolization: Circles of Influence* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 3-29; Edouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* (University of Michigan Press, 1997), 47-75. For more on the meaning of the word Creole in the English West Indies, see Rhonda Frederick, “Creole Performance in Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands,” in *Dialogues of*

I have chosen to refer to the free Creoles of African descent as “colored Creoles” rather than “Creoles of color.” The term colored as it is used here refers to the free people of African descent who occupied an intermediate *colored* class between free whites and enslaved blacks in New Orleans’ three-tiered society. Commonly used in both French and Iberian three-tiered slave societies, a colored classification had both legal and racial implications: it meant that one was both free and black. Unlike the term “free black,” the term colored implies racial hybridity, which was central to the growth and development of New Orleans free colored community. The colored Creoles of New Orleans were free persons of African descent who were also Creoles by ancestry as well as culture and language. Although the meaning of the colored Creoles’ intermediate status shifts significantly after emancipation, I continue to refer to their descendants—people of African descent who embraced their Creole heritage as well as their legacy of freedom—as colored Creoles.

One cannot separate colored Creole people from the process by which they became both colored *and* Creole. It is important to remember that free colored persons’ claims to a Creole identity were based on their ancestral ties to early white settlers, which requires a closer look at the relationship between hybridity and a Creole identity. Widespread interracial sexuality and concubinage⁴ between women of African descent and white men facilitated the social and cultural exchange necessary for *creolization*-- the process of becoming Creole—

Dispersal: Gender, Sexuality, and African Diasporas, ed. Sandra Gunning, Tera Hunter, and Michele Mitchell, A Gender and History Special Issue. (Blackwell Publishing, Ltd, 2004), 91-110.

⁴ In the law, the term concubine is defined as, “a woman who cohabits with a man as his wife, without being married.” John Bouvier, *A Law Dictionary: Adapted to the Constitution and Laws of the United States and the Several States of the American Union 2 volume set* (T. & J.W. Johnson, 1839).

and was the driving force behind the expansion and development of New Orleans' largely Creole colored community. In order to fully understand the growth and development of a colored Creole class in New Orleans, we must examine the centrality of black women to the process of becoming Creole. Black women did not merely give birth to the mixed-race offspring of white Creole men; through intimate and often mutually beneficial relationships with whites, many women managed to obtain freedom and other benefits for themselves and their children, thereby contributing considerably to the growth of the intermediate free colored class. Even as the public relationship between white and colored Creoles waxed and waned throughout the nineteenth century, the intimate bonds that black and colored women formed across the color line during the process of becoming Creole helped the colored Creoles sustain their alliances with whites into the twentieth century.

Although colored Creole people lived in New Orleans as early as the French colonial period, it was not until the Spanish period, when women of African descent took full advantage of Spain's liberal manumission policies, that an identifiable colored Creole community began to take shape. The Spanish granted slave owners in Louisiana greater autonomy over manumission practices than the French. In the late eighteenth century, females comprised just over half of the slave population in New Orleans (between 51 and 54 percent) yet the number of adult slave women who were manumitted was two-and-a-half times that of slave men. Not only were women freed at higher rates but women also participated extensively in the Spanish practice of *coartación*, or freedom purchase. Female slaves were more likely than men to be the purchasers of

freedom as well as the objects of purchase. As women actively forged avenues to freedom through manumission and freedom purchase they also increased the female presence in the free colored community.⁵

Legislation established in the wake of the 1791 uprising in Saint Domingue fueled the rapid growth of the population of free colored women. As thousands of white and free colored refugees fleeing the island poured into the port of New Orleans, city officials feared a violent backlash following the overthrow of Saint Domingue's white colonial government. As a preventative measure, officials placed restrictions on free colored adult male immigrants. In 1806, the Louisiana legislature passed an act prohibiting all free colored men arriving from the Caribbean from entering the Territory of Orleans.⁶ The law did not restrict the arrival of free colored women; in fact, lawmakers explicitly exempted women from the restriction. Free colored women and children under age fifteen were excused because, according to the law, they "shall be supposed to have left the island above named ["Hispaniola and other French Islands of America"], to fly

⁵ Scholarship that attributes the high rates of female manumission to *coartacion* (freedom purchase) and a more liberal manumission policy under the Spanish include: Kimberly S. Hanger, *Bounded Lives, Bounded Places*; Jennifer M. Spear, *Race, Sex, and Social Order in Early New Orleans*; Gilbert Din, *Spaniards, Planters, and Slaves: The Spanish Regulation of Slavery in Louisiana, 1763-1803* (College Station: Texas A & M Press, 1999); Thomas Ingersoll, "Free Blacks in a Slave Society: New Orleans, 1718-1812," *William and Mary Quarterly* 48, no. 2 (1995): 22-62; Gwendolyn M. Hall, *Social Control in Slave Plantation Societies: A Comparison of St. Domingue and Cuba* (Louisiana State University Press, 1971); Hans W Baade, "The Law of Slavery in Spanish Louisiana," in *Louisiana's Legal Heritage*, ed. Edward Haas (Pensacola: Perdido Bay Press, 1983), 43-86.

⁶ The following year, the restriction was amended to include all free negroes and mulattoes arriving from other parts of the United States. Bill Quigley and Maha Zaki, "The Significance of Race: Legislative Racial Discrimination in Louisiana, 1803-1865," *Southern University Law Review* 24 (1996): 155. Violet H. Bryant, "Marcus Christian's Treatment of Les Gens de Couleur Libre," in *Creole: The History and Legacy of Louisiana's Free People of Color* (Baton Rouge, LA: LSU Press, 2000), 54.

from the horrors committed during the insurrection.”⁷ Free colored women were not only afforded greater mobility than free colored men, but they also received sympathy from lawmakers and local citizens who took pity on their condition not only as women refugees, but as the daughters of white planters forced to leave Saint Domingue for their implicit support of black slavery.

Interracial concubinage was a relatively common practice in colonial Saint Domingue, yet its pervasiveness in New Orleans at the turn of the nineteenth century was an immediate and practical response to the conditions of resettlement as white and colored émigrés tried to create stable lives in their newly adopted city. Haitian and Caribbean immigrants arrived in New Orleans with their own customs of concubinage across the color line, as suggested by the large proportion of white men and free colored women and children among them, many of whom had white fathers. A New Orleans priest named Father John Oliver attributed the prevalence of concubinage to “the arrival of a very great number of girls of color from Santo Domingo [Haiti] who spread corruption everywhere.” Father Oliver also acknowledged that white men arriving from Haiti openly delighted in their concubines and colored children. Although Father Oliver placed the blame squarely on colored women, he subsequently questioned the moral rectitude of two priests who had arrived from Haiti with their mulatto “housekeepers” and children.⁸ The Caribbean immigrants’ relatively permissive

⁷ An act to prevent the introduction of Free People of Color from Hispaniola, and other French Islands of America into the Territory of Orleans,” 1806 Acts of 1st Sess., 1st Leg., June 7, 1806, as quoted in, Bill Quigley and Maha Zaki, “The Significance of Race: Legislative Racial Discrimination in Louisiana, 1803-1865,” 155.

⁸ Annabelle M. Melville, *Louis William Dubourg: Bishop of Louisiana and the Floridas, Bishop of Montauban, and Archbishop of Besancon, 1766-1833* (Loyola Pr, 1986), II: 282-283, as cited in

attitudes about white men forming intimate relationships across the color line were reinforced by similar, albeit less formal, Louisiana Creole customs of concubinage.

Furthermore, Frenchmen from the metropole who arrived in New Orleans in the aftermath of the French Revolution began adopting French-Creole social customs, including interracial concubinage. During the nineteenth century, more than a few Frenchmen established families with free colored women.⁹ As the Francophone population grew and coalesced around Creole cultural values, the newly arriving Americans threatened to impose upon them a rigid social order and puritanical values. The Creoles—a group who almost by definition defied strict compartmentalization and fixed moral boundaries—pushed back. White men and colored women continued to engage in interracial unions after the arrival of the Americans in part because it was already an established custom and practical solution to persistently imbalanced sex ratios, but also because it was an outward and openly defiant practice that symbolized the Creoles' desire to preserve their way of life in the face of increasing Americanization. Therefore, the colored Creoles were not simply racial hybrids; rather they were the strange fruit resulting from the complex and ongoing processes of conflict, adaptation,

Sister Mary Bernard Deggs, *No Cross, No Crown: Black Nuns in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans*, ed. Virginia M. Gould and Charles Nolan (Indiana University Press, 2002), xxvii-xxviii.

⁹ Paul F. Lachance, "Were Saint Domingue Refugees a Distictive Cultural Group in Antebellum New Orleans? Evidence from Patterns and Strategies of Property Holding," *Revista/Review Interamericana* 29, no. 1 (1999): 171-192.

and survival in New Orleans's tripartite slave society where racial and social boundaries remained relatively negotiable until the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁰

As early as the 1790s, the colored Creole concubines of white men had already started to establish themselves in the burgeoning Creole *faubourgs* (suburbs) on the outskirts of the *Vieux Carré* (French Quarter). In 1794, Frenchman Claude Tremé began developing his property, a large swath of land behind the *Vieux Carré*, into apportioned plots of land for sale to newly arriving French-speaking residents. By 1795, Claude Tremé had sold a plot of land across the road from his own *habitation* on *chemin du Bayou* (Bayou Road) to a free colored woman named Agnes Mathieu. Shortly thereafter, two free women of color purchased property on either side of Agnes Mathieu's estate and five other free colored women purchased neighboring properties just around the corner on *rue Saint Claude*.¹¹ By 1810, free women of color owned at least nine properties in the burgeoning *faubourg*— nearly twice as many as free black men. In 1805, a white Creole planter named Bernard de Marigny also began developing land on his *habitation* (plantation) located just below the *Vieux Carré* into individual lots available for purchase.¹² The *faubourgs* Tremé and Marigny both featured modest, affordable real estate located just beyond the city limits, which made the

¹⁰ Nicole King, *C.L.R. James and Creolization*, 15-20; Michael Crutcher, "Historical Geographies of Race in a New Orleans Afro-Creole Landscape," in *Landscape and Race in the United States*, ed. Richard Schein (Routledge, 2006), 23-38;

¹¹ In 1799, Rose Tisoneau and Gotton Meunier, both free women of color, purchased plots of land on either side of Agnes Mathieu's estate. In the ensuing ten years, a free woman of color, A. Chapon, purchased land on Bayou road directly across from Agnes Mathieu and Gotton Meunier; immediately around the corner on *rue St. Claude*, five other free women of color—Nanette Enoul, Marie Jeanne Willamine, Henriette Roussève, Marianne Capucin, and Chalinette Duval—purchased property next to one another. *Sale of land, C. Tremé, March 17, 1810* (New Orleans Notarial Archives, March 17, 1810), in Roulhac Toledano, Sally K. Evans, and Mary Louise Christovich, *New Orleans Architecture, Vol. VI: Faubourg Tremé and the Bayou Road*, First. (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, Inc., 2003), 15, 186.

¹² Most of the faubourg Marigny is now part of the Seventh Ward.

neighborhoods particularly desirable to the newly arrived immigrants who sought to establish themselves in New Orleans.¹³

The affordability of the faubourgs Tremé and Marigny and their proximity to the *Vieux Carré* made the neighborhoods particularly attractive to the large population of free colored widows and unmarried mothers seeking affordable housing as well as to white men who desired to purchase homes for their colored mistresses, concubines, and children. From the early years, both *faubourgs* were characterized by a high proportion of female-headed households and a significant presence of white men in colored homes. The 1805 manuscript census of New Orleans indicates that nearly half of all free colored households were headed by women and fully eighty percent of all single-headed free colored households had a female head.¹⁴ The census also reveals a correlation between the large number of free colored women heading their own households and the prevalence of interracial unions between white men and free colored women. In 1805, white men comprised fully sixty percent of the adult male population in nuclear mulatto households; although the census does not clearly indicate the relationships between persons living in the same household, it is likely that a significant number of colored women who lived in nuclear households with white men and colored children were cohabitating with their white lovers. Among the

¹³ *Sale of land, C. Tremé, March 17, 1810* (New Orleans Notarial Archives, March 17, 1810), in Toledano et. al, *New Orleans Architecture, Vol. VI: Faubourg Tremé and the Bayou Road*, 5,14-15, 33; Toledano et. al, *New Orleans Architecture, Vol. IV: The Creole Faubourgs*, 27; Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century*, 131-2; Mary Gehman, *The Free People of Color of New Orleans: An Introduction* (New Orleans: Margaret Media Inc., 1994), 13. For additional information about property and slave holdings of early free colored women, see Kimberly S. Hanger, *Bounded Lives, Bounded Places*, 70-75.

¹⁴ Matthew Flannery, *New Orleans in 1805: A Directory and a Census Together with Resolutions Authorizing Same Now Printed for the First Time* (New Orleans: Pelican Gallery, 1936).

large number of free colored female householders not living with white men, it is likely that some maintained their homes with the economic support of white lovers or fathers who lived nearby. A notable number of white fathers took an active role in their colored families, while others lived in the household only part-time and contributed money to help support the household. Still others left their colored families destitute, leaving the woman and her children to support themselves. White men's experiences with their colored families varied widely yet one thing is clear: white men wielded influence over free colored households, whether by their presence or by their absence.¹⁵

By 1810, thousands of colored Creole women from the Caribbean had settled in New Orleans. Between 1809 and 1810, in one of the largest waves of Caribbean immigration to the city, free colored women comprised the largest segment of the refugee population, outnumbering free colored men more than three to one. Before the Haitian Revolution, the sex ratio among the free colored class in New Orleans was 47 men for every 100 women.¹⁶ Between 1791 and 1810, the overall sex ratio among free colored people increased to 66 males per 100 females but for marriageable men and women aged sixteen and older, the sex ratio had actually declined to 36 per 100.¹⁷ The increasingly disparate sex ratios resulted in large part from the high proportion of colored Creole women arriving

¹⁵ Matthew Flannery, *New Orleans in 1805*; L. Virginia Gould, "In Full Enjoyment of Their Liberty: The Free Women of Color of the Gulf Ports of New Orleans, Mobile, and Pensacola, 1769-1860" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Emory University, 1991), 329-330; Kimberly S. Hanger, *Bounded Lives, Bounded Places*, 90-2.

¹⁶ In 1777, there were 101 free black males and 214 free black females in New Orleans. "Padrón general de todos los individuos de la provincial de Luisiana" (Archivo General de Indias, Papeles Procedentes de la Isla de Cuba, 1777), as cited in Kimberly S. Hanger, *Bounded Lives, Bounded Places: Free Black Society in Colonial New Orleans, 1769-1803*, 22.

¹⁷ *1791 Census of New Orleans* (Louisiana Division, NOPL, 1791); U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Second Census of the United States, 1810, Orleans Parish, Louisiana*, Manuscript Census (Washington D.C.), NARA.

from Haiti.¹⁸ Severely imbalanced sex ratios among the free colored population limited women's ability to form intimate relationships with free colored men, leaving the women to seek security and stability wherever they could find it.¹⁹

For many colored Creole women who arrived in New Orleans, taking up with white men was the quickest way to establish themselves in the city. Free colored women and their children comprised a staggering 86 percent (86.2) of the free colored refugee population arriving in New Orleans in 1809. An overwhelming proportion of free colored women and children lacked the economic support of a husband or father, which led many colored mothers to ensure their families' survival by seeking partnership within the large population of white bachelors. In New Orleans, both native and foreign-born white men outnumbered white women; among whites arriving from the Caribbean, men outnumbered women nearly two to one.²⁰ With a shortage of available white women, white bachelors readily sought sex, companionship, and sometimes long-term intimacy within the rapidly growing population of colored Creole women. Although narrow marriage prospects and limited social and occupational opportunities may have compelled colored women to enter into relationships

¹⁸In Cap Français, Saint Domingue in 1780, women comprised the majority among free persons of color (53 percent of the population). In contrast, men comprised the majority among whites and slaves. Susan Socolow, "Economic Roles of the Free Women of Color of Cap Français," in *More Than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas*, ed. David B. Gaspar and Darlene C. Hine (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 281-282.

¹⁹ The 1809 statistics are for refugees arriving in New Orleans via Cuba. Paul F. Lachance, "The 1809 Immigration of Saint-Domingue Refugees to New Orleans: Reception, Integration and Impact," 111. In Cap Français, Saint Domingue in 1780, women comprised the majority among free persons of color (53 percent of the population). In contrast, men comprised the majority among whites and slaves. Susan Socolow, "Economic Roles of the Free Women of Color of Cap Français," 279-297, 281-282.

²⁰ Among whites arriving in New Orleans from Cuba in 1809, 1,373 were men and 703 were women.

with white men, the relationships had practical advantages and in many cases, proved to be mutually beneficial.

Louisiana's *femmes de couleur* understood the potential advantages of forming sexual relationships with white men and, to some degree, free colored women coalesced around their efforts to successfully establish themselves in intimate relationships. As one observer noted, "In becoming the wife of the man of color, [the free colored woman] would necessarily perpetuate her degradation; but in prostituting herself to the white, she would elevate herself."²¹ By the first decade of the nineteenth century, colored Creole women began sponsoring private balls and public dances held exclusively for the purpose of meeting potential white suitors. Elite colored mothers who sought wealthy suitors for their daughters chaperoned the girls at exclusive society balls where they could mingle with potential suitors. Relatively few women ever attended elite quadron balls. Rather, most attended semi-public dances where white men paid an entrance fee to dance and socialize with mixed-race women. Although the fees ranged widely depending on the social class of the attendees, aside from a handful of invitation-only high-society balls, most dances remained open for public consumption. More often than not, men paid money at the door to have access to a room full of young, often poor, quadron women who had limited resources and few prospects for marriage. The dance organizers encouraged female attendance by offering the women food and drink as well as the promise of intimate partnership and the potential for social advancement. Even if

²¹ Rev. Philo Tower, *Slavery Unmasked: being a truthful narrative of a three years' residence and journeying in eleven southern states: to which is added the invasion of Kansas, including the last chapter of her wrongs* (Rochester, NY: E. Darrow & Brother, 1856), 326.

connections formed at quadroon balls or public dances were only temporary, free colored women often received baubles, money, and small gifts from their white admirers. Some women who regularly attended the balls made a living by bartering their affections for money and goods, but the most enterprising women in attendance entertained men's flirtations in hopes of meeting a suitable long-term partner.²²

For practical reasons, marriage did not have the same appeal for colored women as it did for white women. Colored women could not legally marry their white lovers and marriage to free colored men did not readily afford free colored women the same level of social or economic security. Neither did marriage necessarily keep women from working outside the home. Women who worked before they were married often had to continue working during the marriage to help support the family. Since relatively few colored families could afford to own their own homes, free colored wives and widows stood to inherit little property from their husbands. With diminished benefits resulting from marriage, Creole women may have felt less incentive to marry. Many concubines lived as wives, taking their "husband's" surname and reporting themselves in the census records as married. Even without the legal benefits of marriage, colored Creole women in marriage-like relationships often obtained the social status of legal wives from

²² Joan M. Martin, "Plaçage and the Louisiana Gens de Couleur Libre: How Race and Sex Defined the Lifestyles of Free Women of Color," in *Creole: The History and Legacy of Louisiana's Free People of Color* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 64-70; Monique Guillory, "Under One Roof: The Sin and Sanctity of the New Orleans Quadroon Balls," in *Race Consciousness*, ed. Judith J. Fossett and Jeffrey A. Tucker (New York: NYU Press, 1997), 83; Violet Harrington Bryan, "Marcus Christian's Treatment of *Les Gens de Couleur Libre*," in *Creole: The History and Legacy of Louisiana's Free People of Color*, ed. Sybil Kein (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 50-52; Marcus Christian, "Black New Orleans, 1718-1938," Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans, Louisiana. Ronald R Morazan, "'Quadroon' Balls in the Spanish Period," *Louisiana History* XIV, no. 3 (1973): 310-315.

the Creole community. It seems that with or without marriage, the Creole community held monogamy and long-term commitment in high regard. The small but noteworthy population of free colored bachelors living in New Orleans at the beginning of the nineteenth century suggests that perhaps some women chose not to marry despite the availability of men. It is likely that colored Creole women found they had more mobility and were better able to cope with life's sudden changes while remaining outside the conventions and restrictions of legal marriage, especially since they stood to gain little money or property through marriage. Free colored women readily sought relationships that provided them with social advantages and economic benefits, whether it was obtained through marriage or outside of it.²³

Some white men also found interracial concubinage to be a more practical and more economical option than legal marriage to white women. One traveler to New Orleans observed that white men showed a preference for colored women because, as he reasoned, "such women demand fewer of those annoying attentions which contradict their taste for independence. A great number, accordingly, prefer to live in concubinage rather than to marry."²⁴ Another traveler noted:

"It was much cheaper for him [a white man] to have a quadroon [concubine] . . . than to live in any other way that he could be expected to in New Orleans. His woman did not, except

²³ Matthew Flannery, *New Orleans in 1805*; Kimberly S. Hanger, "Landlords, Shopkeepers, Farmers and Slave-Owners: Free Black Female Property-Holders in Colonial New Orleans," in *Beyond Bondage: Free Women of Color in the Americas*, ed. David Barry Gaspar and Darlene Clark Hine (Urbana: University Of Chicago Press, 2004), 219-36; Susan Socolow, "Economic Roles of the Free Women of Color of Cap Francais," in *More Than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas*, ed. David B. Gaspar and Darlene C. Hine (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 279-297.

²⁴ Quoted in James A. Robertson, *Louisiana Under the Rule of Spain, France, and the United States, 1785-1807*, vol. 2 (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark Company, 1911), 205.

occasionally, require a servant; she did the marketing, and performed all the ordinary duties of house-keeping herself; she took care of his clothes, and in every way was economical and saving in her habits—it being her interest, if her affection for him was not sufficient, to make him as much comfort and as little expense as possible, that he might become the more strongly attached to her, and have the less occasion to leave her.”²⁵

If a man lived openly with his colored family and did not have a legal white wife, he may have established his concubine in prime real estate centrally located in the *Vieux Carré*. Married men and men of moderate wealth usually placed their concubines in homes toward the outskirts of the city. Property on the city’s ramparts was less densely populated, less secure, and less expensive than homes in the middle of the city. For men who kept two families— one white and one colored—placing their concubines on the periphery of the city was often convenient; planters who lived in the surrounding rural areas could quietly slip in and out of town to visit their colored families without drawing much attention, while men who kept two families in the city could limit the contact between their wives and concubines by placing their concubines in more remote locations. But it was not unheard of for white men to maintain two households in close proximity to one another. In 1805, Joseph Lestint lived at 30 Rue St. Philippe with his white family and two slaves but a Joseph Lestint was listed again one block away toward the ramparts, living at 81 Rue St. Philippe with a free woman of color, four children and six slaves.²⁶ One can only speculate how Joseph’s white and colored families felt about the other’s existence and to what degree they expressed discontent about being in close proximity to one another. However, one thing is clear: white, black, and colored women alike were vulnerable to the

²⁵ Rev. Philo Tower, *Slavery Unmasked*, 320-321.

²⁶ Matthew Flannery, *New Orleans in 1805*.

choices and desires of white men. Colored concubines had little power in determining whether their white lovers took a legitimate white wife, but neither did white women get to choose whether their husbands kept colored concubines or not. As one traveler to New Orleans noted, “Every quadroon woman believes that her partner will prove an exception to the rule of desertion. Every white lady believes her husband has been an exception to the rule of seduction.”²⁷ Women of all colors were subjected to white men’s authority yet many free colored women ultimately determined that the potential benefits of an extramarital relationship with a white man outweighed the risks.

From the early French colonial period, Louisiana’s *Code Noir* forbade marriage between whites and persons of color, yet with the arrival of Caribbean Creoles, New Orleans’s free colored women developed sophisticated methods of gaining some of the benefits of long-term relationships while remaining outside the bonds of legal marriage.²⁸ White men and free colored women formed a type of morganatic marriage, or *mariage de la main gauche* (left-handed marriage) that existed on the margins of legitimate marriage and provided colored women with limited inheritance rights.²⁹ In Europe, *mariages de la main gauche* were

²⁷ Harriet Martineau, *Society in America*, I, 116-117.

²⁸ 1685 *Code Noir*; 1724 *Code Noir*; The 1808 Louisiana Civil Code of Louisiana, Article 8, recognized three separate classes—slaves, free persons of color, and whites—and prohibited marriage between them. The 1824 Civil Code continued the ban on marriage across boundaries of race and status. Kimberly S. Hanger, *Bounded Lives, Bounded Places*, 18.

²⁹ In Europe, morganatic marriages typically took place between an upper-class man and a woman of a lower rank; although the arrangement was legally binding, it did not allow the husband to pass his titles, social rank or property to his left-handed bride or offspring. Because the woman had no inheritance rights, a left-handed marriage contract specifically provided money or property to the man’s family separate from his estate. The Louisiana Supreme Court judges in the case of *Marie L. Badillo v. Francisco Tio* (1851) drew a direct connection between morganatic marriage and *plaçage* in Louisiana. For more on *plaçage* and morganatic marriage, see Lambert Surhone, Miriam Timpledon, and Susan Marseken, *Plaçage: Common-Law Marriage, Morganatic Marriage, Free People of Color, Spanish Louisiana, Saint-Domingue* (Betascript Publishing, n.d.).

contractual unions like legal marriage, yet they did not confer the same benefits as legal marriage. In Louisiana, white Creole and foreign-born men as well as a handful of American white men formed similar relationships with free colored women known as *plaçage*. Although *plaçage* relationships were not typically contractual like *mariage de la main gauche*, they were semi-formal unions that were openly acknowledged by the community and should not be considered synonymous with concubinage. *Plaçage* specifically refers to relationships that were formally arranged by the girl's family and her white suitor and included some type of compensatory agreement—usually verbal but sometimes written—explicitly indicating how he would provide for his colored consort and children. Since most *placées* were young women, typically between fourteen and sixteen years of age, white suitors would usually make arrangements with the girl's mother—who was often a consort herself—promising to provide for the young woman and any children the couple would have together. Sometimes a wealthy white father seeking partnership for his colored daughter would arrange for an eligible white suitor to care for his colored daughter as if she were his wife; however, relatively few colored daughters of white fathers were afforded such a high degree of paternal protection.

Although *plaçage* relationships have captured the imagination of many, popular literature and travel accounts have exaggerated the true extent of these unions. *Plaçage* arrangements were almost exclusively the domain of the elite—white and colored—and relatively few couples negotiated compensation at the outset of the relationship, therefore not technically qualifying as *plaçage*. Court cases litigating wills and successions suggest that the amount of money and

property white men bequeathed to their colored families depended upon many factors including, the length of the relationship; the degree of commitment between the lovers; the number of children born out of the relationship; and the man's accumulation of wealth during his lifetime—factors that could not usually be determined at the outset of the relationship. In her 1948 book, *It's an Old New Orleans Custom*, Lura Robinson claimed that in the 1780s, when Governor Estaban Miro passed the “tignon law” banning colored women from wearing plumes, jewelry, and other finery, “the census revealed fifteen hundred ‘unmarried women of color, all free, living in little houses near the ramparts.’” Considering the total number of free colored persons did not reach 1,500 until 1805, Robinson grossly overstated the incidence of *plaçage*.³⁰ A traveler to New Orleans in the 1840s who was fascinated with *plaçage* and interracial relationships described the city as a place where, “all shades, from deepest black to purest white, are here so mixed and jumbled together, and pass in such close and rapid succession, as to produce upon one's vision an impression similar to that caused by a revolving cylinder.” Recalling his travels to New Orleans in the 1830s, Alexis de Tocqueville claimed that *plaçage* was the fate of all colored girls: “A coloured girl is destined from birth to become the mistress of a white. When she becomes marriageable, her mother takes care to provide for her. It's a sort of temporary marriage.”³¹ Regardless of authors and travelers' fascination with

³⁰The free colored population of New Orleans numbered 1,147 in 1789. Matthew Flannery, *New Orleans in 1805*; Lura Robinson, *It's an Old New Orleans Custom* (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1948), 219.

³¹H. Didimus, *New Orleans as I Found It* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1845), 29; Alexis de Tocqueville, *Journey to America*, ed. J.P. Mayer, trans. George Lawrence (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1981); George Wilson Pierson, *Tocqueville in America* (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996). For more travel accounts of New Orleans, see Harriet

plaçage, most women had to make a way for themselves and their children through ingenuity and hard work, and through mutually beneficial intimate relationships, ranging from marriage or marriage-like unions to simple prostitution.³²

Despite colored Creole women's desires to sustain their relationships for a lifetime, they understood that death, separation or divorce, and abandonment constantly threatened the security of their unions. The vulnerability of women's long-term extramarital relationships is apparent in the way some women identified themselves in relation to their lovers. In times when the relationship was going strong, women often listed themselves with the same surname as their lovers. In more precarious times, women gave their maiden names. It was not uncommon for free colored women to form a series of relationships with both white and colored men over the course of a lifetime rather than form one singular lifelong union. The large number of free mulatto children who appeared in birth records and baptismal registers without fathers suggests that in between long-term meaningful relationships, colored women engaged in temporary unions which sometimes resulted in children.³³ Such unions not only highlight the fluidity of colored women's relationships, but they also suggest that women's

Martineau, *Society in America*, 3 vols. (Saunders and Otley, 1837); Bernhard Duke of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach, *Travels by His Highness Duke Bernhard of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach through North America in the years 1825 and 1826* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2001); C.C. Robin, *Voyage to Louisiana, 1803-1805* (Pelican Publishing Company, 1966); G.W. Featherstonhaugh, *Excursion through the Slave States*, 1841.

³² Joan M. Martin, "Plaçage and the Louisiana Gens de Couleur Libre: How Race and Sex Defined the Lifestyles of Free Women of Color," 67-8; Monique Guillory, "Under One Roof: The Sin and Sanctity of the New Orleans Quadroon Balls," 80-85; Matthew Flannery, *New Orleans in 1805*.

³³ For example, in 1791, there were 86 baptisms but only two free colored marriages, which suggest that many free colored children were born out of wedlock. *Nonwhite Marriages, St. Louis Parish, book I, 1777-1830* (New Orleans: Archives of the Archdiocese of New Orleans).

incentive to engage in either marriage or concubinage shifted and changed in response to the demands of their lives.³⁴

Placées and other concubines understood that their relationships were not legally binding nor did they have legal rights to their lovers' estates, which prompted many women to act resourcefully and to make the most of what they acquired during their relationships with their white patrons. Before 1808, Louisiana law allowed concubines to inherit up to one-fifth of their lovers' estates. Colored concubines took advantage of the liberal inheritance law: around the turn of the nineteenth century, free colored women owned more than one quarter of all the real estate in New Orleans's Third District.³⁵ In 1808 the Americans established a new Civil Code that banned all donations to concubines whether the donation was made during the course of the relationship or after the couple was parted by death. The 1825 Civil Code of Louisiana once again permitted moderate donations, allowing white men to donate no more than one-tenth of all moveable property to their concubines yet prohibited the women from inheriting any immovable property including land and real estate.³⁶ Despite the restrictions, many men illegally donated property to their colored paramours and

³⁴ L. Virginia Gould, "In Full Enjoyment of Their Liberty: The Free Women of Color of the Gulf Ports of New Orleans, Mobile, and Pensacola, 1769-1860," 279; Anthony E. Kaye, *Joining Places: Slave Neighborhoods in the Old South* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 51-82; Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 32-39, 112-114; Hanger, *Bounded Lives, Bounded Places*, 52, 91.

³⁵ The *Vieux Carré* was the First District, the American Sector (uptown) was the Second District, and the Creole Sector (downtown) was the Third District. Kimberly S. Hanger, *Bounded Lives, Bounded Places*, 90-2.

³⁶ Under earlier Spanish law, testators could donate up to one-fifth of their estates to their colored consorts and one-third to their natural children, despite having any legal white heirs. J.C. De. St. Romes, ed., *Civil Code of the State of Louisiana* (New Orleans, 1825), Art. 1481.

others found creative ways to circumvent the law by donating money through third parties.³⁷

Persistently imbalanced sex ratios among whites and free colored persons helped to perpetuate the social conditions under which concubinage and interracial sexuality flourished. In 1820, free women of color and white men both outnumbered their respective counterparts more than two to one. Free colored women outnumbered free colored men at a rate of 245 women for every 100 colored men and among whites there were 215 men for every 100 women. Sex ratios among free colored people were more imbalanced than for whites, leaving colored women particularly vulnerable and exposed.³⁸

While it was generally understood that women had little power to openly object to their husbands' transgressions, the preponderance of white men also compromised slave and free colored men's ability to protect women of color and to assert their own patriarchal authority. Unlike parts of rural Louisiana where white men experienced at least some anxiety and apprehension about inciting rebellion among slave men, in New Orleans, the number of white men far exceeded the number of both slave and free colored men, which subdued many white men's fear of retribution by women's husbands, fathers, brothers, or sons. In 1820, the number of adult white males in New Orleans was three-and-a-half times larger than the number of slave men and more than six times the size of the population of free colored men. The sheer size of the adult white male population

³⁷ For other cases involving donations to concubines through third parties, see *Richard v. Charlot et al*, 122 La. 492; 47 So. 841; 1908 (Supreme Court of Louisiana); *Adeline E. Stringer v. Louis Mathis* 41 La. Ann. 985; 7 So. 229; 1889 (Supreme Court of Louisiana).

³⁸ Census figures for 1820 include residents living within New Orleans' city limits and residents living in the surrounding *faubourgs*. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Third Census of the United States, 1820, Orleans Parish, Louisiana*, Manuscript Census (Washington D.C., n.d.), NARA

living in New Orleans and the surrounding *faubourgs* contributed significantly to their ability to form sexual relationships across the boundaries of race and slavery with relatively little retribution or social stigma.³⁹

White suitors did not typically leave large inheritances to their colored concubines and children. But if a man purchased a home for his colored family, the woman often kept the house. Women who owned even the most modest homes used their property as a means of generating income. Some women rented out rooms in their homes as a source of income while others used their homes as collateral to start small businesses working as *marchandes* (market women), hairdressers, seamstresses, shop owners, and boardinghouse keepers.⁴⁰ One free colored Creole woman named Rosette Rochon amassed a substantial amount of wealth first through her intimate relationships with at least three prominent white men, and then through her subsequent business endeavors. Rochon earned money primarily through money lending, owning real estate, renting out slaves, and running other commercial businesses. At the time of her death in 1863, she owned multiple properties throughout the *faubourg* Marigny.⁴¹ Another free colored woman, Françoise Montreuil (also Francisca Montreuil or Fanchon Carriere), had accumulated a considerable fortune during her lifetime; her will valued her estate at 10,459 pesos and included five slaves, two farms on Bayou Road, livestock, a house in the city, furniture and other

³⁹U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Third Census of the United States, 1820, Orleans Parish*; Carl Brasseaux, "Creoles of Color in Louisiana's Bayou Country, 1766-1877," in *Creoles of Color of the Gulf South*, ed. James Dormon (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 67-85.

⁴⁰For more on free colored women's role in the economy, see Kimberly S. Hanger, "Landlords, Shopkeepers, Farmers and Slave-Owners: Free Black Female Property-Holders in Colonial New Orleans," in *Beyond Bondage: Free Women of Color in the Americas*, ed. David Barry Gaspar and Darlene Clark Hine (Urbana: University Of Chicago Press, 2004), 219-36; Susan Socolow, "Economic Roles of the Free Women of Color of Cap Francais," 279-297.

⁴¹Toledano et.al, *The Creole Faubourgs*, 28, 98.

goods.⁴² Françoise had never married but she had multiple relationships with white men, which resulted in at least four mulatto children. Through her own wise business practices as well as contributions from previous white companions, Françoise managed to pass down a substantial legacy to her mixed-race heirs. Women who amassed fortunes comparable to Rosette Rochon and Françoise Montreuil were certainly in the minority but whether or not they acquired wealth, women built their estates using a variety of resources available to them, including family networks, inheritances, donations from lovers, and a sense of resourcefulness.⁴³

When the wealthy French Creole and former mayor of New Orleans, Augustin Macarty, died in 1844, his white and colored heirs battled in court over the future of his estate.⁴⁴ The trial exposed many details about Augustin Macarty's personal life and revealed his penchant for keeping colored mistresses. Macarty had at least four colored mistresses, including a woman named Celeste Perrault with whom he lived from 1799 until his death.⁴⁵ When Macarty died, he provided in his will for Celeste and the couple's son Patrice: he left his clothes and his bedroom furniture to Patrice and the rest of the furniture he left to Celeste as well as three young slaves whom he ordered to be manumitted when they came of age. He also allowed Celeste to remain in the couple's home for six

⁴² Françoise Montreuil began building her fortune with a modest inheritance from her free colored father.

⁴³ Kimberly S. Hanger, "Landlords, Shopkeepers, Farmers and Slave-Owners: Free Black Female Property-Holders in Colonial New Orleans," 219-36; Roulhac Toledano and Mary Christovich, *New Orleans Architecture, Vol. VI: Faubourg Treme and the Bayou Road*, 85.

⁴⁴ Macarty was the sixth mayor of New Orleans (1815-1820).

⁴⁵ In the 1840 census, Macarty was listed living with his legal wife although according to trial testimony, he actually lived with Celeste at the time. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Sixth Census of the United States, 1840, Orleans Parish, Louisiana*, Manuscript Census (Washington D.C.), NARA.

months after his death in order to give her time to find somewhere else to live. Augustin Macarty's provisions for Celeste and Patrice may seem rather modest, considering his estate was appraised at \$58,610 at the time of his death. However, Macarty made out his will according to the law which allowed him to bequeath to Celeste no more than one-tenth of his estate, all of which had to be transferred through moveable property (i.e. slaves, money, clothes, furniture, and goods). Macarty did not provide for his other colored children outright but there is reason to believe he attempted to circumvent the law in order to provide for them.⁴⁶

Rather than allow his white relatives to inherit the remainder of his estate, Macarty appointed a legatee to take control of his property and assets—a move Macarty's white heirs interpreted as deceptive. Several of Augustin Macarty's extended family members⁴⁷ sued Francisco Tio, Macarty's legatee, for control of his estate, claiming that he was illegally appointed on behalf of Macarty's colored children. The defense claimed that Macarty's colored children were natural children—illegitimate children acknowledged by their father—and were therefore eligible for inheritance and thus did not need a legatee interposed on their behalf. But there was little evidence to indicate that Macarty ever claimed the alleged heirs as his natural children. In order for colored children of white fathers to gain inheritance rights, the fathers had to indicate their paternity on official documents or admit paternity either verbally or in writing.⁴⁸ Witnesses and

⁴⁶ *Marie L. Badillo et al. v. Francisco Tio*, 6 La. Ann. 129 (Supreme Court of Louisiana 1851).

⁴⁷ Marie Badillo is the only heir of Augustin Macarty who listed by name in the case.

⁴⁸ Natural children are children born to unmarried, co-habiting couples and unlike illegitimate children who could not legally inherit their fathers' estates, had limited inheritance rights. Louisiana Civil Code stated that colored children could not legally prove paternal descent from

friends testified that Augustin Macarty claimed to have no children, and he never publicly acknowledged any of the alleged colored heirs. In fact, it seems that Augustin Macarty carefully and deliberately abstained from claiming any of his colored offspring. In his written correspondence to his natural son Patrice Macarty, whom Augustin fathered with his longtime partner, Celeste Perrault, the elder Macarty affectionately referred to Patrice as “*mon ami*” (my friend), rather than indicating any familial relationship between the two men.⁴⁹

Except for his relationship with Celeste, Augustin Macarty’s relationships with the mothers of his colored children were generally fleeting and insignificant and may have influenced his decision to leave the women and their children out of his will. Macarty put up his first concubine, Victoria Wiltz, in a house on Dauphine Street, but by the time her daughter Maria Josephine Macarty was born around 1795, Augustin had already ended the relationship.⁵⁰ By 1820, Macarty was living one street over on Burgundy with Celeste Perrault, listed in the census as Celeste Macarty, with the couple’s son Patrice and six slaves. Although friends and witnesses claimed that Macarty never acknowledged any colored children, his daughter Maria Josephine claimed that she always called Macarty father and he recognized her as his daughter. She testified that her own children acknowledged Macarty as their grandfather and that he welcomed Maria Josephine and his grandchildren into his home. Although this claim could not be

white fathers without the father first making some type of public acknowledgement of paternity. Louisiana Civil Code Art. 202, 203, 204, 209,

⁴⁹ *Marie L. Badillo et al. v. Francisco Tio* 6 La. Ann. 129 (Supreme Court of Louisiana 1851).

⁵⁰ During the antebellum period, Dauphine Street had earned a reputation for housing colored concubines, prostitutes, and other women of ill repute. Donald Everett cites an arrest in 1855 of a free colored man and his white mistress who were charged with, “carrying the depravity of Dauphine Street beyond its recognized extent and publicity.” Donald Everett, “The Free Persons of Color in New Orleans, 1803-1865” (Tulane University, 1952), 239.

proven, it is probable that Macarty did acknowledge at least some of his children in private. Maria Josephine and Victoria Wiltz lived one street over from Augustin's house and another of his alleged daughters, Felonise Macarty, lived on the same street as he and Celeste.⁵¹ Even if Macarty did not acknowledge his children publicly, living in such close proximity to several of his children certainly provided ample opportunity to foster familial relationships with his colored offspring behind closed doors.⁵²

Questions remain as to why Augustin Macarty did not legally claim any of his colored relations, including Celeste his concubine of forty-five years. Surely he knew that his colored family did not have natural rights to his estate and that he needed to make specific provisions for them. Macarty may have actually intended for Tio to disperse at least some portion of his estate to his colored heirs—an action that could not be carried out by the courts. By appointing a universal legatee to administer his estate, it is possible that Macarty tried to bypass his white relations and bequeath property to his illegitimate colored children. Francisco Tio was not just Macarty's trusted friend but was part of the family; in the 1820s, Tio took Macarty's daughter Maria Josephine as his concubine and became like a son-in-law to Macarty. It is possible that Francisco Tio felt personally invested in executing Macarty's will according to his wishes or perhaps Tio saw an opportunity for personal gain by retaining control of his

⁵¹ In 1820, Felonise lived on Burgundy with her white patron, several colored relatives and one slave woman. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Third Census of the United States, 1820, Orleans Parish*.

⁵² *Marie L. Badillo et al. v. Francisco Tio* 6 La. Ann. 129 (Supreme Court of Louisiana 1851).

father-in-law's estate.⁵³ In the end, the Louisiana Supreme Court ruled in favor of Augustin Macarty's white heirs and determined that Macarty likely ordered Francisco Tio to illegally donate part of his estate to his colored children. The judge ordered Tio to repossess any money or property he had already distributed and to remit the estate to Augustin Macarty's white heirs. It is unclear whether Tio executed the judge's wishes and returned all of Macarty's property, but it is apparent that free colored inheritance relied heavily on the actions of the white men in charge.⁵⁴

Augustin Macarty's unwillingness to claim his colored mistresses and children may also point to shifting Creole attitudes regarding interracial concubinage. By the 1840s, the Americans had exerted their influence on Creole culture and social mores for nearly four decades; as New Orleans became more fully integrated into the American South, interracial concubinage became a less acceptable lifestyle for all but the most elite white Creole men. Although Augustin McCarty certainly ranked among the Creole elite, he formed close political and economic alliances with the Americans during his tenure as mayor of New Orleans and may not have wanted to publicly declare his participation in interracial concubinage, which by mid century was becoming an unfashionable custom among white Creoles.⁵⁵

⁵³ In 1850, one year before the Supreme court trial, Francisco Tio and Josephine lived in the Sixth Ward (First Municipality) in a home valued at \$30,000. By 1860, Francisco and Josephine still lived in the Sixth Ward but they listed no real estate—only personal estate valued at \$3,000, which suggests that before the trial the couple used at least some portion of Augustin Macarty's estate for their personal use.

⁵⁴ *Marie L. Badillo et al. v. Francisco Tio* 6 La. Ann. 129 (Supreme Court of Louisiana 1851).

⁵⁵ Grace King, *Creole Families of New Orleans* (1921), 373-74

By the 1840s the free colored community had reached its height of culture, education, and sophistication, yet colored Creole men were becoming angry and resentful of the power and influence that white men wielded over free colored women. Because free colored men could not openly denounce the actions of white men without facing retaliation themselves, they developed creative ways to express their discontent through veiled messages. In 1843 and 1845 respectively, a group of educated colored Creole men published two collections of poems, *L'album littéraire* and *Les Cenelles*, which expressed the desires and concerns of New Orleans' free colored men about matters of concubinage. The poets extolled the virtues of their colored sisters and mothers and discouraged women from being lured by material possessions into forming illicit relationships with white men. Many poems in *Les Cenelles* lamented over a lost love, and although the poets did not explicitly identify white men as their sexual competitors or name concubinage as the cause of colored women's disinterest in colored men, *Les Cenelles* contained "hidden transcripts" of resistance. In Mirtil-Ferdinand Liotau's poem entitled, "A Ida" (To Ida), the protagonist explains to his young love that he adores her not for her youth and beauty but for her moral rectitude and strength to resist the temptations of lust and greed. By stating that he is not drawn to her simply for her youthful innocence and beauty, the poet suggests that his romantic intentions are genuine and more deserving than those of potential white suitors who are motivated by sexual desire. In his poem "La Jeune Fille au Bal" (The Young Lady at the Ball), Creole poet Armand Lanusse warned young women to avoid being consumed by the flattery and material goods offered to them at quadroon balls. In the excerpt below, Lanusse explains to a young

woman named Emma that the opulence and grandeur of the balls is nothing more than an illusion created to tempt her into a disreputable lifestyle that will eventually kill her.

