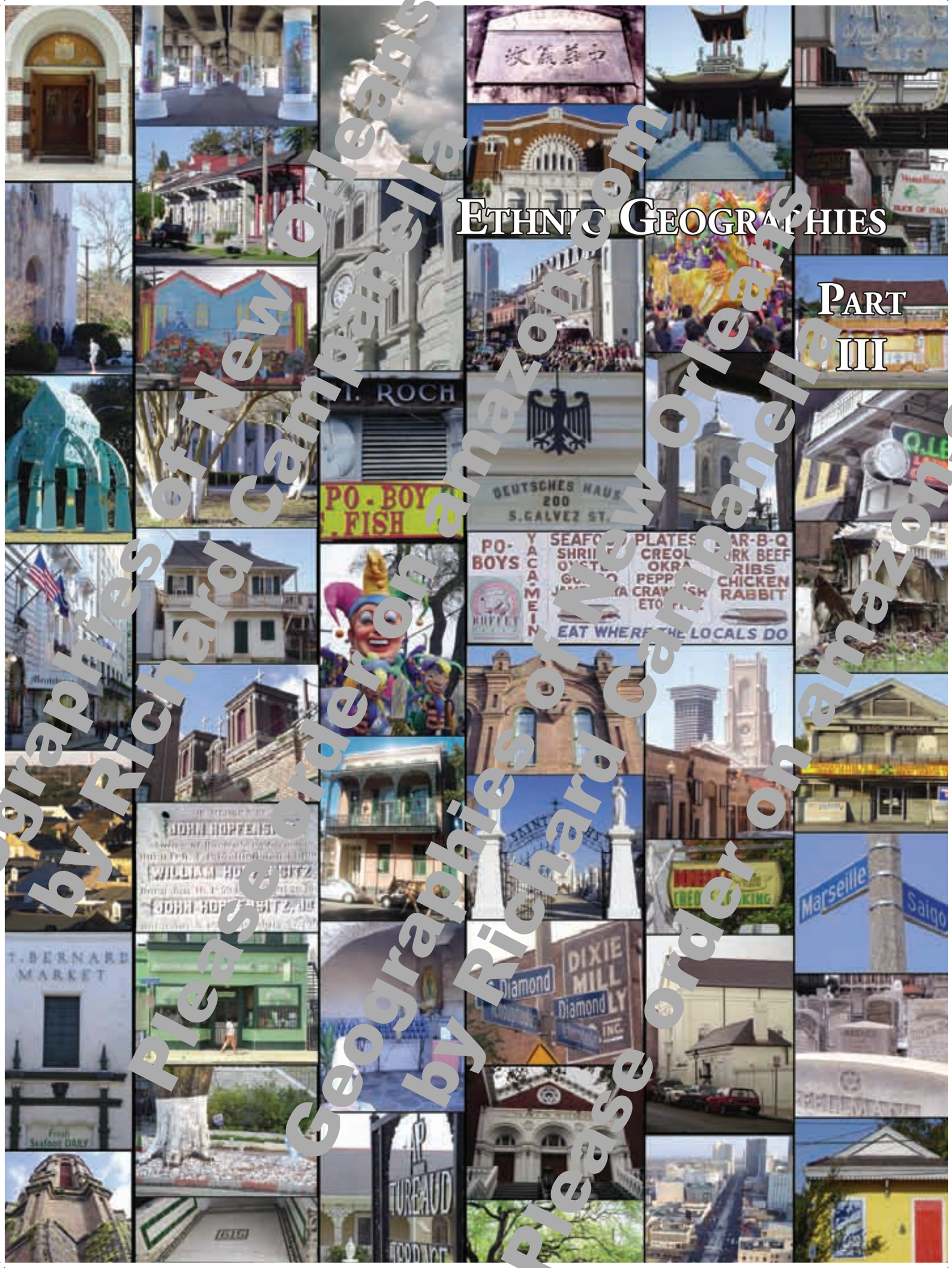


Ethnic Geographies

Part III

America's First Multicultural Society?

> No city perhaps on the globe, in an equal number of human beings, presents a greater contrast of nations, manners, language and complexion, than does New Orleans.
>
> —William Darby, 1816[1]

> The population is much mixed, consisting of foreigners, native French; Americans born in the state and from every state of the Union; a few Spaniards; and foreigners from almost every nation...; there is a great "*confusion of tongues*," and on the Levée, during a busy day, can be seen specimens of every grade, colour and condition: in short it is a world in miniature.
>
> —John Adems Paxton, 1822[2]

> Americans, English, French, Scotch, Spanish, Swedes, Germans, Irish, Italians, Russians, Creoles, Indians, Negroes, Mexicans, and Brazilians. The mixture of languages, costumes, and manners, renders the scene one of the most singular that I ever witnessed.... [They] contrasted altogether such a striking contrast, that it was not a little extraordinary to find them united in one single point. There is a place [representing] the confusion of tongues at the Tower of Babel...it certainly is New Orleans.
>
> —C.D. Arfwedson, 1834[3]

> Truly does New-Orleans represent every other city and nation upon earth. I know of none where is congregated so great a variety of the human species, of every language and colour. Not only natives of the well known European and Asiatic countries are to be met with, but occasionally Persians, Turks, Lascars, Malays, Indian sailors from South America and the Islands of the sea, Hottentots, Laplanders, and, for aught I know to the contrary, Amazonians.
>
> —Joseph Holt Ingraham, 1835[4]

> Jews and Gentiles, the Frenchman, Italian, Spaniard, German, and American of all conditions and occupations. What a hubbub! what an assemblage of strange faces, of the representatives of distinct people! What a contact of beauty and deformity, of vulgarity and good-breeding! What a collection of costumes...!
>
> —Henry Didimus, 1835-1836[5]

Most nineteenth-century visitors to New Orleans regularly marveled about the diversity of the local population, offers more than mere anecdotal evidence for the Crescent City's celebrated ethnic heterogeneity.[6] These observers tended to be worldly, erudite, and by the very nature of their waterborne arrival, usually familiar with other great port cities. Their comments may thus reflect fair comparisons to many other cities worldwide, and are buttressed by the assessments of prominent historians. "Almost from the beginning," wrote the late Joseph Logsdon, "South Louisiana had a diverse population of Frenchmen, Germans, Italians, Indians, Africans, and Spaniards. It contained a mixed population well before Chicago, Boston, New York or Cleveland...." New Orleans' diversity "amazed early travelers...[who] could find comparisons only in such crossroads of the world as Venice and Vienna."[7] Far more immigrants arrived to the United States through New Orleans—over 550,000 from 1820 to 1860, with 300,000 in the 1850s alone—than any other Southern city in the nineteenth century, and for most of the late antebellum era, it was the nation's number two immigrant port, ahead of Boston and behind only New York.[8] Moreover, New Orleans "was an almost perfect microcosm...of the entire pattern of human movement into the United States prior to 1860."[9]

Such superlative notions invite deeper investigation. Was New Orleans, as many observers have passionately commented, "the only 'foreign' city in the United States"[10] and "America's first melting pot?"[11] How does New Orleans's population diversity compare quantitatively to those of other cities of the day? These questions are of great interest to a geographical inquiry. Early multiculturalism would indicate a widespread attraction of this place to peoples from dispersed lands. What attracted them? What impact did they have on New Orleans, and vice versa? And why did this attraction eventually fade? An atypical diversity would distinguish New Orleans from other cities of its day; identifying and explaining distinguishing characteristics among places is a premier mission of the geographer. Additionally, such a distinction begs investigation as to how these various groups lived and intermixed here over the years, and what this means for a nation practically founded on the principle of the "melting pot"—or better yet, "gumbo."[12]

Measuring Historical Diversity

Was New Orleans indeed America's first genuinely multicultural society? There exist about as many ways to measure diversity as there are to define it. This chapter enlists numerical evidence toward answering the above question, then looks behind the question to causation. We begin with some methodological clarifications. Ethnic[13] diversity is judged here not

[1] William Darby, *A Geographical Description of the State of Louisiana* (Philadelphia, PA, 1816), 18.

[2] John Adems Paxton, *The New Orleans Directory and Register* (New Orleans, 1822), 45-46.

[3] C.D. Arfwedson, *The United States and Canada in 1832, 1833, and 1834*, 2 vols. (London, 1834), 2:56.

[4] Joseph Holt Ingraham, *The South-West by a Yankee*, 2 vols. (New York, 1835), 1:99.

[5] H. Didimus, *New Orleans As I Found It* (New York, 1845), 29-30.

[6] For a sampling of nineteenth-century visitor impressions, see John M. Martin, "The People of New Orleans As Seen By Her Visitors, 1803-1860," *Louisiana Studies* 6 (Winter 1967): 361-75.

[7] Joseph Logsdon, "The Surprise of the Melting Pot: We Can All Become New Orleanians," in *Perspectives on Ethnicity in New Orleans*, ed. John Cooke (New Orleans, 1980), 8.

[8] Treasury Department, Bureau of Statistics, *Tables Showing Arrivals of Alien Passengers and Immigrants in the United States from 1820 to 1888* (Washington, DC, 1889), 108-09.

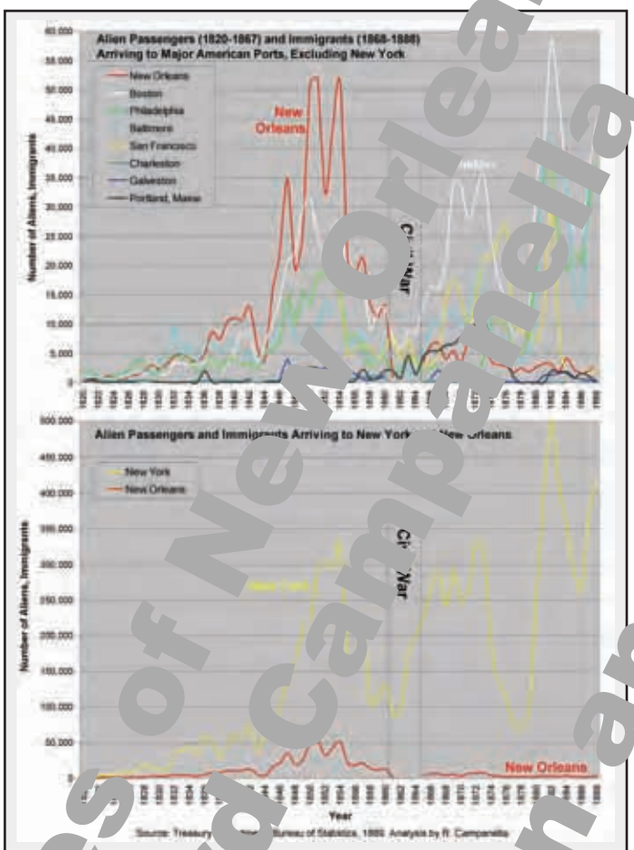
[9] Frederick Marcel Spletstoser, "Back Door to the Land of Plenty: New Orleans as an Immigrant Port, 1820-1860" (Ph.D. dissertation, Louisiana State University, 1979), vi.

[10] Ingraham, *The South-West by a Yankee*, 1:93.

[11] Henry E. Chambers, *A History of Louisiana: Wilderness—Colony—Province—Territory—State—People* (Chicago and New York, 1925), 114.

[12] The old "melting pot" and "salad bowl" metaphors, used to describe ethnic interaction and assimilation in America, do not do justice to the process. Ethnic group identity neither completely "melts" into a new identity, nor maintains complete wholeness in a "salad" of other groups. "Gumbo" better captures the process: some elements blend; others remain distinct; and the whole differs from the sum of its parts. That gumbo is a classic dish of the New Orleans kitchen makes the metaphor that much more appropriate.

[13] An "ethnic group" may be defined as a self-identifying community united by a common ancestral or cultural bond, distinguished from the "charter" group, or host society. In historic New Orleans, that charter group comprised primarily the wealth-



Many immigrants arrived through New Orleans—over 550,000 from 1820-1860, with 300,000 in the 1850s alone—than any other Southern city in the nineteenth century. For most of the pre-antebellum era, New Orleans was the nation's number-two immigrant port, ahead of Boston and behind only New York. All this changed after the Civil War. *Graph and analysis by author based on Treasury Department-Bureau of Statistics data.*

merely as the sheer number of groups coexisting in a locale, but their relative proportions. For example, a city in which only five groups resided in roughly equal numbers would be considered more diverse than a city in which twenty-five groups resided, but only one comprised 90 percent of the population. Additionally, one's place of origin is factored into this assessment. States were far more relevant to peoples' lives in antebellum America than they are today; one's nativity by state and region weighed heavily in self-identity and social interaction. (Consider that the era culminated when militias of soldiers in state militias fought a war over states' rights.) An Anglo from Vermont moving to the predominantly Anglo western frontier in 1820 may well have been seen as "different" for his Yankee origins, despite the similar bloodlines. The difference was that much greater in New Orleans, to which thousands of families from the North and upper South moved in the early nineteenth century. These out-of-state migrants differed—not only in ancestry but also in class, religion, language, political and economic philosophy, and

all worldview—from the Creoles, whose identity was unified by a deep-rooted sense of colonial-era Louisiana nativity. When the data permitted, both Americans born out-of-state (presumably Anglo) and those born locally (presumably Creole) were considered as ethnically diversifying elements.

A distinction was also made between free people of color and enslaved populations, because their different life experiences and attributes made it seem reasonable to view each as an ethnic group within the larger black population. The two groups were seen as different castes in antebellum Louisiana society, the former allotted certain limited privileges and more likely to be Francophone Creole in culture; the latter at the bottom rung and more likely to have spoken the English-out-of-state Anglo world. Because of restrictions on the in-migration of free people of color to Louisiana in the late antebellum era, most residing in New Orleans were native to the state, further differentiating them from their peers in other American cities.[14]

Whatever the ideal definition of ethnic diversity, we are, of course, limited to the data collected in a day (and surviving to today) if we seek to look at the question quantitatively. It is a matter of doing one's best with the scant data that do exist, rather than giving up because the optimal data do not exist. Spanish colonial-era censuses of New Orleans in 1769, 1778, 1788 and 1795–1796, and an early territorial era census of 1805, offer only limited statistics comparable to those collected in the first two American censuses of 1790 and 1810.[15] In the 1810 national census, the new American Territory of Orleans received only peripheral attention, and New Orleans proper even less.[16] City-sponsored counts, tax lists, real estate records and other ancillary sources of population information are useless in a comparative study if the same data cannot be found for other cities. It is not until the 1820 census that we find information detailed enough to allow for diversity comparisons of the nation's largest population centers. The 1850 census (and those following it) is a treasure trove because it was the first to record birthplace, a sound indicator of ethnicity. Late twentieth-century censuses went still further by inquiring about peoples' "ancestries,"

ier descendents of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Francophone and Anglo populations. This book, however, considers all groups regardless of social position, as "ethnic" groups, so long as they perceive or perceived such bonds among themselves. New Orleans is one of the few American cities in which even the primary charter groups spent some time in the position of an ethnic minority.

[14] Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, *American Diary, 1857-8*, ed. Joseph W. Reed, Jr. (London, 1972), 98.

[15] The Spanish census of 1778 counted 3,000 people living in New Orleans, 8 percent more than the previous year but less than the 1769 census. Fifty-one percent were white, 31 percent were slaves of pure African blood, 8 percent were free people of mixed blood, 7 percent were slaves of mixed blood, and 3 percent were free Africans of pure blood. Albert J. Robichaux, Jr., *Louisiana Census and Militia Lists 1770-1789*, vol. 1, *German Coast and New Orleans, Below New Orleans and Lafourche* (Harvey, 1973), 68; see also Roscoe R. Hill, *Descriptive Catalogue of the Documents Relating to the History of the United States in the Papeles Procedentes de Cuba Deposited in the Archivo General de Indias at Seville* (Washington, DC, 1916), 513.

[16] The Territory of Orleans in 1810—roughly present-day Louisiana—contained 76,556 people, of whom 47 percent were slaves, 45 percent were free whites, and 10 percent were "all other free persons, except Indians not taxed." These totals were far more than any other American territory at the time—Mississippi, Indiana, Illinois, and Michigan. A census for New Orleans in the same year counted 17,224 New Orleanians, of whom 57 percent were white. Census Bureau, "Aggregate Amount of Each Description of Persons within the United States of America, and the Territories Thereof," 1810, Government Documents, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University; and Robert E. Fossier, *New Orleans: The Glamour Period, 1800-1840* (New Orleans, 1957), 257.

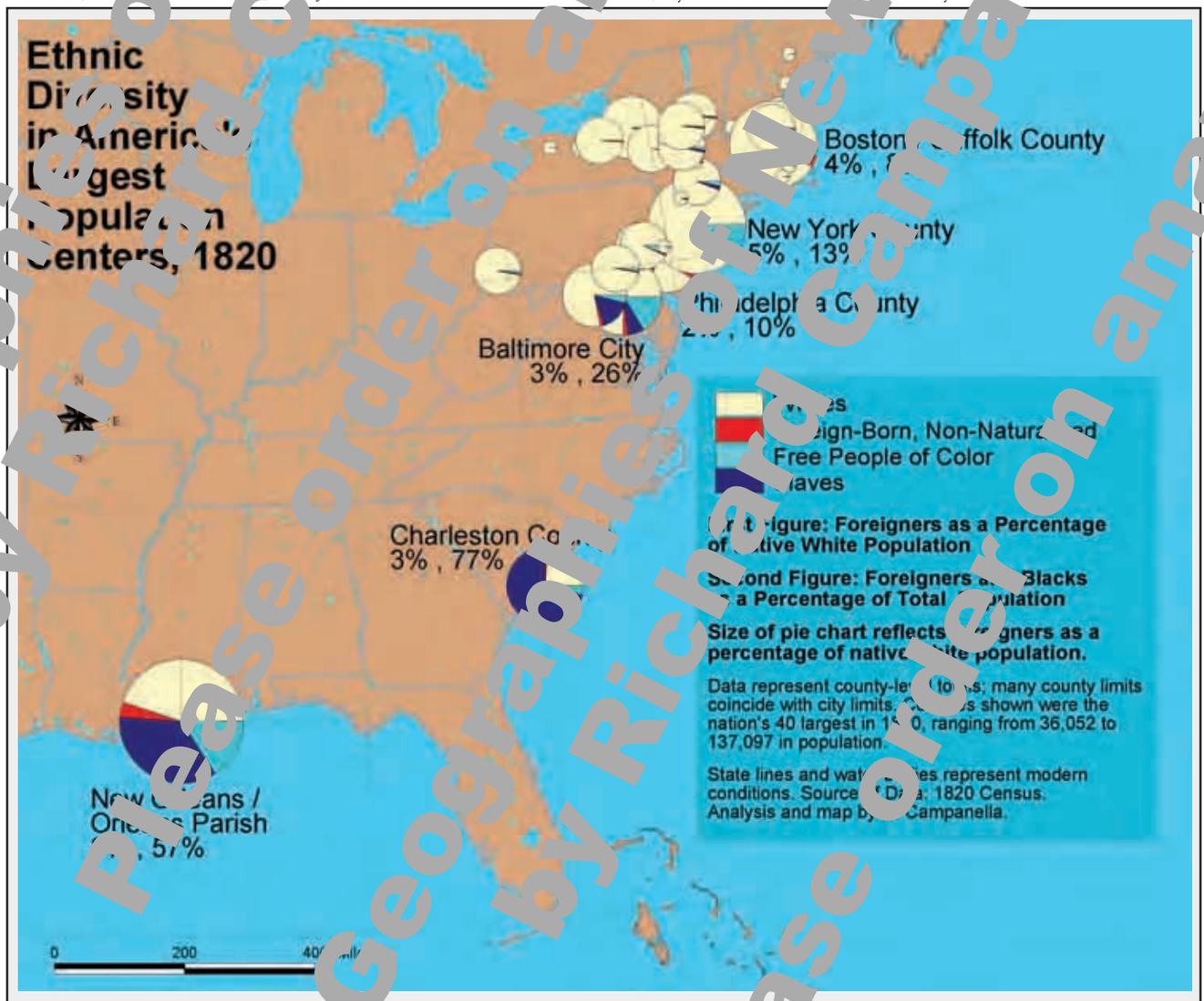
an even better gauge of ethnicity, and the 20[illegible] census went further still by gathering information on an extremely wide spectrum of racial and ethnic intermixtures.

A Place Apart: New Orleans in 1820s America

The compendium volume of the 1820 census categorized whites, non-naturalized foreigners, free colored people, and slaves at the county and city level for the nation's largest communities. Population-wise, Orleans Parish[17] ranked twenty-fifth largest among counties, while New Orleans was fifth among cities in 1820, a year in which the rural county population was kept separate from that of urbanized New Orleans. From the perspective of sheer size alone, there were certainly larger population centers than New Orleans. But from a diversity perspective, Orleans Parish stands at or very near the top. For example, if diversity is reflected by the number of foreigners and blacks (both free and enslaved) compared to the total population, then Orleans Parish ranks number two in the nation, at 57 percent, behind only the highly enslaved county encompassing the port city of Charleston. If we consider the white population as the denominator, the pattern persists: Orleans Parish is second only to Charleston County in the [illegible]atnumbering of non-whites to whites. One may argue, of course, that such measures cannot help but rank Southern counties as extraordinarily diverse, as a statistical offshoot of slavery. Excluding slaves from the calculations, suddenly Orleans Parish becomes arguably the most diverse in the nation. It had by far the highest percent of unnaturalized foreigners compared to its white population (38 percent, ahead of New York's 4.8 percent), and the highest percent of foreigners plus free people of color to white population (45 percent, ahead of Baltimore's 26 percent).[18]

[17] In the early American years, the term *county* was used (officially until 1843) to describe what we now call *parishes* in Louisiana, although for years both terms were used often rather loosely. Orleans Parish in 1820 was not coincident with its present-day boundaries, having included much of today's Jefferson Parish.

[18] County-level data from University of Virginia Geospatial and Statistical Data Center; city-level data from *Census for 1820*. Analysis by author.



An analysis of the 1820 census shows that New Orleans ranked at or near the top in [illegible] indicators of population diversity. *Map and analysis by author.*

Diversity in Major American Cities, 1850

Analysis based on "Statistical View of the United States—Compendium of the [illegible] Census" (1854), by J.D.B. De Bow. See source for details and explanations of discrepancies. Special thanks to Kate Iannuzzi for assistance in data [illegible].

Largest Cities, 1850	Total Population	Locally Born (in city or state)	Born Elsewhere in US	Born in England, Wales, or Scotland	Born in Ireland	Born in Germany, Prussia, or Austria	Born in France	Born in Spain	Born in Italy	Free People of Color	Slaves	Total US Born	Total Foreign Born	Total- Whites	Percent Foreign-Born plus Black to Total Population	Percent Foreign-Born plus Black to White Population	Percent Foreign-Born to White Population	Percent Foreign-Born plus Free Colored to White Population	Percent Locally Born to Total Population	Number of Ethnic / Nativity Groups Exceeding 5% of Total Population
New York	515,547	234,843	[illegible]	[illegible]	133,730	56,250	4,990	303	708	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	235,733	[illegible]	[illegible]	50%	47%	50%	46%	5
Philadelphia	408,762	242,681	43,665	[illegible]	[illegible]	23,104	1,981	291	236	19,761	[illegible]	[illegible]	121,699	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	31%	36%	59%	5
Baltimore	169,054	113,583	16,908	[illegible]	[illegible]	19,454	346	16	67	25,442	2,946	[illegible]	[illegible]	140,666	[illegible]	[illegible]	25%	43%	67%	5
Boston	136,881	68,687	20,261	4,110	[illegible]	[illegible]	225	67	134	1,999	0	[illegible]	[illegible]	134,882	36%	[illegible]	35%	[illegible]	50%	3
New Orleans	119,460	34,101	16,369	3,524	[illegible]	[illegible]	7,522	1,150	658	9,961	18,068	50,470	[illegible]	[illegible]	64%	[illegible]	[illegible]	64%	29%	7
Cincinnati	115,435	39,322	21,236	4,853	14,393	[illegible]	797	4	152	3,237	0	60,558	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	51%	49%	[illegible]	[illegible]	4
St. Louis	[illegible]	20,321	16,208	3,507	9,719	22,584	682	[illegible]	101	1,398	2,656	36,529	38,397	[illegible]	[illegible]	58%	52%	[illegible]	[illegible]	4
Albany	[illegible]	28,738	2,424	2,622	13,079	2,876	[illegible]	[illegible]	1	860	0	31,162	16,591	49,903	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	35%	57%	4
Louisville	[illegible]	[illegible]	8,794	882	3,105	7,526	422	[illegible]	[illegible]	1,538	5,432	25,079	12,461	36,224	45%	[illegible]	[illegible]	39%	38%	5
Charleston	42,985	[illegible]	[illegible]	869	2,369	1,817	187	23	[illegible]	[illegible]	19,532	17,809	4,643	20,012	64%	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	37%	4
Providence	41,513	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	7,635	90	40	10	19	[illegible]	0	31,755	9,679	40,014	27%	28%	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	3
Washington, DC	40,001	19,237	[illegible]	721	2,023	1,257	69	22	49	[illegible]	[illegible]	33,530	4,282	29,730	36%	49%	14%	[illegible]	[illegible]	5
Newark	[illegible]	21,477	[illegible]	[illegible]	5,564	3,828	240	8	0	1,229	0	[illegible]	12,322	37,664	35%	36%	33%	36%	[illegible]	5
Chicago	[illegible]	5,831	7,862	[illegible]	[illegible]	5,094	234	2	4	323	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	29,640	53%	54%	53%	54%	[illegible]	5
Richmond	[illegible]	14,138	1,403	451	[illegible]	760	68	5	34	2,369	9,927	[illegible]	[illegible]	15,274	52%	94%	14%	29%	[illegible]	4
Detroit	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	1,719	[illegible]	[illegible]	282	4	4	587	0	11,055	[illegible]	[illegible]	50%	51%	49%	51%	30%	5
Portland	20,815	[illegible]	[illegible]	206	2,301	[illegible]	14	0	6	395	0	17,265	3,512	[illegible]	19%	19%	17%	19%	73%	3
Mobile	20,515	5,507	[illegible]	[illegible]	2,009	[illegible]	[illegible]	144	65	715	6,803	9,565	4,086	[illegible]	[illegible]	89%	31%	37%	27%	4
New Haven	20,345	13,775	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	284	[illegible]	0	3	989	0	16,641	3,697	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	19%	24%	68%	3
Milwaukee	20,061	2,641	4,540	[illegible]	2,816	7,287	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	98	0	7,181	12,782	19,963	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	65%	13%	5
Savannah	15,312	4,774	1,816	28	1,555	[illegible]	37	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	6,231	6,590	2,434	8,395	61%	[illegible]	[illegible]	37%	31%	4
Wilmington, DE	13,979	8,671	3,527	264	[illegible]	[illegible]	16	1	[illegible]	[illegible]	0	12,198	1,763	11,839	28%	33%	[illegible]	33%	62%	4
Manchester	13,932	9,555	2,689	213	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	0	0	[illegible]	[illegible]	12,244	1,688	13,885	12%	12%	[illegible]	[illegible]	69%	3
Hartford	13,555	8,293	2,258	293	2,188	296	[illegible]	[illegible]	4	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	2,915	13,112	25%	26%	22%	[illegible]	61%	3
Nashville	10,165	4,883	2,302	207	421	208	[illegible]	[illegible]	3	511	[illegible]	[illegible]	948	7,626	34%	46%	12%	19%	48%	4
Portsmouth	9,738	7,088	1,452	405	523	26	6	[illegible]	[illegible]	50	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	9,688	13%	13%	12%	13%	73%	3
Memphis	8,841	2,134	2,892	153	704	350	69	1	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	6,355	43%	60%	22%	24%	24%	4
Wilmington, NC	7,264	3,527	498	47	63	73	9	0	0	[illegible]	[illegible]	4,025	[illegible]	[illegible]	54%	109%	6%	25%	49%	4
St. Augustine	1,934	1,100	144	11	11	5	6	3	1	[illegible]	[illegible]	1,244	56	[illegible]	40%	64%	5%	12%	57%	3

When we consider city-level populations, the relative ethnic diversity of the New Orleans area intensifies. Though fifth in the nation in size, the Crescent City was either a close second to Charleston, or first in the nation (far ahead of such bastions of plurality as New York and Boston), in the rudimentary measures of diversity. According to the best available statistics, New Orleans emerges as one of the most, or *the* most, diverse city in 1820 America.

Numbers tell only part of the story. Other historical circumstances further add to the case for New Orleans' superlative multiculturalism. The city's geographical situation at the nexus of the North American interior with the southern seas availed it to populations largely beyond the influence of the great northeastern ports and colonial ports of the Caribbean basin, the complex Creole societies of the sugar islands, and the ports of southern Europe and South America looked first to New Orleans, not New York or Philadelphia, when interacting with North America. New Orleans' whites, foreigners, free people of color, and slaves rarely "look" the same as those in Washington and Baltimore when listed in a statistical table, but in fact extracted from very different stock. Whites in most American cities were virtually English in ancestry; whites in New Orleans were usually French. Africans in the upper South were absorbed into mostly Anglo-American culture; those in New Orleans were brought into Latin culture, often by way of French and Spanish colonies in the Caribbean. "The very history of New Orleans explains a population mixture that one cannot fail to notice even on the streets of the city," wrote a Russian visitor a few decades later. "Every one of the nationalities that took part in shaping the destiny of Louisiana left its representatives here, and down to the present day Spanish and French are heard along with English. Even the Americans have adopted French words into their language."[19] Politically, New Orleans' foundation and possession by France, followed by almost forty years of Spanish domination, rendered it fundamentally different from all other major American cities at the dawn of the nineteenth century. It was a French-speaking city in an English-speaking nation. It was a Catholic city in a Protestant nation. It legislated civil law in a region of English common law. It watched the fighting of the Revolutionary War, the signing of the Declaration of Independence, and the ratification of the Constitution from across international borders. New Orleans governed, worshipped, surveyed land, built structures, recorded deeds, celebrated holidays, and entombed the dead differently. And its extracted immigrants, investors, and interlopers will more often than not, share those cultural characteristics. French culture prevailed for many years as America's creation, as evidenced by this interview with prominent New Orleans lawyer M. Mazureau conducted by Alexis de Tocqueville in 1832:

> Q. They say that in New Orleans is to be found a mixture of all the nations?
>
> A. That's true; you see here a mingling of all races. Not a country in America or Europe but has sent us some representatives. New Orleans is a patch-work of peoples.
>
> Q. But in the midst of this confusion what race dominates and gives direction to all the rest?
>
> A. The French race, up to now. It's they who set the tone and shape the *moeurs*.[20]

Intensifying this cultural distinction was New Orleans' geographical isolation, separated by a long and waterborne miles from the South's number-two port, Charleston, and twice that distance from the hearth of Anglo-America. New Orleans in the early 1800s represented not only the nation's southwestern frontier, but also a new experience in its westward expansion: a century-old sophisticated foreign society now one under very different circumstances, suddenly Americanized. These factors made New Orleans' early multiculturalism that much more extraordinary.[21]

Ethnic Gumbo: New Orleans in 1850s America

By the midpoint of the nineteenth century, New Orleans had tripled its 1820 population, remaining fifth among cities in the growing nation and enjoying the height of its wealth and prestige. Its ability to attract newcomers—a sound gauge of a city's greatness—peaked in the 1850s. In fact, for most of the years between 1820 and 1860, the remote and isolated Crescent City attracted more immigrants than any other city in the South, and many in the nation save New York. In 1851, a city record of 52,411 immigrants arrived to New Orleans, almost the same number as recorded for Boston, Philadelphia, and Baltimore *combined*.[22] Many of them, of course, arrived and promptly departed for other destinations up the Mississippi valley; others remained and settled locally. Exactly how many can be determined not through immigration data but census data. An analysis of the 1850 census—which tabulated place or country of birth for the first time—provides additional evidence that New Orleans was at the very forefront of the American experiment of pluralism. Some observations about the 1850 census data follow.

Ethnic Gumbo — New Orleans in 1850 was home to more significantly sized ethnic groups (measured by ancestry, na-

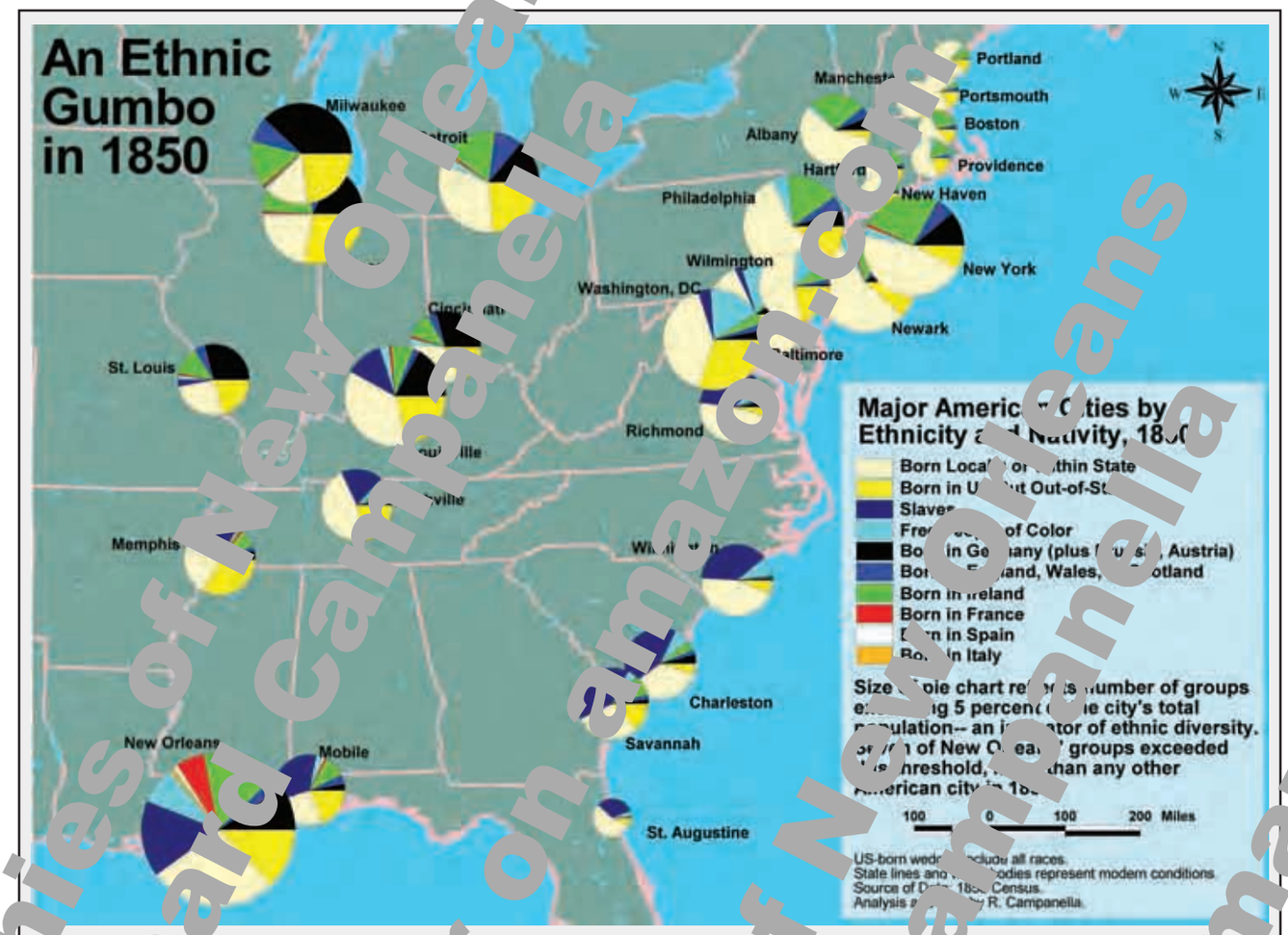
[19] Aleksandr Borisovich Lakier, *A Russian Looks at America: The Journal of Aleksandr Borisovich Lakier in 1857*, eds. Arnold Schrier and Joyce Story (Chicago and London, 1979), 232.

[20] As quoted in George Wilson Pierson, *Tocqueville in America* (Garden City, NY, 1959), 397.

[21] Among the best accounts of antebellum New Orleans' ethnic chessboard are found in the works of historian Joseph G. Tregle, Jr. Especially recommended is "The Ethnic Imperative" chapter in his *Louisiana in the Age of Jackson: A Clash of Cultures and Personalities* (Baton Rouge, 1999).

[22] Treasury Department, Bureau of Statistics, *Tables Showing Arrivals*, 108-09.

[23] Analysis based on data in J.D.B. De Bow, *Statistical View of the United States—Compendium of the Seventh Census* (Washington, DC, 1854), 395-99. Note: this source combines New Orleans, Lafayette, and Algiers for population figures on whites, slaves, and free people of color, totaling 133,650. But figures involving place of birth appear to have been held to different standards, representing only New Orleans proper, whose population in 1850 was 119,460 (91,431 whites; 18,068 black slaves; and 9,961 free people of color). I adjusted the data in the accompanying table such that only New Orleans proper is depicted.



New Orleans in 1850 was home to more significantly sized ethnic groups (measured by ancestry, nativity, race, and enslavement status) than any other American city. Nearly three out of every four residents were born elsewhere. New Orleans in 1850 claimed the highest numbers of French- and Spanish-born residents, and probably Italian-born as well. Foreigners and African Americans comprised a greater percent of the total population (64 percent) more than any of the other eight largest cities in the nation. *Map and analysis by author.*

tivity, race, and enslavement status) than any other American city. That is, when we break each of the twenty-nine major American cities' populations into the sub-groups tabulated by the 1850 census,[24] seven groups in New Orleans each comprised at least 5 percent of the city's total population. No other city had more than five such groups. New Orleans' diversity was thus significant in numbers of people *in* various groups, as well as number of groups. To push the metaphor, not only was New Orleans a rich gumbo of different ethnicities, but no one skimped on the ingredients.

A Town of Out-of-Towners — New Orleans had the lowest percentage of locally born people (26 percent born in the city or state) of the six American cities with populations over 100,000. Nearly three out of every four New Orleanians in 1850 were born elsewhere and came there from every corner of the globe. Four smaller cities near the western fron-

tier—St. Louis, Chicago, Milwaukee, and Memphis—had lower rates of nativity.

Vestiges of Colonial Ties — Nearly a half-century after the departure of the colonial regimes, New Orleans in 1850 still claimed the highest numbers of French- and Spanish-born residents (7,522 and 1,150, respectively) of any city in the nation—and by a wide margin in both absolute and per capita terms. It also had the second-most Italian-born residents, showing Catholic southern Europeans' preference for New Orleans above most other American cities.

A Majority of Minorities — Foreigners and African Americans comprised a greater percent of the total population (64 percent), and of the white population (84 percent) in New Orleans than any of the other eight largest cities in the nation. However, a number of smaller cities—Charleston, Milwaukee, Savannah, among them—ranked higher in these measures of diversity.

[24] The subgroups were aggregated as (1) locally born; (2) born elsewhere in United States; (3) born in England, Wales, or Scotland; (4) born in Ireland; (5) born in Germany, Prussia, or Austria; (6) born in France; (7) born in Spain; (8) born in Italy; (9) free people of color; and (10) enslaved blacks. De Bow, *Statistical View of the United States*, 395-99.

[25] Other tabulations of the same data indicate that New Orleans had the most Italians of any American city in 1850, in both absolute and relative terms. See the chapter on Little Palermo for details.

Foreigners — New Orleans ranked second in the nation (53 percent) in percent of foreign-born[26] to total number of whites, behind only Milwaukee (64 percent), a young city settled by a large German-born population.

Foreigners and Free People of Color — When we consider foreign-born plus free people of color as a percentage of total white population, New Orleans is again number two in the nation, at 64 percent, just behind mostly immigrant Milwaukee (65 percent).

Explaining the Diversity

Though the specifics are subject to debate, both first-person testimonies and statistics show that New Orleans was among the most ethnically diverse major cities in nineteenth-century America. What begs the question, why? What was it about New Orleans that attracted so many from so far and wide, so early? A series of interrelated factors—geographical, economic, sociological, and historical—explain the phenomenon.

Accessibility — A strategically located river/sea port city is, by definition, relatively cheap and easy to reach by waterborne transportation, especially when that river is the likes of the Mississippi, and that sea communicates not only with the Gulf and East Coast but societies in the Caribbean basin, Europe, and Africa. Water bodies, not land, connected New Orleans with the outside world, in an era when humans depended almost entirely on waterborne transportation for commerce and long-distance travel. Immigration routes followed commercial routes, which followed waterways. Fares were sometimes cheap, and ships from the major world ports departed regularly and sailed directly to New Orleans. Accordingly, a wide diversity of people in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries gained easier access to distant New Orleans than to much more proximate smaller ports or landlocked communities. Being a major node in the world shipping system also instilled an international character in New Orleans, which augmented its diversity. Merchant marine sailors, servicemen, multinational businessmen, consuls, and a network of support industries created a community of long-term visitors in New Orleans, many of whom married into the local population established permanent residence and brought brethren. The diversity imparted through the Crescent City's waterborne accessibility might have been greater had the city established a greater number of direct lines with European ports (beyond those associated with cotton exportation), had its local merchants owned and controlled their own shipping fleets, and had fares been consistently cheaper than those of alternative cities in the North and East.[27]

Hinterland — New Orleans operated then and now, as a through-port in service of a vast hinterland. Through this port came people as well as products and raw material, many intent on settling in the interior. But a stop in New Orleans often meant a connection made or an opportunity seized—enough reason to settle in New Orleans. In other circumstances, "many immigrants who disembarked at New Orleans tarried or took up residence there because they arrived destitute and unable to continue their journey, or because they did not have the desire, knowledge, or skills to become agricultural pioneers in the interior valley."[28] Thus, originally drawn by the hinterland, they instead became New Orleanians. Historian A.A. Conway observed that New Orleans, like most large ports serving vast hinterlands, served as a filter on the flow of immigrants, and not necessarily to its benefit. The city often "was left with a residue of poorer, less desirable immigrants who lacked either the resources or the information to strike out for the West, [thus] it became a transit point for the best elements of the immigrant flow" into the interland.[29]

Force — Tens of thousands came in bondage, directly from Africa or via the Caribbean, other Southern ports, and plantations throughout the lower Mississippi Valley. Slaves did not form one homogeneous community unified by race—a fact not appreciated by many slaveholders—but rather a multitude of ethnicities carried from their life experiences and from those of their ancestors. Force was also the factor behind the arrival of some early colonial settlers, whose deportation to the Louisiana colony was the only alternative to imprisonment.

Prosperity and Opportunity — In the decades after the Louisiana Purchase, New Orleans ascended to become one of the wealthiest cities in America, attracting the privileged and the ambitious as well as the job-seeking impoverished and destitute. The Crescent City was the talk of early-1800s America, a cosmopolitan society at the gateway of the Mississippi Valley suddenly thrown open to American commerce, precisely when the serendipitous advancements in ginning and granulation allowed lucrative cotton and sugar production to replace fading colonial-era crops such as tobacco and indigo. "New Orleans has been rated as the third city of the Union," wrote one proud partisan in 1838, "but she is in reality the third only in population and second in a commercial point of view. Her imports are now exceeded only by New York and Boston; while her exports nearly triple any port in the United States except New York, which she exceeds by one third."[30] New Orleans in the early 1800s promised an opportunity to start fresh and to make it big; it offered both the excitement of a frontier town and the sophistication of an elder city. By the mid-1800s, however, New Orleans' relative lack of industrialization forced many "desirable" immigrants to proceed to interior destinations while the poor

[26] Note that the "foreign" statistic in 1820 meant non-naturalized foreigners, while in 1850 it implied foreign-born—comparable, but not identical.

[27] Spletstoser, "Back Door to the Land of Plenty," 57-59.

[28] Ibid., vii.

[29] A.A. Conway, "New Orleans as a Port of Immigration, 1820-1860" (M.A. thesis, University of London, 1949), 220-22.

[30] *Gibson's Guide and Directory of the State of Louisiana, and the Cities of New Orleans and Lafayette* (New Orleans, 1838), preface.

and destitute remained: the city could employ unskilled dock workers and canal diggers in much larger numbers than it could support middle-class professionals and skilled workers. Perceptions of economic opportunity for unskilled workers also attracted thousands of freedmen in the years after emancipation, diversifying the local urban black population with rural blacks of both Creole and African ethnicity.

Marketing, Employment, and Recruitment — Marketing—often deceptive—encouraged some groups to immigrate to French colonial Louisiana, which was in the early years, a land-development scheme predicated on its ability to people the land. Some immigrants were attracted by specific job offers from private enterprises, a compelling proposition for those suffering hopeless conditions in their mother countries. This was the case for the thousands of Irish who immigrated in the 18[illegible] for the grueling and dangerous work of digging the New Basin Canal. Sicilians in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were recruited out of desperate conditions by the marketing efforts of the labor-starved Louisiana sugar industry, abetted by the state of Louisiana. Sugar planters had earlier recruited small numbers of Chinese out of Cuba, California, and the Far East, to replace emancipated slaves. These immigrants often settled in New Orleans after toiling a few seasons in south Louisiana sugar plantations.

"Open Port" — Frederick Marcel Spletstoser notes that no government agency regulated immigration at the port of New Orleans in the antebellum era, and no quarantine was practiced until 1855. Immigrants with diseases, disabilities, criminal records, debts, and other issues who would have been turned away from New York, were allowed access to the United States through New Orleans.[31]

Familiarity — Certain groups established their home in or near New Orleans for its cultural similarity to their homeland. Acadians exiled from French Canada by the English in the 1760s and 1780s found their way to southern Louisiana in part for its familiar Francophone culture. Revolution in Saint-Domingue between 1791 and 1804 scattered thousands of French-speaking islanders throughout the Caribbean Basin, of whom over 9,000 arrived to New Orleans in 1809, again for its cultural familiarity. More so than any other American city, New Orleans attracted large numbers of immigrants directly from France, because the city retained its Francophone culture for decades after the colonial era. It is likely that many Sicilians who immigrated to New Orleans at the turn of the century felt at home with the city's Vatican-oriented Catholicism, the same factor that played a major role in drawing Vietnamese refugees here after the Communist takeover of their homeland. *Physical* familiarity—the similarity of the physical environment to one's homeland—is also said to have drawn immigrants to New Orleans, but this claim is dubious. The Acadians encountered in Louisiana a physical environment quite different from the one they left in Canada. The Sicilians, we are told, embraced the Mediterranean ambience of the French Quarter—or do twenty-first-century observers simply read this conclusion into nostalgic photographs of disheveled Quarter courtyards and cluttered, Venetian-like street scenes? Usually, immigrants select their destinations with only passive regard for the familiarity of the physical environment,[32] else we would see few Latinos in New York, or Germans in Texas, or English in Australia. Modern times have put an interesting twist on the notion of familiarity as a migration factor: there is small but noteworthy in-migration to New Orleans in recent decades, mostly comprising educated professionals, empty nesters, and young adults with a taste for the Bohemian—derives not from what is culturally or physically familiar about the city but from what is distinctive, unique, and alternative to what is perceived as the monotonous American norm.

Chain Immigration — An established community of compatriots settled in a distant land offers a compelling reason for more to come: the settling group informs its brethren of opportunities, warns them of threats, and avails them a haven, a refuge, and a sense of security. The size of an established group may vary from a few dozen to a few thousand before a critical mass is recognized, but once established, immigration rates often increase dramatically as wives, children, relatives, and friends make the move. While the original immigrants might have selected New Orleans for reasons X, Y, and Z, the next wave may choose New Orleans for only one reason: they have in the first wave. This phenomenon of chain immigration is evident today leading Latin American immigrants to various American cities today, in which people of certain towns and villages in Mexico, for example, beeline for specific neighborhoods in American cities where their countrymen reside.

Commercial Ties — Old economic ties, often the byproduct of direct shipping lines, underlie the city's age-old connection to certain world ports. A steady stream of cotton exports to Liverpool made for plenty of room for poor Irish immigrants to ride for New Orleans on cheap fares, serving as ballast in the otherwise-empty holds of ships.[33] Commercial shipping for the tropical-fruit industry connected New Orleans with Palermo in the early nineteenth century, and with La Ceiba, Honduras in the twentieth century. The old Palermo connection made New Orleans today home to the nation's largest concentration of Sicilians. The old Central American connection, in which New Orleans-based banana companies (one run by a Sicilian immigrant, the other by a Russian im-

[31] Spletstoser, "Back Door to the Land of Plenty," 130-31.

[32] Perhaps the best local example of environmental similarity as an immigrant draw is the latter waves of Vietnamese arrivals, who came to the New Orleans area in the 1980s-1990s in part for its fishing opportunities and semitropical climate. But they might not have arrived at all had there been no Vietnamese community already established. That initial community of Catholic Vietnamese refugees connected with the city on cultural grounds: they were specifically invited here in 1975 by the Catholic Church.

[33] See Earl F. Niehaus, *The Irish in New Orleans* (Baton Rouge, 1965), 34-35, on the relationship between cotton exportation and Irish immigration.

migrant) controlled extensive tracts of land and wielded great political power, has made New Orleans today the "third largest Honduran population center in the world."[34]

Isolation — At the dawn of the American era, New Orleans formed the nation's most isolated major urban outpost.[35] The city's remoteness, its separation from its immediate mainland by swamp, marsh, forest, and water, and its position about as far down the Mississippi River as geography would allow, made it the premier place to settle or stop over when traveling the southwestern frontier. The biggest, wealthiest, and most vivacious city naturally attracts the lion's share of that region's immigration and emigration, but when that city is isolated from neighboring cities and surrounded by inhospitable terrain, the attraction of newcomers amounts to monopolization.

Tolerance — New Orleans' prevalent atmosphere of tolerance is a product of its diversity and, to some degree, a cause of it. Black freemen emmigrated to the city after emancipation mainly for economic opportunity, but also to seek refuge in the more liberal attitude toward race and racial subjugation perceived in the Crescent City, relative to the interior South. This civic attribute of tolerance also explains the historically large and currently growing gay population in the city.

"Creole Factor" — Connotations of *Creole*—nativity to the New Orleans region, and the blending of ethnic and racial heritages—add complexity to New Orleans' ethnic diversity, and help distinguish it from that of other cities. In early and mid-nineteenth century usage, *Creole* implied those native to New Orleans and the delta region, who, whether white or black or mixed, traced their lineage back to colonial times and thus were more likely to practice Catholicism, speak French or Spanish, and exhibit locally tinged, Old World Latin cultural traits. The most profound ethnic dichotomy of antebellum New Orleans formed between these Creoles and the recently arrived, English-speaking, Protestant Anglo emigrants from the upper South and northeastern states. This early nineteenth-century understanding of *Creole* has since been supplanted by a modern usage (see next chapter for details), in which the word loosely refers to those black New Orleanians who descend from the free people of color or other mixed-race ancestors with some Francophone heritage. That the concept still survives today as a diversifying element of the black community illustrates yet another angle of New Orleans' unique brand of multiculturalism. Another connotation of *Creole* comes in its process form—"creolization"—meaning, according to one observer, "the blending of different ethnic groups in forming an individual or group identity."[36] To the extent that this means a racial blending, New Orleans society has traditionally recognized gradations between black and white unions, further diversifying the local ethnic and racial landscape. To the extent that creolization means that whoever arrives and intermingles in the steamy gumbo of a New Orleans neighborhood eventually assumes a new, local identity, born of different origins but unified by a sense of place—well, then, there is no greater testimony to New Orleans' true diversity.

Diversity in Decline

New Orleans' ethnic diversity of the early 1800s augmented later in the century, as peoples from southern and eastern Europe and elsewhere arrived to the city at rates greater than those of most other Southern ports. But its national primacy in multiculturalism began to diminish around the time of the Civil War, toppled by transformations both internal and external, gradual and sudden. The was foretold when the American flag first rose above the *Place d'Armes* on December 20, 1803. New Orleans' underlying French Creole culture would slowly hybridize with, and eventually give way to, the dominant way of life of thousands of incoming migrants, backed by the larger American culture and government. "The moment the cession was made, crowds of needy Yankees, or what is worse, Kentuckians, spread all over [Louisiana], attracted by the hope of gain; the latter treating the inhabitants as little better than a purchased property," recounted visitor Charles Sealsfield twenty-five years after the Louisiana Purchase. He continued,

> Full of prejudice toward the descendents of a nation of which they knew little more than the proverb, "French dog," [many Americans] without knowing or condescending to learn their language, behaved towards these people as if the lands, as well as the inhabitants, could be seized without ceremony.[37]

"There is little doubt," wrote Richard Champion Rawlins in 1840, when the cultural transformation of New Orleans was well underway,

> that before long the French will be almost unknown in this city as a distinct community...owing to the large influx of Americans into the city, whilst the French scarcely increase at all in numbers.[38]

For most of the decades between Americanization and the Civil War, Creoles and Americans wrestled each other in politics, business, society, religion, and lifestyle, an omnipresent tension that underscored much of life in the antebellum city. But in no way could Creole culture have survived the onslaught. It was severed from its colonial-era taproot, outnumbered and overwhelmed by an ambitious people born of a vivacious new nation. Creoles had lost most of their political power by the time of the 1852 reunification of the mu-

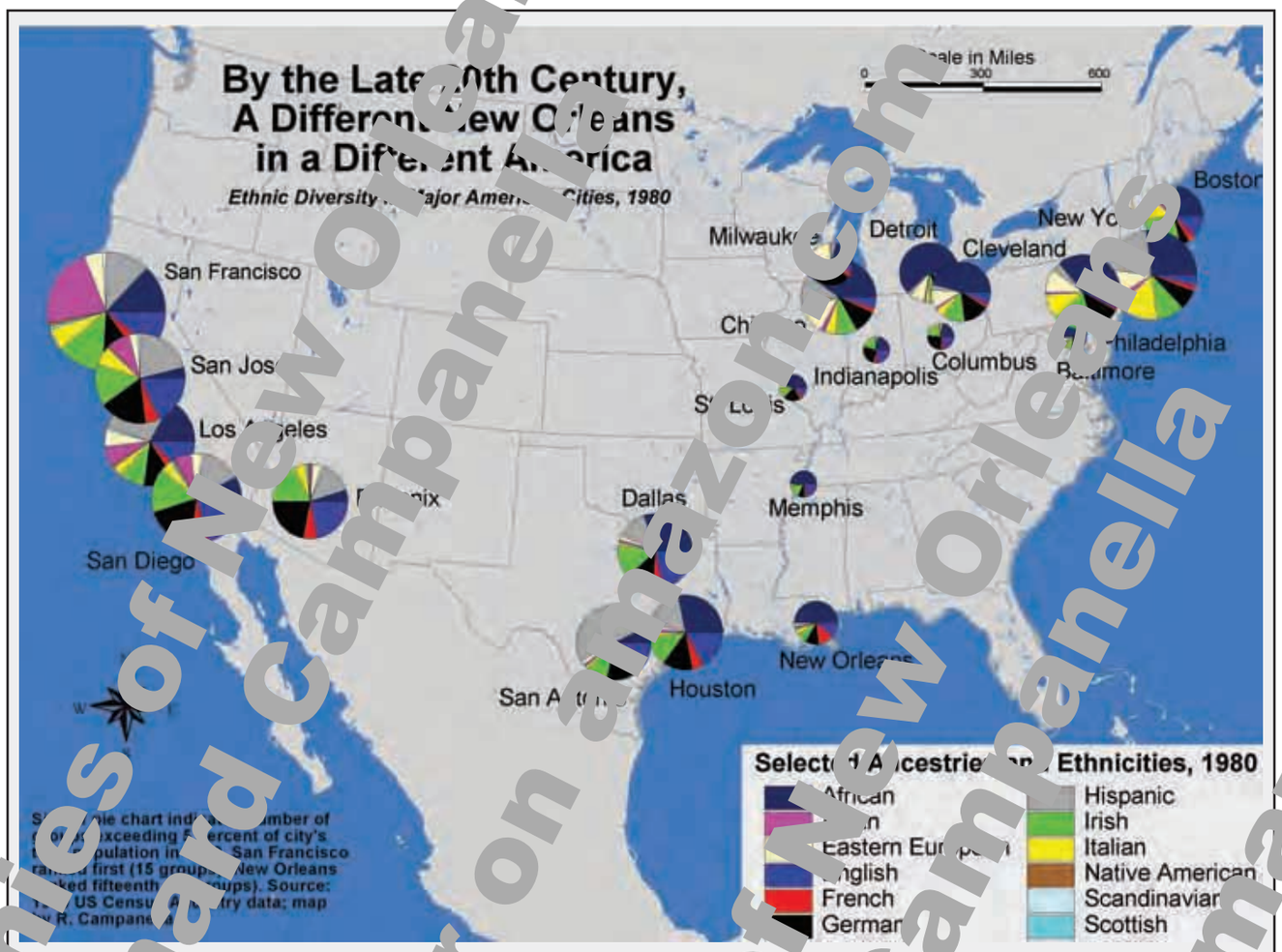
[34] Census data show about 10,000 Hondurans in the metropolitan area, but the Honduran consulate counts about 60,000 in the region, presumably including many American-born children. Jaquetta White, "Nagin Courts Honduran Trade," *Times-Picayune*, June 13, 2002, Metro section, 1.

[35] See analysis in Brian J.L. Berry and Frank E. Horton, *Geographical Perspectives on Urban Systems* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1970), 23, in which historic New Orleans was found to be "well-suited to control the river's internal trade but far distant from the areas which supplied domestic manufactures and from the heart of the domestic consumer market."

[36] John Cooke, *Perspectives on Ethnicity in New Orleans* (New Orleans, 1979), 1.