<p><i>Des plaisirs excessifs ainsi l'ivresse tue. Jeune fille, crois-moi, réprime ce transport. L'éclat qui t'environne et qui charme ta vue, N'est qu'un prisme trompeur qui recèle la mort.</i></p>	<p>The intoxication of excessive pleasures kills. Young lady, believe me, suppress this approach. The brilliance that surrounds you and charms your sight, Is merely a deceptive prism that harbors death.</p>
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Lanusse does not openly implicate white men as the masters of seduction, but by speaking directly to the young women who attended the balls, he alludes to white men's guilt without directly accusing them.⁵⁶

Although the poets of *L'album littéraire* and *Les Cenelles* opposed white men's illicit pursuits as well as colored women's reception to the men's overtures, many of the poets must have felt internally conflicted on matters of miscegenation. Several poets were themselves children and grandchildren of *placées* and others certainly benefited indirectly from concubinage. All of the poets wrote in French and at least two of the poets were educated in France courtesy of their white fathers. During the 1840s, the same time *L'album littéraire* and *Les Cenelles* were published, the colored Creole community had reached its height of culture and sophistication, in part through the spoils of concubinage. Concubinage was a viable method of upward mobility, not just for the women and their children but also for the colored Creole community as a

⁵⁶ Mirtil-Ferdinand Liotau, "A Ida," and Armand Lanusse, "La Jeune Fille au Bal," *Les Cenelles* (1845) (Boston: Hall, 1979).

whole. In extensive kinship and friendship networks, the privileges of concubinage radiated outward, benefitting parents, spouses, extended relatives, and family friends. Even as the poets implored women to pursue respectable relationships with men of their own class instead of forming extralegal unions with white men, concubinage had already become a necessary evil in the Creole community, despite the risks and negative consequences.⁵⁷

Some daughters and granddaughters of concubines sought to break the cycle of concubinage in the family. Women for whom marriage was not possible or desirable occasionally found refuge in the Catholic Church. Sister Henriette Delille, a colored Creole woman who founded the Sisters of the Holy Family, a Catholic order of black nuns, rejected her mother's efforts to place her with a white suitor and instead dedicated her life to serving the city's poor and indigent residents. Delille, herself the daughter of a colored *placée* and a Frenchman, intimately understood the negative consequences of concubinage and she denounced *plaçage* as an immoral lifestyle that threatened the sacrament of marriage. The prevalence of light-skinned colored Creoles in the early years of the Sisters of the Holy Family suggests that joining the order became a viable alternative for Catholic colored women who did not marry or desire concubinage. Although the order remained small until after the Civil War, Delille's successors, some of whom were the daughters of *plaçage*, continued to work toward combating the social problems that resulted from concubinage and extralegal

⁵⁷ Floyd D Cheung, "Les Cenelles and Quadroon Balls: 'Hidden Transcripts' of Resistance and domination in New Orleans, 1803-1845," *Southern Literary Journal* 29, no. 2 (1997): 5-16; Rodolphe Desdunes, *Our People and Our History: Fifty Creole Portraits* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973), 10-24.

marriage. The Sisters opened a school for the academic and moral instruction of colored girls and they regularly cared for unwanted children and orphans, some of whom were the children of concubines and *placées*.⁵⁸

Though concubinage had evolved into an identifiable lifestyle by the early nineteenth century, by midcentury it had become part of the cultural fabric of the Tremé and Marigny neighborhoods. The practice was already in decline by the 1850s, but interracial concubinage appeared somewhere in nearly every Creole family tree. White ancestry became as integral to a colored Creole identity as French language and Roman Catholic traditions. When Bernard de Marigny began naming the streets in his *faubourg* (which would eventually become part of the lower Seventh Ward) he paid homage to the tradition of concubinage. Marigny changed the names of the city streets that extended into his property; he changed Rampart Street, or *Chemin derrière la Ville*— a street commonly associated with concubinage and interracial sexuality—to *rue d'Amour*, or Love Street. Behind Rampart Street was St. Claude Street, which Marigny renamed *Rue des Bons Enfants*, or Goodchildren Street, likely a tongue-in-cheek reference to the offspring of interracial unions.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ When St. Mary's School moved to 717 Orleans St. in 1881, the school occupied the same space as the old Orleans Ballroom which is believed to be a space once used for quadroon balls. Sister Mary Bernard Deggs, *No Cross, No Crown: Black Nuns in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans*, ed. Virginia M. Gould and Charles Nolan (Indiana University Press, 2002), xxvi- xxxvi; Audrey Marie Detiege, *Henriette Delille, free woman of color: Foundress of the Sisters of the Holy Family* (Sisters of the Holy Family, 1976); Violet H. Bryant, "Marcus Christian's Treatment of Les Gens de Couleur Libre," in *Creole: The History and Legacy of Louisiana's Free People of Color* (Baton Rouge, LA: LSU Press, 2000), 51-52; Monique Guillory, "Under One Roof: The Sin and Sanctity of the New Orleans Quadroon Balls," 67-92.

⁵⁹ John Churchill Chase, *Frenchmen, Desire, Good Children and Other Streets of New Orleans* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1979) , 85-86; Joan M. Martin, "Plaçage and the Louisiana Gens de Couleur Libre: How Race and Sex Defined the Lifestyles of Free Women of Color," 67-70.

Despite the legacy of concubinage in the Creole faubourgs, by 1850 it had become clear that the Creoles way of life was being threatened by the increasing Americanization of New Orleans. In 1852, city officials merged the three separate municipal districts—the uptown American sector, the downtown Creole sector, and the French Quarter—into one unified city government, reducing the Creoles’ social and political autonomy in their downtown neighborhoods.⁶⁰ Two years prior, perhaps in preparation for the city's reunification, a city ordinance required Marigny’s street names to be changed back to the original names. The ordinance not only suggested that downtown Creoles lost the right to govern themselves, but it also symbolically denounced the Creoles’ cultural traditions and lifestyle choices.⁶¹

Amidst increasing Americanization, concubinage became a cultural and physical manifestation of a Creole ethnic identity for both white and colored Creoles. With the arrival of thousands of Americans and foreign-born immigrants during the first half of the nineteenth century, Louisiana Creoles were forced to define themselves in contrast to the newcomers. By maintaining intimate and familial ties across the color line, Creoles rejected American sexual mores and asserted their allegiance to the French and Spanish colonial culture that had developed in conjunction with concubinage. Rather than ally themselves with newly arriving American free blacks, Louisiana natives and Caribbean-born *gens de couleur* joined together to affirm their French and Spanish heritage alongside white Creoles. It was during this period, when a

⁶⁰ The city of New Orleans split into three separate districts in 1836.

⁶¹ Ordinance 395 enacted November 20, 1850. John Churchill Chase, *Frenchmen, Desire, Good Children and Other Streets of New Orleans*, 83-99.

Creole ethnic identity began taking shape, that free persons of color in Louisiana began widely referring to themselves as “Creole” (a label that white Creoles would eventually abandon for fear of being classified as a person of mixed race). By taking on the designation “Creole,” Louisiana’s free colored people distinguished themselves from American free blacks while simultaneously affirming their ties to white Creole families through consanguinity and a shared culture. Colored Creole family histories often celebrated the “point of origin” where their European and African ancestors first came together, creating both black and white branches of the same family tree. Considering the progress and achievements some women and men obtained through concubinage—either directly or indirectly— it is understandable why colored Creoles celebrated their interracial roots even as their white relatives chose to forget. Women who engaged in concubinage certainly experienced some of the same socially oppressive and sexually coercive conditions as enslaved black women, but as the old Creole saying goes, “*un bon plaçage vaut mieux qu’un mauvais mariage.*” (“A good *plaçage* is better than a bad marriage.”)⁶² By taking advantage of even the most limited opportunities and privileges afforded them, including concubinage, colored Creole women pushed the boundaries of acceptability and exercised their freedom to the fullest possible extent.⁶³

⁶² As quoted in James Haskins, *The Creoles of Color of New Orleans* (New York: New York Times Book Co., 1968), 23-24.

⁶³ Joseph G. Tregle Jr., “Creoles and Americans,” in *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization*, ed. Arnold R. Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 132-142; Joseph Logsdon and Caryn Cossé Bell, “The Americanization of Black New Orleans, 1850-1900,” in *Creole New Orleans*, 201-209; Introduction: Franco-Africans and African Americans,” in *Creole New Orleans*, 189-200; Virginia R Dominguez, *White By Definition: Social Classification in Creole Louisiana*, 93-132.

The inordinate number of concubines, unmarried mothers, interracial couples, and prostitutes living in “back o’ town”⁶⁴ certainly influenced the area’s reputation for sex and illicit activity. Concubines and *placées* did not trade sex for money as did prostitutes, but it was generally understood that colored women received some kind of compensation from their white lovers in exchange for their loyalty and affection, which placed concubinage on the periphery of the commercial sex trade. It is not coincidental that the Globe Theatre, one of the most notorious ballrooms for contracting *plaçage* unions, at the corner of St. Peter and St. Claude, stood one block away from the area that eventually became New Orleans’ red light district. The area in back of town became so closely associated with interracial sex and vice that when the police arrested one white woman and her free colored lover they accused the couple of “carrying the depravity of Dauphine Street beyond its recognized extent and publicity.”⁶⁵ The charges not only associated interracial sex with vice but also suggested that interracial sex was an acceptable (or at least tolerated) custom on Dauphine Street and the surrounding areas in back of town. The very desire to contain interracial sexuality in a particular part of town indicated that by midcentury interracial concubinage was becoming less acceptable even if it was still tolerated. New Orleans, although still heavily influenced by French Creole culture, was very much a part of the American South. As the slavery debate heated up between the

⁶⁴Although “Back o’ Town” often referred to the “Battlefield” area of Mid-City in the Third Ward, in downtown Creole neighborhoods, they used the term “Back o’ Town” to indicate the area of town behind the French Quarter between Canal Street and the Carondelet Canal. This area is also known as “Over the Basin.” For more on neighborhood boundaries, see “St. Mark’s Ethnic Heritage Project, Oral History of the Tremé and Seventh Ward” (New Orleans, 1978), Collection 327, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University.

⁶⁵New Orleans *Daily Picayune*, July 1, 1855 as quoted in Donald Everett, “The Free Persons of Color in New Orleans, 1803-1865,” 239.

North and the South, New Orleanians reaffirmed their commitment to the institution by enforcing greater separation between whites and free colored persons.⁶⁶

Since the early colonial years, Louisiana's legislature included laws regulating the rights and freedoms of the free colored class; however, by the mid-nineteenth century as attitudes regarding relationships across the color line shifted lawmakers began strictly enforcing the old Black Codes and establishing new ones. All but the most powerful and privileged colored Creole families began to be treated more like American free blacks. An 1843 law required all free colored persons to register themselves with the local parish judge within thirty days and obtain from him permission to remain in the state.⁶⁷ In order to obtain permission free colored persons had to "furnish satisfactory evidence of good character, and shall give bond, with satisfactory security, conditioned for their faithful observance of all the laws of this State relating to free persons of color." According to the legislature, permission to stay in Louisiana could be revoked if free colored persons violated any laws "regulating the duties of the free persons of color toward the whites."⁶⁸ In 1852, following the reunification of New Orleans' three separate municipal districts, local officials required all free colored persons carry proof of their free status. Many if not most free colored persons ignored these mandates; however, by demanding they maintain deference to whites and show evidence of good character and free status in order to remain in Louisiana,

⁶⁶ Violet Harrington Bryan, "Marcus Christian's Treatment of Les Gens de Couleur Libre," 51-52.

⁶⁷ This law applied specifically to free persons of color who arrived in the state of Louisiana before 1836. Acts of Jan. 2, 1843 of the Sixteenth Legislature of Louisiana (effective Mar. 22, 1843).

⁶⁸ Acts of Jan. 2, 1843 of the Sixteenth Legislature of Louisiana, 1st Sess., Act 73, Section 2, p. 46, as quoted in Bill Quigley and Maha Zaki, "The Significance of Race: Legislative Racial Discrimination in Louisiana, 1803-1865," 200.

lawmakers severely limited the rights and privileges of the free colored class. By 1857, the Louisiana legislature forbade slaveholders from manumitting their slaves for any reason. This law not only prevented enslaved men and women from acquiring free status, but it also denied black slave women the most significant benefit they could possibly receive through intimate or sexual unions with their white masters—freedom.⁶⁹

With greater legal and social restrictions placed on interracial concubinage, some colored Creole women sought alternative arrangements. Some turned to free colored men for partnership. Even though free colored men were not typically as financially secure as white men, legitimate marriage granted women inheritance rights as well as some measure of social status. For those women who were unwilling to give up their relationships with white men, some continued to live in open concubinage despite legal and social opposition. The fairest women among them had yet another option— to become *passablanc* (someone who passes for white). By becoming *passablanc* and passing as the legitimate white wife of her white lover, a colored Creole woman stood to gain not only the social status of a white wife but also full inheritance rights for themselves and their children. Although it is impossible to know how many Creoles actually became *passablanc*, and to what extent they passed,⁷⁰ it seems reasonable to

⁶⁹ Justin A. Nystrom, *New Orleans after the Civil War: Race, Politics, and a New Birth of Freedom* (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 19.

⁷⁰ While racial “passing” is a complex historical and sociological subject that cannot easily be quantified, scholars typically identify several different types of passing, including both intentional and unintentional forms of passing and distinguishing between full-time passing, part-time or situational passing, and momentary or incidental passing. For more scholarship on the history of racial passing see, Arthé A Anthony, “‘Lost Boundaries’: Racial Passing and Poverty in Segregated New Orleans,” in *Creole: The History and Legacy of Louisiana's Free People of Color*, ed. Sybil Kein (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 295-316; Martha A. Sandweiss, *Passing Strange: A Gilded Age Tale of Love and Deception Across the Color Line*,

think that the number of Creoles passing for white increased as the benefits and privileges of the free colored class decreased. As fewer Creole women gained social and economic benefits as the colored concubines of white men, more women attempted to pass themselves off as the legal white wives of their white lovers. In many cases, women who successfully became *passablanc* quietly assimilated into white society, therefore making it impossible to know how many colored women actually became white. Some women who attempted to pass as legitimate white wives did so successfully for a number of years before being discovered as colored concubines.

One Seventh-Ward colored Creole woman's unsuccessful attempt to pass for white in the Louisiana Supreme Court became so well known that her story, known as, "The Toucoutou Affair," became the subject of folk songs and popular fiction. In 1858, Anastasie Desarzant, or Toucoutou as she was known to her family and childhood friends, pursued legal action against a free colored woman named Eglantine Desmaziliere after she allegedly slandered Toucoutou's reputation by calling her *une nègre* (a negress) in public. Anastasie Desarzant flatly denied being a woman of color and claimed to be the biological daughter of Jean David Laizer and Françoise Martin, both Swiss immigrants. Based on her claims of whiteness, Anastasie sought to prosecute Eglantine under a Louisiana law that forbade colored persons from committing slander against whites. The court first had to determine whether Anastasie was legally white and therefore

Reprint. (Penguin (Non-Classics), 2010); Baz Dreisinger, *Near Black: White-to-Black Passing in American Culture* (Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 2008); Ariela J. Gross, "Litigating Whiteness: Trials of Racial Determination in the Nineteenth-Century South," *The Yale Law Journal* 108, no. 1 (October 1998): 109-188; Cheryl I. Harris, "Whiteness as Property," *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8 (June 1993): 1707-1791.

eligible to prosecute Eglantine for slander. Prior to the confrontation, rumors about Anastasie's racial ancestry had been circulating for years; Anastasie brought the case to trial in order to resolve her conflict with Eglantine but more importantly, she wanted to resolve all doubt about her racial identity. In a risky move, Anastasie Desarzant went before the court and made herself the subject of public scrutiny. Anastasie hoped the trial would secure her status as a white woman once and for all; however, as Eglantine Desmaziliere's defense attorney began to dissect Anastasie Desarzant's life he eventually exposed her in court as the daughter of a colored woman who fraudulently presented herself as the legitimate white wife of a prominent New Orleans businessman.⁷¹

The witness testimonies revealed that Anastasie went to great lengths to exercise the same rights and privileges afforded white women. Unlike her mother, who openly lived in concubinage and worked as a seamstress and milliner, Anastasie Desarzant lived as a wife, homemaker, and mother—performing the role of respectable white womanhood.⁷² Although she and her white suitor Maurice Antoine Abat did not legally marry, Anastasie lived publicly as his wife, even bearing the surname Abat.⁷³ It is possible that by choosing not to marry, Anastasie and Maurice Antoine wanted to avoid inquiry about her racial ancestry. Yet Anastasie also knew that if she wanted to successfully pass for white, she could not live as his concubine. Even without the security of legal

⁷¹ *Anastasie Desarzant vs. P. Leblanc and E. Desmaziliere, his wife* (Third District Court of New Orleans); *Anastasie Desarzant vs. Pierre Leblanc and Wife* (Louisiana Supreme Court 1858); Edward Larocque Tinker, *Toucoutou* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1928).

⁷² For testimony about Fraçoise Martin/Justine Bacquié's employment, see Diego Morphy's testimony (23,32)

⁷³ In her testimony, Eglantine Desmazilieres alleged that Anastasie Desarzant was not the legal wife of "the gentleman of whom she assumes publicly the name" [Maurice Antoine Abat]. In the 1860 census, Anastasie Desarzant continued to live as "Anatasie Abat" despite the fact that she was found to be a colored woman.

marriage, Anastasie understood that as long as people acknowledged her publicly as the wife of Maurice Antoine she could still reap the social benefits of marital respectability. Anastasie Desarzant shaped her public persona to align with the values and social habits of middle-class white women. Like other respectable women, she baptized her children in the Catholic Church, made appearances with her husband at social events and parties given by her friends and neighbors, and refrained from going out alone in public without a chaperone. Anastasie also avoided visiting or socializing with people of color; she understood that if she truly desired to leave her colored past behind her, she needed to avoid activities that would further arouse suspicion about her racial ancestry.⁷⁴

As the trial wore on, Anastasie felt increasing pressure to provide definitive proof of her whiteness. She realized that if she had any chance of passing for white, she would need to sever all ties with Françoise Martin/Justine Bacquié. In a desperate move, Anastasie privately met with Françoise/Justine and insisted that her mother go before the court to deny any blood relationship with Anastasie.⁷⁵ Reluctantly, Françoise/Justine took the stand and swore before the court that in 1828, Jean David Laizer gave her custody of Anastasie Desarzant, “the legitimate child of a certain Jean Louis Desarzant [Jean David Laizer] and Françoise Martin, both free white persons from Switzerland.” She avowed emphatically that she was not the child’s birth mother. Surely Françoise/Justine knew that it would be difficult to convince the court that she

⁷⁴ *Anastasie Desarzant vs. Pierre Leblanc and Wife* (Louisiana Supreme Court 1858); Edward Laroque Tinker, *Toucouitou* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1928). Anastasie frequently traveled in public with a slave woman whose name is unknown but whom Edward Laroque Tinker refers to as Zaire.

⁷⁵ According to the testimonies of Marguerite Menard and Madame Jules Julien, 68-82.

was Anastasie's colored foster mother, but she also knew that to most people it was practically unthinkable for a mother to deny her own child. Ironically, Françoise Martin/Justine Bacquié maintained the authenticity of her claims, in part, by questioning the plausibility of her own story: "do you believe that a child, the issue of my womb (meaning plaintiff) took me before the judge to take a false oath and I declare that she was not my daughter?" That is exactly what Françoise Martin/Justine Bacquié did—she went before the court and denied all familial ties with Anastasie so that her daughter might be legally declared white. Despite the dramatic testimony, the preponderance of evidence challenged Anastasie and Françoise/Justine's story, ultimately showing that the Swiss immigrant named Françoise Martin and the colored woman named Justine Bacquié were one and the same.⁷⁶

Extensive witness testimony confirmed the maternal relationship between Anastasie and the colored woman.⁷⁷ In cases of racial determination where written records proved to be insufficient or unreliable, witness testimony provided evidence of whether a person lived with the reputation of whiteness. Anastasie Desarzant's attorney Christian Roselius argued that despite evidence suggesting that her mother was a colored woman, Anastasie had been "in the possession of her *status* as a white person ever since her birth," and he subsequently called witnesses to testify that Anastasie had a reputation as a white

⁷⁶ *Anastasie Desarzant vs. Pierre Leblanc and Wife* (Louisiana Supreme Court 1858).

⁷⁷ Despite the inconsistencies of record keeping, Louisiana Civil Code regarded acts of baptism to be of "high and valuable importance" and were considered legal evidence of legitimacy and filiation. Louisiana Civil Code Ann. Art. 193 (212); Louisiana Civil Code Ann. Art. 958 (952); Testimony of Aimé Willoz.

woman.⁷⁸ A friend of Françoise Martin/Justine Bacquié, a free woman of color named Marguerite Menard, testified that although she knew Toucoutou [Anastasie] she had never been to her house because she did not frequent the homes of white people and Anastasie lived as white woman. Christian Roselius made a compelling case in favor of Anastasie Desarzant. He argued that whiteness was property and Anastasie, being a free woman in possession of her white status, should not be deprived of her property.⁷⁹ Because Anastasie lived with the reputation of whiteness, enjoying the same rights and privileges as other white people, Christian Roselius asserted that “even in case of doubt,” she should retain her status as a white woman.

But just as Anastasie’s attorney presented extensive witness testimony, Eglantine Desmaziliere’s attorney also used witnesses to prove Françoise Martin/Justine Bacquié was a colored woman and to subsequently confirm the blood relationship between Anastasie and her colored mother Françoise Martin/Justine Bacquié. Madame Marguerite Guerin testified that she had known the colored woman named Justine Bacquié since 1812 and that Justine also went by the name Françoise Martin. Witness Theodore Drouet, a former tenant of Françoise Martin, claimed to have known Anastasie since she was six or seven years old. Drouet asserted that Françoise Martin also went by the name Justine Bacquié, a surname he alleged came from her former husband. Several witnesses for Eglantine testified to the maternal relationship between

⁷⁸ See Christian Roselius’s opening statement in *Anastasie Desarzant vs. Pierre Leblanc and Wife* (Louisiana Supreme Court 1858). Testimonies of Diego Morphy (23); Madame Cooper (25); Justine Bourquin (30-31); Emelie Moreau (39); and Marguerite Menard (68).

⁷⁹ Albion Tourgée, the attorney for Homer Plessy, would invoke a similar argument about whiteness as property during the U.S. Supreme Court trial of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896).

Francoise/Justine and Anastasie. Marguerite Menard stated that she saw Justine when she was pregnant “and two or three months after met her in the streets with Toucoutou (the plaintiff) in her arms,” while Delphine Dupré testified that years prior she saw Justine Bacquie suckling her infant daughter, Anastasie.⁸⁰

In her own testimony, Eglantine Desmaziliere also called attention to the relationship between the alleged colored mother and her daughter. Eglantine admitted that she had always treated Anastasie as a colored woman because, “her mother was an acknowledged woman of color [and because] her habits of life and social position are those of a woman of color.”⁸¹ Although Anastasie lived like a white woman in her adult years, witness testimony revealed that in her youth, she lived like other colored girls, being raised solely by her mother and attending quadroom balls in hopes of securing a wealthy white protector. Friends and neighbors who testified that Anastasie Desarzent was the daughter of a known colored woman ultimately challenged Christian Roselius’ claims that Anastasie was ever in possession of white status. As long as people in her community openly recognized her as the daughter of a colored woman, Anastasie could never truly be considered white. Witness testimony helped convince the court of a maternal relationship between the two women, and Anastasie was legally and

⁸⁰ Marguerite Guerin (75); Theodule Drouet (68-79); Marguerite Menard (68); Delphine Dupré (77, 78). For more on witnesses who claimed to know Anastasie as the baby of Françoise Martin/Justine Bacquié, see testimony of Mrs. Carmelite Ottman, (26, 27), Domingon (64, 65, 66), and Celeste Auber (82, 83).

⁸¹ Testimony of Eglantine Desmaziliere in *Anastasie Desarzent vs. Pierre Leblanc and Wife* (Louisiana Supreme Court, 1858).

customarily bound to colored status by her association with Françoise Martin/Justine Bacquié.⁸²

Years before the Toucoutou Affair, in another trial of racial determination, Anastasie's attorney had argued that the relationship between mother and daughter was a legitimate marker of social condition. In the 1840s, Christian Roselius litigated on behalf of a slave woman named Salomé Müller (also Sally Miller), known as "The White Slave," who sued for her freedom in the Louisiana Supreme Court alleging that she was actually a white woman who was kidnapped and sold into slavery as a colored woman. Although it seems likely that the woman claiming to be Salomé Müller was really a nearly white slave woman, Roselius was able to convince the court that she was white, in part, because no evidence existed that Salomé's mother was colored or enslaved.⁸³ The law of *partus sequitur ventrum* ("progeny follows the womb") bound children to their mothers through shared status and condition of servitude making the maternal bond more than an issue of mutual love and affection but also a legal union committing both mother and child to either free or slave status.⁸⁴

In his argument, Roselius invoked the case of *Adele v. Beauregard* (1810) which determined that colored persons of mixed blood were presumed free

⁸² Louisiana civil law of 1825 (art. 183) stated, "Children born of a mother then in a state of slavery, whether married or not, follow the condition of their mother." Thomas D. Morris, *Southern Slavery and the Law, 1619-1860* (The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 47-50; John C Hurd and John Hurd, *Law of Freedom and Bondage in the United States* (Appletwood Books, 2009), 4, 14, 146, 160-1, 192.

⁸³ *Miller v. Belmonti* (1849); John Bailey, *The Lost German Slave Girl: The Extraordinary True Story of Sally Miller and Her Fight for Freedom in Old New Orleans* (Grove Press, 2005); Carol Wilson, *The Two Lives of Sally Miller: A Case of Mistaken Racial Identity in Antebellum New Orleans* (Rutgers University Press, 2007).

⁸⁴ Anthony E. Kaye, *Joining Places: Slave Neighborhoods in the Old South* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 52-4; Sally L. Kitch, *The Specter of Sex: Gendered Foundations of Racial Formation in the United States*, 80-1; Thomas D. Morris, *Southern Slavery and the Law, 1619-1860* (The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 48.

unless proven otherwise and then extended the presumption of freedom to include all colored persons without evidence of a slave mother: “in the highest courts of the State of Virginia ... a person of the complexion of the plaintiff [Salomé Müller], without evidence of descent from a slave mother, would be released even on habeas corpus Not only is there no evidence of her being descended from a slave mother, or even a mother of the African race, but no witness has ventured a positive opinion that she is of that race." Witness testimony supported Salomé’s claims to whiteness and she was subsequently granted status as a free white woman. Anastasie Desarzant surely knew of Roselius’ prior victory in court and had hoped for a similar verdict; however, unlike Salomé Müller who had no witnesses to testify to her possession of black blood, Anastasie went to trial only blocks away from her childhood home and had a number of witnesses testify to the familial ties between Anastasie and her colored mother, which ultimately destroyed her case.⁸⁵

While the law of *partus sequitur ventrem* predominantly affected slave women and their children, its informal application to free persons of color may have compelled some colored Creole mothers to pass for white. A colored mother who successfully became *passablanc* could potentially ensure greater freedom and opportunity for her children. As the privileges of the free colored class continued to diminish, more Creole mothers saw passing for white as a way of

⁸⁵ According to Ariela Gross, in almost all cases, women who sought to prove their whiteness in order to gain their freedom were successful. Ariela J. Gross, *What Blood Won't Tell: A History of Race on Trial in America*, First Edition. (Harvard University Press, 2008), 58-60; George Washington Cable, “Salomé Müller: The White Slave, 1818-1845,” *Strange True Stories of Louisiana* (BiblioLife, 2009), 145-191; Thomas D. Morris, *Southern Slavery and the Law, 1619-1860*, 47-50; John C Hurd and John Hurd, *Law of Freedom and Bondage in the United States*, 2-4, 14, 146, 160-1, 192.

maintaining their freedom. Just a few years after the trial of Anastasie Desarzent, the outbreak of Civil War disrupted the legal and social boundaries that had previously distinguished the free colored Creole community from the enslaved masses. The Emancipation Proclamation of 1865, which effectively abolished chattel slavery in the United States, simultaneously condemned free colored Creoles to share legal status with the newly freed black slaves. As the colored Creoles lost their privileged legal status, some sought to retain their social freedoms and advantages by becoming white. Although it is impossible to know how many colored Creoles became *passablanc*, it is likely that as more Creoles came to terms with their loss of status, the frequency of passing increased, therefore making the social phenomenon of racial passing largely a byproduct of emancipation and Reconstruction.

Emancipation and the dissolution of the intermediate free colored class drove some Creoles to openly challenge the new social order. A handful of radical Creole leaders enlisted the help of non-Creole blacks in fighting for racial and social equality. In 1864, colored Creole physician Charles Roudanez established his colored newspaper, the *New Orleans Tribune*, which became a mouthpiece for the radical faction of the colored Creole community. Roudanez and the other writers for the paper advocated freedom and equality for all and promoted brotherhood between Creole and non-Creole blacks. An 1867 article in the *New Orleans Tribune* proclaimed racial solidarity between colored Creole and non-Creole black Republicans, noting, "They are one by blood as they are by political principle. . . our neighbor will find the freedman and the old free man in exactly

the same boat, each fully the equal of the other.”⁸⁶ But outside of the ideological and rhetorical “brotherhood,” most Creoles did not identify as, or socialize with, African Americans. In a practical sense, the two groups had relatively little in common: Creoles continued to speak French while African Americans spoke English; Creoles worshipped at Catholic churches while non-Creole blacks flocked to a growing number of downtown Protestant churches; and colored Creoles celebrated their legacy of freedom while African Americans were adjusting to life outside of slavery. During Reconstruction, some Creole leaders openly called for equality “without regard for complexion,”⁸⁷ but privately Creoles remained largely interested in preserving the rights and privileges they enjoyed as free colored persons.⁸⁸

Compared to the vocal Creole elite male leadership, colored Creole women’s efforts to preserve antebellum status were rather inconspicuous. Some black women in New Orleans joined the fight for freedom and equality, yet colored Creole women were remarkably silent on the issue. With emancipation imminent in the summer of 1864, a free black woman named Mrs. Anderson along with several other free black residents openly resisted white citizens’ efforts to segregate public transportation by refusing to ride in the train car designated for blacks. According to an article in the *New Orleans Tribune*, when Mrs.

⁸⁶ *New Orleans Tribune*, May 21, 1867.

⁸⁷As quoted in, “The Spirit of Progress,” *The New Orleans Tribune* (New Orleans, LA, January 7, 1869).

⁸⁸ David Rankin, “The Impact of the Civil War on the Free Colored Community of New Orleans,” in *Perspectives in American History*, ed. Donald Fleming (Charles Warren Center for Studies in American History, Harvard University, 1977), 379-416; Loren Schweningen, “Antebellum Free Persons of Color in Postbellum Louisiana,” *Louisiana History* 30, no. 4 (Fall 1989): 345-364. For a different perspective on the alliance between Creole and non-Creole blacks in the struggle for political equality during Reconstruction, see Caryn Cossé Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana, 1718-1868*.

Anderson boarded the white train car, police officers arrived to remove her from the train. The author of the article highlighted the efforts of Mrs. Anderson and the other demonstrators as evidence that blacks need not be afraid to exercise their civil rights and he encouraged his readers to similarly resist “negro-hate.”⁸⁹ While colored Creole women wholly opposed the racial segregation and discrimination that kept them from enjoying the same freedoms as whites, they did not see themselves as negroes nor did they desire to call attention to the color issue. The fairest Creoles usually preferred to grumble privately about social inequality while continuing to ride in white cars publicly.⁹⁰

For many Creoles, the best defense against racial discrimination was to avoid the color issue altogether. For darker-skinned Creoles who could not pass for white in public, they often avoided public spaces where they were subjected to segregation and clung to those social markers that distinguished Creoles from non-Creole blacks—the Catholic Church, the French language, Creole schools and social organizations, and downtown neighborhoods. But even for nearly white Creoles, the tension and anxiety over matters of color compelled them to retreat from public view to the privacy of their own Creole enclaves. Colored Creoles frequently avoided public demonstrations or public performances, which Creoles

⁸⁹ “Riding in City Cars,” *The New Orleans Tribune* (New Orleans, LA, July 21, 1864). For more on The New Orleans Tribune, see William P. Connor, “Reconstruction Rebels: The New Orleans Tribune in Post-War Louisiana,” *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 21, no. 2 (Spring 1980): 159-181; David C. Rankin, “The Origins of Black Leadership in New Orleans During Reconstruction,” *The Journal of Southern History* 40, no. 3 (August 1974): 417-440; Jean-Charles Houzeau, *My Passage at the New Orleans Tribune: A Memoir of the Civil War Era* (1872; reprint, Louisiana State University Press, 2001).

⁹⁰ *Right to Ride: Streetcar Boycotts and African American Citizenship in the Era of Plessy v. Ferguson*, 1st ed. (The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 56-62.

who were upwardly mobile or seeking social respectability viewed as “common.”⁹¹ They also minimized their appearance in public records. Relatively few colored Creole women appeared in court records or arrest records in the late-nineteenth century. Women could not easily avoid appearing in some public records—namely vital records and census records—yet the documents reflect that some women attempted to evade identification by recording duplicitous names, usually diminutive names, nicknames, middle names, or the surnames of friends or relatives.

Many colored Creole women involved in intimate relationships with white men avoided the color issue by bypassing or postponing legal marriage even during the period when interracial marriage was legal. In 1870, the Louisiana legislature lifted the ban on interracial marriage, granting an ideological victory to colored Creole women who maintained intimate and familial relationships across the color line.⁹² By permitting colored Creole concubines to legally contract marriage with their white lovers, lawmakers upheld—at least in theory—the promises of the Fourteenth Amendment, which granted persons of color the rights of citizenship and equal protection under the law. Colored concubines who legally married also qualified their mixed-race children for legitimate status and access to inheritances. Perhaps some Creoles believed the law might allow the colored Creole community to successfully preserve their antebellum social customs in a postwar era. Given the potential power and influence of the 1870 law regarding interracial marriage, it is surprising that while some interracial

⁹¹ Alan Lomax, *Mister Jelly Roll: The Fortunes of Jelly Roll Morton, New Orleans Creole and 'Inventor of Jazz'* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973), 37.

⁹² Joseph Dainow, ed., *Civil Code of Louisiana: Revisions of 1870 with Amendments to 1960*, second edition. (St. Paul, MN: West Publishing Co., 1961).

couples took advantage of the new freedom to marry, most did not. The mere legalization of interracial marriage did not make marriage across the color line an easy or popular option; many couples faced condemnation or even retribution from disapproving family members and friends. Increasing racial tension during Reconstruction likely caused some couples to fear inviting the law into their personal lives, instead choosing to quietly maintain their relationships without the benefit of marriage.⁹³

Interracial couples also discovered that they could benefit from the legalization of interracial marriage without actually participating in it. Louisiana law allowed common-law couples to bestow full inheritance rights on their natural children. As long as the parents were not incapable of legally contracting marriage, common-law couples could legitimate their natural children through a notarial act made in the presence of two witnesses. The law only applied in cases where neither party was legally married to someone else. Creole women engaged in adulterous relationships with white men could not take advantage of the law; however, for interracial couples who were legally able to marry, they could still gain the benefits of legitimation without obtaining a marriage contract. It is unclear how aggressively the courts upheld inheritance rights and legitimation for children of unmarried parents. Some common-law couples married later in

⁹³ For a different perspective, see Alecia Long, *The Great Southern Babylon*, 20; Blassingame, *Black New Orleans*, 206-207. Both Long and Blassingame argue that there was a significant increase in interracial marriages after 1870; however, both scholars base their findings on census records and city directories. Blassingame located 205 marriages between whites and persons of color in the 1880 census. It is my contention that the number of actual marriages between whites and persons of color may have increased somewhat after 1870, but the increase was not as significant as Long and Blassingame contend. More than a few couples who claimed legal marriage in the 1880 census were not legally married but were common law partners. An examination of the marriage records from the Archdiocese of New Orleans indicates that while the number of interracial marriages did not greatly increase, a notable number of natural and illegitimate children were baptized in the Church.

life in order to legally secure their children's futures, but for most, marriage was an expensive public ritual that drew unwanted attention to their relationships.⁹⁴

Colored Creole women's resistance or inability to exercise their rights to marry across the color line suggests something further about the changing racial and social climate. Emancipation and the dissolution of the tripartite racial system brought Louisiana in line with the rest of the American South; by the 1870s, Louisiana had more fully embraced American attitudes about race and residents were becoming less tolerant of interracial unions. The declining public tolerance of interracial intimacy likely persuaded some women to pass for white in order to be with their white lovers. Less than a decade after the Toucoucou Affair, Anastasie Desarant renewed her efforts to pass as a white woman by leaving her lover Maurice Abat and the couple's children in New Orleans while she relocated to Texas.⁹⁵ Anastasie subsequently formed a brief relationship with a German immigrant which resulted in a child, Josephine Bauer. Interestingly, by 1880, Anastasie had returned to New Orleans with her daughter and was once again living with Maurice Antoine Abat as his white wife in the couple's home on Elysian Fields Avenue.⁹⁶ Rather than exercise their right to marry, Anastasie

⁹⁴ Joseph Dainow, ed., *Civil Code of Louisiana: Revisions of 1870 with Amendments to 1960*.

⁹⁵ According to the 1860 census, the couple had two white sons, Maurice and Antoine Abat. Anastasie's daughter Josephine Bauer was born in Texas in 1867. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880*.

⁹⁶ Josephine Bauer appears in the 1880 census record as the stepdaughter of Maurice Antoine Abat. Anastasie appears as, "Anesta Abatt," and she reported her age as 31—approximately twenty years younger than her actual age. By 1900, Anastasie moved to St. Bernard parish to live with her daughter and son-in-law, Josephine and Pedro Villanueva—all of whom were listed as white; she remained with them until she died in the 1930s. It is still unclear what happened to Maurice and Antoine but in 1930, a Maurice Abat (who was born in Louisiana the same year as Maurice Antoine and Anastasie's son) was living as a white boarder in Fairfield, Connecticut. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930*; www.ancestry.com.

Desarzant and Maurice Antoine Abat concealed Anatasie's colored ancestry and lived together in concubinage for a second time.⁹⁷

Even for Creoles who lived openly as colored persons, passing for white either temporarily or inadvertently had its advantages. Southern gentlemen occasionally opened doors and tipped their hats to nearly white Creole women, mistaking them for white ladies. In a more tactical move, some Creole parents deliberately sought to register their children as white on official documents. Baptismal records from St. Augustine Catholic Church in the Tremé reveal that some colored Creoles successfully baptized their lightest children as white while their darker children, who were unable to pass, were baptized as colored.⁹⁸ In 1873, Creole homemaker Henrietta Roux (née Cavalier) and her husband Vincent baptized their son Charles Edouard Roux as white. Baby Charles's *parrain* (godfather) was a white man named Edouard DeBlois who was likely Vincent's business associate. Vincent Roux worked as a clerk and Edouard DeBlois was a bookkeeper and it is likely that the two men worked for the same employer. Although it is unclear how close Vincent and Edouard were as friends, Edouard agreed to be the *parrain* of Vincent's colored son and he knowingly assisted Vincent and Henrietta in registering the child as white.⁹⁹

In 1877, Stella Demazillieres (née Alliod) and her husband Eugene, both colored Creoles, baptized their son Joseph Victor Rene Demazillieres as white in

⁹⁷ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900*.

⁹⁸ Acts of baptism were considered evidence in matters of racial designation and paternity.

⁹⁹ *Registers of Baptism, St. Augustine Church, 1873*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Ninth Census of the United States, 1870*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880*.

St. Augustine Church.¹⁰⁰ The child's godparents, Victor Belot and Virginie Arnous, were white (or nearly white) which may have persuaded the priest to record the child in the white baptismal register. It is likely that Victor Belot was actually a colored man, but by all indications, Virginie Arnous was a white woman.¹⁰¹ In 1860, before the Civil War, Stella Alliod's father, a widowed Frenchman, worked as an overseer for Virginie Arnous's French-born father on his plantation in rural Iberville, Louisiana. Eighteen-year-old Stella and her two teenage sisters lived in the Arnous household with Virginie and her father. Living together in the same household, the two women formed a bond that lasted for many years after the Civil War. It appears that Virginie's father lost his plantation during the war which also left Stella's father without a job. By 1870, Stella had moved to New Orleans and married Eugene Demaziliere but she did not leave her family behind. Stella and Eugene lived with their young son as well as her two sisters and Virginie Arnous.¹⁰² By making Virginie her child's godmother, Stella cemented the relationship between her white companion and her colored family. Baptismal records expose colored Creoles' attempts to register their children as white but perhaps more importantly, they reveal the complex and enduring relationships between white and colored Creoles through the Civil War and Reconstruction.

¹⁰⁰ *Registers of Baptism, St. Augustine Church, 1877.*

¹⁰¹ Victor Belot appeared as a white man in the 1870 census but in 1880 he was listed as colored. Virginie Eulalie Arnous appeared as white in the 1860 and 1900 censuses as well as on her death certificate. In 1860, Stella Alliod's family lived with Virginie, which raises questions about her whiteness. Stella's colored family may have simply boarded in Virginie Arnous's home or perhaps they were extended relatives.

¹⁰² It is unclear whether Stella and Eugene were ever legally married but the couple lived as husband and wife until Eugene's death in 1899. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Ninth Census of the United States, 1870; Orleans Parish Death Index, 1896-1907.*

Despite the public's shifting attitude regarding relationships across the color line, old Creole social customs were slow to change. By the end of Reconstruction, a small but significant number of Creole women and their children continued to maintain intimate and familial relationships across the color line. Bound by blood and personal affinity, colored Creoles upheld their relationships with whites not so much for political reasons but rather for personal ones. Certainly some felt genuine love and affection for white husbands, fathers, and lovers, but even in the absence of love, women and their children often gained practical benefits. Some white fathers continued to openly care for their colored wives (legal and common-law) and children despite increasing racial segregation. Pierre Leblanc, the husband of Anastasie Desarzant's social rival, Eglantine Desmazillieres,¹⁰³ not only cared for Eglantine and the couple's six children but he also provided for his children's spouses and his grandchildren. When Pierre died in the spring of 1882, he left an estate inventoried at \$70,855.49,¹⁰⁴ which included real estate and undeveloped land in the Tremé and Seventh Ward, furniture, stocks, bonds, promissory notes, coins, gold pieces, and cash. Pierre's list of beneficiaries included the following: his wife Eglantine; his daughter Mayolla Rose Leblanc, "wife of Pierre Chevalier;" Marie Debergue, the widow of Pierre and Eglantine's son Montpouvier and the mother of his young children; Adolphe Tervalon and Pierre Chevalier, both of whom were Pierre Leblanc's colored sons-in-law; and Louise Beattie, the widow of another son,

¹⁰³ Eglantine lived for more than thirty five years as Pierre's concubine and the couple married on January 19, 1882 less than three weeks before Pierre's death on February 6.

¹⁰⁴ After deductions for liabilities, Pierre's estate was valued at \$67,409.83. Succession of Pierre Leblanc, Amedee Ducatel, notary, vol. 116 (1882), New Orleans Notarial Archives (NONA), New Orleans, Louisiana.

Edgar Leblanc, and mother of his children. Through Eglantine's singular union with Pierre Leblanc, her children, sons and daughters-in-law, and grandchildren reaped the benefits. It is unclear exactly how much money and property each beneficiary received but Louise Beattie and her children stood to receive approximately \$13,000, an amount that Eglantine apparently deemed excessive because several years later she sued Louise for custody of the Leblanc grandchildren, thereby cutting Louise out of the family inheritance.¹⁰⁵

Pierre's daughter Mayolla Rose inherited a substantial amount of her father's money and property. By the 1870s, Mayolla was one of Pierre and Eglantine's only surviving children. In 1876, Mayolla married Pierre Chevalier, the son of a successful colored Creole merchant, Joseph Chevalier, who was likely an associate of Pierre Leblanc.¹⁰⁶ As part of her inheritance, Mayolla received a plot of land on St. Ann Street valued at \$590.00. Less than two months after her deceased father's estate had been inventoried, Mayolla appeared again before a notary, this time to sell another property on St. Ann Street (valued at \$500), which she had owned since 1876, to a dark-skinned Creole woman named Elizabeth Silvestre, the wife of a black mattress maker named Francois George. Mayolla originally purchased the property from Alphonsine Angelain, a young colored Creole woman from the Tremé. Alphonsine probably inherited the

¹⁰⁵ Succession of Edgar Leblanc, No. 9315, 37 La. Ann. 546 (1885), Louisiana Supreme Court. For more on the outcome of the case, see Chapter Two.

¹⁰⁶ Pierre Leblanc owned a dry goods business and Joseph Chevalier was a merchant. Both men owned homes near each other in the Seventh Ward and they likely conducted business together. In 1870, Joseph Chevalier had \$1,700 in real estate and \$300 in personal estate. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Ninth Census of the United States, 1870*.

property from her mother Adele, who was likely a concubine.¹⁰⁷ At the time Mayolla sold the land to Elizabeth Silvestre, the notary stated clearly that Mayolla had acquired the property before her marriage therefore it was hers alone to sell.¹⁰⁸ Through donations by her father and her own shrewd business practices, Mayolla owned at least five properties in the Seventh Ward by 1880 while her mother Eglantine owned six or more.¹⁰⁹

The efforts of Mayolla Leblanc, Eglantine Desmazillieres, Anastasie Desarzant and countless other colored Creole women who challenged the color line in order to maintain their families and social customs may have improved their ability to retain their wealth at rates higher than colored Creole men. In his study of the economic impact of the Civil War on the free colored population, historian David Rankin found that between 1860 and 1870, women were more inclined to maintain their wealth than men and significantly fewer women reported a loss of wealth during that period. Rankin found that while roughly the same number of colored men and women increased their wealth during the decade, twelve and eleven respectively, thirty five men reportedly saw their wealth decrease in comparison with just eleven women. Among those persons whose wealth remained unchanged, seventeen were women and twelve were men. Although more research is needed to fully understand the reasons why women retained their wealth, Rankin's findings suggest that colored Creole

¹⁰⁷ In 1870, Adele was unmarried and unemployed but had \$2,000 in real estate and \$200 in personal estate, which suggests that she may have received the property from a lover. Adele and Alphonsine lived in the Fifth Ward and although street names are not noted in the 1870 census, it is likely that the women lived on the property on St. Ann Street, which is located in the Fifth Ward. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Ninth Census of the United States, 1870*.

¹⁰⁸ Sale of property, Mayolla Rose Leblanc, wife of Pierre Chevalier to Elizabeth Silvestre, wife of Francois George, Octave de Armas, vol. 103, Act. No. 32, New Orleans, May 8, 1882.

¹⁰⁹ This does not include the family property in the Tremé.

women found ways to effectively preserve their antebellum status in postwar society.¹¹⁰

Only a small handful of women ever received substantial inheritances like Mayolla Leblanc and Eglantine Desmazillieres, but the residual benefits of white fathers, grandfathers, and fathers-in-law continued to trickle down in colored Creole families. Through intimate unions, familial relationships, children's baptism, naming of godparents, and various methods of passing for white, colored Creole women contested the hardening of the color line during Reconstruction. Although some women's resistance arose in response to colored Creole leaders' calls for equality and citizenship regardless of color, the vast majority of women were simply trying to maintain their lives the way they always had. By resisting change and preserving old social customs, colored Creole women helped to extend the benefits and privileges of the formerly free colored class for several generations after the fall of slavery.

¹¹⁰ Rankin surveyed 880 free colored heads of household living downtown in the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Wards in 1860 and then located the same heads of household in 1870. David Rankin, "The Impact of the Civil War on the Free Colored Community of New Orleans," in *Perspectives in American History*, ed. Donald Fleming (Charles Warren Center for Studies in American History, Harvard University, 1977), 396-399.

**Chapter Two:
Holding on to the Past: Colored Creole Women in a Post-
Reconstruction Society**

For a full generation after Reconstruction, the lives of colored Creole women more closely resembled the antebellum *femmes de couleur* than black middle-class urban women of the Progressive Era. Amidst the ongoing social and political changes in the late-nineteenth century, the colored Creoles clung fiercely to their past while many African Americans looked hopefully to their future. In the late-nineteenth century, colored Creoles continued to negotiate their position in society despite being forced to share inferior legal status with non-Creole blacks. As whites became increasingly concerned that emancipation and Reconstruction conferred too many rights and privileges on black Americans, they reaffirmed their power and supremacy over nonwhites by placing greater emphasis on racial taxonomy and by implementing rigid policies of racial segregation and exclusion in public spaces including public transportation, parks, restaurants, and commercial establishments. Yet in privacy of the colored Creole family, Jim Crow took hold slowly and unevenly as Creole women continued to maintain intimate and familial relationships across boundaries of color despite increasing restrictions against it. The ban on interracial marriage in 1894 and the codification of “separate but equal” policies in the wake of the 1896 Supreme Court case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* discouraged many nonwhite women from crossing the color line but some colored Creoles continued to preserve social and economic privilege with moderate success through their enduring relationships

with whites. The white men who continued to participate in these relationships, however, revealed the fragility of the tradition: by the turn of the twentieth century, young white Creole bachelors had largely abandoned the practice and most suitors of colored women were either older men or recent immigrants. Although interracial concubinage was losing favor with both white and colored people, it was not until 1908, with the establishment of the Concubinage Act that made interracial concubinage a felony crime, that colored Creole women finally abandoned intimate relationships with white men as a means of social preservation and economic support and instead began nurturing long-term unions with colored men as the primary means of preserving the colored Creole family.

Throughout the nineteenth century, the endurance and stability of the colored Creole family depended heavily on women's capacity to care for and support their children. The correlation between motherhood and family stability was not exclusive to colored Creoles; however, the severely imbalanced sex ratios among Creoles in New Orleans placed an even greater responsibility on women. In 1880, there were 70 Creole men for every 100 women. Creole women and their children comprised three-quarters of the colored Creole population (74.5 percent). Thus, women were central to family structure and development. Creole families did not operate under a ruling matriarchate but rather a female-centered, or matrifocal, family structure where Creole men held positions of power and Creole women acted as central axis figures within the family.¹

¹John Blassingame argues that the black family in New Orleans between 1860 and 1880 was patriarchal, but Blassingame does not differentiate between Creole and non-Creole blacks. Marriage rates among Creoles were significantly lower than for black families, which complicates

Persistent demographic trends among Creoles, including imbalanced sex ratios, low marriage rates within the Creole community, and high male mortality rates, ensured that families could not depend exclusively on marital bonds or long-term intimate unions between Creole men and women for strength and stability; rather, they often relied on complex webs of filiation through which well-established families cared for their most vulnerable members, many of whom were women and children.²

The colored Creole family remained remarkably adaptable in both form and function. Creole women and men moved in and out of the family home as necessary in response to life changes, and the family expanded or contracted accordingly. By 1880, while the majority of both white and non-Creole black families lived in male-headed, nuclear households, colored Creole family organization remained comparatively more diverse, with complex arrangements of parents, children, spouses, extended relatives, boarders, and servants. Augmented-family households—nuclear families living with nonrelatives, boarders, or a combination of both— comprised a significant minority among Creoles while extended-family households—nuclear families living with extended relatives— were about as common as male-headed, nuclear families. Families typically changed residences several times over the years, often in response to

the notion that all families of color in New Orleans were patriarchal in structure. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880, Orleans Parish*; John W Blassingame, *Black New Orleans, 1860-1880* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 91-95.

²Raymond T. Smith, *The Matrifocal Family: Power, Pluralism and Politics*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 1995) 38-58. For other scholarship on the complex webs of filiation among persons of color, see Tera Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 37-43; Anthony E. Kaye, *Joining Places: Slave Neighborhoods in the Old South* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 51-82; Tiya Miles, *Ties That Bind: The Story of an Afro-Cherokee Family in Slavery and Freedom*, 1st ed. (University of California Press, 2006), 50-63; Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 84-89.

their shifting economic condition. High mortality rates caused frequent and often immediate changes in family leadership and produced blended families as widowed men and women married and remarried over a lifetime. Social and economic developments certainly placed extra demands and undue stress on the Creole family, causing the kinship structure to flex and bend but not break.³ Although male-headed nuclear-family households did not comprise the majority of Creole households, they remained the most common household type among Creole families. In 1880, thirty-two percent of Seventh Ward Creole families lived in male-headed, two-parent nuclear households. In comparison, over sixty percent of white and non-Creole black families in the Seventh Ward lived in male-headed, two-parent nuclear households.⁴ Among Creoles, male-headed nuclear households comprised a significant minority rather than the majority. Creole men certainly desired to follow the tradition of their French and Spanish forefathers, who fiercely guarded their position within the southern patriarchal order as head of the family, yet the realities of Creole family life did not always permit supreme patriarchal authority. Men ideally commanded control over the family but with just 70 colored Creole men for every 100 women, it was not always possible for Creole men to assert their authority as head of the family. Two-parent Creole families organized loosely around a patriarchal model, with the husband as the leader and protector of his family; however, colored Creole

³ Arthé Anthony, "The Negro Creole Community, 1880-1920: An Oral History" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Irvine, 1978). For more on the adaptability of the African-American family after Reconstruction, see Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 110-143; W. E.B DuBois, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 192-196; Andrew Billingsley, Amy Tate Billingsley, and Andrew Billingsley, *Black Families in White America* (Prentice-Hall, 1968), 3-10.

⁴It is difficult to determine the changes in family structure between 1860 and 1880 because the 1860 census did not note relationships among household members.

families organized pragmatically first and foremost and aspired to prescriptive ideals whenever possible.⁵

Even when marriage was a possibility, some Creole women still chose practicality over prescription. In 1880 marriage ratios for Creole women remained low with forty-two percent of Creole women claiming married status compared to approximately 54 percent of black and white women. Persistently imbalanced sex ratios undoubtedly impacted Creole marriage patterns. But imbalanced sex ratios were hardly a new social trend among colored Creoles and they alone cannot explain the infrequency of marriage among Creoles in the late nineteenth century. As early as 1805, the sex ratio among New Orleans's adult free colored population was 36 men for every 100 women. By 1820, the ratio was 42.6. Over the next several decades, sex ratios continued to improve and just before the Civil War, there were 82.1 free colored men for every 100 women. But by 1880, the sex ratio among colored Creoles had declined to 74.⁶ The exact reasons for the decline are still unknown. In the early Reconstruction period women of color from the rural areas began relocating to the cities in search of domestic work, which caused the already sizeable population of colored women in New Orleans to swell. It is also possible that as fewer skilled urban jobs

⁵ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880, Orleans Parish, Louisiana* (Washington D.C.), NARA. Raymond T. Smith, *The Matrifocal Family: Power, Pluralism and Politics*, 38-58; Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (Vintage, 1977), 442-50; John W Blassingame, *Black New Orleans, 1860-1880*, 236-8; Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 58-68, 112-114. For more on colored Creole men fighting to command honor and respect see Rodolphe Lucien Desdunes, *Our People and Our History: Fifty Creole Portraits*, xxvii, 3, 14-16..

⁶ The sex ratio is 74 for all mulatto persons living in households with at least one colored Creole adult. In 1880, the overall sex ratio for persons of all colors living in households with at least one colored Creole adult is 70 men for every 100 women. Matthew Flannery, *New Orleans in 1805: A Directory and a Census*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fourth Census of the United States, 1820, Orleans Parish, Louisiana*; *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860, Orleans Parish, Louisiana*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880, Orleans Parish, Louisiana*.

remained open to men of color, more colored Creole men left the city in search of work, thereby creating a greater disparity between the sexes. More research is needed to fully understand the shifting sex ratios among colored Creoles; however, by the late nineteenth century, imbalanced sex ratios had been a prominent feature of the colored Creole community for over a century and Creoles families adapted techniques for survival even when marriage was not possible. Low marriage ratios that persisted after Reconstruction were not simply a consequence of the disparity between the sexes but they also suggest that over several generations, colored Creole women and their children had effectively learned to carry on without marriage, thereby making matrimony less essential to Creole family organization.

The stability of the female-centered Creole family relied heavily on the relationships between women and it is likely that at least a few women found emotional support, affection and sexual intimacy with other women. Although there has been virtually no research on the history of homosexual relationships in the colored Creole community, there is evidence that homosexual relationships did occur somewhat openly in vice districts near Creole neighborhoods.⁷ Sexual

⁷ In her study on illegal sex in antebellum New Orleans, Judith Schafer found that nobody was ever prosecuted in the First District Court for homosexual activity; she asserts that since the Spanish period, laws have prohibited same-sex relations. This indicates that homosexual behavior was visible enough to compel officials to outlaw it. Judith Kelleher Schafer, *Brothels, Depravity, and Abandoned Women: Illegal Sex in Antebellum New Orleans* (Louisiana State University Press, 2009), 8. New Orleans madam Nell Kimball wrote very candidly in her diary about the prostitutes in her brothel engaging in lesbian relationships with one another when they were not attending to clients. Nell Kimball, *Nell Kimball: Her Life As an American Madam*, State First Edition. (Macmillan Publishing Company, 1970). Guidebooks for New Orleans's red-light district noted several brothels as "French," which sometimes indicated that customers could witness lesbian sexual activity performed for audiences. For more on the guidebooks, see Al Rose, *Storyville, New Orleans: Being an Authentic, Illustrated Account of the Notorious Red Light District*, illustrated edition. (University of Alabama Press, 1978), 77. Pamela D. Arceneaux, "Guidebooks to Sin: The Blue Books of Storyville," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the*

activity in the vice districts did not determine behavior among ordinary residents, but colored Creole women living near the French Quarter or the red-light district were likely exposed to same-sex relationships and at least knew that some neighborhood women preferred the company of other women. More research is needed to understand the role of same-sex relationships in the colored Creole community but the low rates of marriage and high proportions of women combined with Creole women's tendencies to form practical unions, suggest that some women likely found emotional security and sexual intimacy among other women.

Women's ability to survive—and in some cases even prosper—outside of marriage impacted men's roles in Creole family organization. Given the disproportionately large population of colored Creole women, it is understandable that a significant percentage of women remained single, but marriage ratios remained low even among the relatively small population of colored Creole men. One might expect that with relatively few colored Creole men available for marriage, the population of bachelors would remain small as the large population of women scrambled to find husbands; however relatively large numbers of Creole men remained remarkably single. In 1880, more than one-third of colored Creole men reported single status compared to approximately one-quarter of black men. Several factors contributed to the high ratio of bachelors among Creole men. The majority of bachelors between age eighteen and twenty-five lived at home with at least one parent, which suggests that some

Louisiana Historical Association 28, no. 4 (October 1, 1987): 397-405; Stephen Longstreet, *Sportin' House: New Orleans and the Jazz Story* (Sherbourne Press, 1965).

young men could not afford to keep a wife. Only twelve percent of single Creole men headed their own households, which further suggests possible economic challenges for bachelors. Yet unlike non-Creole black men who worked predominantly in unskilled jobs, the majority of Creole bachelors worked as skilled laborers; this suggests that even when men had the financial means to support a wife, some simply chose not to do so. Perhaps some colored Creole men learned from their white fathers and grandfathers that concubinage with colored or black women provided the benefits of a wife but required less personal responsibility than marriage. The absence of marriage did not prevent Creole women and men from forming families but without the social and economic stability that often accompanied marriage, Creole women and their children relied heavily on extended relatives to help sustain the family during hard times, which made extended family bonds that much more vital to Creole family relations.⁸

Collaborative living arrangements allowed widowed and unmarried mothers who might otherwise be destitute to provide for their families.⁹ Most Creole women lived at least some portion of their lives without intimate partnership, and many learned to sustain the family in the absence of a husband—often with the help of female relatives. Only four years after Gabriel Rideau and Clementine Robert got married, Gabriel caught pneumonia and died,

⁸ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880*.

⁹ For additional studies that examine the roles of women in collaborative living arrangements, see Tera W. Hunter, *To "Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Harvard University Press, 1998), 36-39; Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*, 104-146; Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (University of Illinois Press, 1987), 41-62.

leaving twenty-four-year-old Clementine to care for the couple's three children.¹⁰ Clementine's brother and sister, Pierre and Estelle, lived with her and helped support the family after Gabriel's death. By 1900, Pierre had moved out, but Clementine and Estelle still lived together with their young children. In the mid-1880s, Estelle began a relationship with a young man named Clay Anderson with whom she had three children. Although Estelle and Clay never married nor lived together, she reported herself to the census taker as Estelle Anderson: at the same time, Clay Anderson spent at least ten years living near Estelle and the couple's children in the Seventh Ward. Clay may have visited his children or contributed financially to his family, but Estelle relied primarily on her sister for day-to-day support in the household. By 1910, Clementine and Estelle lived in separate residences across the street from one another on North Villere Street. Both women lived with their adult children and remained heads of their respective households, but by living in close proximity, the sisters continued to provide mutual support to one another. Like Clementine and Estelle, most Creole women spent some part of their lives engaged in intimate partnerships with men. But Creole women's relationships with their female kin lasted throughout their lives and were often their most stable relationships.¹¹ The practical organization of Creole families was perhaps most evident in extended and augmented households. In 1880, thirty-one percent of all Seventh-

¹⁰ Gabriel Rideau's cause of death is reported in, *U.S. Federal Mortality Schedules, 1850-1885* (Ancestry.com).

¹¹ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910* Raymond T. Smith, *The Matrifocal Family: Power, Pluralism and Politics*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 1995), 55-56, 89-90; Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*, 125-127.

Ward Creole households contained families living with extended relatives and another fourteen percent contained nuclear and extended families living with non-relatives.¹² Large extended and augmented family households relied on the collective efforts of parents, children, extended kin, boarders, and live-in domestics. Households typically contained a combination of family members who stayed home to care for the household and those who worked outside the home to earn income. In households containing multiple women, the women who stayed home performed the daily household duties and attended to the children, including the children of the wage-earning women who were often gone during the day. In the home of Creole widow Mrs. Charles Petin, Mrs. Petin stayed home while three of her adult daughters earned money as seamstresses. While at home Mrs. Petin's daily responsibilities included looking after her twelve-year old grandson Numa and caring for her oldest daughter who suffered from epilepsy and blindness. The women divided duties and chores to effectively sustain the household while still caring for the most vulnerable and dependent members of the family. Through their collective efforts, the Petin women ensured that Numa, the only male living in the Petin household, could attend school full-time.¹³

Some extended and nuclear families took in boarders or non-relatives in the household. Most augmented Creole families who took in non-relatives did so in order to provide additional economic support for the family. Living under one

¹² See appendix for the breakdown of household types.

¹³U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880, Orleans Parish, Louisiana*, Manuscript Census (Washington D.C.: NARA). Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860*, Illini Books Edition. (University of Illinois Press, 1987), 46-54; Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States*, 20th ed. (Oxford University Press, USA, 2003), 119-122.

roof, augmented families could rely on co-residents to contribute to the wellbeing of the household in some meaningful way. On Dauphine Street, Numa and Alexandria Paunoy lived with their two small children, two young nieces, and five boarders, one of whom was elderly and disabled. Alexandria and two of the female boarders worked as cooks while Numa and the male tenants performed skilled trades. It is likely that the three women either worked together or worked rotating shifts, with at least one woman tending to household duties at any given time. The elderly female tenant likely relied on the help of the co-resident women. Even if the women did not share a close personal relationship, cooking for the household, performing daily chores, and earning wages would have required them to work somewhat cooperatively. A few blocks away from the Paunoy household, James and Alida McKenna lived in a large augmented household, which contained three families living in the same residential space. The McKenna's lived with their six children, James' aunt, and Alida's elderly mother, a boarding couple named William and Cecile Wall, as well as a Spanish laborer and his wife. Although the large augmented household shifted and changed over the years, by 1880, the McKennas and the Walls had lived together for at least ten years. Collaborative living allowed Creoles to create some stability within the household and prevented some poor families from becoming completely destitute.¹⁴

¹⁴ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Ninth Census of the United States, 1870, Orleans Parish*. Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*, 85-91; Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States*, 124-1125; Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860*, Illini Books Edition. (University of Illinois Press, 1987), 13; Susan Strasser, *Never Done: A History of American Housework* (Pantheon Books, 1982), 145-161.

Kinship support networks anchored Creole families in the community. As a result, a definitive line between family and community never fully emerged; rather, each institution adjusted to accommodate the needs of the other. Large extended families lived in cooperative neighborhoods where members of the same family lived near one another in nuclear, extended, and augmented households. Children often remained in their parents' household until adulthood and even when they moved out, many children remained close to home. In 1900, Creole cigar maker Emile Bagneris Jr. married his neighborhood sweetheart, Rita Martinez. He moved out of his family's home on Allen Street where his parents raised eleven children and moved into his mother-in-law's house next door where he lived with his new wife, her mother, and her younger siblings. While living next door, Emile remained close to his family, acting as godfather to his siblings' children and working with his father Emile Sr. in the family trade, cigar-making. By 1910, Emile had purchased the house next to his mother-in-law, only two doors down from his family home. His wife Rita had three young children at home, but with her mother, mother-in-law, and four of Emile's sisters nearby she had access to the help of female relatives. In turn, Emile could provide security and assistance to his aging mother and mother-in-law, both of whom were widowed by 1910.¹⁵

Creole households contained diverse family arrangements that were organized by convenience as well as affinity and kinship. An examination of Creole household organization in 1880 reveals that Creoles continued to cross

¹⁵U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910*; For the death record of Emile Bagneris Sr. see, *Orleans Parish Death Index, 1908-1917*. Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 84-85.

boundaries of race, class, and color in the privacy of their own homes. On Laharpe Street, Françoise Castanidor, an unmarried elderly colored Creole woman lived with non-Creole African American boarders in her home, a widowed mother named Elizabeth Clay and her two young daughters. Bazil Ollivier, a white, Louisiana-born Creole carpenter, lived on Rampart Street with his three colored Creole sons who worked as skilled tradesmen, and four colored Creole daughters, all of whom stayed home. A few blocks away, a colored Creole laborer named Eugene Betancourt lived with his wife and children as well as a white boarder named Louis Laroque. In 1880, nearly twenty-seven percent of all Seventh-Ward households headed by mulattoes contained some combination of mulatto, white, and black relatives, nonrelatives, and boarders. Creoles organized their households practically, occasionally taking in white or non-Creole African-American boarders for economic support when necessary.¹⁶

It is impossible to assess how many men and women actually formed intimate relationships across color lines in the late nineteenth century; however, the small but noteworthy number of white fathers living openly with their colored children indicates that racial boundaries remained negotiable for some—at least in private. Englishman George Arrowsmith's colored wife died sometime before 1880 but his mulatto daughter Berthe and her colored Creole husband, a cooper named Alexander Augustin, lived with him in the family home and contributed to the household economy. Mulatto shoemaker Joseph Vila and his wife Nathalie took in Joseph's elderly father Joseph Vila Sr., a Spanish immigrant, to their home on Laharpe Street. Widowed Frenchman Edmond Meunier worked as an

¹⁶ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880*.

attorney and lived with his mulatto son Edmond Meunier Jr. and a twenty-nine-year-old mulatto servant woman in the family home on Kerlerec Street. Some white fathers passed on their family name to their colored offspring and others trained their sons in their trade or craft, indicating that some degree of affection and personal connection between white fathers and their colored children endured despite legal and social restrictions. but they also desired to preserve interracial familial bonds in the household despite increasing social and legal restrictions against interracial relationships. but they also desired to preserve interracial familial bonds in the household despite increasing social and legal restrictions against interracial relationships ¹⁷

Although interracial relationships persisted in the late-nineteenth century, there were signs that the practice was in decline. One indicator was that by 1880, most white men who lived with their colored children were older –if not elderly—men. The advanced age of the white fathers suggests that by the late-nineteenth century, interracial bonds within the family were largely the result of old relationships, unions formed at a time when interracial relationships were more widely tolerated, rather than evidence of new ones. Among those white men who did form new relationships across the color line, a significant proportion were European immigrants. Upon arrival to New Orleans, white foreigners found colored Creole women open and available for partnership and for many men, their only familial ties in the United States were with their legal and common-law colored wives and children. As fewer Creole and American white men sought relationships across the color line, it is possible that colored Creole women

¹⁷ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880*.

recognized immigrant men as their last, best chance at economic security and social mobility. It is also possible that immigrant men found that taking a colored mistress was an effective means of assimilating to the dominant culture; however, by the turn of the twentieth century, as Anglo-Americans and white Creoles agreed that blacks should remain an inferior and separate class, newly arriving immigrants quickly learned that white supremacy and racial segregation were integral to becoming American.¹⁸

By 1890, the move to categorize and separate the races became quite apparent. For the first time, census enumerators were instructed to carefully distinguish between blacks, mulattoes, quadroons, and octoroons, and were given explicit information on fractions of blackness pertaining to each category. The racial description for the category of octoroon included all persons with less than one-eighth black blood as well as persons showing “any trace” of blackness.¹⁹ Census enumerators not only had the authority to discern fractions of blackness, but they also decided who should be deemed pure white. Any trace of blackness supposedly earned a nonwhite classification, yet a number of colored Creoles

¹⁸Marcus Christian, “Genealogy,” 169, 152, The Marcus B. Christian Collection, The Archives and Manuscripts Department of the Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans, as cited in Violet Harrington Bryan, “Marcus Christian's Treatment of Les Gens de Couleur Libre,” in *Creole: The History and Legacy of Louisiana's Free People of Color*, ed. Sybil Kein (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 52; Joseph G. Tregle Jr., “Creoles and Americans,” 131-135, 164-165, 172-175; Works Progress Administration, *New Orleans City Guide* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1938), 24-27; David R. Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White: The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (Basic Books, 2006), 69-72; Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Harvard University Press, 1999), 91-115.

¹⁹ According to the enumerators' instructions for the 1890 census, enumerators were instructed to classify residents according to specific labels of race, color, and ethnic background: “*white, black, mulatto, quadroon, octoroon, Chinese, Japanese, or Indian*. The word ‘black’ should be used to describe those persons who have three-fourths or more black blood; ‘mulatto,’ those persons who have from three-eighths to five-eighths black blood; ‘quadroon,’ those persons who have one-fourth black blood; and ‘octoroon,’ those persons who have one-eighth or any trace of black blood.” *Twenty Censuses: Population and Housing Questions, 1790-1980* (Bureau of the Census), 29.

continued to be classified in the census as white. The 1890 census codified these practices of racial taxonomy, however, the 1880 census reveals that census officials were already paying attention to these distinctions. The 1890 census of Louisiana was destroyed by fire, but the 1880 census highlights striking racial and color variations in Creole families and illustrates the complex and rather arbitrary nature of racial classification.²⁰ In 1880, Seventh Ward mulatto cooper Gustave Chalaire lived on Annette Street with his mulatto wife Corine, young son Anatole, and his elderly white mother, Aime Dietz. Nearby on Bagatelle Street, a twenty-three-year-old widow named Madame Rideau, who was listed in the census as white, lived in a house with her two young children, who were also white, and her two mulatto siblings. Mulatto laborer Frank Bousquie lived with his black wife Marcellise and their two sons, one noted as black, the other mulatto. Myrthier Cassander, a white woman whose parents had emigrated from France, was widowed by 1880 and living with her two children, a white son and a mulatto daughter. Creole painter Albert Victor and his wife Mary only had one child; although the census taker identified the couple as mulatto, he classified their son Albert Jr. as black. In 1900, Seventh Ward residents Joseph and Georgina Gale were listed as the black parents of three white children. The census not only indicates intimate contact across racial and color boundaries but the census takers' curious racial classifications suggest seemingly impossible family constitutions. When racial ancestry was unclear, data collectors classified residents based on phenotype rather than their actual parentage, listing some

²⁰ I use the 1880 census to highlight racial variations rather than the 1900 census because in 1900, the census takers no longer distinguished mulattoes or other mixed race groups.

colored Creole families with black, mulatto, and even white children. Surely with such subjective measurements of race, some census takers also misclassified native and foreign-born whites as mulatto. Without an easily identifiable physical marker of race, policies of racial separation in New Orleans were enforced arbitrarily, at best.²¹

Despite the inability to accurately assign racial classifications, Louisiana lawmakers passed legislation to separate the races, much to the chagrin of colored Creoles. In 1890, Louisiana's Separate Car Act provided "separate but equal" accommodations for white and nonwhite railway passengers, making it impossible for white and colored family members to travel together. Outraged by the new policy, a group of colored Creole community advocates, the *Comité des Citoyens* (Citizens Committee), railed against the Separate Car Act and set out to challenge its legitimacy. After careful planning and preparation, the *Comité* selected Homer Plessy, a near-white colored Creole from the Tremé, to test the constitutionality of the Separate Car Act. The *Comité* arranged for Homer Plessy to board an intrastate train in the car designated for whites and, upon being discovered as a colored man, to be promptly arrested.²² In June of 1892, Homer Plessy boarded the East Louisiana Railroad at the Press Street station just outside of the faubourg Marigny on a train headed across Lake Pontchartrain to Covington, Louisiana. As planned, when the conductor inquired about Plessy's race, he admitted that he was a colored man but refused to move to the colored

²¹ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900*.

²² For a detailed account on the *Comité des Citoyens'* careful planning of the test case involving Homer Plessy, see Keith Weldon Medley, *We As Freeman: Plessy v. Ferguson* (Pelican Publishing Company, 2003), 111-168; Otto H. Olsen, *The Thin Disguise: Turning Points in Negro History: Plessy v. Ferguson, A Documentary Presentation* (Humanities Press, 1967).

car, which led to his immediate arrest.²³ In 1896, Plessy presented his case before the United States Supreme Court in the trial of *Plessy v. Ferguson*. The court ultimately ruled against Homer Plessy and in the process, codified segregation in public spaces and legalized the establishment of “separate but equal” accommodations in the United States.²⁴

Two years after Plessy boarded the Press Street train, segregation laws began directly targeting the family. In 1894, lawmakers reinstated the ban on marriages across the color line, dealing a blow to interracial families. In many ways, the impact of the 1894 law was more philosophical than practical. Between 1870 and 1894, relatively few interracial couples chose to marry; however, the reinstatement of the ban stirred fears and anxieties about the declining status of colored Creoles and the growing inequality between whites and colored persons. The Louisiana court system also began cracking down on concubines and unmarried colored women who attempted to inherit money or property from their lovers. Although the laws of the 1870s, written in the spirit of equality, were designed to elevate the status of African Americans and to confer rights upon a wider swath of the population, as Republican influence declined in Louisiana, so did the legislature’s impetus to uphold racial and social equality in the eyes of the law. The assault on interracial families not only marked segregation’s expansion from the public to the private sphere, but the aggressive legal action suggests that

²³According to Keith Weldon Medley in *We as Freeman*, The Comité des Citoyens left no detail to chance and actually hired a detective to make Homer Plessy’s arrest; p. 139-140.

²⁴Louisiana Separate Car Act, 1890 (Act 111), 152; Louis A. Martinet, ed., “The Violation of a Constitutional Right” (Citizens’ Committee, 1893), Amistad Center, Tulane University; Brook Thomas, ed., *Plessy v. Ferguson: A Brief History with Documents*, The Bedford Series in History and Culture (New York: Bedford St. Martin’s, 1997), 29-38.

intimate relationships in the family continued to pose a real threat to the strict separation of the races.²⁵

In response to the segregation legislation of the 1890s, Creole families devised even more daring and intriguing techniques to protect themselves and their families from increasing restrictions against interracial unions. It was not uncommon for colored Creole women to identify themselves as white or use aliases as a means of combating legal roadblocks and the social stigma associated with interracial unions, extralegal relationships, and unmarried motherhood; however, by 1900, as the consequences for crossing the color line became harsher for whites, a small number of white women and men identified themselves as black along with their colored Creole spouses and mixed-race children.²⁶ A French-born woman named Edna Duhart married Paul Aubert, a colored Creole cigar maker, in 1882. By 1900, the couple and their six children lived on North Derbigny Street and although Edna was French, all members of the family were listed as black.²⁷ Creole painter Benjamin Deau lived on Bourbon Street with his colored mother and German-American wife. Although Benjamin's wife came from German parentage, she was identified as black along with her husband and mother-in-law. Occasionally, white men identified themselves as black. Charles Mainbourg arrived from France in 1870 and within five years, he had married a

²⁵Civil Code of Louisiana, Art. 94, Act 1894, 54; Joseph Dainow, ed., *Civil Code of Louisiana: Revisions of 1870 with Amendments to 1960*.

²⁶ By 1900, after the passage of separate but equal legislation, the mulatto or mixed-race categories were removed from the census and all persons of color were classified as black. The mulatto category reappeared again briefly in 1910. For instructions given to census takers about data collection, see *Twenty Censuses: Population and Housing Questions, 1790-1980* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Bureau of the Census).

²⁷ Although some white fathers sent their colored children to be educated in France which would explain why some colored Creoles claimed French nationality, Edna Duhart was born in France of French parentage and immigrated to New Orleans from France in 1875.

colored woman and the couple was expecting their first child. In 1900, Charles Mainbourg identified himself as black and lived openly with his colored Creole family. It is important to note that nearly all whites passing for black were married with children; surely white mothers and fathers understood the risks of becoming black—particularly at a time when the culture was assigning new meaning to blackness—but their willingness to surrender their white status to preserve their family legitimacy not only indicates the significance of familial bonds but also highlights parents' desire to bestow full inheritance rights onto their children.²⁸

The court's diminishing tolerance of concubinage was arguably more detrimental to the colored Creole family than the ban on interracial marriage. Concubinage was far more common than interracial marriage and much harder to regulate. Colored women living in concubinage with white men often falsely identified themselves as housekeepers, landladies, or boarders in order to avoid drawing unwanted attention to their relationships. Couples engaged in concubinage sometimes attempted to circumvent the law by disguising the true nature of the relationship or by transmitting property to the mistress through a third-party participant. In 1882, Adele Villars, the legitimate white daughter of J.L. Gaston Villars, appealed her case to the Louisiana Supreme Court, claiming that property from her father's estate had been illegally transmitted to her father's colored mistress and illegitimate offspring through a third party. After the death of his white wife, J.L. Gaston Villars lived the rest of his life with his

²⁸ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900*. For more on white to black passing, see Baz Dreisinger, *Near Black: White-to-Black Passing in American Culture*; E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in the United States*, 183-184.

colored mistress and children. In the early 1850s, while he was still legally married, Gaston Villars started a relationship with a young colored Creole woman named Antoinette who was thirty-five years his junior. At age fourteen, Antoinette gave birth to the couple's first child, Victoria, and by 1870, they had at least four children together. Villars' legitimate daughter Adele disapproved of her father's lifestyle, to which her father responded by attempting to cut her off from inheriting his estate. Gaston Villars create a ruse in which he allegedly sold his home to a man named Louis Faivre for approximately \$4,000; however, evidence presented in court suggested that Gaston Villars actually put up the money for the house himself as a means of secretly transferring the property to Louis Faivre. Louis Faivre was not only Gaston Villars' trusted business associate; Faivre had taken one of Villars' mulatto daughters as his concubine.²⁹ Neither Villars nor Faivre married their mistresses under the new law, nor did they naturalize their relationships with their offspring. By not doing so, their colored families lost out. The court determined that Villars' children were illegitimate, and that Faivre was illegally interposed on behalf of Villars' colored relations. Adele Villars thus won her appeal to stop the transmission of the property to her father's illegitimate colored heirs.³⁰

Some Creole women attempted to recover money or property from their lovers' estates by claiming to be owed money for services rendered. In the case of *Stringer v. Mathis* (1889), Joseph Mathis, a white man, lived with his colored

²⁹ It appears that Louis Faivre may have been the father of Victoria Villars' three children. In 1880, Victoria heads her own household in Jefferson and lives with her three younger brothers, Antony, Thomas, and Alexander, and her three children, Clebert, Sallie, and Gaston. Although she reports herself as married, there is no husband living with the family.

³⁰ *Mrs. Adele Villars, wife of Edward Drouet v. Louis Faivre* 34 La. Ann. 198 (Supreme Court of Louisiana 1882).

lover, Adeline Stringer, as a “lodger” in her boardinghouse and kept a room in her home for eleven years. When Joseph died, Adeline attempted to collect \$1644.90 from his estate, which she claimed was for the cost of his rent for the duration of his residency and another \$500 for services she provided as his “sick-nurse.” Joseph’s brother Louis controlled his estate and because he openly disapproved of Adeline and Joseph’s relationship, she knew Louis would not have willingly given her any part of his brother’s estate. Adeline Stringer attempted to collect what she felt rightfully belonged to her as Joseph’s longtime companion but the judge denied her claims, affirming that the couple’s relationship was personal not professional and that as Joseph’s concubine, Adeline was not entitled to any money.³¹

Despite the increasing restrictions on interracial relationships, colored Creoles continued to experience remarkable intimacy across boundaries of race, class and color. Although imbalanced sex ratios and declining economic status among colored Creoles contribute to women's continued participation in concubinage, the desire to maintain Creole family traditions and culture motivated both colored and white Creoles to continue the custom. As the Creoles' cultural significance and political authority continued to diminish in New Orleans, Creoles on both sides of the color line may have felt compelled to cling to their most intimate social practices as a means of preserving Creole cultural traditions. White parents and their colored descendants were bound together for generations by blood and birthright and sometimes formed kinship

³¹ *Mrs. Adele Villars, wife of Edward Drouet v. Louis Faivre* 34 La. Ann. 198 (Supreme Court of Louisiana 1882); *Adeline E. Stringer v. Louis Mathis* 41 La. Ann. 985; 7 So. 229 (Supreme Court of Louisiana 1889). For a detailed account of *Stringer v. Mathis*, see the first chapter of Alecia Long’s book, *The Great Southern Babylon: Sex, Race, and Respectability*, 10-59.

ties so strong that they could not be easily pulled apart. Creole kinship networks worked to preserve the ritual of concubinage within the family, sometimes over the course of several generations. A close examination of the lives of colored Creole sisters Victoria and Eleonore Guyot reveals the ways in which concubinage was passed down from white fathers and colored mothers to their children and demonstrates how the family maintained the tradition even in the face of increasing social and legal opposition.

Victoria and Eleonore Guyot were born in New Orleans during the Civil War to a free colored mother, Josephine Lecarpentier, and a French-born father, Charles Guyot. The girls grew up at a time when free colored status was being abolished alongside slavery and southerners began renegotiating boundaries of race, class, and status. Josephine and Charles raised their daughters in the upper Tremé in a neighborhood called “Over the Basin.”³² Josephine had grown up near the area, largely inhabited by their longtime neighbors, family, friends, and relatives. Although Charles and Josephine changed residences over the years, they remained in downtown Creole neighborhoods and likely frequented the same businesses, churches, and social organizations throughout their lives. Perhaps by remaining near familiar people and places, Charles and Josephine’s family avoided the more overt forms of racial segregation and exclusion which had already begun to permeate public spaces by the 1880s.³³

³² The neighborhood known as “Over the Basin” was the area above Basin Street, bounded by the Carondelet Canal and Canal Street.

³³ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Seventh Census of the United States, 1850, Orleans Parish Louisiana*, Manuscript Census (Washington D.C.); U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Ninth Census of the United States, 1870*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900*.

By the time Victoria and Eleonore Guyot came of age, both girls had followed in their mother's footsteps by becoming the concubines of white men. In her late teenage years, Victoria began a relationship with a white man, a lottery clerk from the Seventh Ward named Thomas P. Taquino Jr. The young couple had their first child, Marie Victoria Taquino, in 1882 and they went on to have at least nine more children together. In the spring of 1892, Thomas and Victoria legitimated their relationship by getting married in St. Augustine Catholic Church, a parish with a large population of Creole parishioners.³⁴ By 1880, Victoria's sister Eleonore had also formed a long-term relationship with a white man and the couple went on to have two children together. Years later, Eleonore entered a relationship with a white widower named Louis Hartine Delahoussaye and the couple married in Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Church, another popular church among Creoles, in 1902. Both Eleonore and Victoria remained married to their respective spouses until parted by death.³⁵

It is possible that Charles and Josephine Guyot actively sought white suitors for their daughters among the local white Creole families that still practiced concubinage. Although Charles was born in France and did not have a history of interracial concubinage in his family, he understandably would have wanted his daughters to have the same rights and privileges as his mother or sisters and he sought to elevate his daughters' social status by placing them with

³⁴ Although the couple legally married on May 28, 1892, in the 1900 census they claim to have been married for 21 years, which approximates the length of their entire relationship. Thomas and Victoria's oldest living child, Marie Victoria Taquino, was born March 31, 1882. In 1900, Victoria claimed to have given birth to 9 children though only 3 were still living at the time of the census; she gave birth to at least one more child, Victoria Taquino, in 1906.

³⁵ Victoria Mary Guyot Taquino died November 7, 1907. Eleonore Adelaide Guyot Delahoussaye last appeared in the 1930 census but I have not yet located her death certificate. *Registers of Marriage, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Parish; Registers of Marriage, St. Augustine Church; Orleans Parish Death Index, 1896-1907.*

white men. As Charles Guyot's concubine, Josephine Lecarpentier understood the potential advantages for her daughters and likely supported concubinage for Victoria and Eleonore. Victoria's husband Thomas P. Taquino Jr. was no stranger to interracial marriage or concubinage; other men in the Taquino family had taken colored mistresses and wives, including his brother Joseph Oscar Adolphe, who married a colored Creole woman.³⁶ Eleonore's husband Louis Delahoussaye also came from a family with an extensive history of forming interracial relationships out in the rural parishes of south Louisiana.³⁷ Both men were familiar with the practice of taking a colored wife or mistress and likely understood the special circumstances and precautions that needed to be taken in order to protect the family.

Although the Guyot sisters and their husbands lived relatively conspicuously, even marrying and baptizing their children in local Catholic parishes, the women and their families experienced a certain amount of isolation and perhaps even castigation in their community. In New Orleans, where residents often hosted elaborate celebrations for weddings, baptisms, funerals, and first communions, the sisters seemed to live rather privately among mostly family members and close friends. An examination of the church records indicates that Victoria and Eleonore's families were certainly close, if not somewhat insular. The sisters were connected by blood but, as colored wives of

³⁶ Joseph Oscar Adolphe Taquino married Marie Meridier, whose race was noted as "couleur" in Our Lady of the Sacred Heart in 1893. The couple also baptized three white children in the same church between 1894 and 1898.

³⁷The Delahoussayes (also spelled de la Houssaye) from the Louisiana parishes of St. Martin and Iberia trace their ancestry to eighteenth-century French nobility. George Washington Cable, *Strange True Stories of Louisiana* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1888), 90-94, 108-120, 144.

white men, they were also bound together by their social position. It was fairly common for two or three close friends or family members to act as witnesses in a marriage, yet Thomas and Victoria Taquino were the sole witnesses at Eleonore and Louis's wedding. When Victoria baptized two of her youngest children in St. Augustine Church, she chose her older children and her sister Eleonore as godparents.³⁸ The sisters had a fairly close, personal relationship, which may have allowed them to rely upon one another for support, but it is possible that the women provided mutual assistance, in part, because they had a limited outside support network available to them. In the face of increasing social and legal opposition to interracial unions, some colored Creole women discreetly formed relationships with men from families who similarly practiced interracial concubinage and then relied on kinship ties within families to act a support system.³⁹

Even among families that traditionally practiced concubinage, there were relatives and extended kin who did not want to be associated with any controversy surrounding interracial liaisons. Considering the intense stigma associated with interracial relationships, it is just as likely that the sisters chose to detach from the larger community on their own. By all indications, Victoria and Eleonore simply wanted to live undisturbed with their husbands and children; perhaps by retreating into their own enclave, they sought to avoid confrontation or discrimination. Victoria and Thomas Taquino married in 1892 at a time when

³⁸ When Victoria and Thomas Taquino baptized their son James Victor at St. Augustine in 1895, the couple's ten year old son George James acted as *parrain* and their thirteen year old daughter Marie Victoria acted as *marrain*. In 1898, Victoria and Thomas baptized their daughter Noelle Strobella and named George James as *parrain* and Victoria's sister Eleonore as *marraine*.

³⁹ *Registers of Marriage, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Parish; Registers of Baptism, St. Augustine Church.*

interracial marriage was legal, but Eleonore and Louis married in 1902, eight years after Louisiana reinstated the prohibition on interracial marriage. Even though marriage across the color line was illegal, the Catholic Church performed the ceremony and legitimated the couple's union in the eyes of God, if not under the law. By 1910, Louis worked as a deputy sheriff in New Orleans and although he was required to uphold the law in public, he privately maintained his interracial marriage, which by 1908 had become a felony crime. Knowing the precarious legal status of their relationship, Eleonore and Louis may have sought to protect their marriage and family by retreating to a small network of close family members and friends. As the South began to reorganize under the new rules of Jim Crow, colored concubines and colored women with white husbands had even greater incentive to live inconspicuously or to even retreat into Creole enclaves where their seemingly unfashionable social customs and deeply entrenched family networks could remain largely unbroken.⁴⁰

Concubines who eventually married their lovers and became legitimate wives were sometimes unable to extricate themselves from the negative reputation that often accompanied concubinage. In some extreme cases, concubines who became legal wives were denied their rights as heirs because of their past participation in concubinage. In 1885, Louise Beattie fought to regain her parental rights after her deceased husband's mother, Eglantine Desmazillieres Leblanc, took custody of her two sons, claiming that Louise was a woman of "notorious bad conduct" and was therefore ineligible to regain custody

⁴⁰ *Registers of Marriage, St. Augustine Parish; Registers of Marriage, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Parish*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910*. By Act No. 87 of the Louisiana Civil Code of 1908, concubinage between a person of the Caucasian or white race and a person of the negro or black race was made a felony.

of her children. Eglantine herself was the colored concubine of Pierre Leblanc for nearly forty years until the couple married in 1882, just two weeks before Pierre's death. But at the time she battled in court over her son Edgar's succession, Eglantine presented herself as a widowed wife and mother seeking to protect her grandchildren from their allegedly immoral mother. Louise Beattie, noted in the legal documents as a "*mulatress*," had lived in concubinage with Eglantine's son, Edgar Leblanc, for several years before the couple married in 1872. The couple married only weeks before Edgar passed away, suggesting that the couple knew his death was imminent and wanted to legitimate their relationship before he died in order to protect their children's inheritance. Eglantine initially pointed to Louise's concubinage with Edgar as evidence of her bad conduct. She further supported her claims against her daughter-in-law by testifying that after Edgar passed away, Louise continued her disreputable lifestyle by living in concubinage with yet another man. In the thirteen years between Edgar's death and the court trial challenging his succession, Louise began a long-term relationship with another man and although the couple never married, they had three children together. During the trial, Edgar's mother highlighted Louise's second stint as a concubine as evidence of persistent bad conduct and successfully convinced the court that she was indeed a disreputable woman and was ineligible from maintaining custody of her sons.⁴¹

⁴¹ *Succession of Edgar Leblanc* 37 La. Ann. 546 (Supreme Court of Louisiana 1885). In giving the court's majority opinion, Judge Bermudez states: "the legal mind is at a loss to perceive why a widow, who misbehaves by living, unmarried, with another man, from whom she begets children, and who is considered as depraved, should be allowed to take charge of the persons and property of her legitimate issue." In speaking of Louise Beattie's concubinage as evidence of her character, Bermudez argues that "the habits of the appellant before her marriage were bad, and since her widowhood have continued to be highly reprehensible. She is twenty-eight years old, therefore

By denying Louise custody of her sons, Edgar LeBlanc's mother also denied her access to their family inheritance. Edgar's father Pierre Leblanc was a wealthy white man who ran a successful dry goods business and had built a substantial estate for his family before he passed away.⁴² In his will, Pierre bequeathed approximately \$13,000 to Edgar's widow, Louise Beattie Leblanc, for the maintenance of her young children. In order to inherit the money, Louise needed to retain custody of her children. Edgar's mother, Eglantine Desmazillieres Leblanc, knew that if she convinced the court that Louise was a woman of notorious bad conduct, she would be ineligible for custody of her children and thereby unable to touch any of the inheritance money.⁴³ It is remarkable that Eglantine made her case by calling attention to Louise Beattie's role as her son's concubine because Eglantine herself was the former concubine of Pierre Leblanc.⁴⁴ Rather than focus solely on Louise's past concubinage, a crime of which Eglantine was equally guilty, Eglantine's attorney argued that Louise should be considered a woman of "notorious bad conduct" specifically because she had given birth to natural children after the death of her husband.⁴⁵

The court concurred and set a new precedent in the Louisiana court system creating a direct association between unmarried motherhood and notorious bad conduct. At the time, Louisiana law granted widowed mothers

still young. She has not absolutely reformed and may persist in misbehaving, so as to endanger both the morals and property of her children."