[37] Charles Sealsfield, *The Americans As They Are; Described in A Tour Through the Valley of the Mississippi* (London, 1828), 169-70.

[38] Richard Champion Rawlins, *An American Journal 1839-40*, ed. John L. Tearle (London, 2002), 106.



After the Civil War, economic opportunities in the industrialized North and advancements in transportation made Northeastern cities far more attractive than New Orleans to European immigrants. Additionally, Southern cities traditionally regarded immigrants with suspicion and did not embrace them or encourage their arrival. With each passing year in the late nineteenth century, weaker and weaker grow the case for New Orleans as America's most multicultural city. This 1980 map shows relative ethnic and cultural diversity in the nation's twenty-one largest cities using the same measure employed in the previous maps from 1820 and 1850. San Francisco ranked first in diversity (fifteen groups, each 5 percent), while New Orleans ranked fifteenth (ten groups), having fallen dramatically from its first place rank in 1850. *Map and analysis by author.*

nationalities; City Hall moved uptown, English became the dominant language, Catholicism no longer accounted for all of the steeples in town, and interaction with the former colonialists decreased with every passing year. Though it would take many decades for most outward expressions of traditional Creole culture to disappear from the streets, New Orleans in the late nineteenth century was no longer the isolated bastion of foreignness that it was in 1803.

The ranks of Germans, Irish, French and others arriving in antebellum New Orleans, large as they were, might have been greater had the South in general realized their value and encouraged their settlement. Instead, according to historian Ira Conway, Southern cities regarded immigrants suspiciously as potential abolitionists, even as immigration swelled Northern cities and allowed them to industrialize. Nativist Know-Nothing activity in New Orleans might also have slowed arrivals. Advancements in ocean-going passenger vessels made Northeastern seaports more economically accessible than distant New Orleans, while Eastern railroads penetrated the Appalachians and reached St. Louis by 1857, making the central Mississippi Valley accessible by rapid overland transport rather than the long, shipwreck-prone voyage through yellow-fever-plagued New Orleans.[39] Worst-ever "yellow jack" epidemics killed over 8,000 New Orleanians in 1853 alone (about one in twelve citizens), including a disproportionately high number of Irish and German immigrants. That immigration from both Ireland and the Germanic states nevertheless reached their highest levels in the early 1850s attests to advantages still perceived by those setting sail for New Orleans.

Political turmoil dropped the number of arrivals in New Orleans thirteen-fold between 1860 and 1861. The ensuing Civil War terminated most immigration and migration to the South, and to New Orleans in particular, which had surrendered early (May 1862) and subsequently suffered a massive disruption of shipping traffic and regional agricultural production. Immigration to the Crescent City would pick

[39] Conway, "New Orleans as a Port of Immigration," 223.

up in later decades, but never would it approach antebellum levels. The damaged economy and reputation of the South after the conflict directed most incoming immigrants to the industrialized, victorious North. Concurrently, the Mississippi River further relinquished its monopoly in traversing the Mississippi Valley. Whereas in the past one had to pass through New Orleans to penetrate the North American interior and extract its resources, easterners in the postbellum age could now take railroads, canals, waterways and roads across the Appalachians to reach the western frontier. Thus, as Creole culture waned, as war took its toll on the local economy, as new immigrants opted for northern cities, as railroads competed with the Mississippi River, and as the nation outgrew its dependence on water borne transportation, both New Orleans' economic strength and its ethnic diversity steadily diminished. We see this in the accompanying *Alien Passengers* graphs, in which the Crescent City rises above all American cities except New York starting in 1837, peaking in the 1850s, then plunging during the Civil War. New Orleans only weakly bounced back a decade later, when even Portland, Maine attracted more immigrants.

With each passing year the late nineteenth century was weaker and weaker grows the case for New Orleans as America's most multicultural city. New York, long the nation's leader in absolute numbers of immigrants, attained that distinction by the close of the century. By the late 1900s, San Francisco ranked arguably as the most diverse city in the nation, according to one analysis of the 1980 census data (see map, *By the Late Twentieth Century, A Different New Orleans in a Different America*), while New Orleans sank to fifteenth.[40] Today, cities such as Sacramento and suburbs of Atlanta or Washington, D.C. surpass New Orleans in most measures of diversity, while the Cortelyou neighborhood of Brooklyn ranked in 2000 as America's most diverse census tract. In terms of foreign-born, New Orleans ranks sixty-seventh in the nation, with only 3.4 percent of its population born outside the U.S., barely ahead of Louisville and Toledo, and far behind Miami's leading 51 percent.[41] One-hundred-fifty years earlier, New Orleans was number two in the nation, with 53 percent foreign-born.

New Orleans' historically superlative ethnic diversity is, like many of its distinguishing characteristics, now a thing of the past. Yet it lives on in the ethos of the city, the built environment, the food and music, in the bloodlines and group memories of its citizens—and in a few remnant words and phrases surviving from the "great confusion of tongues"[42] once heard in America's original generously multicultural metropolis.

Epilogue: In the ten days following Hurricane Katrina, Orleans Parish's original population of 462,000 declined to antebellum levels of about 100,000, then to French colonial levels of a few thousand. Around 70,000 had returned by late autumn, and around 250,000 are predicted to return permanently, in racial and ethnic mixes that can only be speculated about at this early stage. One possibility is that much of the black underclass will resettle elsewhere, leaving behind a smaller, whiter, more gentrified New Orleans. Another is that the city might see an influx of Latino workers to fill new jobs in the construction and tourism sectors. Whatever transpires, one thing is certain: New Orleans society is again making history, as the first modern American metropolis to depopulate entirely, reconstitute, and then reconstruct.

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[40] New Orleans still managed to possess the nation's highest percent of French-ancestry population (13 percent in 1980), more than double other cities. *Census of 1980*. Washington, DC: Bureau of the Census.

[41] Ron Stodghill and Lynda Bower, "Welcome to America's Most Diverse City," www.time.com (accessed October 18, 2002); U.S. Census, "American Community Survey—Ranking Tables, 2002: Percent of Population that is Foreign Born," http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/Products/Ranking/2002/R1560.htm.

[42] John Adems Paxton, *The New-Orleans Directory and Register* (New Orleans, 1822), 45.

Creole New Orleans
The Geography of a Controversial Ethnicity

One should wade warily into the waters of *Creole*, that famously controversial word which means so much to Louisiana history, yet defies so steadfastly consensus on its meaning. Many a researcher, endeavoring to clarify matters, has only muddied those waters, while others have intentionally manipulated the ethereal concept to promote one-sided views or hidden agendas. Identifying Creoles in historical records is that much more difficult, given the vagaries of definition and fluidity of identity, and mapping the patterns of their residential distribution through time is little short of a fool's errand. Yet the geography of Creole New Orleans beckons to students of the Crescent City, so fundamentary is this population to local history and to that treasured sense of distinction extolled by the city. If Creole is an the glib lexicon of the tourist trade, "but the 'New Orleans' in New Orleans," then finding concentrations of Creoles in New Orleans neighborhoods is a step toward finding a certain historical essence and perhaps a certain essential cityscape. Where was Creole New Orleans? Where did the Creoles go, and where do they live today? But, first, who was, and is, Creole?

"To define the Creole is the challenge of every Louisiana historian,"[43] observed one modern-day researcher of this circum-Caribbean conundrum. Those in other fields, such as the geographer, are obligated to examine the scholarly literature and to mesh it with their own findings in primary sources, to separate the dubious from the reliable in time, an optimal set of definitions emerges, though one is always compelled to keep an open mind. Most scholars seem to agree (or at least report) that *Creole* is the anglicization of *Créole* the gallicization of *Criollo*, a noun derived from the past participle of the Spanish verb *criar*, which is usually translated as *to create* but also *to raise* or *to breed*. Others cite a compatible Portuguese etymology. The *Academia Real Española* holds that the word was coined by early Spanish colonials in the West Indies allegedly "to refer to persons born of European parents in the islands as well as to locally born blacks."[44] It seems reasonable that, in the new amalgamated societies emerging from colonization, a new term would come to describe those of Old World parentage born upon New World soil with no first-hand knowledge of the mother country. It also seems reasonable that that term would come to characterize many peoples and things emerging from those new colonial creative tensions and distinct from homeland equivalents but also distinct from indigenous peoples. The notion of *Creole* diffused from the West Indian core as colonialism and slavery spread to the periphery of the Caribbean region. Louisiana represented the northern apogee of that region, and to its shores *Creole* arrived soon after the establishment of French societies in the early eighteenth century. One of the earliest recorded uses of the term in Louisiana appeared in Jean-Bernard Bossu's *Travels in the Interior of North America 1751-1762*. In 1751, Bossu wrote of New Orleans,

> There are four types of inhabitants: Europeans, Indians, Africans or Negroes, and half bloods, born of Europeans and savages native to the country. Those born of French fathers and French, or European, mothers are called Creoles. They are generally brave, tall, and well built and have a natural inclination toward the arts and sciences.[45]

The usage reflects the old colonial Caribbean use of the word in referring ancestry and birthplace, rather than ethnicity and culture. *Creole* remained a subtle and generally irrelevant concept in eighteenth-century New Orleans, because outside force compelled its residents to unify around their common heritage. People generally do not view themselves as "natives" if everyone is native. Those outside forces arrived *en masse* at the turn of the nineteenth century, when waves of refugees arrived from Saint-Domingue, followed by waves of English-speaking, Protestant Anglo-Americans, followed again by thousands of European immigrants. Within a few decades, those of old colonial stock found themselves in a complex, fragmented society, fighting for economic, political, and cultural sway in a city that was once entirely theirs. It was out of this ethnically tumultuous milieu of native-versus-newcomer that the antebellum New Orleans (and Louisiana) creation of *Creole* arose. It was during this era that Creole society figured most prominently as a self-identifying group—even as its decline loomed.[46]

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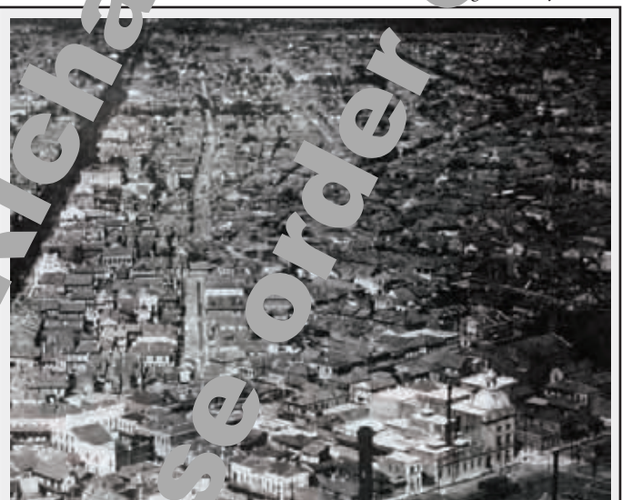
[43] William D. Reeves, *De la Barre: Life of a French Creole Family in Louisiana* (New Orleans, 1980), xvi.

[44] Virginia R. Domínguez, "Social Classification in Creole Louisiana," *American Ethnologist* 4 (November 1977): 591.

[45] Jean-Bernard Bossu, *Travels in the Interior of North America 1751-1762*, trans. and ed. by Seymour Feiler (Norman, OK, 1962), 23-24.

[46] Wrote Roger W. Shugg in *Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana* (Baton Rouge, 1968), 36, "Creole culture was by definition colonial. It flowered briefly in the eighteenth century, and quickly passed into a lingering, stereotyped decadence, noteworthy for its traditional manner, but without creative understanding or vitality."



Roofscape of the Lower Seventh Ward in the 1920s. *Southeastern Architectural Archive, Special Collections, Howard-Tilton, Library Tulane University.*

The best scholarly characterization of *Creole* for the antebellum age, based on usage of the term I have encountered in numerous newspapers and literature of the era, is that of the eminent University of New Orleans historian, Joseph G. Tregle, Jr. In 1952, while working toward his Ph.D. at the University of Pennsylvania, Tregle published a seven-page article entitled "Early New Orleans Society: A Reappraisal" in the venerable *Journal of Southern History*. To the pleasure of some old-line New Orleanians, the paper found many traditional impressions of nineteenth-century Creole society—born of earlier notions that were turned on their heads after Americanization—to be little more than cherished myths: that Creoles comprised those only of pure French or Spanish lineage; that Creoles could have no African blood; that Creoles were haughty aristocrats who disdained the "crass" Americans and forced them to live on the other side of Canal Street. Over the next four decades, Tregle accumulated a wealth of primary-source evidence—examples of usage of the word *Creole* or *creole* in public and private documents of the day—demonstrating that in antebellum Louisiana, *Creole* simply meant *native-born*. The word may be encountered in a multitude of contexts, as a noun or adjective, capitalized or not, but the common denominator of almost all usage was a sense of nativity and indigenousness to southern Louisiana and the neighboring Francophone societies of the Gulf Coast. Creoles generally traced their ancestors to colonial times and exhibited the cultures of those Latin societies.[47] They preceded the era of American domination, and formed the local population whom the Americans "found" here upon their arrival. A Creole of the early nineteenth century might be white, black, or racially mixed; he was almost always Catholic and Latin in culture, and usually had significant amounts of French or Spanish blood. But he could also be of German, Acadian, African, Anglo, Irish, or other origin, so long as he was extracted from local society. "All who are born here, come under this designation [of Creole], without reference to the birth place of their parents," wrote Benjamin Moore Norman in 1845.[48] Joseph Holt Ingraham in 1835 clarified that "'Creole' is simply a synonym for 'native'.... To say 'He is a *Creole* of Louisiana' is to say 'He is a *native* of Louisiana.'"[49] An indignant Creole correspondent to the *Louisiana Courier* in 1831, protesting the continued use of the old born-European-parents definition, pointed out that *Creole* is the term by which "we have ever been distinguished from those who have emigrated to the state.... [It is also used] to signify such as have been born in the country, whether white, yellow, or black; whether the children of French, Spanish, English, or Dutch, or any other nation...."[50] Racial identification was in the Creole ethnicity usually derived from context. Antebellum slave advertisements offering "Creole Slaves," including fourteen-year-old "Eugenie, creole...good child's nurse and house servant" and sixteen-year-old "Sally, creole...tolerable cook"[51] implied that these were black Creoles, while an article on Creole wedding patterns would indicate that these were white Creoles, since blacks were denied suffrage. The *gens de couleur libre* (free people of color—mixed racial ancestry, Catholic in faith, and proudly French in culture) occupied a special racial caste between white and black, and were often described as *Creoles of Color*, or simply *Creoles*, again depending on context. "Mrs. V.," wrote the English visitor Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon in 1857, "is a woman of colour, a creole of Louisiana." Because "no free person of colour has the right to live here unless born here," she continued, this woman "had all the bother of proving herself a creole."[52] Creole ethnicity is further clarified by understanding who would *not* have possessed this identity in the antebellum era. A slave brought down from the upper South would not be Creole,[53] but a French-speaking boatsman of pure African blood residing in Louisiana since colonial times would be. A German or Irish immigrant of the 1830s-1850s would not be Creole (he would be a "foreigner"), but a 1720 *Côte des Allemands* settler, or a member of the colonial Irish Macarty family or Scottish Pollock clan, would be. A Parisian-born Frenchman residing in the city and a French-blooded Saint-Domingue refugee who arrived in the early 1800s would not technically be Creole (both would be "foreign French"[54]), although either might have allied with Creoles for political and cultural reasons. The post-Louisiana Purchase Anglo-Saxon American emigrants were categorically non-Creole, but their Louisiana-born children might, in certain contexts, blur the line. "Any Louisiana, every native, be his parentage what it may, is a Creole. They are convertible terms," explained the 1854 City Directory in an interesting digression on Creolism. Although first noting that "the word *Creole* in Northern latitudes is often misapprehended, so as to imply more or less of negro blood," the writer later allowed that "*Creole* in its usual acceptation means a white person, [but] it applies to all races, as Creole negroes...."[55] The *Bee*, a bilingual newspaper serving primarily the city's French-speaking population, compared *Creole* in

[47] The following characterization of Creole derives in part from my earlier work Richard Campanella, *Time and Place in New Orleans: Past Geographies in the New Millennium* (Gretna, LA, 2002), 115-17.

[48] Benjamin Moore Norman, *Norman's New Orleans and Environs* (Baton Rouge and London, 1975), 73.

[49] Joseph Holt Ingraham, *The South-West by a Yankee*, 2 vols. (New York, 1835), 1:118-19n.

[50] *Louisiana Courier,* October 28, 1831, p. 3, col. 2, originally cited in Joseph G. Tregle, Jr., "On that Word 'Creole' Again: A Note," *Louisiana History* 13 (Spring 1982): 194-95.

[51] *Daily Orleanian*, March 9, 1849, p. 3, col. 4.

[52] Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, *An American Diary 1857-8*, ed. Joseph W. Reed, Jr. (London, 1972), 98.

[53] An 1835 slave ad took care to distinguish between three "american negro" men (Jim, Moses, and Bob) and "a creole mulatto man, "creole negro boy," "creole negro woman," and "creole mulatto boy" (Manual, Nounoutte, Caroline, and Alfred). Charles, the one man born elsewhere, was described as "negro man, a creole of St. Domingo." Such distinctions were common in the slave trade throughout southern Louisiana. *New Orleans Bee*, May 1, 1835, p. 1, col. 3.

[54] Jerah Johnson, "Colonial New Orleans: A Fragment of the Eighteenth-Century French Ethos," in *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization*, eds. Arnold R. Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon (Baton Rouge and London, 1992), 51; and Joseph G. Tregle, Jr., "Early New Orleans Society: A Reappraisal," *The Journal of Southern History* 18 (February 1952): 31.

[55] *Cohen's New Orleans Directory, Including Jefferson City, Carrollton, Gretna, Algiers, and McDonoghville for 1854* (New Orleans, 1854), 34.

1839 to equivalent concepts elsewhere: "A Kentuckian is a Creole of Kentucky and a Yankee a Creole of New England... and an Irishman of Ireland...A Creole is a native of the state or country where he or she may have been born."[56]

Creole Through Time

By the latter half of the nineteenth century, the relevance of Louisiana nativity and colonial-era heritage as a unifying ethnic bond began to fade. Thousands of post-Purchase Anglos had by this time settled into New Orleans society for generations, and were, generically speaking, "natives." Thousands more immigrants of Irish, German and other nationalities had also by now earned their claim to nativity, and intermarriage among all groups abounded. Old Creole political power had waned, and the English language predominated in newspapers and the boards of commerce. The aged dichotomy of old-line, French-speaking, Catholic, Louisiana colonial stock versus recently arrived, English-speaking, Protestant, Northeastern Anglo lost much of its street meaning. The new dichotomy revolved around race, rather than nativity, and was evident in the increasing racial tensions immediately prior to the Civil War. Writes Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon in 1857:

> Every year the regulations concerning free negroes become more annoying. No sailors or cooks, etc. (if free coloured people) can land from the vessels unless by a pass from the Mayor for security from the Captain. No freed negroes can stay in the state unless born there and no free coloured people can enter, so that the free coloured population can only increase by birth.... It is a most unnatural state of things! I never was in a country where law was so perverted so wickedly with right."[57]

After the Civil War and emancipation, in the midst of federal occupation and black Reconstruction government, whites increasingly rejected "the racial openness of Louisiana's past"[58] and longed for the days before the war. Racial identification, once fluid and complex, increasingly polarized to black or white. Many Creoles of Color, bearing the brunt of the new order, had departed for the Mexican ports of Veracruz and Tampico as early as the 1850s, and more so in the 1880s and 1890s, when segregation was legalized.[59] In the postbellum era, white narrative historians and writers of the "local color" school began to recast the Creole ethnicity into a more racially exclusive[60] and socially aristocratic role. They acknowledged only in the most dismissive terms other historical uses, and insisted that popular usage should bear little affect upon "true" meaning. Two theories may explain this postbellum revisionism. Perhaps the historians and writers of this era sought to revive the eighteenth-century notion of *Creole,* which they saw as the original and therefore true meaning of the word, as reflected by Bossu's circa-1751 usage. Or perhaps these observers sought to aggrandize and mythologize their own Creole heritage, a trait that, given the era's racial atmosphere, required the adamant exclusion of all African blood from Creole identity. The unquestioned hegemony of whites prior to the Civil War may have allowed for a certain level of "pan-racial creolism"[61] in which peoples of different racial ancestries openly shared a common ethnicity. But with the fall of the Confederacy and the rise of black political power during Reconstruction, whites in general assumed a newfound antipathy toward blacks of all shades, regardless of ethnicity, and white Creoles in particular, fretful of being confused with blacks, vociferously proclaimed the impossibility of a black Creole. The result was that a large segment of the New Orleans population which had long identified itself as Creole, particularly the descendents of the *gens de couleur libre*, were denied their heritage by the most influential voices of the day. Charles Gayarré, the famed local Creole historian who wrote extensively on the subject, lectured a Tulane University audience in 1885, "It is impossible to comprehend how so many intelligent people should have so completely reversed the meaning of the word *creole*, when any one of the numerous dictionaries within their easy reach could have given them correct information of the subject.... It has become high time to demonstrate that the Creoles of Louisiana....have no claim because of the name they bear, to a particle of African blood in their veins...."[62] In *The Creoles of Louisiana* (1884), George Washington Cable answered his question, "What is a Creole?" with, "any [Louisiana] native, of French or Spanish descent by either parent, whose non-alliance with the slave race entitled him to social rank. Later, the term was adopted by—not conceded to—the natives of mixed blood and is still so used among themselves."[63] Notwithstanding that definition, Cable would later cast doubt on the white racial purity of Creoles in his writings, earning him enemies in New Orleans high society and a famous feud with writer Grace King. "Local color" writers such as Cable carried the no-black-blood existence into the twentieth century, while promulgating what Tregle would later describe as a quasi-religious belief in the mythological Creole—the genteel aristocrat, the charming romantic, the disdainer of physical labor, the *bon vivant*. But word of the revised definition never quite made it to the masses, and mixed-race Francophone Catholics who had long thought of themselves as

[56] *Bee*, May 19, 1839, as quoted in Joseph G. Tregle, Jr., *Louisiana in the Age of Jackson: A Clash of Cultures and Personalities* (Baton Rouge, 1999), 10.
[57] Bodichon, *An American Diary 1857-8*, 98.
[58] Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge and London, 1992), 158.
[59] Mary Gehman, "The Mexico-Louisiana Creole Connection," *Louisiana Cultural Vistas* 11 (Fall 2000-2001): 72.
[60] Racial exclusivity in defining *Creole* was not solely a product of the postbellum era; there are some examples from antebellum times. "I remark having often heard in Europe the name "Creole" applied indiscriminately to all people of colour," wrote C.D. Arfwedson in 1834. "This is, however, a great mistake; for it means a free native to the country, and belongs exclusively to white people in the neighborhood.... A Creole of New Orleans considers it as degrading to be taken for a Mulatto or a Quarteroon." C.D Arfwedson, *The United States and Canada in 1832, 1833, and 1834,* 2 vols. (London, 1834), 1:58-59.

[61] Joseph G. Tregle, Jr., "Creoles and Americans," in *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization*, eds. Arnold R. Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon (Baton Rouge and London, 1992), 172.
[62] Charles Gayarré, *The Creoles of History and the Creoles of Romance—A Lecture Delivered in the Hall of the Tulane University, New Orleans* (New Orleans, 1885), 3.
[63] George Washington Cable, *The Creoles of Louisiana* (New York, 1884), 41.

Creole continued to do so. It was in this era that Rodolphe Lucien Desdunes (1849-1928), born a free person of color, penned the first history of New Orleans Creoles of Color, *Nos Hommes et Notre Histoire*. It was written in French, published first in Montreal in 1911, and not fully translated to English and published in Louisiana until 197[illegible].

Creole would continue to [illegible] in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Despite the [illegible]ety of the revisionist definition, whites in race-conscious Louisiana gradually began to release themselves from explicit Creole identification. *French* or *French Creole*, fine; *white Creole*, no problem. But self-identification simply as *Creole* left a major question unanswered. The strict racial segregation of early twentieth-century Louisiana led whites of genuine Creole ancestry to distance themselves from the polysemous term, removing all potential doubt of their whiteness by severing ties with the equally genuine Creoles of black and mixed-race backgrounds. In time, the popular understanding of *Creole* on the streets of New Orleans evolved to mean a local person of mixed racial ancestry, usually Catholic, often with a French surname, often well-established in business and society, and always with deep roots in the city's history. The ranks of Creole were thinned yet again during the civil rights movement, when the non-Creole black community (which was numerically superior but economically subordinate to the Creole black community) viewed Creole identification as a divisive and elitist faction incompatible with the movement's goals.[64] The Creoles of Color descended from the free people of color, who often owned slaves, surely added to the tension. Forced to "choose sides" in the modern-day racial dichotomy, some Creoles departed for the West Coast (1940s); others passed for white (*passé blancs*) and most chose to declare their primary public racial identity as black or African American. By the 1970s, many black New Orleanians of Creole ancestry, like their Cajun counterparts earlier, abandoned public self-identification as Creole in favor of clear-cut racial solidarity. They did so for fear of dividing the black community; whites had done so earlier for fear of being considered *part of* the black community. The election of Ernest "Dutch" Morial—a Creole of Color who could easily pass for white—as the city's first black mayor in 1977 solidified the newfound political unity of the Creole and non-Creole black communities. Recalled Dutch son Marc Morial in 1994, who himself would serve as mayor for the next eight years, "At that time, the black community had historically been divided...between light-skinned blacks and dark-skinned blacks. Catholic blacks and Protestant blacks... uptown blacks and downtown blacks. My father's political genius was that he was able to convince the overwhelming majority of the black community that they had singular common causes...." "The Creole experience," asserted his mother, Sybil Morial, matriarch of the family, "is a part of history and we should never deny our history. But in this time, I think attempted designations today of who is Creole and who is not are totally irrelevant. I am an African-American, not a Creole.... Much that is good came from the Creole experience. But it also produced much that was bad, including artificial differences that were used to prevent black unity."[65] Most black New Orleanians shared that sentiment, and *Creole* faded from publicly expressed ethnic identity, even as the term (as an adjective, usually for food) was banded about relentlessly by the steadily growing tourism industry. So depleted had grown the ranks of Creole by the late twentieth century that a 1998 anthropological paper on Creolism found it apropos to proclaim in its opening sentence, "There is good reason to believe that there are Creoles in Louisiana." Yet, as researcher Mary Gehman wrote, "to anyone who observes the New Orleans social, political, and racial patterns, it is very clear that 'Creole' is a term used frequently by blacks among themselves for those who carry on the culture, traditions, family businesses and social positions of the free people of color.... Though rarely discussed in the media or other open forums, this intra-racial situation affects the politics, social order, jobs and business of the city in many ways."[67] Code words heard in the larger African American community to refer to its Creole subset include "yellow," "high yellow," and the old French term *passé blanc*. Creole in the past few years has a movement developed nationally primarily among Creoles of Color but also some white Creoles, to reclaim their Creole identity publicly, with no apologies to either black or white America. The Creole revival movement seems to have grown out of the Acadian region of Louisiana during the 1980s, when Creole identity was in steep decline but Cajun identity was coming into national vogue.[68] Creole revivalism appears to be gaining steam, buttressed by the nationwide movement to recognize mixed-race ancestries in the census, and by the recent popular and scholarly interest in traditional and folk cultures. During the landmark Creole Studies Conference held in New Orleans in October 2003, self-identifying Creoles repeatedly stressed their claim to their own identity, not European American, not African American, not a race-based amalgam, but a unique ethnicity with its own history and heritage. Latter-day Creoles face ample challenges ahead, from both political activists intent on racial solidarity and cultural activists so sympathetic to the cause that they expand *Creole* to meaninglessly inclusive extremes.[69] Thus *Creole* will remain controversial into the twenty-first century.

[64] James H. Dormon, "Ethnicity and Identity: Creoles of Color in Twentieth-Century South Louisiana," in *Creole of Color of the Gulf South*, ed. James H. Dormon (Knoxville, 1996), 169-70.

[illegible] Allan Katz, "The Seventh Wards and Power of Mayors," *New Orleans Magazine* 28 (May 1994): 51.

[66] Jacques M. Henry and Carl L. Bankston, "Propositions for a Structuralist Analysis of Creolism," *Current Anthropology* 39 (August-October 1998): 558.

[67] Gehman, *The Free People of Color of New Orleans*, 103.

[68] Dormon, "Ethnicity and Identity: Creoles of Color in Twentieth-Century South Louisiana," 172-75.

[69] An address at the 2003 Creole Studies Conference illustrated in New Orleans the chasm between self-identifying Creoles and well-meaning non-Creole advocates of the Creole cause. A nationally known anthropologist explained the notion of *creole* (small c) as fundamental to the processes of cultural transformation and synthesis—"creolization"—which, to him, reflected metamorphosis from the Old World to the New, from the Caribbean to Louisiana, from motherland to adopted land, from old to new identity. The message was that no one should police the borders of ethnic

Mapping a Controversial Ethnicity

The Creole ethnicity challenges efforts to map residential patterns through time. Nowhere in any decennial census from 1810 to 2000, does the term *Creole* appear regularly. Nowhere in city records are Creoles tabulated comprehensively and consistently, let alone with addresses. Lacking the best data, we have to look for clues, indicators, and surrogates for Creole identity, sometimes calling on two or three simultaneously. Some ideas:

- **Free People of Color** — *Gens de couleur libre* were tabulated consistently, along with whites and black slaves, dating back to colonial-era censuses and into the American era until 1860. Most free people of color were Creoles, but not all—indeed, not always most—Creoles in antebellum New Orleans were free people of color (there were also white Creoles, enslaved black Creoles, and manumitted black Creoles). Mapping the locations of the free colored population at the street level or aggregated by ward would shed light on the Creole geography question.
- **Surname Interpretation** — Surnames listed in city directories or censuses, along with street addresses, can be separated into Gallic- or Hispanic-sounding (Lafrénière, Dumonville, Bouligny) versus Anglo-sounding (Smith, Brown, Thompson), with the implication that the former group was probably Creole and the latter American. Certain letter sequences— *-eaux*, *-aud*, *-ier*—can be used to distinguish probable French family names from those of Anglo and other ancestries. The problem with this approach is that many refugees from Saint-Domingue (who may have been known as *Créoles* on their old island but not here, at least not at first) and many immigrants from France (the "foreign French") may be accidentally categorized as New Orleans Creoles. Some Anglo, German, and Irish surnames, such as the ubiquitous Macarty, run deep into the colonial era and are by all means Creole, but many land on the Anglo side of a surname interpretation. Additionally, some people anglicized their names, others gallicized or hispanicized their names; and still others are just plain difficult to categorize. Nevertheless, the simplicity of this method avails so much mapable data to the historical geographer that it advantages outweigh its disadvantages.
- **"Classic Name" Sampling Technique** — Historians and genealogists have compiled lists of classic or prominent Creole family names of New Orleans. Assuming their criteria for *Creole* were sound and their selection accurate—in other words, assuming such lists form statistically representative samplings—one can scan city directories for those names, map out their residential addresses, and reveal their geography. The problem lies in the word "prominent." Are such lists truly representative of the Creole population, or were the compilers drawn to the most aristocratic and famous names? The three dozen Creole surnames included in Grace King's *Creole Families of New Orleans* (1921) comprise a veritable Who's Who of New Orleans history: Moreau, Pontalba, De Boré, Bouligny, Grima, Pitot, Fortier. One gets the sense that those "other" Creoles on the wrong side of town may not have made it onto these lists. More useful lists appear in Mary Gehman's 1994 monograph *The Free People of Color of New Orleans: An Introduction*, including common first names of free men and women of color, and surnames of free people of color before and after Americanization, including those of Saint-Domingue refugees.[70] Provided representative names can be found, this sampling technique can be useful, time-saving, and free of the pitfalls of the surname-interpretation method, and may even help distinguish among Louisiana Creoles, Saint-Domingue refugees, and foreign French.
- **Race plus Religion** — In the early nineteenth century, adherence to Catholicism or Protestantism offered solid evidence of Creole versus non-Creole ethnicity. But with the arrival of Irish, German, and Sicilian Catholic immigrants from the 1830s to the 1910s, "the distinction between Catholics and Protestants was no longer quite equivalent to the distinction between Creoles and non-Creoles. One could [no longer] infer that a person was Creole from the mere fact that he was Catholic, though it would be difficult for him to become Creole without somehow affiliating himself with the Catholic church."[71] Finding white Catholic New Orleanians is woefully inadequate as a technique to identify Creoles in the city today, because so many are of non-Creole Irish, Sicilian, or Ger-

identity; essentially, anyone could be creole, and creolization is part-and-parcel of the larger American story. In response, up stood the few self-identifying Creoles (capital C) in the audience, who reminded the doctor that to them, Creole was their unique personal heritage and ethnicity—a history with names and faces and traditions, not an intellectual abstraction to be shared by everyone in the hope of excluding no one. *Not* everyone was Creole.

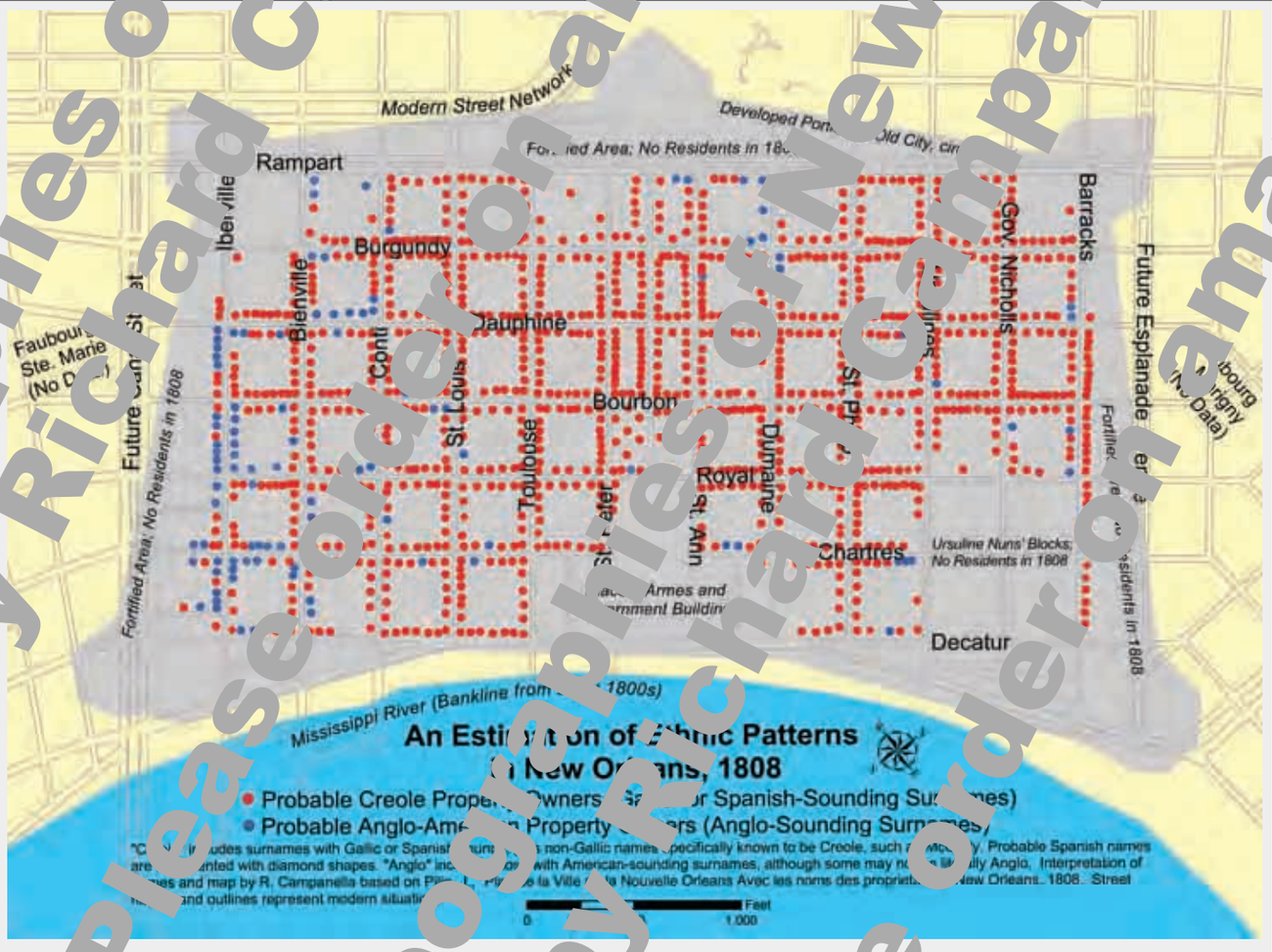
[70] Gehman, *The Free People of Color of New Orleans*, 132–36.

[71] Virginia R. Dominguez, *White by Definition: Social Classification in Creole Louisiana* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1986), 222.

The Autocrat Club on St. Bernard Avenue, an African American social and benevolent society, is closely associated with the Seventh Ward Creole community. *Photograph by author, 2003.*

man ancestry. Finding black Catholic New Orleanians, however, is a compelling technique. Most modern-day New Orleanians who are Catholic in creed and black in race usually trace their roots deep into the city's colonial-era history, have some French or Spanish blood, and may well bear a French surname—all major traits of Creole ethnicity. Modern-day black New Orleanians who are Protestant, on the other hand, more likely arrived to the city from the interior South after emancipation, are purer in their African blood, possess an Anglo surname, and do not claim Creole ethnicity or ancestry. New Orleans is one of the major centers of black Catholicism in America today, and it is no coincidence that the nation's only historically black Catholic institution of higher learning, Xavier University of Louisiana, calls New Orleans home. But how to identify black Catholics? The U.S. Census does not inquire about religion, so one must obtain data on religious affiliation from other sources, namely the Catholic diocese, which tracks this information at the church-parish level. This technique is not without problems. Many people reside in suburban neighborhoods but, for reasons of tradition, worship at the inner-city churches of their childhood, which may be miles away. Many black Catholics may simply not claim any Creole heritage, regardless of whether they could; others may have adopted the faith through a Sicilian or Irish ancestor; others still may have converted. The technique also misses black Creoles who, for whatever reason, may be Protestant or have abandoned their Catholicism, and, as previously discussed, completely misses all white Creoles. Nevertheless, because the popular understanding of *Creole* in New Orleans today implies African Americans of a certain heritage, the black Catholic technique appears to be a sound one.

- **Other Techniques.** Creoles may also be identified through affiliation with such groups as the Creole Association of Louisiana or Anthénée Louisianais of the late nineteenth-century white Creole community, or the



Mapping Creole distributions is challenging because no standardized historical data source records this enigmatic ethnicity consistently and comprehensively. Instead, "indicators" of Creole identity must be used. An 1808 property map of the French Quarter was interpreted for Francophone-sounding surnames (probable Creoles, shown in red) versus likely Anglo surnames, in blue. We see here, less than five years after the Louisiana Purchase, the beginning of one of historic New Orleans' overriding ethnic-geographical patterns: the preponderance of Anglo culture in the upper city (to the left) and Creole culture in lower areas (to the right). This pattern remains evident in the streetscape—architecturally, ethnically, racially, culturally—to this day. *Map and analysis by author based on Plan de la Ville de la Nouvelle Orléans.*

Autocrat Club, Seventh Ward Civic League, Star Young Men Illinois Club of the twentieth-century black Creole community. Finding speakers of French in historical records is one of the most intriguing methods of identifying those of Francophone-Creole culture, were it not for the difficulty in obtaining such data. One may also detect trends and patterns by mapping the membership of Creole-dominated trades such as brick and stone masonry and the unions that represented them, and through socio-economic data, aimed at finding wealthier classes within the local black community. Historical real estate records may offer a treasure trove of information if comprehensive coverage can be found.

Where Was Creole New Orleans?

Prior to 1788, when the city was confined to the present-day French Quarter, the answer to this question was simple: all of New Orleans was Creole. The development of Faubourg St. Mary that year (to relieve population pressure and open up new land after the 1788 fire), followed by the in-pouring of American emigrants particularly after 1803, started to rearrange the cultural landscape of the new American city. Geographical patterns of Creole ethnicity emerging from the moment years at the turn of the nineteenth century would influence Creole New Orleans for the next two centuries. In the following section, various techniques are employed to map these patterns in the years 1808, 1841, 1940, 1970, 1980, and 2001.

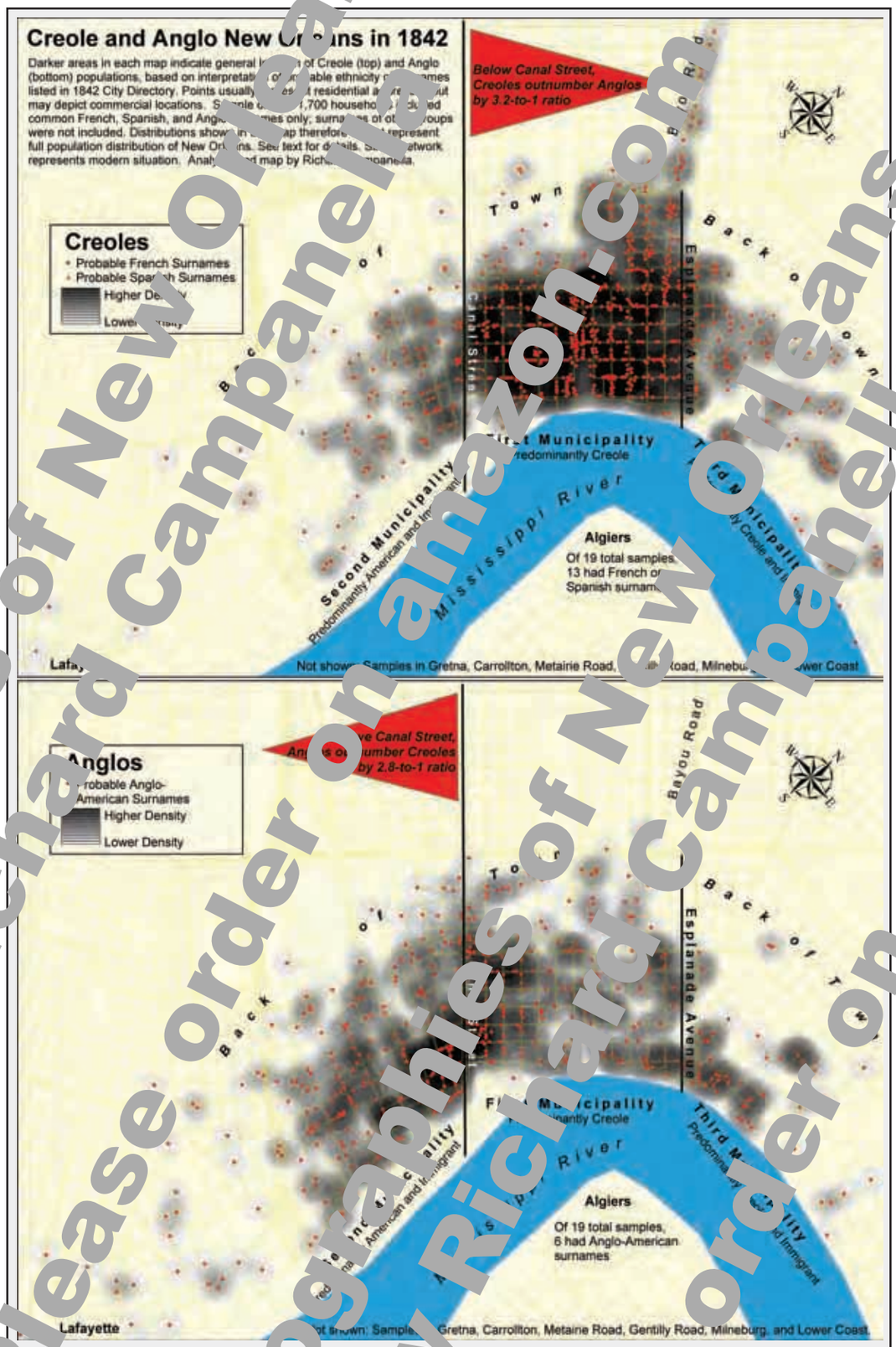
Creole New Orleans, circa 1808

A map of the old city entitled *Plan de la Ville de la Nouvelle Orleans avec les Noms des Propriétaires*, featuring the names of over one thousand property owners laid out upon the parcels, came out five years after the Louisiana Purchase. Property owners are not necessarily indicators of the ethnicity of those who lived on the parcels, but they do offer a glimpse of the ethnic distributions in the city at the time. The surname of each proprietor was interpreted as either definitely or probably French, Spanish or Anglo-American in origin, though some exceptions were made for well-known Creole names that were not of French or Spanish origin. The general pattern in the map, *An Estimation of Ethnic Patterns in New Orleans, 1808*, is clear: most of the old city was dominated by probable Creoles, though the blocks closest to the upper edge of the city (Canal Street did not yet exist) had a small but significant American presence. Only 8 percent (101) of all 1,237 proprietors had American names, and while they were scattered throughout the city, most were concentrated in its upper blocks. Seventy-three percent of those 101 probable Anglo-Americans owned parcels above St. Louis Street, up to the fortification line. St. Louis Street is significant because, some years later (1822), it was identified—by the famous Creole aristocrat Bernard Marigny—as a *de facto* dividing line between predominantly American upper New Orleans and the mostly Creole blocks of the lower city.[72] Creole New Orleans in 1808, then, occupied most of the lower city (plus the new Faubourg Marigny), but was beginning to lose ground to Americans in the upper city. In this map we see the beginnings of the great Anglo/Creole geographical pattern of New Orleans, which can be traced to the fact that the Faubourg St. Mary had been laid out as New Orleans' first suburb precisely as the first trickle of Americanos started to arrive and settle. They generally avoided the crowded, fire-scarred, French-speaking lower city, and because New Orleans' second suburb (Marigny, below the city) would not be ready for houses until 1805, tended to settle predominately *above* the city, in the upper French Quarter and Faubourg St. Mary. The settlement of some Americanos here encouraged more and more to follow, and soon the trend was established. The town/downtown Anglo/Creole pattern remains evident in the streetscape and culture of New Orleans to this day.

Creole New Orleans, circa 1841

The 1840s is a particularly interesting time to map Creole patterns because it was a transitional decade in the Americanization of New Orleans. Ethnic tensions in the preceding decades had split the city into two factions. On one side was an uneasy alliance between French-speaking Catholic Creoles and foreign French (the new immigrants from France and refugees from Saint-Domingue), who, by means of their superior numbers, maintained political and cultural control. On the other side were English-speaking Protestant Americans and their allies, who enjoyed commercial dominance. Both groups were in competition with, and critical of, the other's wielding of power and influence. After years of discord (which sometimes came "perilously close to armed violence"[73]), the Americans in 1836 resolved their problem by winning legislative consent to divide New Orleans into three semiautonomous municipalities. Most Creoles and foreign French would be concentrated in the First Municipality (the French Quarter) and Third Municipality (below the Quarter, which also had a high immigrant population), while most Americans would govern themselves in the Second Municipality (above Canal Street, also home to many Irish and German immigrants). The municipal system pitted sections of the city and their respective ethnic groups in fierce competition against each other. From the perspective of the wealthier Second Municipality, the system supported economic development and alleviated ethnic tensions. From the viewpoint of the mostly Creole-and-immigrant First and "Poor Third" municipalities, the arrangement isolated them and intensified ethnic discord. "Had the Legislature sought, by the most careful efforts," wrote the Third Municipality's *Daily Orleanian* in 1849, "to create a war of races, to make distinction between Creole and American, they could not have chosen a better means for these objects, than the present division oper-

[72] Tregle, "Creoles and Americans," 155.
[73] Ibid., 153.



Where did Creoles and Anglos live in antebellum New Orleans? To find probable Creole households and businesses, surnames in the 1842 City Directory containing the distinctive French letter sequences of *-ais*, *-aud*, *-ier*, *-ign*, *-aux*, *-çois*, and others were extracted and mapped (top). For probable Anglo residences, the most frequent Anglo-American surnames (Smith, Brown, Moore, Thompson, Davis, Jones, and others) were identified and plotted (bottom). True to popular perception, Creoles generally lived below Canal Street, outnumbering Anglos by a roughly three-to-one ratio, whereas Anglos outnumbered Creoles by a similar ratio above Canal Street. But contrary to legend, Canal Street did not decisively divide the two populations. *Map and analysis by author; see text for details.*

ates."[74] The municipality system proved to be inefficient from a city-management standpoint and was eventually abandoned in 1852—but only after the American community had allied with uptown German and Irish immigrants to guarantee numerical superiority over the Creoles. The unified city was now under Anglo control; City Hall was moved uptown, the fulcrum of commerce and communications shifted from the old city to Faubourg St. Mary, and Creole cultural influence was set on a trajectory of steady decline.

Mapping Creole (and American) New Orleanians in the 1840s, then, sheds some light on the residential patterns underlying these politics. The year 1841 is particularly opportune because, in that year, a map entitled *Plan of New Orleans with Perspective and Geometrical Views of the Principal Buildings of the City* was drawn and published by the architect/civil engineer/surveyor, L. Hirsh.[75] This document is important because it may be the only comprehensive reference for the erratic and confusing pre-1852 house-numbering system. Beginning and ending house numbers for most blocks between present-day Howard Avenue and Franklin Avenue from Rampart to the river are set in tiny type in the corner of each block. These numbers were coded into a computer-based Geographic Information System to enable semi-automated mapping at the house-number level. Next came the question of how to identify Creoles and Americans. Recognizing the aforementioned methodological problems, I decided to employ the "surname interpretation" technique to identify Creoles, and "last names" method to identify Americans, using the 1842 City Directory as the data source. To extract the probable Creole names, all those directory entries (out of over 14,000) that contained the distinctive French letter sequences of *-ais*, *-aud*, *-ier*, *-ign*, *-ais*, *-ois* (*-çois*), *-eau*, *-eu*, or *-oi*, or that started with *St.* or that ended with *-ville*, were found and flagged. Examples included Beaumarais, Arnaud, Bois[illegible], Marigny, Lanaux, François, Beauregard, Dubreuil, Bourgeois, St. Amand, and Justinville. Since Creoles may also have had Spanish surnames, entries for Garcia, Gonzales, and all those ending with the letter *z* that were probably Spanish (such as Alvarez, Fernandez, and Lopez, but excluding names such as Fitz and Stultz) were added to the sampling. The number of Creole samples was limited to about one thousand (1,181 to be exact; 1,051 French surnames and 130 Spanish surnames) on the presumption that this would be sufficient to depict overall spatial patterns.

Next came the Americans. Because the ratio of Creoles to Americans in the city was roughly two-to-one[76] the American sample had to be limited to roughly half the size of the Creole. To extract this sample, I determined the most frequent Anglo-American names listed in the 1842 city directory,[77] until a sample size of around 600 (631 to be exact) was reached. These most-common names were Smith, Brown, Moore, Thompson, Davis, Jones, Clark, Lewis, Taylor, White, Jackson, Williams, Hall, Miller, Wilson, Henderson, Thomas, Wood, and Johnson. Seven percent of the samples were lost because of either non-existent or otherwise unmappable addresses, leaving 1,682 probable Creole and American households. These samples, together with their residential and/or business addresses, were then mapped to the 1841 house-numbering system, a process that was only partially automated. Out of the total sample of 1,682 names, 41 percent (those with neat, clean addresses such as "1[illegible] Camp St." or "86 St. Louis St.") mapped out automatically, but the remaining 59 percent (with messy addresses like "Bayou Road b. Maurais & Marigny") had to be manually moved to their proper locations. Even so, after over thirty-five hours of work, 96 percent of the 1,682 names mapped out to within a half-block of their actual historical locations. The two resultant pair of maps, *Creole and Anglo New Orleans in 1842*, depict the following patterns:

- It comes as no surprise that Creoles in 1842 were concentrated primarily in the old city (today's French Quarter, spilling significantly into the Faubourg Tremé and up the Bayou Road (First Municipality). Fewer Creoles lived in the Second and Third Municipalities (faubourgs St. Mary and Marigny). The overall patterns reflect well the observations made by A. Oakey Hall in the late 1840s:

> One section of New Orleans, the First Municipality, the old city, left to the tender mercies of the French and Creole population; narrow, dark, and dirty [meaning either their city or the people]. One, in the Second Municipality, the new city; with here a little of Boston, there a trifle of New York, and some of Philadelphia.... The third section, a species of half village, half city, [unmistakable in its French Faubourg look] is given over to the tender mercies of the Dutch and Irish and the usual accompaniment of flaxen-polled babies and flaxen-tailed pigs.[78]

- It is clear from this map that neither perfect integration nor perfect segregation prevailed between these two ethnic groups. This semi-integrated, somewhat clustered pattern of geographical distribution persisted in New Orleans among almost all groups (with the exception of non-Creole blacks) for most of New Orleans' history. This is evident in many of the ethnic distribution maps in this book.
- True to popular perception, Creoles generally lived below Canal Street, outnumbering Anglos by a roughly 3.2-to-1 ratio, whereas Anglos outnumbered Creoles by a similar 2.8-to-1 ratio above Canal Street. But contrary to legend, Canal Street did not decisively divide the

[74] *Daily Orleanian*, February 19, 1849, p. 2, col. 3.

[75] The Historic New Orleans Collection, accession number 1952.4.

[76] The census recorded 34,101 Louisiana-born New Orleanians in 1850, compared to 16,369 New Orleanians born in America but not in Louisiana. J.D.B. De Bow, *Statistical View of the United States—Compendium of the Seventh Census* (Washington, DC, 1854), 399.

[77] Almost all of the thirty most common names in New Orleans (out of over 7,500 unique surnames) that year were typical Anglo-American names; the top ten were Smith (fifty-three entries), Brown, Martin, Moore, Thompson, Davis, Jones, Michel, Clark, and Lewis (thirty-three entries). Only after the two hundredth or so most common surname did French-sounding names come to predominate. This means, of course, that there were relatively few variations of Anglo surnames, repeated many times in numerous separate families, but thousands of variations of French names, most of which had only one or two family entries.

[78] A. Oakey Hall, *The Manhattaner in New Orleans; or Phases of "Crescent City" Life* (New York, 1851), 35-36.

two groups. Twenty-four percent of those households and businesses below Canal Street, in the disputed Creole section, in fact had American names, and a comparable 25 percent of the entities above Canal Street (in the so-called American Sector) had French and Spanish surnames. The upper streets of the French Quarter were particularly Americanized.[79] This map is corroborated by the observations of Joseph Holt Ingraham, who, walking up Chartres Street from the cathedral in 1835, wrote:

> After passing Rue Toulouse, the streets began to assume a new character; the buildings were loftier and more modern—the signs over the doors bore English names, and the characteristic arrangements of a northern dry goods store were perceived.... We had now attained the upper part of Chartres-street, which is occupied almost exclusively by retail and wholesale dry goods dealers, jewellers, booksellers, &c., from the northern states, and I could almost realize that I was taking a morning promenade in Cornhill [England], so great was the resemblance.[80]

Ingraham later rounded Canal Street to Levée Street (now Decatur) and proceeded downriver: "The stores on our left were all open, and nearly every one of them, for the first few squares, was kept by Americans; that is to say, Anglo Americans as distinguished from the Louisiana French...." Only when he reached the market, about five blocks down, did "French stores [begin] to predominate, till one could readily imagine himself, aided by the sound of the French language, French faces and French goods on all sides, to be traversing a street in Havre or Marseilles."[81] Canal Street, as the boundary between the First and Second Municipalities (1836-1852), did indeed serve as the political "dividing line between the American and French interests,"[82] but it did not exclusively segregate the demographic distributions of the two groups. Comparing the 1842 map to the previous 1808 map illustrates the extent to which American influence infiltrated the former French and Spanish colony during the early nineteenth century. By the time the municipality era ended in 1852, the economic, political and cultural fulcrum would shift from the old Creole downtown to the new American uptown.

• This map may give the impression that the old city in the 1840s comprised only Creoles and some Americans, and few others. Nothing could be further from the truth. The 1850 census indicates that fully 54 percent of the free population of the French Quarter was foreign born; another 14 percent was born in America outside Louisiana, and 32 percent were Louisiana-born. Of those 32 percent, however, less than one-third were white Louisiana-born offspring of Louisiana-born fathers—that is, probable Creoles by the traditional definition. "How, then, can we square these data with the [notion] of the lower city as something approaching an exclusively creole domain?," pondered Joseph Tregle, who tabulated the 1850 data. Tregle hypothesized that writers and the general populace, in forming their impression of the old city, added to the small sum of traditionally defined Creoles "those other parts of the community which seemed to fuse with them into a kind of cultural solidarity, the foreign-born French and Mediterranean stock plus their children and the 2,070 free persons of color, [who were] especially entitled to the name *creole*...."[83] Such a "fusion" would raise the Creole population of the old city to 39 percent in 1850, and higher if Creole slaves were included. The patterns shown on the map do not reflect these complexities, only the spatial patterns of those with probable French and Anglo names.

[79] See discussion on Creoles, Americans, and Canal Street in Campanella, *Time and Place in New Orleans*, 115.

[80] Ingraham, *The South-West by a Yankee*, 1:93-94.