⁴² For more on the will and succession of Pierre Leblanc, see Chapter One.

⁴³ Article 303 of the Revised Civil Code of Louisiana (1870) authorizes both the exclusion and the removal from the tutorship of minors, persons of a conduct notoriously bad, including as well fathers as mothers.

⁴⁴ See Chapter One for Eglantine Desmazilliere's role in the trial of *Anastasie Desarzant vs. Pierre Leblanc and Wife* (Louisiana Supreme Court 1858), also known as the "Toucoutou Affair."

⁴⁵ The parents of children legally classified as "natural" either lived together or the father officially acknowledged his paternity.

custody of their children whether they were legitimate or not. In the case of Louise Beattie, she and Edgar Leblanc legitimated their children through marriage before Edgar's death, but according to the law, Louise's rights to parental custody should not have been contingent upon the children's legitimacy. Eglantine's legal counsel convinced the judges that unmarried motherhood alone was sufficient evidence of notorious bad conduct⁴⁶ and that Louise Beattie, as a concubine and unmarried mother of natural children born after her husband's death, should be declared notorious and subsequently denied custody of her children. Louise Beattie's attorney E. H. McCaleb countered the claim, arguing that in order to officially determine her conduct to be bad and notorious, the court must consider her social condition including "station in life, customs, habits and ideas of the class to which [she] belongs." He went on to assert that, as a colored washerwoman and mother of illegitimate children, Louise Beattie should not be held to the same standards as elite white women because "there is a vast difference between the moral standard of the negro and white race; also in the legal and social status of mothers of legitimate and illegitimate children as well as of their offspring." E. H. McCaleb did not persuade the judges to hold Louise Beattie to a lower moral standard and the Supreme Court of Louisiana upheld the judgment of the Civil District Court which granted custody of the children to their grandmother, Eglantine Leblanc. As lawmakers became less

⁴⁶ The Louisiana Supreme Court concluded that Article 303 of the Louisiana Civil Code (1870) which denied tutorship of children to "persons of a conduct notoriously bad," was *identical* to Article 444 in the French Napoleonic Code which stated that a widowed mother of legitimate children who gave birth to natural children after her husband's death is considered a woman of *inconduite notoire* (notorious misconduct). Ferdinand Berthier, *Le code Napoléon: Code civil de l'Empire français. Mis à la portée des sourds-muets, de leurs familles et des parlants en rapport journalier avec eux* (Paris: A. Durand et Pedone Lauriel, 1870).

sympathetic to unmarried mothers and lovers, particularly those like Louise Beattie who came from poor or working class backgrounds, the benefits ordinary women received from concubinage could no longer readily compensate for the risks.⁴⁷

As fewer Creole women were able to gain social and economic status through concubinage, a greater proportion sought the security and protection that came with legal marriage. Between 1880 and 1900, the percentage of married colored Creole women increased roughly eight percent. One might expect that as the percentage of married women increased, the percentage of single women would decrease in proportion; however, the percentage of single women and single men declined only 1.7 percent and one percent respectively, which suggests that rising marriage rates were not solely the result of more single people getting married. A closer examination of the population of female widows sheds some light on the decline of concubinage and the growth of marriage. As marriage rates among colored Creole women increased eight percent between 1880 and 1900, the number of widowed Creole women declined 4.3 percent. A number of factors likely contributed to the growth among married women and the simultaneous decline among widowed women. Around the turn of the twentieth century, improvements in hygiene, sanitation, and disease control reduced mortality rates and improved the quality of life in New Orleans.⁴⁸ As fewer people succumbed to an early death, fewer husbands and wives became early widows; in other words, married couples would have been able to stay

⁴⁷ *Succession of Edgar Leblanc* 37 La. Ann. 546 (Supreme Court of Louisiana 1885).

⁴⁸ Mary Lou Widmer, *New Orleans 1900 to 1920* (Pelican Publishing, 2007), 19-21, 34-37.

married longer, thereby sustaining or increasing the percentage of married people and reducing the percentage of widows. Lower mortality rates and an improved quality of life also meant that those men and women who did become widowed likely had a greater opportunity for remarriage.⁴⁹ Despite these social developments, the percentage of colored Creole male widowers hardly declined at all. Between 1880 and 1900, the percentage of Creole men who claimed widowed status declined from 5.1 percent to 4.8 percent. Given the similar living conditions for Creole men and women, it seems probable that an improved quality of life would have affected both male and female widows roughly the same. The modest decline among male widowers suggests that lower mortality rates resulting from an improved quality of life only partially explained the decline among the widowed population and cannot sufficiently account for the notable decline of female widows in particular.⁵⁰

The decline among widows appears to correlate to the declining public acceptance of concubinage among women of color. Concubines with children, whether separated from their lovers by death, desertion, or by legal or social barriers, almost always reported themselves to census takers as widowed. Only a handful of women with children ever reported their marital status to the census taker as single. During the late-nineteenth century, in cities throughout the South, the percentage of black and colored widows listed in the census remained abnormally high, in part, because many women falsely identified themselves as

⁴⁹ The 1910 census is useful for examining remarriage because it indicates first, second, and third marriages for marital partners.

⁵⁰ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900*.

widowed.⁵¹ By claiming widowed status, the women may have desired to avert questions about the whereabouts of the man of the house. It's also possible that by claiming to be widowed mothers living with their children rather than concubines living with their illegitimate offspring, the women sought to legitimize their families in the official records. Or perhaps for women in long-term unions, they simply wanted the record to more accurately reflect their level of commitment to their marriage-like relationships. It was not uncommon for concubines and unmarried mothers to classify themselves as widows in order to avoid public scrutiny for their social transgressions. As women of color faced increasingly harsh legal and social consequences for concubinage, fewer women, particularly those seeking social respectability in developing urban communities, including New Orleans, openly engaged in long-term, unmarried partnerships as an alternative to legal marriage; as a result, fewer unmarried women with children falsely identified themselves to census takers as widows as a means of concealing their true relationship status. The noteworthy decrease in the population of female widows combined with the increase of Creole women claiming to be married suggests that at least some of the women who identified themselves as married in 1900 would likely have claimed widowed status in 1880.⁵² It is not entirely clear how many widowed women became married or how many "married" women were legally married rather than simply living under

⁵¹ In 1880, 30.1 percent of colored Creole women and 27.7 of black women identified themselves as widowed-- approximately twice the percentage of white women (14.3). Jacqueline Jones asserts that between 1880-1910 rates of widowhood were between 20-25 percent for urban black families in the South but she does not adequately question the legitimacy of the statistics. For a more critical look at African American marriage statistics, see Samuel H. Preston, Suet Lim, and S. Philip Morgan, "African-American Marriage in 1910: Beneath the Surface of Census Data," *Demography* 29, no. 1 (February 1992): 1-15.

⁵² See appendix for marriage statistics.

the guise of marriage while maintaining common-law relationships, but women's growing desire to assert themselves publicly as the wives of colored men—whether they were actually legal wives or not— suggests that Creole marriage was increasingly important to creating family stability and maintaining female social respectability.⁵³

The shifting trend among Creoles toward marriage with each other was influenced by the growing importance of marriage among non-Creole blacks. After Reconstruction, aspiring-class African Americans challenged whites' notions of black inferiority and sexual licentiousness by seeking to establish themselves as respectable citizens. As African Americans pondered the future of the black race and developed social reform programs in the early Progressive Era, black communities throughout the country began to place a greater value on morality and sexual virtue as markers of good character and social standing. As a result, concubinage became a less acceptable lifestyle, particularly for middle-class and aspiring-class African Americans. An examination of marriage statistics for African American women living in the Seventh Ward reveals that the community embraced marriage as they became more averse to concubinage. In 1880, 54.6 percent of African American women claimed married status and 27.7 percent claimed widowed status.⁵⁴ By 1900, the percentage of married African American women rose approximately nine percent (to 63.4 percent) while the percentage of widowed women declined fully twelve percent (to 15.5 percent). By

⁵³ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900*.

⁵⁴ In 1880, 30.1 percent of Colored Creole women claimed widowed status. The percentage of black women who claimed married status was virtually the same as for white women (54.3 percent).

comparison, the proportion of non-Creole black women who claimed married status was 14.6 percent higher than for colored Creole women and the proportion of widows was approximately ten percent (10.3 percent) lower. Although fewer colored Creole women engaged in concubinage by 1900, they did not abandon it entirely nor did they embrace marriage as quickly as African Americans. Creoles certainly desired to maintain their privileged social status in post-Reconstruction New Orleans but it is clear that they did not initially do so by seeking respectability through legal marriage. Perhaps colored Creole youths, who grew up in predominantly Creole communities, were slower to embrace marriage, in part, because they were less exposed to African American social prescriptions that by the 1880s, had begun to place marriage at the center of middle-class respectability. In 1880, 58.3 percent of colored Creole men claimed married status; although a greater proportion of Creole men were married than women (42.2 percent in 1880), compared to black men, of whom sixty-seven percent were married, Creole men lagged behind. Persistently imbalanced sex ratios among Creoles precluded marriage for some men and women, but others simply did not feel that legal marriage was essential to preserving status.⁵⁵

Despite the persistence of concubinage and the relatively lower percentage of married Creoles, there were indications that marriage remained a significant institution in the Creole family. Colored Creoles, even if not legally married, frequently presented themselves in public as married. Common-law wives used their “husband’s” or children’s last name as their own. In the case of Creole sisters Victoria and Eleonore Guyot, their mother Josephine Lecarpentier never

⁵⁵ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880*.

legally married their father, but she lived her whole life as Charles Guyot's wife and when he died, she identified herself in a local city directory as, "Josephine Guyot, widow [of] Charles."⁵⁶ Another Creole woman, Henriette Cavalier, lived in common law with colored Creole store clerk Vincent Roux from the time she was fifteen years old until his death in 1886. Henriette and Vincent had at least eight children together; like an ordinary middle-class family, she cared for the home and the children while Vincent worked as a clerk. Although the couple never married, Henriette Cavalier regularly appeared in the records as Vincent's wife and was listed in 1890 as "Henriette Roux, widow Vincent." Like many other "widowed" concubines, Henriette inherited property upon Vincent's death and used her assets to care for her children.⁵⁷

Women who engaged in multiple relationships throughout their lives that resulted in children accordingly took the last name of their current partner or youngest child, in order to reflect the family's circumstances. In 1864, a colored Creole woman named Emma Laroche gave birth to an illegitimate daughter named Marie Clothilde and went by the name Emma Jasmin. Since Emma was unmarried, it is not altogether clear where she got the last name Jasmin. It is possible the name came from a man who may have been Emma's birth father: in 1850, Emma's mother Josephine Laroche lived with a male boarder named Jasmin Laville.⁵⁸ In the 1870s Emma Jasmin had children with a man named

⁵⁶ *New Orleans City Directory, 1890*. New Orleans, LA: L. Soards, 1890.

⁵⁷ *Board of Assessors, Real Estate Tax Assessment, Third Municipal District, 1900, 1910-1911*, New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana Division; *New Orleans City Directory, 1890*. New Orleans, LA: L. Soards, 1890.

⁵⁸ "Jasmin Laville" may have been an alias for a man named Jean Jasmin [also spelled John Jasmine]. Jean Jasmin is listed as the father of Emma Laroche Jasmin and at least one of her siblings yet it appears that Jean Jasmin was legally married to another woman. Jean Jasmin and

Jean Battiste Clement and went by the name Emma Jasmin Clement. In the 1880s, Emma had at least two children with a married man and although the children were baptized under their biological father's last name, Bechet, Emma and her children continued to appear in the records over the years with multiple last names. Though it is unclear why some women and their children provided different names so frequently, it appears that at least some women's duplicity of names was done in attempt to resist the dishonor that frequently accompanied unmarried motherhood and illegitimacy and to reflect the familial bonds between mothers, fathers, and their children.⁵⁹

Despite some families' efforts to circumvent marriage, for the predominantly Catholic Creoles, matrimony was a holy sacrament that bound the married couple to both God and the church community. For many Creoles marriage was an expression of religious faith but with or without religion, marriage provided couples and their children with practical benefits that cohabitation did not readily provide. An examination of marriage registers reveals that in nearly every case, legitimate children married legitimate spouses, suggesting that legitimacy was an important social marker. Surely, some husbands and wives misrepresented themselves in the records; however, any attempts to falsely claim legitimate status only further illustrates the importance of being a legitimate heir. While Creoles likely considered legitimacy an

Jean Laville were both born in approximately 1815 and both men are mulatto carpenters. It is possible that Jasmin took on the last name "Laville" (French translation: "the city") as a play on Josephine Laroche's last name ("the rock").

⁵⁹ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Seventh Census of the United States, 1850*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Ninth Census of the United States, 1870*; *Registers of Baptism, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Parish*; Archdiocese of New Orleans; *Orleans Parish Birth Index, 1790-1868*; *Orleans Parish Birth Index, 1886-1899*.

important indicator of moral virtue and perhaps social class, more practically and perhaps more importantly, legitimate children sought legitimate partners because they both carried the family name and had full legal rights to the family estate.⁶⁰

Creoles knew the importance of legitimating their children through marriage and many couples did so shrewdly. In 1903, colored Creole shoemaker Victorin Allain married his longtime partner Corinne in Saint Augustine's Church, and the couple retroactively legitimated their seven children, aged fifteen to thirty-three. One might wonder why Victorin and Corinne waited so long to get married, or, why they decided to marry at all after living together for more than thirty years. Marriage registers show that just one year after their nuptials, Victorin and Corinne's daughter Uranie (also called Angelina) married Joseph Delay in Saint Augustine Church; one year after that, their youngest daughter Victoria married Matthieu Jones.⁶¹ In the marriage registers, both Uranie and Victoria Allain were recorded as legitimate brides who married legitimate husbands. Some couples were so desperate to legitimate their children that they

⁶⁰ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900; Registers of Marriage, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Parish; Registers of Marriage, St. Augustine Church*; Cyprian Davis, *The History of Black Catholics in the United States* (The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1995), 173-194; Michele Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 84-87. For more on Roman Law regarding retroactive legitimation through marriage, see Judith Evans Grubbs, *Women and the Law in the Roman Empire: A Sourcebook on Marriage, Divorce and Widowhood*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2002), 170-172.

⁶¹ Both Allain daughters married mulatto men and lived as mulattoes. It is uncertain whether Victorin Allain and Corinne McGuire Allain came from families of color; both families have black and white members of the same name in their respective hometowns of Baton Rouge and St. Martinville but Victorin and Corinne were classified as white once they moved to New Orleans. After she married, Victoria moved with her husband to his hometown of Natchitoches but Uranie lived with her husband in the Tremé. Because both girls married men of color, it is likely that they were colored Creoles. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860, Orleans Parish Louisiana*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910, Natchitoches, Louisiana*; U.S. Bureau of the Census; *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910. New Orleans; Registers of Marriage, St. Augustine Church*.

hastily married under grave conditions. The attending priests sometimes noted the dire conditions and the immediacy of marriage. When Laura McKenna married Manuel Marquez in 1902, she was so gravely ill that instead of having the wedding at their church, the priest came to the house to perform the ceremony at Laura's bedside. The priest explicitly noted in the register that the couple wanted to legitimate their children before she died.⁶²

Couples incapable of contracting marriage often attempted to bequeath money and property through third-party donations or under the guise of business transactions in order to avoid any legal troubles, a tactic that had proven successful for many women. Sometimes when the third-party participant did not uphold his end of the deal or a deceased lover's will betrayed his agreement with his common-law partner, the jilted concubine brought her case to court. In 1908, Creole mistress Appolina Richard sued her colored lover, Louis Charlot, for defrauding her out of \$3,500 he owed her for property in St. Landry parish that she claimed he purchased from her. Appolina and Louis had lived together in open concubinage for thirty years and had twelve children together but because Louis Charlot already had a legal wife and children he could not legally bequeath his estate to Appolina.⁶³ As Louis got older, Appolina apparently became worried that she and her children would become destitute after he died, and she took steps to secure her family's future. She even gave a local notary \$50 toward Louis's divorce from his wife so that he could legitimate his relationship with

⁶² Although the priest noted Laura's dire condition, Manuel Marquez dies on April 26, 1902, just five days after the couple's nuptials. *Registers of Marriage, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Parish; Orleans Parish Death Index, 1896-1907*.

⁶³ The 1900 census noted Appolina's relationship to Louis as "concubine"—a designation rarely given in the census.

Appolina and make her the legal beneficiary of his estate—but Louis never went through with the divorce. Instead, Louis and Appolina devised a scheme to transfer money to her under the guise of a legitimate real estate deal.⁶⁴ Appolina Richard claimed she purchased 100 arpents of land from Louis Charlot and then sold it back to him for \$3,500 in promissory notes. In actuality, Louis donated the land to Appolina which she subsequently “sold” to him in exchange for the promissory notes. When Richard tried to cash in the notes, she found they were no good and the mortgage had been terminated. Louis Charlot had apparently used the land title several times as collateral for loans and to pay off debts, rendering the land practically worthless. In response, Appolina asked the court that she be fairly compensated for the land title. The court agreed that Louis Charlot had misused his land title and defrauded Appolina out of \$3,500, but ultimately the judges denied her claims for compensation on the basis that she was an adulterous concubine who was “responsible for the situation in which she finds herself.” After thirty years and twelve children Louis Charlot left Appolina penniless to work as a farm hand alongside her children until she died; and in an effort to stop colored concubines from inheriting money and property from their lovers, the Louisiana legislature protected Louis’s decision to leave his illegitimate family destitute.⁶⁵

In the same year Appolina Richard lost her case in the Louisiana Supreme Court, the legislature dealt concubines a major blow. In 1908, lawmakers established the Concubinage Act, which declared all concubinage

⁶⁴ The trial judge remarked that it was still a fairly common practice between patrons and concubines for the woman to “pay” for property and land they cannot legally inherit.

⁶⁵ Richard v. Charlot et al., No. 17,168, Supreme Court of Louisiana, 122 La. 492; 47 So. 841; 1908 La. LEXIS 490; U.S. Bureau of the Census; *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910*.

between whites and negroes to be a felony offense carrying a sentence of imprisonment and hard labor. The Concubinage Act passed on July 1, 1908 and was written into the official books three days later on Independence Day. Three weeks later, a colored Creole man named Eugene Bertrand and his white lover Odette Duval became the first couple arrested under the Concubinage Act.⁶⁶ Although the state may have targeted Eugene Bertrand for immediate prosecution because he lived in concubinage with a white woman, the state also indicted white men under the law. In 1910, the State prosecuted a white man named Octave Treadaway for living in “open and notorious concubinage” with his colored lover. Treadaway fought back, arguing that the law prohibits concubinage between “a person of the Caucasian or white race and a person of the negro or black race” and Treadaway asserted that his partner was an “octoroon,” not a negro; therefore the law did not apply to him. Defense attorneys presented extensive definitions of the words “negro” and “colored,” arguing that colored people legally and customarily constituted an entirely separate group from the negroes in the state of Louisiana. Treadaway successfully defended his claims that the Concubinage Act did not apply to him on the basis that his octoroon lover was colored, not negro. However, Treadaway’s victory was short-lived. Shortly after the court ruling, the

⁶⁶ The couple was arrested on July 27, 1908. Section 1 of Act No. 87 of 1908 reads as follows: Be it enacted by the general assembly of the state of Louisiana, that concubinage between a person of the Caucasian or white race and a person of the Negro or black race is hereby made a felony, and whoever shall be convicted thereof in any court of competent jurisdiction shall for each offense be sentenced to imprisonment at the discretion of the court for a term of not less than one month nor more than one year with or without hard labor. *State v. Bertrand et al.*, No. 17,374, Supreme Court of Louisiana, 122 La. 856; 48 So. 302, January 18, 1909; Also, *State v. Bertrand et al.*, No. 17,531, Supreme Court of Louisiana, 123 La. 575; 49 So. 199, April 12, 1909.

Concubinage Act was amended to replace the phrase, “negro or black race” with “colored or black race.”⁶⁷

The Treadaway case pushed officials to finally close the legal racial gap between black and white, diminishing the intermediate space occupied by the Creole community and forcing Creoles into the same degraded legal status as non-Creole blacks. The Concubinage Act of 1908 and its reissue in 1910 to specifically include colored people destroyed the last vestiges of the tripartite racial system in New Orleans and sought to replace it with the two-tiered system that predominated in other parts of the American South. By making interracial concubinage a felony crime, the Louisiana legislature advanced segregation efforts in the private sphere and further dissuaded colored women from forming relationships across the color line.

⁶⁷ *State v. Treadaway et al* No. 18,149, Supreme Court of Louisiana, 126 La. 300 (Supreme Court of Louisiana 1910); Act. No. 87 (1908); Act no. 206 (1910).

Chapter Three: Women and “The Golden Door of Opportunity”

The changes affecting the colored Creole family in the late-nineteenth century were also reflected in the community. As segregation forced colored Creoles into closer proximity to African Americans, the Creole community pushed back by vigorously maintaining old physical boundaries between the colored Creole and non-Creole black communities and embracing those Creole social practices that had historically distinguished them from African Americans—namely living in Creole neighborhoods, working in skilled trades, and observing Catholic liturgical rituals. Colored Creole women were particularly influential in preserving the old Creole way of life. As homeowners and householders, they embedded their families in downtown Creole neighborhoods, which helped strengthen the community. Whether they were homemakers, wage earners, or both, colored Creole women embraced domesticity as a marker of their feminine virtue and privileged social status. Catholic religious worship was central to Creole community life and women, as the moral purveyors of the family, ensured their families attended Mass and participated in the Church sacraments. In times of religious or moral transgression, the women also used the Church as a place for spiritual and social redemption. By developing new ways of preserving old traditions, colored Creole women worked both individually and collectively to delay the effects of Jim Crow on the colored Creole community.¹

¹ For critical analyses of the development of the free colored community after the Civil War, see Arthé A. Anthony, “The Negro Creole Community in New Orleans, 1880-1920” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Irvine, 1978); Joseph G. Tregle Jr., “Creoles and

For Creoles, living below Canal Street continued to be an important marker of Creole identity and community. Although increasing Americanization and white racial solidarity had largely erased the uptown-downtown divide for American and Creole whites in New Orleans by the end of the nineteenth century, colored Creoles maintained the old boundary at Canal Street as a physical marker separating the colored Creole community and the African-American community. A handful of colored Creoles lived above Canal Street, but the overwhelming majority lived in downtown Creole neighborhoods. Beyond any notions of Creole solidarity, Creoles chose downtown residences first and foremost for practical purposes. Essential Creole kinship networks remained deeply rooted in downtown neighborhoods with virtually all Creole families having extended relatives living below Canal Street. Additionally, most French-speaking Catholic Churches as well as nearly all Creoles businesses, labor unions, and social organizations were located in downtown Creole neighborhoods. The clustering of Creole families and Creole institutions below Canal Street meant that active membership in the colored Creole community practically required living at a downtown address. While Creoles may have lived downtown for largely practical purposes, the concentration of Creole kinship and social networks also allowed Creoles to better preserve and protect those features that

Americans," 131-185; Joseph Logsdon and Caryn Cosse Bell, "The Americanization of Black New Orleans, 1850-1900," in *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization*, 201-261; David Rankin, "The Impact of the Civil War on the Free Colored Community of New Orleans," in *Perspectives in American History*, ed. Donald Fleming (Charles Warren Center for Studies in American History, Harvard University, 1977), 379-416; Loren Schweninger, "Antebellum Free Persons of Color in Postbellum Louisiana," *Louisiana History* 30, no. 4 (Fall 1989): 345-364; James H. Dormon, "Ethnicity and Identity: Creoles of Color in Twentieth-Century South Louisiana," in *Creoles of Color of the Gulf South*, ed. James H. Dormon (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 166-179.

distinguished the colored Creole community from the African American community.

Female labor and wage earning were among the most significant markers of social distinction between colored Creole and non-Creole black women in late nineteenth-century New Orleans. Not only were colored Creole women less likely than black women to work outside the home but they were also much less likely to work in domestic labor, which in the South continued to be predominantly black women's work. In 1880, slightly more than one-quarter (26.6 percent) of colored Creole women reported some type of employment compared to forty percent of black women. Of those Creole women who were employed, nearly half (49.3 percent) earned money through skilled or professional occupations, including seamstresses, nurses, hairdressers, and teachers. In contrast, only twenty percent (20.8 percent) of formally employed black women worked in skilled professions, with the vast majority (79.2 percent) laboring as servants, cooks, and laundresses.² The disparity between Creole and non-Creole black women's work is noteworthy, yet the implications of these differences extend far beyond labor and wage earning. With fewer colored Creole women working outside the home and nearly half of all Creole working women performing skilled occupations, colored Creole women not only experienced better working conditions than most non-Creole black women, but they had a greater

² Although fewer black women worked in skilled or professional occupations than Creole women, women of color in the Seventh Ward were more likely to work in skilled or professional occupations than other urban black women in the South. Jacqueline Jones asserts that between 1880 and 1915, fewer than four percent of urban black women in the South worked in skilled or professional occupations. Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*, 143.

opportunity to embrace domesticity and homemaking as markers of social status and female respectability.

In the years after Reconstruction, female domesticity had become more important to African American notions of respectable womanhood. One of the ways formerly enslaved women asserted their freedom was by embracing their roles as homemakers. The rise of black Protestant churches during the Reconstruction era also influenced women's notions about creating female respectability and virtue through domestic responsibility. Black women's efforts to become homemakers were simultaneously reinforced by many of the public policies established under Reconstruction. Throughout the South, government officials sought to supervise African American family life and regulate their codes of conduct and morality as a means of maintaining social order (and social supremacy). Reconstruction policies attempted to regulate the private lives of African Americans, including social conduct, marriage and cohabitation, inheritance and property rights, and child custody, all under the pretext of maintaining social order and stability.³ As historian Thomas Holt asserts, Reconstruction agents did not simply desire to create a class of African American workers, but they sought "to make them into a working class, that is, a class that would submit to the market because it adhered to the *values* of a bourgeois

³ For more on the impact of Reconstruction-era policies on African American gender roles and family life, see Leslie A. Schwalm, *A Hard Fight for We: Women's Transition from Slavery to Freedom in South Carolina* (University of Illinois Press, 1997), 234-68; Thomas C. Holt, "An Empire over the Mind': Emancipation, Race, and Ideology in the British West Indies and the American South," in *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward*, ed. J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); Thavolia Glymph, "Freedpeople and Ex-Masters: Shaping a New Order in the Postbellum South, 1865-1868," in *Essays on the Postbellum Southern Economy*, ed. Thavolia Glymph and John J. Kushma (College Station: Texas A&M University Press); Mary J. Farmer-Kaiser, *Freedwomen and the Freedmen's Bureau: Race, Gender, and Public Policy in the Age of Emancipation*, 4th ed. (Fordham University Press, 2010), 1-34.

society."⁴ For women of the middle and aspiring classes, embracing bourgeois values meant embracing women's domestic roles as wives, mothers, and homemakers.

Prescriptive literature praised black and colored homemakers for their feminine virtue and domestic responsibility. An 1880 article entitled "What a Woman Can Do," published in *The New Orleans Weekly Louisianian*, a local newspaper for people of color, highlights the growing importance of women's domestic roles and credits them with being the source of "true happiness [in] the family." Another article in 1881 entitled, "Homekeeping and Housekeeping," describes the significant responsibilities of homemaking. According to the article, a homemaker was not meant to simply cook and clean all day but should attend to all matters of the "domestic machinery," including social entertaining, home decorating, raising the children and attending to her husband. Housekeeping was undoubtedly part of homekeeping but whether a woman performed domestic labor only in her own home or in other people's homes for income, the articles suggest, her main priority should be to effectively manage her own home and family.⁵

But even as African American prescriptive literature hailed homemakers as the embodiment of "everything pure, sweet, and beautiful," non-Creole African Americans had fewer opportunities than colored Creole women to stay home and

⁴ Thomas C. Holt, "An Empire over the Mind': Emancipation, Race, and Ideology in the British West Indies and the American South," 287-88.

⁵ "What A Woman Can Do," *New Orleans Weekly Louisianian*, February 14, 1880, sec. pg. 2, col. 4; ; "Homekeeping and Housekeeping," *New Orleans Weekly Louisianian*, July 23, 1881, sec. pg. 1, col. 3, 5.

embrace domesticity.⁶ In 1880, the percentage of colored Creole women who stayed home or "kept house" was more than twice that of black women: 64 percent (64.6) of colored Creole women kept house compared to 31 percent of black women.⁷ Colored Creoles, particularly those from families with a long history of freedom, were generally wealthier than non-Creole blacks and were more likely able to afford to stay home. Yet before the emancipation of slaves, free colored Creole women had embraced the feminine ideal of domesticity as a marker of their free status. In the antebellum era, white suitors of colored concubines valued the homemaking skills of their Creole lovers. As one traveler noted in the 1850s, a free colored concubine "did all the marketing, and performed all the ordinary duties of house-keeping herself; she took care of his clothes, and in every way was economic and saving in her habits."⁸ As homemakers and housekeepers colored Creole women not only asserted their free status but they used their domestic skills as social capital to form and maintain intimate relationships with men who could afford to keep them at home.

By the late-nineteenth century, as female domesticity became increasingly important among the black masses, colored Creole women aggressively embraced homemaking as an outward manifestation of Creole feminine virtue and social privilege. Yet few colored Creole women could afford to stay home without earning income. The legacies of interracial concubinage and Creole

⁶ "A Truly Happy Home," *New Orleans Weekly Louisianian*, November 26, 1881, sec. pg. 2, col. 3.

⁷ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880, Orleans Parish, Louisiana*.

⁸ Rev. Philo Tower, *Slavery Unmasked: being a truthful narrative of a three years' residence and journeying in eleven southern states: to which is added the invasion of Kansas, including the last chapter of her wrongs* (Rochester, NY: E. Darrow & Brother, 1856), 320-321.

family affluence left colored Creole women with rather extensive property holdings, which they sometimes used to generate income. By renting out rooms in their homes, colored Creole women could still cultivate their homemaking skills while earning money for the household. In 1880, 25 of the 156 Creole households headed by women in the census sample contained boarders. By 1900, there were fewer Creole landladies, with 6 of the 114 households containing boarders, yet colored Creole women still comprised over half (52.3 percent) of all Creole homeowners.⁹

In 1880, mother and daughter Celile and Josephine Joseph earned extra income by renting a room in their home on Kerlerec Street to a young bachelor named Robert Collins. Although Robert was listed as a boarder, he and Josephine were intimately involved with one another, and the couple eventually married and had eleven children together. Robert's rent not only supplemented Celile's income as a cook but it also allowed Josephine to stay home.¹⁰ At age fifty-two, Ophelia Jolis did not have a husband to support her, but she supported herself by renting out rooms in her modest home on St. Anthony Street. In 1900, elderly Creole widow Odile Dusseuau lived with her adult daughter and grandchildren as well as her niece and her elderly sister in her home on North Roman Street. Although none of the women worked, Odile earned income for her family by renting part of her home to two Creole brothers. In 1900, thirty-eight-year-old Creole widow Octavie Lamothe lived with her two young daughters in one of the oldest properties on Elysian Fields Avenue. Lamothe owned two

⁹ I have not included comparative statistics on homeownership for earlier years because homeownership for persons of color is not consistently noted in the census before 1900.

¹⁰ In 1910, Robert and Josephine Collins claimed to have been married for thirty-two years, which would have been 1878— two years before the 1880 census.

homes on the same block (valued together at \$3,800) and rented out rooms for income. She may have purchased the real estate herself or inherited it from her French father or from her deceased husband. Although the conditions for how she obtained the real estate is still unclear, it is apparent that the widow Octavie Lamothe used her property to generate enough income to support herself and her children without having to give up her role as homemaker.¹¹

Although homemaking was considered ideal for women of color, keeping house required long hours of hard physical labor. Women who kept house spent their days cooking, cleaning, tending to children and interacting with family members and other neighborhood women. Daily household chores kept women on their feet all day trimming candlewicks, gathering pounds of wood and coal, fetching water from the cistern, clearing fireplaces, sweeping and scrubbing floors, emptying chamber pots, cooking meals for the family, and doing the family's laundry. Despite the technological advancements made in the late nineteenth century, industrialization made little improvement in the drudgery of housework, particularly for women of modest means. Without electricity, indoor plumbing, running water, or any of the modern appliances beginning to appear in major cities in the northeastern United States in the late-nineteenth century, colored women in the South toiled in their households from sunup to sundown. Laundry typically took two women a full day to complete, and cooking had to be performed several times throughout the day. Without the assistance of hired

¹¹ An examination of the property tax records shows that Octavie Lamothe still owned the properties in 1910-1911. *Property Tax Assessment, Orleans Parish, Second Municipal District*, New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana Division; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910*.

domestic laborers, women who kept house relied on their own efforts as well as the efforts of other women in the house to complete the daily chores and to help balance their roles as both homemakers and housekeepers.¹²

Cooking was among the most arduous tasks. Preparing meals for a family took a considerable amount of time; women spent hours sifting flour, mixing batter, plucking chickens, cleaning seafood, shelling nuts, peeling vegetables, and performing other routine cooking tasks. With little refrigeration in New Orleans' hot and humid climate, women went to the market practically every day to buy fresh meats, dairy, and produce. By the early 1890s, women in the Seventh Ward and Tremé had access to large area markets including St. Bernard Market, Rocheblave Market, and Tremé Market as well as neighborhood grocers, butchers, and street vendors. Sunday dinners and social celebrations sometimes featured elaborate dishes with seafood, game, and meats purchased from the neighborhood butcher, but for day-to-day cooking, Creole women saved time and money by cooking economical, one-pot meals that incorporated leftovers, vegetables from the garden or the local grocer, bits of cured and salted meats, and a dietary staple, usually beans or rice. But even a slow simmering pot of red beans had to be watched—kitchen fires frequently burned down homes and claimed lives. Women relied on the help of other family members in the household to complete the kitchen chores. Grandmothers could tend to boiling pots while older children could fetch water, peel vegetables and make trips to the corner grocery. The lady of the house supervised the kitchen and may have acted

¹² U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880*; McKinney, Louise, *New Orleans: A Cultural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 39-40; Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States*, 111; Susan Strasser, *Never Done: A History of American Housework*, 50-66, 85-124.

as head chef, but because she relied on the voluntary efforts of other women in the household rather than on hired domestic help, she had to remain somewhat flexible in her demands and expectations of the household.¹³

Cooking was certainly laborious but washing clothes was arguably the most miserable household task. Washing clothes was both physically exhausting and time consuming. A woman first had to gather water and heat it in a basin over a fire; with a large paddle, she agitated the clothes as they boiled and then transferred them to an empty basin where she used lye soap to scrub the clothing against a washboard. She then gathered more clean water to rinse the clothes and then wrung them out and hung them to dry. Once the clothes were dry, they had to be pressed by heating an iron over a fire or stove and then carefully moving the iron across the fabric so as not to burn it. Washing clothes for an entire family typically took two or more women an entire day to complete. It is likely that most middle-class and working-class women occasionally relied on hired help as well as the unpaid efforts from female kin in the household in order to complete the household chores and still have some leisure time to participate in community activities and events.¹⁴

A small minority of colored Creole women eased their burdens by hiring domestic help. In 1880, twenty-three-year-old Creole homemaker Josephine

¹³ For more on Creole women and cooking, see interviews with Anna Johnson, Irma Williams, and Leah Chase in *St. Mark's Ethnic Heritage Project, New Orleans, Louisiana, Tremé and Seventh Ward, 1978*, Collection 327, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University. The markets in the Tremé and Seventh Ward are indicated on area maps. Sanborn Map Company, "New Orleans, Louisiana, 1895-1896. vol. 1," Sanborn Digital Maps (Proquest, 2008). Arthé A. Anthony, "The Negro Creole Community in New Orleans, 1880-1920" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Irvine, 1978), 120-130; Lyla H. Owen and Owen Murphy, *Creoles of New Orleans* (New Orleans: First Quarter Publishing Company, 1987), 27-30.

¹⁴ Susan Strasser, *Never Done: A History of American Housework*, 104-109; Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States*, 111-113; Mary L. Widmer, *New Orleans, 1900 to 1920*, 44-45.

Deslandes [née Azaretto] had a one-year-old daughter and a newborn baby at home. With no other women living in the house to help Josephine care for the children and do the housework, her husband, a colored Creole cigarmaker named Raoul, hired a black live-in servant woman named Felicite Lacour to assist with childcare and the daily chores. On Hospital St. in the Tremé, Creole housewife Mayolla (spelled Magnola) Leblanc Chevalier tended to her home with the help of a live-in domestic servant, an eleven-year-old black girl named Mary. In Seventh Ward household, Creole widow Philomene Dellande [née Pedlove] employed a black live-in servant woman named Leticia Abrams for more than ten years. After her husband's death, Philomene lived with her two adult sons who helped support her financially, but it is likely that Philomene continued to rely on Leticia to provide daily personal assistance and to clean the house. In addition to the small number of Creole women who could afford live-in domestic help, a few others may have occasionally hired washerwomen for the day. But the majority of Creole women performed their own domestic chores with only the help of other women in the household.¹⁵

With or without domestic assistance, relatively few colored Creole women could afford the social privilege of staying home without also earning income themselves. Creole husbands and lovers, particularly those who worked as unskilled laborers, could not always afford to be the family's sole provider which often meant that wives and daughters had to work. Additionally, the persistently high percentage of female widows in the colored Creole community suggests that Creole homemakers knew the likelihood of becoming widowed and prepared

¹⁵ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880*.

themselves and their daughters to earn money, often in skilled occupations. In 1880, half (49.3 percent) of all Creole women who reported employment performed a skilled trade or professional occupation. Creole women's work typically consisted of a variety of short-term, proprietary or individually contracted jobs that perpetually shifted and changed depending on the availability of resources and the woman's familial responsibilities. Certainly, some women had the same employer for many years, but most colored women in New Orleans usually earned income from multiple sources, working both formally and informally to meet the family's economic needs.

Women reported a wide array of occupations including nurse, schoolteacher, hair dresser, music instructor, and business proprietors, but seamstress work was by far the most common. In 1880, the majority of single Creole workingwomen were employed as seamstresses as were a notable number of married and widowed women.¹⁶ In 1880, 65.5 percent of all single Creole women who reported employment claimed to be seamstresses as did 31.6 percent of married working women and 28.0 percent of widowed women. Seamstress work was considered respectable in part because it required training and skill, unlike most occupations available to women of color. Women also preferred sewing and dressmaking because it could often be done from home on a flexible schedule. Highly skilled seamstresses and dressmakers sometimes worked in white homes sewing for wealthy families, but seamstresses were not constantly under the watchful eye of white employers like cooks, maids, and laundresses.

¹⁶ In 1880, 33.3 percent of married Creole working women reported employment as seamstresses and 30.4 of widowed Creole workingwomen reported employment as seamstresses.

For women who wanted to be home to care for their households and children, almost any job that could be done from home was better than working in white households. Creole parents who sent their daughters out of the house to work often sent them to work in local, Creole-owned businesses where they hoped their girls would be protected from exploitation. Creole women readily turned to jobs that allowed them some autonomy in their work and some flexibility to earn money while still caring for their households and their children.¹⁷

Sewing became particularly popular among women living in middle-class Creole enclaves where most women did not work outside the home but many still needed additional income. In 1880, colored Creole widow, Phelicite Esteve, lived on New Orleans Street with her three adult children. Phelicite and her two daughters worked as seamstresses while her son earned money as a brick mason. In a neighboring house, Josephine Toussaint and her three daughters worked as seamstresses while her husband worked as a carpenter. On the same block, the two teenage daughters of the Widow Octavie St. Alexandre worked as seamstresses as did her neighbor Pauline Franville, wife of Creole carpenter Ernest Franville.¹⁸ Wives and daughters of Creole tradesmen earned money through seamstress work while maintaining the standards of ideal middle-class womanhood that discouraged women from working outside the home.¹⁹

¹⁷ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880*; Arthé A. Anthony, "The Negro Creole Community in New Orleans, 1880-1920," 71-87; Susan Strasser, *Never Done: A History of American Housework*, 105-144.

¹⁸ Although Josephine Toussaint is listed as white in the 1880 census, she appears colored in birth records and city directories. [Marie Josephine] Octavie St. Alexandre claimed to be married in 1880, but her husband, Jules DuGardin St. Alexandre died in 1878. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880*; *Orleans Parish Death Index, 1877-1895*.

¹⁹ Mary E. Odem, *Delinquent Daughters: Protecting and Policing Adolescent Female Sexuality in the United States, 1885-1920* (The University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 47-48; Christine

Although seamstresses worked on a more flexible schedule, their working conditions were often less than ideal. Unlike middle-class Creole women who worked for private families, some poorer women sewed for retail clothing and tailor shops, working long hours for little money. Before widespread industrialization in New Orleans, Creole women set up their own sewing “factories” at neighborhood homes where women could come and do piecework sewing for money. Mothers and daughters as well as other women from the neighborhood would rotate in and out as their daily schedules permitted, spending time at the sewing machines making ready-to-wear clothing and getting paid by the dozen. In an interview with Creole scholar Arthé Anthony, one young colored Creole woman who sewed from home with her mother and sisters around the turn of the twentieth century later recalled practically being “chained” to the sewing machine, spending many hours making clothes for local retailers.²⁰ Even though seamstresses typically earned a modest income, the autonomy and flexibility of such labor did not exist in most types of black women’s work. For Creole women, home-based sewing was so popular that one of the major local department stores, Haspel’s, capitalized on their labor by formally establishing a sewing factory in the heart of the Seventh Ward.²¹ Small dressmaking and tailoring shops sometimes employed several Creole girls to sew directly from the shop. Working in groups, the women could ply their craft in the security of one another’s company while talking about neighborhood happenings, sharing

Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860*, 43-54; Susan Strasser, *Never Done: A History of American Housework*, 134-144.

²⁰ Arthe A. Anthony, “The Negro Creole Community in New Orleans, 1880-1920,” 73-76.

²¹ Haspel’s department store was first established in 1909 by Joseph Haspel Jr. By the 1920s, Haspel established a sewing factory at Broad St. and St. Bernard Ave.

information about family and friends, and even exchanging information about social or employment opportunities. Home-based sewing and communal sewing factories allowed Creole women to earn income on a flexible work schedule but they also provided a dynamic space for social interaction and mutual support.²²

Creole women may have desired to work from home and to negotiate their own work schedules, but by the turn of the twentieth century the spectrum of labor opportunities for Creole women began narrowing significantly. Between 1880 and 1900, the number of Creole women in the workforce rose eleven percent and at the same time the diversity of female occupations diminished. In 1880, half (49.3 percent) of all working Creole women reported a skilled occupation. By 1900, that number declined to 42.1 percent. Single women were affected the most; in 1880, thirty-six percent of single women were employed, of which 65.5 percent worked as seamstresses. By the turn of the century, about half of all single women claimed employment yet only 38.2 percent worked as seamstresses. At the same time, unskilled labor rose from 24.1 percent to 41.2 percent among single women. The Creole community was not oblivious to the decline in skilled and professional labor. By the late 1880s, Creole community action groups began demanding the city employ more colored teachers in downtown schools. Colored teachers were regularly passed over by the board in favor of white teachers, and the Creole community spoke out against it. Concerned citizens approached the school board to demand they hire more black schoolteachers. Creoles took pride in their tradition of performing skilled and

²² Although Susan Strasser does not specifically address the seamstress work of African American women, she highlights the collaboration and camaraderie among seamstresses. Susan Strasser, *Never Done: A History of American Housework*, 125-144.

professional labor and the growth of the unskilled masses aroused concerns. Not only were mothers, daughters, and wives being forced to work outside the home, but they were forced to join ranks with black women in domestic service roles. The growing number of Creole women working in domestic service was symptomatic of the Creoles' declining social status. As more Creole husbands and fathers were forced out of their skilled trades and into unskilled labor jobs, fewer men could support their families without additional income, forcing wives and daughters to take jobs in domestic service. The complex social hierarchy among Creoles did not necessarily relegate female domestic workers to the lower classes, yet the strong correlation between black women and domestic service jobs placed colored Creole domestic workers in jeopardy of losing separate status.²³

Maintaining good standing in the Creole community depended, in part, on preserving those characteristics that distinguished colored Creoles from non-Creole blacks. Men and women had to be constantly vigilant of one's proximity to blackness, both physically and socially. *Children of Strangers*, Lyle Saxon's novel about a rural Creole community in the early twentieth century, highlights the link between blackness and social status. In the beginning of the novel, Saxon describes his near-white Creole protagonist, Famie, as looking like a "Spanish girl," with only the faintest trace of African blood, claiming that, "nobody in the world—unless he looked mighty close—could tell that she was a mulatto." Famie enjoyed the social and economic benefits of her privileged Creole status even

²³ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900*; "The Colored Creoles Organize to Secure Better Schools," *The Weekly Pelican* (New Orleans, LA, January 8, 1887); "Colored Schools," *The Weekly Pelican* (New Orleans, LA, February 5, 1887).

after she had an illegitimate child with a white man. Eventually, Famie sold her property—including land that had been in her family for generations—and began working as a poor laundress while living in common-law union with a black man. Famie’s social transgressions ultimately caused her to be cast out of the Creole community. As her social status declined, Saxon began to describe Famie’s physical appearance like that of a black woman: “Day by day she grew more like the negroes among whom she worked: exposure darkened her skin, and nowadays she tied her head up in a *tignon* as negro women do.” In her degraded state, a white couple, who had once mistaken Famie for a white girl when she was a child, took her for a negress. As Famie’s life more closely resembled that of a black woman, her blackness began to manifest in her physical appearance. Few things embodied the black female experience like domestic service and colored Creole women tried to avoid it at all costs.²⁴

Creole patriarchs certainly tried to keep their wives and daughters from working as domestics but Creole mothers also actively sought to protect their daughters’ honor, virtue, and social standing by keeping them at home whenever possible. Although the majority of employed married and widowed women worked as cooks, servants, and washerwomen in 1880, only 24 percent of single women age fifteen or older worked in domestic service. In contrast, approximately 53 percent of employed single non-Creole black women worked in domestic service.²⁵ Instead of sending their daughters to work in white homes, some Creole mothers forfeited their position as homemaker and went to work in

²⁴ Lyle Saxon, *Children of Strangers*, (Pelican Publishing Company, 1937), 6, 246.

²⁵ In the 1880 sample of white households, only two single white women reported working in domestic service—one was an Irish immigrant and the other was born to Irish immigrant parents.

place of their daughters. Mary Cecile Joseph spent her life as a wife, mother, and homemaker until her husband died in the 1870s. After Louis Joseph's passing, fifty-five-year-old Mary took a job as a cook while her twenty-year-old daughter Josephine kept house. Josephine appeared to be healthy enough to go to work but she stayed home while her elderly mother worked as a domestic laborer. Perhaps after the death of her husband, Mary sought to secure her daughter's future by improving her marriage prospects; by staying home, Josephine could "keep house" and perform the role of a respectable, middle-class woman.²⁶

Most mothers who headed their own households did not have the luxury of keeping their daughters out of the workforce. Without a husband or father present to provide economic support, female heads of household relied on adult children, relatives, and boarders in the household to earn income. Until the death of her husband Eugene, Stella Demasiliere [née Alliod] had stayed home and taken care of her children. Only one year after Eugene Demazilliere passed away, every member of the Demazilliere household had a job, including Stella. For the first time since she was married, Stella Demazilliere worked outside the home, working as a seamstress for a tailor's shop. Stella's three daughters worked as dressmakers and laundresses and her son worked in a warehouse. In Eugene's absence, the family took the necessary steps to sustain itself through hardship, but it is likely Stella would have kept her daughters at home until they found husbands if it had been economically feasible.²⁷

²⁶ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880*.

²⁷ *Orleans Parish Death Index, 1877-1895*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880*.

For many poor and destitute Creole women domestic labor was their only option to earn income. In 1880, approximately 64 percent of Creole wives and widows²⁸ who reported an occupation were domestic laborers, suggesting that even though domestic employment for women was frowned upon, the majority of women who worked outside the home had few other viable options. The death of a husband often forced Creole widows, most of who had never formally worked outside the home, to take domestic service jobs cooking and cleaning for other women's families. When 35-year-old P. Deterville became widowed, she could no longer care for herself or her family without additional support. She and her four young children became live-in domestic servants for wealthy white banker, J.B. Montreuil and his two adult sons. It is unclear if the relationship between Widow Deterville and the Montreuil's remained strictly professional; however, with limited labor opportunities available to her and no husband, she was vulnerable to the impulses and demands of her employer.²⁹

The real dangers of domestic work as well as the potential social consequences of performing black women's labor prompted colored Creole women to stay home whenever possible and develop resourceful ways of earning money. The small but significant number of female-headed households with no visible means of support indicates that the actual breadth and scope of women's work is obscured in the records. Although approximately 72 percent of Creole women reported staying home in 1880, many of those women earned some form of income even though they did not report it. Households with several women

²⁸ Excluding single women.

²⁹ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880*.

could perform multiple types of labor from home at the same time: washing and ironing clothes; selling eggs from the chicken coops and vegetables from the garden, performing seamstress work, or teaching piano lessons from the front room. Wives who cooked lunch for their husbands sometimes made enough food to sell to other hungry workers at the job site. Even adolescent girls contributed to the household economy. Girls earned money sweeping the *banquettes* [sidewalks] and carrying groceries home for neighbors. Creole women were rather adept at earning money while remaining in the safety and security of their own homes. Working from home and negotiating one's own working conditions was central to Creole notions of womanhood; it not only allowed women to provide for their families but they could still lay claim to the higher social status that accompanied the role of homemaker.³⁰

In 1880, Henriette Fonvergne remained at home after the death of her husband, Pierre Arnoud Fonvergne, as did her three adult daughters. Although none of the Fonvergne women reported employment in the census, it is likely that they earned money informally with jobs they could perform from home. Over the years, Pierre Fonvergne had provided his family with a solidly middle-class lifestyle; in 1860, a decade before his death, Pierre had \$800 in personal estate and owned one black slave girl. Although Pierre was relatively successful, his estate could not support his entire family after his death.³¹ The women found

³⁰ *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880*; Susan Strasser, *Never Done: A History of American Housework*, 18, 47; Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States*, 119-120, 228-229.

³¹ In 1860, Pierre Arnoud Fonvergne worked as a clerk and he had \$800 in personal estate (no real estate listed) and owned one black slave girl. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census of the United States-Slave Schedules, 1860, Orleans Parish, Louisiana* (Washington D.C.) NARA, as cited on ancestry.com.

ways to support themselves and take care of their children. Henriette's adolescent son, Virgile, continued his education and did not drop out to help support the family after the death of his father; that Virgile remained in school suggests that the family was not destitute, even if they struggled financially. In later years, Henriette lived on Urquhart Street with her unmarried daughter Anita and her adult granddaughter (also named Henriette) and all three women worked as seamstresses. Because sewing professionally takes skill and years of experience, it is likely that the Fonvergne women sewed for money even during the years they did not formally report employment.³²

While many Creole women followed the traditions of their mothers and grandmothers, earning income through legitimate, albeit informal, types of labor, some Creole women also engaged in controversial, disreputable, or illegal occupations to earn income.³³ Although relatively little is known about women who performed illegal jobs, the establishment of a red-light district in New Orleans, which operated legally between 1898 and 1917,³⁴ makes it somewhat easier to obtain details about the lives of known prostitutes during that period. By 1900, New Orleans' red-light district, known as "The District" or "Storyville," had

³² U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900*.

³³ Writing about free colored women in nineteenth-century Bahia, B.J. Barickman and Martha Few argue that census records do not give a full or complete picture of women's work because census takers typically noted traditional or "legitimate" occupations and did not record multiple jobs or informal types of labor. Also, the women themselves did not report illicit or illegal occupations. No women in the census samples from New Orleans reported themselves as prostitutes, root workers, spiritual healers, or voodoo mambos or priestesses. B.J. Barickman and Martha Few, "Ana Paulinha de Quieros, Joaquina da Costa, and Their Neighbors: Free Women of Color as Household Heads in Rural Bahia (Brazil), 1835," in *Beyond Bondage: Free Women of Color in the Americas*, ed. David Barry Gaspar and Darlene Clark Hine (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 179.

³⁴ Although the city approved the establishment of a red-light district in 1897, the law did not go into effect until January 1, 1898.

been in operation for two full years, yet many women who openly lived and worked in the red-light district reported alternative occupations to the census takers despite the legality of prostitution in that area.³⁵ At 235 Bienville Street, Madame Lulu White ran one of the most successful quadron brothels in the District, yet all five female “boarders” living in her house reported themselves as seamstresses and dressmakers. Other famous madams, including Willie Piazza, Josie Arlington, Bertha Golden, and Nell Kimball ran rooming houses full of women allegedly employed as seamstresses, stenographers, washerwomen, and cooks.³⁶ Despite the legality of prostitution, women went out of their way to protect themselves from the social persecution that accompanied disreputable occupations.³⁷

In late summer of 1897, only a few months before the red-light district became official, a light-skinned woman named Mary Rivera was arrested for prostitution near Gravier and Rampart Streets. Five days later, she was arrested again in the same location for the same crime, yet the second time, she reported her occupation as washerwoman.³⁸ It is possible that Mary Rivera worked as a

³⁵ The red-light district, known as “The District” to area locals, was sometimes referred to as “Storyville,” named after Alderman Sidney Story who drafted the legislation on the red-light district.

³⁶ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930*. By 1930, Lulu White and Willie Piazza both ran rooming houses on Saratoga Street in an area of town where African American prostitution flourished. For a detailed description of life in a brothel in New Orleans red-light district, see Nell Kimball, *Nell Kimball: Her Life As an American Madam*.

³⁷ Lulu White, “New Mahogany Hall” (New Orleans, LA, n.d.). Alecia P Long, *The Great Southern Babylon: Sex, Race, and Respectability*, 102-147; Judith Kelleher Schafer, *Brothels, Depravity, and Abandoned Women: Illegal Sex in Antebellum New Orleans* (Louisiana State University Press, 2009), 60-73, 124-154; Al Rose, *Storyville, New Orleans: Being an Authentic, Illustrated Account of the Notorious Red Light District*; Stephen Longstreet, *Sportin' House: New Orleans and the Jazz Story*, 205-222.

³⁸ When Mary Rivera was arrested on August 29, the arresting officer listed her offense only as “Gravier and Rampart” which was an area known for prostitution. On her second arrest, the

washerwoman most of the time and supplemented her income with prostitution, but it is more likely that Mary earned most of her income from prostitution and she falsely reported being a washerwoman to the arresting officer. Either way, it is clear that women engaged in disreputable or notorious occupations did not readily identify their actual sources of employment or income.³⁹

Creole women often did perform traditional labor in tandem with their unconventional trades. Perhaps most notably, the famed voodoo queen, Marie Laveau, reported her official occupation as “hairdresser,” a trade she performed from the front of her home while providing spiritual advice to her clients in the back. By 1880, Marie Laveau still lived in her famed French Quarter home on St. Ann Street with her son, daughter-in-law, and her two grandchildren. Although Marie Laveau remained an active spiritual leader in the voodoo religion until her death in 1881, she appeared in the census as an elderly widow who stayed home while her son acted as head of the household. It is possible that Marie Laveau and other conjurers, healers, and root workers earned at least some of their income through traditional employment, but because these unconventional occupations rarely appeared on official records it impossible to know the extent of women’s participation in illegal or illicit trades.⁴⁰

In cases where a Creole woman's honor was in jeopardy, perhaps by participating in illegal, illicit or seemingly immoral activities, she attempted to

officer charged Mary under Ordinance 4434, which the officer noted was for “lewd and abandoned” women. For more on Ordinance 4434 (1890), see Alecia Long, *The Great Southern Babylon*, 107-109.

³⁹ Arrest Records, New Orleans Police Department, 1897, City Archives, NOPL; Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860*, 97-100.

⁴⁰ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880*; Barbara R. Duggal, “Marie Laveau: The Voodoo Queen Repossessed,” in *Creole: The History and Legacy of Louisiana's Free People of Color*, ed. Sybil Kein (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 157-178.

uphold publicly some semblance of respectability while often privately seeking religious reconciliation. For Creoles, the Catholic Church remained central for religious worship and social activities, but it also provided opportunities for social redemption. Some women participated in religious sacraments to fulfill their spiritual duties and obligations as Catholics and to uphold their virtue as legitimate wives and mothers; yet for "fallen" women, participating in religious rites of passage—namely marriage, baptism, and extreme unction or last rites—provided a way to reconcile past transgressions and reestablish social legitimacy in the community. Common-law wives who later married in the Church often did so to legitimate their children as well as themselves. Marriage and retroactive legitimation granted children born of common-law unions full inheritance rights and potentially increased their social status as they became legitimate heirs of the family.⁴¹ Baptism also provided a way for unmarried mothers to create some semblance of legitimacy for their children. By declaring paternity at the time of baptism, common-law wives assured their natural children some inheritance rights.⁴² Mothers of illegitimate children may not have been able to secure inheritance rights for their children but by providing the name of the alleged

⁴¹ Article 196 of the Louisiana Civil Code (1870) asserts that "Children legitimated by a subsequent marriage have the same rights as if they were born during the marriage." Joseph Dainow, ed., *Louisiana Civil Code: Revisions of 1870 with Amendments to 1960*.

⁴² Natural children are different from illegitimate children. Children are deemed *natural* if they are born to unmarried parents who were capable of contracting marriage at the time of the child's birth (excluding children from adulterous or incestuous relationships) but whose fathers have been legally acknowledged. Fathers could acknowledge paternity at the time of the child's baptism or by notarial act in the presence of two witnesses. Although natural children had rights to inherit property from their fathers, their rights were limited. Natural children could only be called to inherit if he had no legitimate children or other legitimate heirs (ascendant or descendant), collateral relatives, or legal wife. If the parish court judge deemed the natural child as the legal heir, the father's estate had to be carefully inventoried, after which the natural child received only two-thirds of his estate. The remaining one-third of the estate acted as restitution in case a legitimate heir was found and the estate had to be later reclaimed from the natural child in favor of the legitimate heir. Louisiana Civil Code, Arts. 200, 203. 919, 928.

father to the Church and appointing godparents, the women established their children within Creole kinship networks that formed the foundation of the community.⁴³

As patrons and parishioners of the Church, Catholic Creole women formed a powerful sector of the religious community in New Orleans. Creole women attended mass regularly and gave generously of their time and money. They joined religious societies, sent their children to parochial colored schools, and supported colored orphanages, schools, and asylums. While some women continued to attend St. Louis Cathedral in the French Quarter at the turn of the century, many had become active members of two notable Creole parishes—St. Augustine and Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Church. Located in the heart of the Tremé neighborhood, St. Augustine Church had served the Creole community since the 1840s and was an important institution for several generations of Creole families who married there, baptized their children, and held funerals for loved ones within its walls. In the Seventh Ward, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart parish, established in 1871, served as a place of religious worship and social communion for the neighborhood's growing population of middle-class Creoles residents.⁴⁴

⁴³ If the paternity of the child was not noted in baptismal records or through notarial act, the child could petition the court to legally acknowledge filiation if the child could prove at least one of the following: the child has always been in possession of the natural father's surname; the assumed father treated the child as his own, providing for his maintenance, education, and long-term security; the child is acknowledged by the father's extended family; the child is acknowledged as belonging to the assumed father by the community. Louisiana Civil Code, Arts. 200, 203, 195. For more on colored Catholic parishioners, see: James B. Bennett, *Religion and the Rise of Jim Crow in New Orleans* (Princeton University Press, 2005) 145, 163-181; Cyprian Davis, *The History of Black Catholics in the United States*, 98-115.

⁴³ Joseph Dainow, ed., *Louisiana Civil Code: Revisions of 1870 with Amendments*

⁴⁴ Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Church was first located at 1503 Annette Street before being relocated to St. Bernard Avenue.

It was perhaps the women's devotion to their local parishes that occasionally led church officials to grant religious dispensations to Creoles who were ineligible to take the sacraments. Around the turn of the century, a small but significant number of Creole women received matrimonial dispensations. A dispensation from the Diocese authorized the parish priest to suspend the general laws of the Catholic Church to allow ineligible couples to legitimate their union in the Church. The Church granted dispensations most commonly for couples of different religious backgrounds and for consanguineous couples.⁴⁵ In 1889, when non-Creole black couple Samuel Gordon and Anna Johnson married in Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Church, they received a dispensation for a "mixed marriage"—he was Catholic and she was Protestant.⁴⁶ The priest noted in the marriage register that if the couple ever has children, "they must be brought up in the Catholic Church." In 1896, colored Creoles Emma Bernard and her husband-to-be George Moret received a dispensation for a second-degree consanguineous marriage at St. Augustine—Emma and George were first cousins.⁴⁷ Upper-class Creole families often sought to preserve their elite bloodlines by intermarrying with other well-established Creole families, which sometimes involved marrying a collateral relative.⁴⁸ Although consanguineous marriage was usually frowned upon by non-Creole black families, Creoles continued to embrace the practice at the turn of the century. In 1896, wealthy

⁴⁵ Dispensations for couples of different religious backgrounds was noted in the record, the "Decree Concerning 'Sponsalia' and Matrimony" included in the St. Augustine Parish Marriage Registers, as "mixtae religionis" or "disparitas cultus (disparity of worship)". Consanguineous couples were blood relatives descended from the same ancestor.

⁴⁶ Marriage Register, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Parish, Archdiocese of New Orleans.

⁴⁷ Marriage Register, St. Augustine Parish, vol. 7, Archdiocese of New Orleans.

⁴⁸ Collateral relatives are descended from the same ancestor but do not share the same direct bloodline.

businessman and esteemed member of the Creole community, Ovide C. Blandin,⁴⁹ acted as witness to the second-degree consanguineous marriage of Irene Petilat and Joseph P. Dolliole. Blandin's open support of the couple's union suggests that consanguinity continued to be a valued and respected practice among elite Creole family networks.⁵⁰

By the late nineteenth century, relatively few Creoles sought to legalize their interracial relationships through marriage, yet the Catholic Church continued to perform marriages across the color line. Although interracial couples did not need an official dispensation from the Church to marry, priests occasionally indicated in the marriage registers if the couple was interracial; even if the marriages were not forbidden they were certainly noteworthy. In 1886, a colored Creole woman named Françoise Soulé, and her French fiancé Joseph Bruat legitimated their relationship in the Catholic Church.⁵¹ Françoise Soulé was the illegitimate daughter of a colored woman named Eugenie Roy and a Frenchman named Pierre Soulé, a famed attorney and U.S. politician.⁵² At the time of their marriage, Françoise and Joseph had been living together for nearly

⁴⁹ Ovide Casimir Blandin was the son of Adolphe Blandin, a wealthy colored Creole grocer who owned \$14,000 in real and personal estate in 1860. In the early Reconstruction period, Ovide became a State Delegate for Orleans Parish (Second District, 1867-1868). He eventually became a self-described "capitalist" and major property holder in the Seventh Ward. *Property Tax Assessment, Orleans Parish, Second Municipal District* (1880), New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana Division; *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860*; *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880*; *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900*; Charles Vincent, *Black Legislators in Louisiana During Reconstruction* (Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1976).

⁵⁰ For regulations regarding dispensations for marriage, see "Decree Concerning 'Sponsalia' and Matrimony," printed in the marriage register for St. Augustine Parish; Marriage Registers, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Parish; For more about non-Creole blacks and taboos about sexual relationships with extended relatives, see John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*, 149-172.

⁵¹ Marriage Registers, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Parish.

⁵² Pierre Soulé also acted as defense attorney for Pierre Leblanc and Eglantine Desmazillieres in the case of *Anastasié Desarzant v. Pierre Leblanc and Wife*, also known as the "Toucoutou Affair" (see Chapter One)

thirty years and had seven children together. For many years, Françoise lived under the guise of “housekeeper” in Joseph Bruat’s home, but it is presumed that after the couple legitimated their relationship in the Church they lived openly as husband and wife.⁵³

Even after Louisiana reinstated the ban on interracial marriage in 1894,⁵⁴ the Catholic Church sanctioned a handful of marriages between white men and colored Creole women. In 1902, a colored Creole woman named Eleonore Guyot married her white fiancé, Louis Delahoussaye, in Our Lady of the Sacred Heart. Three years later in the same parish, Anna Marie Decou, a colored Creole woman, married a white man named Lille Michel Toledano. By all indications, Anna Marie was light enough to pass for white. Her paternal grandparents were light-skinned free Creoles of color from Point Coupée Parish; her maternal grandmother was a mulatto woman and her maternal grandfather was a Sicilian-born immigrant who, ironically, worked in the mid-nineteenth century as a police officer even though he was engaged in a long-term, illegal interracial union.⁵⁵ By 1910, Anna Marie had been involved in an illegal interracial marriage for five years yet because of her white appearance, the census taker noted her as the

⁵³ *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860; Ninth Census of the United States, 1870; Tenth Census of the United States, 1880.*

⁵⁴ Interracial marriage was legal in Louisiana between 1870 and 1896.

⁵⁵ I could not locate a marriage certificate for Anna Decou’s maternal grandparents, Germain Berton and Françoise Bricou. It is possible that the couple did not attempt to legitimate their relationship because interracial marriage was illegal from 1825 to 1870 (and then again in 1894) and Germain Berton worked as a police officer in New Orleans in 1860. Berton also later fought for the Confederacy in the Civil War as a 2nd Lieutenant in Company F, 4th European Infantry Regiment, Louisiana. Louisiana. Booth, Andrew B., *Records of Louisiana Confederate Soldiers and Louisiana Confederate Commands*, 3 vols. New Orleans, 1920 (Reprint) Spartanburg, SC: The Reprint Company, 1984, as cited in *American Civil War Soldiers* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com.

white wife of Lille Michel Toledano.⁵⁶ Despite Anna Marie's racial "passing" in the census, the attending priest listed her as *couleur* (colored) and Lille Michel Toledano as *blanc* (white) in the marriage register, indicating that he knew the couple was interracial but performed the marriage ceremony anyway.⁵⁷

Beyond spiritual fulfillment or religious obligation, colored Creole women understood the practical benefits of engaging in religious sacraments and rituals. In the act of baptism, the naming of the godparents not only provided children with a means of support if their parents could no longer care for them but godparentage also strengthened kinship bonds between extended family members and allowed Creole families to create ties to other family networks in the community. Wealthy Creole Eglantine Desmazillieres Leblanc acted as *marraine* (godmother) to at least four children in the 1880s, all of whom were extended relatives of the Desmazillieres family. It is likely that the relatives chose Eglantine because she was among the most economically secure and socially well-connected members of the family.⁵⁸ Godmothers were chosen for practical reasons as well as personal affinity. In 1880, a Creole woman named Marie Augustine acted as godmother to three different children in less than a six-month period. Because all three children were either natural or illegitimate, it is possible that Marie Augustine acted as a patron or sponsor to ensure that the children would be cared for if something happened to their mothers. For

⁵⁶ In 1910, Anna and Lille Michel lived at 1719 Touro Street and Anna's brother, Adigé Decou lived a few houses down at 1741 Touro. Adigé was also listed as white.

⁵⁷ *Registers of Marriage, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Church, 1905.*

⁵⁸ It is important to note that although Eglantine Desmazillieres had the economic wherewithal to care for godchildren as early as the 1850s, she did not become a godmother until she was legally married to Pierre Leblanc in 1882, which suggests that family stability was also an important factor in choosing godparents.

mothers of illegitimate or natural children, the naming of godparents was particularly important, not only to ensure the safety and wellbeing of their children but also to create some semblance of social legitimacy for children who were not considered legitimate heirs.

Parents chose their children's godparents for myriad reasons. The importance of kinship, friendship, and even occupational networks led many parents to name siblings, extended relatives, close friends or fellow tradesmen as godparents.⁵⁹ In 1903, unmarried Creole mother Pauline Arthidore baptized her natural daughter Josephine Arthidore in Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Church and named her sister, Josephine Barbarin [née Arthidore] as the child's *marraine*. Pauline's decision to select her oldest sister as godmother and to name the child after her suggests that the two women had a warm relationship. Pauline and Josephine seemed to have a close relationship with their other sisters as well; when Josephine baptized her children in the Church, she named three Arthidore sisters as *marraines*.⁶⁰ Pauline likely chose Josephine as *marraine* because the sisters Arthidore shared a close bond, but it is also possible that Pauline chose her, in part, because Josephine and her husband Isidore Jean Barbarin were socially well connected in the Creole community. The couple lived in the Tremé neighborhood and earned a modest living as unskilled laborers,⁶¹ but Isidore Barbarin was also a prominent musician and during his life he

⁵⁹ For more on the relationship between godparentage and kinship and occupational networks, see Juuso Marttila, "Beyond the Family and the Household: Occupational Family Networks," *Journal of Family History* 35, no. 2 (April 1, 2010): 128-146.

⁶⁰ Louise Arthidore (spelled Arthidor) acted as *marraine* to Josephine's son Adolphe Paul Barbarin in 1899; Elizabeth Arthidore (spelled Artidor) acted as *marraine* to Theresa Barbarin in 1900; and in 1902, Emilie Arthidore (spelled Artidore) acted as *marraine* to Louis Isidore Barbarin whose *parrain* was Mack Royal, the father of Pauline Artidore's natural children.

⁶¹ In 1900 Isidore worked as a day laborer and Josephine worked as a house maid.

maintained significant ties with other well-known musicians such as Bunk Johnson, Joe “King” Oliver, and the young Louis Armstrong. As Isidore Barbarin’s wife, Josephine socialized with members of some of New Orleans’ best-loved brass bands, even appointing Creole musicians Paul Chaligny and Bartholemy Bruno as *parrains* to two of her children.⁶² Perhaps by naming Josephine Barbarin as *marraine* to the younger Josephine, Pauline Arthidore not only sought to reinforce kinship ties within the family, but she also sought to create important social connections for her children through her sister’s associations.⁶³

While Josephine Barbarin maintained significant social ties in the colored Creole community, she was likely excluded from the most elite Creole social circles. Her husband Isidore Barbarin played the cornet for several popular brass bands⁶⁴ and although he performed at parties and events for exclusive Creole social clubs, musicians and performers were not typically well respected among the colored Creole elite. Josephine’s employment as a domestic servant suggests that she socialized primarily with other ordinary working-class and middle-class Creole women and their families. Despite Josephine and Isidore’s modest economic status, his reputation as a popular musician connected their family to

⁶² in 1893, Bartholemy Bruno became *parrain* to Josephine and Isidore Barbarin's daughter Marie Antoinette; In 1899, Paul Chaligny became *parrain* to Adolphe Paul Barbarin who eventually followed in the footsteps of his father and *parrain* by becoming a musician. Three of Josephine and Isidore Barbarin’s sons—Paul, Louis, and Lucian Barbarin—became successful musicians in their own right. Josephine was also the grandmother of the late musician Danny Barker.

⁶³ *Registers of Baptism, St. Augustine Church; Registers of Baptism, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Church*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900*; Al Rose and Edmond Souchon, *New Orleans Jazz: A Family Album*, 3rd ed. (Louisiana State Univ Pr, 1984); Louis Armstrong, *Satchmo* (Da Capo Press, 1986).

⁶⁴ Including but not limited to the Onward Brass Band, the Excelsior Brass Band, the Tuxedo Brass Band, and the Original Zenith Brass Band.

the Creole masses, which ultimately enhanced their social standing within the community. Social connections within the Creole community became even more important as Creole privilege and influence diminished in public spaces. Belonging to powerful Creole social networks not only created a greater support system for Creoles but it was also evidence of one's membership in the colored Creole community. For brown-skinned Creoles like Josephine and Isidore Barbarin, social connections provided powerful evidence of Creole heritage even when their skin color and physical appearance did not.⁶⁵

By the end of the nineteenth century, as white supremacy shaped the southern social order, skin color and physical appearance became increasingly important physical markers for belonging to the colored Creole community. Light or white skin not only distinguished colored Creoles from darker-skinned non-Creole blacks, but it served as physical evidence of the Creoles' European heritage and their racial proximity to whiteness. If whiteness was presumed to be superior then the colored Creoles, who shared the same European bloodlines, reasoned that they should be granted at least some of the privileges of whiteness; however, the Jim Crow laws of the 1890s forced colored Creoles and non-Creole blacks to share public space and social status. Yet for those nearly white Creoles who were frequently mistaken for white in public spaces, many still avoided the most severe color prejudice and occasionally enjoyed the benefits of whiteness. In the U.S. Supreme Court trial, *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), Homer Plessy's

⁶⁵ According to census records for Josephine Arthidore Barbarin and Isidore Barbarin (1880 - 1930), they were both consistently listed as negro or black—not mulatto. Surviving photos of Isidore Barbarin confirm that he was brown-skinned. For photos and biographical information on brass band members, see Al Rose and Edmond Souchon, *New Orleans Jazz: A Family Album*.

attorney Albion Tourgée argued that a white physical appearance was so valuable that it should be considered property:

How much would it be worth to a young man entering upon the practice of law to be regarded as a white man rather than a colored one? Six-Sevenths of the population are white. Nineteenth-twentieths of the property of the country is owned by white people. . . . Under these conditions, is it possible to conclude that the reputation of being white is not property? Indeed, is it not the most valuable sort of property, being the master-key that unlocks the golden door of opportunity?⁶⁶

Although the courts did not agree with Albion Tourgée, colored Creoles knew that light skin afforded them greater social capital and they took action to preserve those privileges.⁶⁷

Colored Creole women understood all too well the value of light skin and a white physical appearance and several women's organizations became supporters of Homer Plessy's case. Plessy and the Citizen's Committee (*Comité des Citoyens*), a Creole social action group, fought for years to challenge the constitutionality of the Louisiana Separate Car Act (1890), which segregated all street cars and intrastate trains. Many African American and colored Creole churches, schools, and organizations from all over Louisiana donated money to Plessy and the Citizen's Committee but a handful of colored Creole women's organizations gave sizeable donations. Most women's groups could afford only modest amounts of money, usually less than twenty dollars, but some groups

⁶⁶ As quoted in Otto H. Olsen, *The Thin Disguise: Turning Points in Negro History: Plessy v. Ferguson, A Documentary Presentation*; also quoted in Brook Thomas, ed., *Plessy v. Ferguson: A Brief History with Documents*.

⁶⁷ For an extensive analysis on the value of whiteness, see Cheryl I. Harris, "Whiteness as Property," 1707-1791.

gave more. The Ida Club⁶⁸ gave \$55, Les Dames Inseparables gave \$50, and the ladies of the Society des Francs Amis together with the Ida Club raised another \$140 for Homer Plessy through concerts and various fundraising events.⁶⁹ The women took action because they believed that providing separate accommodations for persons of color was a violation of their citizenship rights; still some were perhaps even more concerned about the hardening of the color line between whites and nearly white colored persons, which forced colored Creoles to share space with non-Creole blacks and ultimately diminished the Creoles' social privilege.

Yet whites perceived the large population of nearly white colored persons as a threat to the future of white supremacy in New Orleans and they responded by aggressively embracing segregation legislation. The large population of mixed-race persons, both colored Creoles and light-skinned American blacks, was a reminder of New Orleans's unconventional past and an ever-present obstacle to becoming fully Americanized under the South's Jim Crow order. In a pamphlet published by The Citizen's Committee, Albion Tourgée highlighted whites' fear and hatred of nearly white colored persons: "Unlike all other distinctions found in our American life, the nearer the individual approaches in intellect, culture, character and conditions, to the ideal by which the white race measures the comparative excellence of its own individuals, the more obnoxious he becomes to those who arrogate to themselves the right to control his conduct

⁶⁸ The Ida Club, "dramatique, lyrique, et littéraire" (dramatic, lyrical, and literary), is likely named after the poem "A *Ida*" by F. Liotau published in *Les Cenelles*.

⁶⁹ The list of donors and the amounts given are listed on the final pages of "The Violation of a Constitutional Right" (1893).

and shape his destiny.” Tourgée reasoned that white supremacy necessarily required the subjugation of the nearly white Creole because, as he asserted, “how shall a man, who has nothing to boast of but his white blood, maintain his claim of ‘superiority,’ if a ‘bleached nigger’ is looked upon with tolerance!. . . . How shall a white man of wealth enjoy his wealth and duly impress others with his greatness, if a colored man is allowed to own a finer house, have better horses and make as much display as he? Evidently it cannot be done.”⁷⁰ Three years after Tourgée wrote these words on behalf of the Citizen’s Committee, the United States Supreme Court ruled against his client Homer Plessy in the trial, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, affirming Tourgée’s allegations about racial stratification and white supremacy.

At the time Plessy’s legal battle began, colored Creole women were not yet the targets of Jim Crow legislation and they continued to have greater social mobility than colored Creole men. When Louis Martinet and The Citizen’s Committee first began planning to test the Louisiana Separate Car Act (1890) they recognized that whites showed a greater tolerance for light-skinned colored women in public spaces. In an 1891 letter to Albion Tourgée, Louis Martinet wrote, “It would be quite difficult to have a lady too near white refused admission to a ‘white’ car,” and they ultimately decided that the test would be most successful if they used a light-skinned man— Homer Plessy.⁷¹ By the mid 1890s, Louisiana enacted new anti-miscegenation legislation specifically designed to

⁷⁰ Albion Tourgee, “The Violation of a Constitutional Right” (The Crusader Print, 1893), Amistad Research Center, Tulane University.

⁷¹ “Louis A. Martinet to Albion Tourgée, October 5, 1891,” #5760, Albion W. Tourgee Papers, 1880-1896, Special Collections, Kent State University, as cited in Olsen’s *Thin Disguise*, 56.

target colored women. In 1894, Louisiana reinstated the ban on interracial marriage. By 1908, interracial concubinage was made a felony punishable by up to one year spent in prison or laboring in a workhouse. Colored women may not have been considered a major threat in public spaces, but whites understood the potential threat women posed in private spaces and they actively sought to keep colored women from forming intimate relationships across the color line.⁷²

In response to interracial concubinage becoming a felony, more colored Creole women sought intimate partnership exclusively among colored men, which contributed to the growing insularity within the colored Creole community. It was not unusual for Creoles to socialize mainly with other Creoles but as Jim Crow infiltrated both private lives and public spaces, women could no longer gain social benefits through relationships with white men nor could they whiten their offspring through interracial unions. Instead, colored Creole women had to cultivate light skin and social privilege through intimate relationships with colored Creole men. Yet, finding appropriate partnership was not easy—imbalanced sex ratios, although less severe around the turn of the century, still presented challenges for women seeking partners; the declining social and economic status among Creoles also meant that women were choosing from a narrowing pool of acceptable men. In order to maintain the integrity of colored Creole womanhood in the community, the women worked to protect their roles as

⁷² Mark Elliott, *Color-Blind Justice: Albion Tourgee and the Quest for Racial Equality from the Civil War to Plessy v. Ferguson* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2006), 248; Keith Weldon Medley, *We As Freeman: Plessy v. Ferguson* (Pelican Publishing Company, 2003), 133-135; Barbara Y Welke, "When All the Women Were White, and All the Blacks Were Men: Gender, Class, Race, and the Road to Plessy, 1855-1914," *Law and History Review* 13 (1995): 262-316.

homemakers and skilled laborers and as faithful members of the Catholic Church. Yet doing so required the women to constantly tend to kinship and friendship networks which ultimately contributed to the growing separatism and insularity of the Creole community.

Chapter Four: Preserving Privilege Through Practicality

Colored Creole women's roles in the family shifted in response to the Louisiana legislature's redefinition of race and color. The establishment and enforcement of rigid segregation and antimiscegenation laws between 1890 and 1910 deterred many colored Creole women from engaging in intimate relationships with white men. At the same time, the changing emphasis on racial taxonomy also discouraged fair-skinned colored Creole women from forming partnerships with darker-skinned men. As African Americans across the country pondered the future of the race, colored Creoles understood that their future as a distinct group relied heavily upon cultivating familial relationships exclusively within the colored Creole community. Women implicitly recognized their responsibility to select carefully from the available pool of colored Creole men and to foster Creole cultural traditions in the home. Colored Creole women worked to preserve those characteristics of Creole womanhood that had previously distinguished them from non-Creole black women: having light skin; possessing a long family legacy of freedom; embracing domesticity and homemaking; performing skilled occupations, and participating in Catholic religious traditions. However, as the colored Creoles' privileged status diminished, it became more difficult to maintain their distinction from African Americans. Despite their precarious future, colored Creole women did not seek to maintain their privileged status by adopting more stringent codes of morality and respectability. While African-American middle-class women may have embraced marriage and sexual chastity for women as essential markers of social

status, colored Creole women followed a system of practical morality that often placed the obligations of the family and the improvement of the larger Creole community above aspirations for individual morality or respectability.

The 1908 ruling by the Louisiana Supreme Court, which made interracial concubinage between whites and blacks a felony crime, significantly impacted the way colored Creole women formed partnerships. Women engaged in interracial relationships were certainly in the minority but the 1908 ruling fueled subsequent legal battles over the color line and contributed to the growing social stigma against interracial relations of any kind. In 1910, a white man named Octave Treadaway faced charges for living in open concubinage with a colored woman; he appealed the charges on the basis that his partner, an octoroon, was not a negro but rather a person of color. The Louisiana Supreme Court agreed that colored persons had historically occupied a different category than negroes. The 1908 Concubinage Act specifically prohibited “the living together or cohabitation of persons of the Caucasian and of the *negro* races [italics added],” intentionally excluding, as Treadaway’s attorneys argued, persons of color. During Treadaway’s appeal, the Louisiana Supreme Court judges acknowledged that the author of the bill originally cited both blacks and persons of color but subsequently struck out the clause that included persons of color. The court concluded that lawmakers would not have eliminated the clause implicating persons of color if the law was indeed designed for persons of mixed blood. Although the Supreme Court sided with Treadaway, the legislature convened the

following month and amended the law to include persons of color as well as blacks.¹

As the legal consequences of possessing black ancestry became more severe, cases determining racial identity sometimes appeared before the Louisiana Supreme Court. In 1910, the same year as Octave Treadaway's trial, a case of possible mistaken racial identity appeared before the Louisiana Supreme Court. Sam Lee and his wife sued the New Orleans Great Northern Railroad Company in the amount of \$15,000 for pain and suffering when the train conductor, believing the Lee's were colored, demanded the couples' two teenage daughters, Edith and Belle, give up their seats in the white car and move to the negro car. When the girls refused to move, the train conductor ejected them from the train, causing the family "great mortification and humiliation." When the case first appeared before a District Court in St. Tammany Parish, the defense claimed they had evidence confirming that the girls were of mixed ancestry on the maternal side of the family. The court concluded that Sam Lee was undoubtedly white, but questions arose about the ancestry of his wife, Adaline Baham Lee. Adaline's father was of mixed ancestry but through the trial, it remained unclear if her father, Abraham Baham, was of mixed Indian or African ancestry, an essential detail to the case. If Mrs. Lee's father was indeed part Indian rather than African, the Louisiana Separate Car Act (1890) would not have

¹ Section 1 of Act No. 87 of 1908: "Be it enacted by the general assembly of the state of Louisiana, that concubinage between a person of the Caucasian or white race and a person of the Negro or black race is hereby made a felony, and whoever shall be convicted thereof in any court of competent jurisdiction shall for each offense be sentenced to imprisonment at the discretion of the court for a term of not less than one month nor more than one year with or without hard labor." The 1910 reissue of the Concubinage Act was virtually the same as the 1908 Act but the 1910 Act replaced the phrase "person of the negro or black race" with "person of the colored or black race." Concubinage Act, 1908, Section 1 of Act No. 87; Concubinage Act, 1910, Act 206; *State v. Treadaway* 126 La. 300; 52 So. 500 (Supreme Court of Louisiana 1910).

applied to his granddaughters. Further complicating matters was the fact that Abraham Baham had been deceased more than twenty years at the time of the trial. In the St. Tammany District Court, several witnesses from both the prosecution and the defense testified to Mr. Baham's racial ancestry. After hearing conflicting testimony, the judges asserted that they would determine Mr. Baham's racial ancestry "not only by evidence of the admixture of negro blood, but by evidence of reputation, of social reception, and the exercise of the privileges of a white man." Although the court admittedly heard a substantial amount of evidence to support the Lee's case that Abraham Baham was not a negro, the Louisiana Supreme Court justices asserted that the evidence was not sufficient to overturn the original ruling as "erroneous." The burden of proof was on the Lee family and ultimately they did not have sufficient evidence to prove their daughters were free of African ancestry.²

The Lee daughters' courtroom drama was not wholly unfamiliar to Creoles. A century before the Lee family appeared before the Louisiana Supreme Court, the case of *Adelle v. Beauregard* (1810) determined that mulatto persons were presumed to be of privileged free status; but by the turn of the twentieth century segregation legislation called for strict separation of the races without a margin, which eliminated mulattoes' privileged legal status and relegated them to the same degraded status as blacks. Creoles who had previously occupied the marginal space between black and white not only lost their privileged intermediate legal status but they also lost the social benefits that came with

² *Lee v. New Orleans Great Northern Railroad Co.* 125 La. 236; 51 So. 182 (Supreme Court of Louisiana 1910); Louisiana Separate Car Act, 1890, section 2, Act 111.

being of mixed racial ancestry. The case of *Adelle v. Beauregard* concluded that all mulattoes were presumed to be in possession of their freedom unless an accusing party could prove otherwise. By 1910, the legal trial of *Lee v. New Orleans Great Northern Railroad* proved that the presumption of African ancestry was sufficient evidence to deprive citizens of their equality and it was up to the accused to prove they were indeed *not* black.³

Segregation and antimiscegenation legislation (including the Plessy decision in 1896 and the Concubinage Act of 1908 which made interracial concubinage a felony crime and its reissue in 1910 to eliminate the legal distinction between colored and black), led to a shift in Creole family formation. Even if interracial families managed to live together in secret, segregation laws ensured that they could not travel together in public. As the legal and social benefits women gained from interracial unions diminished dramatically, fewer women were willing to risk their reputations and their freedom for the slim chance at achieving social improvement through extralegal relationships. By 1910, it had become clear that women could no longer effectively cultivate Creole ancestry by forming intimate relationships across the color line; instead, women had to cultivate Creole ancestry exclusively from *within* the colored Creole community.⁴

The growing proportion of colored Creoles who claimed married status further suggests that more colored Creole women and men sought legitimate

³ *Adelle v. Beauregard* 1 Mart. (o.s.) 183 (Supreme Court of Louisiana 1810).

⁴ A. Leon Higginbotham Jr., *Shades of Freedom: Racial Politics and Presumptions of the American Legal Process* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 127-151; Paul F LaChance, "The Foreign French," in *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization*, 120-126; Alecia P Long, *The Great Southern Babylon: Sex, Race, and Respectability*, 10-15, 55-56; Concubinage Act, 1908, Section 1 of Act No. 87; Concubinage Act, 1910, Act 206.

partnerships with one another. Between 1900 and 1930, the percentage of Creole men claiming bachelor status declined from 34.4 percent to 26.5 percent, while men claiming married status increased from 60.8 percent to 71.4. Among colored Creole women, the proportion of women claiming married status increased from 48.8 percent to 54.2 percent. While the growth among Creole married women may seem rather modest for a thirty-year period, it is important to look closer at the sources of the growth: as the percentage of married women increased, the percentage of single women decreased, suggesting that more single women were getting married. It seems logical that the pool of available single women would be the source of growth for the expanding married population; however, that was not the case among colored Creoles between 1880 and 1900. In the final two decades of the nineteenth century, the proportion of married Creole women increased but the source of growth came from the widowed population, not from the population of single women. By 1930, however, more single Creole men and women were choosing marriage: between 1900 and 1930, the percentage of single Creole women declined from 25.2 percent to 18.6 percent and the percentage of single men declined from 34.4 percent to 26.5 percent. The shrinking population of single Creoles and the growing proportion of men and women claiming married status suggests that colored Creoles were taking calculated measures to foster marriage in the community.⁵

By the turn of the century, African Americans throughout the U.S. began embracing marriage as the foundation of the family and an important indicator of

⁵ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930*.

middle-class and aspiring-class values.⁶ With marriage at the center of African-American notions of middle-class respectability, Creoles undoubtedly felt pressure to more aggressively embrace marriage as a marker of both class and respectability. For Creoles, embracing marriage was also linked to their developing group consciousness. Unmarried motherhood and common-law unions, which were increasingly associated with the darker, poorer classes of African Americans, became less acceptable choices for Creole women who desired to preserve their distinction from non-Creole black women. But regardless of how much Creole women may have wanted to get married, the persistently imbalanced sex ratios hindered the Creoles' ability to fully embrace matrimony as the foundation for procreation and family organization. In 1900, the sex ratio among Creole adults living in the Seventh Ward was 76.7 men for every 100 women—lower than for either whites or blacks.⁷ The sex ratio did not change much over the next three decades; by 1930 there were 76.6 Creole men for every 100 women.⁸ Regardless of the social prescriptions endorsing marriage, Colored Creole women remained conflicted between the desire to uphold the ideal of

⁶ The emphasis on marriage as the foundation for the family and as a marker of social respectability emerges after emancipation and is solidified with the growth of the black middle-class. See Stephanie J. Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to Be and to Do: Black Professional Women Workers During the Jim Crow Era* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1996); Michele Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction*; Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (The University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

⁷ In 1900, the sex ratio among Seventh-Ward white adults was 87.8 and among black adults, the sex ratio was remarkably even with 95.8 men for every 100 women.