A.P. Tureaud monument on St. Bernard Avenue. Many of New Orleans' civil rights leaders, from the late nineteenth century to modern times, came from the city's black Creole community. *Photograph by author, 2003.*

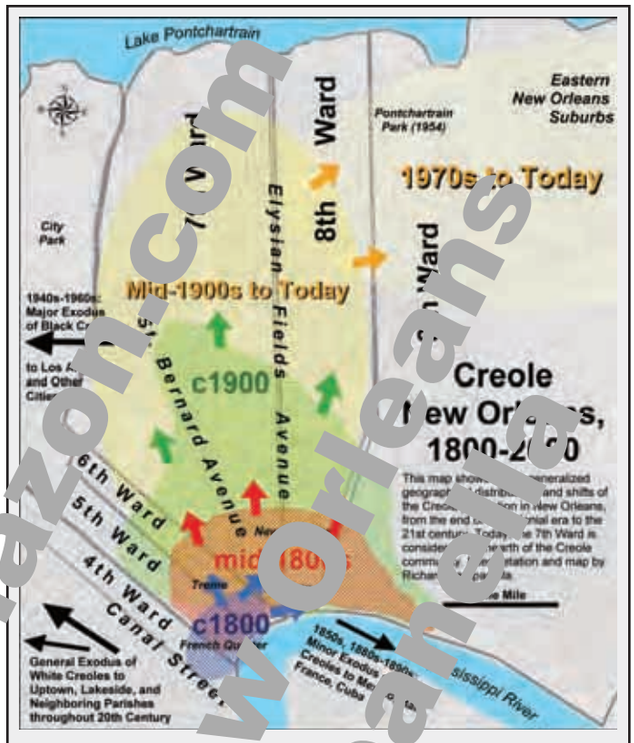
[81] Ibid., 1:101. It is interesting to note that another first-person account from 1858, six years after the end of the exclusive municipality era, contradicted Ingraham's observations of the cultural cityscape: "The two languages divide the city between them. On one side of the great bisecting avenue of Canal Street the shop-signs are in French, and every one speaks that language; on the other side the shops and the language are English." Charles Mackay, *Life and Liberty in America: or, Sketches of a Tour in the United States and Canada in 1857-8* (New York, 1859), 167.

[82] H. Didimus, *New Orleans As I Found It* (New York, 1845), 15.

[83] Tregle, "Creoles and Americans," 165-66.

Geographical Shifts in the Creole Population, from the Civil War to the Civil Rights Movement

Wealthier Creole families began departing the French Quarter around the time of the Civil War. Some moved to the tony new garden suburbs of Esplanade Avenue in the 1850s; others lost their businesses and fortunes to the turmoil of the 1860s and left their mansions for humbler abodes in the lower faubourgs. A small group of free Creoles of color, alarmed by the increasing racial tensions of the day, left Louisiana in the 1850s for port cities in Mexico, where their descendents live today.[84] The free people of color from antebellum times were devastated by the social changes following the Civil War, as this middle caste in Louisiana's three-caste social hierarchy lost its property and special legal status, and was now viewed by whites as little different from the lowest classes of emancipated slaves.[85] More Creoles of Color departed for Mexico as well as Haiti, Cuba, and Panama in the 1880s-1890s. By century's end, concentrations of Creoles in New Orleans shifted from the French Quarter, Tremé, and Marigny farther into the Sixth, Seventh, Eighth, and Ninth wards, between the Mississippi River and the backswamp, where some had been allowed settled for almost a century. Poor Sicilian immigrants replaced the Creole population in the Quarter during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, making it into a high-density "Little Palermo." With the installation of drainage technology at the turn of the century, the swamps were drained and the backswamp edge crept farther and farther toward Lake Pontchartrain, until the entire river-to-lake swath of the Seventh, Eighth, and Ninth Wards was developed, by the 1950s, for residential living. White Creoles, who by now generally no longer identified themselves as Creole, departed along with other whites for the new suburban developments of lakeside New Orleans in the early decades of the 1900s, and for Jefferson Parish and other neighboring suburbs later in the century. Meanwhile, black Creoles left the city in droves starting in the late 1930s, taking the Sunset Limited from New Orleans for Los Angeles, where war-related industries offered jobs and no legal segregation threatened to impede them. "In the '40s during World War II," recollected one New Orleans Creole in a 1984 interview, "the majority of people from the seventh ward moved out to California—migrated to L.A. in search of jobs in factories…. They have the same traditions [in the west side of L.A.] as here—the names of some of the spots. You go to St. Bernard Food Market or there, got a hot sausage factory over there, Olivier's … it's like my second home."[86] Mary Gehman reports that in the 1950s there was even a stretch of Jefferson Boulevard in Los Angeles called Little New Orleans with the St. Bernard Market, Merlin Saulny's Restaurant, Duplantier's Barber Shop, and the Big Loaf Bakery, the only place in Los Angeles that made New Orleans style French bread."[87] Although many of the estimated 5,000 California Creoles have since moved again to other areas in Los Angeles, Jefferson Boulevard between Arlington Avenue and Crenshaw Boulevard today is studded with Creole diners, Cajun food restaurants, and businesses with French names.[88] Smaller pockets of New Orleans Creoles formed in other large western and northern urban areas.



This map illustrates the shifting geography of Creole New Orleans over two centuries. Once concentrated in the original city, Creoles moved below and behind the Quarter, then toward the lake after the swamps were drained. Many departed New Orleans altogether, some for Mexico and the Caribbean in the mid-1800s, more for California in the mid-1900s. During these two hundred years, the very concept of Creole identity transformed dramatically. *Design and analysis by author.*

These black Creoles who remained in their ancestral city tended to move out of the old faubourgs and into certain new lakeside suburbs (most prominently Pontchartrain Park) of the Seventh, Eighth, and Ninth Wards. Prompting this move was the nationwide preference for suburban living in new homes following World War II, the outlawing of racist deed covenants that kept blacks out of new lakeside subdivisions, and the urban decline of old neighborhoods. Among the assaults on the old Creole faubourgs were the destruction of the well-loved forested North Claiborne Avenue neutral ground for Interstate 10 in 1966, and the leveling of ten blocks of Faubourg Tremé for the urban renewal project that became the Mahalia Jackson Theater for the Performing Arts and Louis Armstrong Park by 1980. Many Creoles would

[84] Gehman, "The Mexico-Louisiana Creole Connection," 68-75.
[85] Dormon, "Ethnicity and Identity," 168.
[86] As quoted by CETA Artists in the City of New Orleans Project/Owen Murphy and Lyla Hay Owen, *Créoles of New Orleans* (New Orleans, 1987), 86.
[87] Gehman, *The Free People of Color of New Orleans*, 118.
[88] C.J. Schexnayder, "From To L.A.-Cajuns and Creoles Living in the Golden State," *The Times: A Local Weekly Newspaper,* June 19, 2002, www.timesofacadiana.com.

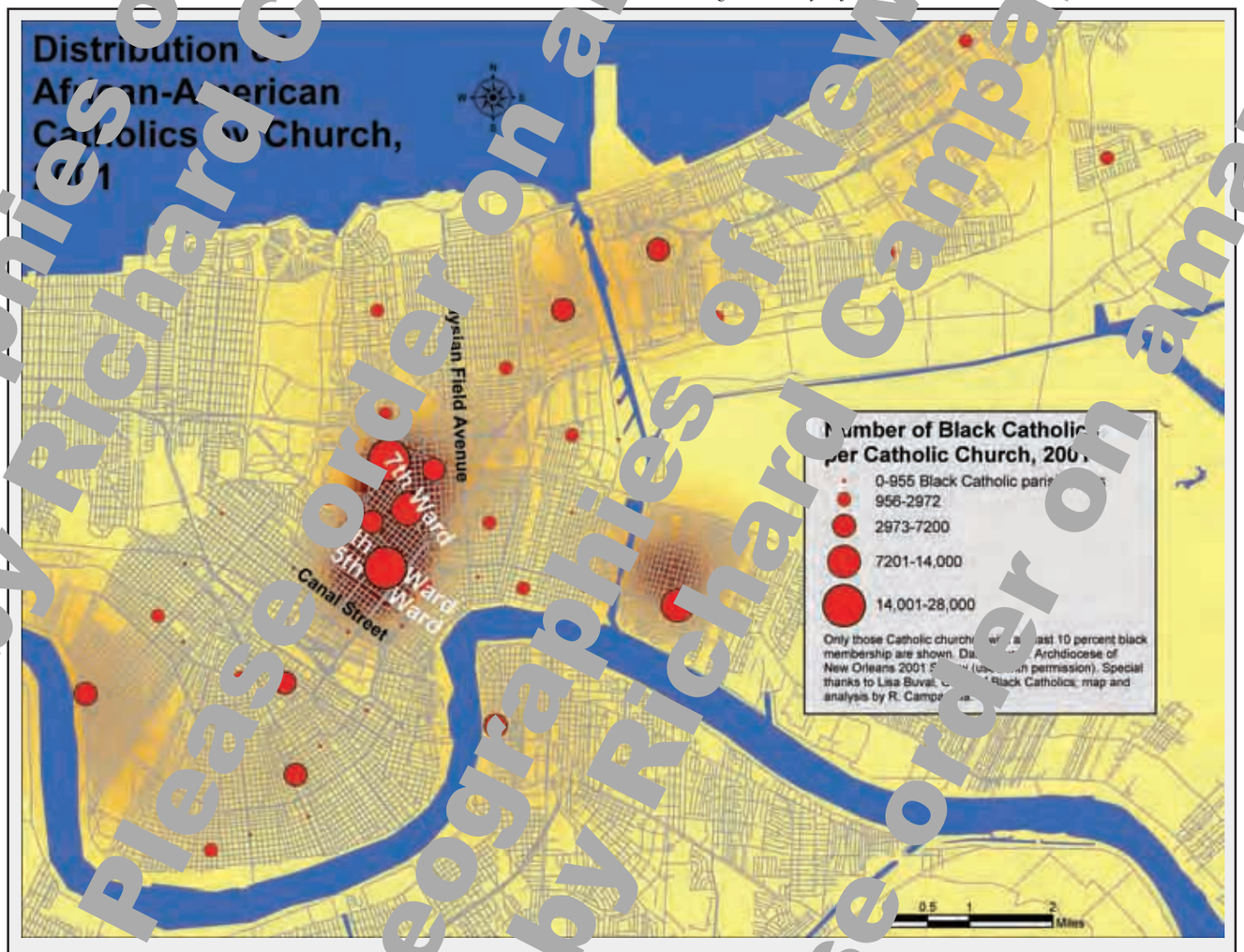
move again to the even newer suburbs of eastern New Orleans, home today to much of the city's black middle class. (See map, *Creole New Orleans, 1800-2000*.) Thus, during a span of two centuries, Creole New Orleans shifted by the 1800s migrated out of its original French Quarter hearth, to the lower faubourgs, then lakeward up the Elysian Fields and Franklin Avenue corridors (early to mid-1900s), and eastward out Gentilly Boulevard to the subdivisions beyond the Industrial Canal (late 1900s). The Seventh Ward in particular, since the late nineteenth century, became the geo-political entity most associated with the Creole population, both in fact and in the public lexicon. Many of the most influential leaders of the New Orleans black community, such as A.P. Tureaud and other civil rights pioneers, were Seventh Ward Creoles. The area has been called the "Mother of Mayors,"[89] with mayors Ernest "Dutch" Morial, Sidney Barthelemy, and Marc Morial all tracing roots to the storied ward.

Catholicism as a Clue to Creole New Orleans

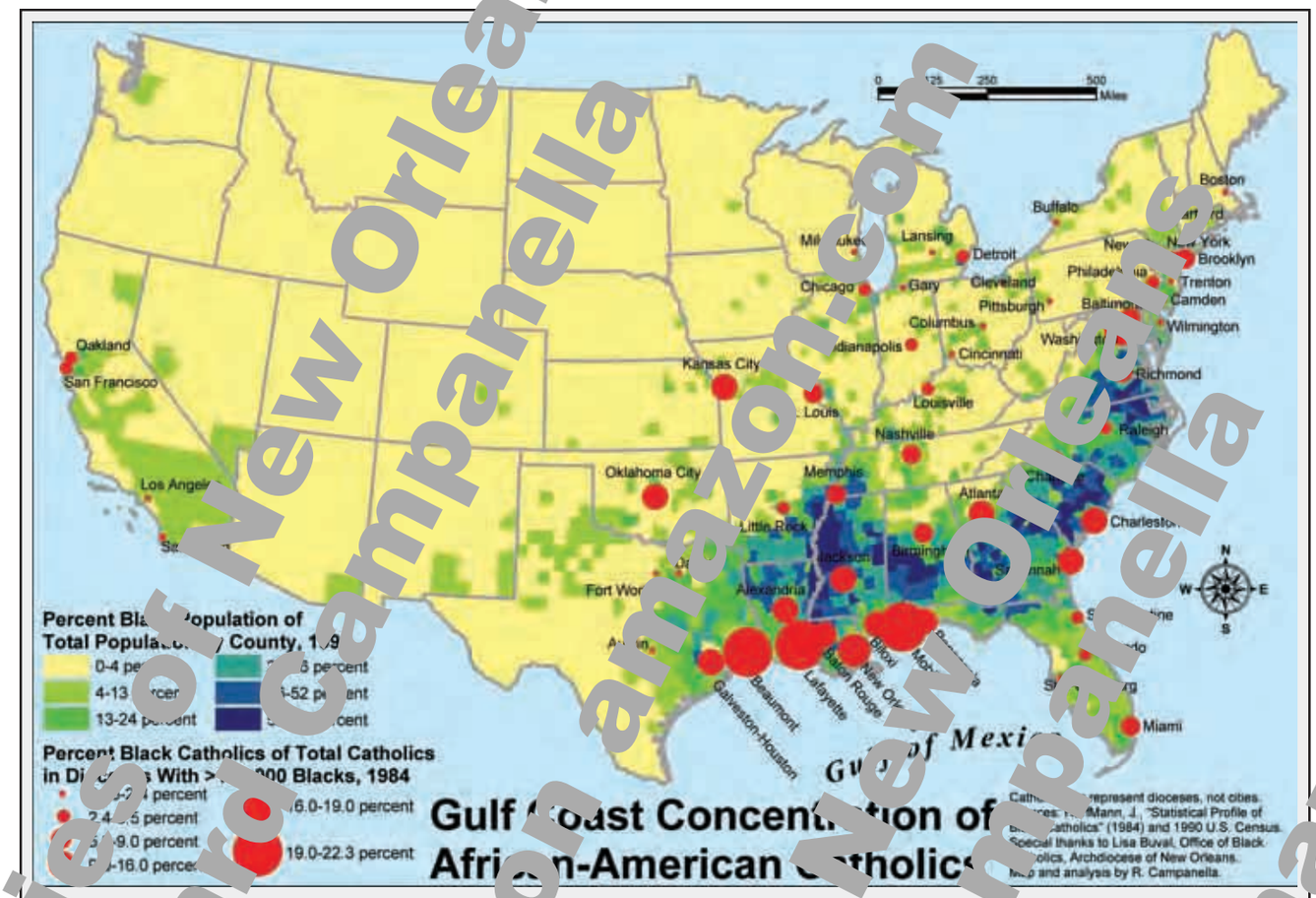
As the Creole population shifted, so did Creole streetscapes and landmarks. Popular perceptions of the "main street" of black Creole New Orleans shifted from North Claiborne Avenue northward to St. Bernard Avenue and North Broad Street. Epicenters of Creole Catholicism also moved with the population. Creoles in antebellum times worshipped primarily at St. Louis Cathedral in the French Quarter and St. Augustine in the Faubourg Tremé, both located in the heart of the era's Creole population clusters. After the beginnings of segregation of churches in 1895, "certain churches became associated with [the] colored Creole community,"[90] the most prominent among them Corpus Christi Church (1916) on St. Bernard Avenue, located in the Seventh Ward beside of the core Creole area. Holy Redeemer, a new parish was carved from Corpus Christi Parish, and St. Peter Claver and Epiphany were founded in adjacent areas in the Sixth and Seventh

[89] Katz, "The Seventh Ward: Mother of Mayors," 51-54.

[90] Domínguez, *White by Definition*, 223.



Where is Creole New Orleans today? Black Catholicism offers clues. New Orleanians who are African American and Catholic are more likely to trace their roots into the city's colonial past, possess Francophone or Spanish surnames, recall family elders who spoke French Creole, and descend from the antebellum free people of color. True to popular perception, the central Seventh Ward area stands out as the city's main Creole area, though not the only one. *Map and analysis by author based on data provided by Lisa Buval, Office of Black Catholics, Archdiocese of New Orleans.*



Using black Ca[illegible]olicism as an indicator of Creolism nationwide, we see that, a[illegible]least in these 198[illegible]tholic diocese data, the Gulf Coas[illegible] indeed "the [illegible]ole coast." Recent immigration from the Caribbean to Mia[illegible]nd New York [illegible]y have altered these patterns.
Map and an[illegible]is by author based on data pr[illegible]ded by Lisa Buval, Office of Black Catholics, Archdi[illegible]ese of New Orleans.

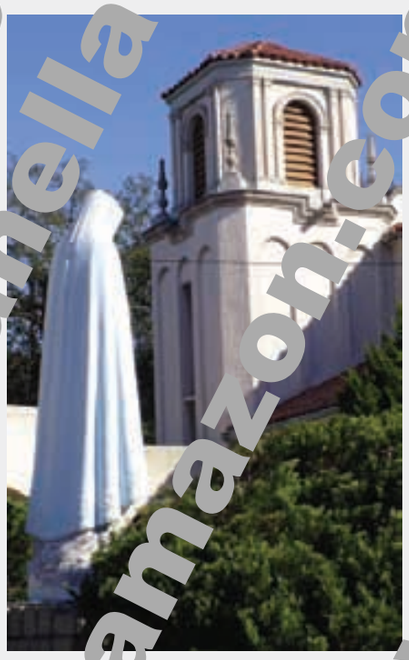
wards. These [illegible]r churches "became near[illegible]ynonymous with Creole i[illegible]the black community. By impli[illegible]ion, membership in these [illegible]rches was thought to s[illegible]l Creole identity."[91] (Othe[illegible]predominantly black Catho[illegible]churches, such as St. D[illegible]v[illegible], St. Philip's, and Blessed [illegible]Sacrament, are not neces[illegible]located in traditionally recogni[illegible]ed Creole areas, illustrating that such concentration[illegible]ar[illegible]by no means exclusive.) As the Creole population moved out through Gentilly an[illegible]ward the lake, it spawned new predominantly black Ca[illegible]lic parishes: St. Paul's, wh[illegible]g[illegible]ew out of Corpus Christi; Leo the Great; St. Raphael and St. Gabriel's, serving p[illegible]ish[illegible]ioners in Gentilly Wo[illegible]nd Pontchartrain Park, [illegible]d Im[illegible]maculate Heart of Mary and others in the suburb[illegible]a[illegible]t of the Industrial Can[illegible]. The map *Number of Black Catholics per Catholic Church, 200[illegible]* shows those Orleans Parish [illegible]urches in 2001 with a[illegible]e[illegible]s[illegible]10 percent African Ame[illegible]ca[illegible]ember-ship, with t[illegible]implication that most black Catholics in New Orleans h[illegible]a[illegible]least some current or pas[illegible]cl[illegible]m to Creole identity.[illegible]ru[illegible]to perception, the central Sev[illegible]h Ward—"the fountainhea[illegible]of New Orleans' Creole c[illegible]ur[illegible]"[92]—st[illegible]ou[illegible] dramatically in this technique as a main[illegible]eole area, though not the only one. One journalist[illegible]es[illegible]d this exact area as "the [illegible]orher lode [illegible]New Orleans' rich Creole heri[illegible]g[illegible]Black and heavily Catholic[illegible]this is the neighborhood, [illegible]d said, t[illegible]ar provided the city with its skilled plasters, masons, car-p[illegible]ters and ot[illegible]r[illegible]isans."[93] A woman who[illegible]up in this [illegible]ame area (spe[illegible]ally North Robertson at C[illegible]mbus) in the [illegible]1[illegible]80s desc[illegible]d it as "the nest of the Cr[illegible]district and so near the f[illegible]rich, Creole aristocracy of [illegible]ade] Avenue," and wro[illegible]of the Creole dialects, customs, and characters of the n[illegible]ighborhood.[94] The same Ca[illegible]olic-based technique map[illegible]d at the national level (map *Gulf Coast Concentration of African-American Catholics*) shows that, in 1984, the o[illegible]French colonial Gulf Coa[illegible]region remained the premier [illegible]earth of Creolism in North [illegible]merica. Immigration of Haitians and other West Indians [illegible]o major cities of the East Coast may have altered this patter[illegible]ce these data were collected [illegible]over twenty years ago.

Occupation as a Clue

Skilled buildin[illegible]ades have long been associated with the black Creole co[illegible]unity of New Orleans, from colonial

[91] Ibid., 224.
[92] Gordon Russell, "Pampy Barré Has Done Well For Himself," *Times-Picayune*, June 19, 2005, A18.
[93] Bruce Nolan, "Men[illegible]ar Women's Family," *Times-Picayune*, June 17, 2004, B1-2. The specific area re[illegible]enced in the above quote was the 1900 block of Duels Street, which is lo[illegible]recisely in the high-Creole section of the central Seventh Ward as indicate[illegible]n the map.
[94] Elise Kirsch, *Dow[illegible]own New Orleans in the Early "Eighties:" Customs and Characters of Old Ro[illegible]n Street and Its Neighborhood* (New Orleans, 1951), 1.

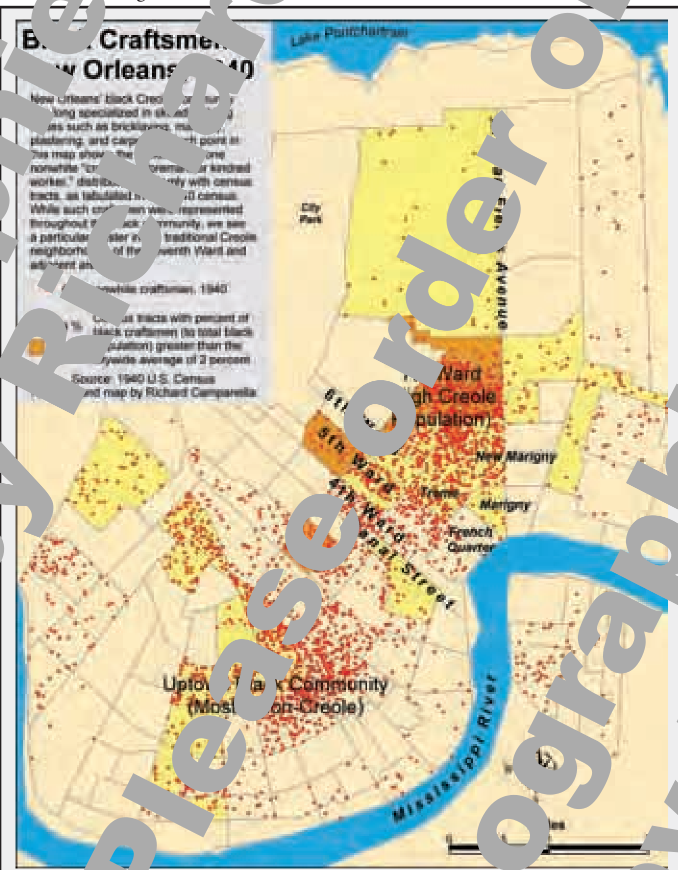
Not your typical Southern city: black Catholic cityscapes in and near the Seventh Ward. *Street photos by author; rooftop photos of St. Peter Claver and St. Augustine by Ronnie Cardwell, 2003.*



and antebellum times to today. Wrote the *Daily Picayune* in 1859,

> Our free colored population form a distinct class from those elsewhere in the United States…. Some of our best mechanics and artisans are to be found among the free colored men. They form the great majority of our regular, settled masons, bricklayers, builders, carpenters, tailors, shoemakers, [and are also] excellent musicians, jewelers, goldsmiths, tradesmen and merchants. As a general rule, the free colored people of Louisiana, and especially of New Orleans—the "creoles of color," as they style themselves—are a sober, industrious and moral class.[95]

Ironwork, lathing, plastering, painting, and tile setting are among the other professions and crafts that Creoles have handed down for generations, dating back sometimes to French, Caribbean, and African working traditions. These lines of work availed to the men of color (to whom the doors of many other professions were closed) a level of independence, steady work, opportunities for creativity, and a sense of accomplishment. Their labors have permanently enriched the physical city of New Orleans, and much of the city's spectacular architecture stands today as a monument to their efforts. Tracing the residential patterns of these tight-knit, tradition-bound artisans provides clues to the geography of Creole New Orleans. "This 7th ward here was full of trade people," recollected the late Mardi Gras Indian Chief Allison "Tootie" Montana, himself a skilled lather with deep Seventh Ward roots. "You could build a house, really didn't have to spend no money at all. You knew plasterers, You knew lathers. You knew carpenters. You knew plumbers…."[96] The U.S. Census, which collects data on occupation, tabulated numbers for nonwhite "craftsmen, foremen, and kindred workers" at the census-tract level for the first time in 1940.[97] The map *Black Craftsmen in New Orleans, 1940* verifies a cluster of African American craftsmen living in the Seventh Ward and adjacent areas known for high Creole populations, but also shows many black craftsmen living in non-Creole uptown areas, particularly the former back-of-town section now known as Central City.



Creoles of color were (and remain) famous for their skills in the building crafts. This map shows, for 1940, a cluster of African American craftsmen living in the Seventh Ward and adjacent areas known for high Creole populations, but also shows many black craftsmen living in non-Creole uptown areas, particularly the former back-of-town section now known as Central City. *Map by author, based on 1940 Census.*

Linguistics as a Clue

Mapping the patterns of French speakers offers additional evidence to the geography of Creole New Orleans. Historically, the ability to speak French and its local variations served as a reliable indicator of Creole identity, more so than religion or ancestry. To a keen ear, it might even serve to distinguish Creoles from foreign French immigrants, Acadians, and Saint-Domingue refugees, not to mention the castes and classes among them. Though much of that language diversity is gone today, linguists still identify three French-related languages spoken in modern Louisiana: Cajun French, Louisiana Creole, and Colonial French. Of these, Cajun French counts the largest number of speakers today, most of them rural white Acadians residing throughout Louisiana's so-called Francophone Triangle. Louisiana Creole (*français nèg'*), considered a separate language influenced by French and African tongues rather than a variation of French, is spoken by an estimated 20,000-30,000 (circa 1998) mostly African-Louisianians[98] clustered around New Roads in Pointe Coupee Parish, along Bayou Teche near Lafayette, in the German Coast above New Orleans, and reportedly south of Lake Charles.[99] Colonial French, the old French of educated Creoles, is the rarest variety of Louisiana French. Additionally, standard French, the type taught in schools, is heard in Louisiana, sometimes among elders of the upper class. No firm linguistic boundaries separate these tongues in Louisiana; rather, a continuum prevails, such that a black Creole in St. Martinville may drift in and out of Cajun French, English, and Louisiana Creole in the course of conversation. It is not clear how the French variations once heard in the streets of New Orleans fit into such a continuum, because most recent scholarly research in

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[95] "Haytian Emigration Movement," *Daily Picayune*, July 16, 1859, p. 5, c. 2. This article described the Haitian government's appeal to Creoles of color in New Orleans to immigrate to the island nation.

[96] Allison Montana, as quoted in Nick Spitzer, "The Aesthetics of Work and Play in Creole New Orleans," in *Raised to the Trade: Creole Building Arts of New Orleans*, eds. John Ethan Hankins and Steven Maklansky (New Orleans, 2002), 115.

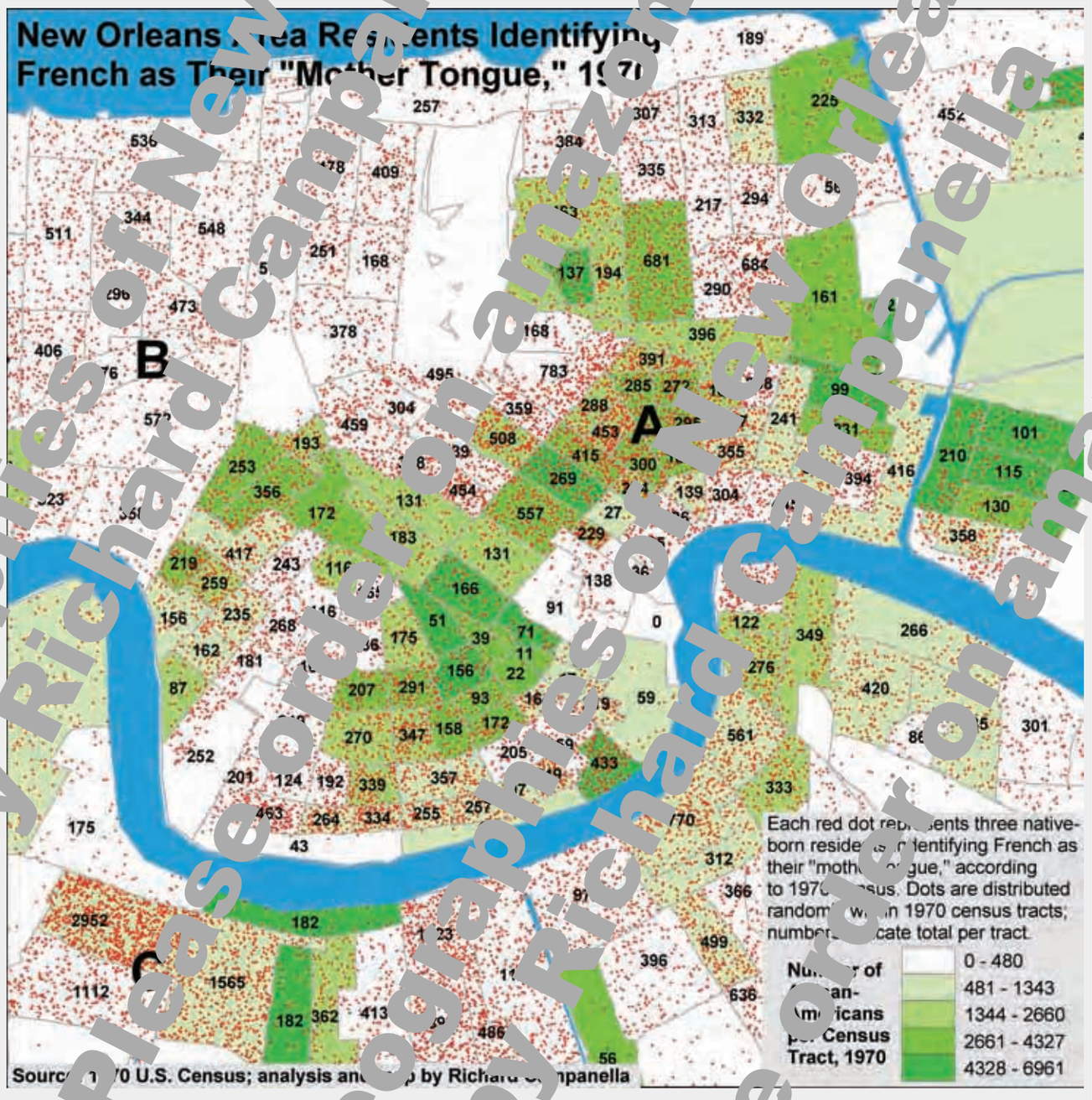
[97] U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Population and Housing Statistics for Census Tracts New Orleans, La.-1940* (Washington, DC, 1942), 46-53.

[98] Albert Valdman, Thomas A. Klingler, Margaret M. Marshall, and Kevin J. Rottet, *Dictionary of Louisiana Creole* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1998), 3.

[99] Based on map by Neumann reproduced in Thomas A. Klingler, *If I Could Turn My Tongue Like That: The Creole Language of Pointe Coupée Parish, Louisiana* (Baton Rouge, 2003).

Louisiana linguistics has focused on rural areas in modern times, not urban areas in either historical or modern times. It is probable that old New Orleans French changed from a rural African-influenced *français nègre* to Colonial French to a Parisian French imported directly from France. There is some debate as to whether Louisiana Creole was spoken by native New Orleanians, or imported to the city by emigrants from nearby rural areas, where it has always been more prevalent. For our purposes here, the French spoken by New Orleans Creoles may be generically referred to as French Creole. How to map these folks?

U.S. censuses have since 1890 collected data on language spoken at the household or individual level, but certain nuances about the data frustrate their use to map detailed geographical distributions. Finding French-speaking households in the old population schedules suffers from the problem of lumping French-speaking Creoles together with non-Creole French speakers. Separating out those with Louisiana birth-



Mapping linguistic patterns offers additional evidence for the geography of Creole New Orleans. Remarkably, 41,719 residents of Orleans Parish claimed French as their "mother tongue" (the language spoken in one's childhood home) in the 1970 census. They are mapped here in red dots, and plotted numerically, upon green shading representing the density of the African American population per census tract. Points in majority-black tracts likely represent black Creoles/Creoles of Color (labeled "A," in the Seventh Ward). Points in majority white tracts may be white Creoles or descendents of French immigrants (labeled "B"), or they may be Acadians recently settled in the city. Note the large number of points in mostly white tracts on the West Bank, particularly Westwego (labeled "C"), which practically abuts the Acadian region. *Map and analysis by author.*

place, or with Louisiana-born parents, may help disentangle this information, but any approach involving the original hand-written population schedules is extremely time-consuming and requires a team of assistants. Compendium volumes offer aggregations at coarser spatial scales (such as wards or census tracts), but in most censuses language is not among the pieces of information aggregated. "French" or "Creole" as languages often fall in the "other" category of some censuses and thus suffer from undercounting. In other cases, the phrasing of the question affects the reliability of responses and thwarts the comparability from decade to decade. Finally, the complex continuum of French variations spoken in Louisiana into modern times obfuscates the direct association of certain speech patterns with convenient language categories and thence with specific ethnic groups.

Queries regarding "mother tongue," which the Census Bureau defined as the language spoken in one's childhood home, offer particularly interesting results. While "mother tongue" may be a straightforward notion in homogeneous societies, confusion may arise in multicultural communities. What is the mother tongue of a multilingual household? Adult New Orleanians responding to the "mother tongue" queries (appearing in the censuses of 1910-1940 and 1960-1970) presumably drew upon childhood memories dating anywhere from the 1850s to the 1950s, when English, French, French Creole, Sicilian, German, Spanish, and other languages could be heard on city streets. Queries about one's mother tongue may also inspire some people to respond sentimentally, either to affirm or deny a particular heritage. Renewed ethnic pride may explain why the 298,420 white Louisianians who claimed French as their mother tongue in 1940 grew mysteriously to 487,526 in 1970, despite the precipitous decline of traditional Cajun culture during those thirty years.[100]

Mother-tongue data for New Orleans in 1970 divulges fascinating patterns. Fully 41,719 American-born residents of Orleans Parish—one of every fourteen—claimed French as their mother tongue that year. This figure is almost double the *combined* total of those claiming Italian, Spanish, German, Polish, Russian, Hungarian, and Yiddish as their mother tongues.[101] At first glance, this statistic seems incredible: French ceased being New Orleans' *lingua franca* around the Civil War, and steadily disappeared from the streets of New Orleans throughout the course of the twentieth century. French and Creole was spoken mostly by elders in parlors and churches by the end of that century, and rarely as a first language.[102] Could it be that there were this many French speakers in this major American city, 167 years after its colonial era? If respondents heeded well the Census Bureau's definition of "mother tongue," these points may not necessarily represent French speakers, but rather people who grew up in households in which, many years ago, some variation of French was spoken at some level. Speakers in majority-black tracts are more likely to represent black Creoles and Creoles of Color (labeled "A" in the map *New Orleans Area Residents Identifying French as Their "Mother Tongue," 1970*); speakers in majority-white tracts may be white Creoles or descendents of French immigrants (labeled "B")—or they may be Cajuns recently settled in the city. Many rural Cajuns emigrated to New Orleans during and after World War II, when jobs and agricultural mechanization pushed rural peoples nationwide to the nearest major cities. Note particularly the large number of points in mostly white tracts on the West Bank, particularly Westwego (labeled "C"), which practically abuts the Acadian region. While greater New Orleans is not and never was a Cajun city, there are more Cajuns here than one might expect (though less than tourism promoters want you to believe). The local phone books list plenty of classic Cajun names such as Boudreaux, Hebert, Landry, and Thibodeaux.[103] An alternative explanation is that some people responded emotionally to the term "mother tongue," claiming French to affirm their Francophone heritage. Finally, it is quite possible that many of these points represent *bona fide* speakers of some variation of Louisiana French. According to Gilbert E. Martin, "prior to...World War II, it was not uncommon to hear the Creole language spoken daily on the streets of New Orleans."[104] Indeed, all of the older siblings of Mayor Ernest "Dutch" Morial, a Seventh Ward Creole born in 1929, spoke some French.[105] Whatever the explanation, one geographical pattern is clear: a cluster of speakers appears in the majority-black tracts that make up the old Creole neighborhoods of the Seventh Ward, a pattern of Creole ethnic distribution corroborated in the other maps of this chapter.

Creole Cityscapes

Creole cityscapes—that is, elements in the built environment that reflect past or present Creole ethnicity—assume three forms in twenty-first-century New Orleans. The first manifests itself in the hundreds of structures exhibiting Creole architectural styles, most of them built before the mid-nineteenth century. To stroll through the lower Quarter, faubourgs Tremé and Marigny, and Bywater is to observe streetscapes like few others surviving in modern America. But, despite the architecture, few Creoles still reside here;[106]

[100] Larbi Oukada, "Louisiana French: A Linguistic Study with a Descriptive Analysis of the Lafourche Dialect" (Ph. D. Dissertation, Louisiana State University, 1977), 63.

[101] U.S. Census. Fourth Count Summary Tape (Population), "Mother Tongue and Nativity," 1970. Data extracted and tabulated by author from digital files. Numbers do not include foreign-born residents.

[102] Tulane University linguist Dr. Thomas A. Klingler interviewed, between 1994 and 2003, two fluent speakers of Creole and two of upper class French, all New Orleans natives in their eighties and nineties. While many older New Orleanians remember the elders of their youth speaking French and Creole as their first and second languages, and may themselves use certain words and phrases, fluent native French and Creole speakers are rare in New Orleans today. Personal communication, Thomas A. Klingler, December 5, 2003.

[103] Domínguez, *White by Definition*, 189.

[104] Gilbert E. Martin, *Creole Chronology: 2,300 Years of Cultural Continuity* (Castro Valley, CA, 1992), 55.

[105] Hirsch, "Simply a Matter of Black and White," 292.

[106] In 1808, the vast majority of parcel owners of the French Quarter had Francophone surnames; only [illegible] percent were Anglo. Two centuries later, this figure had reversed: only 8.9 percent of the French Quarter's parcel owners in 2002 had Francophone surnames. Survey by author, Orleans Parish Assessment Roll, District 2,

North Claiborne Avenue was once popularly perceived as the "main street" of black Creole New Orleans, lined with locally owned businesses and shaded by over two hundred live oaks. Most of the neutral ground was destroyed in 1966 for the construction of I-10. Today, many people identify St. Bernard Avenue (and sometimes North Broad) as the "main streets" of the black Creole community, though North Claiborne is not forgotten. Murals on the interstate pillars commemorate local civil rights leaders and black history, and the live oaks are poignantly remembered on the outermost pillars (above). Each Mardi Gras the former neutral ground beneath the interstate once again becomes "main street," crowded with thousands of revelers, Mardi Gras Indians, picnickers, and second-line parades (upper right). It is one of the great cultural experiences of modern New Orleans, missed by nearly all the thousands of tourists in town for the festivities. St. Bernard Avenue, penetrating the heart of the Seventh Ward (right), also goes unnoticed by the millions of Creole-curious tourists who visit New Orleans annually. *Photographs by author, 2003-2004.*

their historic former homes are now often occupied by recent white transplants or non-Creole blacks. Walk farther and more Creole cityscapes unveil themselves, this time in structural details: the solid carpentry of a St. Roch frame house; the exquisite plasterwork of an uptown mansion; the intricate gingerbread on an Irish Channel shotgun house; the ironwork of a French Quarter townhouse. Though post-dating the glory days of Creole architecture, these historical buildings often exhibit the handiwork of Creole craftsmen, "raised to the trades" of ironwork, carpentry, masonry, lathing, and plastering[107] for generations. But here too you are unlikely to find Creole people, unless a craftsman happens past you en route to a worksite. To find the *living* historical cityscape, one must depart these picturesque historical cityscapes near the river and head toward the lake, into the heart of the Seventh Ward and surroundings. Up the "main street" of modern Creole New Orleans, St. Bernard Avenue. Down North Broad Street. Along North Rampart Street as it swaps paths with St. Claude Avenue. Among the strip malls of Gentilly Boulevard. Up and down the scores of lesser streets between Esplanade and Elysian Fields. Eastward into the low-lying 1960s subdivisions of eastern New Orleans. You'll find few tourists here: no tour buses crawl through the streets at the pace of the guide's amplified narrative; no brochure racks clutter the corners of public buildings. These Creole cityscapes, structurally speaking, are unspectacular, lined with twentieth-century ranch houses and modern commercial edifices that could be found anywhere. But a closer inspection exposes clues to modern Creole identity—the French surnames, the black Catholicism, the foods, the word "Creole" used in business names—which culturally set this neighborhood apart from the rest of New Orleans just as Creoles have set New Orleans apart from the rest of the nation. Clues of Creolism may also be found through a culinary geography—an enticing research project awaiting some intrepid investigator—in which the availability of distinguishing Creole cooking ingredients (such as rabbit) in local grocery stores, or the styles of gumbo prepared in mom-and-pop restaurants, is mapped citywide.[108] Whatever the technique, one major geographical

2003.

[107] Jonn Ethan Hankins and Steven Maklansky, eds. *Raised to the Trade: Creole Building Arts of New Orleans* (New Orleans, 2002).

[108] The Seventh Ward style of gumbo, according to legendary Creole chef Leah Chase, is "a somewhat thin, medium-brown brew with crab, shrimp, chaurice, ham, smoked sausage, and [sometimes] veal stew meat." "The Creole gumbo here doesn't change [in] the Creole community, and when I say Creoles I mean Creoles of color. If you talk to people in the 7th Ward they will tell you that the way I (cook gumbo) is the way they do it." Why certain ingredients? "You put it in there because that's what your mama told you to do." Brett Anderson, "Bowl of Wonder," *Lagniappe's*

"Foodscapes" throughout the Seventh and Eighth Wards, directly or indirectly informed by Creole culture. "Creole" as an adjective for certain foods or cooking styles accounts for most of the modern-day usage of the word. *Photographs by author, 2003-2004.*

Examples of early nineteenth-century Creole architecture, reflecting local, West Indian, Francophone, and African influences. Of the few dozen such buildings still standing in New Orleans, not one is located above Canal Street. *Photographs by author, 2003-2004.*

pattern seen for almost two hundred years remains in twenty-first-century New Orleans: the non-Creole black community predominates above Canal Street, in Central City and Uptown, whereas the black Creole/Creole of color community lives primarily in the downtown half of the city, below Canal Street and east of City Park. This is a modern-day derivative of the old downtown-Creole/uptown-Anglo pattern, first seen around the time of the Louisiana Purchase. Recalled two Creole women interviewed in the 1970s about this ancient pattern,

> Canal Street was the dividing line. People who lived north of Canal Street called themselves Creoles, they were somewhat of a different type of Negro. South of Canal Street, uptown, there seemed to be a different class of Negro. You just didn't mix with those people. You just didn't cross the boundary.[109]

One learns little of the geography of Creole New Orleans from a survey of the word *Creole* in the cityscape today. While French Quarter restaurants and merchants recklessly exploit the enchanting term to authenticate their offerings, the genuine Creole community and its businesses endure in relative obscurity in Seventh Ward neighborhoods, unbeknownst to and unvisited by the millions of Creole-curious tourists exploring the Creole City annually. Only during Jazz Fest do visitors come *en masse* to the Seventh Ward, yet most festival-goers, though deeply appreciative of local culture, are ignorant to the fact that they are in the modern-day heart of Creole New Orleans. As it can be heard above the noise of the genuine Creole restaurants in the Seventh Ward, a popular rendezvous for the African American business and political community is owned by Sam "Pampy" Barré, practically required to shout its *bona fides* in a print ad posted in the visitor-oriented *Where* magazine. Its copy read, in part, *"Pampy's Creole Kitchen... authentic Creole cuisine...native Creole cuisine...original Creole cuisine...dine in a casual ATMOSPHERE with a true Creole family...WHERE IT ALL STARTED...DEEP in the heart of the 7th Ward."*[110] The word *Creole* appeared eighty-nine times in that seventy-two-page magazine; fully 60 percent of the usage was by commercial establishments located in the French Quarter, one of the least ethnically Creole neighborhoods in modern New Orleans. Eighty-three percent of the uses were as a culinary adjective, describing a food cooking style, or restaurant theme. Another 12 percent described elements of the built environment, such as a style of architecture, historical neighborhood, or structure name, and less than 5 percent—four uses—meant a particular people. (These percentages would probably be in reverse if nineteenth-century usage were similarly tracked.) And of these four uses of *Creole* to describe people, only one implied a group currently living in modern New Orleans—the aforementioned "true Creole family" of Pampy's Creole Kitchen.[111]

Epilogue: The modern-day Creole community settled in the very parts of the Seventh, Eighth, and Ninth Wards that flooded terribly after Hurricane Katrina. The catastrophe will likely further scatter the ethnic group, across the city, region, or nation, perhaps to the point of eliminating any sort of recognizable Creole neighborhood. This loss, if it comes to pass, will represent one of Katrina's greatest wounds to the cultural heritage of New Orleans.

But even at this early stage, there are signs of resiliency. The famed Creole chef Austin Leslie died while evacuated to Atlanta, his life was celebrated with a jazz funeral held on a beautiful October Sunday afternoon in New Orleans. The procession started at his former workplace—Pampy's Creole Kitchen—and wended its way through the heart of the Creole Seventh Ward. It was the city's first jazz funeral after Hurricane Katrina.

Dining Guide, *Times-Picayune*, April 4, 2004, 15 and 16.

[109] As quoted by Arthé Agnes Anthony, "The Louisiana Creole Community in New Orleans, 1880-1920: An Oral History" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California-Irvine, 1978), 141.

[110] Advertisement for Pampy's Creole Kitchen, *Where-New Orleans*, December 2003, 27.

[111] Analysis by author of December 2003 edition of *Where New Orleans* magazine.

Where Was the Irish Channel?

While numerous historical accounts tell the story of Irish New Orleans, few track the elements of place established by the tens of thousands of Irish immigrants who settled in the Crescent City. This aspect begs further investigation because ethnic interaction in this city of cooperative diversity is inherently fascinating, and because the one place most associated with New Orleans' Irish is among the most famous ethnic enclaves in the city: the Irish Channel. The peculiar sobriquet "Irish Channel" helped save (and perhaps form) the memory of this district, for though the Irish have gone elsewhere, what modern city planner would be foolish enough to change such an enigmatic name?

The name is but one of the mystifying aspects of the Irish Channel. The appearance, epicenter, boundaries, even the extent to which this neighborhood was genuinely Irish, also persist as gray-zones and recycled secondary information in the historical literature on New Orleans. Some say the Irish Channel encompassed a vast riverside swath above downtown, reflecting the widely observed pattern that "Irish immigrants found employment in the warehouses and terminal facilities they had helped to build."[112] Others claim it centered around certain community loci or corridors within this district, such as churches, markets, or streets. Still others point to ethnically heterogeneous census populations and dismiss the entire notion as just another local myth. Modern-day technocrats cite government reports and declare resolutely that the Irish Channel officially lies between such-and-such a street and this-and-that avenue, regardless of either historical data or popular perceptions, while urban activists view the district as a state of mind—it lies wherever residents say it is. The goal here is not to recount the history of the Irish in New Orleans; nor is it to trace the spatial patterns and reconstruct the cityscapes of Irish New Orleans. Rather, the goal here is shed light on one specific question: Where was the Irish Channel?

The term "Irish Channel" seems to have emerged in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. A perusal of numerous Irish-related newspaper articles, plus a survey of thousands of additional articles in the course of my other research, failed to uncover use of the term in the antebellum era. An 1861 *Daily True Delta* article about continued violence in the St. Thomas Street area, for example, contained numerous Irish names but made no reference to the area as the Irish Channel. In an 1883 magazine article about the 1878 yellow fever epidemic, George Washington Cable made reference to the "blocks and courts in the filthy Irish quarter of St. Thomas and Tchoupitoulas streets," but despite Cable's proclivity for "local color," failed to use the colorful term.[113] A computer-assisted search for the words "Irish Channel" in nearly one million pages of national periodicals and books published between 1815 and 1876 returned only references to the geographical feature of that name in Ireland.[114] A review of the bibliographies of other New Orleans Irish works also turned up no evidence. In 1893, however, the *Times-Democrat* published the recollections of a seventy-three-year-old gentleman who not only used the term "Irish Channel" but implied that it had been in the popular vernacular for a while. That "Irish Channel" emerged as a neighborhood appellation sometime after the Civil War was the assessment of Author Earl F. Niehaus, author of *The Irish in New Orleans, 1800-1860*, the 1965 publication that remains the most-cited work on this topic.[115] Though its origin is a mystery, the resonating name stuck, however, ever since, residents, observers, writers and historians have all weighed in on describing its location. "Where is the Irish Channel?," pondered the *States-Item* in a 1980 special report on the historic neighborhood. "The location is as hard to pin down as a leprechaun, not only because there is general disagreement on the subject, but also because the Channel seems to often have been on the move."[116] Few researchers dwell on the issue of location, but all make some effort to define it geographically. Many unknowingly quote each other; some describe the neighborhood as perceived rather than as was; and just about all seem to be enamoured with the notion of a mysterious old enclave rooted so deeply in New Orleans that its very location is a secret of the past.

Geographers are intrigued by peoples' varied perceptions of place and space, all the more so when the perceptions are heartfelt, adamantly defended, and difficult to verify. One suspects that more learned of both people and place by listening to these sundry perceptions and taking them seriously, rather than assuming the supremacy of only one and dismissing all others. In published sources since the late 1800s, one encounters a variety of "theories" regarding geographical perceptions of the Irish Channel. The discussion below sorts these various interpretations into the "Adele Street Theory," the "In-and-Around-Adele-Street Theory," the "Tchoupitoulas Street Theory," the "Riverside Swath Theory," the "Bounding-Box Theory," the "Myth Theory," and the "State-of-Mind Theory." To these I add my own geographic analysis using thousands of Irish names and addresses from a century ago. Where was the Irish Channel? You be the judge.

The Adele Street Theory

"I *do* know where the Irish Channel is.... The one and only Irish Channel of New Orleans was Adele Street," declared sixty-eight-year-old lifelong resident Richard A. Braniff in a 1937 *Times-Picayune* recollection. For this old-timer,

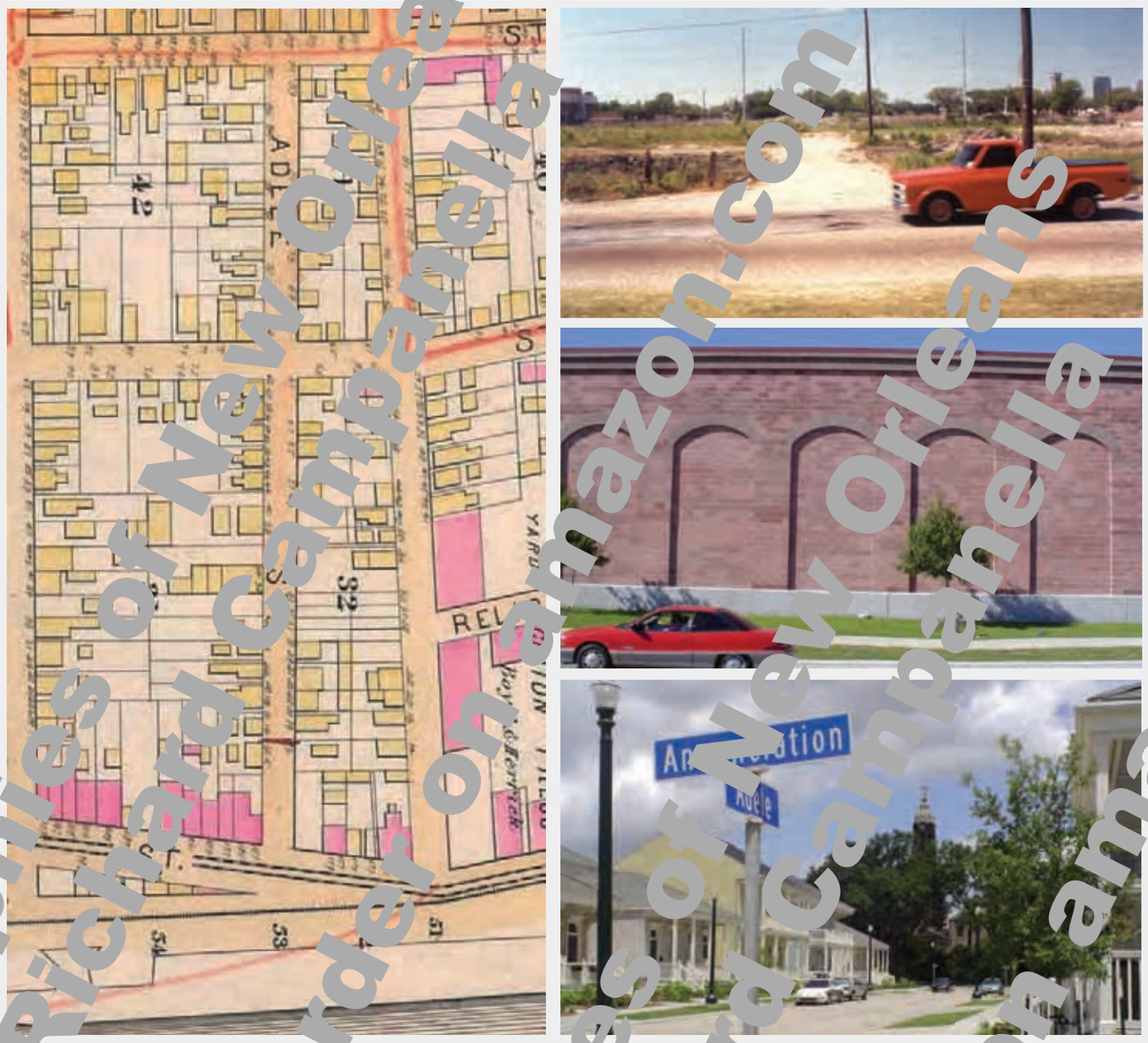
[112] David Ward, *Cities and Immigrants: A Geography of Change in Nineteenth Century America* (New York, London, Toronto, 1971), 67.

[113] "More Stabbing on St. Thomas Street," *Daily True Delta*, July 10, 1861; George W. Cable,"Flood and Plague in New Orleans," *The Century, A Popular Quarterly* 26 (July 1883): 428.

[114] Search conducted through "Making of America," Cornell University, http://library5.library.cornell.edu/moa/ (accessed April 12, 2004).

[115] Charles Patton Dimitry, "Recollections of an Old Citizen," *Times-Democrat*, September 10, 1893; Earl F. Niehaus, *The Irish in New Orleans* (Baton Rouge, 1965), 27.

[116] "Finding Channel easy—as catching leprechauns," *States-Item*, March 10, 1980, A6.



Two-block-long Adele Street, defended adamantly by some neighborhood elders as the Irish Channel, extended perpendicularly from Tchoupitoulas Street near the flatboat wharves of antebellum Lafayette. It was named in the late 1870s for the 1[illegible] Robinson Atlas (left). Adele's historical structures were cleared for the St. Thomas public housing project in the late 1930s, which in turn was demolished in the early 2000s for the mixed-income housing plan named River Garden. The photo pair at upper right shows former Adele in 2002, after the demolition of St. Thomas, and two years later, after a controversial Wal-Mart was built squarely on Adele's old site. In the River Garden development behind Wal-Mart, planners created a new Adele Street (bottom right), a few hundred feet from what many call the original Irish Channel. *Photographs by author, 2002-2005, and courtesy New Orleans Notarial Archives.*

the Irish Channel was [illegible] areal feature one lived "in" but a linear entity one lived "on." Adele Street stretched over two blocks, from Tchoupitoulas to St. Thomas streets and hosted about forty-four buildings (thirty-three houses and the rest commercial, institutional, and industrial structures) which forty families occupied and many more patronized. Quick to dismiss "the flashy writers and glib commentators" who suggested otherwise, Braniff authoritatively described his Irish Channel right down to the ratio of double to single cottages, its characters and characteristics, and exact street measurements to the hundredth decimal place. For this gentleman, the Irish Channel not only existed but had very specific and well-defined boundaries. More significantly, he recollected that the two hundred or so people who lived on Adele Street were "principally Irish and German, with the Irish slightly outnumbering the Germans,"[117] and for a while, there was even a Negro church there (though no blacks lived there). Clearly, in this testimony the label *Irish Channel* did not imply a purely Irish neighborhood segregated from other ethnicities. The only thing Braniff could not peg down was the original of the name, though he did delight in shooting down some popular theories.[118]

[117] Richard A. Braniff, "'Irish Channel' Days Recalled by 'Native Son,'" *Times-Picayune*, January 25, 1937, [illegible]. Italics added in opening sentence.

[118] The dismissed theories included (1) a barroom light reminded a seaman of a beacon marking a channel of coastal Ireland, and (2) the many Irish patrons lining outside a competitor's store prompted an unpopular English grocer to dub the assemblage a "channel."

A kindred spirit, Gus Laurer, dismissed the more expansive Channel theories in a 1941 interview with Lyle Saxon, later published in the 1945 classic *Gumbo Ya-Ya*. "People get all mixed up when they talk about the Irish Channel," said Laurer. "It doesn't cover the streets they think it does. A channel links two bodies of water, don't it? Well, the Irish Channel is right there—Adele Street—it lies 'tween Tchoupitoulas and St. Thomas Streets. That is the real channel, and I remember when there was nothin' but Irishmen on it."[119]

Channel-born Arthur J. O'Keefe, who served as mayor of New Orleans in the late 1920s, felt the same way:

> The real Irish Channel—little Adele St.—you know how it started? It was really the back yards of the houses facing on St. Andrew and Joseph sts. There was so much work on the river, the Irish that were there, started sending for their cousins, brothers, all their relations, and the Irish immigrants kept coming in.... Well, there wasn't enough houses for them, so they built those little cottages—if you notice they're all small along Adele St.—and in no time the houses were full with the Irish.[120]

Interview after interview conducted by the Federal Writers' Project in 1941 iterate the case for Adele Street. "I never lived in the real Irish Channel, that's Adele St.," recalled eighty-one-year-old George Leitz, whose German-born parents raised him in the area. "We called it 'Goats' Alley,'" for all the milk-bearing goats raised there.[121]

"I've lived right in this neighborhood for sixty years," declared Charles Cole. "The Irish Channel is Adele street—[it's] only two blocks wide between St. Thomas and Tchoupitoulas and I remember when only the Irish and the Scotch lived there. There were the McShanes, O'Connors, McAllisters, Egan, Greer—those are all good names, ain't they?" Cole explained that the Channel got its name "long before I was born," when the captain of a docking ship saw rain-flooded Adele Street and said, "By God, it looks like the Irish Channel."[122] Neighbor George Morrell recounted a similar yarn: Irish immigrants, he recalled, used to frequent an Adele Street saloon named "The Ocean Home," owned by Mike Noud. "One Irishman looked at Adele street when it was flooded from the rain and said: 'If this is the "Ocean Home," that must be the Irish Channel.'"[123]

Mrs. Powell, a fifty-four-year-old bar owner, readily acknowledged that her neighborhood at Orange and Tchoupitoulas "was never called the Channel, of course.... Adele St. [was] the real Irish Channel."[124] "Adele St. was really the Irish Channel," agreed John P. Bayer, born in 1856. "Adele St. was for the Irish—a hard-working lot—they had to be. Longshoremen, Screwmen—and Cotton."[125]

In the 1960s, the well-known tax assessor and neighborhood advocate Richard F. Burk added authoritative support to the Adele Street theory. The lifelong Channel resident explained that the only ingress and egress to the river in this area was an opening across from Adele Street, through which many laborers, sailors, and new arrivals funneled into the neighborhood directly through this street.[126] A few years later, Bartholemew La Rocca, an elderly German resident interviewed for a social-work documentary, concurred with the Adele Street definition of the Irish Channel:

> "Well, I'll tell you, the Irish Channel is only a few blocks, it started from Saint Thomas to Tchoupitoulas on Adele Street. Outside of the other places weren't known as the Irish Channel, you might have everybody called it that, but it wasn't known as the Irish Channel.

The In-and-Around-Adele-Street Theory

This theory also recognizes the centrality of Adele Street, but gives it some elbowroom and bounds it with "fuzzy" edges rather than definitive ones. A *Times-Picayune* article from

went on to describe the changing demographics of Adele Street: "There wasn't a nigger in sight, they didn't dare come down here. Now look at 'em. They just move in everywhere. You can't get away from 'em." "Gus Laurer-Irish Channel," April 29, 1941, Lyle Saxon interview manuscript, Federal Writers' Project, Folder 8.1.

[120] Arthur J. O'Keefe (White) 1904 Jackson St.," June 26, 1941, ibid., 2.

[121] "George Leitz (White) 2919 Annunciation St.," July 16, 1941, ibid., 3.

[122] Charles Cole (White) 475 Josephine St.," May 1, 1941, ibid., 2.

[123] George Morrell (White) Jackson Avenue," June 24, 1941, ibid., 1.

[124] "Mrs. Powell (White) 1524 Tchoupitoulas St.," June 1[illegible], 1941, ibid., 2.

[125] "John P. Bayer (White) 1229 St. Andrew St.," August 22, 1941, ibid., 3.

[126] As quoted by Carolyn Kolb, "The Auld Sod on Adele Street," *New Orleans Magazine* 1 (December 1966): 9.

[127] Peter Aubert Casanave, "The Irish Channel, A Neighborhood Documentary" (M.A. thesis, Louisiana State University in New Orleans, 1971), 36.

Public markets played a role in driving Irish residential patterns. Bracketing the main residential distribution of Irish were St. Mary's Market at the downtown end and the Bayou Bridge Market farther uptown. Both are gone now, but their imprint remains in the cityscape. Shown here is St. Mary's Market, dating to 1822 and photographed around the turn of the century (left), and its former site today (right), between North and South Diamond streets off Tchoupitoulas. *Southeastern Architectural Archive, Special Collections, Howard-Tilton Library, Tulane University Library; 2003 photographs by author.*

1938, reporting the impending destruction of the area for what would later be known as the St. Thomas public housing project, employed this view by describing the Irish Channel as not a linear feature but an areal one—"a 'channel' with three forks[:] St. Andrew and Josephine and Adele streets, running two blocks from the Mississippi to St. Thomas Street." The article also made clear that the existence of the Irish Channel did not insinuate a purely Irish population: "Mainly the Irish, but some French and Germans, getting their livelihood from the adjacent docks, built the 'channel.'" The reporter's informant, sixty-five-year-old Edward T. Gras, himself was more French and German than Irish, yet he readily applied the famous appellation to his neighborhood and once lived in what he described as "its heart:" on Adele Street. But Gras also "heard the term Irish Channel' applied to other sections, even to a long series of streets parallel, rather than vertical to, the river."[128]

The writers of a popular history of the Garden District adhered to the up-and-around Adele-Street theory when they described the "Irish Channel section of Lafayette [as] the streets closest to the upper limits of New Orleans and nearest the river, Felicity, St. Mary, Adele, and Nuns."[129] The WPA writers of the 1938 *New Orleans City Guide* pushed the focus a bit uptown, viewing "the riverfront sections immediately above and below Jackson Avenue" as the Irish Channel.[130] The author of a historical journal article centered the Channel around the distant intersection of Constance and Euterpe streets—a full mile from others' interpretations—but then added that many Irish overflowed into the city of Lafayette, thus forming an Irish section that would include the general Adele Street area.[131] (Adele Street, laid out in 1813, pertained to Orleans Parish from 1818 to 1833, and to the Jefferson Parish city of Lafayette from 1833 to 1852. Adele was three blocks above Felicity Street, which formed the parish line from 1812 to 1818 and from 1833 to 1852.[132])

Some credence for this theory comes from historian John Leslie Kolp's statistical analysis of the 1850 census for Lafayette. Kolp found that, while Germans outnumbered Irish two-to-one among Lafayette's 14,190 residents, Irish immigrants and their children made up a greater percentage (31.2) of the city's First Ward than they did of the other four wards. The First Ward was bounded by Felicity, the river, Jackson Avenue, and Chippewa—in other words, in and around Adele Street. But before this statistic is upheld as evidence for the Irish Channel, it must be noted that the First Ward had an even higher percentage of Germans (36.3 percent), not to mention 11.8 percent American, 7.4 percent French, 5.2 percent Creole (Louisiana born), and 6.5 percent from elsewhere.[133]

The Tchoupitoulas Street Theory

In her 1954 thesis, "A History of the Irish Channel 1840-1860," Sylvia J. Pinner acknowledged disagreement about the Channel's location, but described the Adele Street theory as a "legend," instead viewing the principal riverside road perpendicular to Adele—Tchoupitoulas Street—as a more significant feature. "Whatever the boundaries were, there is no dispute that Tchoupitoulas road was the main avenue of the Irish Channel."[134] This theory holds that Tchoupitoulas, the old Spanish *Camino Real* and original "River Road" connecting New Orleans with the upper plantations, formed a series of important neighborhood landmarks with a convenient access route leading into the city while forming an interface between the residential area and the riverside wharves. "Saloons, so-called coffee houses, 'segar stores,' oyster bars, and boarding houses" lined Tchoupitoulas through the Channel, anchored by Thomas Hamond's Louisiana Hotel, a favorite rendezvous of the predominantly Irish Third Ward Democracy Club, and the adjacent St. Mary's Market, described as "the Irish French Market."[135] The Poydras Market would later anchor its lower end. Additionally, Tchoupitoulas Street fronted by long riverside warehouses and warehouses (many on them on the new "batture lots" of New Levee and Front Levee) where many Irish and Germans labored. "When four steamers were made fast to the levee," wrote the Maine traveler John S.C. Abbott upon arriving to New Orleans in 1859, "the wide area extended between was thronged with laborers, nearly all Germans or Irish."[136] Another traveler in 1858 described "the busy, picturesque, swarming levee, with its negroes and its Irishmen..."[137] Among these levee-side operations were the Orleans, Mississippi, and Baxter cotton presses, seven cotton pickeries, wharves, and a major cattle landing at the foot of Seventh Street, where shipments of Texas herds were received for the nearby slaughterhouses.[138] The aptly named Bull's Head tavern was located next to the cattle landing on Tchoupitoulas, catering to flatboatmen and local Irish laborers. (Lafayette was a major port for flatboats descending the river.[139]) According to one first-person account, a tiny

[128] W.M. Darby, "Residents Sorry to Quit Neighbors in Slum Projects," *Times-Picayune*, February 19, 1938, 1.

[129] Martha Gilbert Samuel and Ray Samuel, *The Greek Boys of the Garden District and the Old City of Lafayette* (1961; reprint ed. New Orleans, 1972), 3-4.

[130] Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration, *New Orleans City Guide* (Boston, 1938), 43.

[131] A.A. Conway, "New Orleans as a Port of Immigration, 1820-1860" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of London, 1949), 10.

[132] Sam R. Carter, *A Report on Survey of Metropolitan New Orleans Land Use, Real Property, and Low Income Housing Area* (New Orleans, 1941), "Growth in Area: New Orleans, Louisiana," fold-out map in Part I.

[133] John Leslie Kolp, "Suburbanization in Uptown New Orleans: Lafayette City, 1833-1852" (M.A. thesis, University of New Orleans, 1975), 80.

[134] Sylvia J. Pinner, "A History of the Irish Channel 1840-1860" (Honors thesis, Tulane University, 1954), 6.

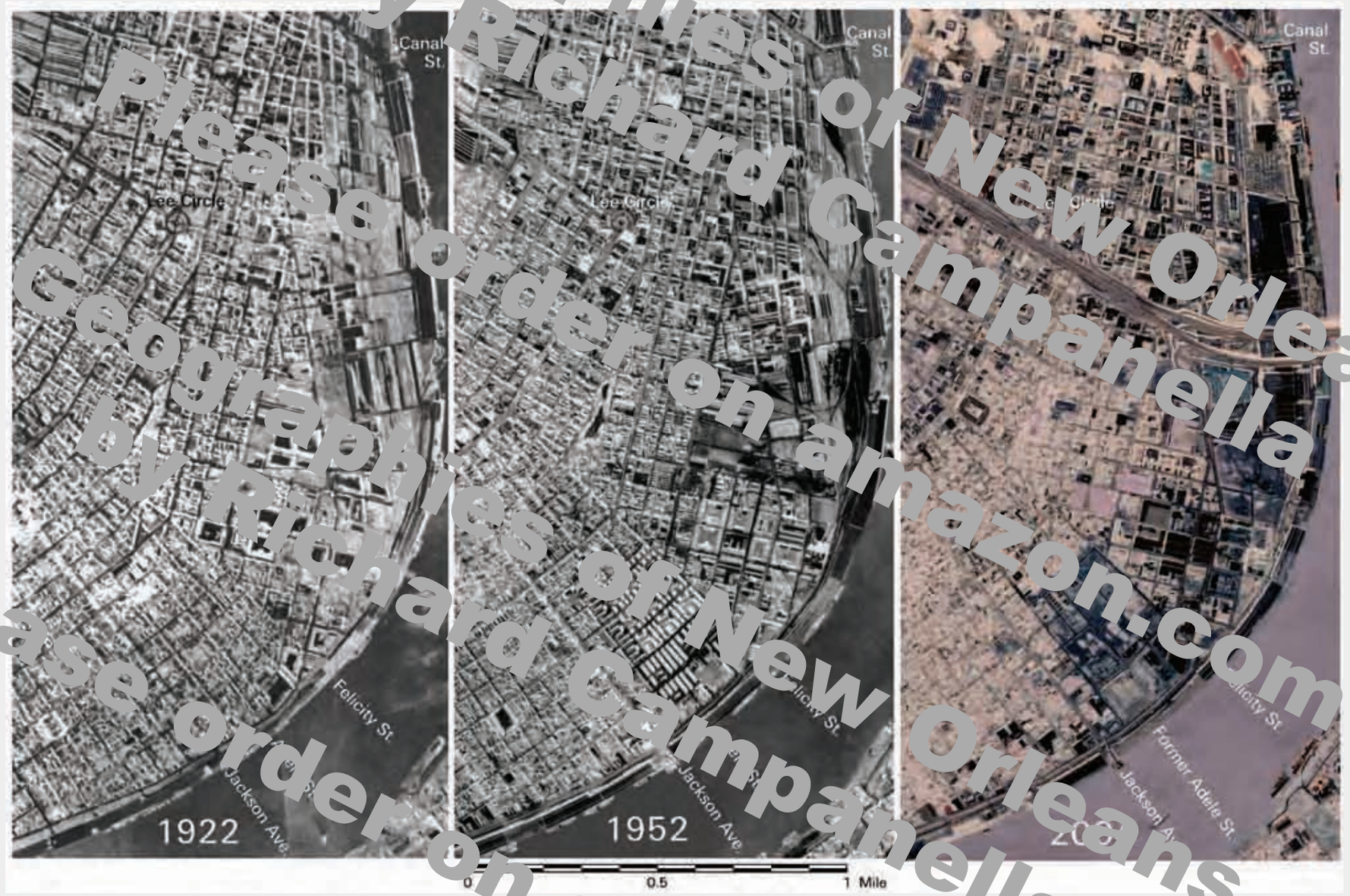
[135] Ibid., 6-7.

[136] John S.C. Abbott, *South and North, or Impressions Received During a Trip to Cuba and the South* (New York, 1860), 73.

[137] Charles Mackay, *Life and Liberty in America, or, Sketches of a Tour in the United States and Canada in 1857-8* (New York, 1859), 178.

[138] James A. Renshaw, "The City of Lafayette," *The Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 2 (January 1919): 7; and Charles Gardner, *Gardner's New Orleans Directory for 1861* (New Orleans, 1861).

[139] According to John Banvard's 1840s descriptions of Mississippi River life, "La Fayette…is where all the boats land that descend the river," but later mentioned that the "upper part of the shore" in adjacent New Orleans also harbored flat boats, as well as "keel boats and water craft of every description." Irish workers predominated through the upper wharves. As quoted by John Francis McDermott, ed.,



Most Irish Channel "theories" locate the elusive district somewhere within this downtown-riverside swath, from Canal Street (top) to Louisiana Avenue. These images capture the vast changes wrought here over eighty-two years. Note in particular the neighborhood around Adele Street, shown in its original state in the 1922 photograph, after the late-1930s construction of the St. Thomas housing project in the 1952 photograph; and after St. Thomas' demolition, in the 2004 satellite image, taken while the Wal-Mart was under construction. *GIS processing by author; images from Port of New Orleans, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and DigitalGlobe.*

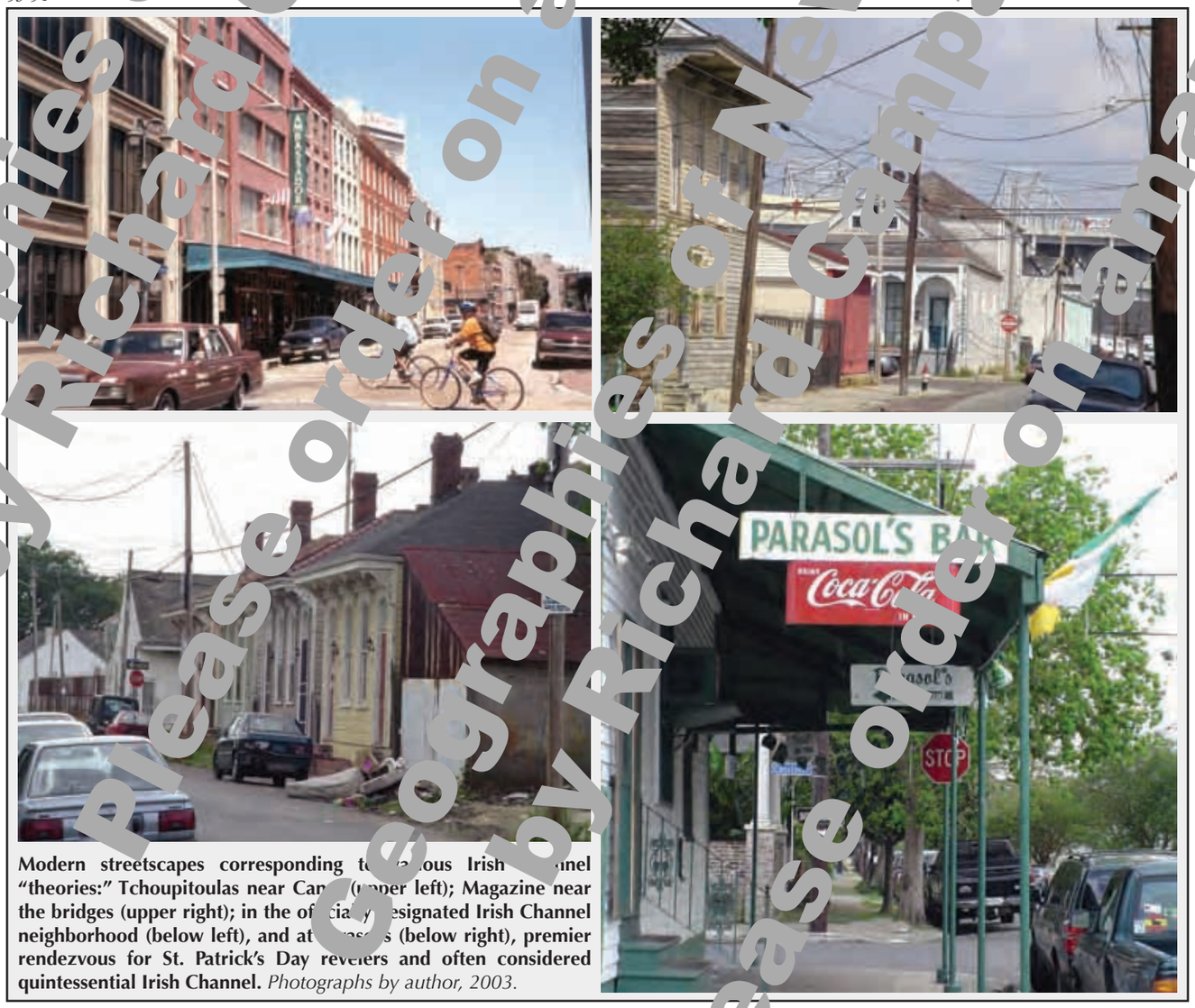
settlement grew around the intersection of Tchoupitoulas and St. Mary (two blocks from Adele and one block outside the Orleans Parish line) because it was at Bull's Head that flatboats were broken up for fuel and building material.[139] By another account, Tchoupitoulas near Adele "became the principal business thoroughfare during the 1870s and was lined with establishments of all kinds: barrooms, oyster saloons, furniture stores, barber shops, lottery shops, sailors' establishments, pharmacies and wholesale houses, and shoe, dress, cigar, candy and confectionery shops."[140]

That Tchoupitoulas dominated social and economic life in the ragged riverside edge of antebellum New Orleans is probable; whether it formed the main corridor of the Irish Channel is another question. How many Irish lived and worked along Tchoupitoulas Street in antebellum times is difficult to verify, due to the lack of many usable street addresses in census schedules of the day, but possible to estimate through other sources. Using the 1859 City Directory, I surveyed a selection of classic Irish surnames, recorded their addresses, and converted them to the modern street-numbering system. Of the 830 samples (which comprised both residential households as well as businesses) counted citywide, twenty-six entries (3.1 percent) were located along Tchoupitoulas Street, from Gravier to Felicity (its upper terminus at the time). Census data tells us that there were about 4,000 Irish-born people in New Orleans in 1860, plus many American-born people of Irish descent. Assuming that the sampling accurately represented the total Irish population, then perhaps seven or eight hundred Irish-born individuals had recorded addresses along the seventeen blocks of Tchoupitoulas Street prior to the Civil War. Factoring in their offspring might increase this figure to over a thousand, and adding those workers who toiled near Tchoupitoulas but did not reside there, or were too far down on the economic ladder to have been recorded by the city directory would significantly increase the total. One sampled name had an address on Adele Street, which, by the same reasoning, would equate to about thirty Irish-born individuals unrecorded by persons. Adele Street

Before Mark Twain: A Sampler of Old, Old Times on the Mississippi (Carbondale and Edwardsville/London and Amsterdam, 1968), 56.

[140] Charles Patton Dimitry, "Recollections of an Old Citizen," *Times-Democrat*, September 10, 1893.

[141] Lyle Saxon, Edward Dreyer, and Robert Tallant, *Gumbo Ya-Ya* (Boston, 1945), 53-54



Modern streetscapes corresponding to various Irish Channel "theories:" Tchoupitoulas near Carondelet (upper left); Magazine near the bridges (upper right); in the officially designated Irish Channel neighborhood (below left), and at Parasol's (below right), premier rendezvous for St. Patrick's Day revelers and often considered quintessential Irish Channel. *Photographs by author, 2003.*

Locations of English-speaking Catholic churches both drove and followed the geography of Irish New Orleans. Seen here, clockwise from upper left, are the churches of Alphonsus (with St. Mary's in the background), Ss. Peter and Paul, St. Patrick, St. John the Baptist, and St. Theresa. *Photographs by author, 2003-2004.*

was only two blocks long, so these data do not necessarily diminish the Adele Street theory.[142]

The Riverside Swath Theory

Some observers, among them historians who have assessed the dispersed nature of Irish settlement patterns in census data, take the "Irish Channel" sobriquet to mean a generalized swath of neighborhoods located along the old city, below and within the former city of Lafayette, and proximate to the river. This theory commits no particular streets or clusters within this area as being the Irish Channel, makes no assumption of a majority-Irish ethnic composition within it, and may or may not cite specific streets bounding it. One example is Robert C. Reinders, who, in *End of an Era: New Orleans, 1850-1860*, described the Channel as "between Camp Street and the river in the First and Fourth Districts"—that is, Canal Street to Toledano Street, another way of saying all riverside neighborhoods between the old city and the plantations. (Reinders also notes that many Irish moved into the Third District below the French Quarter.)[143] By not going out on a limb, this theory is probably the most unassailable, and may very well be the one that survives the most thorough tests of both historical and anecdotal information. It may also have at least one first-person supporter from 1893—significant, because evidence of actual usage of the term *Irish Channel* in the nineteenth century is scant. That year, seventy-three-year-old Capt. William H. James recollected that in the 1830s (before the main waves of famine refugees), poor Irish immigrants settled primarily in three locales. One was along or near the banks of the New Basin Canal at the northern edge of the Faubourg St. Mary; another was

[142] *Gardner's New Orleans Directory for the Year 1859.*

[143] Robert C. Reinders, *End of an Era: New Orleans, 1850-1860* (New Orleans, 1954), 18.

near present-day Gallier Hall in the heart of S[illegible]y, and the third was "*at and above Tchoupitoulas and C[illegible]l streets*. To this quarter was the given the name, prob[illegible] a souvenir of the land of their nativity, of the 'Irish Ch[illegible]el.' Here w[illegible] many engaged in the work of hauling c[illegible]on and [illegible]stern produce."[144] One can take this to m[illegible] the block immediately at the Tchoupitoulas/Canal [illegible]rsection, but m[illegible]re likely it means starting from that int[illegible]rsection and hea[illegible]ng riverward along Tchoupitoulas and the Mississippi, giv[illegible] the nature of the riverfront work. A *States-Item* article m[illegible]ny years later alluded to the looseness of the Channel's river-perpendicular boundaries: "Most people ag[illegible]e that the r[illegible]ver and Magazine Street form two of its boundaries, [but] pinning down the other set of boundarie[illegible] [illegible]res consid[illegible]rable acrimony. The Downtown line ha[illegible] bee[illegible]n set at anywhere[illegible] m Canal Street to Jackson Avenue; the Uptown lin[illegible] has been pinpointed at anywhere from w[illegible]ington Aven[illegible]e to Louisiana Avenue."[145] In other words, a generalized riversi[illegible]e swath.

In applic[illegible]on—that is, i[illegible]n planning and zoning—the convenient riverside-s[illegible]ath theory usually succumbs [illegible] official, we[illegible]-defined b[illegible]unda[illegible]es. Preservationism reach[illegible] the Irish Channel in the e[illegible]1970s, after the Riverfron[illegible] Expressway controversy of the 1960s galvanized local activists and th[illegible]l publica[illegible] of the Friends of the Cabildo's *New Orle[illegible] Architecture: [illegible] Lower Garden District* i[illegible]troduced Ne[illegible] Orleanians t[illegible] the treasures in their own ba[illegible]kyard. The [illegible]ish Channel Committee on Historical Lan[illegible]marks and Neighborhood P[illegible]eservation set its very first goal, in 1971, as the establi[illegible]shment of official boundaries a[illegible]ound the neighborhood. "[illegible]he original Irish Channel ran f[illegible]om Canal St. to Louisiana [illegible]ve. and from St. Charle[illegible] [illegible] to the river," [illegible]ommen[illegible]ed chairman Sam J. Allen, [illegible]iting a riverside swath theo[illegible]y, "however, these boundaries h[illegible]ve changed quite a bit si[illegible] the first Irish settlers came."[146] [illegible] after, preservation [illegible]or[illegible]nd city planners got out [illegible]r maps and grease pencils.

The Bounding-Box Theory

Ambiguity is anathema to those who seek to plan a[illegible] ma[illegible]riage, and for good rea[illegible]on[illegible] is hard to run a city or b[illegible]ness or anything without clear rules and set limits. F[illegible]ban planning, this me[illegible]n[illegible]zzy, subjective urban per[illegible]ions must be demarcated into official neighborhoods and d[illegible]stricts with undisputed "[illegible]o[illegible]nding boxes." What for d[illegible]cades was called "the French quarters," the "French section," or "the old city" becam[illegible] [illegible]o[illegible] French Quarter, bound[illegible] o[illegible]ially by Iberville, R[illegible]part, Esplanade, and the river, once it came under legal [illegible]rotection in 1937. What everyo[illegible]e k[illegible]ew loosely as "downto[illegible]n" became delimited with street-s[illegible]ide signage once the Downto[illegible]n Development District g[illegible]t to wor[illegible] th[illegible]

[144] Dimitry, "Recollections of an Old Citizen" ([illegible]is added).
[145] "People and Places: The Channel from a[illegible]rso[illegible]l Point of View," *States-Item*, March 8, 1980, *Lagniappe* section, "Where Is [illegible]Irish Channel?" text box, p. 3.
[146] "Irish Channel Goals Are Set," unidentified loc[illegible]ewspaper, July 20, 1971, Kenneth Owen File, Louisiana Collection of Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans.

early 2000s. The "bounding-box theory" reached the Irish Channel at least by th[illegible]1930s, when the WPA *New Orleans City Guide*, in a secti[illegible]devoted to motor car tours of the city, identified St. Josep[illegible]Street, the river, Louisiana Avenue, and Constance Street[illegible]he neighborhood's edges.[147] In setting the lower boundary [illegible]t S[illegible] Joseph Street, in what [illegible]e now call the Central Busi[illegible]ss District/Warehouse Distric[illegible] far below most other I[illegible]ish Channel perceptions, the [illegible]A seemed to be prescribing to the "riverside swath theory," [illegible]ecting hard edges only f[illegible]the convenience of tourists. [illegible] would be among the last Channel perceptions to extend[illegible]s f[illegible]r downtown, because [illegible]bout the time the WPA gui[illegible]was published (1938), a la[illegible]e se[illegible]tion of riverside New Or[illegible]s was demo[illegible]sh[illegible]d for a U[illegible]. Housing Authority public [illegible]using proj[illegible]t lat[illegible] known [illegible] Thomas. In place of ov[illegible] a dozen b[illegible]cks [illegible] crowded mid-nineteenth-century cit[illegible]scape[illegible] arose iden[illegible]al brown-[illegible]en brick government apar[illegible]ment buil[illegible]ngs arranged in distinctive geometric patte[illegible]mid barren, [illegible]sty yards. The St. Thomas Housing Project would alte[illegible] pe[illegible]ples' perceptions of where the Irish Cha[illegible]el was located, [illegible]utting the broad riverside expanse in[illegible] and exclu[illegible] even Adele Street. By the time seventy[illegible]-year-old Ch[illegible]nel resident John P. Bayer was intervi[illegible]ed by Lyle S[illegible]xo[illegible] in 1941, the new spatial perception h[illegible]aken root: "[illegible]e St. was really the Irish Channel," he [illegible]de clear, *"bu[illegible] o[illegible]urse all of this is known a[illegible] the Chan[illegible]ow. From Feli[illegible]y[illegible] to Washington and from [illegible] river to Magaz[illegible]e."*[148] Neigh[illegible] Richard Braniff would hear nothi[illegible] of the newfangl[illegible]ounding-box theory:

> A l[illegible] has been said [illegible] written about the Channel t[illegible] a[illegible]e, becaus[illegible] peopl[illegible] don't know where the Channel re[illegible]a[illegible]is. The orig[illegible]al Iri[illegible] Channel is two blocks, star[illegible]n Tchoupitoulas and [illegible]ng to a dead end at St. Thoma[illegible]a[illegible]s called Adele St. *Some people think the Channel runs from Felic[illegible]y to Louis[illegible]Ave. and from Magazine back to the river, but they're wrong.*[149]

Also alte[illegible]ing Channel perceptions was the re-identification of the are[illegible]elow St. Thomas as the "Lower Garden District." The [illegible]owing preservationist movement adopted this designation, coined by architectural historian Samuel Wilson [illegible], in 1962) for the "Nine Muses" area around Coliseum Square, thus extricating it from wh[illegible] many people had once identified as the Irish Channel. I[illegible]dication of *New Orleans Ar[illegible]tecture: The Lower Garde[illegible]istrict* in 1971 further established the new term in th[illegible]con. In the decades that [illegible]llowed, bounding-box th[illegible]ries invariably identified areas *above* the vicinity of Jackson Avenue as the Irish Channel, consistently excluding [illegible]oth the St. Thomas area and the Lower Garden District, regardless of their historical association with the Irish. Some versions of the bounding-box theory:

[147] Federal Writers' Project, [illegible] the Works Progress Administration, 332.
[148] "John P. Bayer ([illegible]1229 St. Andrew St.," August 22, 1941, Lyle Saxon interview manuscript, [illegible]er[illegible] Writers' Project, Folder 81, 3 (emphasis added).
[149] "Richard Braniff ([illegible]ite) 943 Washington Ave." May 5, 1941, ibid., 1 (emphasis added).

• When the director of a proposed documentary film about the neighborhood interviewed an advocate of the "Adele Street theory," he noted, "To people who insist on such a restricted definition, the Channel is dead. The Saint Thomas housing project [having] physically supplanted it."[150] Rather than ending the project, the director simply relocated *his* Irish Channel to the area bounded by Felicity Street, the river, Toledano, and Chestnut. His rationale was that this area roughly coincurred with the old city of Lafayette, where many Irish as well as German immigrants once lived. Here we see the historically "fuzzy" Irish Channel retrofit to clear, fixed boundaries, tipping the hat to history but prioritizing for modern convenience.

• Bureaucratic neighborhood delineation in New Orleans, when generations-old perceptions of place were translated to lines on maps, commenced in 1973 and 1974 with the architectural firm Curtis and Davis' influential *New Orleans Housing and Neighborhood Preservation Study*. The seventy-three units identified in the investigation were modified over the next year to sixty-two official city neighborhoods, based on a fusion of historical perceptions, natural geographical barriers and major transportation arteries, social and economic patterns, and pre-existing census tract boundaries. The study at first defined the Irish Channel as bounded by Josephine, the Mississippi River, Louisiana Avenue, and Magazine Street, but the city later adjusted these to First, Tchoupitoulas, Toledano, and Magazine streets. This demarcation remains today as the city's official interpretation of the Irish Channel.[151] The relatively small patch excludes a significant portion of the former city of Lafayette, including Jackson, Sorrel, and Adele, and other famous Channel streets. Nevertheless, First Street offered a convenient edge for this governmental version of the Irish Channel because it also divides the tenth and eleventh wards; Toledano Street is doubly suitable because it separates the eleventh and twelfth wards as well as the fourth and sixth Municipal Districts. This bounding-box interpretation of the Irish Channel is one of the smallest and farthest upriver.[152]

• In 1974, local residents founded the Neighborhood Improvement Association of the Irish Channel (later the Irish Channel Neighborhood Association), which proved to be a key player in the formalization of Irish Channel perceptions. "The name [of the association] was chosen," explained the group's historian, Ken Owen, "not because it is historically the Irish Channel (it isn't) but because the people who lived between the streets of Jackson and Washington Avenues, Tchoupitoulas and Magazine referred to the area as the Irish Channel." The association expanded this narrow box upriver to Delachaise Street in 1975, in response to concerns that the planned second Mississippi River bridge might be built down Louisiana Avenue. "These boundaries, established by the Association, have since come to officially mark that neighborhood called the Irish Channel."[153] The honest explanation makes no pretense about the historical accuracy of its bounding box.

• In 1976, after two years of persuasion by neighborhood advocate Christine Moe and others, the National Park Service designated the neighborhood as the Irish Channel Area Architectural District for its National Registry of Historic Places. Though mostly an honorary designation with limited federal benefits (rather than a legal prohibition on demolition), the official designation did much to institutionalize the concept of the Irish Channel in citizens' minds. The Irish Channel National Historic District used Jackson Avenue, Tchoupitoulas Street, Delachaise Street, and Magazine Street as its borders, an area described at the time as possibly "the largest, relatively untouched mid-late nineteenth century neighborhood in the United States." Note that the wharves riverside of Tchoupitoulas and the projects below Jackson Avenue were excluded from this and most other bounding-box theories, not because they lacked an Irish past but because they no longer harbored architecture worth saving.

• Finally, in 2002, the Irish Channel became New Orleans' fourteenth local Historic District—a designation with far more preservationist clout than the federal equivalent—that city adopted those National Historic District boundaries in place since 1976. (There was one minor exception: lots fronting Jackson Avenue from Magazine to Chippewa were excluded from the local Irish Channel Historic District—the first time any Channel delineation got down to the *sub*-block level.) Thus, by the close of the twentieth century, the amorphous geography of the nineteenth-century Irish Channel had settled in bureaucratic, black-and-white lines intersecting on maps at ninety-degee angles.

The Myth Theory

"Travel accounts and popular surveys have created the impression that the Irish in New Orleans either isolated themselves or were segregated," Father Earl F. Niehaus wrote in *The Irish in New Orleans 1800-1860*. After the term *Irish Channel* emerged in the years after the Civil War, he contin-

[150] Casanave, "The Irish Channel," 2, 3, and 37.
[151] Curtis and Davis, *New Orleans Housing and Neighborhood Preservation Study* (New Orleans, 1974), 2:150-151; Darlene M. Walk, *Milneburg City Neighborhood Profile: City of New Orleans* (New Orleans, 1978), 1.
[152] Walk, *Milneburg City Neighborhood Profile*, 2; New Orleans City Planning Commission, *New Orleans Land Use Plan* (New Orleans, 1999), 63.
[153] Ken Owen, "Irish Channel Neighborhood Association: A Short History," *Irish Channel Neighborhood Association Newsletter* 9 (March 3, 1983): 2-3.
[154] Ibid., 3; and Louisiana National Register of Historic Places Inventory Nomination, Statement of Significance, 1976, as quoted in Irish Channel Study Committee. *Irish Channel Study Committee Report*, submitted to the City Planning Commission, New Orleans, Louisiana, February 7, 2001.

ued, "this picturesque, though mysterious, phrase caught on and a myth was born."[155] Citing census data to the contrary, Father Niehaus dismissed the notion of Irish residential segregation, and with it the existence of the Irish Channel as a specific place. Indeed, late nineteenth-century population schedules from the decennial census indisputably show scores of Irish-born households integrated with hundreds of families of German, French, Sicilian, Anglo, African, and multitude of other ancestries. Rare anywhere in the city were expansive sections of exclusively Irish people, or for that matter any one ethnic group. Instead, the typical social geography of historic New Orleans embodied a door-to-door heterogeneity of ethnicities (and, to a lesser extent, races) with an occasional predominator of one group in certain areas. As the only book-length scholarly history of New Orleans' Irish, Father Niehaus' work has become deeply influential in the local historical community. His assessment of the Irish Channel as a myth has been adopted by many New Orleans history *cognoscenti*, some of whom savor the opportunity to scoff at the charming delusions of local rubes." But are these historians too quick to dismiss the Irish Channel? Must a neighborhood comprise exclusively one group to be recognized as an ethnic enclave, one worthy of a name like *Irish Channel*? We have seen that some Irish Channel interpretations, including those held by old residents of the neighborhood, made no presumption of exclusive Irish ethnic makeup, instead readily acknowledging that the Channel was multiethnic and integrated. Yet, to them, it was still the Irish Channel—a proper noun in the lore of folk rather than the documents of officials, but a proper noun nonetheless.

The State-of-Mind Theory

Local history buffs, aware of the gap between popular notions of the Irish Channel and scholarly doubts of its exis-

[155] Niehaus, *The Irish in New Orleans*, 27-28.

This rare early nineteenth-century multifamily cottage on Religious Street at Orange, probably the oldest surviving structure above Canal Street, gives an idea of the modest housing stock occupied by Irish immigrants in the uptown riverfront. It was recently renovated into a bistro. *Photograph by author, 2005.*

tence, found benign refuge in a theory of the own: the Irish Channel as a state of mind. This theory celebrates the area's historical architecture and affirms the nostalgia felt by old residents and their descendents, yet does not deny the hard statistical data refuting Irish predomination. It also does not preclude the use of bounding boxes defining its edges, because many state-of-mind proponents are also preservationists and community activists, who see planning commissions and zoning regulations as pillars of civilization. Note how the *Irish Channel 1980 Home Tour* brochure grapples with the varied and conflicting perceptions of this place:

> In all probability, the area of the Faubourg Lafayette was the original "Irish Channel" as opposed to the area around Coliseum Square, which was called the "Irish Lace District." Part of Faubourg Lafayette has been claimed by the Coliseum Square Association and is called the Lower Garden District, and the rest has recently been organized under the St. Thomas Association. Nevertheless, it was the residents of this area who named it. The [Neighborhood Improvement Association of the Irish Channel] defined its boundaries. *The Irish Channel is a state of mind*: proud, protective and full of the spirit of living....[156]

The state-of-mind theory takes neighborhood conceptualization of the Irish Channel to a postmodern extreme, casting aside properties of location, boundaries, historical data, and even existence, in favor of an intrinsic specialness of place. The Irish Channel is where you feel it.

Perceptions of the Irish Channel reveal how city dwellers alter their comprehension of place and delineation of regions through time. Imagine that Richard Braniff—the charming old curmudgeon who declared in 1937, "The one and only Irish Channel of New Orleans was Adele Street"—might react to modern-day boosters with their planning documents, or to preservationists' expedient expansion of the Channel up to Magnolia Street, or to its perception as a state of mind. How might these varied perceptions of the Irish Channel compare to historical data?

A Look at the Historical Data

Mapping mid-nineteenth-century Irish New Orleans poses a number of challenges. Simply recording references to Irish areas in contemporary press will not suffice—too generalized and spotty. Nor can the statistical compendia of the decennial census help, because birthplace information (collected starting 1850) was not aggregated at the ward level until 1910, and not at the census tract level until 1940, by which time old Irish residential patterns were largely dispersed.[157] Lacking these sources, one must go back to the original handwritten population schedules to identify and map Irish-born residents, one by one, among the thousands of households lining the hundreds of blocks of antebellum New Orleans. That all house numbers and many street names have since been changed (that is the least of the problems: there's also

[156] Neighborhood Improvement Association of the Irish Channel, *Irish Channel 1980 Home Tour* (New Orleans, 1980), 11 (emphasis added).

[157] U.S. Department of Commerce, *Geographic Areas Reference Manual* (Washington, DC, 1994), 1

Irish in nineteenth-century New Orleans resided in dispersed patterns, with most settling along the river and back-of-town rather than in the inner city (French Quarter). The economic geography of the antebellum city explains the pattern. The 1842, 1859, and 1901 maps above are based on samplings of common Irish surnames listed in city directories; the 1940 map shows only those born in Ireland, at the census tract level. *Map and analysis by author.*

deciphering the elegant cursive, decoding the [illegible]ne abbreviations, and discerning the faint (sometimes completely faded) lettering against a background of scratched yellowed microfilm. It's a big job. But an insurmountable challenge arises with the fact that census enumerators in 1850, 1860, and 1870 recorded neither the house number nor street name for the households they visited. In the column labeled "Dwelling house—numbered in the order of visitation" in the population schedules, enumerators simply wrote the incremental number of the abode "in order of visitation," rather than the more logical house number and street name. What inspired the enumerators to neglect such a critical piece of information is the secret of some long-departed (and none too soon) project manager. Surely the enumerators kept track of the areas they covered, but their tracking system beyond the perimeters of each enumeration district is lost to history. Other data sources such as voting records, marriage licenses, and obituaries are too spotty and erratic (especially for recent immigrants) for this sort of city-wide mapping project, which requires even and comprehensive coverage. Deprived of the best data source, one must select surrogates. I decided to extract a representative sample of "classic" Irish surnames, find their addresses in the annual city directories, translate the old addressing system to the current one, and map out the patterns. City directories are no match for censuses for this type of research, but for this investigation, their contents, legibility, consistency, and accessibility made them the best choice. The result would not be a map of New Orleans' total Irish population, but a reasonable representation of its distribution based on a systematic sampling. To find the most common and unmistakable Irish names, the alphabetized burial records of the historic St. Patrick's Cemetery #1, a good a place as any to find the vestiges of old Irish New Orleans, were consulted. Familiar names such as *Callaghan, Canavan, Cullen, Farrell, Flanagan, Flynn, Kelly, Murphy*, and those starting with *Fitz-, Mc-* and *O'*, such as *Fitzpatrick, McDonald* and *O'Brien*, predominated among the hundreds of entombed. This list was narrowed down to *Fitzgerald, Fitzpatrick, Fitzsimmons, Flanagan, Kelly,* and all surnames starting with *Mc-, O'-*, on the assumptions that such phenomens are (1) most likely to be residents of Irish ancestry, (2) least likely confused with those of other ethnic groups, and (3) fairly representative of the larger local Irish community's residential patterns. Entries for the sample names were then located in the *Gardner's New Orleans Directory for the Year 1859*. Why 1859? Because that year allowed enough time after the early-1850s peak of Irish immigration to New Orleans for the new residents to "settle in," while avoiding the turmoil of the approaching war years (there were no city directories published in New Orleans for 1862 through 1865). The year 1859 was as good as any from the mid-1850s to 1861. Of the 83 entries for the selected surnames listed in the 1859 directory, about 54 percent were paired not with house numbers but nearest street intersections, such as "Melpomene n. Dryades," meaning on Melpomene Street (now Martin Luther King Boulevard) near its intersection with Dryades Street (now Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard). Once changed street names were accounted for, these entries mapped with a high level of confidence. The remaining 45 percent were listed by the unintuitive old house numbering system, for which the invaluable WPA *Alphabetical and Numerical Index of Changes in Street Names and Numbers, 1832-1938*, as well as the Robinson Atlas of 1883, was consulted to translate to the modern (post-1894) system. Most of these points plotted with reasonable accuracy. One percent of the samples lived outside Orleans Parish at the time (five in Algiers, and another five in the former Jefferson Parish developments of Jefferson City, Kickerville, and Carrollton, now all in uptown New Orleans), and a very small number were ignored because their addresses were clearly erroneous. The final map, in the lower left corner of *Irish New Orleans, 1841-1940*, depicts the distribution of Irish samples for the late 1850s, mapped within a half-block of their actual residential and business addresses.

Having exercised the methodology for 1859, I repeated the exact same process using the *Soards' New Orleans City Directory for 1901*. This year was chosen because much of the Irish Channel (as defined today) developed into a high-density cityscape in the last two decades of the 1800s. A total of 2,208 names and addresses were calculated from 1901, almost triple the count from 1859. Although these data took much longer to prepare, most mapped out easily because their addresses followed the modern system. Nevertheless, 13 percent had to be mapped manually because of street name changes, demolished neighborhoods, and long-disappeared features.

I then went back in time to 1842 and repeated the process, again using the exact same methodology. City directories were not published with annual regularity prior to the 1850s; the 1842 directory is one of the few published soon after the first significant waves of poor Irish immigration. Only 554 samples were extracted for this year, compared to 831 in 1859 and 2,208 in 1901. Of these, 150 entries had intersection addresses (such as "Philippa b. Hevia & Girod Sts."), which were mapped manually after accounting for changed street names. The other 204 were part of a problem, because the pre-1852 New Orleans house numbering system is sporadically documented. These points were mapped as best as possible using a number of sources, including A. Hirt's 1841 *Plan of New Orleans with Perspective and Geometrical Views of the Principal Buildings of the City.* Their margin of error is roughly one and a half blocks from actual locations.

One issue raised by this method, particularly for the earlier dates, is that some people with the surnames *Fitz-, Flanagan, Kelly, Mc-*, and *O'* may in fact be "old Irish" living in far better circumstances than the poor "new Irish" immigrants of the 1830s through 1850s. This is not a major problem, because the latter group outnumbered the former by at least a ten-to-one ratio besides, "old Irish" may well be considered "just as Irish" as later arrivals. Also, judging Irish ethnicity

by surname tends to lump together all ethnic variations—Scotch-Irish, Anglo-Irish, native Irish, not to mention some Americans—regardless of how those individuals may have identified themselves. A third and more serious consideration is that city directories were more apt to list businessmen at their work addresses than laborer families at their residential addresses, especially poor immigrant families living in high densities. Boardinghouses near the riverside wharves teemed with single male Irish immigrants, few of whom made it into the city directory. If so, these data may be somewhat biased toward the working, middle and upper classes of Irish, at the expense of the bottom rung. Then again, most poor "new Irish" families had resided in the city for five to twenty-five years by 1859, arguably enough time for most to settle into vocations and residences that would warrant inclusion in a city directory. A perusal of the 1859 City Directory shows plenty of Irish laborers, clerks, carmen, and draymen listed among the fewer but nevertheless numerous Irish attorneys, judges, commission merchants, and even a university president. I felt no compulsion to eliminate Irish-name professional firms and other white-collar businesses, because if the goal is to map the geography of Irish New Orleans, such entities should be included. Nevertheless, these considerations should be kept in mind.

Observations: Irish New Orleans, 1842-1940

1842 — According to Niehaus, Irish in New Orleans prior to the 1830s generally lived in the present-day French Quarter, and expanded upriver across Canal Street into Faubourg St. Mary over the next two decades.[158] The 1842 map seems to bear out Niehaus' observations: we see an intensive cluster in the French Quarter (but only the *upper* Quarter) as well as the across Canal Street into Faubourg St. Mary. The numerous Irish in the upper area and the scarcity elsewhere in the old city correlate to the predomination of American culture in the upper streets (signs and spoken word in English, northeastern architectural styles, etc.) and the more French-speaking Creole culture encountered below roughly St. Louis Street. In antebellum times, these inner-city neighborhoods tended to be quite mixed in their residential living—the opposite of what "inner city" connotes today—with elegant townhouses intermixed with commercial/residential storehouses, many of these still standing today. The Irish living and working here in 1842 were probably the wealthier, established segments of their community, particularly in the vicinity of Girod, Camp, and Julia streets. It was on Girod Street in 1843 that one observer noted, "you observe every side hear 'illigant [elegant] Irish,' in the mother tongue, and with as graceful a brogue as if you stood on the banks of the Shannon or at the lakes of Killarney...."[159] Above to see some Irish in the neighborhoods upriver from the Faubourg St. Mary and along Tchoupitoulas, the beginnings of a poor Irish enclave tending to the unskilled labor needs of the riverfront and the urban periphery. Major waves of famine Irish had yet to arrive at this time; when they did, this riverfront area, and to a lesser extent the riverfront below the old city, became their main destinations. One thing is clear in this map: the Irish Channel, however defined, did not yet exist in 1842.

1859 — A few years after the peak wave of Irish immigration to the city (almost 75,000 came during 1849-1853[160]), we see a marked expansion of the Irish community in all directions restricted only by the topographic patterns of the natural levee and backswamp. But the expansion was not evenly distributed. The greatest spread followed the Magazine-Tchoupitoulas corridor from the older Faubourg St. Mary/Lafayette Square cluster toward the semi-rural upriver edge, forming a *generalized riverside swath*. This again corroborates Niehaus' observations that, in this era, Irish residential preferences drifted from "the so-called Irish Channel from near Canal Street in the Second Municipality (its original location), to the riverfront streets of the City of Lafayette. There the Irish immigrants remained in the majority throughout the antebellum period." Thomas K. Wharton witnessed this demographic at an 1854 New Year's Eve mass at St. Teresa of Avila Church, the geographical heart of this swath:

> Passing by the church of St. Teresa on our way from St. Mary's market, all Ireland seemed to be streaming from its portals. The astonishing high average an element they form in our resident population—that is, the Irish. A stranger from Dub-

[160] This figure includes some non-Irish immigrants departing from Great Britain, and does not distinguish between those Irish who remained in New Orleans and those who proceeded upriver. Conway, "New Orleans as a Port of Immigration, 1820-1860," Appendix.

[161] Niehaus, *The Irish in New Orleans*, 30.

Julia Street played a prominent role in the early nineteenth-century Irish community. Wealthier, established members, who founded St. Patrick's Church (upper left) on nearby Camp Street, lived on or near Julia, while poorer Irish immigrants lived near the turning basin of the New Basin Canal, once located in the area at the bottom right of this photograph. Irish laborers dug this canal between 1832 and 1838, with great loss of life. *Photograph by author, 2003.*

[158] Niehaus, *The Irish in New Orleans*, 28.

[159] "A Kaleidoscopic View of New Orleans," *Daily Picayune*, September 23, 1843, p. 2, col. 3.

> or Londonderry might fancy himself quite at home again in our streets....[162]

Behind this trend is the demand for dock workers in the uptown and Lafayette flatboat wharves, the greater availability of cheaper land and lower-density housing, the predomination of English as the first language, and the high immigrant population already residing there. The older Faubourg St. Mary Irish community was significantly more prosperous (indeed, some of these data points represent Irish businessmen at their office locations) than the new upriver communities.

We also see lesser clusters along the back-of-town, from the Dryades Street area to the turning basin of the New Basin Canal. English visitor Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon might have witnessed one of these enclaves near the canal in 1858, perhaps around Perilou Street, when she was shown "a street called Battle Row because the Irish are always fighting and murdering one another there... In the Workhouse (which is a prison for small offences as well as a refuge for destitutes) I saw again Irish Irish, most of them in for a drink."[163] Many also resided in the predominantly Creole faubourgs of Treme and Marigny. "The great mass of the immigrants—Irish and German—land in this municipality,"[164] noted the *Daily Orleanian* in 1849, referring to the Third Municipality's Faubourg Marigny levee. Upon landing, many Irish remained in the "Poor Third" because it offered the unskilled riverfront jobs and low-density cheap housing they required, and because this was the area to which they were first exposed. English-speaking Catholic churches arose and most of these clusters thus drew the Irish families within, thus drawing more Irish.

Notable also is the marked dearth of Irish in the central and lower French Quarter in the 1859 map. This inner city offered few unskilled labor opportunities for poor immigrants, both in the housing stock to shelter them, a predominant language that the Irish did not understand, and a Latin culture that was alien to them. It comes as no surprise that few Irish called the French Quarter home in this era. Noteworthy also is the Irish avoidance of what is now called the Garden District—the affluent American-style suburb that developed since the 1830s between Magazine Street and St. Charles in the former city of Lafayette. Irish seemed to avoid both ends of New Orleans society—the high-density Creole old city and the leafy new American suburbs—instead finding home with other immigrants in the urban periphery.

By the Civil War then, Irish were found in great numbers along the river above the inner city, but also below and behind it. An 1849 article alluded to this peripheral-dispersed pattern when it announced the establishment of an Irish immigrant Society in the Third Municipality's Faubourg Marigny (Bywater), where thousands of Irish settled, but recommended that similar subscriptions "ought to be disseminated largely throughout the city, Lafayette, Carrollton, Algiers, etc."[165]—where many more resided.

1901 — Irish New Orleans at the turn of the century mirrored the total population distribution, while the "riverside swath" augmented as its most expansive concentration. Closer inspection shows the swath consisting of a number of clusters: one a few blocks behind Lafayette Square, a stronger one riverside of Lee Circle and up toward Thalia Street, and a third one roughly from Orange Street to Fourth Street between Tchoupitoulas and Magazine. There were many Irish near Adams Street, and many more in blocks between Magazine and the river. Irish also aggregated in the same back-of-town and Faubourg Marigny locales as in 1859, as well as in Algiers, and a trickle headed up Canal Street toward the cemeteries at the Metairie Ridge. The Irish seemed to continue to avoid the mansion-lined streets of the Garden District and nearby Coliseum Square, while only a handful occupied the predominantly Sicilian blocks of the lower Quarter and the highly integrated Faubourg Tremé.

These patterns held to substantiate, to varying degrees, some of the aforementioned theories of the Irish Channel, a term which was definitely in popular use by this time. Recall, however, that these were only mapping Irish names; were we to map Germans, Sicilians, African Americans, and all others, the clustering phenomenon would give way to a complex, heterogeneous mosaic.

1940 — The availability of census-tract-level information on birthplace in the 1940 census eliminated the need to repeat the methodology for this year. While this is a time, the resultant map is not directly comparable to those of earlier years: Irish-born people by 1940 were mostly elderly and mainly representative of the larger Irish-ancestry community. We see that these Irish elders could be found throughout most of New Orleans; in fact, almost everyone, regardless on their Irish Channel definition, agrees that those of Irish ethnicity had moved away from their riverside roost by this time. Areas with the most Irish-born folks in 1940 still reflected nineteenth-century patterns. There were tracts in the Third District, one in the same Canal Street/Cemeteries area observed in 1901, and three tracts in uptown that roughly correspond to the Irish Channel.

Most Irish families deserted the broadly defined Irish Channel area for new lakeside neighborhoods after World War I, and even more left the downtown wards during the middle-class exodus of the late twentieth century. The closures of century-old Irish Catholic churches, such as St. Alphonsus uptown in 1979 and Sts. Peter and Paul Church downtown in 2001, followed the departures. African Americans came to predominate in the Channel area during the mid- to late twentieth century, joined by up to 3,500 Honduran, Cuban, and Ecuadorian immigrants who settled here

[162] Thomas K. Wharton, *Queen of the South—New Orleans, 1853-1862: The Journal of Thomas K. Wharton*, eds. Samuel Wilson, Jr., Patricia Brady, and Lynn D. Adams (New Orleans, 1999), 60.

[163] Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, *An American Diary 1857-8*, ed. Joseph W. Reed, Jr. (London, 1972), 97.

[164] *Daily Orleanian*, November 27, 1849, p. 2, col. 1.

[165] *Daily Orleanian*, May 5, 1849, p. 2, col. 2.

starting in the 1960s.[166] Gentrification pressures now crowding these groups out, as real estate investors buy and restore old houses between Magazine and the river and sell them to affluent professionals. Those Irish Americans with deep roots in New Orleans' history now mostly reside in a dispersed pattern throughout Jefferson Parish, the West Bank, lakeside New Orleans, and beyond. Only on St. Patrick's Day do they return to what they and their fellow citizens universally perceive to be their ancestral turf.

In comparing the various Irish Channel theories to historical data, certain trends emerge:

- Earlier perceptions of the Irish Channel extended to locate the place closer to downtown, while later perceptions (including all those associated with modern city planning and historical preservation) invariably have nudged the district upriver. The exception is Adele Street area, seen by some as the original Channel, which seems to occupy the common ground of almost all interpretations. This upriver drift in people's Irish Channel perceptions concurs with historical data of locations of Irish households and businesses. The sequence of maps in *Irish New Orleans, 1841-1940* shows that the Irish population was once clustered within three blocks of Canal Street in 1842, then gradually migrated upriver by 1859 and 1901. This correlation helps to validate the very disagreement among the various theories. The data corroborate the theories, when taken as a whole.
- It comes as no surprise that older Channel theories tend to embody soft boundaries—again with the exception of Adele Street—while preservationists' theories usually delineate the area with hard, defensive boundaries. In this we see the Irish Channel transforming from a spontaneous, organic phenomenon observed offhand, to a disappearing phenomena that needs to be brought to the attention of society to be saved.
- Comparing the theories to the 1901 data (map, *Where Was the Irish Channel?*), it seems reasonable that Magazine or Constance—certainly not St. Charles Avenue—bounded the Channel on the lakeside, while Tchoupitoulas bracketed it on the riverside. In this matter there is concurrence among the theories. But downriver-upriver boundaries, as expected, were less concurrent: the 1901 data might allow one to see the Channel spanning from St. Joseph to Washington Avenue (with a gap around the non-residential blocks near Euterpe Street), or alternately, from Race to Washington.

Where Was the Irish Channel?

Where, then, was the Irish Channel?

My instinct is to conclude that the Irish Channel indeed existed, at Adele Street. We have first-person testimony to that effect, not from passing observers but from life-long residents. These writers clearly recalled the term applied *as a proper noun to a specific place*, regardless of its exact nature and role in residential patterns. Who are we to refute them? No one questions the legitimacy of the term *French Quarter*, even though that quarter was never primarily French. Nor are cartographers erasing the name *Irish Bayou* from maps of that eastern Orleans Parish waterway, for a lack of Irish residents along its banks. These and many other place names—indeed most—originated as vernacular terms which evolved into proper nouns, regardless of their literal accuracy. Document-based historians should exercise caution before dismissing generations of folk knowledge.