⁸ Among blacks and whites living in the Seventh Ward in 1930, the sex ratios were 90.4 men for every 100 women and 91.8 men for every 100 women respectively.

marriage and the demographic realities that made marriage difficult, if not impossible, for many Creole women.⁹

Unmarried mothers, abandoned lovers, and widowed women sometimes classified themselves as married, which suggests that even in the absence of marital relationships, colored Creole women considered marriage to be an important factor in determining their social standing and reputation. Even after the dissolution of a relationship, some Creole women continued to present themselves as married women. Stella Relf married Creole cigar maker George Tervalon in 1885 and by 1900 the couple had three children together. By all indications, George Tervalon lived the life of a sporting man. In 1879, he had a child out of wedlock with a woman named Malvina Miguel.¹⁰ In 1880, George Tervalon married Marie Torregane and by 1881 the couple had a daughter named Emma.¹¹ In the same year Emma was born, George had another child with a woman named Josephine Bannafou and baptized the baby in St. Augustine Church.¹² Although George's marriage to Stella lasted longer than any of his previous relationships, by 1910, the couple had split up and George was living as a "single" boarder in the home of a married couple in the Tremé. Stella continued to report herself as a married woman until George's death in 1928, after which

⁹ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930*.

¹⁰ Malvina Miguel was the niece of Norbert Rillieux, a prominent Creole engineer and inventor. In 1880, Malvina and her daughter Louisa Elvige Josephine Tervalon lived with Norbert and his wife Catharine.

¹¹ By 1900, Emma Tervalon was sixteen years old and living as a boarder in a residence on Customhouse in an area near the red-light district. *Orleans Parish Marriage Index, 1831-1925*; *Orleans Parish Birth Index, 1869-1885*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900*.

¹² Although it doesn't appear that George and Josephine lived together, they baptized their child Louis Phillippe Tervalon as a natural child in 1881. *Registers of Baptism, St. Augustine Church*.

she claimed widowed status.¹³ Surely Stella's family, friends, and neighbors knew that George had left the family but by continuing to claim married status, Stella may have hoped to retain some respectability as a legal wife rather than publicly acknowledge her position as an abandoned woman.

Malvina Miguel, the mother of George Tervalon's illegitimate daughter Louisa, also claimed to have once been married—presumably to George—when she listed herself as a widowed mother in 1880. Malvina Miguel had lived with her uncle Norbert Rillieux, a prominent Creole engineer and inventor, since she was a young girl and continued to do so even after she had given birth to Louisa.¹⁴ By reporting herself as widowed, Malvina Miguel may have desired not only to affirm her own propriety but also to preserve respectability for her uncle and aunt who supported her. Yet the fact that Norbert Rillieux and his wife Catharine allowed Malvina to continue to live with them even after she had a child out of wedlock suggests that unwed motherhood, though frowned upon, was not an unforgivable offense. In 1881, two years after the birth of her daughter, Malvina married Creole cigar maker Pierre Mazin and the couple went on to have five children together, the oldest of whom was named Norbert, after her uncle.¹⁵

¹³ *Orleans Parish Death Index, 1918-1928*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930*.

¹⁴ Norbert Rillieux developed a faster more efficient method for refining sugar which revolutionized the sugar industry. He also submitted plans to the city to improve the canals and sewer system but because he was a man of color, the city rejected his designs. Rillieux's plans reportedly would have significantly reduced the death toll in New Orleans caused by yellow fever. Wihelmena Robinson, *Historical Negro Biographies* (New York: Publishers Co. Inc., 1969), 117-118 as quoted in Rodolphe Desdunes, *Our People and Our History*, 73.

¹⁵ Malvina and Pierre Mazin married on May 30, 1881 and Norbert Pierre Mazin was born December 23, 1881, which suggests that Malvina was probably pregnant at the time of the marriage. By 1930, Norbert Pierre was listed in the census living uptown as a white man named Peter N. Mazin (Peter is the English name for Pierre). *Orleans Parish Marriage Index, 1831-1925*; *Orleans Parish Birth Index, 1869-1885*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930*.

Perhaps Malvina faced less social stigma for having a child out of wedlock than some other women because her uncle was a prominent member of the colored Creole community. The most esteemed members of the Creole community enjoyed the greatest flexibility in matters of morality and virtue but it is likely that for all Creole women, the support of family members somewhat mitigated the shame of unwed motherhood.

In addition to family support, other social factors could alleviate the social stigma of unwed motherhood, which highlights the flexibility of Creole morality. Contemporary scholarship suggests that middle-class African Americans ascribed to rigid codes of morals and sexual virtue. In contrast, colored Creoles adhered to a practical morality that was somewhat negotiable and examined matters of morality in a holistic manner.¹⁶ In other words, Creoles took into consideration the social standing and family background of the person committing the social transgression and determined whether the benefits of engaging in socially questionable behavior ultimately outweighed the risks. In the case of Malvina Miguel, she came from a well-respected Creole family who supported her and her daughter, which may have helped diminish the social castigation that accompanied unmarried motherhood. The fact that only two years after the birth of her illegitimate daughter she was able to secure a marriage with a middle-class

¹⁶ For more on the relationship between African American social class and codes of respectability, morality and sexual virtue, see Michele Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction*; Michele Mitchell, "Silences Broken, Silences Kept: Gender and Sexuality in African American History," *Gender and History* 11, no. 3 (November 1999): 433-44; Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Harvard University Press, 1994); Victoria W. Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability: African American Women in Interwar Detroit* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Stephanie J. Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to Be and to Do: Black Professional Women Workers During the Jim Crow Era*; Willard B. Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color: Black Elite, 1880-1920* (Indiana University Press, 1990).

Creole man indicates that unwed motherhood did not necessarily damage women's social reputations beyond repair.

Social standing in the Creole community was determined by a complex web of factors, the most significant of which were matters of lineage, heredity, and social breeding. Non-Creole blacks certainly considered matters of family background and social breeding to be important indicators of social class and status but they placed a greater emphasis on personal achievement than did colored Creoles. In his 1960 sociological study of New Orleans's colored Creole community, Roland Wingfield described social relationships in the colored Creole community as *Gemeinschaft*-like, where the interests of the community are often placed above the needs of the individual. Wingfield concluded that colored Creoles who were born in 1910 or earlier placed a greater value on those factors that made one essentially Creole—having a strong Creole lineage with evidence of antebellum free colored status; demonstrating good manners and a pleasant personal comportment, which was considered evidence of superior Creole social breeding; and possessing physical features that clearly indicated European ancestry. He found that Creoles placed less emphasis on matters related to personal achievement or individual choice, including wealth, education, moral conduct, personal fame, or occupation. Wingfield also found that the subsequent generation placed greater emphasis on personal achievement. For Creoles born between 1910 and 1940, family background and skin color were the two most important social factors; however, manners, or social breeding, became less important while factors of personal achievement or individual choice, including education, moral conduct, and occupation became more important. Wealth and

personal fame were the two least important factors for Creoles born between 1910 and 1940. It is likely that African-American social prescriptions had a greater influence on the younger generation of Creoles. But for colored Creoles born before the reissue of the Concubinage Act in 1910, which forced colored Creole persons to share legal status with African-Americans, social standing was largely determined by those factors which linked them to the colored Creole community.¹⁷

Because matters of lineage, social breeding and heredity were critical in determining one's place in the social hierarchy, colored Creole women tried to choose their intimate partnerships and social relationships carefully. Determining one's social standing based on ancestry and family background was a complex process. Colored Creole families with French or Spanish ancestry and long legacies of freedom generally held the highest status. Anglo-European ancestry was not significant in the Creole community. Inquiring about someone's surname was a subtle way for Creoles to determine whether someone else was also Creole. Aline St. Julien, a Creole woman who spent her youth in the Tremé in the 1920s and 1930s, remembered meeting new friends and potential suitors as a young woman after which her older relatives would ask, "Is he Creole?" "Are They Creole?" or, "What's his name?" If the young man's last name was American, Ms. St. Julien's mother inquired about his mother's and

¹⁷ For colored Creoles born before 1910, the factors determining social rank are listed here in order of importance: family background, manners, color, wealth, education, moral conduct, personal fame (moral conduct and personal fame were ranked equally), occupation. For colored Creoles born between 1910 and 1940, the factors determining social rank are listed here in order of importance: family background, color, education, manners, moral conduct, occupation, wealth, personal fame. Roland Wingfield, "The Creoles of Color: A Study of A New Orleans Subculture" (Master's Thesis, Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University, 1960), 59-97.

grandmother's maiden names until she found a French or Spanish last name. Although most Creole names were French or Spanish in origin, other well known Creole surnames including McKenna and Macarty usually indicated Creole ancestry. Names like "Jones or Johnson or Brown" revealed that the person was an "American negro" and was therefore a questionable partner.¹⁸ As more colored Creoles intermarried with American blacks, surnames were not always accurate indicators of Creole ancestry, but inquiring about someone's last name became a symbolic test that simultaneously determined one's membership in the Creole community while reaffirming the importance of non-Anglo European ancestry to a Creole ethnic identity.¹⁹

Having good manners was also an important factor in determining social standing and respectability in the colored Creole community. Because personal conduct is primarily learned behavior, having good manners indicated that one came from a good family. With Creole girls' reputations on the line, mothers, grandmothers, and other female guardians supervised the behavior and social activities of young girls and frequently chaperoned the girls in public spaces. Nuns and religious women also took an active role in policing the social behavior of young women. At St. Mary's Academy for Young Ladies of Color, the Sisters of the Holy Family sought to educate the students academically and to also "instill that refinement which marks the woman of virtue and culture." In order to ensure the girls remained respectable, the Sisters did not allow the girls to leave the boarding residence for social purposes unless they were accompanied by a

¹⁸ Aline St. Julien interview, "Divided for Color and Hair" in "Quartee Red Beans, Quartee Rice" (New Orleans, LA, n.d.), Amistad Research Center, Tulane University.

¹⁹ Arthé A. Anthony, "The Negro Creole Community in New Orleans, 1880-1920," 101-109.

parent or chaperone. The Sisters also monitored the girls' mail and correspondences, inspecting all sent and received letters and packages and destroying any materials "not considered good."²⁰ The students from St. Mary's Academy came primarily from middle-class and elite families and were likely chaperoned more closely than Creole girls from the lower social classes; however, even the poorest Creole families could instill good manners in their children, which made social etiquette an equalizing factor among colored Creole of all economic backgrounds.

As the color line became more rigid in New Orleans and the consequences of being black more severe, skin color became one of the most important factors in determining colored Creole status. Light skin and fine features had always been important indicators of Creole heritage—being highly visible markers of European ancestry—but by the early decades of the twentieth century, possessing light skin and fine features became essential to a Creole ethnic and cultural identity. For most of the nineteenth century, colored Creoles' privileged status was shaped primarily by their freedom, wealth, and skilled or professional occupations yet by the early twentieth century, those previous markers of status had begun to fall away and both Creoles and non-Creoles shared marginalized non-white status. At the same time, a handful of non-Creole blacks managed to gain wealth, learn skilled trades, and educate their children in both secondary and higher education, which further blurred the line between Creole and non-Creole. Creoles found that by determining social status primarily by ancestry,

²⁰ "St. Mary's Academy for Young Ladies and Girls, prospectus, 1905" (A. P. Bedouin, n.d.), Convent of the Sisters of the Holy Family, New Orleans, LA.

heritage, and skin color, and only secondarily by personal achievement, they reaffirmed their commitment to the collective community and effectively maintained social separation from non-Creole blacks.²¹

Women, as reproductive partners and the bearers of children, were expected to be particularly mindful of skin color and physical features when choosing partners. Although a complex web of social factors determined who was an appropriate partner and who was not, Creole women were often encouraged by older female relatives to select a partner of the same skin color or lighter. Women who did not date acceptable partners experienced significant tension in their familial relationships, which often provided enough incentive to follow the social rules of being Creole. Women who dated men who were too dark to be considered acceptable were sometimes chided by their female relatives and told their children would be “niggers”—the implication of which is not only that they would be considered black, and therefore inferior, but also that the children would remain on the social margins of the Creole community.²² Women were expected to consider the skin color of their future children when selecting a partner; if they did not, the family’s female relatives would often weigh in on the matter. One Seventh Ward resident, Zona Duplessie, whose mother, grandmother, and aunts grew up in the early twentieth century, recalled the

²¹ For more on skin color among twentieth-century Creoles, see Arthé A. Anthony, “The Negro Creole Community in New Orleans, 1880-1920,” 101-102, 134; Arthe A Anthony, “‘Lost Boundaries’: Racial Passing and Poverty in Segregated New Orleans,” in *Creole: The History and Legacy of Louisiana's Free People of Color*, ed. Sybil Kein (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 295-316; Virginia R Dominguez, *White By Definition: Social Classification in Creole Louisiana*, 206-210; Roland Wingfield, “The Creoles of Color: A Study of A New Orleans Subculture.”

²² Interview with Zona Duplessie, audiocassette transcribed by the present author, in “St. Mark's Ethnic Heritage Project, Oral History of the Tremé and Seventh Ward” (New Orleans, 1978), Amistad Research Center, Tulane University.

women's influence during her early years of courtship. Duplessie asserted that when she dated young men who were too dark, female relatives would disapprove, saying, "your children would have nappy hair," and "don't have those little black nappy-headed babies around me." She said that when her female relatives approved of the young man's color, they commented about how the couple would one day have "nice" children.²³ As light skin became an essential physical marker of Creole distinction, selecting a partner with light skin and fine features with whom you could reproduce light-skinned children became essential to Creole courtship and family making.

Even after a woman secured a husband of an acceptable color and had a child with him, the most color-conscious relatives in the family often expressed concern about how dark the child would eventually become. It was not uncommon for her female relatives to inspect the newborn babies in the family, examining the fingernails, tips of the ears, and other physical features, in an attempt to assess what color the children would be once they reached maturity.²⁴ A small number of Creole women from the educated elite may have come in contact with literature regarding scientific theories of racial formation and alleged methods of detecting African ancestry, but the overwhelming majority of women developed their ideas about color from within the Creole community. Women first learned how to perform color tests from other female kin who undoubtedly learned from their female predecessors. Whether it was done directly or indirectly, from the privacy of the family home or in a communal

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ For more on examining for physical markers of skin color, examine interviews with Zona Duplessie, Olga Jackson, and Aline St. Julien, audiocassettes transcribed by the present author, "St. Mark's Ethnic Heritage Project, Oral History of the Tremé and Seventh Ward."

setting, Creole women passed on their notions and beliefs about race, color and reproduction to their children. In doing so, they were shaping the younger generations' understanding of what it meant to be Creole.²⁵

Creole women took a particularly active role in securing partnerships for their children. Mothers encouraged their sons and daughters to attend social events in the community where they could meet acceptable partners and arrange courtships. Young adults often joined junior auxiliaries of Creole social-aid-and-pleasure clubs where they could meet and socialize exclusively with other Creoles. Since Creoles usually formed friendships and courtships within the neighborhood, some parents made certain that their children socialized solely with Creoles of the fairest complexions. One Seventh Ward Creole, Clarence Guillamet, attested to the pervasiveness of "paper bag tests" and claimed that it was typically the mothers who administered the test. He recalled attending several Creole parties as a youth where, "the mama was at the door with a paper bag." According to Guillamet, the mothers would attempt to be discrete about it, using a paper bag as the receptacle to hold the tickets taken at the door as party guests arrived: "If you were too dark, your ticket wasn't accepted and placed in the paper bag."²⁶ To some extent, Creole mothers saw monitoring the color line among their children's peers as responsible parenting. Seventh Ward resident Zona Duplessie recalled an incident where the women from the family of a boy she was dating came to see what she looked like and to find out more about

²⁵ Ariela J. Gross, *What Blood Won't Tell: A History of Race on Trial in America*, First Edition. (Harvard University Press, 2008), 9-10, 38-41; Virginia R Dominguez, *White By Definition: Social Classification in Creole Louisiana*, 206-210.

²⁶ Interview with Clarence Guillamet, audiocassette transcribed by the present author, "St. Mark's Ethnic Heritage Project, Oral History of the Tremé and Seventh Ward."

whether she was an acceptable partner or not. During her courting years, Duplessie remembered meeting young men's parents but, as she recalled, "his mother would do all the talking." Fathers took an interest in their children's courting practices as well, but Creoles recalled a particularly high level of social involvement and policing from the women in the family.²⁷

Despite the best efforts of mothers and female chaperones to police the girls' social and sexual activities, it was not uncommon for Creole women and men to engage in premarital sex. The census records reveal that illegitimacy was often remedied by the parents' subsequent marriage. Some couples married prematurely—marrying either immediately before the birth of their first child or shortly thereafter—while others waited several years after the birth of their children to get married. In 1930, forty-one-year-old widowed laundress, Valentine Leblanc, reported that she married her husband Joseph in 1910, yet the couple's eldest son Joseph Jr. was born in 1909.²⁸ In 1900, Euphrosine Durald and her husband Oscar reported to the census taker that they had been married for ten years and had a ten-year-old son. Yet marriage records show that Euphrosine and Oscar married in 1895—not 1890 as the couple had reported. Euphrosine was not a young woman and she already had three adult children from a previous relationship but she and Oscar still felt compelled to make their relationship appear publicly respectable.²⁹ In 1930, Cecilia Broussard lived on

²⁷ Interview with Zona Duplessie, "St. Mark's Ethnic Heritage Project, Oral History of the Tremé and Seventh Ward."

²⁸ It is unclear if Joseph and Valentine Leblanc were ever legally married. No record of the couple's marriage was found. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930*.

²⁹ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900; Orleans Parish Marriage Index, 1831-1925*.

Duels Street with her husband Louis and the couple's children and grandchildren. Cecilia and Louis claimed to have been married for twenty-five years. The couple's eldest child, Louis Jr., was twenty-seven years old, which would have made him illegitimate at the time of his birth. Louis Jr. and his wife Ernestine lived with Cecilia and Louis Sr. in the house on Duels and although they claimed to be married for seven years, the couple had a nine-year-old son. Cecilia and Louis Broussard allowed Louis Jr. and Ernestine to live together in their house without being married, which suggests that although premarital sex and premature marriages were frowned upon, they were still somewhat tolerated.³⁰

Both Louis Jr. and Ernestine contributed financially to the household, which likely made their presence in the household more bearable for Louis Sr. and Cecilia. It is also possible that Louis Sr., who was older than his wife, considered Louis Jr. and Ernestine's presence in the household a form of social security for his wife in the event he passed away. Beyond any sentimental ideal of marriage or virtue, mothers understood that they could potentially gain social and financial security through their children. The disproportionately large population of Creole widows suggests that women's futures were particularly precarious; the women were motivated, at least in part, by their desire for self-improvement. In 1900, elderly widow Eliza Petit lived with her daughter and

³⁰ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930*. For more on African-American and working-class attitudes about sexual virtue and acceptable behavior, see Ruth M. Alexander, *The "Girl Problem": Female Sexual Delinquency in New York, 1900-1930* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 48-50; Michele Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction*, 94-95; Mary E. Odem, *Delinquent Daughters: Protecting and Policing Adolescent Female Sexuality in the United States, 1885-1920* (The University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 43-45; John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, 2nd ed. (University Of Chicago Press, 1998), 74-75, 183-188;

son-in-law who provided for her financially. Eliza actually appeared in the 1900 census twice—once as a resident in the Frenchmen Street home of her younger daughter and son-in-law, Adelaide and Albert Carriere, and again as a resident on St. Bernard Avenue in the home of her older daughter and son-in-law, Louisa and Paul Milanes— and in neither residence did Eliza report employment, which suggests that she was able to stay home. Eliza eventually took permanent residence in Louisa and Paul’s home where she lived until at least 1920. Paul Milanes was a dentist and had the financial wherewithal to care for his mother-in-law, whereas Adelaide’s husband who worked as an unskilled day laborer likely struggled to provide for his family.³¹

Though some mothers gained social and economic security through the good fortune of their daughters’ marriages, others had to continue working while living with their daughters and sons-in-law. In 1930, elderly widow Mary Gibson lived with her daughter and son-in-law on North Robertson Street. Mary’s son-in-law Louis Gonzales worked as a porter and although he made enough money to let his wife Julia stay home to care for their four young children, he could not afford to support his mother-in-law as well. Mary Gibson worked as a housekeeper for a private family and although she may have wished to quit working and help her daughter keep house, she had few other options available to her. Mary’s two other daughters were unmarried schoolteachers and would not have been able to support their mother any better than Julia and Louis Gonzales. For many women, securing respectable and mutually beneficial relationships for

³¹ Louisa and Paul Milanes’ last name is sometimes noted as Lavigne. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930*.

their daughters continued to be a viable and practical method for ensuring their own security in their later years.³²

For some widowed mothers, the practical benefits of allowing unmarried children and their common-law lovers to live in the family household sometimes overshadowed the social dishonor of unmarried, domestic partnership. In 1900, Pauline Arthidore and her domestic partner Maximillian “Mack” Royal lived with their two children on Hospital Street in the Tremé in the home of Pauline’s widowed mother Louise. Louise Arthidore worked as a cook to support her three minor children who still lived at home and it is likely that she needed the economic support Pauline and Mack provided.³³ Despite Louise Arthidore’s presumed acceptance of Pauline and Mack’s common-law relationship, the couple attempted to create some semblance of legitimacy by concealing their true married status and listing themselves in the census as a married couple, with Pauline sharing Mack’s last name.³⁴ Though Pauline Arthidore and Mack Royal maintained their relationship for at least seven years and had four children together, their relationship was unstable and tumultuous at times; Mack and Pauline baptized their son Barthelemy Joseph Royal in St. Augustine Church in 1899 and less than two years later, Mack baptized another child in St. Augustine—this time with a woman named Elizabeth Fortier. Mack and Pauline later reconciled and baptized their fourth child in 1903 at Our Lady of the Sacred

³² U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930*.

³³ Although Pauline was not formally employed, Mack Royal worked as a carriage driver and as a musician.

³⁴ In the 1900 census, Mack and Pauline appear with the surname “Roy” instead of Royal. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900*.

Heart Church. Despite the precarious nature of the couple's relationship, they still desired the social respectability that accompanied legitimate marriage.³⁵

The presence of marriage did not necessarily indicate stability. The growth of marriage among colored Creole women and men may have also resulted, in part, from the Creoles' economic decline. As the proportion of married Creoles increased, so did the proportion of Creole nuclear families living with extended relatives. Between 1900 and 1930, the percentage of households headed by both husband and wife increased from 63 percent in 1900 to 74.4 in 1930; and the percentage of two-parent, nuclear families living with extended relatives increased from 9.2 percent of all colored Creole households to 15.9 percent.³⁶ Nuclear families took in extended relatives for myriad reasons. Some solidly middle-class Creole nuclear families took in the more vulnerable members of the family. On New Orleans Street in the Seventh Ward, Creole physician Joseph Hardin owned his own home—valued at \$6,000—where he lived with his wife Leontine and their three young children as well as Joseph's unmarried sister, Geneva Marchand; his widowed mother, Adele Marchand; and his elderly uncle, John Hardin. In the household of eight, Joseph Hardin was the only employed family member but it is likely that Geneva and Adele contributed to the household by performing essential domestic chores.³⁷

Evidence from the census suggests that in the early decades of the twentieth century, extended family members became an increasingly important

³⁵ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900; Registers of Baptism, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Church; Registers of Baptism, St. Augustine Church.*

³⁶ Two-parent nuclear families living with extended relatives are classified in the appendix as Simple Extended households.

³⁷ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930.*

source of social and economic support for widowed and unmarried colored Creole mothers. Between 1900 and 1930, the percentage of women claiming widowed status remained high. Widows comprised 25.8 percent of the population of Creole women in 1900 and 25.6 percent in 1930. In contrast, the percentage of black women who claimed widowed status was 15.5 and 16.9 percent respectively. At the same time, the percentage of Creole households containing only women and their children declined significantly, which suggests that fewer widowed and unmarried mothers were living alone without the assistance of extended family members or boarders. The excessively high population of female Creole widows suggests that a significant minority of women claiming widowed status were probably unwed mothers. The tendency of Creole women to falsely claim widowed status certainly did not originate in the twentieth century but in prior decades, widowed and unwed mothers were remarkably adept at caring for their children without extended family members or boarders living in the household. In 1880, 15.5 percent of all Creole households contained one parent living alone with their children and in 1900 that number increased to 17.6 percent.³⁸ By 1930, the percentage of Creole households containing one parent living alone with their children had declined to just 8.5 percent, suggesting that fewer widowed and unwed mothers were able to take care of their children without assistance from extended family members.³⁹

³⁸ The overwhelming majority of single-parent nuclear households were headed by women. In 1880, 5 single-parent nuclear households in the census sample were headed by fathers—one of whom was white. In 1900, only 1 household in the sample was headed by a father and in 1930, all single-parent nuclear households in the sample were headed by women.

³⁹ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880, Orleans Parish*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930*.

By 1930, married couples also struggled financially and fewer Creole husbands could afford to keep their wives at home. By living in extended family arrangements and combining resources, some men continued to keep their wives and daughters from working outside the home. Between 1900 and 1930, marriage rates among Creoles increased, and the number of extended households rose, yet fewer women could afford to remain at home. The percentage of Creole wives who stayed home declined from 79.3 percent in 1900 to 73.9 percent in 1930. Some Creole families responded to the economic decline by either taking in extended kin or moving in with their extended relatives. By 1930, a greater percentage of married Creole women who stayed home lived in households with extended relatives than in 1900. In 1900, 14.5 percent of all married women who stayed home lived in households containing a two-parent nuclear family and extended relatives.⁴⁰ By 1930, the percentage increased to 23.1 percent. By living with extended relatives, ordinary colored Creole women increased their chances of staying home and performing the role of domestic wife and mother rather than working outside the home for wages.⁴¹

Just because a man could afford to keep his wife at home did not necessarily mean that she always behaved like a well-mannered Creole woman. On April 25, 1925, despite laws regarding the prohibition of alcohol in the United States, a New Orleans police officer arrested thirty-three-year-old married Creole homemaker Viola Gillard along with five or six of her Seventh-Ward neighbors

⁴⁰ Simple Extended households.

⁴¹ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930*.

for drinking and disturbing the peace.⁴² The following day, Viola was arrested again for being drunk in public. On Claiborne Avenue, Creole homemaker Leonetta Quest and her husband Emile were arrested along with two other people on a Sunday afternoon for disturbing the peace. Although most Creole homemakers who appeared in arrest records were detained for petty crimes, some women committed more serious offenses. On July 4, 1925, a Seventh-Ward homemaker named Alberta Royal and her husband Cornelius were arrested at approximately 1 a.m. at the corner of Touro and Marais Streets for fighting and disturbing the peace. Alberta Royal allegedly got the better of her husband because the police additionally charged her with “cutting and wounding one Cornelius Royal.” Both Albert and Cornelius had to either pay \$15 or spend thirty days in jail for the offense.⁴³

In New Orleans, where daily survival was first and foremost, sex, violence, and vice were not necessarily incongruent with respectability, and in some cases, they were the means to obtaining it. The generations of Creole women who unlawfully established relationships across the color line or illegally obtained inheritances for themselves and their children understood that the end goal sometimes justified the means. Nevertheless, breaking social or legal codes involved a certain degree of risk. The Creole community forgave most readily those women who, after violating the law, managed to either improve or maintain their social position. There was a number of ways women improved their position by breaking the law, including illegally obtaining money or property,

⁴² The prohibition of alcohol went into effect in January, 1920.

⁴³ *Arrest Records, New Orleans Police Department, 1925, City Archives, NOPL.*

selling their personal affections for material gain, and whitening their children through interracial unions.

Women who risked violating the law in pursuit of social improvement sometimes ended up in a worse social position than where they started. In 1925, the police came to arrest Emile Logas and his wife Mary Gougis Logas (née Johnson) at their home on Annette Street for violating the Concubinage Act of 1910. Emile Logas, a native-born white man of French and Swedish parentage, married Mary Johnson, a fair-skinned colored woman of Creole descent in 1891, at a time when interracial marriage was still legal but the color line was becoming increasingly rigid. After Louisiana reinstated the ban on interracial marriage in 1894, the couple and their four children lived as white. In 1900, Mary claimed to be a Louisiana-born white woman of Swedish parentage and Emile claimed to be a Louisiana native of French parentage. The couple misrepresented their ancestry yet they based their claims on Emile's actual ancestry: According to the 1870 census, Emile's father Francois was a Swedish-born immigrant and his mother Sophie arrived in New Orleans from France. Although Mary Logas was actually a colored woman, she must have looked white in order to pass as the offspring of Swedish parents.⁴⁴

It appears that Mary only passed for white in an official capacity; in her daily life, she appears to have maintained contact with her family of origin. In 1900, Emile and Mary Logas shared the same dwelling on North Derbigny Street with two other families. Both families were black and one had the surname

⁴⁴ *Arrest Records, New Orleans Police Department, 1925*, City Archives, NOPL; *Orleans Parish Marriage Index, 1831-1925*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Ninth Census of the United States, 1870*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900*.

Johnson, Mary's maiden name, indicating that Mary continued to have close contact with her colored relatives. For the next two decades Mary and Emile continued to live together with their children; however, as the rules about interracial relationships became more rigid, Mary and Emile appear to have distanced themselves from Mary's colored kin. In 1910, the couple and their children no longer shared a dwelling with colored families but they took in Emile's nephew, Charles Massoto.⁴⁵ In 1920, Mary and Emile Logas lived on Annette Street with their son Emile Jr., their daughter Irene and her husband John Priez, their son Andrew, their widowed son-in-law, Joseph Matherne, and his young daughter Aline who was named after her deceased mother, Aline Logas Matherne—all of whom were listed as white.

The events that triggered the couple's eventual arrest remain unknown, but on the evening of June 16, 1925, the police swiftly arrested Emile Logas at the family's home on Annette Street. Approximately thirty minutes later, they arrested Mary in the Eighth Ward near St. James and Painters Streets. Emile was released the same night on a \$250 bond and Mary was subsequently paroled for violation of the Concubinage Act of 1910. At the time of their arrest, Mary and Emile Logas had already lived together as a legitimate family for at least thirty-four years. Although Mary and Emile married during the period between 1870 and 1894 when interracial marriage was legal, law enforcement refused to acknowledge the legality of the union, and subsequently charged the couple with violation of the Concubinage Act. Mary and Emile Logas's family was

⁴⁵ In 1910, Charles Massoto is listed as Emile Logas's nephew. In 1920 and 1930, Charles Massoto is listed as a boarder; however, because he lived with the Logas family for at least twenty years and even moved with them when they relocated to Annette Street, it is likely that Charles was kin to the family.

permanently altered by their public exposure. In 1930, Emile Logas Sr. still lived on Annette Street with the couple's "white" children, Emile Jr. and Irene Priez, and nephew Charles Massoto, but Mary no longer lived with the family.⁴⁶ Irene Priez continued to claim married status, but her husband John had abandoned Irene and the Logas family, leaving her to raise the couple's son Lawrence without him. Joseph Matherne also left his in-laws' house and purchased a home several blocks away on Frenchmen Street, leaving his daughter Aline behind to be raised by her deceased mother's family. It is possible that John Priez and Joseph Matherne left the Logas family household after discovering that their mother-in-law, and consequently their wives, were colored women.⁴⁷ It is unclear what happened to Mary but it is possible that she maintained some kind of relationship with Emile and her children because although Mary no longer lived with her husband in 1930, Emile still reported himself to the census taker as a married man.⁴⁸

The hardening of the color line and the rigid enforcement of the Concubinage Act had damaging effects on Creole families and redefined the way colored women formed intimate partnerships. As the practical value of interracial relationships diminished and the social and legal consequences became more severe, fewer colored women and white men were willing to take

⁴⁶ In 1930, Emile Logas's family still lived on Annette Street but they moved a few houses away from their 1920 residence on Annette Street residence. In 1920, Emile Sr. rented a house at 1715 Annette Street and in 1930, Emile Jr. was listed as the owner of the family's home at 1701 Annette Street.

⁴⁷ Although Joseph Matherne made an effort to keep his family together after the death of his wife by living with the Logas's, he may have faced significant social stigma by the discovery of Mary and Emile's violation of the Concubinage Act. Joseph was a relative of the elite Crozat family, a white Creole family with deep roots in New Orleans and he may have been pressured to leave his colored daughter behind. Despite the scandal, Joseph still recognized the existence of his marriage; in 1930, although he lived alone, he listed himself as a widower.

⁴⁸ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930*.

the risk. Although interracial relationships were no longer a viable method of social improvement, the colored Creoles' code of practical morality permitted women to develop new and creative ways of attaining and preserving status and respectability almost exclusively from within the colored Creole community.

**Chapter Five:
Living in “Splendid Isolation”: Women, Community, and
Identity in the Early Twentieth Century**

The colored Creole community responded to increased racial segregation and the hardening of the color line by strictly reinforcing the cultural boundary between colored Creoles and African Americans. Although Creoles had little authority to stop legislators from legally classifying them as negroes, the Creole community sought to preserve some semblance of social privilege by maintaining cultural separation. Colored Creole men were the most publicly visible members of the community, and they organized and directed the community in matters of legal or civil rights; however, colored women’s efforts, public and private, were central to the community’s development. In many ways, women were essential to preserving Creole distinction. Wives and mothers upheld domesticity and keeping house as markers of respectable Creole womanhood; by passing down housekeeping skills and traditional methods of Creole homemaking, the women taught their daughters and granddaughters to do the same. Working women clung fiercely to their traditional Creole occupations, including skilled and professional jobs as well as a number of informal occupations, even amidst the social and economic decline of the Creole community. Creole clubwomen gave generously of their time and money to assist the most destitute members their community. Women, as the moral purveyors of the family, also ensured their families’ participation in Catholic religious traditions, which strengthened the bonds within the community and further reinforced the cultural difference between Catholic Creoles and Protestant African Americans. Finally, Creole

women of all social classes were responsible for organizing parties, holidays, and celebrations—events which were at the heart of Creole social life.

Creole identity at this time was increasingly bound up with ideals of respectability. These ideals moved Creole identity farther away from the sexual license that had characterized the community in the nineteenth century. But not all colored Creole women aligned themselves with this respectability. Arrest records reveal a handful of Creole women who worked as prostitutes, madams and hustlers, while others appeared on record for theft, violence, public drunkenness and various other crimes. Even for those women who violated the rules of respectability, the Creoles' practical codes of morality did not necessarily banish those women to the social margins. Status in the community was determined by a host of factors, and violence or minor infractions did not automatically result in diminished respectability. Yet as colored women became increasingly anxious about matters of respectability and social status, they worked both individually and collectively, to enforce socially respectable behavior as a marker of the community's cultural boundary between Creole and non-Creole blacks. In doing so, colored Creole women helped to preserve the last vestiges of Creole social privilege in the age of Jim Crow.

Because Creole women understood homemaking and keeping house as an extension of the Creoles' privileged status, the women sought to pass down domestic skills and crafts to their daughters. One of the most significant domestic traditions women passed on to their daughters was the art of Creole cookery. Even today, as many old Creole traditions have fallen out of practice, Creole cuisine remains one of their strongest connections to the past. Mothers

taught their daughters to cook primarily for practical reasons. Cooking was an essential domestic chore that required a considerable amount of time and energy from all the women in a household. Creole cooking was also a valuable skill that women could use to earn income. One colored Creole woman, Anna Johnson, recalled helping her mother cook for wealthy white Creoles at a Social Aid and Pleasure Club on St. Peters Street. From nine o'clock in the morning until the evening, Anna Johnson and her mother cooked traditional Creole cuisine for the club members, including shrimp Creole, crawfish bisque, and *cowain* (turtle). Whether women cooked for their families or for employers, Creole women and their daughters maintained strong links to their Creole heritage through cooking.

Although cooking was arguably the most significant domestic custom passed down from mother to daughter, women also taught girls methods of resourceful homemaking and housekeeping. Domestic skills were essential to Creole womanhood; wives were expected to keep a clean and orderly home and, if necessary, use their housekeeping skills to make money. Most Creole families lived on a limited budget and mothers taught their daughters to be shrewd and practical in household affairs. Girls learned how to “make groceries” (do the grocery shopping) for the family, and their mothers instructed them on where to get the freshest meat and produce and how to get the best deals. In addition to learning practical skills of housekeeping and homemaking, some Creole girls became proficient in ornamental and decorative crafts. Pupils at St. Mary’s Academy, a private Catholic school for colored girls, learned decorative sewing

skills including, “embroidery, crochet, Tarleton, [and] flowers.”¹ Although specialty sewing lessons were generally limited to girls from middle-class or elite families, working-class Creole girls gained practical sewing skills while sewing with other women. Creole girls also learned creative ways to beautify their homes. A common practice among Creole women was to wash the *banquettes* [sidewalks] in front of their homes with red brick powder or yellow ochre. Washing the sidewalks with color was an affordable way to improve the outside of the home but it was a rather laborious task that older women sometimes hired younger women to do. Whether women adorned their homes with intricately-sewn decorative objects or brightened their sidewalks with colored powder, Creole women made earnest efforts to beautify their homes as an essential part of Creole homemaking and they instructed their daughters to do the same.²

As Creole social and economic status diminished, fewer husbands could keep their wives at home without supplementary income. Between 1900 and 1930, although the percentage of married women increased, the percentage of married women who stayed home declined from 79.3 percent to 73.9 percent. Wives who kept house often earned money from home to help support the household. By doing so, wives could embrace domesticity while still contributing to the household economy. Census records provide a rather static and incomplete picture of women’s work. The records are particularly silent on wage-

¹ Tarleton, or Tarlatan, is a thin muslin fabric used under ball gowns to give them shape. Learning Tarleton would have been essential for high-fashion dressmaking.

² “St. Mary’s Academy for Young Ladies and Girls, prospectus, 1905” (A. P. Bedouin, n.d.), Convent of the Sisters of the Holy Family, New Orleans, LA; Interviews with Irma Williams and Anna Johnson, audiocassettes transcribed by the present author, “St. Mark’s Ethnic Heritage Project, Oral History of the Treme and Seventh Ward.” Lyle Saxon and Edward Dreyer, *Gumbo Ya-Ya: A Collection of Louisiana Folk Tales*, 1st ed. (Pelican Publishing Company, 1987), 45.

earning strategies for women who did not work outside the home for wages. Interviews with Creole residents of the Tremé and Seventh Ward conducted in the 1970s by the St. Mark's Ethnic Heritage Project shed some light on the resourceful ways Creole women earned income from home in the early decades of the twentieth century. According to the residents, one of the most common ways women earned money was by taking in laundry. Women who had the space and equipment at home to wash, dry, and iron large amounts of laundry often did so to supplement income. One Creole resident, Gerald Emelle, recalled his mother and grandmother doing other people's laundry from the family home. Washing clothes for wages did not bring in much money but women preferred the freedom and security of working in their own homes on their own schedules, away from the watchful eye of white employers. Gerald Emelle's grandmother ironed clothes for the same white man for more than twenty years but she never let him in her house. According to Emelle, "she always met him at the door. She always taught us never to let white people in your house."³ Gerald Emelle's grandmother's response to white men in her home indicates an important shift in the relationship between colored women, white men, and respectability. As relationships across the color line became less acceptable, and in many cases were illegal, colored women distanced themselves from their past connections with white men by keeping them out of the house entirely. By keeping out white

³ Interview with Gerald Emelle, audiocassette transcribed by the present author, "St. Mark's Ethnic Heritage Project, Oral History of the Tremé and Seventh Ward."

employers, colored Creole women could maintain the integrity and privacy of the family home, while also using the home as a workspace.⁴

Although some women kept white employers out of their homes, it was not uncommon for Creole women to conduct their business directly from the household. Creole ladies ran “sweet shops” in their homes, selling candy, beverages, and frozen treats to neighborhood children, often from the front window of the house.⁵ Creole hairdressers typically serviced clients in their own homes, as did some seamstresses and music teachers. In 1912, twenty-one-year-old Creole hairdresser Rita Barrois worked from her parents’ home on St. Philip Street in the Tremé where she offered hairdressing services as well as “massage and scalp treatments;” Creole matron Victoria Gaspard worked as a “fashionable dressmaker” from the Frenchmen Street home she shared with her husband, elderly mother, and her nephew; Naomi Verrett and her sister Fabiola Franklin both worked from the family home—Naomi gave music lessons and Fabiola worked as a dressmaker.⁶ All of the women mentioned above lived in homes headed by their fathers or husbands. Although Creole patriarchs could not always sustain the household without the help of other wage earners, most managed to keep their wives and daughters from working outside their homes.

⁴ African American women and working-class women of all colors regularly performed various types of informal, wage-earning labor from home. See Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*, 112-114; Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860*, 46-52; Susan Strasser, *Never Done: A History of American Housework*, 110-112; Ellen Ross, *Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London, 1870-1918* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 44-47.

⁵ “Black Tour of Tremé,” audiocassette transcribed by the present author, “St. Mark's Ethnic Heritage Project, Oral History of the Tremé and Seventh Ward.”

⁶ *Wood's Directory: Being a Colored Business, Professional, and Trade Directory of New Orleans Louisiana* (New Orleans: Allan T. Woods, 1912), 30, 35, 44.

Creole women's work underwent subtle yet important changes in the early twentieth century. Advances in technology and mechanization forced some types of women's work into factories. Some women who previously contributed to the household economy by working from home were obliged to earn income outside the home, often performing similar types of labor in factories. At-home seamstresses began working in clothing factories and laundresses took jobs in commercial laundries. Although home production continued to be a popular way for Creole women to earn income, noticeably fewer married women could afford to support their families by working inside the home.⁷

The declining number of Creole dressmakers, tailors, and seamstresses who worked from home indicates a major shift in Creole women's employment. Between 1900 and 1930, the percentage of women employed in seamstress work declined. At the same time, the type of labor that seamstresses performed also underwent major change. In 1930, 23.9 percent of Creole workingwomen were employed as seamstresses, down from 33 percent in 1900.⁸ And for the first time, the majority of seamstresses worked in clothing factories rather than sewing from their own homes. Part of what had made seamstress work attractive to women was the flexibility of the work schedule and the ability to earn money from home while still tending to the family. By moving into the factories, women not only lost personal autonomy but they also lost some of the skill required for

⁷ Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States*, 108-137.

⁸ Although the percentage of Creole seamstresses declined among women of all marital statuses, the following is a breakdown of the decline: Between 1900 and 1930, the percentage of married workingwomen employed as seamstresses declined from 27.8 percent to 22.2; among single women, the percentage declined from 38.2 percent to 27.8 percent; and among widowed women, from 29.6 percent to 20 percent.

handmade sewing—skills that had been passed down from Creole mothers and grandmothers for generations. Industrial sewing reduced seamstress work from a skilled craft to routine factory labor. Women in factories sewed clothing parts rather than whole tailored outfits. In 1930, Estelle Roques reported herself as a seamstress in a pants factory. It is unlikely that Estelle made the whole pair of pants; she probably sewed only the inseam, or inserted the zipper. Some Seventh Ward Creole women who worked in clothing factories listed more specific jobs, including making collars, trimming fabric, and cutting thread.⁹

The demands of factory labor likely contributed to the decline among employed single and widowed women. Factory women had to abide by their employers' schedules, rules, and regulations and were often made to work under harsh physical conditions. The women were also vulnerable to the demands of inappropriate employers or supervisors who sometimes took advantage of their female employees. In 1900, approximately half (49.3 percent) of all single Creole women and 58.7 percent of widowed women reported employment and by 1930, the percentage of employed single and widowed women declined to 46.2 percent and 30.3 percent respectively. The sharp decline of widowed seamstresses may be due to the inability of elderly widows to maintain the pace of factory work. Many older women continued to perform seamstress work from home. In 1930, elderly Creole widow Marceline Faure owned her own home on Pauger Street (valued at \$3,600) where she worked as a dressmaker. Fifty-seven-year-old Creole widow Marcelin Patin worked as a seamstress from her home on Allen Street where she

⁹ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930*.

lived with her divorced daughter, Leontine Boidore (also spelled Boisdore). The thirty-five-year-old Leontine worked as a factory seamstress at the nearby Haspel Company on St. Bernard Avenue in the Seventh Ward. It may be that elderly women could not readily keep up the pace of factory labor, but the tendency of older women to continue sewing from home indicates something further. The increasing demand for factory seamstresses diminished young Creole women's need or desire to retain the sewing skills of their mothers and grandmothers and highlights an important shift away from skilled female labor.¹⁰

Some younger Creole women abandoned trades altogether to take up professional occupations. By the early decades of the twentieth century, a small but significant number of educated middle-class black women in major cities throughout the U.S., including New Orleans, began joining the ranks of trained professionals. In 1930, the percentage of Creole workingwomen in the professional ranks was more than four times higher than for black women living in the Seventh Ward. Approximately thirteen percent of employed Creole women reported professional occupations, compared to 2.8 percent of employed black women. Although the percentage of Creole professional women paled in comparison to the 61.9 percent of white working women in professional jobs, it is likely that colored Creole working women took pride in their positions as professionals. As the number of Creole seamstresses declined and more Creole women moved into unskilled or semiskilled factory labor, female professional trades replaced skilled trades as the distinguishing feature of middle-class Creole women's work. In this regard, the colored Creole middle-class began to look

¹⁰ *ibid.*

more like the mainstream middle-class. Teachers, nurses, and office women avoided the harsh working conditions of domestic service and factory labor while earning decent wages for their households. An advertisement for professional training at Fisk University printed in a New Orleans' city directory for African Americans boasted of its students' "high standards of independent manhood and womanhood," suggesting that professional occupations and social respectability went hand in hand.¹¹ In 1930, twenty-six-year-old Hilda Fortune worked as a school teacher and lived with her parents and her seven siblings in the family home on O'Reilly Street. As a school teacher Hilda could earn income to help support the household while maintaining herself as a respectable middle-class Creole woman.¹²

Some women took professional jobs to support themselves after their relationships ended. Virginie Lessassier did not work while she was married to her husband Charles Lessassier. But by 1920, Charles had left the family, and Virginie worked as a nurse for child welfare while supporting her adopted son Charles Jr.¹³ Ten years later, Charles Jr. had moved away but Virginie continued to work as a nurse. Creole widow Mathilde Dupre did not work outside the home until her husband Ernest died in 1927. At least two of Ernest and Mathilde's

¹¹ *Wood's Directory: Being a Colored Business, Professional, and Trade Directory of New Orleans Louisiana* (New Orleans: Allan T. Woods, 1914), 14.