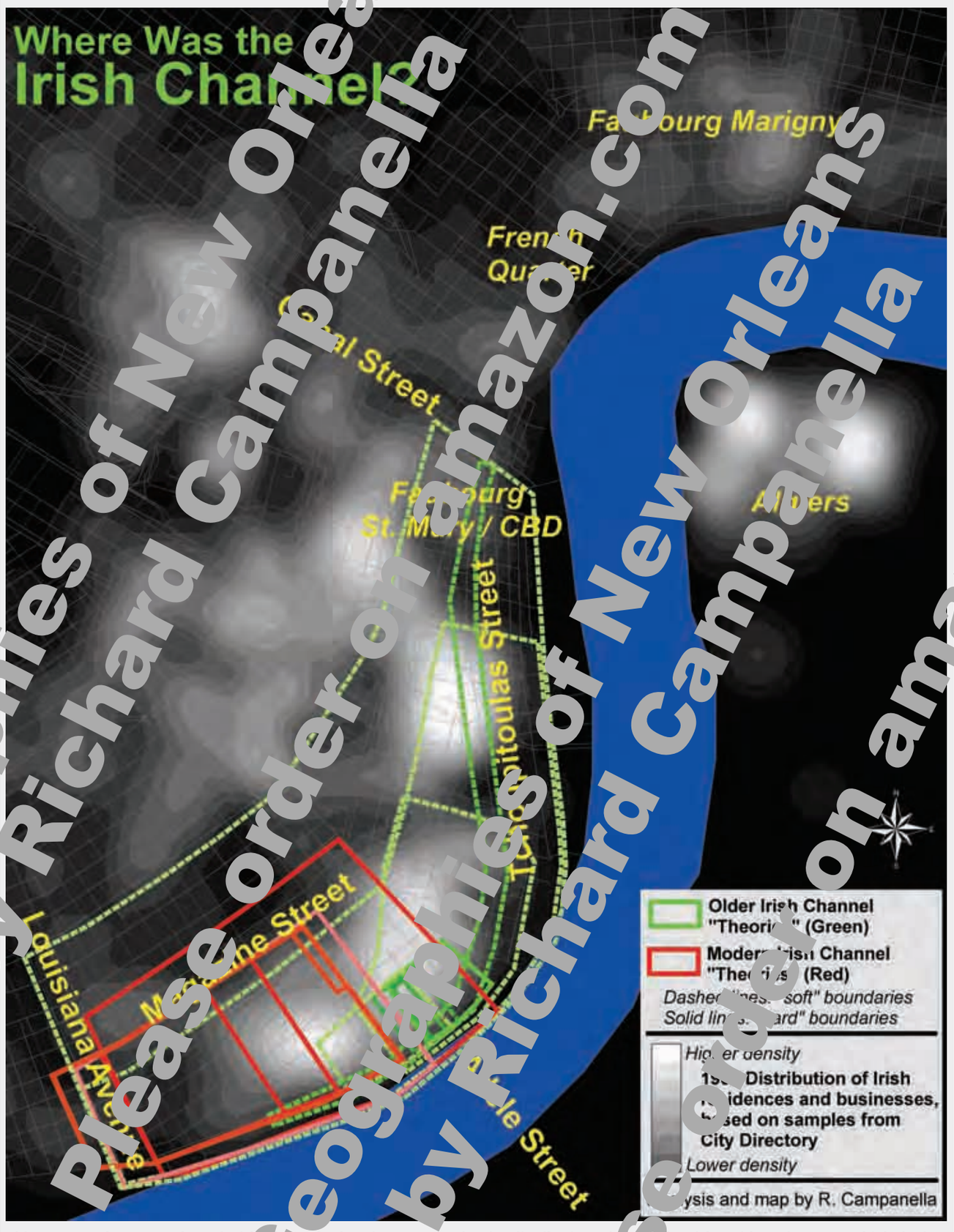
But we also have ample evidence that the residential geography of the Irish in New Orleans did not constitute a discrete, intensely clustered, exclusively Irish neighborhood, thus to perceive the Irish Channel as such is flat-out erroneous. Clusters are not the only geographical distributions of interest; dispersion can be just as significant. The more interesting question becomes, then, *why were the Irish dispersed throughout New Orleans?* Why were they *not* intensely clustered, as the term *Irish Channel* might connote? The answer stems from the nature of American cities at the time of Irish immigration. Irish were part of the first great wave of immigration to the United States from the 1820s to the 1850s, an era "before either urban employment had been centralized or local transportation had been improved"[167] in most American cities. Job opportunities for poor, unskilled Irish immigrants in New Orleans were primarily on the flatboats, wharves, in warehouses and cotton presses, in slaughterhouses and stockyards, building railroads and digging canals—all of which were located *away* from the inner city. "From 1830 to 1860," observed one historian, "hardly a canal was built in New Orleans without Irish labor,"[168] and most were located in the semi-rural urban periphery. With no pressing need to be near downtown and few transportation networks to commute them to their work sites, Irish settled throughout the low-density, village-like neighborhoods near or beyond the city limits, primarily Lafayette above New Orleans, the back-of-town, and the Third Municipality below the city. Germans, who arrived at roughly the same time and under similar conditions, exhibited a remarkably similar geographical distribution (Faubourg Marigny's "Little Saxony" was about as purely German as the Irish Channel was purely Irish—which is to say, not very.[169]) Additionally, few housing opportunities were available in the inner city for the bottom-rung poor, as these

[166] Luis Emilio Henao, *The Hispanics in Louisiana* (New Orleans, 1982), 22. The Hispanic presence in the general Irish Channel area goes back farther: a small community of Mexicans and Nicaraguans settled in the nearby Coliseum Square area in the 1920s and founded, in 1944, the Primera Iglesia Bautista Hispano Americana. The Baptist Church is still in operation, at 2020 Sophie Wright Place. Ana Gershanik, "Baptist Hispanic Church Marks 60 Years," *Times-Picayune*, August 19, 2004, Downtown Picayune section, p. 1.

[167] Ward, *Cities and Immigrants*, 105.

[168] Pinner, "A History of the Irish Channel 1840-1860," 2.

[169] See the end of the chapter, "Little Saxony and the German Enclaves of New Orleans," regarding why the notion of an "Irish Channel" has survived but "Little Saxony" has not.



This map overlays a number of Irish Channel "theories" upon a density distribution of probable Irish residents in 1901, which depicts higher concentrations in brighter shades. Where was the Irish Channel? Answering this question means grappling with complex issues of history, geography, nomenclature, perceptions of place, and mythology. *Map and analysis by author based on 1901 City Directory and numerous "theory" sources.*

valuable parcels were dedicated to lucrative commercial or affluent residential use. The hundreds of spacious townhouses erected in the French Quarter and Faubourg St. Mary in the 1820s through 1850s were built as mansions for wealthy families, not apartment complexes for unskilled laborers.[70] With no place to rent and no work to sustain them, poor immigrants to mid-nineteenth-century New Orleans had little incentive to settle in the inner city.

All this changed radically for the second great wave of immigration, at the turn of the twentieth century, by which time employment had centralized in the urban core and transportation networks connected it with the outskirts. The wealthy used those streetcar lines to relocate to the garden suburbs—Creoles left the French Quarter for Esplanade Avenue; Anglos left the Faubourg St. Mary for uptown—leaving immense old mansions to be "subdivided" into immigrant tenements. Thus, second-wave immigrants such as Italians, eastern Europeans, and Chinese tended to settle in the residential/commercial belt immediately surrounding the inner city, avoiding the rural fringe just as earlier waves of Irish and Germans avoided the city center. In sum, first-wave immigrant groups, including the Irish, tended to disperse outwardly more so than cluster (centrifugal forces), while second-wave groups tended to cluster inwardly more than disperse (centripetal forces). These patterns have been observed in many nineteenth-century American cities; New Orleans' experience was not unique.

Where was the Irish Channel? Readers can draw their own conclusions. After all, why break with tradition?

[70] This is not to say that the French Quarter lacked immigrants in antebellum times; in fact, it had large numbers, though not to the level of adjacent areas. Those foreigners who settled in the old city tended to be non-English-speaking Catholics of Latin culture.

Most Irish families departed the Irish Channel area by the mid-1900s. Some Hispanics moved in as early as the 1920s and especially in the 1960s through 1980s, when up to 3,500 Honduran, Cuban, and Ecuadorian immigrants lived in the vicinity. Many have since moved to Jefferson Parish. This Latin American restaurant forms an interesting backdrop to the St. Patrick's Day parade, an event that reinforces annually the notion of the Irish Channel. *Photograph by author, 2002.*

Irish New Orleans: Timeline of Selected Milestones and Trends

Year/Era	Event/Trend
Colonial Era to Early American Era	Though few in number, Irish often prominent in financial and religious affairs. One example the Macarty family, Irish in country but Creole in ethnicity. First arrived Louisiana in 1726; the Macarty clan would become powerful landowners in what is now uptown New Orleans by the turn the nineteenth century.
1809	First St. Patrick's Day celebrated in New Orleans.
1820s	Famines plague Ireland, trickle of upper-class Irish starts arriving in New Orleans. Irish community at this point is small, economically mixed, and roughly split between Catholic and Presbyterian.
1828	Local Irish population becomes sufficiently influential for politicians to appeal to the "Irish vote" for the first time, during the Jackson-Adams presidential campaign.
1831	New Orleans Canal and Banking Company capitalizes with $4 million to build a six-mile-long, sixty-foot-wide navigation canal with levees and a toll road from Faubourg St. Mary to Lake Pontchartrain. Indigent Irishmen are recruited to dig the New Basin Canal.
1832	Cholera epidemic in autumn claims 6,000 lives in New Orleans, among them many recent Irish immigrants.
1832	Thousands of poor Irish immigrants excavate the New Basin Canal (1832-1838); at least 6,000 perish. Irish work on the Pontchartrain Railroad on Elysian Fields, canals on rural sugar plantations, and numerous other labor-intensive projects.
1830s	Irish and German immigration makes New Orleans a majority-white city, a characteristic it would maintain until about 1976.
1833	St. Patrick's Church is founded on Camp Street in Faubourg St. Mary, by members of the established Irish community. It is only the second Catholic church above Canal Street, after a small circa-1820 chapel on Delord (Howard) near Tchoupitoulas.
1833	City of Lafayette incorporated; its flatboat wharves, unskilled-labor needs, and cheap low-density housing attract thousands of Irish and German immigrants. Lafayette includes what some describe as the "original" Irish Channel, Adele Street. Lafayette blocks closest to present-day St. Charles Avenue (today's Garden District) are decidedly wealthier, more Anglo.
1840s-1850s	Lower-class Irish increasingly compete with free blacks, hired-out slaves, and unskilled immigrant laborers for jobs such as draymen, stevedores, domestic servants, maids, waiters, and cooks. Others gain skills and become merchants, mechanics, policemen, and firemen. Wide chasm separates "old Irish" and large population of lower-class "new Irish" immigrants.
1841	New 185-foot-high St. Patrick's Catholic Church erected on Camp Street site of smaller, circa-1833 church; new structure designed by famed Irish-born New Orleans architect James Gallier, Sr. The prominent Gothic tower makes St. Patrick's a premier landmark of Irish New Orleans.
1845-1847	Potato crop in Ireland fails twice; famine ensues, particularly after 1847 blight, and immigration to America surges.
1847-1854	Peak years of Irish immigration to New Orleans. According to one source, 93,035 Irish arrive to city during 1847-1854, though not all remain.
1848	St. Teresa of Avila Catholic Church founded at 1145 Coliseum Street, serving Irish and others.
1849	Sts. Peter and Paul Catholic Church built at 725 Marigny Street for the large Irish community in the Third Municipality. Recently established German and French Catholic churches (Holy Trinity and Annunciation, respectively) operate nearby, reflecting mixed immigrant and Creole population of this area.
1850	The first census to record birthplace counts 20,200 Irish-born residents living among New Orleans' 116,375 inhabitants, 17 percent more than the second-largest immigrant group (Germans) and nearly triple the number of foreign-French. In neighboring Lafourche, Irish-born and their children number approximately 2,750, about half the size of the German population.
1851	27,234 Irish immigrants pass through the port of New Orleans, highest annual figure ever. Many are destined for the interior.
1851	St. John the Baptist Church established at 1139 Dryades, primarily to serve large Irish community there and working near the busy turning basin of the New Basin Canal.
1852	Fifteen new Catholic parishes are established, up from only two in the 1830s. Many had Irish pastors and large Irish congregations.
1853	Summer-time yellow fever epidemic kills 12,000 New Orleans, of which one-third are Irish. More than one in five Irish-born residents perishes.
Mid-1850s	Know-Nothing activists clash with Irish immigrants in violent riots.
Late 1850s	Irish immigration to New Orleans abates, because of end of potato blight and improving conditions of people to land in Ireland (due to declining population), rise of Know-Nothing movement in America, and new railroads connecting Northeastern cities with interior.
1858	St. Alphonsus completed at 2030 Constance Street, for English-speaking Catholic community of the area, primarily recent Irish immigrants. Nearby St. Mary's Assumption and Notre Dame de Bon Secours cater to local German and French populations, respectively, reflecting historical diversity of this so-called Irish Channel neighborhood.
1860	24,398 Irish-born live in New Orleans (population 168,675), compared to 19,752 Germans.
1860	Sts. Peter and Paul Church, main Irish community landmark of the lower faubourgs, moves two blocks to its new structure at 2317 Burgundy Street.
Post-Civil War	The term "Irish Channel" emerges in the popular vernacular.

1870	With famine-related immigration peaking now past, Irish-born population begins slow, steady decline: 14,643 Irish-born live in city of 191,416; for first time, there are slightly more German-born. Size of locally born Irish ethnic group grows.
1872	Newly completed St. John the Baptist Church noted for its onion-dome spire, replaces wooden edifice of 1139 Dryades.
Late 1800s	Building boom in Irish Channel: hundreds of cottages and shotguns are built in the neighborhood, converting village-like blocks into high-density cityscape.
1880	13,970 Irish-born live in New Orleans (population, 216,090), compared to 13,944 German-born and 1,995 Italian-born.
1890	7,923 Irish-born live among 242,104 New Orleanians.
1892	John Fitzpatrick becomes first Irish-American mayor of New Orleans.
1893	Term "Irish Channel" appears in *Times-Democrat* story; implies term has been in use locally for a while.
Mid-1890s	Era of Irish immigration to the United States draws to a close.
1900	5,398 Irish-born live in New Orleans, compared to same number of Italian-born and 8,733 German-born.
Post-World War I	Gradual exodus of Irish from Irish Channel commences; black population increases.
1938-1940	U.S. Housing Authority clears section of Irish Channel, including Adele Street, for St. Thomas public housing project.
Late-1940s to 1970s	Middle-class exodus leaves Irish Channel and other old Irish areas in social, economic, and physical decline.
1947	St. Patrick's Day parade traditions start in the Irish Channel.
Mid-1960s-1970s	Spanish-speaking immigrants, primarily from Honduras as well as Cuba and Ecuador, move into Irish Channel area, at one point numbering 3,500 (10 percent of neighborhood population). Most have since moved to Jefferson Parish.
1971	Friends of the Cabildo's *New Orleans Architecture: The Lower Garden District* is published; includes parts of broadly defined Irish Channel; helps launch model preservation and restoration movement.
1974	Neighborhood Improvement Association of Irish Channel (later Irish Channel Neighborhood Association) formed; blocks closer to Magazine Street see renovation and gentrification in the decades that follow.
1976	Irish Channel placed on National Register of Historic Places, at the time one of the largest urban districts in the nation.
1979	St. Alphonsus Catholic Church, premier Irish church uptown since 1858, closes for lack of parishioners and later becomes a cultural center.
2001	Sts. Peter and Paul Catholic Church, premier Irish church in Marigny District since antebellum times, closes for lack of parishioners. Later reopened when nearby St. Vincent de Paul burns; new parishioners are mostly Spanish-speaking Latin Americans.
2002	Irish Channel becomes local historic district, ensuring greater protection from demolition.
2001-2004	St. Thomas housing project, which replaced Adele Street area in 1938, is demolished for project HOPE VI mixed-income housing complex. New "River Garden" apartments and homes, some built in traditional New Orleans styles and some on site, while a controversial new Wal-Mart is built precisely on top of old Adele Street.

Sources: Lehaus, Baudier, Finn, De Bow, Boré, and Reynolds; Pitot, Kolp, Jackson, Friends of the Cabildo, and others cited throughout the text.

Little Saxony
and the German Enclaves of New Orleans

The patterns of German immigration into nineteenth-century American cities resemble those of the Irish who arrived in the same era, under comparable conditions, and in equivalent numbers. So it was in New Orleans, where, despite some important socioeconomic differences, Irish and Germans (or, as they were called in the nineteenth-century press, "Dutch," a corruption of *Deutsch*) rubbed shoulders on the levees and wharves of the bustling Southern port, and in their efforts to rise above the bottom rung. It is interesting, then, to compare the residential geographies of these two antebellum immigrant groups, to each other and to those of other groups who arrived under very different circumstances after the Civil War. The story of the Germans in this region begins beyond the limits of New Orleans, at the dawn of the colonial era.

Early German Immigration to the New Orleans Area

In 1721, nearly two decades after Iberville and Bienville founded French colonial Louisiana, financier John Law and his Company of the West received a twenty-five year monopoly charter for the commercial development of the territory. Law's proposition that the ragged colonists scattered throughout Louisiana since 1699 lacked critically needed agricultural skills led him to recruit German farmers from the Rhine region for immigration to the colony. Decades of war, famine and persecution made the prospect of a new life in Louisiana agreeable to weary Germans and Swiss of the Palatinate, Alsace, Lorraine, Württemberg, Baden, and neighboring regions. No documents survive recording the number of Germanic peoples who immigrated to Louisiana in this era; historians have cited numbers ranging from 2,500 to 10,000, most of whom perished before establishing their lives in the New World. John Hanno Deiler, the Bavarian-born German professor and community historian estimated that of the approximately 6,000 Germans who left for Louisiana in the early 1720s, only 2,000 survived to arrive in the colonial port along the Gulf Coast, where many perished. After initial failure in the Arkansas River region, a few hundred Germans eventually settled along the Mississippi above New Orleans, in a place that would become known as *La Côte des Allemands*.[171] These German farmers had come not to make quick riches and return home or because they had been shipped out as criminals or moral lepers, wrote historian Edwin Adams Davis. Rather, they came of their own volition to build homes and to make a new life for themselves and their families," and it was this group that "probably saved the Louisiana colony."[172] The German Coast (originally comprising the villages of Hoffen, Marienthal, Augsburg, and Carlstein, with varying orthographies) grew to span both banks of the Mississippi, twenty-five to forty river miles above New Orleans, roughly from modern-day St. Rose to Convent and from Bayou Des Allemands to the southern shores of lakes Maurepas and Pontchartrain. The modern-day town of Des Allemands and a number of other toponyms recall the old German presence, as do thousands of descendents of the original settlers who assimilated into French Creole and later Anglo-American culture. Many intermarried with French and Anglo, their German language seems to have given out entirely to French and English by the early to mid-nineteenth century, and the Germans of *La Côte des Allemands* became the German Creoles of St. Charles and St. John the Baptist parishes. Many gallicized or anglicized their names over the years: *Weidel* became *Waydel*, *Scheckschneider* became *Schexnayder*; *Zweig* became *Labranche*, and Miltenberger became the *Mil de Bergue*. For the remainder of the eighteenth century and into the early nineteenth century, other Germans from Europe and the Eastern Seaboard migrated in small numbers to join the successful agricultural colony at *Côte des Allemands*. Some would eventually move closer to New Orleans to engage in market gardening and commerce, but it was not until a century after the founding of New Orleans that large numbers of Germans arrived and began forming a major cultural presence in the Crescent City proper.

The Great Wave

The Napoleonic Wars and the severe famine that followed pushed the first major wave of German immigrants to the United States in the 1810s, in search of economic opportunity and freedom from political and religious persecution. Too poor to pay their own passage, many submitted to "redemption," a form of indentured servitude in which the immigrant would commit, upon arrival, his services for three to eight years to the sponsor, often the ship captain. The captain might sell this servitude to merchants at the port of disembarkation, who in turn would contract out the redemptionist as a laborer, paid only in food, clothing, and quarters. In March 1818 two "Dutch" ships delivered 507 German redemptionists—survivors of a group originally numbering 1,100—to New Orleans, initiating the new era of German immigration in the city.[174] Described by one writer in 1828 as "white slaves," the German redemptionists entered New Orleans society very close to its bottom. Once freedom was gained, many settled in the city's rural fringe and started

[171] J. Hanno Deiler, *The Settlement of the German Coast of Louisiana and The Creoles of German Descent* (Philadelphia, 1909) 10-49, and René Le Conte, "The Germans in Louisiana in the Eighteenth Century," trans. and ed. Glenn R.Conrad, *Louisiana History* 8 (Winter 1967): 72-73.

[172] Edwin Adams Davis, *Louisiana: A Narrative History* (Baton Rouge, 1961), 58.

[173] Deiler, *The Settlement of the German Coast of Louisiana and The Creoles of German Descent*, 78, 118-24.

[174] John Fredrick [illegible], *The German People of New Orleans, 1850-1900* (Leiden, 1958), 2-4

[175] Charles Sealsfield, *The Americans as They Are; Described in A Tour Through the Valley of the Mississippi* (London, 1828), 175.

raising vegetables to make a living. "Several years ago a pair of ships arrived with German emigrants, who were sold to pay for the cost of their passage," recounted the Duke Bernhard of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach during his 1826 visit to New Orleans. "Amongst these were several gardeners. These emigrants left their masters shortly thereafter; some established themselves independently, the others succumbed to the unhealthy climate."[176] Germans numbering in the low hundreds annually trickled into the city between 1815 and the mid-1850s, when perhaps as many as 7,000 Germans lived in the city.

Counting those Germans setting foot in New Orleans is a tricky matter, for a number of reasons. First, families were likely to list their birthplace as any one of a number of Germanic cities, states, and regions in this pre-unification era, principally in present-day southern Germany and the Rhineland. Second, for every German destined for New Orleans, three more intended only to transfer vessels here and continue up the Mississippi River, the primary sources for these numbers—annual reports of the German Society of New Orleans (starting in 1847), immigration reports from the U.S. Customs House, and passenger manifests from the ships themselves—rarely agree on exact numbers and sometimes contradict markedly. All generally show that German immigration *to* or *through* New Orleans was not a series of discrete waves, but rather one massive (though annually fluctuating) rise, peak, and decline between the late 1810s and the end of the century.[177] The recorded numbers commence at very low rates around 1820, then climb into the hundreds in the early 1830s, then to 2,000-4,000 range per year into the mid-1840s. The late 1840s saw rates climb to the 7,000-10,000 per year range, which jumped into the tens of thousands in the early 1850s, peaking at 35,900 in 1853, according to German Society data. "Throughout all Germany there exists an anxious desire to emigrate to America," reported the *Daily Orleanian* during these peak years. "Whole towns are on the move, and companies are everywhere organizing to emigrate."[178] After 1853-1854, numbers dropped abruptly to the 10,000 per year range, mostly because new West-bound railroad lines in the Northeast negated the need to go through New Orleans, but also because the yellow fever epidemics of these years tainted New Orleans' name. (The year 1853 coincided with New Orleans' worst yellow fever epidemic, which took the lives of 8,000 residents. By one estimate, Germans comprised 5,500 of the victims.[179]) German arrivals evaporated entirely during the Civil War years, and remained in the very low thousands (with a minor peak above 5,000 in 1871-1872, reflecting the Franco-Prussian War) until 1885, when they dropped into the hundreds and finally ended.[180] Those few Germans still trickling into the Gulf of Mexico in the late nineteenth century often landed at the improved deep-water harbor of Galveston instead of New Orleans.

Most German immigrants landing in New Orleans during the high antebellum era soon departed for St. Louis, Cincinnati, and elsewhere in what was, at that time, the West. How many became New Orleanians? Census data from 1850, when New Orleans had the nation's sixth-largest urban German population, record 11,223 German-born New Orleanians, plus 205 Prussians and 129 Austrians of probable German ethnicity. Together, the German immigrants in 1850 amounted to 8.6 percent of all those living in New Orleans plus Algiers and Lafayette, 11.1 percent of the white population, and 23.7 percent of the foreign-born population. They were exceeded only by the 20,200 Irish-born.[181] Other summations of the same census data scaled for Orleans Parish put the number of German-born at 11,425 out of 119,460 total (9.6 percent), or out of 119,985 total (9.8 percent). Many others lived just beyond city limits at the time.[182] These census figures err on the conservative side, countered by more liberal estimates from within the German community. If John Hanno Deiler was right in estimating that 20 to 25 percent of the 30,627 German immigrants landing in New Orleans from 1847 to 1860 decided to remain, and assuming a steady rate of 1,000 per year, then the German-born community probably numbered in the mid-30,000 range on the eve of the Civil War. That figure generally concurs with perceptions within the community, which estimated them at 20,000-25,000 in 1859, around 30,000 in 1867, and up to 36,000 and 38,000 in 1870.[184] The official 1860 count of German-born came in at the lower end of that range, 19,553 out of 168,675 total in Orleans Parish, or 11.6 percent, still the highest in the city's history[185] and the largest German colony in the South. After the 1860 census peak, German-born New Orleanians declined by 2,000-3,000 individuals per decade over the next eighty years, as the original immigrants died off at rates faster than new immigrants could re-

[176] Duke of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach Bernhard, *Travels by His Highness Duke Bernhard of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach Through North America in the Years 1825 and 1826*, trans. William Jeronimus, ed. C.J. Jeronimus (Lanham, New York, Oxford, 2001) 367.

[177] See graph, *Immigration to New Orleans of Selected Immigrant Groups, 1803-2003*, in the chapter, "An Ethnic Geography of New Orleans."

[178] *Daily Orleanian*, March 2, 1849, p. 2, col. 3.

[179] Louis Voss, *History of the German Society of New Orleans* (New Orleans, 1927), 80.

[180] Interpolated from Raimund Berchtold, "The Decline of German Ethnicity in New Orleans, 1880-1930" (M.A. thesis, University of New Orleans, 1984) graph of German-ancestry data on page 4; J.L. Laquaite, "The German Element in New Orleans, 1850-1880" (M.A. thesis, Tulane University, 1949) graph on page 12; and J. Hanno Deiler, "Germany's Contribution to the Present Population of New Orleans, with a Census of the German Schools," *Louisiana Journal of Education* (May 1886), 3.

[181] J.D.B. De Bow, *Statistical View of the United States—Compendium of the Seventh Census* (Washington, DC, 1847), 395. New York had the nation's largest German-born population (55,476) in 1850, followed by Cincinnati, Philadelphia, St. Louis, and Baltimore. In relative numbers, Milwaukee was by far the most German major city, at 36.3 percent, followed by Cincinnati and St. Louis, both around 29 percent. Germans tended to avoid the old New England cities in favor of the Mid-Atlantic and West, near good agricultural land.

[182] Census figures cited by Voss, *History of the German Society of New Orleans*, 74, and Berchtold, "Decline of German Ethnicity in New Orleans, 1880-1930," 6.

[183] Deiler, "Germany's Contribution to the Present Population of New Orleans, with a Census of the German Schools," 3-4.

[184] These figures are culled from a variety of Deutsche Zeitung and Taegliche Deutsche Zeitung articles from 1859-1870, translated into English and catalogued in the article file in the Louisiana Collection of the main branch of the New Orleans Public Library.

[185] Berchtold, "Decline of German Ethnicity in New Orleans, 1880-1930," 6. Other sources cite the city's population in 1860 as 174,491.

place them. In 1890, there were 11,338 German-born New Orleanians, but 42,321 American-born children of German immigrants, together comprising 22.1 percent of the city's population. By 1930, German-born and their offspring had declined to 2,159 and 15,953, respectively, totaling only 4 percent of the city's population.[186] The last sizable cohort of German-born New Orleanians—those who came over as infants around the Franco-Prussian War in 1870—had all but died off by the mid-twentieth century.

Characteristics of the German Immigrants

Before exploring German residential patterns, let us first take a closer look at the German people who chose to risk their lives in a perilous journey into the Mississippi Valley via New Orleans. Many German immigrants from the post-Napoleonic Wars era (1810s-1840s) were poor rural farmers, nearly as dispossessed and destitute as the Irish famine refugees who would come later. Those arriving during the peak immigration years of the late 1840s and 1850s were quite different, often relatively well-educated, urban, skilled and of moderate means—at least able to pay their own passage. Political persecution following the German Revolution of 1848 had sent this elite class ("the 48'ers") to seek refuge in America. While historian Robert T. Clark, Jr. these so-called "German liberals" were "fervid democratic idealists who were seldom contented with their lot under the rule of Metternich...that they were willing to lay down lucrative positions and professions to try their fortunes in an utterly strange land."[187] They were literate, cultured, religious, humanitarian, and politically outspoken against the tyranny and autocracy that had driven them out of their homeland. Clark suggests that most of the German liberals originally planned to proceed up the Mississippi and settle in the West, but many remained in or returned to New Orleans because their heritage prepared them more for city life than the toils of frontier agriculture. Historian Robert C. Reinders, on the other hand, contends that "the 48'ers simply did not remain in New Orleans...few Germans with money or zeal stayed in New Orleans and therefore the city's German population was not composed of the elite of the Teutonic immigration."[188] Whatever their level of preparedness, newly arrived German immigrants lacked the language skills, capital, and cultural familiarity to settle quickly into New Orleans society, particularly in the face of an unwelcoming Nativist climate. In response, Germans founded the *Deutsche Gesellschaft* (German Society) in 1847, at first to aid immigrants in settling into the city or to make travel arrangements to move on, and later to promote German cultural enrichment. The German Society, source of the immigration data cited earlier, was joined by dozens of similar German charities over the years, including insurance organizations, benevolent societies, and advocates for the many orphans created by yellow fever.

Germans in New Orleans were also a religious people, forming nine congregations of the Catholic faith, thirty-three Protestant churches in at least seven denominations, and four Jewish congregations, between 1825 and 1900.[189] Education ranking high among the priorities of this community, private religious schools often adjoined churches. To satisfy the demand for information and political expression, Germans in 1848 launched the *Deutsche Zeitung*, which served the German-speaking community uninterrupted until 1907. It competed with a rich array of other German-language periodicals, with names like *Der Deutsche Courier*, *New Orleanser Tag Blatt,* and *Die Lafayette Zeitung*. Announcements lining the pages of these newspapers, printed in elegant calligraphic type, reveal another extraordinary trait of the New Orleans German community: its penchant for cultural affairs, particularly theater, singing, and festivals. Countless notices appear for organizations such as the German Vaudeville Company, Germania Quartette and Philharmonic Society, German Theater Shakespeare Club, the Liedertafel singing group, friendship clubs, music societies, harmony clubs, and theater troupes. They publicized events such as the *Volksfest* at the Fairgrounds, charitable balls, gymnastic events, picnics, festivals to honor great Germans or their birthdays, and dramatic fare (sometimes politically charged) presented at the German Theater and other venues.[190] So enthusiastic was the love of song among local Germans that the North American Sängerbund, the German singing society, selected New Orleans as the host for its 1900 annual convention. Housed in a specially built temporary *Sängerhalle* near Lee Circle, the 1,700 singers and 8,000 spectators witnessed one of the largest performance events in the city's history at the time. Ellen C. Merrill, author of an extensive literature review on Germans in the lower Mississippi region, identified for the nineteenth century alone forty-three German fraternal organizations, twenty-six religious organizations, twenty-four German benevolent societies, twenty-four military organizations, twenty-three singing and musical groups, twenty-one trade and professional associations, twelve volunteer fire companies, nine drama societies, nine heritage societies, eight sporting clubs, seven political societies, six cultural societies, and two handicraft clubs in Louisiana, the vast majority in the New Orleans area.[191]

Such high civic-mindedness, however, came from the relatively few at the more stable end of the German community's

[186] Ibid., 6.

[187] Robert T. Clark, Jr., "The German Liberals in New Orleans (1840-1860)," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 20 (January-October 1937): 138.

[188] Robert C. Reinders, *End of an Era: New Orleans, 1850-1860* (New Orleans, 1964), 18.

[189] Numbers based on compilation by Raymond Neil Calvert, "The German Catholic Churches of New Orleans, 1835-1898" (M.A. thesis, Notre Dame Seminary, New Orleans, 1986), 116-20; and J. Hanno Deiler, *A History of the German Churches in Louisiana (1823-1892)*, trans. and ed. Marie Stella Condon (Lafayette, 1983).

[190] These headlines were culled mostly from the *Deutsche Zeitung* from the 1850s through the 1870s, translated into English and catalogued in the article file in the Louisiana Collection of the main branch of the New Orleans Public Library.

[191] Ellen C. Merrill, *Louisiana German-American Resources*, 2 vols. (Gretna, LA), 1:140-56, 16

economic spectrum. Most Germans in the early years "were in desperate condition and eager to find any kind of work," laboring shoulder-to-shoulder with their Irish neighbors "on the river front loading and unloading ships, constructing and repairing levees, and after Civil War days, seasonal employment in the sugar cane fields…."[192] The Louisiana German Draymen's Association, organized in 1854 as a benevolent society for dock workers, was one of the largest such organizations in the area. Working-class German men also labored for German businessmen in local industries such as the printing of German-language newspapers (particularly during their 1850s heyday) and the making of beer (from brewed "city beer" in the early days, followed by industrialized breweries in the 1880s). German girls, like the Irish, were in high demand as domestics.[193] For every few of the laborers, there was one German who secured sufficient means to go into business for himself, often in wholesaling, restaurants, coffeehouses, saloons, beer halls, boarding houses, and hotels. A roughly equal number used their trade skills to make a living as tailors, artists, bakers, masons, watchmakers, shoemakers, carpenters, clerks, and domestics. And for every few of these businessmen and tradesmen, there was one German who applied his training from the motherland toward a professional career in New Orleans as a doctor, engineer, lawyer, apothecary, professor, financier, or merchant.[194]

German Spatial Distributions in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans

The New Orleans encountered by German immigrants in the late antebellum decades was one in which the wealthy professional class lived largely in the upper city, and both employment and cheap housing for the working class and poor lay in the urban fringe. Slaughterhouses, cotton presses, a sugar refinery, docks, mills, factories, an early grain elevator, municipal projects, and one of the Mississippi's busiest flatboat landings offered unskilled work opportunities along the river both above and below the city. Similar circumstances prevailed behind the city around the Old Basin and New Basin canals in the back-of-town. Just as the Irish immigrants of this era dispersed throughout this urban fringe, in semi-clustered patterns along the river and in various pockets surrounding the inner city so too did Germans. Another explanation for the diffused geography of Germans comes from the immigrants' original disembarkation point. Because of a tax levied against ship captains for each immigrant brought to New Orleans, the German newcomers were dumped below and above the port itself"[195]—in other words, in the urban fringe. This initial peripheral distribution may have exposed German immigrants to certain areas, but socioeconomic factors—housing, wages, and proximity to peers—probably played a weightier role in keeping them there. Whatever the cause, the resulting dispersed spatial pattern was clear. The accompanying map, *German Churches and Schools in New Orleans as Indicators of Nineteenth-Century German Residential Clusters*, reflects this dispersion by mapping the locations of German institutions. If one were to map the location of every German soul in New Orleans in the mid-1800s as a white dot upon a field of black, the pattern would form a Milky Way galaxy of greater and lesser concentrations, with no intervening clusters and no complete absences. The concentrations included upper New Orleans and the then-separate Jefferson Parish cities of Lafayette, Jefferson, and Carrollton; the West Bank communities of Algiers and Gretna; the rear faubourgs St. Mary and Treme, and the lower faubourgs of the Third District. We will focus on the two German concentrations that were earliest, largest and most developed before the Civil War, situated "in both extremities" of the city, "Lafayette and the Third Municipality."[196] It is these two areas, particularly the latter, which have been occasionally dubbed, by residents and historians, as "Little Saxony."

The Lafayette German Concentration

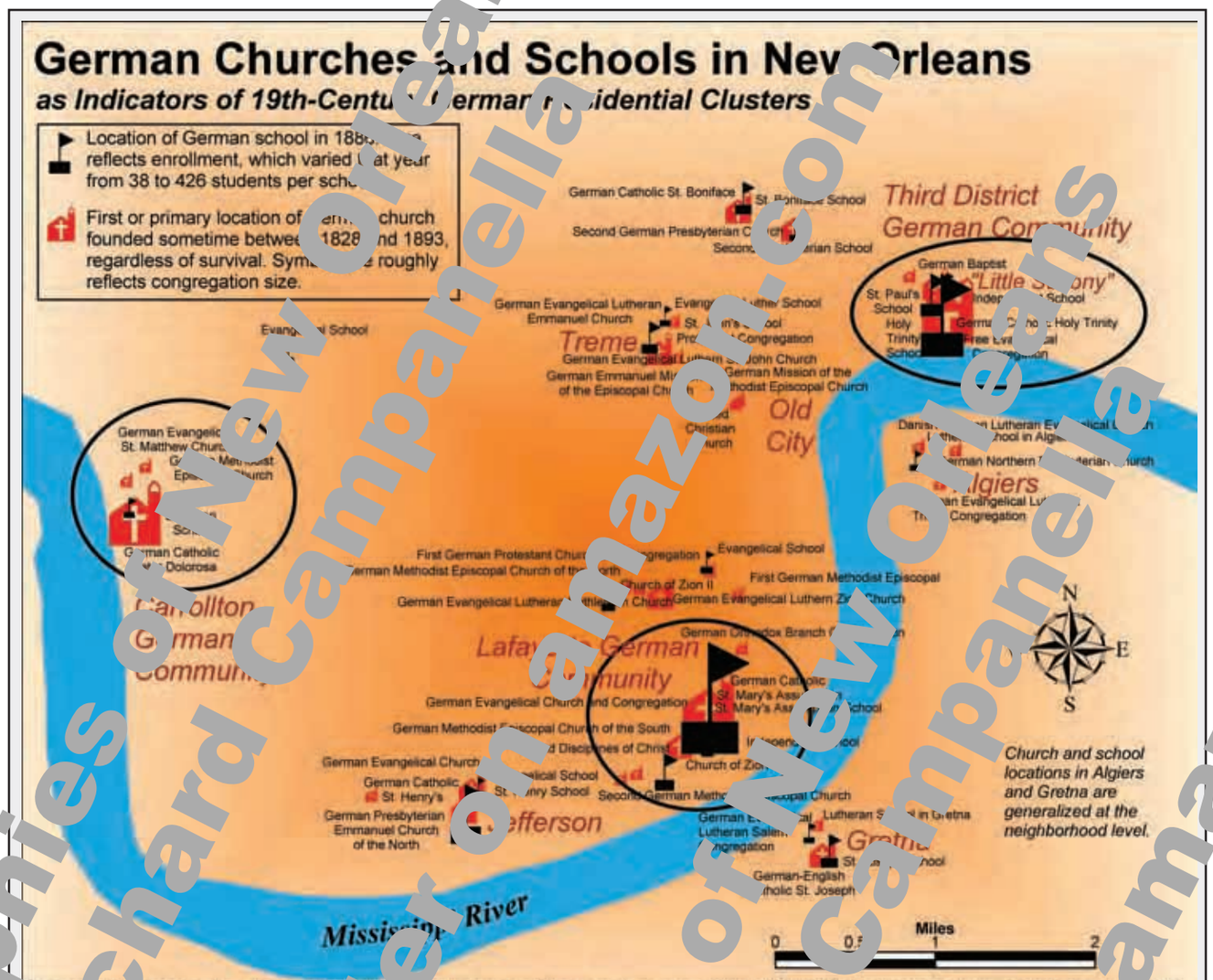
The upper reaches of old New Orleans—that is, upper Faubourg St. Mary and the adjacent faubourgs of Delord, Saulet, La Course, and Annunciation—were, in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, occupied by low-density residential neighborhoods populated by poor immigrants, particularly German and Irish. So German was the area between present-day Howard Avenue and Felicity Street in 1843 that the *Daily Picayune* (using "Dutch" to mean "the natives of Holland, Russia, and all the German States") wrote,

> You will see nothing but Dutch faces and hear nothing but the Dutch language, every word as rough as a rock of granite.... The upper part of the city is so thoroughly Dutch that the very pigs grunt in that language; you may well imagine yourself to be in the precincts of Amsterdam."[197]

One of the earliest German religious congregations in the city, the First German Protestant Church and Congregation of New Orleans (1825-1848), was located in the heart of this sprawling village-like area, on Clio between St. Charles and Carondelet.[198] The area now known as the upper Central Business District, the Warehouse District, and the Lower Garden District may well have been New Orleans' first major German ethnic concentration.

Plantations immediately above New Orleans were subdivided periodically in the early decades of the nineteenth

[192] Nau, *The German People of New Orleans, 1850-1900*, 51.
[193] "Most of the servants of the [St. Louis Hotel] were Irish or German," wrote Sir Charles Lyell in 1846, who described the area as "part of town where we heard French constantly spoken." Sir Charles Lyell, *A Second Visit to the United States of North America*, 2 vols. (London, England, 1850), 2:112.
[194] Nau, *The German People of New Orleans, 1850-1900*, 51-64.
[195] Merrill, *Louisiana German-American Resources*, 1:67.
[196] "The Germans in the United States are numbered at two millions. In our own borders they are numerous, especially in both extremities—Lafayette and the Third Municipality." *Daily Delta*, January 30, 1850, p. 2, col. 2.
[197] "A Kaleidoscopic View of New Orleans," *Daily Picayune*, September 23, 1843, p. 2, col. 3.
[198] Deiler, *A History of the German Churches in Louisiana (1823-1893)*, 11.



Source: Church Information: Deiler, J.H., "A History of the German Churches of Louisiana 1823-1893" (1894), as translated by Marie Stella Condon (1983). School Information: Deiler, J.H., "[illegible]'s Contribution to the Present [illegible]ion of New Orleans, with a Census of the German Schools" (1886). Analysis and map by Richard Campanella. This map is designed to give a general [illegible] German res[illegible] population clusters of the 19th [illegible]y. Please consult original data sources for specific information about church and school locations, names, and [illegible]s all these aspects varied over time.

Churches, schools, clubs, and other organizations proliferated among German immigrants in nineteenth-century New Orleans, and serve as reliable indicators of German residential patterns. In general, Germans, like the Irish, dispersed throughout the urban periphery, where jobs for immigrants and [illegible]eal estate values beckoned, while few lived in the expensive city center. Three major German concentrations, shown here, formed in old Lafayette, the Third District, and Carrollton. *Map and analysis by author based on listings compiled by J.H. Deiler.*

century, as owners decided [illegible] more money could be [illegible] from the urban development of their land than from [illegible] continued cultivation. Those subdivisions above Felicity Street—faubourg Nuns, Lafayette, Livaudais, and later Delassize—were incorporated as the Jefferson Parish city of Lafayette in 1833.[199] Lafayette toward Nyades Street (now St. Charles Avenue) developed with large, spacious American-style mansions and gardens; Lafayette toward the riverfront and Tchoupitoulas Street developed with smaller, economical cottages for the working class. The little city as a whole was "a thriving, growing, busy place, with warehouses and shipping, cotton presses, slaughter houses, and business establishments and offices of all kinds."[200] Yet Lafayette was sufficiently bucolic to allow for truck gardening, favored German occupations that was well patronized by the large urban population nearby.

Just as Lafayette developed, German immigration increased. Upper New Orleans became crowded with immigrants, and riverside commercial activity (and their attendant job opportunities) spread upriver to and beyond city limits. "As Lafayette grew in importance, it attracted the overflow population from its larger neighbor, New Orleans. These new inhabitants were usually people from foreign lands, chiefly more Germans and Irishmen."[201] Omnibus lines along Magazine and Tchoupitoulas streets, and later on Prytania and Apollo (now Carondelet), allowed for transportation between

[199] Meloncy C. Soniat, "The Faubourgs Forming the Upper Section of the City of New Orleans," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 20 (January 1937): 198.

[200] Henry Plauché Dart, as quoted in Kathryn C. Briede, "A History of the City of Lafayette," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 20 (October 1937): 925.

[201] Ibid.

Jackson Avenue near the Tchoupitoulas intersection formed downtown Lafayette proper. In 1852, when Jefferson Parish city was incorporated into New Orleans, this area was an extraordinarily important place in the ethnic geography of the German, German-Irish, and Irish communities for most of the nineteenth century. Although dilapidated today, the cityscape is rich in clues to a storied past. *Photograph by author, 2004.*

the two parishes, as did the New Orleans and Carrollton Railroad (1835) on present-day St. Charles. The Germanification of Lafayette occurred at its core by the early 1830s, before the great surge in German immigration of the next two decades, as Herman Didimus observed in 1835-1836:

> The city of Lafayette is busy behind me—a mere suburb of rural, wooden houses; on my left I hear a confused Babylonian dialect, sounds rather than harshness, the patois of provincialisms, and half corruptions of all the Germanic tongues—it is the German quarter....[202]

Residents at this time held political meetings in German and elected officials with names like *Kaiser*, *Klarr*, and *Phelps*. Of the approximately 3,227 residents (including 634 slaves) of Lafayette in 1840, "by far, the most preponderating part of the colony were settlers of German extraction."[203] We may conservatively estimate that at least 1,000 to 1,500 Germans lived in Lafayette that year, mostly concentrated near the river. This equates to about 10 percent of the metropolitan area's total German population, if an 1842 estimate of 14,000 in the *Lafayette City Advertiser* is accurate.[204] Actual numbers of Lafayette Germans might be significantly higher, due to undercounting of immigrants. One historian went so far as to describe Lafayette as New Orleans' "Germanic-American suburb," and traced the origin of the city's public school system to the Lafayette German community in 1841.[205]

Lafayette Germans were quick to put down institutional roots in their new city, collaborating with Irish and French neighbors to found Lafayette's first Catholic church in 1836. With increasing German immigration, need arose for German-speaking priests and German-speaking congregations. Heeding the call were Redemptorist priests from Europe, who arrived to the city starting in 1837 and commenced work in Lafayette. In 1844, they founded the New German Roman Catholic Church on Josephine between Laurel and present-day Constance: St. Mary's Assumption, the first German Catholic church in the city and state, conveniently located in the heart of Lafayette. It was accompanied by a host of other German Protestant and Jewish congregations formed in the area during the 1840s and 1850s (every church erected in Lafayette between 1842 and 1847 served German congregations[206]), particularly around the foot of Jackson Avenue. The Tchoupitoulas Street/Jackson Avenue intersection was Lafayette's *de facto* town center, home to its municipal buildings, stores, port and flatboat wharf, market, omnibus station, and ferry to Gretna (which helped to form a prominent German concentration in that West Bank community). Lafayette also boasted a German Theater, a German English School, a multitude of clubs, political organizations, and cultural societies, such commercial institutions, and drinking establishments such as the Lafayette Gardens.[207]

Fueled mostly by German and Irish immigration, Lafayette's population grew to 7,080 in 1846, 8,232 in 1847; and 14,190 in 1850. Despite its recent plantation heritage, certain parts of Lafayette were not at all their unusually small slave population (approximately one slave for every eight whites), for two reasons: most German and Irish immigrants were now of near wealthy enough to afford slave labor, and Germans in particular frowned on the institution of slavery. Historian John Leslie Kolp conducted a statistical sampling of the population schedules from Lafayette's 1850 census (the first to record birthplace), and found that 39.4 percent of the 14,190 residents of Lafayette, roughly 5,600 people, were either German-born or first-generation German-American. They intermingled with around 2,800 American-born people of probable Anglo ancestry; 2,750 Irish; 1,250 residents of foreign French background; 880 people born elsewhere; and only 920 Creoles. Lafayette indeed attracted newcomers more so than natives—by over a nine-to-one ratio, if Americans are considered newcomers—but could not be claimed by any one group as its exclusive ethnic enclave. The highest German concentrations were in the wards closest to the river, particularly Ward 2 (bounded by Felicity on the river, Harmony and Chippewa), where 50 percent of the residents were either born in Germany, or born of those who were.[208] If the term "Little Saxony" were used in Lafayette, it would have best described the sixty or so blocks between Chippewa and the river, from Felicity to Soniat. Another researcher noted a particular concentration of Germans in the area bounded by Magazine, St. Andrew, the river, and Sixth Street and de-

[202] H. Didimus, *New Orleans As I Found It* (New York, 1845), 7, published in 1845 based on observations from winter 1835-1836.
[203] B.J. Krieger, *Seventy-Five Years of Service* (New Orleans, 1923), 13.
[204] *Lafayette City Advertiser*, January 29, 1842, p. 2, col. 2.
[205] Briede, "A History of the City of Lafayette," 935. Regarding German schooling, see also the previously cited *Lafayette City Advertiser* piece of January 29, 1842.
[206] Calvert, "The German Catholic Churches of New Orleans 1836-1898," 14, 19-24.
[207] This information was compiled from the following article synopses catalogued in the New Orleans Public Library-Louisiana Collection newspaper index: *Deutsche Zeitung*, November 1849, p. 2, col. 4; March 19-22, 1850; May 18, 1853, p. 3, col. 4; and June 8, 1850, p. 3, col. 3.
[208] John Leslie Kolp, "Suburbanization in Uptown New Orleans: Lafayette City, 1833-1852" (M.A. thesis, University of New Orleans, 1975), 80.

scribed it as "Lafayette City's own 'Little Saxony'"[209] though the source of the data and the term *Little Saxony* is unspecified. Readers will notice at this point that the Lafayette German clusters match very closely those area described as the Irish Channel in the previous chapter—a commentary on the similarity of the two groups' geographies.

In the early 1850s, then, Lafayette was far more German in a relative sense compared to New Orleans proper where 11,425 German-born people resided in a total population of 116,375. In 1852, the city of Lafayette willingly consolidated with its much larger neighbor at the same time that New Orleans abandoned its ill-conceived municipality system, adopted in 1836. The German population of the Jefferson Parish city of Lafayette thus became residents of the Fourth District of New Orleans, suddenly making it one of New Orleans' two premier German ethnic concentrations. As German immigration declined after its 1853 peak, the local German community began to assimilate and rise economically, gradually becoming less German and more American in its cultural outlook.

One of the landmark events of this German community in the post-Lafayette era was the replacement of the small wooden Redemptorist St. Mary's Assumption Church (1844) on Josephine Street with a breathtaking new brick house of worship designed in the German Baroque style. The new St. Mary's Assumption arose in 1858-1860 and was later surrounded by a complex of ancillary structures to serve and educate the much enlarged German-speaking community. Barely one hundred feet away, across Constance Street, the Redemptorists had previously erected St. Alphonsus Church (1855-1858, in a style that has been described as English Baroque Revival) to serve the mostly Irish English-speaking Catholics of the area. Also in 1858, the Jesuit Fathers built Notre Dame de Bon Secours around the corner on Jackson Avenue to serve local French-speaking Catholics (most of whom were French immigrants, rather than Creole French, who remained downtown). These were magnificent national churches, not to mention the varied Protestant churches serving the Anglo-American and black populations and the synagogues of the Jewish community, symbolizing the multiethnic nature of former Lafayette in the nineteenth century. They serve, again, as reminders that ethnic intermixing predominated over intense clustering in historic New Orleans. As German, Irish, and French immigrants died out and were replaced by their Americanized English-speaking children, the congregations of St. Mary's Assumption, St. Alphonsus, and Notre Dame de Bon Secours lost their ethnic associations, and were eventually amalgamated (1920) into one parish, in which English was the new language.[210] Today, only St.

[209] Harriet Somerville Irvine, "The Impact of German Immigration on New Orleans Architecture" (M.A. thesis, University of New Orleans, 1984), 6-

[210] R. Warren Ro... *Louisiana Church Architecture* (Lafayette, 1984), 24-25, and

Germans in New Orleans were a religious people, founding three congregations of the Catholic faith, thirty-three Protestant churches of at least seven denominations, and four Jewish congregations between 1825 and 1961. Religious, schools, and orphanages accompanied many of the institutions, which both caused and reflected the German presence in certain areas. Seen here, clockwise from upper left, is the Bavarian-style Holy Trinity, St. Vincent de Paul (now Blessed Francis Seelos), St. Paul Lutheran, Jackson Avenue Evangelical, St. Mary's Assumption, and its predecessor, St. Mary's Chapel. The first three are located in the downtown Third District; the latter three are found uptown, in former Lafayette. *Photographs by author, 2004.*

Mary's Assumption continues to serve as a Catholic Church. St. Alphonsus closed in 1979 and is now a cultural center; Notre Dame de Bon Secours had been demolished in the 1920s.

The Third District German Concentration

A few years after the *Daily Picayune* (1843) observed that parts of the Second Municipality were "so thoroughly Dutch that the very pigs grunt in that language,"[211] a visitor from Manhattan made an equally ironic observation about the municipality at the opposite end of the city:

> The third [municipality,] a species of half village, half city, (unmistakable in its French Faubourg look) is given over to the tender mercies of the Dutch and Irish, and the usual accompaniments of flaxen-polled babies and flaxen-tailed pigs.[212]

"The Third," comprising all neighborhoods below Esplanade Avenue, offered to poor immigrants attributes similar to those in the upper fringes of the city: cheap and conveniently located housing and low-skill job opportunities along the riverfront. Immigrants' exposure to the Third was immediate: "The great bulk of the immigrants—Irish and German—land in this municipality, and stray around for hours...despatched to various places, in quest of situations...."[213] Immigrants thus circulated here in their initial explorations of the city, and many eventually settled here. The same pattern occurred in Lafayette, also an immigrant landing, but culturally the two sections were distinct: whereas generally wealthier English-speaking Americans lived amid uptown immigrants, it was less well-off French-speaking Creoles who lived among those immigrants settling in the much-older downtown area. This lower district, anchored by the Faubourg Marigny, extended downriver to the faubourgs of Daunois, Delphine (occupied by a large cotton press), Montegut, Clouet, Montreuil, Carraby, and Washington, and reached back to Faubourg New Marigny and other developments along the backswamp edge.[214] Physically and culturally isolated from the booming heart of New Orleans and least developed in its urban amenities, the Third ranked as the poorest of the three municipalities. Its own newspaper, the *Daily Orleanian*, published in English and French, routinely described its home turf as the "old Third," "dirty Third," "poor Third," and only occasionally and ironically as the "glorious Third."[215]

Germans arrived *en masse* to these lower faubourgs in the 1830s, when hundreds, but not yet thousands, landed annually in New Orleans. The exact *when* and *where* of this German influx to the lower city is difficult to ascertain, but clues can be garnered from various sources. Enough Germans had settled in the area during the 1830s to warrant the founding of initial German-nationality institutions by the early 1840s. The first such religious entity in the Third Municipality, known variously as the German Evangelical Church, German Protestant Church, or German Orthodox Evangelical Congregation of New Orleans and Lafayette, was founded in August 1840 and held services at various temporary locations. Chartered in 1842 under that last name, the church purchased a lot on the corner of Port and Craps (now Burgundy) in 1843 and built a small wooden chapel before year's end. One of the first priorities of contributing members, who all had Germanic surnames and resided in the area, was to

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[210] Friends of the Cabildo, *New Orleans Architecture*, vol. 1: *The Lower Garden District* (Gretna, 1971), 124. It is said that at least one sermon was delivered in German every Sunday at St. Mary's up until America's entry into World War I in 1917.
[211] "A Kaleidoscopic View of New Orleans," *Daily Picayune*, September 23, 1843, p. 2, col. 2.
[212] A. Oakey Hall, *The Manhattaner in New Orleans; or, Phases of "Crescent City" Life* (New York, 1851), 35-36.
[213] *Daily Orleanian*, November 27, 1849, p. 2, c. 1.
[214] Friends of the Cabildo, *New Orleans Architecture*, 4:3-24.
[215] Gleaned from editions of the *Daily Orleanian*, 1849-1850.

Visible in this view of the lower French Quarter and Faubourg Marigny are three German landmarks of the Third District: St. Paul Lutheran (upper left), Holy Trinity Catholic Church (twin spires at center), and Blessed Francis Seelos Catholic Church (upper right, formerly St. Vincent de Paul). The multi-ethnic Third District also had substantial Creole, Irish, Sicilian, African American, and other local and foreign-born populations. *Photographs by Ronnie Cardwell and author, 2004.*

Like the Lafayette and Joseph cemeteries uptown, the downtown St. Vincent de Paul and St. Roch cemeteries are the final resting places for thousands of Third District Germans. Within the walls of St. Roch's Campo Santo is a picturesque German Gothic chapel (1876) built by Father Peter Leonard Thevis in gratitude for the survival of his parishioners during the 1868 yellow fever epidemic. *Photographs by author, 2004.*

build a German language school another indicator of the growing German population in the area.[216]

Among the new German residents were an increasing number of Catholics, who had, at the time, but two options to celebrate Mass in their native tongue: the new St. Mary's Assumption far uptown in Lafayette, or St. Vincent de Paul on nearby Dauphine Street, which only occasionally offered German-language services. As a third alternative Bishop Antoine Blanc directed to Third Municipality Germans use of the new St. Mary's Catholic Church (1845), recently appended to the former Ursuline Convent on Condé (Chartres) Street in the First Municipality, still a number of blocks away. Instead, a new Catholic parish was established specifically for the growing German Catholic community in the Third Municipality faubourg of Marigny. Father Francis M. Mascarel, formerly based in Lafayette, transferred to this area to established Holy Trinity Church on October 26, 1847, on the corner of Dauphine and St. Ferdinand. The first few years were tumultuous, climaxing in a suspicious conflagration in 1851 that destroyed the church, rectory, school, and a number of neighboring structures. The church was rebuilt by 1853 on an adjacent lot on St. Ferdinand, where it would become the symbolic hearth of the German Catholic community of the lower city and, along with the Orthodox Evangelical Congregation a few blocks away, one of the anchors of the German residential cluster known loosely as Little Saxony.[217] "Holy Trinity was the parish for all German Catholics: farmers, truck gardeners, dairymen of Gentilly, and settlers of Milneburg," noted the authors of *New Orleans Architecture: The Creole Faubourgs*. Its parish "was later reduced until St. Bonaventure was established on Galvez and Lapeyrouse Street, and Elysian Fields became the boundary between the two parishes in 1871."[218] Holy Trinity stood in the middle of the Faubourg Daunois, a development immediately below the original Faubourg Marigny. St. German was it in the 1840s and 1850s that it was sometimes called *Faubourg Des Allemandes*. But although ethnic marking trumped the predomination of any one group in this area, and as in Lafayette, major groups had their national churches. "We have," in the [Third Municipality," observed the bilingual *Daily Orleanian* in 1849, "a French Catholic Church, a German and an American or Creole [because] sermons in French and German are rarely understood by the natives of Ireland."[219] Another article in the same paper caricatured the multiethnic Third's aldermen as Jonathan Peabody, Yacob Musheinheimer, Paddy O'Shaughnessy, Emanuel Haman, [and] Adelaide Creole." It lamented another on the matter of language in local government, if "French, Spanish, German, Irish etc., is introduced into the council, it will be necessary to have an interpreter for Alderman Wiltz's French speeches; Alderman Siewerssen's German ditto, and Alderman Meehan's Irish harrangues! Spare! gentlemen, the already too much burlesqued old Third, this Babylonian affliction!"[220]

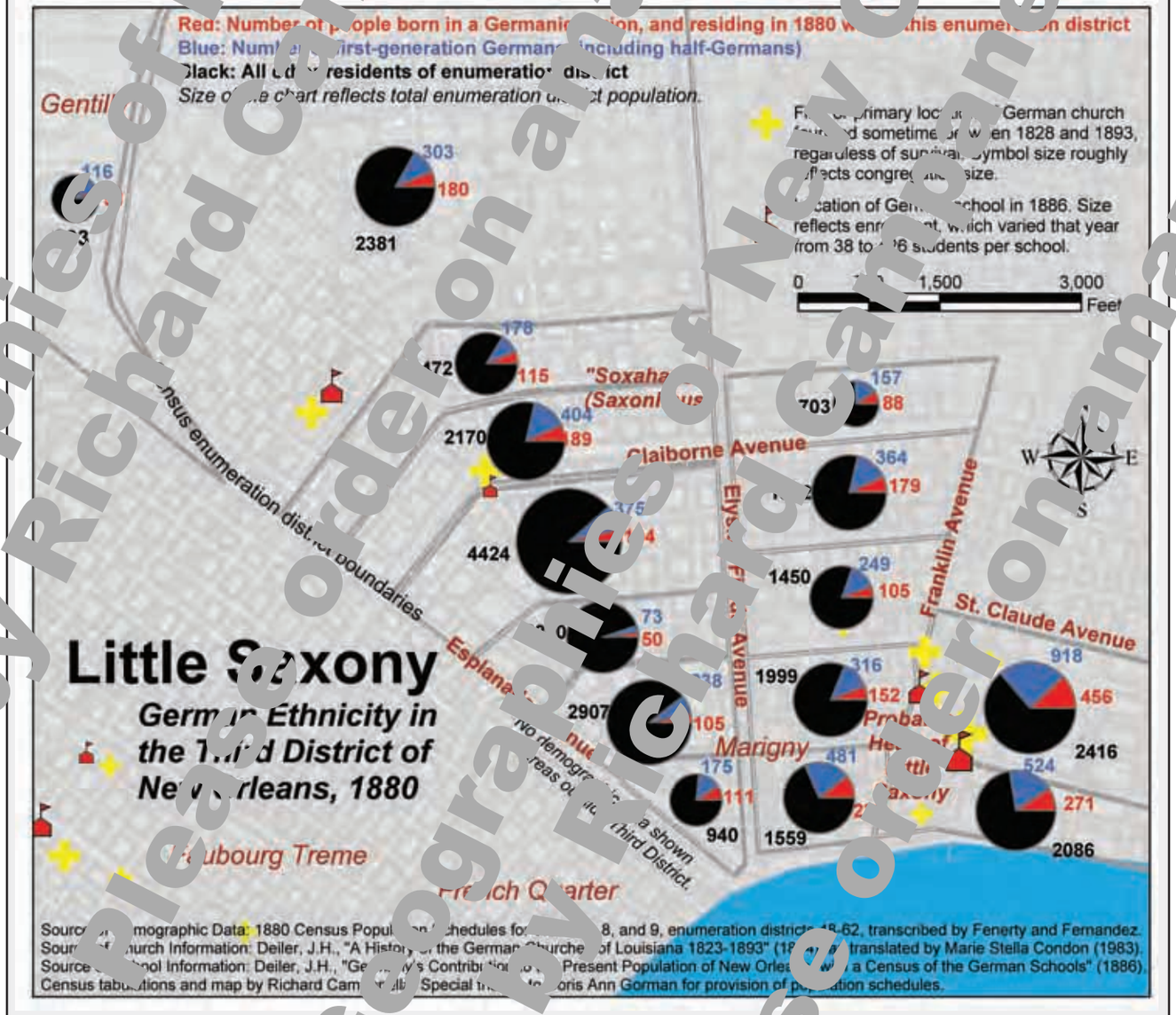
Use of the sobriquet *Little Saxony* for Germanic sections within the multiethnic Third is a bit ambiguous. One is more likely to come across the term in secondary and tertiary sources, both scholarly and popular, rather than in primary sources such as newspaper articles and records of the era. This is often the case with neighborhood nicknames, especially those with an ethnic slant, as they are generally considered slang and somewhat offensive at the time. Most recent citations of the term trace to John Frederick Nau's oft-quoted *The German People of New Orleans* (1958), in which he wrote, "The Germans settled particularly in the municipality that stretched

[216] Kevin Bozant, *Port & Burgundy: A Pictorial History of St. Paul Lutheran Church, New Orleans* (New Orleans, 1990), 2-18.
[217] Calvert, "The German Catholic Churches of New Orleans 1836-1898," 82-86; and Roger Baudier, *The Catholic Church in Louisiana* (New Orleans, 1939), 367.
[218] Friends of the Cabildo, *New Orleans Architecture*, 4:171.
[219] *Daily Orleanian*, May 4, 1849, p. 2, col. 2.
[220] *Daily Orleanian*, March 9, 1849, p. 2, col. 1.
[221] *Daily Orleanian*, February 26, 1849, p. 2, col. 1.

from Esplanade to Elysian Fields, which, because of the great number of Germans living there, became known as 'Little Saxony.'" Nau in turn cited two references for the term: a 1901 publication by John Hanno Deiler and Nau's interview with an elderly man who resided in the area during the turn of the century. Another researcher, Raimund Berchtold, placed Little Saxony in the rear of the Esplanade-Elysian Fields triangle (the Seventh Ward), "bounded roughly by Elysian Fields, St. Bernard and N. Claiborne avenues and N. Prieur Street." German-born residents comprised about one-quarter the population of this area during its 1880 peak; by 1880, German ethnicities in general made up about half the district's population.[222]

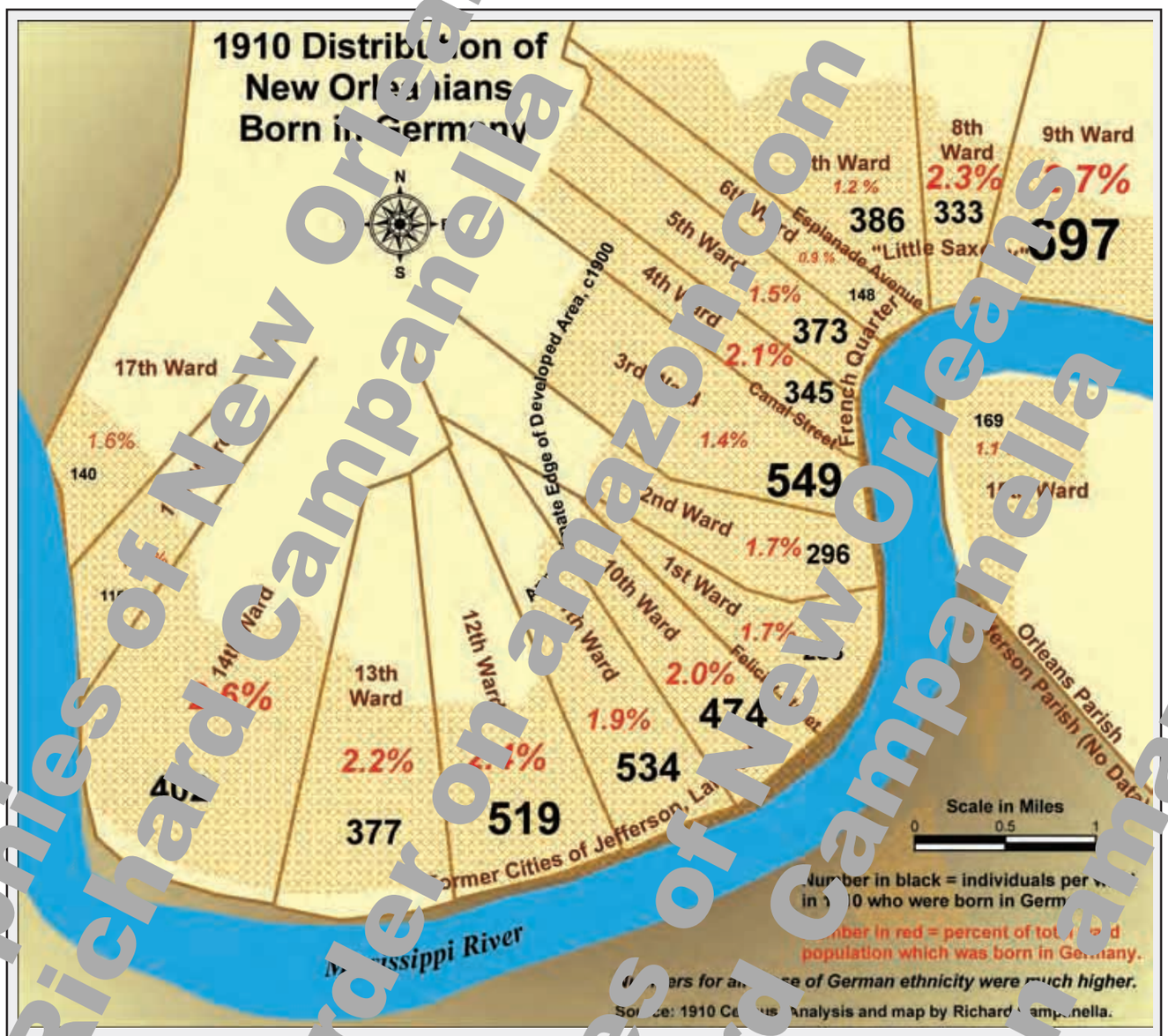
According to another source, this district, as far back as the Florida Canal, was settled during the 1750s peak of German immigration, and was known as "Soxahaus," apparently a corruption of "Saxonhaus." In the late nineteenth century, Soxahaus was lined with wooden shotgun houses in gingerbread ornamentation, built right up to the banquette, which was once a genuine banquette (raised wooden planks), later paved with bricks. Neighborhood boys would roll empty beer kegs down the planks to the fire hydrant to retrieve good water when the cistern water went bad. "In the cool of the morning," recalled one elderly German girl a half-century later, "you could see the hausfraus scrubbing the bricks in front of their homes." Bakers, groceries, dairies, florists, and home-based cottage industries operated throughout the area. Mardi Gras in Soxahaus was remembered for the fights between the Morning Glory Social Club and the Wochomoo-Boys which, loaded up on German beer, would battle attempt parade down narrow Frenchmen Street. Musicians formed

[222] Berchtold, "Decline of German Ethnicity in New Orleans, 1880-1930," 7.



Source of demographic Data: 1880 Census Population Schedules for [illegible]8, and 9, enumeration districts 18-62, transcribed by Fenerty and Fernandez.
Source of church Information: Deiler, J.H., "A History of the German Churches of Louisiana 1823-1893" (1894), translated by Marie Stella Condon (1983).
Source of school Information: Deiler, J.H., "Germany's Contribution to the Present Population of New Orleans with a Census of the German Schools" (1886).
Census tabulations and map by Richard Campanella. Special thanks to Doris Ann Gorman for provision of population schedules.

Where was Little Saxony? Trying to locate this little-known but oft-cited ethnic cluster is reminiscent of the much more famous controversy of the Irish Channel. An analysis of the 1880 census sheds some light on the Third District (Faubourg Marigny) German community, and probable locations of Little Saxony and "Soxahaus." *Map and analysis by author based on population schedules of the 1880 Census. Note: in this map, "first-generation" implies locally born children of German-born immigrants.*



In the twentieth century, German-born immigrants from the 1840s and 1850s, though declining in number, remained dispersed throughout the city. Antebellum concentrations in former Lafayette and the Third District are still evident in these 1910 census data. The patterns would mostly disintegrate after World War I. *Map and analysis by author.*

lands and played for food and drink in local dance halls, a practice which was known in Soxahaus, as "playing for plums." The percent of German natives in Soxahaus declined from around 25 percent in 1860 to 4 percent by century's end, when German immigration had all but ceased. American ethnicities declined from 50 percent of the total to 20 percent in 1900. By the 1950s, only a few aged Germans remained in old Soxahaus, which had deteriorated to a state not all that different from its present condition.[223]

To "find" little Saxony and Soxahaus through numerical data, I surveyed transcriptions of the 1880 U.S. Census population schedules of the Third District (as it was called

the 1852 rectification of the municipalities) and tabulated all German-born and first-generation American-born Germans at the enumeration-district level.[224] Within Enumeration Districts 48 through 62, there was a total population of 36,878 residents, comprising a thorough mixture of foreign-born and locally born people of white, black and mixed racial ancestry. Whites hailed from throughout the world—France, Ireland, Germany, Spain, Italy, Cuba, Mexico, England, Sweden, and beyond, and throughout the United States. (There appeared to be a disproportionately large number of Pennsylvanians, possibly connected with locals by means of their German heritage.) Most persons listed as black or mulatto were born

[223] James Wobbe, "Old Soxahaus Settlement is Larger Germantown," *New Orleans Item*, October 11, 1953, p. 11; and Bernhold, "Decline of German Ethnicity in New Orleans, 1880-1930," 7. For other nineteenth century recollections of street life in this area, see Elise Kirsch, *Down Town New Orleans in the Early "Eighties:" Customs and Characters of Old Robertson Street and Its Neighborhood* (New Orleans, 1951).

[224] These figures were compiled using transcriptions of the 1880 census, enumeration districts 48-62, by two local genealogists, Patricia Ann Fenerty and Patricia White Fernandez. Use of transcribed census data allows for much faster analysis than use of microfilm copies of original handwritten population schedules. Census enumerators prior to 1900 usually did a poor job in scribing house addresses, forcing an abandonment of my original plans to map Germans to the street level.

locally, in Louisiana, or in neighboring states, though there were some born in the Caribbean and even Africa.[225] Within this diverse and international population were 2,485 people born in the Germanic areas of Austria, Baden, Bavaria, Bremen, Denmark, Hamburg, Hanover, Mecklenburg, Nassau, Prussia, Saxony, Württemberg, Oldenburg, and, after unification, from Germany. Another 4,111 were American-born with at least one parent born in those Germanic areas. Thus, one of every fifteen residents of the Third District in 1880 was German-born, and one in every five could claim at least half German ancestry. Among whites only (who made up 74 percent of the district's total population) about 27 percent had at least some German ancestry. The map *Little Saxony: German Ethnicity in the Third District of New Orleans, 1880* indicates that Germans lived in greatest density in Enumeration District 56, from Royal to the river between Elysian Fields and present-day Franklin Avenue, near Holy Trinity Church. Largest numbers of Germans, in both absolute and relative terms, lived in the large Enumeration District 62 (present-day Bywater from St. Claude to Royal), home to two other major Catholic churches.

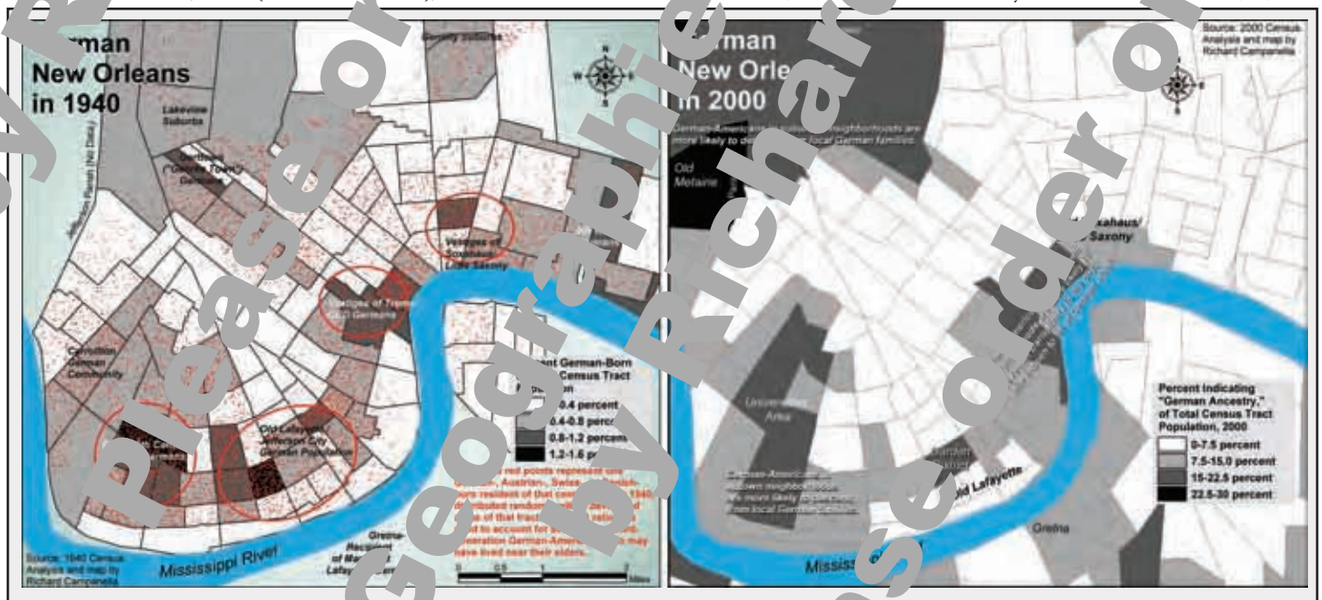
Looking within these enumeration districts to the street level, two areas emerge as being particularly German in 1880. One was Soxahaus, was spanned, according to the census data, a bit more broadly than described earlier, roughly from Annette Street to Spain Street, and from Urquhart to North Johnson. Of those most-German streets within this bounding box, about 32 percent of roughly 2,300 residents were German. The other was the area immediate upriver from Holy Trinity Church, from lower Frenchman Street to Royal Street to Franklin Avenue and the river, where about 33 percent of roughly 2,400 residents were German. The highest specific concentration was on lower Frenchman Street from Decatur to Royal, where Germans numbered eighty of about 150 people. In the map I labeled these two areas "Soxahaus," and "Little Saxony," respectively, but such terms were undoubtedly used very loosely, and certainly not as German exclusive, bounded areas. The former may have been viewed as a subset of the latter, or perhaps they were synonymous; German-speakers obviously used *Soxahaus* while English speakers presumably used *Little Saxony*. Like the Irish Channel, such perceptions of ethnic place simply left resolute demarcation in the complex ethnic geography of New Orleans.

Decline of German Ethnicity

In 1882, with German immigration waning in decline, German ships switched from the deteriorating port of New Orleans to the recently deepened harbor of Galveston, Texas, forcing immigrants to incur extra expense and hassle to settle in New Orleans. Within the city, too, immigrants from the 1840s and 1850s died off, and with practically no new blood arriving from the fatherland, *Deutschtum* (German ethnic identity) waned in their fully Americanized children and grandchildren. "German residential clusters began to thin out," wrote Raymund Berchtold in his thesis "The Decline of German Ethnicity in New Orleans 1880-1930;" "German theaters died out completely, the German press was reduced to all of one newspaper, [...] German clubs lost members and support, and churches and schools became transformed from German to English-speaking institutions."[226] Increasing prosperity and declining German ethnic identification dispersed German residential enclaves, which in turn further dimin-

[225] There lived on Royal Street in the Faubourg Marigny one Clara Stevens, born in Africa in 17[illegible] and possibly brought to the New World in chains. Infants known only by Miss Stevens who to themselves would reach an advanced age might have surveyed this shotgun streetscape into the 1970s—a living link between the colonial-era slave trade and the space age. Patricia Ann Fenerty and Patricia White Fernandez, *1880 Census of New Orleans*, 8 vols. (New Orleans: 1991-[illegible]), 7:22.

[226] Berchtold, "Decline of German Ethnicity in New Orleans 1800-1930," ii, 2-7.



These maps show the distributions of the few remaining German-born New Orleanians in 1940 (left), and of people claiming German ancestry in the 2000 Census (right). By the late twentieth century, most German American New Orleanians resided in patterns that simply echoed the larger white population. *Maps and analysis by author.*

Beer gardens, bakeries, and groceries (one of which, Schwegmann's, became the premier local grocer) were popular businesses in the German community. Kolb's, a German restaurant founded in 1899 by Bavarian immigrant Conrad Kolb, operated at 125 Charles Avenue until 1994. *Photograph by author, 2004.*

ished ethnic interaction in the economic, political, spiritual, educational, and recreational aspects of neighborhood life—leading to further spatial dispersion. By 1910, differences in the percent of German-born varied only slightly throughout the city's seventeen wards, from a low of 0.9 percent in the 3rd Ward, to a high of 2.7 percent in the Ninth Ward (see map, *1910 Distribution of New Orleanians Born in Germany*), home to the largest absolute number of German-born (1,207).

When war clouds gathered over Europe in 1914, patriotism among German-Americans for their fatherland at first rekindled ethnic pride. But as German U-boats started attacking ships of non-belligerent countries, including the United States, Americans responded with a sweeping anti-German sentiment. When America joined the war, all outward expressions of German culture came under the glaring eye of an incensed public. An intolerance of all things outwardly German assailed German-American populations nationwide, and German New Orleanians suffered their share. Teaching and speaking the German language, flying a German flag, and dealing in German-made merchandise became criminal acts in Louisiana. Clubs disbanded, schools eliminated German programs, and churches ended German services.[227] Berlin Street in uptown New Orleans was renamed to honor General Pershing; businesses and institutions eliminated the word *German* in their names; and some families anglicized their Teutonic surnames. Nationally and in New Orleans, the frankfurter (the sausage popular in Frankfort, Germany) was renamed "hot dog," and sauerkraut was dubbed "liberty cabbage." Nearly a century of local German cultural traditions had become victims of a distant war. "When the war ended in November 1918, German ethnicity in New Orleans was devastated. It had almost completely vanished from the face of the city."[228] Geographically, the backlash against German identity further scattered German neighborhoods, to new suburbs such as Lakeview, Gentilly, City Park/Bayou St. John area, and Gerttown, named for German grocer Adolfred Gerke, who opened a grocery at Colapissa Street and Carrollton Avenue in 1893 and helped develop the area with German families.[229] The map *German New Orleans in 1940* shows the residential distribution by census tract of those few remaining German-born New Orleanians in 1940, when only vestiges of the old Little Saxony, Lafayette, Carrollton, Third Ward/Tremé concentrations may be perceived. The catastrophe enveloping Europe at that time eventually did less cultural damage to the German-American community of New Orleans than the First World War, but only because, by the 1940s, there was so little left to lose.

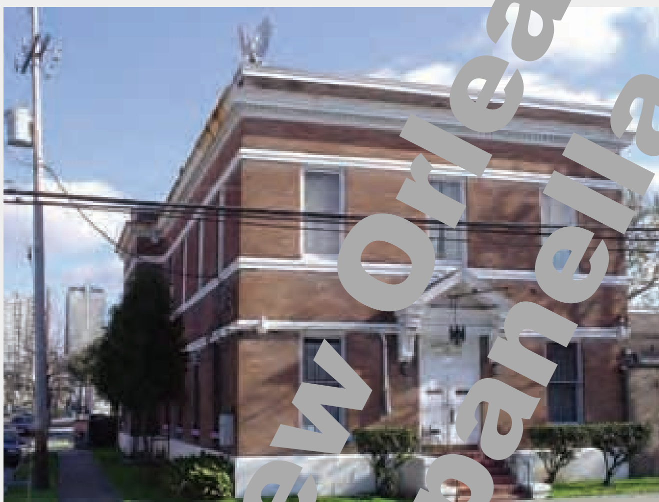
The geography of German Americans in greater New Orleans today generally echoes the patterns of the larger white population (map, *German New Orleans in 2000*). Those claiming German ancestry in Orleans, Jefferson, St. Bernard, and Plaquemines parishes numbered 95,251 in the 2000 census, or about 9.4 percent of the total population and 18.5 percent of the region's whites. Within New Orleans, those figures were 26,404 (roughly the same as the number of German-born residents at the time of the Civil

[227] Merrill, *Louisiana German-American Resources*, 1:xv.

[228] Berchtold, "Decline of German Ethnicity in New Orleans, 1880-1930," ii, 28-29.

[229] Cheryl Q. White and Darlene M. Walk, *Gerttown/Zone 6 Neighborhood Profile: City of New Orleans* (New Orleans, 1978), 3.03.

Germans introduced beer to New Orleans, previously a "wine town," through home-brewed "city beer" in the mid-nineteenth century and through industrial breweries starting in the 1880s. Jax, Dixie, (Dixie shown here) and Falstaff all trace German roots; only Dixie remains in operation. *Photographs by author, 2004.*



Deutsches Haus, home for many local German events (most notably Oktoberfest), keeps alive the legacy of the circa-1847 *Deutsche Gesellschaft* **from its headquarters on South Galvez Street.** *Photograph by author, 2004.*

War); 5.4 percent of the total population; and 19.4 percent of the white population. The census tracts spanning old Lafayette (Felicity to Toledano, from the river to Claiborne Avenue) maintained a comparable German-ancestry population in 2000, numbering 1,137 (5.7 percent of total population, 18.1 percent of whites), of whom 371 lived in the Garden District. Lakeview, from City Park Avenue to the lake, is home to a substantial German-ancestry population ([illegible]500), and includes five of the "most German" census tracts (over 25 percent of total population) in the metropolis. Jefferson Parish had twenty-six such tracts, all on the east bank save one in Gretna. The census tract with the highest proportion of German-ancestry residents was in Harahan, behind the Colonial Golf and Country Club, at 30[illegible] percent. In absolute numbers, more Germans (1,19[illegible]) lived in the lakefront census tract between Causeway and Clearview in Jefferson Parish. Most of these suburban and uptown peoples descend from local nineteenth-century German stock. This is generally not the case for the additional [illegible]702 German-Americans living in downtown New Orleans in 2000, in the riverside tracts from Lee Circle to the Industrial Canal. Most of these folks are recent transplants to the area, who happen to be of German ancestry. Faubourg Marigny, once home to "Little Saxony," today is largely gentrified, gay, and recently arrived to the neighborhood; Soxahaus, now an unnamed section of the Seventh Ward, is mostly poor and black. Few old German families remain in the Third District.

Streetscapes of German New Orleans

Evidence of a Germanic past dots the modern cityscape, sometimes cryptically, sometimes magnificently. The former city of Lafayette, from the raffish riverside blocks known as the Irish Channel to the tree-lined streets of the Garden District, is replete with structures that housed German and Irish immigrants and their descendents during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Thousands are entombed at the Lafayette and St. Joseph cemeteries I and II, where German names and German birthplaces are inscribed into weathered marble. Near the foot of Jackson Avenue, once "downtown Lafayette," the intricate brickwork for which German builders were known is visible in the former Evangelical Congregation Church, organized in 1[illegible], and in the former Gates of Prayer Synagogue, erected across the street between 1857 and 1867 by German Jews. Stunning brickwork is the hallmark of the principal surviving German landmark of former Lafayette, majestic St. Mary's Assumption on Josephine and Constance, attributed to German architect Albert Diettel and executed in the German Baroque fashion for the Redemptorists in 1858 through 1860. Next door, in the church's complex of dependencies, is the Father Seelos Center and National Shrine of Francis Xavier Seelos, named for the beloved Bavarian-born Redemptorist priest (1819-1867) who served this community devotedly and was beatified by Pope John Paul II in 2000. St. Mary's Chapel (1844), the quaint wooden antecedent to the grand St. Mary's Assumption Church, had been relocated to St. Joseph Cemetery in 1863, but was returned to Jackson Avenue near St. Charles in 1997-1999. Many schools, churches, orphanages, and other institutions once patronized by Germans still stand, though with new occupants, and scores of homes designed and built by German architects line the streets of old Lafayette and adjacent neighborhoods. Uptown itself developed in part on the rails of a local German's efforts: Charles F. Zimpel surveyed many of the future German-populated uptown subdivisions, and engineered the New Orleans & Carrollton Rail Road (1831) to connect them with another of his developments, Carrollton (1833), another future German enclave. A ride on the St. Charles Streetcar Line today from Felicity Street to South Carrollton Avenue is a ride through and upon elements of nineteenth-century German New Orleans.

Perhaps the best surviving symbol of nineteenth-century German New Orleans is Turner's Hall, designed by German architect William Thiel and built in 1868 for the Turnverein ("gymnasts") charitable and cultural society. *Photograph by author, 2004.*

While German architects were busy throughout the city in the nineteenth century, Germanic architectural styles are scarce in New Orleans simply because they were not in vogue at the time. But certain traits, such as these stepped brick gables, abound on institutional, industrial, and commercial structures either built by or for Germans. *Photographs by author, 2004.*

Clues to a German past abound too in the Third District, though they are a good deal more *past* than uptown. Foremost among these are the elegantly simple twin Bavarian-style towers of Holy Trinity Church, standing since 1873 on St. Ferdinand Street but closed since 1997 for want of a congregation. Forlorn and weather-beaten, its garden weedy and its religious art auctioned off, Holy Trinity is one of the city's last surviving national churches. Farther down Dauphine Street, the former St. Vincent de Paul Church (1866), once home to a large German congregation, appears in good condition, but was charred on the interior by a blaze in 2002. St. Vincent's Parish, which had been renamed Blessed Francis Seelos Catholic Church when two other nearby Catholic churches were closed in 2001, was home to a vivacious Hispanic congregation until the time of the fire. Bucking the trend of church closures in the Third District is St. Paul Lutheran (built in 1889) on Burgundy and Port, a derivative of the earliest German Protestant presence in the Third District (1840) and a survivor of several name changes, a number of structural fires, and radical neighborhood transformation. The inscription on its cornerstone is one of the very few remaining vestiges of the German language in Little Saxony today. Like the Lafayette and St. Joseph cemeteries uptown, the cemeteries of St. Vincent de Paul and St. Roch are the final resting places for thousands of Third District Germans. Within the walls of the enchanting St. Roch's *Campo Santo* cemetery is a picturesque German Gothic chapel (1876) built by Father Peter Leonard Thevis in gratitude for the survival of his parishioners during the 1868 yellow fever epidemic. Descendents of those Germans entombed in the surrounding crypts pay visits from the suburbs on All Saints' Day, when, for a fleeting moment and in small numbers, a latter-day Little Saxony forms once again in the Third District.

While the most prominent surviving markers of the historical German cityscape tend to be religious in nature, vestiges of commercial and cultural elements remain as well, as scattered throughout the city as were their builders. The old breweries of Jax, Falstaff, and Dixie, which all trace German roots, still mark the skyline (though only Dixie still brews beer, now far from the vacant Falstaff in the former "brewery district"). Schwegmann's supermarkets, founded by Third District Germans in 1869, and Kolb's Restaurant, started in 1890 by Bavarian immigrant Conrad Kolb, were part of the city's "foodscape" into the 1990s. The old German bakery Leidenheimer's is still a top maker of "French" bread, and the Deutsches Haus—"ground zero for all local German happenings"[230]—keeps alive the spirit of the circa-1847 *Deutsche Gesellschaft* from its headquarters on South Galvez Street. Perhaps the best surviving symbol of nineteenth-century German culture in New Orleans stands on narrow Lafayette Street in a quiet corner of the Central Business District. Turner's Hall, designed by German architect William Thiel and built in 1858 for the Turnverein ("gymnasts") charitable

[230] *Times-Picayune*, October 1, 2004, *Lagniappe* section, p. 3.

and cultural society, symbolizes the city's old German ethos, "a worthy monument to the genius and patient labor of the population which called it into existence." On the exterior walls are the intricate brickwork and compound pilasters, parapet, cornice, and dentils typical of German architecture in this city. Within those walls, repainted in their original pastel blue, were once a gymnasium, reading room, and game room, and space for music, singing, dance, drama, and the arts, emblematic of the Turners' mission of a sound mind in a sound body. The Turnverein are long departed, but the success of German immigrants in New Orleans seems to indicate their mission was accomplished.

The Lack of a German Sense of Place in New Orleans

The Irish of New Orleans proudly claim their Irish Channel, despite that the various territories ascribed to that appellation were thoroughly mixed and sometimes more German than Irish. Though the Germans of New Orleans exhibited the same distributed geography of the Irish—a Milky Way galaxy of greater and lesser concentrations—there is little public memory of their sense of place in the historic tapestry of the city.[232] Why? For one, *Irish Channel* is a unique and compelling term that circulated among the English-speaking general population, whereas equivalent place associations regarding Germans were restricted to German-speaking newspapers, concealed from popular culture. *Irish Channel* was a convenient moniker for an otherwise nameless riverside swath; the equally nebulous Little Saxony, on the other hand, may be described as the Creole faubourgs, Faubourg Marigny, Bywater, and other havens. The Irish Channel is also reinforced annually by the St. Patrick's Day parades which have rolled in and near the neighborhood since 1947, authenticating the Irish claim to this area to tens of thousands of spectators, many of them denizens of the suburbs. There is no equivalent German civic ritual. The Irish also paraded in the Third District, from Markey's Irish Pub up Royal Street to within sight of the spires of Holy Trinity, but again there is no German response. "We are too stolid," opined one local man of German descent when questioned about the lack of awareness of Germans in Louisiana. "There is no St. Bonifacce parade."[233] Perhaps, but were not the Germans exuberant in their culture 150 years ago, with their singing groups and *Volksfests* and friendship clubs? More likely, the lack of a German sense of place in the ethnic geography of New Orleans stems from the traumatic cultural squelch occasioned by the world wars. German ethnic cohesion at the neighborhood level, civic rituals, and the public display of nationality, all of which fuel popular perceptions of place, were extinguished for decades and never fully recovered. To the extent that they have, perhaps some intrepid advocate—a latter-day John Hanno Deiler—may lay claim to the newly consecrated Holy Trinity property and convert it into a German cultural center or museum, and its weedy garden into grounds for Oktoberfests or a revival of the *Volksfest* tradition. Perhaps only then will *Little Saxony* or *Soxahaus* return to their place in the ethnic geography of New Orleans.

[231] As quoted in Francis of the Cabildo, *New Orleans Architecture*, 2:180.

[232] The term "Irish Channel" appeared 3,030 times in *Times-Picayune* articles between 1992 and June 2004; the term "Little Saxony" appeared only four times in the same period. An Internet search on "Irish Channel" and "New Orleans" yielded 2,490 results in 2004; a similar search on "Little Saxony" and "New Orleans" yielded only seven results. Lexis-Nexis and Google.com searches conducted in February 2004.

[233] Earl F. Niehaus, "Catholic Ethnics in Nineteenth-Century Louisiana," in *Cross, Crozier, and Crucible: A Volume Celebrating the Bicentennial of a Catholic Diocese in Louisiana*, ed. Glenn R. Conrad (New Orleans and Lafayette, 1993), 49.

Dryades Street Neighborhood and the Geography of Jewish New Orleans

With each major wave of immigration to New Orleans came a small percentage of Jewish peoples. Those arriving with the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century influx from the Francophone, Hispanic, and American worlds encountered the ethnic geography of early New Orleans society, as described in the Creole chapter, and settled accordingly in and near the crowded French Quarter. Those arriving with the great antebellum wave from northern Europe settled in dispersed distributions throughout the semi-rural periphery of New Orleans, as described in previous chapters on the Irish and Germans. Those who came with the smaller late nineteenth-century wave from southern and eastern Europe settled in very different geographical patterns, as we shall see in upcoming chapters. The geography of Jewish New Orleans is particularly interesting because this group, united by religion across a variety of nationalities, traverses many immigration waves and their corresponding residential patterns, allowing us to compare their differing geographies through time. Organizational structure of the Jewish community of New Orleans differs from its counterparts in other American cities for its prevailing Reformist heritage, and its long history, dating back to the dawn of the colonial era.[234]

In 1719, two young men, Jacob and Romain David from La Rochefoucault, France, may have been the first Jewish persons (judging solely by surnames) to set foot in Louisiana.[235] André Pénicaut, carpenter and chronicler of early French Louisiana, mentioned some Jews among the 4,000 French and German settlers arriving in colonial Louisiana in 1720, possibly including the Jewish business manager of John Law's Company of the West.[236] But the *Code Noir*, the colonial law in effect from 1724 to 1803 mostly aimed at regulating slavery, banned Jews from the colony in the first of its fifty-five articles, and expulsions at the beginning of the Spanish regime further dissuaded Jewish immigration to Louisiana. One researcher cites evidence for no more than a dozen or so probable Jewish individuals or families, with names such as David, Jacobs, and Solomon, arriving in New Orleans sometime between the city's founding in 1718 and the end of the colonial era in 1803.[237] According to Bertram Wallace Korn, researchers "have found no evidence to justify a very late report that Jewish services were conducted in New Orleans in 1750; indeed, we have not located any Jews in the town [with documentary evidence] until 1757-58, and there is not the slightest hint...that they attempted to meet for worship."[238] One may conclude that while there likely was a small "Jewish Creole" presence in colonial Louisiana, a Jewish community was absent.

Early Jewish Society: 1803-60s

Lucrative economic opportunities drew tens of thousands to New Orleans in the early nineteenth century, making the new American city the nation's number-two immigration destination. A small fraction, perhaps around 1 percent, of these foreign immigrants and American emigrants were Jewish, primarily Sephardic, hailing originally from France, Spain, Portugal, and the Low Countries. French and German Ashkenazic Jews made up the remainder.[239] Because these early arrivals were small in number, rapidly assimilated, and not particularly religious, no Jewish community, much less a Jewish neighborhood, developed during the first two decades of American dominion. Indeed, it took "much longer to found a synagogue in New Orleans than in any comparable location"[240]—perhaps because the high-risk/high-reward opportunities of this dynamic port city attracted the sort of ambitious, individualist pioneers who tend to eschew the sanctuary of ancient religious and social traditions.

This changed as the Jewish population grew to include more civic-minded individuals and families in the following decades, as evidenced by the founding of the first congregations in the 1820s. One assembly is said to have been found-

Visiting New Yorker Jacob da Silva Solis founded the Congregation Shangarai Chassed (Gates of Mercy) in 1827 or 1828, the first permanent Jewish congregation in New Orleans and outside the original thirteen colonies. The congregation, predecessor of today's Touro Synagogue, built an impressive synagogue with Corinthian columns and two Byzantine steeples at this site on Carondelet Rampart Street in 1851. It was sold in 1882, demolished in the 1920s, and recently commemorated with this historic landmark sign. *Photograph by author, 2003.*

[234] Leonard Rissman, "The New Orleans Jewish Community," in *Jews in the South*, eds. Leonard Dinnerstein and Mary Dale Palsson (Baton Rouge, 1973), 288.

[235] Samuel Proctor, "Jewish Life in New Orleans, 1718-1865," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 40 (1947): 111.

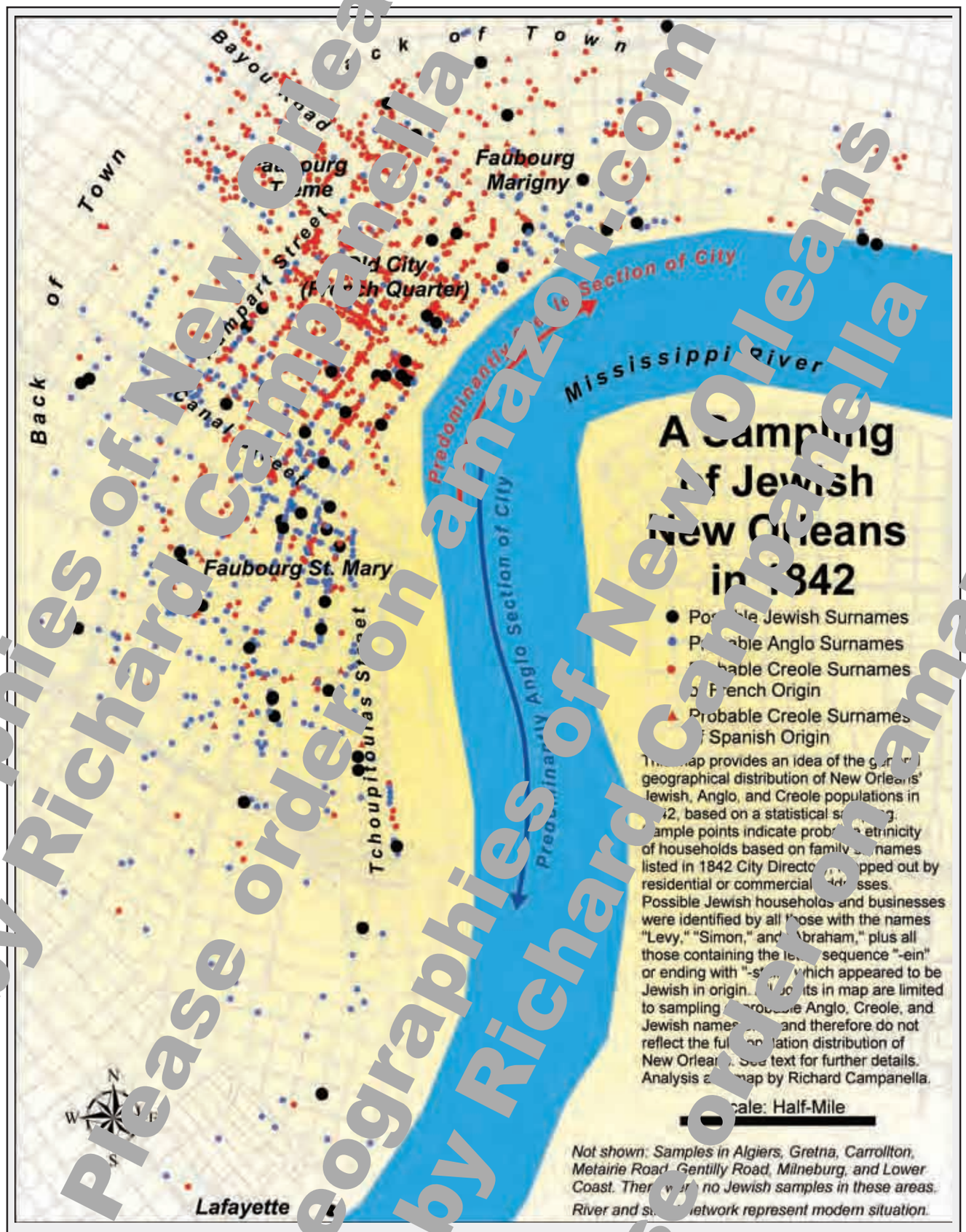
[236] J. Hanno Deiler, *The Settlement of the German Coast of Louisiana and The Creoles of German Descent* (Philadelphia, 1909), 21.

[237] Benjamin Kaplan, *The Eternal Stranger: A Study of Jewish Life in the Small Community* (New York, 1957), 39-40. See also Louisiana Historical Records Survey, *Inventory of the Church and Synagogue Archives of Louisiana: Jewish Congregations and Organizations* (Baton Rouge, 1941), 1-2.

[238] Bertram Wallace Korn, *The Early Jews of New Orleans* (Waltham, 1969), 22.

[239] Irwin Laughlin, "A Historical Introduction," in *Jews of New Orleans: An Archival Guide*, ed. Walter Sullivan (New Orleans, 1998), 12. The most prominent among these early Jewish immigrants was Judah Touro, a Sephardic Jew born in Newport, Rhode Island, who arrived in New Orleans in 1802 by way of Havana, fought in the Battle of New Orleans, and eventually made his millions as a commission merchant. His philanthropy later in life still benefits New Orleans today.

[240] Korn, *The Early Jews of New Orleans*, 209-11.



Early Jewish settlement in New Orleans favored the more Americanized areas of the upper French Quarter and upriver districts. This map shows that of fifty-five probable Jewish surnames found in the 1842 city directory, 71 percent resided above the *Place d'Armes* in the central French Quarter. The city's first Jewish congregation, Gates of Mercy (1828), first worshipped on Toulouse Street and later built a synagogue at 420 North Rampart, both located within the more Americanized upper French Quarter. *Map and analysis by author.*

ed in 1824 by twelve men, but the evidence to sustain it may simply represent a misprint.[241] Most sources credit the effort of 1827-1828, when the visiting New York Jacob da Silva Solis founded the Congregation Shangarai Hassed (Gates of Mercy) by state charter, as the first permanent Jewish congregation in New Orleans and outside the original thirteen colonies. Although this congregation, predecessor of today's Touro Synagogue, comprised members mostly of Ashkenazic background, it nevertheless practiced Portuguese rituals in its services (as dictated by its by-laws, written in English and French) and generally reflected Sephardic culture, perhaps in deference to the local French Judaic environment.[242] Gates of Mercy struggled in its first few years in the Crescent City, with scant membership, no rabbi, no forum, and an upper room on Toulouse Street as a place of worship.[243] Rural backswamp land for the city's first Jewish burial ground, the original Hebrew Rest Cemetery at Jackson and South White, was also acquired in the year 1828.[244]

An analysis of the officers and members of the original Gates of Mercy congregation (1828) sheds light on the commercial activity and ethnic geography of this community. The city directory contained entries for sixteen of the thirty-four names; assuming these entries were indeed the men of the congregation, several patterns emerge for the early 1830s:

- 79 percent (eleven of the fourteen whose occupation was listed) operated retail stores. The others included a carpenter, a ship broker, and a surgeon-dentist.
- 64 percent were specifically involved in the dry-goods and/or soft goods (clothing and hats) trade.
- 81 percent of the sixteen men worked (and possibly lived) in the old city, but mostly in its upper blocks, particularly Levee and New Levee Streets (present-day Decatur and North Peter), where eight members operated dry goods and clothing stores, some of them adjacent to each other. Only one—the ship broker—worked in the predominately Creole, lower part of the old city, on 17 Main (that is, Dumaine Street) close to the river.[245]

Research from later in the antebellum era generally corroborates these findings. Western historian Elliott Ashkenazi, "of the approximately 240 Jewish business firms...identified in New Orleans between 1841 and the Civil War, more than 50 percent traded in clothing or dry goods. Jews also sold jewelry, tobacco, and fancy imported goods [while others] became cotton merchants or general commission merchants supplying several items at the wholesale level to urban and rural customers." Geographically, "Jewish businesses in New Orleans tended to concentrate near one another,"[246] be they in pushcarts or stalls near the levee or in shops along Chartres Street, which Ashkenazi determined to have the most Jewish businesses. One significant Jewish-owned enterprise on Chartres was Benjamin Levy's printing and publishing operation, which played an important role in distributing literature and business news to the city and in helping form something of a "newspaper district" on Chartres Street.[247] More prosperous Jews lived and worked on the Faubourg St. Mary streets of Camp, Magazine, and Tchoupitoulas. Comparing these patterns to those of Anglos and Creoles suggests trend markers: Jews generally settled in the upper, more American-dominated section of the city. The map, *A Sampling of Jewish New Orleans in 1842*, shows that of forty-five probable Jewish surnames found in the 1842 City Directory, thirty-nine resided above the *Place d'Arms* (now Jackson Square in the central French Quarter) and only sixteen resided below it.[248] But Jewish households could be found throughout New Orleans, including the lower city, for a long time. In 1808, for example, the Abrahams family owned a parcel on the corner of present-day Chartres and St. Philip on the Creole side of the city, with likely Creole neighbors named Alpuente, Laville-boeuf, Fortier, and Landreaux. Possible Jewish surnames such as Benjamin and Simon owned other old-city parcels that year.[249] The English traveler G.W. Featherstonhaugh noted during his 1835 visit, in the typically caustic terms of the day, "a few anxious Jewish-looking faces going up and down the narrow streets" of the Creole part of town, "looking at you inquiringly, as if they would willingly transact some sort of business with you."[250] An 1843 account of Madison Street, near the market in the Creole area, described it as "a sort of Congress of Nations," where you would find

> a Swiss clockmaker...a French tailor...a Spanish harness maker...a store of a Jew peddler...a Dutch knife grinder...a negro barber...then to a French restaurant, where professional musicians and others eat *gombo*....[251]

Oakey Hall (1847) described among the peddlers approaching docked steamboats, the "Yankee with his curious knick-knacks," and "the Jew...with his hundred-bladed penknives, sponges, and metallic pencils."[252]

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[241] Legend holds that a *Minyan* (quorum) of Sephardic Jews formed in New Orleans as early as 1775-1780. Bertram Wallace Korn dismissed all of this for lack of documentary evidence, suggesting that the supposed 1824 congregation was probably a misprint or a slip of the pen on the part of Rabbi James K. Gutheim in 1850. Ibid., 192; Julian B. Feibelman, *A Social and Economic Study of the New Orleans Jewish Community* (Philadelphia, 1941), 70; W.E. Myers, *The Israelites of Louisiana* (New Orleans, 1926), 7.

[242] Korn, *The Early Jews of New Orleans*, 197.

[243] Lachoff, "A Historical Introduction," 14.

[244] This below-ground graveyard, later named Gates of Mercy Congregation Cemetery, was relocated in 1957 to present-day Hebrew Rest Cemetery on Elysian Fields in Gentilly. Kaplan, *The Eternal Stranger: A Study of Jewish Life in the Small Community*, 40.

[245] Gates of Mercy founding officers and members from Korn, *The Early Jews of New Orleans*, 197-98. Analysis by author using primarily the New Orleans City Directory of 1832; one name was found in the New Orleans City Directory of 1822.

[246] Elliott Ashkenazi, *The Business Jews in Louisiana, 1840-1875* (Tuscaloosa and London, 1988), 13.

[247] Richard Campanella, *Time and Place in New Orleans: Past Geographies in the Present Day* (Gretna, 2002), 147-54.

[248] Sampling by author using surnames of *Levy*, *Simon*, *Abraham*, plus all those containing *–ein* which appear Jewish, as listed in the City Directory of 1842.

[249] Gilbert J. Pilié, *Plan de la Ville de la Nouvelle Orléans Avec les noms des proprietaires*, New Orleans, August 1, 1808.

[250] G.W. Featherstonhaugh, *Excursion Through the Slave States, From Washington on the Potomac to the Frontier of Mexico* (New York, 1968), 140.

[251] "A Kaleidoscopic View of New Orleans," *Daily Picayune*, September 23, 1843, p. 2, col. 3.

[252] A. Oakey Hall, *The Manhattaner in New Orleans; or Phases of "Crescent City" Life* (New York, 1851), 175.

Jewish Enclaves in Downtown and Uptown, circa 1850

Political instability in central Europe led to America's trickle of Germanic peoples from various cities and states, starting in 1818 and increasing dramatically from the 1830s to the Civil War. Most German immigrants disembarked at major ports of the Mid-Atlantic states, but many sailed further toward the fine agricultural lands of the Mississippi Valley, landing first at New Orleans, through which passed 255,718 Germans (recorded) between 1831 and 1859.[253] Roughly one in five who disembarked at New Orleans settled there, forming a German-born community numbering up to 7,000 by the 1840s and around 9,000 by the Civil War. Among them was a small percentage of Ashkenazic Jews from rural agricultural areas in Bavaria, Alsace, and neighboring regions. The exact percentage is unknown, but estimates of the Jewish population in antebellum New Orleans range from 125 families in 1843, to 1,000 "aggregate accommodations of Jewish churches" in 1850, to 1,250 "accommodations" in 1860.[254] Making some loose assumptions, we may estimate that perhaps 10 percent of New Orleans' German immigrants were Ashkenazic Jews of German ethnicity.

Enthusiastic participation by these recently arrived German Ashkenazics in the older, Sephardic-tradition Gates of Mercy congregation led to the replacement of its Portuguese customs with German ones, and the tightening of its mild by-laws with strict religious interpretations. A division developed between the two groups. In the 1840s, the Sephardic-tradition faithful abandoned their effort "to unite all members of the community into a Sephardic Congregation"[255] and broke off to found their own Congregation Nefutsoth Yehudah (Dispersed of Judah, 1846), leaving Gates of Mercy to the new German Ashkenazics. Judah Touro, the famed self-made millionaire and philanthropist, helped ensure the future of the Dispersed of Judah when he donated to it the former Second Christ Church,[256] a prominent temple commanding the centrally located corner of Canal and Bourbon streets. This became New Orleans' first dedicated synagogue (1847), but it soon proved too small for the growing congregation, which built a larger temple of similar design (incorporating architectural elements of the predecessor) on Carondelet between Julia and St. Joseph in 1854–57, with monies bequeathed by Touro.[257] The location of these two community focal points reiterate that this segment of the Jewish community generally resided and worked in the upper French Quarter and Faubourg St. Mary. Still, their total numbers were very small and the population density of this area was high, so by no means could this community nor any for the next half-century be accurately characterized as forming a "Jewish neighborhood."

Meanwhile, the more recent wave of German Ashkenazic immigrants, many Bavarian and Alsatian, began to establish a presence in uptown and in the Jefferson Parish city of Lafayette (present-day Lower Garden District, Irish Channel, and Garden District), culturally and geographically apart from the Dispersed of Judah and Gates of Mercy. What attracted immigrants in general to the semi-rural upriver outskirts were the unskilled work opportunities afforded by the flatboat and steamboat traffic landing at the levee (as opposed to the New Orleans riverfront, which handled international trade). These interior vessels brought livestock, grains, lumber, coal, and other agricultural and raw materials to Lafayette's wharves, requiring handling and processing—primarily butchering and tanning—and thus providing employment.[258] These sprawling, malodorous, shipping-dependent activities needed to be on the outskirts of town and by the river, and were as dependent on low-priced real estate as were poor immigrants for their housing. Thousands of laborers in turn created demand for local merchants, grocers, peddlers, tailors, butchers, and other professions traditionally associated with the

[253] A.A. Conway, "New Orleans as a Port of Immigration, 1820–1860" (M.A. thesis, University of London, 1949), Appendix C.

[254] "United States Historical Census Data Browser," University of Virginia Geospatial and Statistical Data Center, http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/census (accessed 1998).

The footprint of Jackson Avenue was home to a small but tightly knit community of Ashkenazic Jewish immigrants in the 1840s and 1850s, when the great wave of German immigration arrived to New Orleans and settled in what was then known as Lafayette. Most moved uptown forty or fifty years later. Attesting to their former presence on Jackson Avenue is the Gates of Prayer congregation's now-empty Lafayette Hall, built between 1857 and 1867 and now the oldest surviving major structural landmark of Jewish New Orleans. *Photograph by author, 2004.*

[255] Hirschbelman, *A Social and Economic Study of the New Orleans Jewish Community*, 71.

[256] The Second Christ Church was a massive Greek Ionic-style temple designed by James Gallier and Charles Dakin and built in 1835-1837. Protestants worshipped there until Judah Touro acquired and donated the structure to the Dispersed of Judah in 1847. The synagogue was soon demolished to make way for Touro Row, twelve three-level stores built during the 1850s. A few units survive at the Royal Street end of the block. Friends of the Cabildo, *New Orleans Architecture,* 8 vols. (Gretna, 1972), 2:22-23.

[257] The Louisiana Historical Records Survey states that business encroachment forced the relocation of the synagogue at Canal and Bourbon, a reasonable explanation given the booming commercial activity on Canal Street in the 1850s. "Part of the façade, the columns and statues, were moved from the original site for use in the new building," constructed starting in May 1856 and dedicated in April 1857. Louisiana Historical Records Survey, *Inventory of the Church and Synagogue Archives*, 21.

[258] Bobbie Malone, "New Orleans Uptown Jewish Immigrants: The Community of Congregation Gates of Prayer, 1850-1860," *Louisiana History* 8 (Summer 1991): 243.

Jewish community. The gravitation to this area of Irish and German immigrants, including Jews among the Germans, was natural.[259] As early as the mid-1830s a *Chevra* (society) was formed in Lafayette by these newcomers, though further documented organizational efforts would not occur until the late 1840s.[260] In 1849 or 1850, the Ashkenazics founded the Jewish Benevolent Society of Louisiana and the Congregation Shangarai Tefiloh (Gates of Prayer, January 1851), and bought land on the rural outskirts (present-day Joseph Street) for their cemetery.