¹² U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930*. Stephanie J. Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to Be and to Do: Black Professional Women Workers During the Jim Crow Era*, 134-63; Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994* (W. W. Norton & Company, 1999).

¹³ I could not locate a marriage record for Charles and Virginie Lessassier and it remains unclear whether the couple was legally married or not. In the 1910 census, they list themselves as a married couple but by 1920, Charles is gone and Virginie gives her marital status as single—not divorced or widowed. Charles Jr. is listed in the 1910 census as the natural child of Malaysian parents.

daughters previously worked in professional trades—Mary Dupre worked as a stenographer for a black newspaper and her sister Viola worked as a stenographer for an insurance company.¹⁴ After Ernest's death, Mathilde joined her daughters in the professional workforce when she took a job as a private school teacher.¹⁵ Another Creole woman, Julia Blandin, became a manager in her family's business after her marriage ended in divorce. Her grandfather John Blandin ran a successful funeral business and Julia likely grew up learning the family trade. Julia Blandin's parents died when she was young and she was subsequently raised by her paternal aunt Felicie Blandin in John Blandin's home. After Julia's 1920 marriage to Oscar Remy ended, she once again resided with her aunt Felicie in the family home and managed the family's funeral parlor. Julia Blandin likely grew up learning the details of running a funeral business and may have been quite adept at her occupation; however, Julia built her career as a professional woman through the opportunities afforded her through her family's business. Although relatively few women came from families who owned and operated their own businesses, many Creole professional women obtained their jobs through connections within Creole family networks or other forms of social privilege.¹⁶

¹⁴ Mary worked as a stenographer in 1920; Viola in 1930. *Orleans Parish Death Index, 1918-1928*.

¹⁵ Mathilde also owned her own home valued at \$2,400 in 1930—something that she and Ernest hadn't done by 1920.

¹⁶ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930*. Julia Noemie Blandin married Oscar Bernard Remy on February 5, 1920. *Orleans Parish Marriage Index, 1831-1925*. Julia's father Sidney Blandin died July 29, 1899; her mother Bertha Blandin (née Poree) died Jun 12, 1900. *Orleans Parish Death Index, 1896-1907*.

Creole women considered professional jobs respectable in part because of the social privilege or family connections that women often needed in order to obtain professional occupations. Creole business owners regularly hired the daughters of friends, neighbors, and relatives to work in the business, but with relatively few Creoles owning or operating white-collar businesses or hiring professional or clerical workers, Creole girls sometimes relied on other forms of social privilege to get jobs. Some white employers would only hire light-skinned girls, particularly for office work or customer service positions. Hazel Bean recalled color discrimination in employment: "You would see a job in the newspaper . . . saying they need a light-skinned girl . . . I shouldn't have even gone there because the ad was in the paper for light-skin."¹⁷ Whether the women obtained jobs through hard work, family connections or by simply having light skin, a significantly higher percentage of Creole women obtained professional occupations than did black women; the small but significant number of Creole women in professional jobs reinforced the importance of light skin and maintained the image of Creole social superiority.

Most Creole working women did not have the opportunity or educational background to work in professional jobs and a significant minority of Creole women worked in domestic labor. The percentage of Creole women working in domestic labor declined between 1900 and 1930, but many women continued to work in domestic labor.¹⁸ By 1930, 45.7 percent of all Creole workingwomen worked as cooks, laundresses or servants, down from 55.7 percent in 1900.

¹⁷ Hazel Bean interview, "Quartee Red Beans, Quartee Rice" (New Orleans, LA, n.d.), Amistad Research Center, Tulane University.

¹⁸ Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States*.

Married and widowed women comprised the majority of domestic laborers. Half of all widowed workingwomen performed domestic labor, as did 55.6 percent of married women. Comparatively, just one-third (33.3 percent) of single Creole women performed domestic labor. The decline in domestic labor was not a trend exclusive to colored Creole women— non-Creole black women also experienced a decline in domestic service work. In 1900, 76.7 percent of black working women were domestic laborers; by 1930, sixty percent of black women reported a domestic occupation. Perhaps the rising marriage rates for women of color contributed in part to the decline in female domestic service workers. With more Creole women choosing marriage in 1930 than in 1900, it is possible that Creole husbands, fathers, and sons worked diligently to keep their wives, daughters, and mothers from domestic service. However, that argument does not explain the decline among black female domestics. Between 1900 and 1930, marriage rates among black women remained steady. While the growth of marriage among persons of color may have contributed to the decline of female domestic laborers, it alone cannot explain the dwindling numbers of black and colored domestic workers.¹⁹

The growth of technology and mechanization appears to have been a significant factor in the decline of black and colored female domestic labor. By the early decades of the twentieth century, middle-class families could send their soiled linens to commercial laundries, which was more efficient than hiring a washerwoman for the day. Some women of color who previously worked as

¹⁹ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930*.

private laundresses began taking jobs in commercial laundries. In 1920, Louise Alexander worked as a laundress from her home but by 1930, Louise worked in a commercial laundry as a “mangler,” or laundry wringer. In 1920, Creole widow Elizabeth Montreuil and her sister Ophelia Nicholas worked as laundresses for private families. Ten years later, Elizabeth’s daughter Viola was also as a laundress but she was employed by a commercial laundry. Elizabeth’s son Andrew also worked in the laundry business as a clothing presser.²⁰

By 1930, it was not uncommon for men to work alongside women in laundries, washing, pressing, and often delivering clothes to customers. In 1930, Oliver Harris, an African-American husband and father of three small children, supported his family by working as a “washer” in a laundry. Famed Creole musician Emile Bigard also earned money as a washer in the 1920s and 30s. Emile Bigard came from a family of prominent musicians and although he was a well-known violinist, in 1920, he supplemented his income by working in a commercial laundry. By 1930, Bigard had retired from music and he and his wife washed clothes for private families.²¹ Black and colored men, many of whom were raised by women, gained experience in their youth performing domestic chores, including cooking, cleaning, and laundry. Though most men suppressed their knowledge of domestic chores as they grew older, embracing their

²⁰ Alice Kessler-Harris details the impact of technology and mechanization on domestic work and household production. Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States*, 108-113. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930*.

²¹ Before he retired from music, Emile Bigard played with Kid Ory, King Oliver, and several bands including the Magnolia Orchestra during WWI and the Maple Leaf Orchestra. He was the uncle of drummer Alec Bigard and clarinetist Albany “Barney” Bigard. Emile Bigard also supplemented his income by running lottery games in the neighborhood. In 1924, the same year he retired from playing music, Bigard was arrested in the Seventh Ward for operating an illegal lottery. *Arrest Records, New Orleans Police Department, 1924*, City Archives, NOPL. Al Rose and Edmond Souchon, *New Orleans Jazz: A Family Album*, 147, 151.

prescribed gender roles and avoiding domestic work, they carried those domestic skills with them into adulthood. Perhaps the commercialization and industrialization of laundry work erased some of the gendered associations between women and laundry. Despite men's employment in commercial laundries, washing clothes for wages remained largely the domain of black and colored women.²²

Some women shunned low-paying domestic and industrial jobs for illicit forms of wage earning. More than a few Creole women appeared in the arrest records as prostitutes, madams, and hustlers. In 1914, seventeen-year-old Rita Baptiste was arrested at the corner of Villere St. and Bienville St. in the red-light district for "sitting in a doorway indecently attired." Rita violated Ordinance 6701, a regulation on prostitution. In 1917, the police arrested twenty-one-year-old Elvira Ducros on Marais Street in Storyville, or "The District" as most locals knew it, for the same crime. In 1921, Loreta Peroux was arrested for prostitution on Franklin Street, in a rough part of town known as "The Battlefield," an area that contained a vice district for African Americans. Peroux violated Ordinance 4565 for practicing prostitution and Ordinance 5112, which appears to have specifically targeted women practicing prostitution with "Venereal Disease [*sic*]."

Light-skinned Creole men also found employment as homosexual prostitutes in the vice districts. Former New Orleans madam, Nell Kimball recalled an active trade in light-skinned colored boys, or *goldskins*. Most of the boys were orphaned, homeless, or living in poverty, which left them few options

²² In her study of working-class Londoners during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, Ellen Ross found that boys frequently helped their mothers with housework and laundry. Ellen Ross, *Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London, 1870-1918*, 80, 148-55.

to earn money. Working in The District may have been lucrative for them because, as Kimball recalled, many of the boys were well taken care of by their white patrons. Musician Danny Barker also noted the market for colored male prostitutes in The District. Barker recalled playing one Friday night at Beansy's Boudoir in 1926, where "about two hundred sissies, faggots, punks, moffydice, she-men and she-boys—all colors, all sizes and all ages (from sixteen to sixty) . . . they would all talk and gossip about each other, just like women do."²³ One madam of a homosexual brothel, a man called Miss Big Nellie, threw lavish soirees for colored male prostitutes and their white johns. According to Stephen Longstreet, "there was no color line" at Miss Big Nellie's house: "Negroes and whites mixed at these balls."²⁴ The description of white men and their colored lovers dancing and socializing at interracial balls evokes images of the lower-class quadron balls of the nineteenth century, where, for a price, white men's sexual pleasures and fantasies were fulfilled by mostly poor and destitute light-skinned women. Although black and colored men were prohibited from entering The District as customers, they were welcomed as prostitutes to satisfy the sexual desires of white patrons.²⁵

Relatively few Creole madams ever appeared in the arrest records, but in 1914, the police arrested Creole housewife Eloise Simone at her home on the edge of the French Quarter for "keeping [an] immoral house." Eloise Simone lived just outside the tenderloin district, where it was legal to keep a house of prostitution,

²³ Stephen Longstreet, *Sportin' House: New Orleans and the Jazz Story*, 201-202.

²⁴ *ibid.*

²⁵ Nell Kimball, *Nell Kimball: Her Life As an American Madam*, 198; Danny Barker and Alyn Shipton, *Buddy Bolden and the Last Days of Storyville* (Continuum, 2001), 110; Stephen Longstreet, *Sportin' House*, 201-202.

and was therefore in violation of the law. Simone never achieved the notoriety of the famed quadroon madams Lulu White and Countess Willie Piazza who ran quadroon brothels in The District, but it is likely that she had a faithful downtown clientele who sought to avoid the brothels in the highly conspicuous red-light district located just several blocks away.²⁶ Unlike the quadroon houses in The District that catered exclusively to white men, it is likely that Eloise Simone served mostly black and colored clients. Eloise's Barracks Street home was just one block from the Tremé and one block from the Seventh Ward, making it accessible for downtown men of color. Although the police eventually uncovered Eloise's illicit business, it is likely that she made great efforts to be discreet. Eloise's two-story home was located near several commercial establishments, including a Chinese laundry, a funeral parlor, and a telephone company. Immediately across the street was a convent for Carmelite nuns. Rather than conduct her illicit business directly from her own private home, it is possible that Eloise ran her "immoral house" from the free-standing two-story building behind her residence which appears to have served as a kitchen or slave quarters at an earlier time.²⁷ Despite the rather conspicuous location of Eloise Simone's home in a busy area of the French Quarter, she perhaps avoided some of the more intense scrutiny of the madams in The District who, by law, had to serve an all-white clientele.

Certainly, some black and colored men hired prostitutes in The District. One former resident of The District, Irma Williams, recalled that even though

²⁶ *Arrest Records, New Orleans Police Department, City Archives, NOPL.*

²⁷ Sanborn, 1908-1909, vol.2 sheet 128. Eloise Simone lived at 1029 Barracks St.

black men weren't legally allowed to patronize the brothels, they sometimes did it anyway. Speaking about the customers in a nearby brothel, Ms. Williams said, "the later it get, the blacker they [the customers] get," suggesting that men of color could get served if they waited until after most of the white patrons had come and gone.²⁸ However, this was the exception—not the rule—and most men of color kept out of The District. Patrolling police officers did not always wait for men of color to illegally enter a brothel in The District before arresting them. On September 27, 1914, Creole dentist Manuel Vincent and two other men of color were arrested at 12:55 am for "loitering at Iberville and Rampart"—one block away from The District's Basin Street boundary. The judge ordered the three men to either pay \$2.50 or serve ten days in jail. While colored prostitutes were allowed to work in The District, colored men were largely forbidden.²⁹

By 1917, the city took greater measures to enforce racial segregation in The District. In February of that year, city officials passed Ordinance 4118, which demanded that all colored prostitutes living and working in the red-light district relocate to the black vice district above Canal Street in The Battlefield. Since the establishment of The District, colored Creoles and other light-skinned women of color either worked in quadroom houses or passed as swarthy white women in white brothels. In her autobiography, former New Orleans madam Nell Kimball recalled hiring colored girls and passing them off as "Spanish." Kimball wrote, "I had a lot of girls who were mulatto, what they call metisse, negrillonne, and from Brazil calcolo and mulato [*sic*]. If they couldn't pass as Spanish, I'd turn them

²⁸ Interview with Irma Williams, audiocassette transcribed by the present author, in "St. Mark's Ethnic Heritage Project, Oral History of the Treme and Seventh Ward."

²⁹ *Arrest Records, New Orleans Police Department, City Archives, NOPL.*

over to a madam that ran a nigger house. I never ran anything but a white whorehouse with a little color, you might say, for flavor.”³⁰ Local residents and city officials pushed to segregate sexuality in New Orleans’s tenderloin district, thereby eliminating the “flavor” from white brothels.

Using the same language as the 1910 Concubinage Act, which classified black and colored persons together, the ordinance specifically targeted, “any prostitute or woman notoriously abandoned to lewdness, of the *colored or black race* [emphasis added].”³¹ The measure took effect on March 1, 1917, just weeks after it was passed. By March 7, the police had arrested Creole prostitute Rose Cordier in a brothel on Conti Street for violating Ordinance 4118. The arresting officer noted that he apprehended Cordier for committing a crime “relative to being a colored prostitute living in the white district.” Rose Cordier tried to resist the arrest by claiming to be a white woman from France; however, her claims were unsuccessful and she was ultimately charged with violating Ordinance 4118. Colored Creole prostitutes, some of whom serviced a white clientele in the most profitable brothels in The District, felt the sting of segregation when city officials forced them from the white vice district to live and work among poor African Americans in The Battlefield.³²

³⁰ Nell Kimball, *Nell Kimball: Her Life As an American Madam*, 3-4.

³¹ Ordinance 4118 C.C.S., 1917, as quoted in Alecia P. Long, *The Great Southern Babylon: Sex, Race, and Respectability*, 193.

³² In the 1910 census, Rose Cordier is listed as Rita Cordier, a woman of color. She lived in The District at 212 N. Liberty St., just one block away from famed colored madams Lulu White, Willie Piazza, and Emma Johnson. At the time of her arrest in 1917, the officer recorded Rose Cordier’s race as white and noted France as her birthplace. It is unclear how the police officer ultimately determined that she was not a Frenchwoman. *Arrest Records, New Orleans Police Department*, City Archives, NOPL; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910*. Alecia P. Long, *The Great Southern Babylon: Sex, Race, and Respectability*, 191-2.

Although Creole prostitutes occasionally appeared in the arrest records for hustling, most Creole women arrested for petty crimes like stealing, gambling, and disturbing the peace were not formally employed in illicit occupations. On the same day as Rose Cordier's arrest, the police detained eighteen-year-old Creole prostitute Edna Duplessis on Gravier Street in the black tenderloin district, known as "The Battlefield," on suspicion of larceny. Edna and another woman of color, Camille Green, allegedly stole \$60 from a Creole man named August Bourgeois, presumably a client. In 1917, the police arrested a forty-seven-year-old married Creole cook Victoria Victorian (alias Victoria Landry) at her home on St. Ann Street in the Tremé for grand larceny. Though the arresting officer left few details about the pending case, it is possible that Victoria was accused of stealing from her employer. A number of unemployed women as well as women who kept house also appeared in the arrest records. In 1925, seventeen-year-old Sara Lafaye was arrested for breaking into the Elysian Fields Avenue home of Mrs. Felix Sarrazin.³³ At the time of her October arrest, Sara Lafaye was unemployed. Without a job Sara could hardly afford to purchase new winter clothes, which may have prompted her to take the items allegedly stolen from Mrs. Sarrazin, a sweater and coat, valued together at \$50. In addition to theft, some Creole women were arrested for violent crimes. On July 4, 1925, a Seventh-War homemaker named Alberta Royal and her husband Cornelius were arrested for fighting and disturbing the peace. In the *mêlée*, Alberta allegedly cut

³³ Felix Sarrazin's wife was Jeanne Delahoussaye, the sister of Louis Delahoussaye (see Chapter Two).

her husband. It is likely that the violent incident between husband and wife was partly fueled by heavy drinking on the Fourth of July weekend.³⁴

Alcohol appears to have been involved in a number of women's arrests. Despite the legal prohibition of alcohol in 1920, New Orleanians could readily obtain alcohol from local bootleggers or from saloons. The greatest obstacle to alcohol consumption was the declining supply, not the unwillingness of saloon and restaurant owners to sell it. To maximize the liquor supply, bartenders diluted the alcohol with other substances to make powerful cocktails; saloons in vice districts sold whiskey mixed with fusel alcohol and a little morphine or opium, or wine mixed with water and cocaine, for about ten cents a glass.³⁵ With such potent concoctions available to them, men of all colors were frequently arrested for public intoxication; yet some Creole women also openly and repeatedly violated Prohibition laws. On April 25, the police arrested Mary Narcisse for public drunkenness at 1922 North Tonti St., directly across the street from the Rock of Ages Baptist Church. On the same day, the police arrested thirty-three-year-old Seventh-Ward Creole homemaker Viola Gillard for drinking and disturbing the peace. The next day, police apprehended Viola again for public drunkenness. The police discharged Mary Narcisse and Viola Gillard immediately after their arrests. Most people arrested in downtown neighborhoods for public drunkenness were dismissed without charge. With little punitive action taken by the New Orleans police department, residents and

³⁴ *Arrest Records, New Orleans Police Department*, City Archives, NOPL.

³⁵ William Ivy Hair, *Carnival of Fury: Robert Charles and the New Orleans Race Riot of 1900* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1976), 76-7.

visitors to the city continued to purchase and consume alcohol during Prohibition almost as if there were no laws against it.³⁶

Even well-respected Creoles were occasionally arrested for drunkenness and other petty crimes with seemingly few social repercussions. In 1924 the police arrested Joseph Dolliole, a descendant from one of the oldest free colored Creole families in New Orleans, for drunkenness at his Pauger (Bourbon) Street home. His arrest did not seem to have any lasting effect on his social standing in the community or with his family. By 1930, Joseph worked as a cooper and owned his home where he lived with his wife, nine children, two sisters, two cousins, and his elderly mother. More than a few middle-class Creoles appeared in the arrest records for drunkenness, gambling, or violence. In 1925, two Creole plasterers from the Seventh Ward, Herman Labeaux and Arthur Esteves, were arrested at nearly one o'clock in the morning for fighting and disturbing the peace. Both men were released just thirty minutes after their arrests without charge. In the same year, police arrested Creole barber Robert Balthazar for "cutting and wounding one William Charbonnet." Balthazar must have injured Charbonnet severely because the judge set his bond at \$500, a high amount even for serious crimes.³⁷ Despite the incident, by 1930, Balthazar had become a successful proprietor who owned his own barbershop and his own home on Galvez Street (valued at \$5,000) where he lived with his wife and two children. In the colored Creole community, arrests by the police were not uncommon and

³⁶ William Ivy Hair, *Carnival of Fury: Robert Charles and the New Orleans Race Riot of 1900*, 75-9; Alecia P. Long, *The Great Southern Babylon: Sex, Race, and Respectability*, 178-82; Stephen Longstreet, *Sportin' House: New Orleans and the Jazz Story*, 145-53.

³⁷ Comparatively, Emile Logas was arrested two months later for a felony violation of the Concubinage Act of 1910 and his bond was set at \$250.

the act of being taken into custody did not necessarily diminish one's standing in the community.³⁸

In rare cases, colored Creoles actually improved their standing in the community by participating in activities deemed socially improper. Perhaps the most obvious example is Creole jazz musicians who improved their position by playing music in the vice districts, namely The District and The Battlefield. Many early black and Creole jazz musicians, most of whom came from ordinary Creole families, first gained respect and fame while playing music in New Orleans brothels and saloons or running numbers in the vice districts.³⁹ Jelly Roll Morton recalled his first job playing music in the red-light district: "One Saturday night whilst on one of the wild jaunts [in The District], we heard that one of the houses was stuck for a pianist. My friends encouraged me to go for the job . . . I pulled myself together and started playing with the confidence of being in my own circle. 'That boy is marvelous'—this was the remarks of the inmates."⁴⁰ Despite his success, Jelly Roll Morton's family did not approve of his career as a musician. Morton's great-grandmother, Felicie "Mimi" Pechet (née Boudoin) thought playing music was a "common" occupation— one not befitting a Creole man who came from, as Morton himself put it, "a line of respectable Creole house servants and cigar-makers."⁴¹

³⁸ *Arrest Records, New Orleans Police Department, City Archives, NOPL; U.S. Bureau of the Census, Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930.*

³⁹ See Danny Barker and Alyn Shipton, *Buddy Bolden and the Last Days of Storyville*; Louis Armstrong, *Satchmo*; Ron Carter and Tom Stoddard, *The Autobiography of Pops Foster: New Orleans Jazzman* (Backbeat Books, 2005).

⁴⁰ Alan Lomax, *Mister Jelly Roll: The Fortunes of Jelly Roll Morton, New Orleans Creole and "Inventor of Jazz,"* 31.

⁴¹ Alan Lomax, *Mister Jelly Roll: The Fortunes of Jelly Roll Morton*, 31, 37, 61-96; Louis Armstrong, *Satchmo*, 144-149; Danny Barker, *Buddy Bolden and the Last Days of Storyville*, 71-72; Al Rose and Edmond Souchon, *New Orleans Jazz: A Family Album*, 216-263.

Yet Mimi Pechet was not wholly opposed to all types of disreputable behavior. In 1880, she lived on Urquhart Street in her son Emile's house along with her daughter Laura (listed in the census as Eleonore), Laura's married lover, a colored Creole named Julien Joseph Monette, and the couple's four children. That same year, Julien Monette was also listed in the census as the head of a household on Galvez St. where his legal wife, Philomene Poydras Monette, and their two children resided.⁴² In fact, Julien and Philomene were married in 1873, more than two years after Laura Pechet had her first illegitimate child with Julien, a daughter named Louise Hermance Monette. In the fourteen-year period between 1871 and 1885, Laura Pechet and Philomene Monette bore at least ten of Julien's children. Laura Pechet gave birth to Louise on April 10, 1871. Julien and Philomene had their first child, Charles Albert Monette, March 11, 1872; a little over a month before the couple's September wedding, on August 5, 1873, Philomene gave birth to the couple's second child Arnold Pierre Monette. Seven months after Julien's wedding to Philomene, Laura Pechet gave birth to her second child, a son named Henry C. Monette. Less than a year after Henry's birth, Philomene once again gave birth, this time to a daughter, Louisa Emilie Monette, in February, 1875. Laura Pechet (spelled Peché) gave birth to August Reynolds Monette on August 28, 1876. One year later, on August 25, 1877, Philomene gave birth to Louis Julien Lionel Monette. In February of 1879, Laura's son Joseph Roscoe Neville Monette was born. Nearly three years later, in January 1882, Philomene gave birth to Arthur Delfort Monette. On February 5,

⁴² According to Alan Lomax, Philomene Poydras was listed as Julien's legal wife on his military pension forms. Alan Lomax, *Mister Jelly Roll: The Fortunes of Jelly Roll Morton*, 329.

1885, Philomene gave birth to her last child, Seymour Benjamin Monette. The following year, Julien Joseph Monette died of yellow fever while working on a canal in Panama.⁴³

Julien extended his affections to both Philomene Monette and Laura Pechet over the years and was actively involved with both of his families. Laura Pechet's family later believed that she and Julien were married, which suggests that he was often present in the Pechet household. Mimi Pechet appears to have tolerated, if not approved, of her daughter Laura's cohabitation with Julien. Julien Monette was a well-respected member of the community. In 1868, Monette was one of the first colored men elected to the State Senate. By 1880, Louisiana's Reconstruction government had been disbanded and Julien Monette earned steady income working as a tailor. Because he was listed in the 1880 census as the head of Philomene Monette's household and as a resident in Laura Pechet's household, it is likely that Julien contributed financially to both households. Espousing the Creole code of practical morality, Mimi Pechet understood that Laura and her children were better off with Julien's part-time residence in the household than without him.⁴⁴

Around 1886, Laura and Julien's daughter Louise Monette gave birth to an illegitimate child of her own, a son named Ferdinand Lamothe (also spelled La Menthe or Lamotte), or, as he would eventually be known, Jelly Roll Morton.

⁴³ *Orleans Parish Birth Index, 1869-1885; Orleans Parish Marriage Index, 1831-1925.*

⁴⁴ Julien and Philomene Poydras married on September 17, 1873. *Orleans Parish Birth Index, 1869-1885; Orleans Parish Marriage Index, 1831-1925*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880*. Alan Lomax, *Mister Jelly Roll: The Fortunes of Jelly Roll Morton*, 32-37; Howard J. Jones, "Biographical Sketches of Members of the 1868 Louisiana State Senate," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 19, no. 1 (January 1, 1978), 76-7.

Because Louise Monette was only about fifteen years of age when she gave birth to Ferdinand, Mimi Pechet stepped in to help her granddaughter raise him.⁴⁵ Rather than turn Louise away from the family for having an illegitimate child, the women of the family banded together to help her. In addition to Mimi Pechet's influence, Ferdinand's *marraine*, Eulalie Echo, also played a pivotal role in his upbringing.⁴⁶ It was only when Ferdinand grew up and took up a "common" occupation that the family rejected him. Jazz musicians rarely earned steady income; they mingled with the lower social classes of whites, colored Creoles, and non-Creole blacks; and they frequently played in vice districts—factors that did not promote Creole social progress and were therefore considered contradictory to the community's cultural advantage over non-Creole blacks. Mimi Pechet may have been concerned about Ferdinand's respectability, but it is also likely that she disapproved because her grandson chose an impractical career that offered little hope of social advancement.

The unwritten social contract between the Creole community and its members obligated Creoles to take both individual and collective responsibility for supporting the community and maintaining Creole social distinction. Men and women were expected to choose Creole partners, live in Creole neighborhoods, follow Creole cultural traditions, raise their children to have good manners, and whenever possible, work in skilled occupations. Those Creoles who did not uphold the social contract were more likely to live on the margins of the

⁴⁵ The exact date of Ferdinand Lamothe's birth is disputed but his sister Amide, who was born in 1897, said she was told Ferdinand was eleven years older than she was, which would indicate that he was born in or around 1886. Additional records located by Alan Lomax corroborate the approximate birth date. Alan Lomax, *Mister Jelly Roll: The Fortunes of Jelly Roll Morton*, 35.

⁴⁶ Alan Lomax, *Mister Jelly Roll: The Fortunes of Jelly Roll Morton*, 9-10, 36.

Creole community. Some Creoles became marginal because they chose not to uphold the contract; other poor and working-class Creoles, who already lived on the borderlands between black and Creole, were simply unable to uphold the social contract with the Creole community. Either way, inclusion in the community depended upon one's level of engagement in Creole cultural life. By 1910, the Creoles had already lost their privileged legal status and their economic status was in decline; however, the Creoles still largely maintained their cultural distinction from African Americans. By actively participating in those activities and rituals that continued to define Creole culture as a separate entity, the Creoles sought to uphold the boundary between Creole and non-Creole blacks and thereby maintain their social advantage.

Creole women were central in upholding the social contract and maintaining Creole cultural distinction. By the early twentieth century, the consequences of Jim Crow threatened the progress and achievement of persons of African descent throughout the United States. Elite, middle-class, and aspiring-class African American women sought to advance the race through their collective action. Some Creole clubwomen belonged to African-American social or religious organizations, but the vast majority sought membership in predominantly Creole organizations. African-American notions of social reform, racial advancement, and self-reliance likely resonated with colored Creole women's groups; however most Creole clubwomen focused their efforts on

preserving the Creole community specifically, rather than working collectively with non-Creole black women's groups to achieve racial progress.⁴⁷

The names of Creole women's groups reflected the members' aspirations for respectability and moral virtue. Some names alluded to religious piety and morality: *La Morale Chrétienne* (The Christian Doctrine),⁴⁸ *Dieu Nous Protège* (God Protects Us), and *Société des Dames du Sainte Coeur de Marie* (Ladies of the Sainted Heart of Mary Society). Others suggested group unity and cooperation: *Société des Demoiselles Unies* (Society of United Young Ladies), *Les Dames Inseparables* (Inseparable Ladies), and *Les Dames d'Harmonie* (Ladies of Harmony). And still other names reflected humility and obedience: *Société La Docilité* (Docility Society), *La Modestie* (Modesty), and *Dames du Silence* (Ladies of Silence).⁴⁹ Organizations' use of the word *dames* (ladies), instead of *femmes* (women), seems to have been a conscious choice. *Femmes* indicated that the group was for women (as opposed to men) but *dames* connoted femininity and gentility. Even if the women were not publicly treated as ladies, colored women's organizations provided a space where women could gather to reinforce ideal womanhood for themselves.

Creole social organizations' rules and regulations helped shape notions of respectability among their members. *Les Jeunes Amis* (Young Friends), a colored

⁴⁷ Michele Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction*, 149-164; Willard B. Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color: Black Elite, 1880-1920* (Indiana University Press, 1990) 242-246; Kibibi V. C. Mack, *Parlor Ladies and Ebony Drudges: African American Women, Class, and Work in a South Carolina Community* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 29-33, 49-60.

⁴⁸ In 1915, The Archdiocese of New Orleans reported 130 members of the religious society called, "The Christian Doctrine for Colored People." *Catholic Directories, Archdiocese of New Orleans, 1880-1930*, Archives of the Archdiocese of New Orleans.

⁴⁹ Louis A. Martinet, ed., "The Violation of a Constitutional Right" (Citizens' Committee, 1893), Amistad Research Center, Tulane University; *Wood's Directory: Being a Colored Business, Professional, and Trade Directory of New Orleans Louisiana*, 7-12.

Creole Social Aid and Pleasure club, denounced concubinage as an unfit lifestyle for respectable men and women; they reinforced this belief by offering sick and death benefits exclusively to legitimate wives and children. The rules of membership for *Les Jeunes Amis* explicitly stated that sick and death benefits would be given only to legitimate or legitimated children, excluding all illegitimate offspring. The organization also refused benefits to any member's "concubine or mistress," which censured dues-paying members by denying benefits to domestic partners. Membership in elite mutual-aid societies and social-aid-and-pleasure clubs, including *Les Jeunes Amis*, was limited to Creoles of "good character [who] enjoy a good reputation." Certainly some members of elite organizations ignored the rules and engaged in disreputable activities or illicit behavior, but such conduct was becoming less acceptable in the Creole community.⁵⁰

Both black and colored organizations promoted social respectability and moral virtue, but religious differences between Catholic Creoles and Protestant African Americans reinforced the need for separate colored Creole organizations. The local Catholic parishes sponsored religious societies for both whites and persons of color; since most Catholics of color were Creoles, not African Americans, the Creoles exerted considerable influence in Catholic colored religious organizations. The colored branch of the Society of St. Ann, established

⁵⁰ "Constitution of 'Les Jeunes-Amis' Societe de Bienfaisance Mutuelle," n.d., Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, 24-25; Stephanie J. Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to Be and to Do: Black Professional Women Workers During the Jim Crow Era*, 83-86; Michele Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction*, 12-15; Joseph Logsdon and Caryn Cossé Bell, "The Americanization of Black New Orleans, 1850-1900," in *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization*, 201-203, 208-209.

sometime after the establishment of St. Ann Catholic Church in 1852, was one of the oldest religious societies available to Catholic women of color in New Orleans. The society was established to honor the church's patron saint. According to Christian tradition, St. Ann was the mother of the Virgin Mary and the grandmother of Jesus. It is common practice among Catholic parishioners to venerate the Virgin Mary and St. Ann, but colored Creole women had a particularly strong affinity for these icons. Saint Ann is the patron saint of pregnant women, mothers, grandmothers, homemakers, housewives, and seamstresses—roles which were familiar to Creole women. With so many widowed and single mothers and grandmothers in the community left to care for their families without the help of a husband, the icon of St. Ann, who was herself the mother of an unmarried pregnant woman, may have resonated strongly with Catholic Creole women.⁵¹

Members of the Society of St. Ann and parishioners of St. Ann Church frequently honored their patron saint at the Shrine of St. Ann located on Urusline Street, one block away from the church. The shrine remains one of the most fascinating places of worship in New Orleans. Modeled after the grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes in France, the Shrine of St. Ann was built in 1902 as a place of religious devotion and spiritual healing. On Good Friday, devout Creoles visited St. Ann when practicing the tradition of “making nine churches,” a walking pilgrimage to nine different Catholic churches in the city. Although the shrine was mainly visited by Catholics, non-Catholic African-American women who

⁵¹ Roulhac Toledano, Sally K. Evans, and Mary Louise Christovich, *New Orleans Architecture, Vol. VI: Faubourg Treme and the Bayou Road*, 191; John J. Delaney, *Dictionary of Saints*, Revised. (Image, 2005), 45.

were influenced by Catholicism and folk spirituality also visited the shrine.

Women seeking husbands customarily visited the Shrine of St. Ann where they would implore, “St. Ann, St. Ann, please send me a man,” and perhaps even leave her a penny for good luck.⁵²

There is little information available about the smaller religious organizations for Catholics of color in downtown New Orleans. I could not locate records for the societies of St. Clotilde and St. Barbe, both of which were established in the Tremé, but a closer examination of the patron saints of these organizations yields some information about the possible values and objectives of these groups. According to the beliefs of the Roman Catholic Church, Saint Clotilde, the wife of a Frankish king, was a pious and faithful woman who performed notable acts of charity and mercy.⁵³ It is possible that the members of The Society of Saint Clotilde took up the causes of their patron saint by giving alms to the poor or collecting donations. Acts of charity were not only part of women’s Christian duty, but they were also outward manifestations of women’s efforts to uplift the community.

The Society of St. Barbe had roots in the Catholic Church but it may also have had some ties to Haitian Vodou. Although her origins are obscure, St. Barbe is believed to have helped people seeking protection from sudden death.⁵⁴

⁵² Alice La Plante and Clare La Plante, *Dear Saint Anne, Send Me a Man: And Other Time-honored Prayers for Love* (Universe, 2002); Dr. Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America*, 2nd ed. (Yale University Press, 1998), 132-162; David C. Estes, “The Saint Ann Shrine in New Orleans: Popular Catholicism in Local, National, & International Contexts,” *Louisiana’s Living Traditions*, January 2011, http://www.louisianafolklife.org/LT/Articles_Essays/SaintAnnShrine.html.

⁵³ Clotilde is also the patron saint of brides, parents, adopted children, and widows.

⁵⁴ Because St. Barbe is supposed to provide protection from sudden death, she is the patroness of military soldiers. According to Lyle Saxon, white Creoles celebrated St. Barbé Day which was in

Considering the precarious living conditions in New Orleans and the recurring outbreaks of epidemic illness, including yellow fever that killed more than 38,000 people in New Orleans between 1817 and 1905, many New Orleans Catholics may have looked to St. Barbe for protection.⁵⁵ After further research on the life and legend of St. Barbe, it seems likely that the Catholic church's historical account of St. Barbe has origins in the legend of the pre-Christian Celtic goddess, Brigid, who is linked to both the Catholic Saint Brigid and the Vodou *loa* (spirit) Maman Brigitte, protectress of the cemeteries.⁵⁶ In New Orleans, the Society of St. Barbe held their meetings at Inseparable Friends Hall on St. Philip Street in the Tremé, less than half a mile from the St. Louis Cemeteries Nos. 1 and 2. It is possible that the members of the St. Barbe Society were involved with the preservation and upkeep of the cemeteries. Visiting the cemeteries is a customary Creole tradition. On All Saints Day (November 1), Creole women—black and white—visit the cemeteries to leave flowers, say prayers, and to clean and repair the graves of their loved ones. On the following day, All Souls Day (November 2), practitioners of Haitian Vodou traditionally pay their respects to Maman Brigitte. In New Orleans, a city with strong Haitian roots, where the

honor of the soldiers. Lyle Saxon and Edward Dreyer, *Gumbo Ya-Ya: A Collection of Louisiana Folk Tales*, 166.

⁵⁵ Using George Austin's *The History of Yellow Fever* (1909) and *the Biennial Report of the Board of Health of the City of New Orleans, 1904-1905*, the Louisiana Division of the New Orleans Public Library counted 38,386 yellow fever deaths between 1817-1905.

⁵⁶ St. Barbe is also the patroness of firemen and some scholars believe her legend is connected to the pre-Christian Celtic fire goddess named Brigid. The goddess Brigid is also tied to the Irish Catholic patron Saint Brigid—both of whom share the same name and the same feast day (February 1). Alban Butler, *Lives of the Saints* (Benzinger Brothers, 1894), 462; Lewis Spence, *Legends and Romances of Brittany (Illustrated Edition)* (Dodo Press, 2010), 306-308. The Haitian Vodou *loa* (spirit) Maman Brigitte has syncretic ties to the Catholic St. Brigid. In the Vodou religion, Maman Brigitte is the wife of Baron Samedi, the *loa* of the dead and the keeper of the cemeteries. Ray T. Malbrough, *Hoodoo Mysteries: Folk Magic, Mysticism & Rituals* (Llewellyn Publications, 2003), 140; Claudine Michel and Patrick Bellegarde-Smith, *Vodou in Haitian Life and Culture: Invisible Powers*, 1st ed. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 36. Jim Haskins, *Voodoo & Hoodoo* (NY: Original Publications, 1978), 46-74.

worlds of the living and the dead are inextricably linked, it is reasonable to think that at least a few organizations dedicated their efforts to honoring their ancestors.⁵⁷

However, most activities of Creole social organizations were dedicated to providing services and entertainment to their living dues-paying members. Parties and social events hosted by Creole organizations afforded colored women the opportunity to be ladies in the company of gentlemen. Several times a year, social-aid-and-pleasure clubs sponsored major social events including balls and masquerade soirees. Members of the most exclusive organizations received formal invitations in the mail that invited attendees to wear “fancy dress” and present calling cards at the entrance of the ballroom. Many of the grand balls held during Mardi Gras season resembled events held by the white New Orleans elite. Creole women usually had to save up money to attend such elaborate celebrations but for many, having the opportunity to don formal attire and perform the role of elite ladies made it worth the financial sacrifice.

Social-aid-and-pleasure clubs held other, less-formal events, throughout the year, including parties, parades, and picnics. These were often open to non-members but, typically still limited to the Creole community. Picnics held at various locations, including Hardin’s Park, Loeper’s Park, and the colored section of the lakefront on Lake Pontchartrain, were often all-day affairs open to families and friends of club members. Parties and dances held at the various social halls throughout the Tremé and Seventh Ward were open to Creole adults and young

⁵⁷ Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead*, 0th ed. (Columbia University Press, 1996), 208-209; Stephanie J. Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to Be and to Do: Black Professional Women Workers During the Jim Crow Era*, 74.

adults of courting age and featured musical entertainment by local jazz bands. Creole parents could dance and socialize with one another while chaperoning their sons and daughters, who were mingling with friends and potentially seeking courtship among the pool of acceptable partners.⁵⁸

Creole social-aid-and-pleasure clubs were also influential in maintaining the social welfare institutions in downtown neighborhoods. Creole organizations donated resources to schools, orphanages, and asylums that aided the poor and destitute. The Catholic Church controlled nearly all of the colored asylums and institutions downtown; by giving financial support to the Church's social aid missions, Creoles emphasized their devotion to the Catholic Church and affirmed their dedication to helping colored Catholics. It is also likely that Creole organizations sought to preserve the history and legacy of wealthy free black and Creole philanthropists who first established the institutions.⁵⁹ In the nineteenth century, Thomy Lafon, a free man of color born to a French father and Haitian mother, donated money for several establishments, including St. John Berchmans' Asylum for Colored Girls, Lafon Asylum of the Holy Family (for the aged), and The Lafon Asylum for Colored Boys. Lafon also donated money for the preservation of *L'Ecole des Orphelins Indigents* (School for Indigent Orphans), a school originally financed by another notable benefactor, the widow Marie Couvent.⁶⁰ Maintaining *L'Ecole des Orphelins Indigents* became an important

⁵⁸ Invitations and calling cards for Creole social events included in the Marcus Christian Collection, "Negro Culture in New Orleans [ephemera]," Marcus Christian Collection, Subseries XI.11 Research Data, Box 15, Louisiana Collection, Earl K. Long Library, UNO.

⁵⁹ Rodolphe Desdunes, *Our People and Our History: Fifty Creole Portraits*, 92-94, 101-108.

⁶⁰ The widow Couvent left money in her will to establish a school for black and colored orphans of the Third District (Seventh Ward). She specifically requested that the school be under the tutorship of Catholic clergy.

mission for the Creole community. Although the school was originally established for the education of orphans, Creole parents could pay tuition to enroll their children in the school, which offered one of the best educations for children of color in New Orleans. The students at *L'Ecole des Orphelins* received instruction in both English and French from black and colored teachers.

In 1915, a hurricane destroyed the school along with many other establishments in the city, threatening the future of the historic institution. Creole social organizations worked with the board of directors to rebuild the school and by 1916, with the help of generous donations from Creole organizations including *Francs Amis*, *Jeunes Amis*, *Amis Inseparable*, *San Jacinto Pleasure Club*, *Dames du Silence* (Ladies of Silence), *Dames de la Moralité* (Ladies of Morality), and *Dames Unis* the board of directors was just \$2,000 shy of completing the rebuild.⁶¹ Unfortunately, *L'Ecole des Orphelins Indigents* the school was unable to raise all the necessary funds and the school's doors closed permanently in the aftermath of the storm.⁶² Despite *L'Ecole des Orphelins'* inability to recover, the charitable members of Creole social

⁶¹ Although James Bennett argues that the Creoles' efforts to raise enough funds to reopen the school "fell far short" of their goal, they raised at least 80 percent of the estimated costs of rebuilding the school. According to "History of The Catholic Indigent Orphan Institute," a document published by the school's board of directors in 1916, the building destroyed in the storm cost \$12,000 to build in the mid-1890s. Considering the new structure would cost substantially to build more twenty years later, it is assumed that the Creoles raised more than \$10,000 on their own to fall just \$2,000 short of their goal. "History of the Catholic Indigent Orphan Institute" (Board of Directors for the Catholic Indigent Orphan Institute, 1916), Marcus Christian Collection, Louisiana Collection, Earl K. Long Library, UNO; James B. Bennett, *Religion and the Rise of Jim Crow in New Orleans* (Princeton University Press, 2005), 219.