Immigrants were also attracted to the Faubourg Marigny, at the opposite end of town, for the same reasons that made Lafayette appealing. Germans, among them a small percentage of Jews, settled in the old Creole neighborhood starting in the 1830s, when the area became the city's Third Municipality through the system adopted in 1836. The *Daily Orleanian*, the newspaper of this multiethnic area, spoke of Third Municipality aldermen who might be "Creoles or Anglo-Saxons, Celts or Hebrews...."[261] Yet Jewish institutions were lacking from this Creole area, indicating that the Jewish population, while present, was small, scattered, and not organized. The map, *A Sampling of Jewish New Orleans in 1842*, shows a relatively small but not inconsiderable number of probable Jewish names residing and working in the predominantly Creole lower city. A number of hypotheses might explain this apparent Jewish avoidance of lower New Orleans. If indeed this is the case. On the "pull" side, many Jews were immigrants from other American cities and naturally settled among other Americans, who predominated uptown. Many were English-speakers. Where they were French-speakers, all gravitated to those blocks where English tongues and English signs proliferated. For well-established Jews, most commercial activity—the banks of lower Royal Street, the retailers and publishers of Chartres Street, the professional offices of Gravier Street—transpired in these same upper areas, drawing Jewish merchants and businessmen to the busiest part of the inner city. For recently arrived, poorer Jews, Lafayette's large immigrant population and wharf-side economy offered more opportunities for retailing, skilled professions, and other traditional Jewish-specialty trades than did the lower city. On the "push" side, many Jewish newcomers, might have avoided this Creole side of town for its provincial Old World culture, French language, and relative lack of economic development (the Third Municipality was known as the "Poor Third"). Creoles, on their part, deriving from the same colonial-era influences which produced the *Code Noir*, may not have been as accepting of Jewish neighbors and business competitors as those on the more cosmopolitan American side of town, though this is certainly subject to debate. Largely absent from the lower city, Jews in antebellum New Orleans thus formed two scattered, low-density concentrations: the older, established Sephardic and Ashkenazic community in downtown (the upper French Quarter and lower Faubourg St. Mary), and the recently arrived Ashkenazims in uptown (upper Faubourg St. Mary and Lafayette). To this day Jewish institutions of both the past and present are almost entirely lacking from the lower, eastern half of the metropolitan area.

The uptown Ashkenazic community, comprising recent working-class immigrants of limited means, attempted to consolidate with the "Ashkenazicized" Gates of Mercy congregation, sharing as they did a German heritage and language. But Gates of Mercy members, longer established and socially and economically more secure than the uptown immigrants, responded with silence.[262] Snubbing of newcomers by established peoples of similar origins is a common phenomenon, reflecting at times the latter's insecurity or sense of threat by the "less-educated masses who might fan the flames of the ever-present nativism."[263] The resultant reflected "the gulf separating Downtown and Uptown Jews"[264] in the late antebellum era; a similar downtown/uptown ethnic-geographical gulf would form later, though with different ethnic components, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Gates of Mercy did, however, respond to the Dispersion of Judah's new synagogue, its building and dedicating its own new house of worship on a lot on North Rampart Street between Conti and St. Louis (present-day 410-420 North Rampart), in 1851 (known as the *Deutsche Shule* ("German

[259] A sampling of the 1850 Jefferson Parish census revealed Lafayette society was about 40 percent German-born, 20 percent American-born, 9 percent Irish-born, 9 percent French-born, 7 percent Creole (Louisiana born), and 6 percent other immigrants thus comprised nearly three-fourths of Lafayette's population; German immigrants formed the largest group in all five of Lafayette's wards. John Leslie Kolp, "Suburbanization in Uptown New Orleans. Lafayette City, 1833-1852" (M.A. thesis, University of New Orleans, 1975), 80.

[260] Myers, *The Israelites of Louisiana*, 42.

[261] *Daily Orleanian*, May 2, 1849, p. 2, col. 1.

[262] Lachoff, "A Historical Perspective," 16.

[263] Malone, "New Orleans Uptown Jewish Immigrants," 246.

[264] Ibid., 247.

Gates of Mercy purchased a small building on North Rampart Street between St. Louis and Conti for $4,200 in 1845 and converted it to a synagogue. This structure, displaced by 1851, was identified as "the first permanent Jewish house of worship in the State of Louisiana" on a commemorative plaque recently erected by the Jewish American Society for Historical Preservation. The 1850 city directory records two synagogues at "Hebrew (German) Rampart, [between] St. Louis and Conti," and "Hebrew (Portuguese) [corner of] Canal and Bourbon." *Cohen's New Orleans and*

Diagonally across from the Lafayette Shul was the home for the Association for the Relief of Jewish Widows, Orphans, and Half-Orphans (1855-1859), the first Jewish orphanage in the nation, on Jackson Avenue at Chippewa. It relocated uptown in the 1880s. *Southeastern Architectural Archive, Special Collections, Howard-Tilton Library, Tulane University.*

Synagogue"), Gates of Mercy's new home was an impressive old-city landmark with Corinthian columns and two Byzantine steeples towering over humble Creole cottages and classic French Quarter townhouses—a picturesque example of ethnic diversity manifested in architecture. The location of this new synagogue further testifies to the geography of the older New Orleans Jewish population.

Physical landmarks of the uptown Ashkenazic Gates of Prayer congregation arose in the 1850s throughout the modern-day neighborhoods of the Lower Garden District and Irish Channel. These community focal points, now mostly gone, included a benevolent society at Washington and Constance, later at Fifth and Chippewa; a rented store at Seventh and Tchoupitoulas used for services; and the first purchased property and wooden school at Fulton and St. Mary, used as a synagogue starting in 1855. A home for the Association for the Relief of Jewish Widows, Orphans, and Half-Orphans—the first Jewish orphanage in the nation—was built on Jackson and Chippewa in 1855-1856, just before a larger synagogue known as the Lafayette Shul and later the Jackson Avenue Shul, was built diagonally across the intersection in 1857-1860.[265] The reasons for the clustering of Jewish institutions in Lafayette were threefold. First and foremost was the aforementioned attraction of German immigrants to this area. Second, the social and economic gulf between the Lafayette immigrant Jews and the established Jewish community downtown led the immigrants to create their own cultural environment (a benevolent society, a burial ground, synagogues, schools, orphanages, etc.) locally. Third and relatedly, the geographical distance between Lafayette and the downtown Jewish population encouraged the creation of conveniently located institutions. Land for a new Lafayette synagogue (eventually Gates of Prayer), for example, was originally sought in 1848 by "forty families who were formerly *compelled to attend a synagogue in New Orleans, at a distance of two miles from the center of Lafayette.*"[267] The streetcar spur on Jackson Avenue connecting with the New Orleans & Carrollton Rail Road and leading into the city was of no use to those Lafayette Jews who refrained from using mechanized transportation on the Sabbath. The tendency of local Jews to organize within political demarcations such as city limits and municipal districts was also noted in the circa-1905 *The Israelites of Louisiana*: "New Orleans, even eighty years ago, had its lines of demarcation [within which special *Minyanim* [quorums] were organized, each in turn becoming later the nucleus of the congregations. Among the venerable Israelites of the city, reminiscences are treasured of the 'Old Lafayette,' as the upper district of that era in and about Jackson Avenue was denominated."[268] The cluster of Jewish institutions at the foot of Jackson Avenue was accompanied by a concentration of Gates of Prayer members' businesses along streets such as Tchoupitoulas and New Levee.[269]

Not all Jewish immigrants settled in the Lafayette area. The 1850s saw the arrival of some Prussian Ashkenazic Jews from eastern Germany and western Poland, who established the Congregation Temime Derech (Right Way) in 1857, and bought land and built a synagogue on Carondelet and Lafayette Street, behind City Hall at the time. Right Way, known colloquially as "the Polish group," remained downtown until it disbanded in 1903; the synagogue was demolished for an extension of City Hall, and many former members later joined Congregation Beth Israel.[270] For reasons that are partly coincidental, Carondelet Street, from Canal Street to Louisiana Avenue, was the address for a large number of significant Jewish landmarks, from the 1850s to the present.

Aside: Jewish Populations in America, Louisiana, and New Orleans

Approximately 150,000 Jewish people lived in the United States in 1860. Of them, about 33,200, or 22 percent, lived in the South and border states. As large as this percentage may seem, one source estimates that, forty years earlier, about *half* of American Jews lived in the South, roughly 1,350 to 2,500 people. Louisiana in 1860 was home to far more Jews (6,730) than any other Southern or border state. Maryland was second with 5,000 and all others had between 1,000 and 3,000 each.[271] Within Louisiana, New Orleans undoubtedly had the largest population that year, at least 1,250 religiously active individuals but probably less than the 4,000-5,000 total population estimated by one researcher.[272] The disproportionately high concentration of Jews in Louisiana and then in New Orleans suggests that the state and city offered certain attractive attributes to Jewish immigrants. In the case of the state, it may have been the high number of tiny towns and settlements, creating numerous opportunities for a favorite Jewish line of business: shop-keeping.[273] Or it may have been the availability of arable land. In the case of the city, it was probably the myriad economic opportunities spawned by a robust shipping-based economy. The cosmopolitan, tolerant atmosphere of this highly multicultural city also played a role.

Estimations of the Jewish population of the United States and of New Orleans over time vary widely, because of intermarriage, congregational inactivity, conversion, and the lack of consistent census data on religion affiliation (questions relating to religion are not asked in modern censuses.)

Lafayette Directory for 1850, 197; Louisiana Historical Records Survey, *Inventory of Church and Synagogue Archives*, 19.

[266] Ibid., 24-25; Lachoff, "A Historical Introduction," 16-17; and Joseph Magner, *The Story of the Jewish Orphans Home of New Orleans* (New Orleans, 1905), 13.

[267] As quoted in Rabbi Max Heller, *Jubilee Souvenir of Temple Sinai, 1872-1922* (New Orleans, 1922), 6 (emphasis added).

[268] Myers, *The Israelites of Louisiana*, 42.

[269] Malone, "New Orleans Uptown Jewish Immigrants," 244, 261 and 275-77.

[270] Louisiana Historical Records Survey, *Inventory of Church and Synagogue Archives*, 27-28.

[271] Data summarized from a number of sources cited in Ashkenazi, *The Business of Jews in Louisiana, 1840-1875*, 8-13.

[272] Malone, "New Orleans Uptown Jewish Immigrants," 242.

[273] Ashkenazi, *The Business of Jews in Louisiana, 1840-1875*, 11.

Following are estimates from various official and secondary sources:

Estimates of the Jewish Population of the United States		Estimates of the Jewish Population of New Orleans	
Colonial	~1000	Colonial	Probably <50
1818	3,000	[illegible]	125 families
1824	6,000	1850	[illegible]
1840	15,000	[illegible]54	2,[illegible]**
1850	50,000	1860	[illegible]0*
1860	150,000	1870	[illegible],950*
1880	230,000	1890	2,750***
1897	937,[illegible]	1906	935 families
1905	1,[illegible]	1916	2,653
1907	1,77[illegible]	19[illegible]	9,000
1914	2,933,374	[illegible]	8,700
1917	[illegible],000	19[illegible]8	6,472
2000-2002	[illegible]200,000 [illegible]141,325	[illegible]53	9,100
		2002	13,000****

National estimates from Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Religious Bodies 1916: Part II*, [illegible]0. See also Ashkenazi, *Business [illegible] in Louisiana, 1840-1875*, 9; [illegible], "Jewish Life in New Orleans, [illegible]8-1860," 11[illegible], and United Jewish Communities, viii. City estimates based on [illegible]0 and 18[illegible] Census; U.S. Department of Commerce-Bureau of the Census *Religious Bodies* statistics from 1916, 1926, and 1936; Feibelman, *A Social and Economic Study of the New Orleans Jewish Community*, 71; and Benjamin Goldman's research from 195[illegible], as quoted in Lachoff, "A Historical Introduction," 30.
*These figures represent "accommodations," or seating capacity of existing synagogues. **Magi[illegible], *Story of the Jewis Orphans Home of New Orleans*, 5. ***Stern, "Origins of Reform Judaism in New Orleans," 108. ****Figure for greater New Orleans quoted from Bruce Nolan, "N.O. Catholic Membership Falls," *Times-Picayune*, September 28, 2002.

Reformism in New Orleans

Around the time of the Civil War, a new bifurcation developed in the New Orleans Jewish community, reflecting an international Reformist movement among German Jews that gained popularity in America during the mid-nineteenth century.[274] In 1861, an ordained Orthodox rabbi—the first in a community known for its lax interpretation of Jewish law—by the name of Dr. Bernard Illoway lectured the Gates of Mercy congregation on the righteousness of Orthodoxy over the Reform movement. "Ironically," wrote Irwin Lachoff, "these sermons made New Orleans Jews aware of the possibility of reforming the traditional practices and became the catalyst for the creation of a Reform temple in the city."[275] In response, the Rev. James Koppel Gutheim, spiritual leader of the Gates of Mercy in the early 1850s, founded the city's first Reform congregation, Temple Sinai (1870), consisting of many Gates of Mercy members. With the "cultivation and spread of enlightened religious sentiment"[276] as its mission, Temple Sinai bought a lot on Carondelet Street (near its present-day intersection with the Pontchartrain Expressway) in 1871, and had a magnificent new temple erected upon it. Temple Sinai cost $104,000, seated 1,500 people, boasted a $6,000 organ and one thousand gas jets for illumination, and broke the skyline with twin 115-foot-high towers of Roman-Byzantine style and two-tone striped decoration visible throughout the city. When it was completed in 1872, it was the most prominent Jewish landmark the mostly Catholic city had ever known.[277] Practically every photograph of the Lee Circle area from the 1870s to the 1970s could not help but include the Temple Sinai.

The Civil War, summertime yellow fever epidemics, and the Panic of 1873 beleaguered both the German-congregation Gates of Mercy and the Portuguese-congregation Dispersed of Judah. As both groups traced their heritage back to the original 1828 Gates of Mercy, the suggestion was made in 1878 that the two congregations merge. The amalgamation was at first rejected but finally accepted and effected in 1881, incorporating as the Shangarai Chassed Linfuzoth Yehudah (Gates of Mercy of the Dispersed of Judah) and meeting at the older congregation's circa-1854 synagogue on Carondelet near [illegible]. The union rendered surplus Gates of Mercy's *Deutsche Shule* on North Rampart Street in the old city, which was sold off in [illegible], used by the Troy Laundry Company at the turn-of-the-century, and demolished thereafter. The new amalgamated congregation soon adopted the present-day name of Touro Synagogue, though this did not become official until 19[illegible]7.[278]

Orthodoxy in New Orleans

Just as the Ashkenazic immigrants diversified the mostly Sephardic-tradition Jewish community of New Orleans in the early nineteenth century, a new trend developed in the late 1800s that would counter the Reform movement and render more complex New Orleans' ethnic and religious mosaic. Though immigration was low in the post-war years, a steady number of mostly Orthodox, Eastern European Jews (primarily Russians and Poles) arrived to the Crescent City, and, wanting no part of Reform, organized their own Orthodox congregations. Polish Jews predominated in the founding of the Society of Men for the Glory of Israel (1871), which rented quarters in the [illegible]00 block of Carondelet; Baltic-region Jews were among those who organized the Society for the Hope of Israel (1864), meeting variously at two addresses on Carondelet and one on Dryades Street. The Society of the Psalms organized in 1875 and congregated near the Poydras Street Market, where many worked. Russian, Polish, and Galacian Jews formed the United Brotherhood of the Sephardic Rite (Anshe Sfard) in 1896 and met at 209 South Rampart,

[274] Feibelman, *A Social and Economic Study of the New Orleans Jewish Community*, 64.
[275] Lachoff, "A Historical Introduction," 18.
[276] As quoted in Louisiana Historical Records Survey, *Inventory of Church and Synagogue Archives*, 3[illegible].
[277] Ibid., 36.
[278] Ibid., 22, and Lachoff, "A Historical Introduction," 19.

then South Rampart at Julia, and later at 13[illegible] South Rampart.[279] These and other Orthodox Jews from eastern Europe comprised about one-quarter to one-third of New Orleans Jewry in the turn-of-the-century era; culturally and economically, they contrasted with the established reform community, of which German Ashkenazics were the majority. In 1890, roughly 550 Orthodox Jewish communicants worshipped in seven small congregations with a total property value of $20,000, while 2,200 Reformists worshipped in two massive congregations (Temple Sinai and Touro Synagogue) valued at $215,000.[280] As is often the case in the strained relations between established communities and immigrant brethren, elements within the older German Jewish community dissuaded eastern European Jewish immigration to the city, and as a result, fewer came to New Orleans than did to other American cities in the early twentieth century. Those who did "remained unorganized and unheard among the city's population,"[281] scattered among smaller congregations. In 1904, a number of Orthodox groups merged as the Congregation Beth Israel (House of Israel), which acquired the home of former Mayor Joseph Shakespeare at 1616 Carondelet and converted it to a place of worship serving 175 families by 1908. Around this time, another Orthodox congregation, Anshe Sfard, also moved to the area—1300 South Rampart—"reflecting the concentration of East Europeans in the Dryades Street neighborhood. This area, roughly bound by St. Charles Avenue, Claiborne Avenue, Julia Street, and First Street, became the focus of such [a] settlement when small merchants and peddlers began moving uptown, out of the Poydras Market area (Poydras and Dryades streets) around 1890."[282]

Dryades Street Neighborhood and the New Downtown/Uptown Enclaves

Dryades Street near the Melpomene intersection emerged from a semi-rural state in the 1840s, particularly after the influential Irish businessman Patrick Irwin opened the Dryades Street Market in January 1849. "The erection of the proposed market in the Second Ward will...prove highly advantageous to our up-town population, and largely increase the value of property in the vicinity," predicted the *Daily Picayune*.[283] With the market in place, the Melpomene Canal (which flowed under the market) draining off surface water, and churches and schools constructed in the 1850s, the Dryades Street area was deemed by the 1860s "an agreeable dwelling place" and socially, morally and religiously a desirable portion of the city."[284] A retail community started forming on Dryades Street in the 1850s and was long established by 1903, when merchants, most of them Jewish, took out a full-page ad in the *States* to promote their businesses:

> Lined along both sides of Dryades street from Clio to Philip streets, is a succession of stores where every article of necessity or luxury may be found in great profusion. Indeed, no part of the city offers a wider opportunity for the supply of every desire, from the palatial establishment of the Chas. A. Kaufman Company to the unpretentious little store of the humble trader, all cater for trade and invite the public to become their guests.[285]

In that charming Victorian diction, the advertisement introduced a litany of Jewish merchants: Hochstein, "the popular young grocer;" Bauman, the jeweler; Eldburn, "one of the most polite men you ever met;" Silverstein and his china and glass shop; Schimofskey, the furniture dealer; Hunsinger's game and poultry stall in the market; and Kaufman's, "the greatest place on the street," where shoppers were gently warned that "it would be well not to leave your purchase until the great [Christmas] rush is on."[286] Despite the preponderance of Jewish names in the Dryades Street business district, a thorough ethnic mixture prevailed on Dryades and in the surrounding neighborhood. Next door to Jewish retailers in the heart of the commercial strip stood, in the late nineteenth century, St. Mary's Dominican Convent, the Christian Brother's College, St. John's Parochial School, and the German Presbyterian Church.[287] Thousands of poor blacks, many of them emigrants from Louisiana plantations following emancipation, settled on the "woods side" of the street. Dryades became the number-two retail district in the city, behind only Canal, and the number-one street for black shoppers.

Jewish-owned shops could be found not just on Dryades but along nearby South Rampart Street (described in the 1930s as "the Harlem of New Orleans"[288]), where a string of tailors, jewelers, and other racially integrated businesses served a predominantly black clientele. Representative of this Orthodox Jewish-owned integrated commercial presence was Karnofsky's Music Store at 427 South Rampart, where a young Louis Armstrong worked in 1908 and which, later as Mohawk Music, became "the first major music store catering to African-Americans."[289] Racial composition maps made by the WPA in the 1930s show that Jewish retailing along South Rampart and Dryades formed a commercial interface between the white front-of-town (including the CBD and residential areas) and the black residential back-of-town. Dryades Street

[279] Louisiana Historical Records Survey, *Inventory of Church and Synagogue Archives*, 52; and Lachoff, "Historical Introduction," 20.

[280] Harriet Kohn Stern, "Origins of Reform Judaism in New Orleans" (M.A. thesis, Univrsity of Texas, 1977), 108, based on surveys conducted by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations for the 1890 census.

[281] Lachoff, "A Historical Introduction," 23.

[282] Ibid., 24.

[283] "Opening of the Dryades Street Market," *Daily Picayune*, January 11, 1849, p. 2, col. 6.

[284] "Melpomenia is looking up," *New Orleans Times*, April 3, 1866, p. 2, col. 4.

[285] "Dryades St. and Market," *Sunday States (New Orleans States)*, December 20, 1903, p. 20.

[286] Ibid., 20- 21. Roughly [illegible] names in the Dryades Street advertisements accompanying this article were of probable Jewish heritage.

[287] Elisha Robinson and Joseph H. Pidgeon, *Robinson's Atlas of the City of New Orleans, Louisiana* (New York, 1883), Plate 3, "Part of 1st Dist., New Orleans."

[288] Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration, *New Orleans City Guide* (Boston, 1938), 343.

[289] Greg Thomas, "Sharing the Music," *Times-Picayune*, December 29, 2002, Money section, p. 1.

itself formed an integrated retail district for African Americans living almost exclusively behind Dryades, and for ethnic whites living almost as exclusively riverside of Dryades.[290] It was this latter section, loosely known as the "Dryades Street neighborhood," that became New Orleans' only universally recognized "Jewish neighborhood." The WPA New Orleans City Guide of 1938 described the point "Carondelet Street, from Jackson to Louisiana Avenue, [as] the street of the Orthodox Jews."[291]

Why did Orthodox Jews live, work, and worship in a more clustered spatial pattern than previous generations of Jews in New Orleans, and why in this particular location? Distinctiveness in terms of ethnicity, language, social and economic status, and religious interpretation largely explains the pattern. That they were not particularly welcome by some established members of the old Reform congregations probably added to the Orthodox clustering tendency.[292] There is also a pragmatic cultural reason explaining the concentration: by religious law, Orthodox Jews cannot ride mechanized transportation to attend synagogue on the Sabbath. They therefore must live within a reasonable walking distance from their

[290] Based on Sam R. Carter, *A Report and Survey of Metropolitan New Orleans Land Use, Real Property, and Low Income Housing Area* (New Orleans, 1941), fold-out maps following page 136. See also African Americans for details.

[291] Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration, *New Orleans City Guide*, 44.

[292] In a piece published in the now-defunct *New Orleans Ethnic Cultures* journal, Nikki Stiller reported that these tensions were alive and well in 1978, when her attempts to include the uptown Jewish community in a discourse on ethnicity in New Orleans were met with "coldness" and "lack of interest." The uptown Jews of "nineteenth century Western European stock," opined Stiller, "have no desire to identify or affiliate themselves with Yiddish-speaking, pushcart-eating, and economically insecure Eastern European Jews" who were settled in the city and in the wilds of Metairie. Though other anecdotal evidence suggests that the tensions were perhaps not quite so strained, the correlation between cultural chasm and the geographical distance once separating the groups is clear. Nikki Stiller, "The New Orleans Jewish Community and the Russian Jews," in *New Orleans Ethnic Mosaic*, ed. John Cooke (New Orleans, 1978), 60-61.

Orthodox Jewish immigrants gravitated to the Dryades area in large part for its municipal market, which provided easy-entry job opportunities and conveniences to working-class immigrants. Opened in 1849, the picturesque Dryades Street Market straddled the Melpomene intersection and was served with streetcar lines connecting with the Magazine Street Market, another source of immigrant employment. The wooden market, shown here in a 1903 newspaper ad and compared to the same place today, was replaced in the early twentieth century with a brick Spanish Revival structure, which still stands (below) on Martin Luther King Boulevard. The market closed around 1950. *Photographs by author, 2003-2004; drawing from the Sunday States, December 20, 1903.*

This detail of a rare aerial photograph captured in the late 1910s, shows Dryades Street as the second thoroughfare from the left, and St. Charles Avenue at right. Notice the circa-1872 Temple Sinai on the block to the left of Lee Circle (upper right), and the Dryades Market at lower left, straddling Melpomene. *Southeastern Architectural Archive, Special Collections, Howard-Tilton Library, Tulane University.*

places of worship, which accordingly must be established within the general residential distribution of their members. But why in the Dryades Street area, and not elsewhere? Several likely factors emerge:

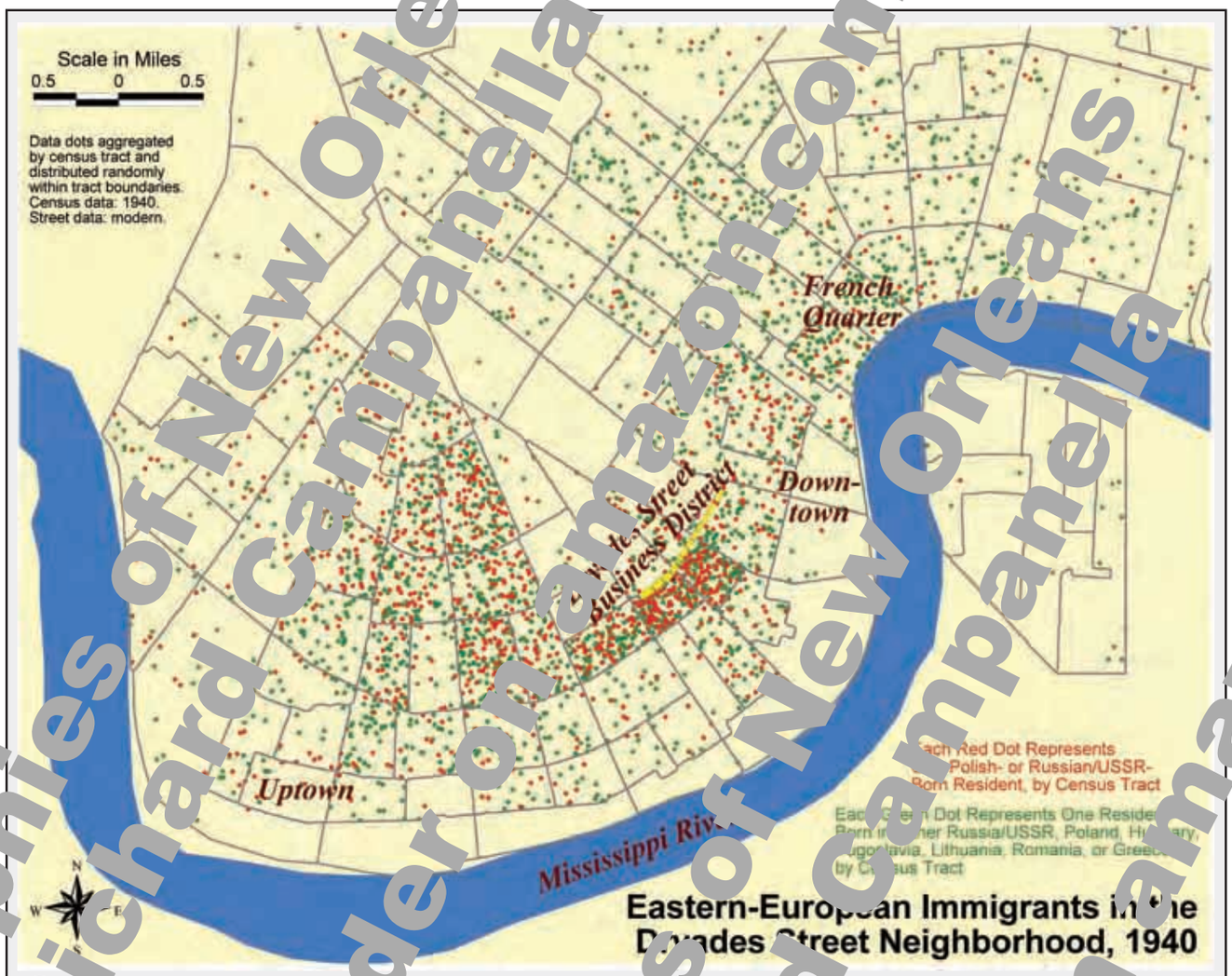
- Many community members originally worked as vendors, peddlers and merchants at the Poydras Market, located in the central ground of Poydras Street between Penn and South Rampart. Through the middle of this market—in fact, directly under its cupola—ran perpendicular Dryades Street, and on parts of it ran a streetcar line communicating with the Dryades Street neighborhood. On Dryades at the Melpomene intersection stood another municipal market, the 3,000-stall Dryades Market, also convenient to the streetcar line and local shoppers and vendors. The Dryades Street line, opened in 1866 and electrified in 1896, provided convenient transportation connection between the residents' neighborhood, workplaces, and shopping destinations.[293]
- The position of Dryades Street (as well South Rampart, closer to the CBD) as an interface between the white front-of-town and the black back-of-town area made to merchants on these corridors a substantial retail clientele on both sides of the racial divide. Jewish merchants, tailors, and jewelers catered in particular to the black community, which was excluded from most of the downtown stores through Jim Crow laws. The development of this source of economic demand by many of New Orleans Jews open a niche for immigrant storekeepers to fill, in the potentially located wherever predominantly black neighborhoods abutted mostly white areas as the Dryades/South Rampart corridor best fit this bill.
- The Dryades Street neighborhood at the turn of the century was a working-class area of functional cottages and frame houses. Rent and land were reasonable, yet accessible to the Central Business District and the job opportunities it afforded. The nuisance of living near the congested CBD was counterbalanced by the convenience. The Dryades Street area thus fell within that hardened working-class commercial-residential zone immediately surrounding the Central Business District ("the immigrant belt:" see chapter, "An Ethnic Geography of New Orleans") alone that was also home to Chinatown, Little Palermo and other ethnic enclaves at the turn of the twentieth century.

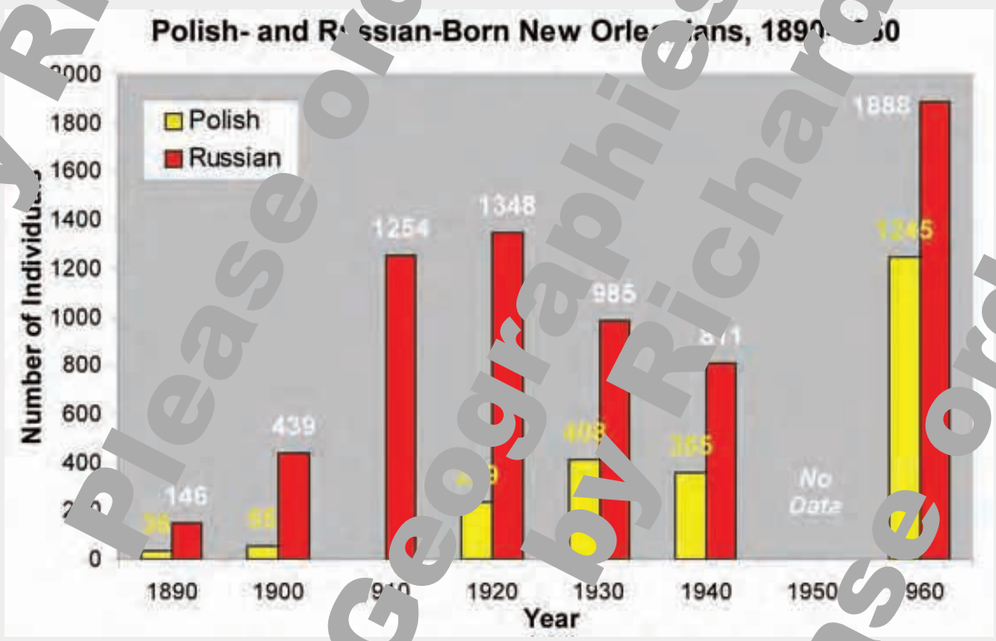
Once a critical mass of Orthodox Jews assembled in the Dryades Street neighborhood and religious institutions arose, more brethren naturally gravitated to the area because of the existing cultural infrastructure. They were joined by Sicilians, Irish, Germans, eastern Europeans, African Americans, and others who worked and dwelled in this exceedingly diverse neighborhood. In 1938, for example, just on the 1400 block of Dryades, Luca DiMaggio sold fruit and Charles Siracusa cut hair next door to Harry Finkelstein's second-hand clothing store and across from Benjamin Goldstein's shoe store. The Barton Kosher Delicatessen was located a few doors from the Masonic Lodge, Albert Silverman's poultry, and the Hibernia Bank's Dryades Street Branch. A block past the Dryades Market (where butchers Joseph Labadot, Jacob Grisoli, Jacob Koretzky, and René Freche offered meats for dinner) was dessert at the Pearlman Bakery, and spirits at Palermo Murphy Liquors.[294] At its post-World War II peak, approximately seven households, twenty institutions, and 200 businesses—stores with names like Kaufman's, Levigne's, Cohen's, and Weiner's, as well as professional offices and market stalls—lined the twelve blocks of Dryades Street from Howard Avenue to Philip Street.[295] The sights, sounds, and

[293] Louis C. Hennick and E. Harper Charlton, *The Streetcars of New Orleans* (Gretna, 2000), 81.

[294] *Polk's New Orleans City Directory 1938* (New Orleans, 1938), 1269-1270.

[295] Data rounded from Ibid., *1947*, 94 of pink section.

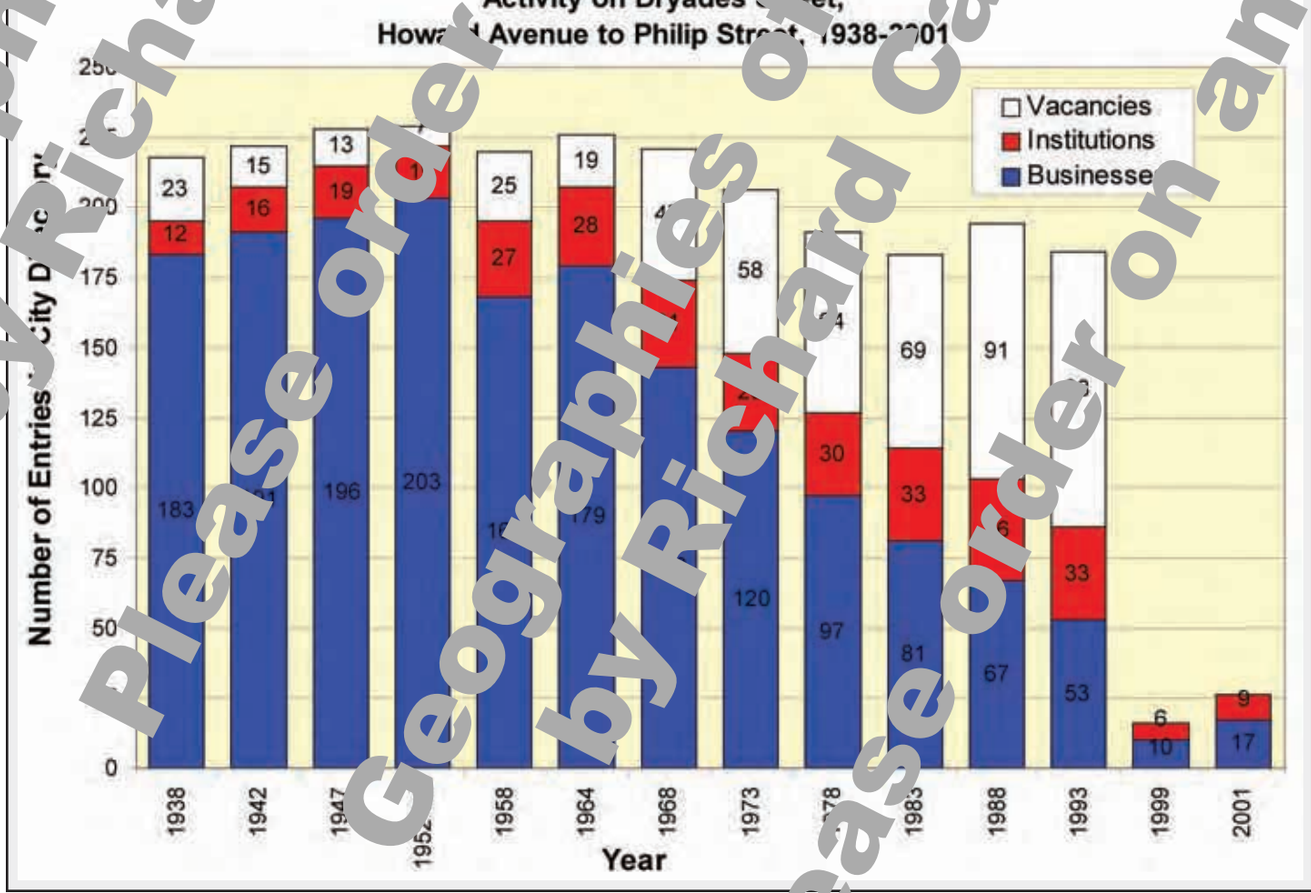




As the Reform community moved uptown in the late 1800s, increasing Orthodox immigration from Russia, Poland, and elsewhere in Eastern Europe arrived and settled downtown, primarily between Dryades Street and St. Charles Avenue, from Howard to Louisiana. The "Dryades Street neighborhood" was highly multiethnic; Orthodox Jews probably comprised about 20 to 25 percent of the population. Many operated businesses on Dryades proper, catering to both black and white customers in the days of segregation. Others ran shops on South Rampart for a similar clientele. *Map, graph, and analysis by author based on 1890-1960 censuses.*

Religious laws helps explain the Dryades Street neighborhood: Orthodox Jews cannot ride mechanized transportation to attend a synagogue on the Sabbath, and therefore must live within walking distance from their places of worship. Shown here are those synagogues, as well as other Jewish institutions and businesses, in 1940, and the same area in 1998, after the suburban exodus radically transformed the area. The Reform community generally does not adhere to this tradition and settled uptown in a more dispersed pattern. *Maps and analysis by author based on 1941 Louisiana Historical Records Survey and 1938 City Directory.*

Social transformations in the 1960s brought an end to the Orthodox Jewish community of Dryades Street. The graph at right tracks Dryades's decline by counting entries in city directories from 1938 to 2001. The maps above show ethnic diversity in the area in 1940 and 2000, based on census data. *Maps, graph, and analysis by author.*



smells of the neighborhood exuded elements of European cities crossed with a New Orleans aesthetic, a community culturally closer to Brooklyn or Manhattan than to Carrollton or Algiers.

As the Orthodox community settled in the Dryades Street area, the Reformists migrated from the "old uptown" of upper Faubourg St. Mary and Lafayette to the garden suburbs of "new uptown:" upper St. Charles Avenue toward Audubon Park. Their institutions followed. Touro Synagogue—that is, the amalgamated Gates of Mercy of the Dispersed of Judah congregation—moved from their antebellum synagogue at Carondelet near Julia to a new Byzantine-style building at 4200 St. Charles Avenue on January 1, 1909.[296] Gates of Prayer, the Lafayette-based Ashkenazic congregation formed during the German immigration, relocated from its antebellum site on Jackson Avenue to the comfortable new environs of 1239 Napoleon in 1920. Its main reason for departure was the deterioration of the neighborhood.[297] (The Jewish Widows' and Orphans' Home, built in old Lafayette in the same era by the same congregation, had relocated uptown in the late 1880s when the enormous Jewish Orphans' Home was completed on St. Charles Avenue at the present-day Jefferson intersection, then called Peters Avenue. The long gone home was the most prominent landmark of uptown New Orleans for many years.) In 1925 Temple Sinai continued the uptown migration of Reform congregations when it too decided to relocate. It held its last service in the circa-1872 temple on Carondelet Street in 1926, started building a new Byzantine-style synagogue at 5227 St. Charles Avenue in 1927, and occupied the new site in 1928.[298] For many decades, a geographical, economic and cultural chasm prevailed between these wealthier, older, more Germanic, totally assimilated, and highly influential St. Charles Avenue Jews"[299] of the uptown Reform congregations, and the working-class eastern-European-immigrant "Dryades Street Jews" of the downtown Orthodox congregations. In this regard, the geography of Jewish New Orleans mimicked that of New York City, where wealthier German Jews resided in the affluent Upper East Side, far from the lower-class Russian Jewish immigrants amassed in the Lower East Side.[300] Neither population predominated in their neighborhoods; in fact, both were numerical minorities. The uptown Reform community outnumbered the Orthodox by roughly a two-to-one margin, and was more influential in New Orleans business and society by a wider margin. But it was not as culturally distinctive and geographically concentrated as the Orthodox, in part because of the Reformists' greater wealth, establishment, and assimilation in the community, and for the aforementioned Sabbath tradition. Not compelled to live within walking distance of their places of worship, the Reform community was and remains fairly dispersed within the spacious confines of uptown. Nor was there ever a particular strip of Reform-owned businesses in uptown; their business enterprises were the great department stores and professional offices of Canal Street and the CBD. For these reasons, it was the picturesque Dryades Street scene of the Orthodox community that generations of New Orleanians warmly remember as "the Jewish neighborhood."

Aside: Jewish New Orleans in 1938

A *Social and Economic Study of the New Orleans Jewish Community*, conducted in 1938 by Julian B. Feibelman and published in 1941, revealed the following information:

- There were 6,472 Jews in New Orleans in 1938, or 1.4 percent of the city's 1930 population of 458,762. This figure fell below an earlier estimate of 9,000, and equated to a smaller percentage than in eight other American cities with populations over 100,000, in which the average Jewish percentage per city was slightly over 11 percent.
- The average size of the 1,321 Jewish families in New Orleans was 3.03 people, significantly less than the New Orleans average of 3.81 and the Louisiana mean of 4.09. Three-quarters of the population was over age twenty one.
- In 1938, 47 percent of Jewish families belonged to Reform congregations, 25 percent were Orthodox, and the remainder were unaffiliated. By 1953, 57 percent identified themselves as Reform, while 30 percent claimed Orthodox.
- The community was well-educated on 1938 standards: "one-third have public school education; nearly one-half has part or complete high school; and more than one-quarter has some or complete college training."[301] Almost 70 percent of Jewish children received regular religious education.
- 91 percent of New Orleans' 6,472 Jews in 1938 were native-born (that is, possessed U.S. citizenship), a year when 95 percent of New Orleans was native-born. The foreign-born contingent included 985 from Russia and 408 from Poland. During and after World War II, local Orthodox Jews helped settle a contingent of Jewish refugees from war-torn Europe, sharing as they did the Yiddish language. Many among this last significant influx of Jews to New Orleans resided for a while in the Dryades area.
- Among the 2,290 people gainfully employed, the occupation of manager-executive was the most common

[296] Louisiana Historical Records Survey, *Inventory of Church and Synagogue Archives*, 22.

[297] "History," Congregation Gates of Prayer, Gates of Prayer Congregation, http://uahcweb.org/largo/history.html (accessed April 2002 and May 2004).

[298] The majestic old synagogue on Carondelet was sold, remodeled, and used alternately as offices, storage space, a community theater, and studios before being demolished in 1977. Its site is now an empty lot next to WDSU Channel 6's office.

[299] As quoted by Elizabeth Mullener, "Genesis and Exodus," *Times-Picayune*, May 25, 1997, Living Section, E1

[300] Robert M. Fogelson, *Downtown: Its Rise and Fall, 1880-1950* (New Haven and London, 2001), 3.

[301] Feibelman, *A Social and Economic Study of the New Orleans Jewish Community*, 56.

These former Jewish religious buildings on the Dryades neighborhood are now used by African American Protestant congregations. *Photographs by author, 2002-2003.*

(41 percent), followed by salesman/buyer (24 percent), and clerical worker (15 percent). Doctors and lawyers comprised 7 percent of the workforce.

Regarding intermarriage and assimilation, incomplete but nevertheless interesting data from the 1938 survey showed that "more non-Jewish women marry Jewish men, than do Jewish women marry non-Jewish men. One in 17 Jewish families has a non-Jewish member."[302]

Exodus to the Suburbs

The middle-class exodus from New Orleans to the suburbs during the 1950s-1960s had a limited impact on the uptown Reform community. For one, uptown remained prosperous and relatively safe during the crime waves of recent decades. Secondly, most Reform congregations were incorporated in the nineteenth century under charters that restricted them to Orleans Parish. An exception was Gates of Prayer, founded in 1850 in the Jefferson Parish suburb of Lafayette, two years before it was annexed into New Orleans. After about seventy years on Jackson Avenue and another half-century at 1139 Napoleon Avenue, Gates of Prayer decided to depart New Orleans starting in 1966 and moved incrementally over the next decade, finally dedicating a new suburban temple in 1975. Members decided to move because of neighborhood deterioration, rumors of a Mississippi River bridge on Napoleon Avenue, and because many members were already relocating to the suburbs.[303] Once again, Gates of Prayer was the first synagogue in suburban New Orleans, albeit briefly. Today, Gates of Prayer operates a world away from the vacant circa-1860s Jackson Avenue Shul, at 4000 West Esplanade Avenue, the locus of nine Jewish religious and educational institutions strung out along this suburban Jefferson Parish boulevard.

A generation after the Reform community moved uptown, the Orthodox community began to leave Dryades Street for the same "pull" and "push" factors that drove millions of middle-class urban Americans to the suburbs after World War II.[304] Unlike the Reform community, which relocated from the inner city to uptown decades earlier, the Orthodox had more geographical options from which to choose, because the metropolitan area had by the mid-twentieth century expanded considerably toward the lake and into Jefferson Parish. Also unlike the uptown Reform community, the Orthodox Jews of Dryades Street lived in racially mixed residential blocks adjacent to the city's most expansive African American neighborhoods. These Jews were on the front lines of the social changes of the 1950s and 1960s, and witnessed occasional racial tensions. In 1960, civil rights activists had observed that blacks accounted for roughly three-quarters of the clientele at Dryades Street stores, but only one-third of their workforce and one-fourth of the better jobs. "Upwards of two thousand blacks staged the first civil rights march in

[302] Ibid., 54.

[303] "History of Congregation Gates of Prayer," Gates of Prayer Congregation, http://uahc.org/nafa006/index.html (accessed April 2002 and May 2004).

[304] A 1958 sociological study reported that "pull" factors weighed heavier than "push" factors among those who left New Orleans in the previous five years: 31 percent moved for more housing space, 14 percent for business reasons, and 10 percent to buy a home, and 10 percent because of a decrease in family size. Less than one in ten explained their move as leaving an undesirable neighborhood. Bernard Reissman, *A Profile of a Community: A Sociological Study of the New Orleans Jewish Community* (New Orleans, 1958), 40-41.

This former home of Shevra Thilim, built in 1927 at 826 Lafayette Street in the CBD, is the farthest-downriver extant structural landmark of historic Jewish New Orleans. The congregation relocated uptown in 1949 and later to Metairie. *Photograph by author, 2003.*

Only Anshe Sfard (2230 Carondelet Street) remains in operation near the old Dryades area, the last institutional element of New Orleans' only formally recognized Jewish neighborhood. *Photograph by author, 2003.*

New Orleans living memory, and a boycott followed. Concessions were made by the merchants and tensions eased, but in the wake of the incident many long-time merchants began to see their future uptown or the suburbs. Integration played an even greater, though unintended, role in the decline of Dryades Street: the fall of Jim Crow opened up retail options, once limited to Dryades, South Rampart, and few other places, for thousands of African American shoppers. As they took their business to Canal Street, enterprises on Dryades folded, storefronts were shuttered, and Jewish families departed. The residential exodus was followed by the relocation or closure of the neighborhood's Jewish institutions, which in turn triggered the departure of remaining residents. Concurrently, Orthodox congregations throughout the city lost membership to out-migration, secularization of youth, and internal divisions. In the 1950s, a faction of Chevra Thilim, which had moved from its Central Business District location (826 Lafayette Street) to uptown South Claiborne Avenue in 1949, broke off to form the city's first Conservative synagogue. After a while on Magazine Street near Napoleon, it moved in 1978 to Jefferson Parish, under the name Tikvah Shalom (Hope of Peace). Chevra Thilim itself became Conservative in 1988.[306] The Orthodox Beth Israel, bound by its charter to Orleans Parish, relocated in 1971 to the Lakefront area at Canal and Robert E. Lee Boulevard. It and Anshe Sfard "strive to keep Orthodox Jewish traditions alive in New Orleans"[307] today. Only this latter congregation, located at 2230 Carondelet Street, survives in the Dryades Street area, the last trace of this once-vibrant and unique New Orleans neighborhood.[308] A neighborhood still exists here, of course, filled with its own hopes and dreams, but crime and despair taunt those aspirations and seem, at times, to prevail.

Today, the former Dryades Street neighborhood is a ghost of its former self: the Orthodox Jews have departed, the shops have closed, the aromas of delicatessens have drifted away, and the ethnic diversity is gone. Even the names have changed. In 1977, Melpomene from Baronne Street to Claiborne Boulevard, including its prominent intersection with Dryades, was renamed Martin Luther King Boulevard. Twelve years later, Dryades Street from Howard Avenue to Philip Street was renamed Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard, in honor of a

Dryades Street (now Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard, and Melpomene Street (now Martin Luther King, at right), today. *Photographs by author, 2002-2003.*

[305] Liva Baker, *The Second Battle of New Orleans: The Hundred-Year Struggle to Integrate the Schools* (New York, 1996), 326.

[306] Lachoff, "A Historical Introduction," 32-33.

[307] Ibid., 34.

[308] Anshe Sfarde Synagogue is located at the uptown edge of the Dryades Street neighborhood, on a shady and pleasant street close to St. Charles Avenue and the Garden District. Proximity to prosperous areas may partially explain Anshe Sfarde's survival. Many members live in the suburbs.

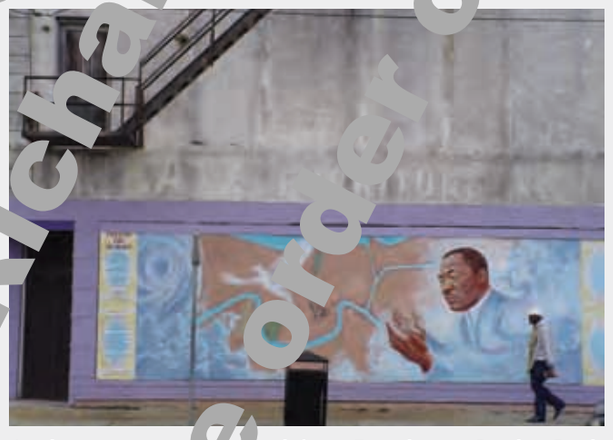
Now-closed Jewish-owned department stores on former Dryades Street: Kaufman's, at left, was completely renovated a few years ago as a community art gallery, which has since become the locus of the revived neighborhood spirit on the new Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard. Handelman's is currently undergoing a similar adaptive reuse. *Photographs by author, 2003.*

local civil rights leader. What was once unofficially but universally known as "the Dryades Street neighborhood" is now officially called Central City. Businesses from the earlier generation are largely disappeared, including the large, multistory department stores dating from the nineteenth century. Those few enterprises lasting in recent decades tend to be corner grocery stores, beauty shops, and the like, often with hand-painted signs. Trash, weeds, and immobile old cars predominated in the blocks around Oretha Castle Haley in the last years of the twentieth century.

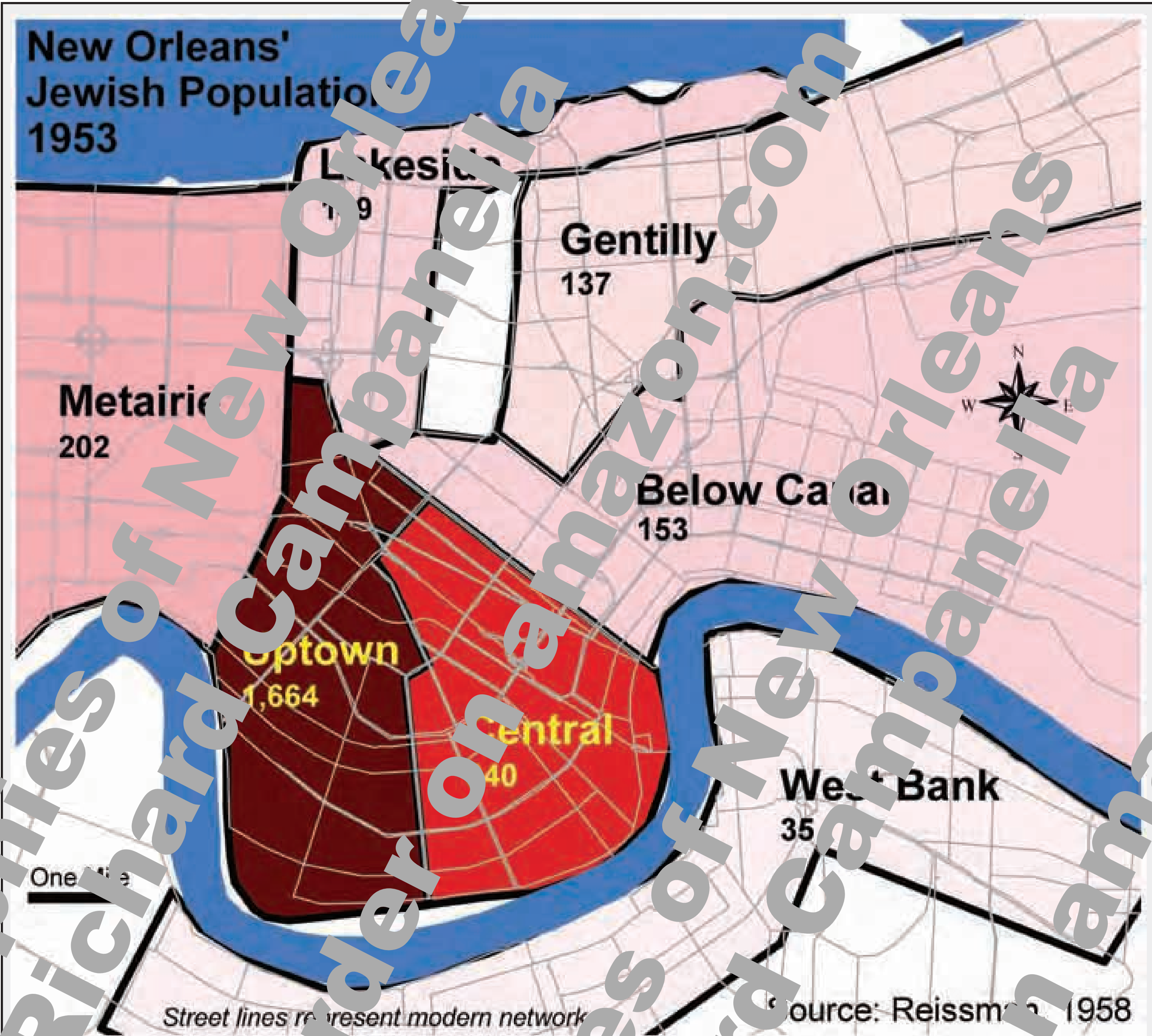
The graph on page 275, *Activity on Dryades Street: Howard Avenue to Louisiana Street, 1938-2001*, developed from city directory listings, tracks the decline of the Dryades business community in the late twentieth century. Certain telltale signs of neighborhood decline start to appear as one peruses directory listings for multiple years. Buildings, for example, are often subdivided into apartments and boarding houses. Substantial businesses are replaced with tiny ones, if at all. The old Dryades Market was closed around 1950 after a century of service, as automobiles carried its clientele out to new suburban supermarkets. Vacancies increase, to the point that directories in the 1990s no longer bothered to list them. Thousands "Not Verified" start to appear in the listings. The Masonic Temple and the myriad organizations that met there all disappeared. The number of social-welfare organizations for the poverty-stricken began to increase. There was even a "Get 'Em & Hit 'Em" Liquor Store at 2136 Dryades in 1973—which apparently did well, because by 1988 it opened up a bar and expanded into a neighboring lot.

The only traces of Dryades Street's former vibrancy today are faded palimpsests on decaying buildings along what was once the second busiest commercial streets in the city. But changes on the horizon: urban activists and the preservationist community have teamed with local residents in revitalizing the area with architectural restoration, new construction, house relocation, and conversion of former department stores and shops to art galleries and community centers. Colorful murals celebrating New Orleans culture and commemorating the civil rights legacy of the area now cover bare brick walls, across the street from the Popular Café Reconcile, a restaurant providing job training for at-risk youth. Initial discussions of a civil rights museum on Oretha Castle Haley, seen by some as the birthplace of the city's civil rights movement, are currently underway. By late 2004, seven new business and community entities had been established on the boulevard, including the first financial institution in decades. The street once associated with the Jewish community now thoroughly and proudly reflects a black identity. Said one activist, "we need to make sure we keep investing in this street that *an African-American street* has our time, investment and money." With the same hard work that lifted the Orleans immigrants from their stalls in the Poydras Market to their present day prosperity, Central City may also rise again.

Mark Schleifstein, "Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard," *Times-Picayune*, December 1, 2004, A1-A14 (emphasis added); Bruce Eggler, "Civil Rights Museum Is Revived by Senator," *Times-Picayune*, May 31, 2004, Metro section, B1-2.