⁶² With the financial assistance of Sister Katharine Drexel (founder of Xavier University), the school was rededicated as St. Louis of the Holy Redeemer in 1916. Although the school still instructed black students, it was no longer an independent institution run by an all-black board of directors. In 1916, a white priest supervised the school with the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, a order of white nuns, instructing the students.

organizations—many who lost personal property and loved ones in the storm—made a remarkable effort to save the nearly seventy-five-year-old institution.⁶³

The hurricane of 1915 had a significant impact on the largely Catholic Creole community. In the aftermath of the storm, the rebuilding effort hastened the effects of Jim Crow in the Catholic church. The need to repair and rebuild provided Church leaders with opportunities to create new segregated parishes. At the time of the storm, the Archdiocese had already established two segregated churches: St. Katharine's in 1895, located near the Canal Street boundary separating uptown and downtown; and St. Dominic in 1909, located uptown on Cambronne Street. The move toward segregation angered Catholics of color and made them fearful about the future of interracial Catholicism. Despite increasing segregation in Catholic churches, most colored Creoles continued to attend their racially mixed parishes into the 1910s and early 1920s. Although segregation remained less pronounced in the Catholic Church than in Protestant denominations, colored Catholics were still forced to sit in segregated pews and take communion separately only after white parishioners had taken the sacrament. Some black and colored Catholics faced more aggressive forms of discrimination. White parishes situated nearby segregated black parishes

⁶³ Roger Baudier, Sr., "The Story of Saint Louis School of Holy Redeemer Parish, 1847-1956, New Orleans, Formerly Saint Louis School For the Colored, l'Institution Catholique pour l'Instruction des Orphelins dans l'Indigence, Widow Couvent School," unpublished ms., n.d., Archives of the Archdiocese of New Orleans, 14-17; James B. Bennett, *Religion and the Rise of Jim Crow in New Orleans*, 157-161, 218-220; Betty Porter, "The History of Negro Education in Louisiana," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* XXV (July 1942), 278.

sometimes refused to admit colored parishioners or administer communion, directing them to attend the segregated parish.⁶⁴

When Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, an integrated church, was destroyed by the storm in 1915, the archdiocese pressured black members to attend the new colored church, Corpus Christi, established in 1916, just a few blocks away from Our Lady of the Sacred Heart. To coerce Catholics of color to attend the segregated church, the archbishop had colored and black parishioners' sacramental records transferred from their racially mixed churches nearby to the new colored parish of Corpus Christi. Rather than suffer mistreatment and humiliation at racially mixed churches, many Creole and non-Creole blacks began attending mass at the segregated churches. In 1919, the Church established Holy Redeemer Church for African Americans in the lower Seventh Ward (in the area known as the Marigny) and in 1920, The Josephites purchase the old St. Ann church building on St. Philip Street in the Tremé and rededicated it as St. Peter Claver, a church for colored parishioners. In 1927, the archdiocese established St. Raymond Church for colored Catholics in "back o' town." By 1921, over 24,000 Catholics attended the six Josephite colored churches in New Orleans. The Catholic Church used the storm of 1915 as an opportunity to establish separate colored parishes, which ultimately brought the social order of the Catholic Church in line with the rest of the South.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ James B. Bennett, *Religion and the Rise of Jim Crow in New Orleans*, 220-224; Cyprian Davis, *The History of Black Catholics in the United States* (The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1995), 200-204.

⁶⁵ Dolores Egger Labbé, *Jim Crow Comes to Church: The Establishment of Segregated Catholic Parishes in South Louisiana*, 2nd ed. (Ayer Co Pub, 1978); James B. Bennett, *Religion and the Rise of Jim Crow in New Orleans*, 222-225.

The efforts to reorganize New Orleans's Catholic churches into segregated parishes persuaded some Creoles to leave the Catholic Church and seek religious guidance elsewhere. As the archdiocese continued to establish separate colored churches, a host of non-Catholic churches opened their doors in the Tremé and Seventh Ward. Between 1915 and 1940, the Catholic Church established four new colored churches in the Tremé and Seventh Ward. Comparatively, by 1940, there were at least twenty-eight non-Catholic colored churches in the same area.⁶⁶ It is reasonable to think that some colored Creoles attended their local neighborhood churches on Sundays rather than travel to one of the four colored Catholic churches—if not because of their disenchantment with the Catholic church, then simply for convenience.

Among the non-Catholic churches in New Orleans, colored Creoles arguably had the strongest connection with the Spiritualist churches. Spiritualism, a monotheistic religion that advocates communing with the spirits of the ancestors through séances and spiritual mediumship, became a popular religious movement among New Orleans colored Creoles as early as the 1850s.⁶⁷ Leaders of New Orleans' Spiritualist churches have traced the Creoles' connections with Spiritualism back to the followers of Marie Laveau, which suggests that there are links between Voodoo and Spiritualism in New Orleans. Both religions conjured the spirits, communed with the dead, and sought to ward

⁶⁶ This is a conservative estimate. In my examination of all the churches noted on the Sanborn maps in the Tremé and Seventh Ward (1937-1940), twenty-eight churches were specifically designated as colored. Some other churches may have been colored but were not noted as such and at least five additional churches on the map appeared with no name or racial designation.

⁶⁷ Early Creole followers of Spiritualism included Nelson Desbrosse, Octave Rey, and Joanni Questy.

off evil through ritual spells and folk magic.⁶⁸ Perhaps more importantly, both Voodoo and Spiritualism appropriated Catholic symbols and rituals, including religious saints, holy water, incense, and candles, which would have been familiar to the predominantly Catholic Creoles.⁶⁹

Spiritualist churches may have been particularly attractive to colored Creole women because of the Church's strong female leadership. Unlike Catholic churches which were directed exclusively by men, Spiritualist churches of the twentieth century were headed predominantly by women. In the 1920s, Spiritualism became increasingly popular in New Orleans when Mother Leafy Anderson's established a Spiritual congregation uptown on Amelia Street and introduced Spiritualism to non-Creole African Americans. Until that point, most Spiritualists of color were Creole. As further evidence of the Creoles' involvement in Spiritualism, two of New Orleans' most prominent Spiritual churches in the 1930s were located downtown: Christian Sunlight Spiritual Mission Church on N. Prieur St. in the Tremé and Helping Hand Spiritual Church on N. Robertson St. in the heart of the Seventh Ward.⁷⁰ Jelly Roll Morton's beloved *marraine*, Eulalie Echo, had been a devout follower of Spiritualism for as long as he could remember. As Morton later recalled,

⁶⁸ I have used the spelling "Voodoo" here as opposed to *Vodou*, as above, because "Voodoo" is the common spelling for Louisiana Voodoo and "*Vodou*" is the common spelling for Haitian *Vodou*. I have distinguished these here because folk magic, or Hoodoo, was present in Voodoo and Spiritualism in Louisiana. For an example, see page 37 for the story of Eulalie Echo.

⁶⁹ Claude F. Jacobs, *The Spiritual Churches Of New Orleans: Origins, Beliefs, And Rituals Of An African American*, 1st ed. (Univ Tennessee Press, 2001), 20-48, 65-67, 74-76; Caryn Cossé Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana, 1718-1868*, 187-222.

⁷⁰ Sanborn Map Company, "New Orleans, Orleans Parish, Louisiana, 1929-1940, vol. 1," Sanborn Digital Maps (Proquest, 2008), page 15, square 621; Sanborn Map Company, "New Orleans, Orleans Parish, Louisiana, 1929-1940, vol. 2," Sanborn Digital Maps (Proquest, 2008), page 114, square 242.

'She used to monkey around with this spiritual business. There were glasses of water around her house and voices would come out of those glasses. Very prominent people would consult my godmother and she would give them stuff like uncooked turtle heart—*cowein*—she'd have them swallow that and, afterwards, they had good luck and no one could harm them. Here, late years, I have often thought many of my troubles came from my being around during those séances when my godmother fooled around with that underground stuff.'⁷¹

Although Eulalie Echo was never a Reverend Mother in the Spiritual church, she was a prominent Creole practitioner who had a loyal group of followers who sought her help and guidance with the spirits.

In addition to communing with the dead, the Spiritual religion was considered somewhat peripheral, or as Jelly Roll Morton noted, "underground," because Spiritual churches often maintained interracial congregations. White, black, and colored congregants worshiped and prayed together, with little regard for the color line. This behavior also drew attention from law enforcement. In 1925, Mother Leafy Anderson and sixteen of her followers, black and white, were arrested at 10:40pm on Desire St. in the Eighth Ward for disturbing the peace and holding a "voodoo" meeting using a fish-fry permit.⁷² The congregants were arrested at the home of Antonio and Evelina Vega, persons noted in the arrest record as Spanish.⁷³ For Creoles who witnessed the rapid decline of interracial

⁷¹ Alan Lomax, *Mister Jelly Roll: The Fortunes of Jelly Roll Morton, New Orleans Creole and "Inventor of Jazz,"* 9-10.

⁷² It is likely that there were also colored persons, but the arrest records did not distinguish persons of mixed-race. *Arrest Records, New Orleans Police Department 1925*, City Archives, NOPL.

⁷³ It is unclear whether Antonio and Evelina were actually of Spanish or Latin descent or if they were colored persons. Light-skinned Creoles were sometimes noted in the records as Spanish.

worship in the Catholic church, Spiritual churches provided one of the last spaces where persons of all colors could regularly interact with one another.⁷⁴

Regardless if colored Creoles practiced Spiritualism or Protestantism, they still usually retained some ties to the Catholic Church. By the 1920s, colored Catholic parishes had become central to Creole cultural life. Although segregated churches initially met with resistance, the Creoles discovered that the churches provided them a safe space to worship without the burden and humiliation of being Jim Crowed by whites into separate pews. However, the churches also provided a place for Creoles to preserve their social privilege and reinforce a separate and distinct Creole ethnic identity. Seventh-Ward sisters, Hilde Demony and Josephine Butler recalled that at Corpus Christi Church, the light-skinned Creoles sat on one side of the church and dark-skinned blacks sat on the other side. Rather than allow segregated churches to erase the distinction between Creoles and non-Creoles, colored Creole parishioners used the Catholic Church as a place to reinforced the existence of a separate Creole community.⁷⁵

Catholic Creoles immediately engaged in social and leadership roles in segregated churches. In 1922, the colored branch of *La Morale Chrétienne* petitioned the archdiocese to transfer from St. Louis Cathedral in the French Quarter to St. Peter Claver Church in the Tremé. The members' desire to move to a segregated church suggests that many colored Catholics had come to embrace the safety and security of worshipping in segregated colored parishes. In just a

⁷⁴ Claude F. Jacobs, *The Spiritual Churches Of New Orleans*, 34, 36, 40-41; Caryn Cossé Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana, 1718-1868*, 213-215.

⁷⁵ Interviews with Hilde Demony and Josephine Butler, audiocassette transcribed by the present author, in "St. Mark's Ethnic Heritage Project, Oral History of the Tremé and Seventh Ward." James B. Bennett, *Religion and the Rise of Jim Crow in New Orleans*, 226-228.

few years, Corpus Christi Church became the largest black Catholic parish in the nation and had the largest parochial school in the city. Corpus Christi, located in the heart of the Seventh Ward, became closely associated with a colored Creole identity. The church held big festivals and socials where Creoles could consort with one another in a respectable manner. When Aline St. Julien was a young woman, her family lived in the Tremé and attended St. Peter Claver Church, but she recalled wanting to attend mass at Corpus Christi. According to Ms. St. Julien, it was generally believed that the “nice” Creole families—or those with good social standing—attended Corpus Christi. Certainly nice families attended St. Peter Claver and other downtown churches but because Corpus Christi was near middle-class and elite Creole enclaves, it was considered the quintessential colored Creole church. As colored Catholic churches rose in popularity and significance, the Creoles’ social hierarchy was reflected in church attendance and membership.⁷⁶

A handful of Catholic Creole families remained in their racially mixed churches, but by the 1920s, most colored Creoles had become members of the nearby colored churches. Nathalie Bachemin (née Lavigne) and her husband Thomas baptized at least six of their children in Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Church. The couple baptized their sons David Solomon Bachemin in 1903, Antoine Bachemin in 1909, and Joseph, their youngest son, in 1915. When the three Bachemin men went on to marry, none of them married at Our Lady of the Sacred Heart. David married Emma Felix at St. Peter Claver in 1925; Antoine

⁷⁶ Interview with Aline St. Julien, audiocassette transcribed by the present author, in “St. Mark’s Ethnic Heritage Project, Oral History of the Treme and Seventh Ward.” James B. Bennett, *Religion and the Rise of Jim Crow in New Orleans*, 220, 221, 223-224.

married Josephine Idalls at St. Paul's Church on Gentilly Boulevard in 1952; and Joseph married Marguerite Mansion at Corpus Christi in 1942. Creole jazz musician Louis Barbarin was baptized at interracial St. Augustine Church around the turn of the century, as were at least three of his siblings. Despite the family's close ties to St. Augustine Church, when Louis Barbarin married Marie Phillips in 1923, the couple married at St. Peter Claver Church. In 1889, Seventh-Ward Creole Marie Blanchard was baptized as white at Our Lady of the Sacred Heart. A note written years later in the column of the baptismal register reveals that Marie married August Hippolyte at St. Peter Claver Church in 1927—indicating that Marie Blanchard was actually colored, not white.⁷⁷

Some Creoles who passed for white continued to take the sacraments at predominantly white churches. A note written in the baptismal records at Our Lady of the Sacred Heart reveals that a Creole woman named Louise Bagneris married Joseph Thompson Kirkland in the same church in 1931. Although Louise Bagneris came from a colored Creole family, she was baptized white in 1908. Unlike most of her siblings, who had at least one godparent who descended from either their mother or father's side of the family, Louise had two allegedly white godparents who appear to be of no blood relation to the family.⁷⁸ According to tradition, it was not uncommon for the godparents to bring the child to the church for baptism unaccompanied by the child's parents. In Louise's

⁷⁷ *Registers of Baptism, St. Augustine Church; Registers of Baptism, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Church.*

⁷⁸ One other Bagneris child also had white godparents. Edward John Bagneris was baptized in 1910 at Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Parish and both of his godparents, Rene and Emily Roubion, lived as white (it appears from the census records that although the Roubion's were frequently listed as white, in 1910, the family was listed as mulatto). Unlike Louise, who appeared in the baptismal register as white, Edward was listed as colored.

case, it is unlikely that the priest had any suspicion that the child was colored. Despite being baptized white, Louise lived as a Creole with her colored Creole parents. It is unclear whether Louise and Joseph got married as a white couple but it is probable that Louise's light skin and her connection to Our Lady of the Sacred Heart enabled the couple to marry in the predominantly white church.⁷⁹ Notwithstanding the handful of Creoles who continued to marry in the old integrated Creole churches, most Creoles began new family traditions by taking the sacraments in colored Catholic churches.

The development of colored Catholic churches further contributed to the Creole community's increasing insularity. Between 1915 and 1930, the archdiocese of New Orleans opened four colored Catholic churches in downtown neighborhoods.⁸⁰ With the hardening of the color line and the enforcement rigid of segregation policies since the 1890s, the Creole community had begun to turn inward as a means of self-preservation. The growth of Creole social-aid-and-pleasure clubs in the Tremé and Seventh Ward further enhanced the Creole community's authority and influence in downtown neighborhoods. Whether or not residents were members of social clubs, the activities of social and benevolent organizations became part of neighborhood culture. In 1912, ten organizations met regularly at Artisans' Hall on North Derbigny Street; four at *Francs Amis* Hall on North Robertson; ten at *Les Amis Inseparables* Hall on St. Philip; nine at St. James Hall on North Derbigny; nine at *Salle de L'Equite* Hall on North Robertson; seven at *New Amis Sincere* Hall on North Claiborne; and eighteen at

⁷⁹ Louise gave birth to the couple's son Joseph in November 1931. The family eventually relocated to Northern California.

⁸⁰ Corpus Christi in 1916, St. Peter Claver in 1921, Holy Redeemer in 1919, and St. Raymond in 1927.

Economy Hall on Ursuline.⁸¹ Creole social life organized around churches, social clubs, and meeting halls; as the number of Creole establishments grew and became concentrated in downtown neighborhoods, Creole culture continued to flourish in “splendid isolation.”⁸²

However, the community’s ability to remain isolated depended heavily on the efforts of women. With churches, social clubs, and social gatherings at the center of Creole community life, it is important to examine the essential roles women played in those affairs. It is clear that women, as the moral purveyors of the family, were largely responsible for the family’s attendance and participation at church. Weddings, baptisms, funerals, and other religious observances created prime opportunities for Creoles to gather together and nurture relationships within the community. A child’s First Communion often prompted parents to invite friends and family to the house to celebrate over food and drink. Friday night fish fries, held by benevolent organizations, in observance of meatless Fridays during the Lenten season, were customary social events for culturally Catholic Creoles; children played together, women socialized with one another, and men assembled over beer and card games.⁸³ On St. Joseph’s Day, Catholics of color celebrated by holding large feasts and watching the Mardi Gras Indians

⁸¹ *Wood's Directory: Being a Colored Business, Professional, and Trade Directory of New Orleans Louisiana* (New Orleans: Allan T. Woods, 1912), 7-13.

⁸² “splendid isolation” was a phrase used by a British royal officer, George Goschen, in 1896. Goschen was paraphrasing comments made by a Canadian official, George Eulas Foster, who was describing late-nineteenth century British foreign policy. Foster described Britain as “splendidly isolated from Europe,” pointing to Britain’s resistance to engage in European affairs or negotiate with other nations. In his book *Desegregating the Altar*, Stephen J. Ochs also uses the phrase “splendid isolation” to describe the growing insularity of New Orleans Catholic colored Creole community. Stephen J. Ochs, *Desegregating the Altar: The Josephites and the Struggle for Black Priests, 1871-1960* (Louisiana State University Press, 1993), 215-216.

⁸³ Interview with Irma Williams, audiocassette transcribed by the present author, “St. Mark's Ethnic Heritage Project, Oral History of the Tremé and Seventh Ward.”

gather along Bayou St. John at dawn before parading through the streets.

Celebrations, religious observances, holidays, and social gatherings were at the heart of Creole community life and all required the labor and skills of women.

Creole cooking was an essential part of all social gatherings and observances. Food was even an important part of regular Sunday religious customs. Creole homemaker Anna Johnson and her mother used to make and sell hot *calas*, fried cakes typically made of flour, yeast, rice, and sugar, outside St. Augustine Church to parishioners attending mass. Making traditional *calas* took a significant amount of time and effort: the batter had to sit overnight and was beaten every hour throughout the night at which time small amounts of rice and sugar were added. In the morning, the batter was dropped by the spoonful into hot oil, fried, drained, and then dusted with powdered sugar. Despite the labor involved, several female respondents from the St. Mark's Ethnic Heritage Project interviews recalled making *calas* and selling them on Sunday mornings outside church, suggesting that it was not only a common way for Creole women to earn income but, for many colored Creoles, eating hot *calas* after church was a popular cultural tradition—one that was preserved mainly through women's efforts.⁸⁴

Holidays and observances were not complete without an abundant supply of food. Each family had traditional recipes that appeared on the table every year— *Calas* and cocoa for breakfast on the day of a child's First Communion; *cowain* for Easter dinner; turkey, oyster salad, and ham for Christmas—and it

⁸⁴ Interviews with Anna Johnson, Irma Williams, and Louise Abrams, audiocassettes transcribed by the present author, "St. Mark's Ethnic Heritage Project, Oral History of the Tremé and Seventh Ward."

was women's responsibility to prepare the meals.⁸⁵ Creole cuisine always accompanied rites of passage, including weddings and baptisms; but it was perhaps funerals and wakes that featured the most generous fare for family, friends, and guests. Pops Foster, a jazz musician who played with Creole musicians including Sidney Bechet, Alphonse Picou, and Kid Ory, played at funerals a few times a month and recalled eating and drinking well at the families' homes: "You'd drink coffee, beer, wine, and whiskey, and they had sandwiches to eat."⁸⁶ Jelly Roll Morton intentionally sought jobs playing music at funerals and wakes because there was always an abundance of food and drink available: "At any time we heard somebody was dead we knew we had plenty good food that night . . . the minute we'd walk in, we'd be right in the kitchen where the food was—plenty ham and cheese sandwiches slabbered all over with mustard, and plenty whiskey and plenty of beer." Morton also recalled occasions when the dead men's widows went out of their way to show him hospitality: "Very often the lady of the house would be back there [in the kitchen] with us having a good time, too, because she would be glad he was gone." Even women who did not grieve the death of their husbands still generously provided their guests with food and libations.⁸⁷

In addition to preparing meals for traditional celebrations and observances, Creole women also cooked food to celebrate informal neighborhood gatherings. Colored Creoles frequently socialized in the homes of family, friends,

⁸⁵ Anna Johnson interview, audiocassette transcribed by the present author, "St. Mark's Ethnic Heritage Project, Oral History of the Tremé and Seventh Ward."

⁸⁶ Ron Carter and Tom Stoddard, *The Autobiography of Pops Foster: New Orleans Jazzman*, 73-75.

⁸⁷ Alan Lomax, *Mister Jelly Roll: The Fortunes of Jelly Roll Morton, New Orleans Creole and "Inventor of Jazz,"* 15.

and neighbors. Although Creoles held parties in parks, meeting halls, and at the lakefront, Jim Crow segregation discouraged Creoles from celebrating in public. Instead, they tended to socialize exclusively with other Creoles in the privacy of their own homes. As colored Creole Aline St. Julien stated, “We lived in a small world. All our friends were Creoles.”⁸⁸ While working-class Creoles may not have been invited to the private parties of the elite, they still gathered together on porches and backyards, to eat, drink, and share stories. In the Tremé, Creole women sometimes threw parties known as “Blue Monday” parties. Customarily, women did the family’s laundry on Mondays; because women begrudged the back-breaking work of doing laundry, they referred to it as “blue Monday.” Creole women sometimes set aside the laundry to hold “blue Monday” parties. In preparation, women made traditional *lundi* (Monday) red beans using the hambone leftover from Sunday dinner—sometimes cooking the beans directly inside metal washtubs cooked over the fire. They invited family, friends, and neighbors, who collectively took the day off work to gather and socialize all day over food and wine. Whether Creoles gathered for formal holidays or informal celebrations, women were responsible for preparing the necessary provisions to sustain partygoers all day long.⁸⁹

As the primary shoppers for food and household goods, Creole women played an important role in the success of local Creole grocers and vendors. Homemakers and housekeepers did most of the shopping for the family and they

⁸⁸ Interview with Aline St. Julien, audiocassette transcribed by the present author, “St. Mark’s Ethnic Heritage Project, Oral History of the Tremé and Seventh Ward.”

⁸⁹ Interviews with Grace Carr and Gerald Emelle, audiocassettes transcribed by the present author, “St. Mark’s Ethnic Heritage Project, Oral History of the Tremé and Seventh Ward.” Susan Strasser, *Never Done: A History of American Housework*, 104-124.

frequented Creole grocers, bakers, and butchers almost daily. Dozens of vendors sold food and various goods at local markets including Tremé Market, Rocheblave Market, and St. Bernard Market (now Circle Foods), yet many Creole women intentionally sought to do business with Creole proprietors. In 1912, Creole butcher Robert Vaucresson (also spelled Van Cresson) ran a thriving business from St. Bernard Market selling beef, pork, mutton, and various types of sausages to a mostly Creole clientele. The Vaucresson family had been selling sausages in St. Bernard Market since the market opened in 1899 and by 1912, the business had expanded across three market stalls.⁹⁰ Eventually the Vaucresson's purchased a separate store across the street from St. Bernard Market near the corner of Claiborne Avenue and St. Bernard Avenue.⁹¹ By the mid-twentieth century, the name "Vaucresson" became practically synonymous with Creole meats and sausages. Creole *marchande* (market woman) Hermina Labeaud sold a variety of food items from her St. Bernard Market stall, including fish, game, fruits, and vegetables. Hermina advertised her business in the *Wood's Directory*, a directory for colored businesses and trades, listing herself as "Mrs. J. Labeaud." Between 1900 and 1910, her husband John Labeaud worked as a market vendor while his wife stayed home with the children. It appears that John left the family sometime between 1910 and 1920, at which time Hermina took over the business in order to support her family.⁹² She eventually became as

⁹⁰ *Wood's Directory: Being a Colored Business, Professional, and Trade Directory of New Orleans Louisiana*. Vaucresson's operated out of market stalls thirteen through fifteen.

⁹¹1800 St. Bernard Avenue.

⁹² John Labeaud did not live in the household in the 1920 or 1930 census but Hermina continued to list herself as married. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910*; U.S. Bureau of the

successful in the market as her husband, if not more so, and by 1930, she had purchased her own home (valued at \$2,300) near St. Bernard Market on New Orleans Street where she lived with her children and grandchildren.⁹³ Not all Creole market vendors became as successful as Robert Vaucresson or Hermina Labeaud, but most owed their success, in part, to loyal female patrons.

Creole women's loyalty to Creole-owned businesses was not solely based on their devotion to holding the Creole community together. It was not uncommon for Creole proprietors to give their regular customers *lagniappe*, or, a little something extra. Bakers sometimes threw in an extra *beignet* or green grocers added an extra tomato or mirliton for good measure, as a sign of appreciation or good faith.⁹⁴ Children sent to the market by their mothers often received *lagniappe* from the shopkeeper, ensuring the child would come to her shop again when sent on an errand. Creole musician Danny Barker recalled "making groceries" for a prostitute in the neighborhood when he was a young boy, after which the grocery clerk gave him "half a stage plank" (a sugar-coated ginger cake) for *lagniappe*.⁹⁵ Decades later, Barker never forgot it. For merchants, giving customers *lagniappe* was a clever business practice. Shrewd shoppers were more likely to patronize a business that occasionally gave them something for free. *Lagniappe* was not strictly a colored Creole custom, but rather a common practice among all New Orleanians; however, colored Creole

Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920*; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930*.

⁹³ Hermina Labeaud lived next door to Creole musician Isidore Barbarin and his wife Josephine. Hermina's son John Labeaud Jr., lived two doors down and he also worked as a market vendor.

⁹⁴ Also known as a chayote or pear squash. Mirlitons are commonly eaten in South Louisiana.

⁹⁵ Barker specified his stage plank was "three inches wide, six inches long, and a half-inch thick." Danny Barker and Alyn Shipton, *Buddy Bolden and the Last Days of Storyville*, 103.

proprietors may have been more inclined to give colored Creole women *lagniappe* than non-Creole black women, which further cemented the relationship between Creole shoppers and merchants.⁹⁶

In addition to forming alliances with local merchants, Creole women collaborated with neighborhood women to maximize their rather limited resources. Although communal bake houses became less common after the turn of the twentieth century, several functioning bake houses existed in downtown residential neighborhoods as late as the 1940s.⁹⁷ Typically located in the center of residential blocks and accessible through a common walkway, communal bake houses provided local women with additional oven space. Although most homes had kitchens, many were small, inconvenient, and could not accommodate cooking for a large family. Because bake houses were accessible to all families in the neighborhood, women had to work cooperatively to devise general rules for using the ovens, dividing time equitably so women could get dinner on the table.⁹⁸ Women also worked together raising communal gardens. Surely women would have preferred to tend to their own private gardens, and some did, but with limited yard space, many homemakers resorted to growing vegetables in nearby empty lots.⁹⁹ While some women may have kept all the products of their

⁹⁶ John Churchill Chase, *Frenchmen, Desire, Good Children and Other Streets of New Orleans*, 223-225. The Creole proverb, “*Lagniappe c’est bon butin*” (Lagniappe is lawful booty),” highlights the importance of *lagniappe* in New Orleans culture; as quoted in, Lafcadio Hearn, *Gombo Zhebes*, (1885; reprint Applewood Books, 2001), 21.

⁹⁷ For an example of a communal bake house, see Sanborn Map Company, “New Orleans, Orleans Parish, Louisiana, 1929-1940, vol. 2,” Sanborn Digital Maps (Proquest, 2008), sheet 124, square 255. For an example of a communal kitchen, see Sanborn Map Company, “New Orleans, Orleans Parish, Louisiana, 1908-1909, vol. 2,” sheet 158, square 296.

⁹⁸ Some women used the bake houses of local bakeries for personal use, with permission from the store owner. Susan Strasser, *Never Done: A History of American Housework*, 3, 5, 28.

⁹⁹ For examples of communal gardens, see Sanborn Map Company, “New Orleans, Orleans Parish, Louisiana, 1908-1909, vol. 1,” sheet 57, squares 771 and 772.

harvest for themselves, it is likely that women swapped fruits and vegetables with one another, which allowed them to save money and diversify their families' diets. Despite any philosophical beliefs against consorting across the color line, ordinary black, white, and colored women interacted regularly, albeit briefly, in communal work spaces. As long as the benefits of women's neighborhood collaborations outweighed the social prescriptions, women in the Tremé and Seventh Ward quietly breached social conventions in favor of practicality and self interest.

Creole women contributed in various ways to the growing insularity of New Orleans's colored Creole community, but one of their most significant and enduring contributions to maintaining a visible separation between colored Creoles and non-Creole blacks was the cultivation of light skin. The methods by which women selected appropriate partners and formed intimate relationships have already been detailed at length, but in order to fully assess the success of those methods, it is necessary to explore the outward benefits and privileges colored Creoles gained by having nearly white skin or a racially ambiguous appearance.

Racially ambiguous Creoles could pass for white in public and take advantage of whites-only facilities—a privilege that even the wealthiest black man or woman could not buy in the South. Aline St. Julien, a New Orleans Creole who, as a young woman, wished that she had lighter skin and straighter hair because Creoles who looked white could pass in public:

They'd go to the Saenger Theatre [on Canal Street] and different places. Every place was segregated but the fair-skinned people could try on clothes in the department store and dark-skinned

people couldn't. You weren't allowed to try on clothes. You had to sit behind the screen which said FOR COLORED ONLY on buses and public spaces. The toilets were FOR COLORED, FOR WHITES. But these people who were fair-skinned could pass! They didn't have to bother about those signs. They could sit in front of the screen, they could go to the Saenger, they could go and try on clothes at Holmes [D. H. Holmes department store], so they felt a little better than the next guy.¹⁰⁰

Clarence Guillemet, himself a Creole, also recalled nearly white Creoles passing for white on public transportation. During the early twentieth century, blacks and whites were separated on street cars and buses by adjustable screens that slid from the front of the car to the back. The screens were moved to accommodate the white and black passengers. As more whites got on board, the screen would be pushed toward the back of the car to make room for the whites to sit, forcing some colored passengers to stand. Guillemet remembered riding the bus uptown to school with the Creole kids from Xavier Preparatory Academy. According to him, the lightest among them would sit in the white section on the Magazine Street bus, while laughing at the darker kids who were forced to ride behind the screen. Guillemet claims that he went to jail several times over the years for illegally moving the screens.¹⁰¹

Light-skinned Creoles, even if they could not pass for white, were often given opportunities not afforded to darker-skinned persons of color. Hazel Bean, an African American woman who grew up downtown, recalled color discrimination in employment: "You would see a job in the newspaper . . . saying they need a light-skinned girl." Haspel's Department Store in the Seventh Ward

¹⁰⁰ Aline St. Julien interview, "Divided for Color and Hair," in "Quartee Red Beans, Quartee Rice" (New Orleans, LA, n.d.), Amistad Research Center, Tulane University.

¹⁰¹ Clarence Guillemet interview, transcribed from audiocassette by the present author, "St. Mark's Ethnic Heritage Project, Oral History of the Tremé and Seventh Ward" (New Orleans, 1978), Collection 327, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University.

was known to hire light-skinned Creole women almost exclusively. Olga Jackson, a former employee at Haspel's, remembered her employer priding himself on his selection of girls: "Joe Haspel—we used to call him Papa Joe—he'd look over his [sewing factory] plant at all the women working and he'd say, 'Look at that flower garden'. That was his was his cliché [*sic*]. He meant all of the light-skinned Creoles." Beyond employment opportunities, light-skinned Creole women also had greater access to the most elite social clubs and parties. The *Francs Amis* and the Autocrat Club were notoriously exclusive. Louise Abrams, a Creole woman who grew up in Tremé, recalled, "if you weren't light, you couldn't be a member of [the Autocrat] club." Hilde Demony and Josephine Butler were light enough to get into both *Francs Amis* and the Autocrat and they confirmed that, "if you was dark, you could not go in really." By excluding dark-skinned blacks, colored Creoles had shed any remaining hopes or ideas about ever living in a colorblind society. The colored Creole community implicitly embraced the supremacy of whiteness, and in doing so, they continued to use light-skin as social capital.¹⁰²

Perhaps nobody understood the value of light skin better than brown-skinned Creoles and African Americans. Even in their old age, brown-skinned residents of the Tremé and Seventh Ward remember painful episodes in which they were excluded from the family or treated differently because of their skin color. Lolet Williams's grandmother once told her of a family incident that occurred around 1909, when her father remarried following the death of her

¹⁰² Interviews with Hazel Bean, Olga Jackson, Hilde Demony and Josephine Butler, transcribed from audiocassettes by the present author, "St. Mark's Ethnic Heritage Project, Oral History of the Tremé and Seventh Ward."

mother. Lolet's grandmother was too brown, or as Lolet put it, "too pretty brown" to be accepted by her new stepmother. According to Lolet, when her grandmother was just six or seven years old, "she had to sit outside on the outside steps while all the rest of the brothers and sisters visited with the new Mama and her Daddy, because she was too dark to go in the house." S.H. Stephenson, an African American resident of the Tremé, remembered how his mother treated him and his dark-skinned sibling differently from her four other light-skinned children. When he was older, S.H. Stephenson thought maybe he imagined the discrimination; however, one of his light-skinned brothers later confirmed that their mother had shown greater affection for him than for the two darker Stephenson siblings.¹⁰³

In the early-twentieth century, African-American women throughout the country had become preoccupied with skin color, with many seeking to cultivate light-skin through careful partner selection and sexual reproduction. The extreme measures some women took to reinforce the color line between colored and black only highlights the advantages and opportunities that often came with having light skin. Tremé resident Lolet Williams asserted that, for women, skin color "made a difference on who you could marry because if you were fair-skinned, [you] were looking for a fair-skinned husband so that the children would be fair-skinned and they would still have a chance of crossing the color line so they could make it a little bit easier than if they were accepted or recognized as

¹⁰³ Interview with Lolet Williams and S.H. Stephenson, transcribed from audiocassette by the present author, "St. Mark's Ethnic Heritage Project, Oral History of the Tremé and Seventh Ward."

being black.”¹⁰⁴ Colored Creole women understood all too well the practical importance of skin color and they did what they could to pass on the privileges of light skin to their children.

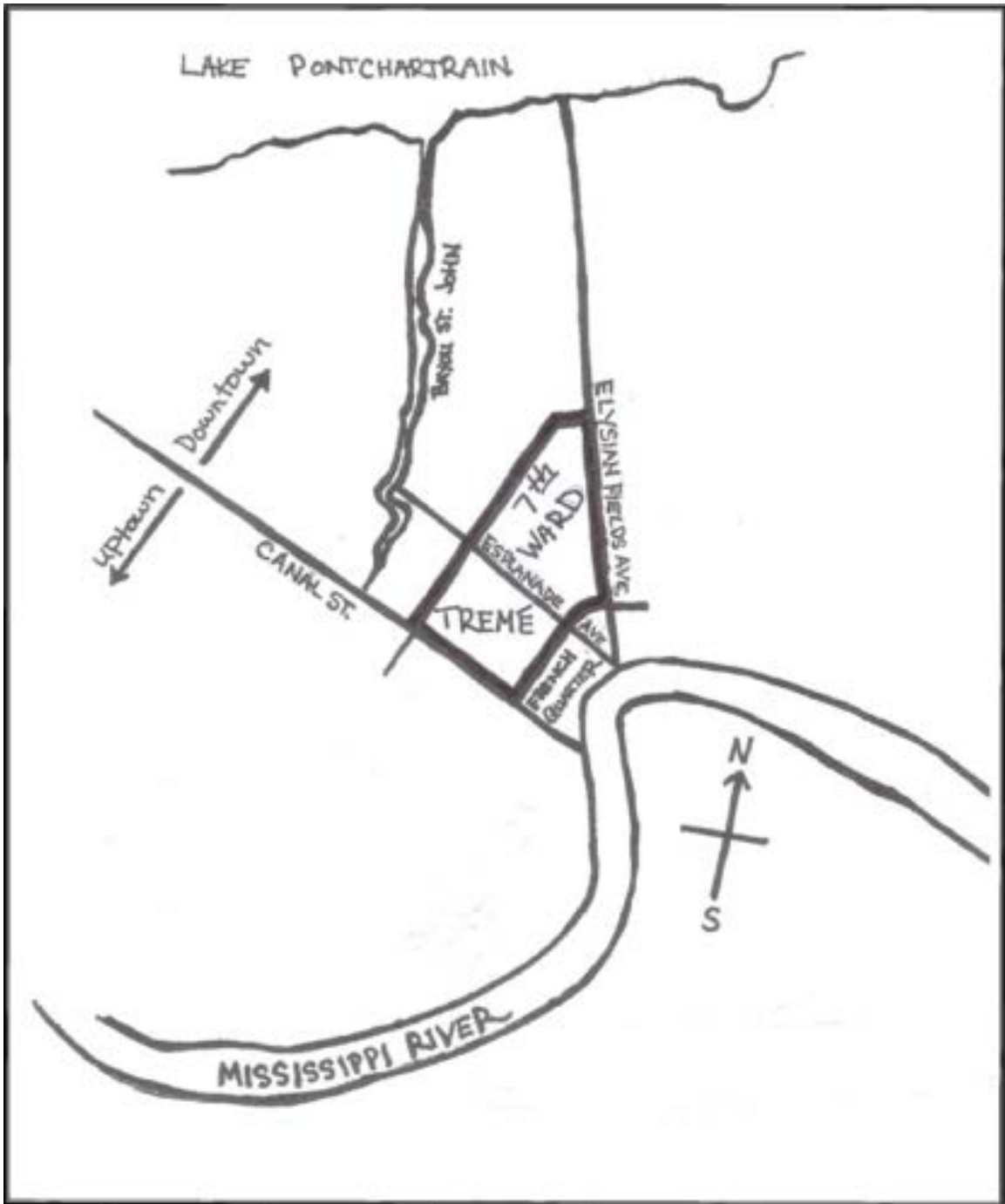
For the Creoles, social status and privilege was not simply a matter of color; rather it was about maintaining ties with those traditions and social customs that, at one time, had legally separated the colored Creoles from non-Creole blacks. When a visible colored Creole community emerged at the turn of the nineteenth century, Louisiana and Caribbean Creole women drew on the social practices and customs of their enslaved and free mothers who sought freedom and social mobility through intimate relationships with white men. The women and the offspring of those unions— children who were visibly whiter than their black and colored mothers— usually reaped at least some of the benefits and privileges of whiteness. Women and their children who invested wisely and planned for the future built the foundation for a beige bourgeoisie in New Orleans. The colored Creole middle-class of the nineteenth century continued to maintain intimate and personal relationships with whites, which was further made evident by the colored Creoles’ fair skin and European features. By the turn of the twentieth century, only a handful of colored Creole families maintained personal relationships with white family, friends, or neighbors; however, the physical evidence of past relationships across the color line—light skin and a white physical appearance—remained deeply entrenched in the colored Creole community. While women could no longer cultivate Creole

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Lolet Williams, in “Quartee Red Beans, Quartee Rice” (New Orleans, LA, 1978), Amistad Research Center, Tulane University.

heritage and culture by forming relationships with white men, as many of their foremothers had done, colored Creole women worked collectively and individually to maintain a separate Creole ethnic identity, and to cultivate a noticeably Creole culture— one rooted in practical morality, Catholic religious traditions, and the distinctive social customs and rituals of their Tremé and Seventh Ward neighborhood.

APPENDIXES

**Appendix A:
Map of the Tremé and Seventh Ward**



Appendix B:
Color, Sex, and Age Distribution Among Seventh Ward Residents, 1880-1930

YEAR	Colored Creoles				Non-Creole Blacks				Whites			
	M	F	TOTAL	SEX RATIO	M	F	TOTAL	SEX RATIO	M	F	TOTAL	SEX RATIO
<u>1880</u>												
overall pop.	303	410	713	73.9	155	169	324	91.7	64	62	126	103.2
age 18+	175	251	426	69.7	88	109	197	80.7	34	35	69	97.1
under 18	128	159	287	80.5	67	60	127	111.7	30	27	57	111.1
<u>1900</u>												
overall pop.	235	311	546	75.6	123	129	252	95.3	61	66	127	92.4
age 18+	135	176	311	76.7	69	71	140	97.2	36	41	77	87.8
under 18	100	135	235	74.1	54	58	112	93.1	25	25	50	100
<u>1930</u>												
overall pop.	174	224	398	77.7	124	147	271	84.4				
age 18+	98	128	226	76.6	75	84	159	89.3				
under 18	76	96	172	79.2	49	63	112	77.8				

Appendix C:

Description of Household Types, 1880-1930

Solitaire Families

1. Solitaire Family—One man or woman living alone

Nuclear Families

2. Incipient Nuclear Family—Husband and wife living together without children.
3. Simple Nuclear Family—Husband and wife living together with their children
4. Attenuated Nuclear Family—Either a mother or father (but not both) living in a household with their children (natural, adopted, or children in their care).

Extended Families

5. Single Extended Family—One man or woman living with other relatives (not spouses or children).
6. Incipient Extended Family—Husband and wife living with other relatives and no children.
7. Simple Extended Family—Husband and wife living with their children and other relatives.
8. Attenuated Extended Family—Either a mother or father living with their children and other relatives (no spouse with the head of household).

Augmented Families

9. Single Augmented Family— One man or woman living with non-relatives (boarders, renters)
10. Single Extended Augmented Family— One man or woman living with both relatives and non-relatives.
11. Incipient Augmented Family—Husband and wife without children living with non-relatives.
12. Incipient Extended Augmented Family— Husband and wife without children living with relatives and non-relatives.
13. Simple Augmented Family—Husband and wife with their children, living with non-relatives.
14. Simple Extended Augmented Family— Husband and wife with their children, living with relatives and non-relatives.
15. Attenuated Augmented Family— One mother or father with their minor children living with non-relatives.
16. Attenuated Extended Augmented Family—One mother or father with their minor children living with relatives and non-relatives.

Household types are adapted from *Andrew Bilingsley, Amy Tate Bilingsley, and Andrew Billingsley, Black Families in White America (Prentice-Hall, 1968)*.

Appendix D:
Seventh-Ward Household Composition, 1880-1930

Household Types, 1880

	Number of Households	Number of Female-Headed Households (%)	Number of Homeowners (%)
Black	78	22 (28.2)	N/A
Creole	148	44 (29.7)	N/A
White	20	2 (10.0)	N/A

		Number of Households BLACK	Total (%)	Number of Households CREOLE	Total (%)	Number of Households WHITE	Total (%)
Solitaire	1	2	2.6	10	6.7	--	--
Nuclear	2	9	65.4	5	48.0	--	65.0
	3	33		43		13	
	4	9		23		--	
Extended	5	4	20.5	10	31.1	--	5.0
	6	2		6		--	
	7	6		20		1	
	8	4		10		--	
Augmented	9	1	11.5	5	14.2	1	30.0
	10	1		1		--	
	11	1		1		--	
	12	--		2		--	
	13	3		6		3	
	14	--		3		2	
	15	1		3		1	
	16	2		--		--	

Household Types, 1900

	Number of Households	Number of Female-Headed Households (%)	Number of Homeowners (%)
Black	53	10 (18.9)	13 (24.5)
Creole	119	32 (26.9)	21 (17.6)
White	23	6 (26.1)	8 (34.8)

		Number of Households BLACK	Total (%)	Number of Households CREOLE	Total (%)	Number of Households WHITE	Total (%)
Solitaire	1	--	--	8	6.7	--	--
Nuclear	2	11	73.6	8	63.0	1	60.9
	3	20		46		8	
	4	8		21		5	
Extended	5	2	18.9	7	21.0	1	39.1
	6	1		4		2	
	7	7		11		5	
	8	--		3		1	
Augmented	9	1	7.5	2	9.2	--	--
	10	1		1		--	
	11	1		1		--	
	12	--		--		--	
	13	1		3		--	
	14	--		2		--	
	15	--		--		--	
	16	--		2		--	

Household Types, 1930

	Number of Households	Number of Female-Headed Households (%)	Number of Homeowners (%)	
Black	61	13 (21.3)	17 (27.9)	
Creole	82	20 (24.4)	29 (35.4)	
White	51	8 (15.7)	23 (45.1)	

	Household Types	Number of Households BLACK	Total (%)	Number of Households CREOLE	Total (%)	Number of Households WHITE	Total (%)
Solitaire	1	3	4.9	5	6.1	6	11.8
Nuclear	2	8	60.7	9	61.0	7	52.9
	3	25		34		19	
	4	4		7		1	
Extended	5	--	22.9	3	31.7	3	31.4
	6	2		4		2	
	7	8		13		10	
	8	4		6		1	
Augmented	9	2	11.5	--	1.2	--	3.9
	10	--		--		--	
	11	2		1		--	
	12	--		--		--	
	13	1		--		1	
	14	1		--		--	
	15	1		--		--	
	16	--		--		1	

Appendix E:

Marital Status of Seventh Ward Residents, 1880-1930

1880

Women

	Creole	Black	White
Single	26.9%	17.5%	35.1%
Married	42.2	15.6	51.4
Widowed	30.1	27.7	13.5
Divorced	.8	--	--

Men

	Creole	Black	White
Single	35.4%	27.3%	55.3
Married	58.3	67.0	44.7
Widowed	5.1	5.7	--
Divorce	1.1	--	--

1900

Women

	Creole	Black	White
Single	25.2%	21.1%	34.1%
Married	48.8	63.4	43.9
Widowed	25.8	15.5	21.9
Divorce	--	--	--

Men

	Creole	Black	White
Single	34.4%	39.2	57.1
Married	60.8	58.1	40.5
Widowed	4.8	2.7	2.3
Divorce	--	--	--

1930**Women**

	Creole	Black	White
Single	18.6%	17.4%	31.2%
Married	54.2	66.3	54.5
Widowed	25.6	15.2	14.3
Divorce	1.5	1.1	--

Men

	Creole	Black	White
Single	26.5%	34.9%	34.2%
Married	71.4	62.8	57.5
Widowed	2.0	2.3	6.8
Divorce	--	--	1.4

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