As the street name changed from Dryades to Oretha Castle Haley, so too shifted the street's sense of ethnic place, from Orthodox Jewish to African American. Here, a Katz Furniture advertisement fades behind a freshly painted mural of Martin Luther King releasing a dove over the troubled neighborhood, which is depicted cartographically at center. *Photograph by author, Mardi Gras 2005.*



While there are no "Jewish neighborhoods" in modern New Orleans, one overriding spatial pattern has persisted since antebellum times: a Jewish preference for the upper reaches of the city and the western half of the metropolis, as illustrated in these 1953 data. Jewish institutions, landscape features, and households are scarce in areas below the French Quarter or east of City Park. This pattern can be traced to the historical Anglo/Creole ethnic geography of the early nineteenth century, in which Jewish families generally settled among the Anglos, toward uptown. *Map by author based on data collected by Leonard Reissman.*

Geography of Jewish New Orleans, 1800s-2000s

Present as Jewish peoples were within New Orleans' various waves of immigration, we see in the geography of Jewish New Orleans reflections of the patterns of numerous other groups. Those few Jews who lived in colonial New Orleans resided in cultural anonymity dispersed throughout the French Quarter, replicating the pattern of many minority groups settling in the Creole city. Those Sephardim and Ashkenazim who arrived in the early 1800s also dispersed citywide but showed a predilection for the Americanized blocks of the upper French Quarter and Faubourg St. Mary, where the first Jewish congregations were established. This downtown pattern correlated with that of Anglo emigrants who also generally avoided the Creole lower half of the city. The German Ashkenazic Jewish immigrants who arrived in the mid-1800s settled largely uptown in Lafayette, reflecting the tendency of poor immigrants of the day to disperse in the semi-urban periphery, where unskilled employment and cheap land made life tenable. With the more prosperous Jewish establishment living downtown and the poor Jewish immigrant community living uptown, the antebellum geography of Jewish New Orleans echoed the city's socio-economic geography: *the wealthier classes were found in the inner city; the working-class immigrant classes settled in the outskirts.* This trend has been observed in many antebellum American cities.

In the decades following the Civil War, the trend reversed. Wealthier classes evacuated the inner city and headed to the

uptown garden suburbs, opening up housing opportunities downtown for the working-class poor, where unskilled job opportunities now lay. Orthodox Jewish immigrants arriving in the late nineteenth century from eastern Europe initially settled downtown, in the gritty Dryades Street area, while the prosperous descendents of the older Jewish families—who now worshipped in Reform congregations—relocated far uptown, in the leafy neighborhoods around upper St. Charles Avenue. "Dryades Street Jews" and "St. Charles Jews" would come into the local lexicon to describe this ethnic, economic, and geographical gulf. This trend, too—of postbellum immigrants settling downtown as established populations moved outward—has been observed in many American cities.

Finally, once again in parallel with other groups and other cities, the downtown Orthodox Jewish community departed for the Jefferson Parish suburbs during the decline of the inner city in the 1960s, while the Reform community generally stayed put in uptown. The Jewish community of the greater New Orleans metropolitan area today resides mostly in the western half, with the possible exception of the French Quarter,[310] very few Jews live in the downtown, eastern, or southern (West Bank) portions of the metropolis. Except for a few cemeteries on Elysian Fields Avenue, Jewish institutions and other landmarks, present or present, are almost wholly absent from these areas. This pattern can be traced back to the historical American/Creole ethnic geography of the nineteenth-century New Orleans. Maps of the Jewish and Creole communities today indicate that the two groups continue to reside apart from each other, one uptown and west,

From the late 1800s to the 1960s, the geography of Jewish New Orleans comprised a downtown Orthodox community and an older, more established uptown Reform community. The latter generally remains uptown today, while the old downtown Orthodox community now mostly resides in the Jefferson Parish suburbs, joined by some Reformists. A large out-of-state Jewish population associated with Tulane University also dwells uptown, near campus. *Map and analysis by author.*

Congregation Shangarai Tefilo (Gates of Prayer) cemetery is located uptown at Joseph and Garfield streets, near Langenstein's corner grocery, founded in 1[illegible]. Despite the citywide tradition of above-ground burial introduced by the Spanish and often explained as a response to high water tables, all Jewish cemeteries in the city are below-ground, in accordance with Jewish tradition. This demonstrates that burial customs in New Orleans are primarily reflections of cultural rather than geographical factors. *Photograph by author, 2004.*

[310] The 2002 Orleans Parish Assessment Roll records a significant number of probable Jewish surnames among the parcel owners of the French Quarter. It is difficult to ascertain, however, how many owners actually reside in the Quarter.

The Jewish Widows' and Orphans' Home in old Lafayette relocated uptown in the late 1880s to this impressive edifice on St. Charles Avenue at the present-day Jefferson intersection, then called Peters Avenue. It was the most prominent landmark of uptown New Orleans for many years. The site is now occupied by "the JCC," the Jewish Community Center. *Southeastern Architectural Archive, Special Collections, Howard-Tilton Library, Tulane University.*

Touro Synagogue and Temple Sinai for the two major landmarks of the uptown Reform community along St. Charles Avenue. *Photographs by author, 2003.*

one downtown and east. In one curious spot, however, do they symbolically unite: at the Creole Kosher Restaurant on 115 Chartres Street.

Evidence of past Jewish geographies can be found sconced in the modern-day cityscape. A few crumbling remnants of the Gates of Prayer congregation remain at the foot of Jackson Avenue, most notably the former Lafayette Shul, the oldest surviving major structural vestige of Jewish New Orleans. The Jewish retailers have mostly departed the CBD, although Rubenstein's (since 1924) and Meyer the Hatter (since 1894), among the last of the old-line soft-goods stores downtown, still operate on St. Charles Avenue, and Fischer's Jewelry still survives on South Rampart. Abundant evidence may be found in the former Dryades Street neighborhood, where most synagogues, institutions, and homes from the Orthodox era still stand. Where business signs such as *Handelman* and *Levigne* still are visible, and where one synagogue, Anshe Sfard, miraculously still functions. Jewish New Orleans is most evident during the high holy days along uptown St. Charles Avenue, when hundreds of faithful walk from their homes to Temple Sinai and Touro Synagogue, the two descendents of western America's first Jewish congregation, founded in the French Quarter almost two centuries earlier.

Creole Kosher Kitchen on Chartres Street. *Photograph by author, 2004.*

The Dryades area is replete with clues to its former Orthodox Jewish association. *Photograph by author, 2003.*

Haberdasheries, dry-goods stores, jewelers, tailors, and other Jewish-owned businesses once lined South Rampart Street and other downtown thoroughfares. A few remain (visible in upper photos), last representatives of a long line of downtown merchants, dating in some cases to the early nineteenth century. Clues such as old signs and doorway mosaics attest to their former presence. *Photographs by author, 2003-2004.*

Greek New Orleans
From Dorgenois to Decatur

Hellenistic undercurrents seem to pervade the streets of New Orleans. Perhaps they emanate from the city's antebellum penchant for Greek Revival architecture, a style that seems as if transported by some magic spell from Greece, the tomb of past greatness, to Louisiana, the cradle of future empire."[311] Or perhaps they are vestigial of a slaveholding aristocracy, a heritage shared by both Greece and New Orleans and said to be the provenance of the South's affinity for the ancients' ideals. Possibly a role was played by the city's most famous Greek resident, Lafcadio Hearn, who, before gaining fame as a chronicler of Japan, practically "invented" modern impressions of New Orleans as a newspaper correspondent in the postbellum years.[312] But more likely, the Hellenistic tone comes from a thread of international maritime commerce that unifies all major seaports, binding cities a thousand miles apart more tightly than they may be to their immediate neighbors. "New Orleans resembles Genoa or Marseilles, or Beirut or the Egyptian Alexandria more than it does New York," wrote A.J. Liebling; "New Orleans is within the orbit of Hellenistic world that never touched the North Atlantic."[313]

That Hellenistic world is not merely a figurative notion in New Orleans—it is a literal presence. Greek sailors and merchants have long embraced the Crescent City as a favorite port of call, creating an ephemeral presence among the honky-tonks of Decatur Street, while, at the opposite end of town—but on tree-lined North Dorgenois Street—forming a permanent community responsible for the hemisphere's first Greek Orthodox Church. These slaves, which exist today in transmuted forms, represent the two primary experiences of Greeks and Greek-Americans in New Orleans: the Crescent City as home for days, and as home for generations. Those who have called New Orleans home represent one of the smaller pieces of the Crescent City's ethnic puzzle, but a symbolically important one because their residential geography was typical of the many smaller ethnic groups in the city.

Greeks in America

The modern-day manifestation of ancient Greece emerged as an independent nation in 1832, following almost four centuries of Turkish rule and a prior millennium as Byzantium, the eastern part of the former Roman Empire. During those 400 years under the Ottoman Turks, Islamic rulers administered Greek Christians and other groups as autonomous *millets* ("nations") supervised by each group's religious leaders. Although Christians were relegated to a second-class status, the millet arrangement allowed the Orthodox Church to assume both an influential religious and political role among the Greek peoples of the Ottoman Empire, and "made possible the survival of the Greeks through four centuries of alien rule."[314] This fusion of religion and national identity eventually flowered in the Greeks' fight for independence (1821-1829), the establishment of sovereignty (1832), and the installation of a constitutional monarchy (1862). The prominent role of the Orthodox Church within Greek culture, nurtured over centuries and richly evident in Greece today, would manifest itself also in the ethnic cityscape of New Orleans.

The only significant Greek exodus arriving to the New World in the eighteenth century was a group of about 400 indentured servants brought in the 1760s to what is now is mostly named New Smyrna Beach, Florida. Most relocated to St. Augustine in 1777 and eventually blended with the population.[315] Small numbers trickled to America after Greece's revolution of 1821, but for most of the early nineteenth century, Greek immigration was measured in the single digits. Only one Greek arrived to the port of New York in 1848, compared to 91,769 Irish and 51,873 Germans; a decade later, that number increased—to two.[316] Only eighty-six Greek-born residents were recorded in the entire United States in the 1850 census. The number rose to 328 in 1860 and 390 in 1870, years in which most foreign immigration had been stilled by the Civil War. The next decade saw the tiny Greek-born community double to 776, then quadruple to 1,857 by 1890 and again to 8,515 in 1900. It was not until the early twentieth century that Greeks reached substantial numbers on a national scale, as the Greek-born population increased twelvefold by 1910 to 101,282. (Estimates of the *total* Greek ethnic community in America at that time range from 100,000 to a probably overestimated quarter-million.[317]) Most Greek immigrants—males predominated by a wide margin in the early years—escaped rural agrarian lives in pursuit of urban opportunities; almost half ended up in cities, mill towns, and mining towns of Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York, Illinois, and California. Lowell, Massachusetts, and Chicago attracted the largest numbers at the turn of the twentieth century.

One reason behind the sudden jump in Greek immigration to America in the early 1900s was the decline of Greece's main export, currants, to France and Russia, which had erected import tariffs against the raisin-like fruit. Having destroyed their olive groves to plant currant vineyards, Greek farmers and their dependents now found their produce without a market. Many farmed, and some immigrated. Other rea-

[311] *United States Democratic Review* 8 (November-December 1840): 537.

[312] In his anthology *Inventing New Orleans* (Jackson, 2001), S. Frederick Starr argues that much of the modern mystique and imagery of New Orleans originated in the essays and articles penned by Lafcadio Hearn during his ten-year stint in the city, 1878-1888.

[313] A.J. Liebling, *The Earl of Louisiana* (New York, 1961), 87.

[314] Alice Scourby, *The Greek Americans* (Boston, 1984), 2.

[315] Ibid., 24.

[316] Thomas Burgess, *Greeks in America: An Account of Their Coming, Progress, Customs, Living, and Aspirations* (Boston, 1913), 16.

[317] Henry Pratt Fairchild, *Greek Immigration to the United States* (New Haven, 1911), 111-12; and Burgess, *Greeks in America*, 51.

sons included a weak industrial sector made vulnerable for its lack of diversification, an unstable and shifting government, an occasionally favorable exchange rate with the dollar, and an unyielding mountainous landscape.[318] Once in settled pioneers established themselves, "chain migration"—the encouragement of relatives and friends in the old country to join those already arrived—brought second and third waves of immigrants to American shores. This process, affected by many other factors, transpired throughout the twentieth century, when the size of the Greek-born community in America hovered mostly between 100,000 and 200,000, decade to decade.[319] These numbers only reflect those actually born in Greece, which, with the passage of time, represents a shrinking percentage of the total ethnic group. The larger Greek-American ethnic community, regardless of birthplace, may be estimated at roughly two to three times more. In 1960, for example, the census statistic for "number of persons of foreign stock reporting Greece as origin" yielded 370,183 respondents nationally (2.3 times the Greek-born number that year), with most living in New York, Illinois, California, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania.[320]

Immigration data, as opposed to the aforementioned census data, show that from 1820 to 1990, over 700,000 Greeks arrived to the United States, slightly over 1 percent of total immigration, with the greatest peak from 1900 to 1910 and a secondary peak in the 1960s and 1970s.[321] These immigrants created, according to the 2000 census, a community of 1,153,337 Americans (0.4 percent of the population) who claimed Greek as their ancestry, or two to four million, according to sources within the Greek community.

Greeks in New Orleans

Among the very few Greeks who circulated in colonial New Orleans was a wealthy Athens merchant named Michael Jacob, who arrived in the 1760s and married a local woman of mixed Acadian and Native American lineage. The couple's daughter, Marianne Celeste Dorsey, born in 1777 (who by one account "may qualify as the Greek 'Virginia Dare'"[322]), married a native of the Greek island Hydra, named Andreas Dimitry. The Dimitry union in New Orleans in 1799 has been described as the first known marriage of two Greeks in North America.[323]

Enough Greek visitors and business interests existed in New Orleans to warrant the establishment of a Greek Consulate in New Orleans in 1848, which still operates today. To find Greek New Orleanians in this era, one must scour population schedules for those few entries citing Greece as their birthplace—and this can only be done starting in 1850, when birthplace was first recorded in the census. Even then, the number of Greeks, particularly in busy ports such as New Orleans, were probably undercounted, because their affiliation with the shipping industry made many a transitory presence. An 1873 article in the *New York Times* approximated the size of the New Orleans Greek community as "over 200,"[324] which would make an estimate of about 150-175 for the late antebellum era seem reasonable. This figure presumably included all people of Greek ethnicity, including locally born, because census data for only those born in Greece fall far short of 200. Such contradictory information is common in historical estimates of small ethnic-group populations; in general, censuses tend to underestimate, and community advocates often overestimate. The 1900 census statistical compendia listed only eighty-four Greeks living in all Louisiana, of which forty-eight lived in New Orleans; these numbers tripled by 1910 to 253 in the state and 175 in New Orleans. Increased immigration in the early twentieth century inspired the publication of a number of books and studies on the Greek immigrant community in America, and these sources provided substantially higher figures. The *Thermopylae Almanac* of 1904 put New Orleans' Greek population at a reasonable 250, and the *Greek-American Guide* (1909) estimated 300.[325] But Seraphim G. Canoutas' circa-1911 estimate of 700 Greek New Orleanians is probably an overestimation. These independent studies abated as Greek immigration declined, forcing us to rely again on census data. The 1920 census says that New Orleans was home to 432 of Louisiana's 600 sons and daughters of Greece, while in 1930 the city contained 341 Greek-born residents plus 311 locally born offspring of at least one Greek-born parent. Accounting for undercounting, the transient seamen community, and second- and third-generation Greeks, the total Greek ethnic population by World War II was probably in the upper hundreds. Louisiana in 1960 counted 477 "number of persons of foreign stock reporting Greek as origin," of which 449 were in New Orleans, another probable undercount.[326] According to sample-based data from the 2000 census, which asked for one's "ancestry," there were 5,929 Greek-Americans in Louisiana (claiming primary or secondary Greek ancestry), of which 40 percent lived in the greater New Orleans metropolitan area, with most living in Jefferson Parish (1,321)

[318] Scourby, *The Greek American*, 4; and Burgess, *Greeks in America*, 9-10.

[319] "Tech Paper 29, Table 1. Region and Country or Area of Birth of the Foreign-Born Population, With Geographic Detail Shown in ecennial Census Publications of 1930 or Earlier: 1850 to 1930 and 1960 to 1990," U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0029/tab01.html (accessed 1999).

[320] "United States Historical Census Data Browser," University of Virginia Geospatial and Statistical Data Center, http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/census/ (accessed 1999).

[321] Stavros T. Constantinou, "Profiles of Greek Americans," in *Geographies of Identity of Ethnic America: Race, Space, and Place*, eds. Kate A. Berry and Martha L. Henderson (Reno and Las Vegas, 2002), 95-97.

[322] Charles C. Moskos, *Greek Americans: Struggle and Success* (New Brunswick and London, 1989), 5.

[323] Descendents of the Dimitry family went on to play illustrious roles in Louisiana's history: see Curtis J. Waldo, *Illustrated Visitors' Guide to New Orleans* (New Orleans, 1879), 177-82.

[324] This same article described the three hundred-strong San Francisco population as "the best organized of all the Greek colonies in the States of the Union," *New York Times*, August 4, 1873, p. 2.

[325] As cited by Fairchild, *Greek Immigration to the United States*, 253 and 259.

[326] University of Virginia Geospatial and Statistical Data Center.

and New Orleans proper (820).[327] The community itself has estimated its size at over 10,000 in the metropolitan area.

During the early-1900s peak in Greek immigration, New Orleans, despite its attributes, had a disproportionately small (around 300) Greek population. Other southern cities such as Atlanta, Birmingham, and Savannah each had 500, while tiny Tarpon Springs, Florida, had 1,000, half the town's population and most of its fishing-based labor force. Nationwide, San Francisco was home to 3,000; Lowell counted 7,000; Chicago had 15,000, and New York was home to 20,000.[328] Why relatively few in New Orleans? The reason lies in the timing and nature of the peak of Greek immigration. Booming industrial activity in America's manufacturing regions demanded unskilled laborers, creating opportunities for Greeks (and other southern and eastern Europeans) either already arrived or planning to immigrate. Many Greek immigrants went to places like the New England textile mills of Lowell, Manchester, and Nashua; the slaughterhouses of Chicago; the steel mills of Pittsburgh; the lumber mills near Seattle; and the railroad-construction and mining operations throughout the Midwest and West. Even more arrived in New York and Chicago for the food-based opportunities offered by immense cities (particularly in food services), while others sought unusual locales that demanded specialized skills, such as sponge fishing in Tarpon Springs, the most densely populated Greek community of the day. New Orleans in the early 1900s simply did not have enough industrial activity or other large-scale, quick-hire employment opportunities to attract to unskilled laborers in large numbers.[329] Nor was it sufficiently expansive and prosperous to offer a bounty of opportunities in food service, fishing and fish marketing, and other Greek specialties. But it did offer some, and hundreds of immigrants over the years joined the already established, more prosperous local Greek community, with whom they formed an ethnic enclave around North Dorgenois Street.

The Greek Enclave on North Dorgenois Street

The prosperity of the 1850s—which in New Orleans translated to bustling international maritime activity—augmented the local Greek population and planted the seeds of a permanent community. The most influential segment of this population comprised neither immigrants nor seamen but professional representatives of Greek shipping firms, New Orleans' contingent of "the directors of great Greek mercantile houses in America...that band of financiers from the upper stratum of Hellenes famous long before the period of immigration."[330] Greek firms established footholds in major American ports starting in the 1850s—Boston, New York, Savannah, Mobile, New Orleans, Galveston, San Francisco, and others—and held a special interest in New Orleans for its command of the cotton trade. It was around this nucleus of wealthy cotton and shipping agents that a small permanent Greek colony of their families and supporters, as well as a few immigrants and transient seamen, coalesced. Together, they formed a minute component of an extraordinarily multicultural city: 40 percent of the city's 119,460 residents, and [illegible] percent of its whites, were foreign-born. Close to 40,000 came from Ireland, Germany, and France, and another 9,000 came from scores of other societies. New Orleanians of this era attended over sixty different houses of worship, representing Catholicism, eight Protestant denominations, and Judaism.[331] Missing from this religious landscape was the other great faith of the Judeo-Christian world, the Holy Eastern Orthodox Church.

The patriarch of New Orleans' antebellum Greek community was Nicholas Benachi, scion of a prominent Athens family and diplomat, businessman, and real estate magnate in the fashionable Esplanade Avenue garden suburb. In the 1860s, Benachi aided his Greek compatriots in acquiring land for what would become the western hemisphere's first Eastern Orthodox Church. It was constructed not far from Benachi's circa-1859 mansion, which still stands at 2257 Bayou Road. *Photograph by author, 2003.*

No wonder, then, that the roughly 150 or so Greeks (as well as Syrians, Serbians, Russians, and Slavs) in town longed for the support and unity that such an entity would provide. Founding any church required dedication and finances, but establishing the first New World representation of one of the world's great religions demanded additional leadership and influence. These attributes were brought to the task by a group of New Orleans-based Greek cotton merchants of the worldwide Ralli Brothers firm, led by the Consul of the Royal Government of Greece, Nicholas Benachi. Scion of a promi-

[327] "Profile of Selected Social Characteristics, 2000, Census 2000 Summary File 3 (SF 3) - Sample Data," U.S. Census Bureau, http://factfinder.census.gov (accessed 2000). Data for 1930 from Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration, *New Orleans City Guide* (Boston, 1938), 44.

[328] As cited in Fairchild, *Greek Immigration to the United States*, 258-60. Seraphim G. Canoutas tabulated higher figures for most of these cities (including 700 for New Orleans), but they may be overestimates. As cited in Burgess, *Greek in America*, 226-34.

[329] Unskilled Sicilian immigrants came to New Orleans in much larger numbers in the 1880s-1900s, but only because they were directly recruited for sugar plantation work. Greeks were eyed but not actually recruited for such employment.

[330] Burgess, *Greek in America*, 33.

[331] Population data from J.D.B. De Bow, *Statistical View of the United States—Compendium of the Seventh Census* (Washington, DC, 1854), 399; church data from *Gardner's New Orleans Directory for 1861*, page xxii.

nent Athens family and the quintessential nineteenth-century urban aristocrat, Benachi was a diplomat, businessman, sportsman, community leader, and real estate magnate in one of the city's fashionable new garden suburbs. The recently extended Esplanade Avenue toward Bayou St. John. On the heels of failed attempts to found an Orthodox church in the late 1850s, Benachi aided the local Greek community by seeking land to build a new Eastern Orthodox Church in 1860. Four years later, amid the tumult of the Civil War and occupation, Benachi offered his own property (probably his circa-1859 mansion which still stands at 2257 Bayou Road) as a place of worship for neighbors of the Orthodox faith. From 1864-1866, the Eastern Orthodox Church celebrated its rituals on these semi-rural outskirts of the Crescent City. It was not the only Greek association in the city. A Greek seamen's benevolent association is said to have existed in the 1840s, and the New Orleans Greek Committee of Relief distributed pamphlets about homeland political issues in 1866.[332] That same year, the Orthodox congregation assembled enough money (through donations from Benachi and his colleagues John and Demetrios Botassis, Greek consul to New York City and Greece's official representative at Abraham Lincoln's funeral) to purchase for $1,200 one of Benachi's undeveloped properties near the Esplanade Ridge. The parcel was located roughly halfway between the French Quarter and Bayou St. John, a few blocks from Benachi's mansion on Bayou Road. The street was named North Dolhonde, and a fund the lot numbered 230 a block and a half above Esplanade, the newly founded Eastern Orthodox Church of the Holy Trinity constructed its first permanent holy place. This elegantly simple house of worship may be the first edifice in New Orleans history that can be described as truly Greek Revival—in design. Its Classical pediment, sitting atop high Corinthian columns, which gave the otherwise bucolic little

[332] Joseph Cartwright, *The Insurrection in Candia and the Public Press* (New Orleans, 1966).

wooden chapel an imposing and majestic demeanor, probably reflected the communicants' ancestral pride as much as the revived style popular in New Orleans and America up to that time. The new house-numbering system of 1894 and the subsequent street-name changes of 1895 changed Holy Trinity's address to 1222 North Dorgenois Street.[333]

The establishment of Holy Trinity gave identity and unity to the Greeks of New Orleans, among themselves and in the eyes of the outside world. *Harper's Weekly* noted in 1870, "There is a Greek chapel in New Orleans, in which city is quite a large population of Russian Greeks and Moldavians from the Danubian provinces."[334] Wrote a New York journalist in 1873, "In New-Orleans the Greek community is important enough to maintain a church of their own religion, built some five years ago by subscription, and divine service celebrated every Sunday in the Greek language by a priest educated in the National University of Athens."[335] Although Saints Constantine and Helen's Church in Galveston may, by some measures, have preceded Holy Trinity as the first Orthodox parish in the hemisphere, scholarly assessment generally validates Holy Trinity's status, in the words of Alexander Doumouras, the "oldest Orthodox community in America which included Greeks" and as the "first parish of the Greek Orthodox Church in America," particularly the first documented effort to survive to the present.[336]

[333] A street named "Dorgenois," so named for a nearby plantation owner, appeared on the 1834 Zimpel map from the Girod Canal to Bayou Road, along the northern edge of the Derbigny plantation. Parcel 230 and the future church site were forgotten at the time, not yet laid out. Twenty years later, the street was depicted as *D'Orgenois* in a subdivision plan for the property by Gueno plantation. The general area later occupied by the Greek enclave was initially subdivided from Bayou Road plantations around this time. Later in the century, the street was divided into an upper section named Dorgenois and a lower section called Delhonde. They were unified as South and North Dorgenois by 1895, and remain so today. Charles F. Zimpel, *Topographical Map of New Orleans and Its Vicinity* (New Orleans, 1834), and Louis Surgi, *Plan of Lots of Ground in [Faubourg] Gueno* (1836).

[334] "Home and Foreign Gossip," *Harper's Weekly*, October 29, 1870, p. 699, col. 4.

[335] *New York Times*, August 4, 1873, p. 2.

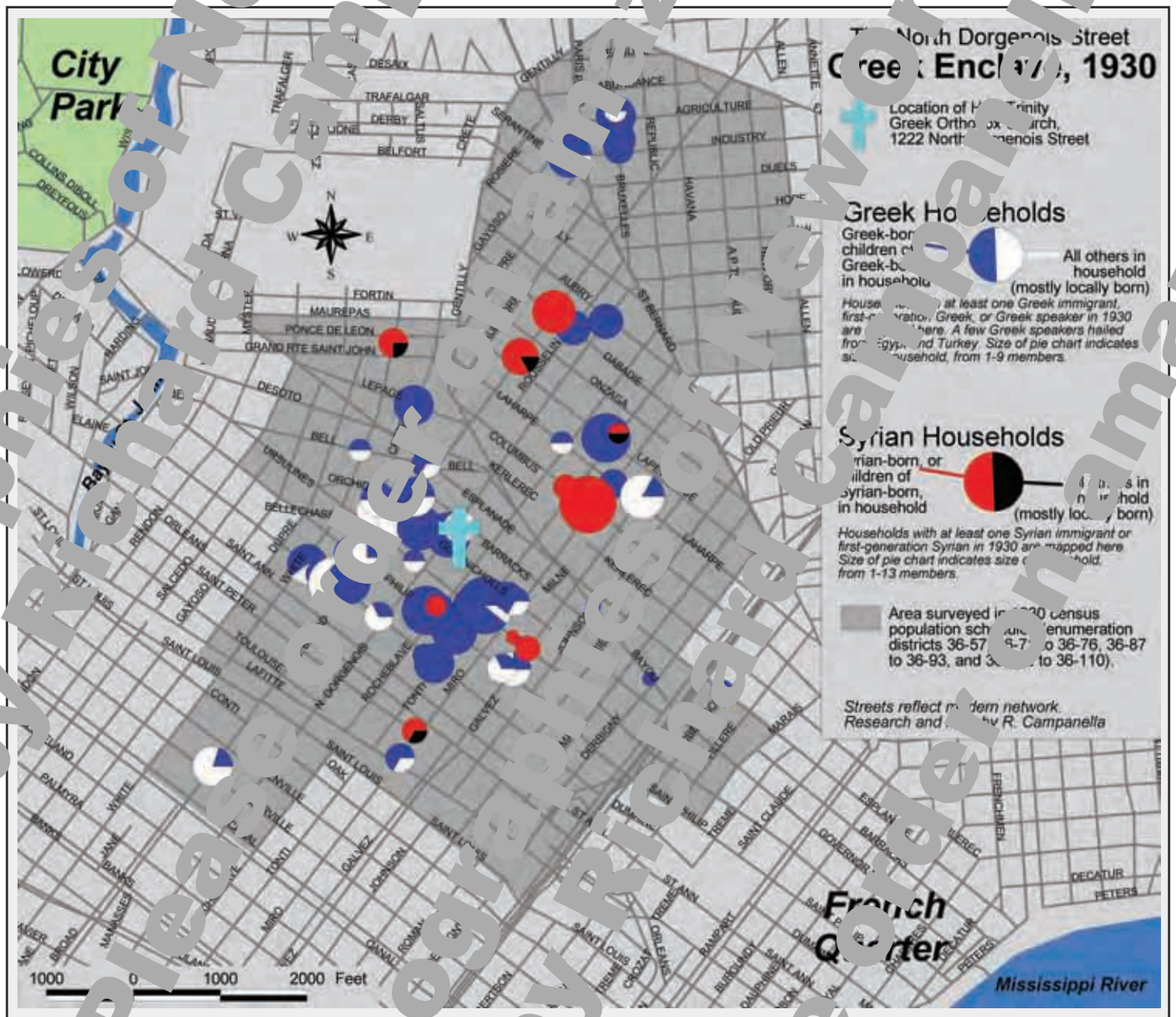
[336] Alexander Doumouras, "Greek Orthodox Communities in America Before World War I," *St. Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly* 11 (1967): 173, 177, and 179.

The establishment of the Eastern Orthodox Church of the Holy Trinity gave identity and unity to New Orleans' Greeks. Their elegantly simple church, built in 1866 at present 1222 North Dorgenois, formed the nucleus of a small but significant ethnic cluster for over a century. These photographs probably date to 1900-1910. *Southeastern Architectural Archive, Special Collections, Howard-Tilton Library, Tulane University.*

In time, the Greek cotton merchants w[ho] sponsored Holy Trinity liquidated their firms in the city and sent their agents elsewhere, leaving the church to th[e] permanent Greek immigrant community and some Orthodox faithful of Syrian and Slavic background.[337] Being socially and spiritually central to the local Orthodox community, yet geographically isolated from downtown New O[rleans], Holy Trinity acted as a cultural magnet for these ethnicities as the premier eastern Orthodox Church on the continent. Holy Trinity also formed a symbolic node in the vast Mississippi Valley and Gulf Coast region throughout which Greek sailor-immigrants circulated in the postbellum era, as described by the *New York Times* in 1873. Greeks in Ame[rica], it reported,

> mostly go to [Chi]cago, where they easily find work in loading vessels and navigating the lakes.... As soon as the lakes are frozen in the Winter time they go down the Mississippi River, and ma[ny] of them are working on the steam-boats plying between St[.] Louis, Cincinnati, Louisville, Cair[o] and New-Orleans. O[ver] 200 of them are to be found in the Crescent City, where they seem to be thriving under the more genial climate, not dissimilar to that of their own country. They have all sorts of professions; many are fruit dealers, keep little restaurants and coffee houses, [in] which are seen Greeks talking all at the same time generally, all the idlers of the Grecian Archipelago, drinking coffee, and smoking paper cigarettes. [Many] of them are oyster dealers and oyster fishers, owning generally their little craft, which they operate themselves and trade all along the coast from New Orleans to Indianola and

[337] Theodore Saloutos, *The Greeks in the United States* (Cambridge, 1964), 122; Doumouras, "Greek Orthodox Com[munities] in America [before] World War I," 177.



New Orleans around 1900 was home to about three hundred people of Greek ancestry, many of whom lived in the Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh wards between the French Quarter and Bayou St. John. In 1930, at least two hundred Greek Americans lived within a mile of Holy Trinity, roughly half the total Greek population of the city. The neighborhood comprised mostly white working-class and middle-class families; though most were Louisiana-born, the area was surprisingly international, with many residents hailing from France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, and elsewhere. The area's heterogeneity reflects a reoccurring pattern in the historical ethnic geography of New Orleans: spatial intermixing of ethnicities usually trumped intensive clustering. *Map and analysis by author based on 1930 Census. Note: in this map, "first-generation" implies the locally born children of immigrants born in Greece.*

> Matamoras, or on the other side through the lakes to Mobile and Pensacola....[338]

New Greek immigrants gravitated to the North Dorgenois Street area of the Sixth and Seventh Wards, where the church and countrymen provided support and company, where nearby streetcar service connected the area with downtown, where adjacent North Rampart Street offered amenities and business opportunities, and where the middle-class makeup of the neighborhood kept housing prices reasonable. Cottages and shotgun houses were erected on nearly every parcel, and live oak trees were planted. In a sense, the North Dorgenois enclave represents the importance of the Orthodox Church to the Greek community played out at the city scale, recollecting the significant role the Church played in holding together Greek national identity during the 400 years of Turkish rule in Greece.

Yet the North Dorgenois Street neighborhood was by no means a "Greek Town," as were found in other cities: the area was thoroughly mixed ethnically and to some extent racially, being also the general home of much of the city's Creole population. Only eighteen people of stated Greek ancestry lived in the census enumeration districts surrounding Holy Trinity in 1880, and one-third of them were members of Nicholas Benachi's immediate family.[339] In the decades that followed, Greeks never came close to predominating numerically in this neighborhood; more Greeks lived elsewhere in the city that here. In fact, ward-level data from the 1920 census shows that more Greek-*born* residents lived in the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Wards (193, fifty-six, and forty-eight people, respectively) individually than in the Sixth and Seventh Wards (thirty-five and ten), which included the Holy Trinity area, combined.[340] But here lived Greeks in greater concentration that anywhere else in the Crescent City. They formed a colony here because Holy Trinity was here; Holy Trinity was here because benefactor Nicholas Benachi offered for its construction a parcel here; Nicholas Benachi was here for the booming cotton trade of the late antebellum years and New Orleans ruled this trade because of its strategically located port which connected it to seafaring nations throughout the globe, among them Greece.

Holy Trinity grew steadily in the early twentieth century. The complex at 1222 North Dorgenois grew to include the church, rectory, library, and a parish in St. Louis No. 3 cemetery. The organization itself was chartered in 1909 by the State of Louisiana as the Eastern Orthodox Church of the Holy Trinity, and in 1921 as the Hellenic Orthodox Church. Also growing was the locally residing congregation, with an influx of new Greek immigrants in the 1910s and 1920s which correlated with a nationwide surge. A survey of population schedules of the 1930 census, focusing on those enumeration districts within about a mile of Holy Trinity, provides a snapshot of New Orleans's Greek community at the time:[341]

- There were 247 residents who were either born in Greece or had at least one Greek-born parent, and an additional forty-three people (mostly locally born Greek Americans) who resided within these households. By this measure, a total of 290 people of probable Greek ancestry lived within the North Dorgenois Street Greek enclave, roughly half the Greek population of the city. These 200 people were distributed in fifty-two households, of which four spoke Greek at home.
- Of these fifty-two households, eight had members born in Turkey, Egypt, or Bulgaria but nevertheless spoke Greek. These were probably people of Greek ancestry who had "emigrated from the Hellenistic diaspora (Turkey, Balkan countries, Egypt, Cyprus)"[342]—another source of underestimation of Greek-American populations. There were an additional ten Syrian households in the area, home to forty-one Syrian immigrants or first-generation Syrians, and four locally born relatives. Half the households spoke Syrian.

Spatially, most Greek households lived in the residential blocks immediately east of Holy Trinity at 1222 North Dorgenois, while others lived in the Seventh Ward across Esplanade Avenue. Fewer lived on Esplanade Avenue itself, probably because of its higher rents ($40-$45/month) compared to adjacent neighborhoods,

[338] *New York Times*, August 4, 1873, 2.

[339] Patricia Ann Fenerty and Patricia White Fernandez, *1880 Census of New Orleans*, vol 6 (New Orleans, 1997), Ward 6, enumeration districts 46 and 47, and *1880 Census of New Orleans*, vol 7 (2000), Ward 7, enumeration districts 54 and 55.

The Greek-associated North Dorgenois Street area was subdivided from old plantations in the 1830s and 1840s, developed by the late 1800s. Much of that solidly built housing stock still stands today, under a canopy of live oak trees. The neighborhood suffers from socio-economic woes but possesses many appealing attributes, and may soon rebound. *Photograph by author, 2003.*

[340] Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1920*, vol. 3, *Population* (Washington, DC, 1922), 403 (Composition and Characteristics of the Population, for Wards of New Orleans).

[341] Based on 1930 U.S. population schedules of enumeration districts 36-57, 36-71, 36-72, 36-73, 36-87, 36-88, 36-90, 36-92, 36-93, 36-102, 36-103, 36-106, 36-107, and 36-110. These districts were selected for their proximity to Holy Trinity.

[342] Constantinides, "Profiles of Greek Americans," 94.

whose rents decreased at a rate of about $ per month per block as one moved away from Esplanade.[343]

- The eighty-one Greeks (including three Syrians) who were born overseas and who specified their year of immigration, arrived as early as 1870 and as late as 1925. There were no surviving antebellum arrivals in 1930, one who immigrated in 187[illegible] from the 1890s, fifteen from the 1900s, forty-three from the 1910s, and fourteen from the 1920s. More immigrated in 1914 (both the median and the mode) than any other year. All these figures are consistent with the nationwide trends in Greek immigration.
- Greek households in this enclave were mostly working- and middle-class with a few professionals. Renters outnumbered homeowners, and nuclear families, usually with two to four children and sometimes an in-law or boarder, predominated.
- Of the sixty Greeks and Syrians who specified their occupations, nearly half (twenty-six) worked in food services. Eleven owned their own restaurants, confectionaries, bakeries or fruit stores, five were seafood merchants (usually handling oysters), and the remainder were cooks, bakers, vendors or waiters. The second largest group (twelve) worked as carpenters, electricians, auto mechanics, repairmen, and telephone or construction company employees. Five were retailers of clothing or dry goods; another five were barbers and cleaners; three were steamship engineers; and the remainder worked in professions ranging from physician to streetcar conductor to acting to petty small owner.
- The general neighborhood composition, mostly, but not exclusively, white working-class and middle-class families. Though most were Louisiana born, the area was surprisingly international, with a fair number of people born in France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, and elsewhere, on almost every block. The heterogeneity of the area reflects a general precept of the historical ethnic geography of New Orleans: spatial intermixing of ethnicities usually trumped intensive clustering.

In subsequent decades, those census tracts covering the North Dorgenois area were home to about 20 percent of the city's Greek-born population (and as many as half of all ethnic Greeks), despite comprising less than 5 percent of city's census tracts and land area. The census tract in which Holy Trinity was located contained more Greek-born, twenty-two in 1940; sixteen in 1950) than any other tract in the city.[344]

By mid-century, the circa-1866 church at 1222 North Dorgenois no longer satisfied the congregation's needs, and was cleared away for a new structure. Though of an entirely

The Holy Trinity congregation replaced its original 1866 church with this structure in 1951, designed in a modern Mediterranean style incorporating Greek crosses. Above the entrance, the Greek mosaic inscription from the Book of John reads, "I am the gate of the sheep.... If anyone enters [by me he will be saved] and will…go out and find pasture. Sacred Temple of Holy Trinity, erected Year 1951." It is the last obvious clue to the former Greek presence in this neighborhood, as the congregation moved away in 1976. The edifice is now St. Luke's Episcopal Church. *Photographs by author, 2003-2004; special thanks to Yannis Vassilopoulos for translation.*

[343] Sam R. Carter, "Average Rental Map, New Orleans, Louisiana, 1939," in *Report on Survey of Metropolitan New Orleans Land Use and Property, and Low Income Housing Area* (Baton Rouge, 1941), following page 42.

[344] Based on census tracts 36, 37, 40, 41, and [illegible] from the 1940 and 1950 census. U.S. Census, *Population and Housing Statistics for Census Tracts—New Orleans, La.* (Washington, DC, 1942), 29-30, and "Census Tract Statistics—New Orleans, Louisiana," *1950 Population Census Report*, vol. 3 (Washington, DC, 1952), 9-10.

In 1976, over 110 years after its founding, Holy Trinity sold the North Dorgenois property and moved to Bayou St. John at Robert E. Lee Boulevard. The new Holy Trinity continues to serve as the cultural nucleus for over four hundred Greek-American families spread throughout the metropolitan area, and it is to this site, with its spacious Hellenic Cultural Center and magnificent cathedral (ceiling at right), that thousands of New Orleanians come to celebrate the springtime Greek Heritage Festival. *Photographs by Yanni Vassilopoulos, 2004.*

different style, the new Holy Trinity (1951) featured architectural elements typical of the Orthodox faith, particularly in its domed roof, mosaics, and Greek crosses. Social circumstances in New Orleans changed over the next quarter-century: like the Orthodox Jews of Dryades Street, the Sicilians of the French Quarter, and the Chinese of Chinatown, most Greek-Americans denizens of the century-old enclave departed for new neighborhoods in eastern New Orleans, the lakefront, and Jefferson Parish. In 1976, over 110 years after Nicholas Benachi created the North Dorgenois Street Greek enclave by helping found Holy Trinity, the Western Hemisphere's oldest Orthodox Church sold the property and pulled up its roots. Its new home (after three years of temporary locations) overlooked the scenic and historic banks of Bayou St. John at Robert E. Lee Boulevard, where, prior to the construction of the lakefront, the industrial ance discharged into Lake Pontchartrain. Today, people of Greek ancestry are scattered throughout the predominantly white neighborhoods of the metropolis, with 38 percent more living in Jefferson Parish than in New Orleans proper. The 2000 census counted 4,785 Louisianians claiming Greek as their primary ancestry, distributed in 307 of the state's 1,106 census tracts. But only in twenty-eight tracts did Greek Louisianians comprise more than 1 percent of the population. Most of those were in the New Orleans metropolitan area, where the population was 2,358, but there were three clusters in far corners of the state: sixty-one around Lake Charles on the Mississippi River, seventy-nine near DeRidder north of Lake Charles, and sixty-three in Monroe. In 2000 the "most Greek" census tract in the state (153 residents) was the Pontchartrain Shores neighborhood of Metairie north of West Esplanade Avenue, between Kent Avenue and Lake Villa Drive.[346] Despite the suburban dispersion, Holy Trinity remains *the* cultural nucleus for over four hundred Greek-American families in the metropolitan area, and it is to this site, with its spacious Hellenic Cultural Center and magnificent cathedral, that thousands of New Orleanians come to celebrate the annual springtime Greek Heritage Festival.

A World Away, A Mile Away: The Greeks of Upper Decatur Street

A mile from the graceful homes of North Dorgenois, and three from the sunny banks of Bayou St. John, existed a very different Greek enclave in New Orleans. Though these Hellenics explored downtown New Orleans for no more than a few days, they nevertheless carved out a place of their own in, what was to them, a foreign but favorite city. They were the thousands of Greek merchant marines who sailed the ships of their homeland and made a temporary (and sometimes permanent) home in this port of call. Greek sailors have been a part of downtown New Orleans' street scene since the seafaring nation first took an interest in the imports and exports of the American interior. For many decades, Greek sailors formed a district on the 200 block of Decatur Street.

In his 1979 essay *Odysseus in Louisiana: The Greek Sailors in New Orleans*, Andrew Horton explained that the Greek Merchant Marine, at the time largest in the world, sent upwards of 1,000 registered ships per year to America's second busiest port. Since each vessel employed a crew of about forty marines, of which at least 30 to 50 percent had to be Greek, about 20,000 Greek seamen arrived to the port of New Orleans annually. Another 5,000 to 10,000 Greek nationals sailed for vessels flying other flags. Prior to the mid-twentieth century, most Greek sailors were islanders by birth and sailors for life, dedicated to their profession; older on average, they were more likely to have families back home and regularly remit earnings to them. By the time of Horton's research, youthful adventurers from Athens and other interior cities were increasingly replacing the traditional "AB" (able bodied) Greek seaman, and though most still sent their money

[345] "Profile of Selected Social Characteristics, 2000. Census 2000 Summary File 3 (SF 3) - Sample Data," U.S. Census Bureau.

[346] Computed from 2000 U.S. Census data on primary ancestry (based on statistical samples, not actual counts), at the census tract level.

home, these young *tihodiotis* (luck chasers) ‘w d to taste the salty air of new adventures.”[347] They found n New Orleans, which, Horton reported, was select d ur animously by Greek sailors as their favorite Americ n c ts atmosp e climate, moderate size, and the proxim of its p to its downtown endeared the lively and tive city t e Hellenics, and their favorite place i n was unqu tionably upper Decatur Street. There, pa icula y on the 0 and 200 blocks, awaited a door-to-door d ict of G k-run bars, restaurants, and shops catering to the few h ndred Greek sailors who happened to be in port. It wa like few other places in the nation, even am ng port citi , n the density of the clustering and in its catering toward Gree *naftes* (sailors), as well as seamen from th countries. Alo g upper Decatur and adjacent Iber ille w clubs with na s like the Athenian Room, Zorba’s Habana B r, Scorpio’s, Casa Cuba, the Acropolis, L Amantes, Tr de Winds, Casa Angelo, Victor’s Copa-Cabana, Mediterran n Room, Pirate’s Den, The Greek C and the Gre Italian Seamen’s Club.[348] Inside, the at osphere wa abo as authentically Greek as a place beyo Greece ca be, w th patrons speaking the l guage, eating ypical food listening to live *bouzouki* b s dancing the traditional *zeybekiko*, and paying astronomical bills to G k owners busy nights, the clubs wer cked, the e itement electr e atmosphere “vital,” yet in a way, wh some,” perh s because the regulars were ined by “ peculiar bond”[349] of shared origins and circu sta ces, aggregated in a d t n yet welcoming city. Outside on Decatur Street, the at osphere was decidedly less w olesome: these particula cks had become a haven for pr itution, due n no small pa to the constant presenc of h ndreds of sailors out n t e town. The *Figaro* in 197 ported that “the first hree blocks of Decatur Street is he ost open prostitu- tio operation—in broad daylight t New Orleans has er e Storyville.”[350] A raid in spring in 1979 landed this men’s enclave on the fro ages of local newspapers in a less-than-favorable light, l commentators at the time mphasized that the scenes inside the clubs and outsid o Decatur Street were as diff r as day and night.

Less-than-favorably a escribes how the local Gre community had traditi lly viewed its brethren who sa in and out of the city and its rowdy nightlife. Th k-Americans of North Dorgenois Street (used metapho ally here, since by this t e most local Greeks ha oved to other neighborh ds) and the Greek seamen upper Decatur came fro distinct worlds, made their living differently, and ra crossed paths. That chang when a leade of the lo Greek Orthodox community, th William Gaines, endeavored for years to m ister to the

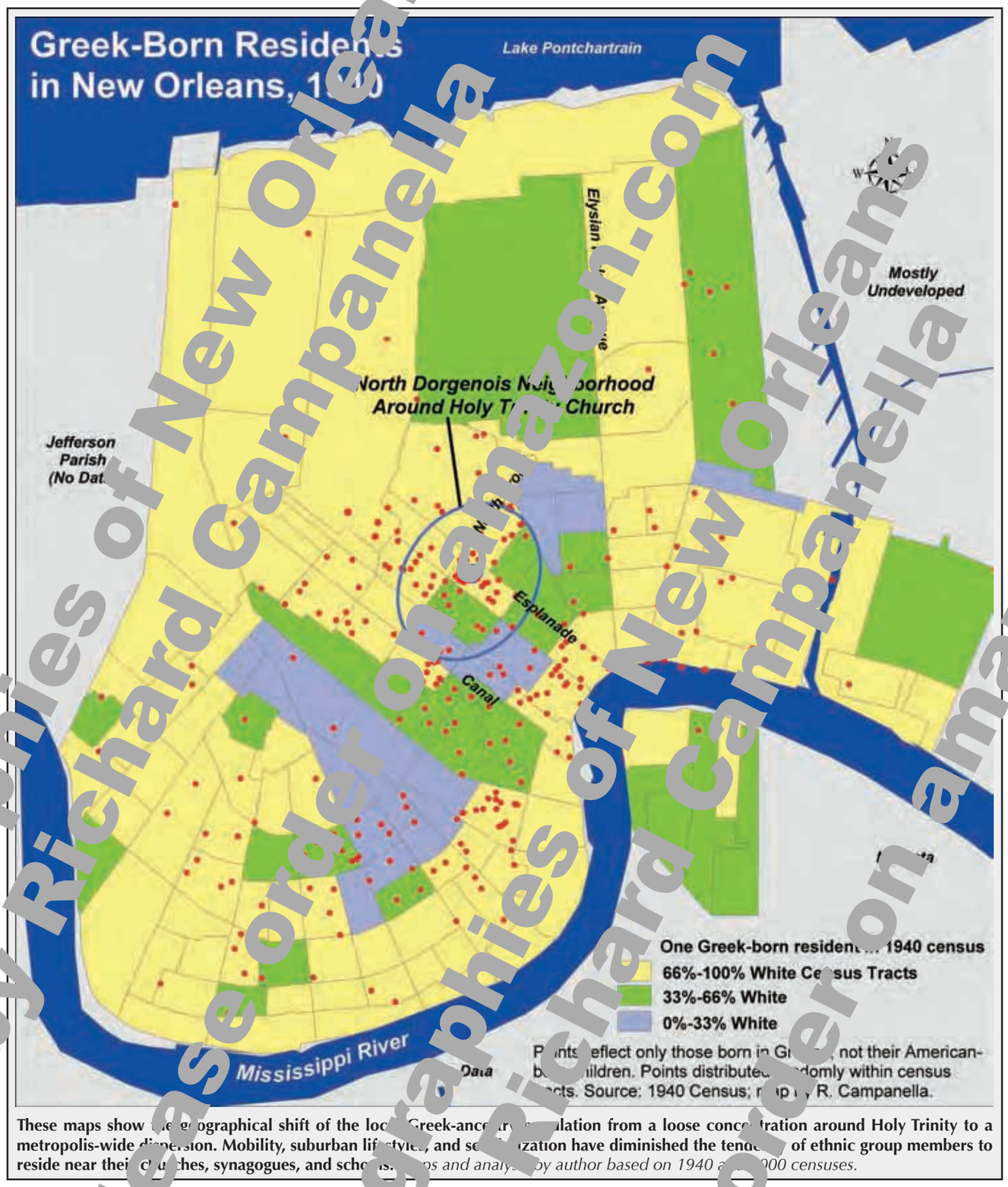
[347] Andrew Horton, “Odysseus in Louisiana: Th reek Sailors in New Orleans,” in *Perspectives on Ethnicity in New Orleans*, ed. Jo n C (New Orleans, 1979), 27.
[348] Culled from late-1970s sources, including *New Orleans City Directory* (New Orleans, 1979) and newspaper articles cited in this section.
[349] Gary Esolen, “Tonight’s the Night,” *Figaro* (June 4, 1979): 9.
[350] Iris Kelso, “Red Lights Over New Orleans,” *Figaro* (May 14, 1979): 16.

Greek seamen, established the St. Nicholas Maritime Center to give the sailors an rnative to the club scene on upper Decatur.[351] Located the Catholic Church-run Stella Maris Maritime Center o 609 Gov. Nicholls Street and named for Greece’s patron s t of the seas, St. Nicholas represented a union of the tw di inct manifestations of H nic culture in New Orlea s.

Starting n t e 1960s, new containeri n technology radically changed the shipping industry. eak-bulk cargo, once lab iously packed into hulls u y unit, was now stored s standardized metal contain r handled in mass-produ ion mode, lifted by crane irectly off ships and ont trucks and trains. The techno w chinned the ranks of lo gshoremen and seamen worl ide by as m ch a 0 per- ce Because containerized sh s were now unloa ed so efficiently, those few seamen who kept their jobs h little time to take R&R at the por of ca One of the distinguishing

[351] Horton, “Odysseus in Louisiana: The Greek Sailors Orleans,” 30-31.

For many years, this bl k of Decatur Street in the upper French Quarter was like few others in the nation in its density of Greek-run establishments catering to Greek sailors. Inside, patrons spoke Gree e Greek foods, listened to live *bouzouki* bands, and danced t aditional *zeybekiko*. The district dried up in the 1980s ith changes in the shipping industry and in the city’s econo y away from shipping and toward tourism. With it went a vita and historically significant part of French Quarter cult e last of the sailor hang-outs. Now tourists dominate th s reets, and only a few vestiges of the Greek establishments remain. *Photographs by author, 2002-2003.*



These maps show the geographical shift of the local Greek-ancestry population from a loose concentration around Holy Trinity to a metropolis-wide dispersion. Mobility, suburban lifestyles, and secularization have diminished the tendency of ethnic group members to reside near their churches, synagogues, and schools. *Maps and analysis by author based on 1940 and 2000 censuses.*

characteristic of port cities—seamen out for a night on the town—began to disappear. The composition of the merchant marines changed in this era. While Greece is still a major ship-owning country, many of its vessels fly the flags of other nations, such as Liberia and Panama, and it is from those and other nations that crews are drawn. As fewer and fewer Greek merchant marines set foot in New Orleans, the Greek clubs of upper Decatur Street began to disappear, starting in the 1980s, just as the tourism industry began overtaking the port as the city's major employer. Today, with about 800 Greek-owned ships calling to Louisiana ports and probably under 10,000 Greek seamen arriving to the Port of New Orleans annually, not a single Greek nightclub remains on upper Decatur. The strip now caters mostly to tourists, who number over 10 million annually; one is more likely to hear canned Cajun music spilling out of Indian-run T-shirt shops,

of plunging notes of funk emanating from the Harvard University-owned House of Blues, than the rhythm of a *bouzouki* band and the stomp of *zeybekiko* dancing. Barely a trace of Greek clubs may be found, save an occasional faded sign on a door or window. The district may have been the last in a long line of sailor's hang-outs in downtown New Orleans, dating back to early nineteenth century and including red-light districts such as "The Swamp" on Girod Street, Gallatin Street near the French Market, the Tango Belt, and Storyville. Yet a few sailors' "refuges" still operate in the upper Quarter and CBD, where visiting seamen can call home, take care of finances and paperwork, and even partake of traditional foods and sundries from home. Most have signs in Greek in their storefronts. And while the St. Nicholas Maritime Center on Gov. Nicholls Street is now a condominium, Greek sailors and captains continue to pay visits to Holy Trinity and other institutions of Greek New Orleans during holidays and special events.

Greek Places in the Ethnic Geography of New Orleans

Major groups such as those of African, Anglo, Creole, Irish, German, and Italian ancestry dominated the urban cityscape of New Orleans. The remainder constituted a multitude of less-celebrated, less-studied groups. Greeks. Filipinos. Slavs. Norwegians. Syrians. Indians. Spanish, including Basque. Peoples from the Arab world, Europe, Africa, the Americas, and Asia. The Greek enclave of North Dorgenois is representative of the geographical experience of these smaller groups, who often coalesced around an important religious or cultural institution, but who did not exclusively live in that neighborhood, and probably did not numerically predominate there. Their impact on the cityscape was usually subtle, but as a whole they helped render New Orleans a truly multicultural city. A perusing of the population schedules of any early twentieth-century census attests to the prevalence and integration of these smaller groups throughout the city. Though they did not form conspicuous concentrations like Little Palermo and Chinatown, the ethnic mosaic of New Orleans would be much less intricate without them.

The geography of transient populations, too, should not be neglected. The Greek seamen of upper Decatur, no matter how brief their stay, nevertheless transformed the cityscape of those two blocks for many decades, injecting an exotic, international milieu into the gritty streets of the upper French Quarter. So too did transients from earlier eras, be they Kentucky flatboatsmen in the early 1800s, Anglo businessmen from the North residing in the great Faubourg St. Mary hotels during antebellum winters, or soldiers on leave seeking the escapism of Bourbon Street during World War II. Ironically, the Greek cityscape of upper Decatur has since given way to one formed by another transient group, tourists, whose expectations and needs have driven the utter transformation of downtown New Orleans.

Does New Orleans remain "within the orbit of a Hellenistic world,"[352] as A.J. Liebling observed in 1[illegible]? The Greek presence is not quite as palpable today as it might have been on North Dorgenois in 1920 or on upper Decatur in 1[illegible]5. In 2004, plans to move the local Greek Consulate, open since 1848, to the larger Greek community in Tampa, Florida, seemed to symbolize that "the oldest Greek community in North and South America" is losing ground to larger enclaves elsewhere in the United States.[353] But the august Holy Trinity Cathedral, the Greek-language advertisements on seamen's outposts in the CBD, and the Greek temple-like designs of Gallier Hall seem to maintain that subtle Hellenistic ambience in the streets of New Orleans.

[352] Liebling, *The Earl of Louisiana*, 7.
[353] Joan Treadway, "Greeks in N.O. Fight Consulate Relocation," *Times-Picayune*, July 16, 2004, B1-2.

Paradoxical Yet Typical
The Geography of New Orleans' African American Community

"Paradoxical yet typical" describes the complex residential patterns of the African American community in New Orleans since colonial times. *Paradoxical*, in that black New Orleanians were residentially most integrated with whites at a time when the races were socially most segregated—during slavery—but as tolerance and integration increased over the next century and a half, whites and blacks spatially drifted apart in their residential settlements. *Typical*, in that, as counterintuitive as it may seem, this racial geography mimics those witnessed in other old Southern cities. The geography of New Orleans' African American community provides startling insights into the history of the city, the nature of urban slavery, the impact of the Civil War and emancipation, economics, land value, the amenities and nuisances of a deltaic urban environment, and, of course, race relations. The result today is a spatial distribution of African Americans that is *de facto* segregated in many ways yet still more integrated than in many major American cities. "Two centuries of paradox" is how one researcher described the phenomenon.[354]

[354] Daphne Spain, "Race Relations and Residential Segregation in New Orleans: Two Centuries of Paradox," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 441 (January 1982).

Black Residential Patterns in Antebellum Times

Premier among the settlement types of enslaved African Americans was the "back-alley" pattern. Many slaves in New Orleans labored as domestics and resided in the distinctive slant-roof quarters appended to the rear of townhouses and cottages. Others, many of them skilled craftsmen and artisans, lived in detached tenement-like quarters on back streets, close by the abodes of their owners, if not immediately adjacent to them. "This arrangement had the twin virtue of keeping [slaves] under close surveillance and providing white with constant service."[355] Other slaves, particularly those hired out by their owners to do project work, resided in shanty towns along the swamp edge.[356] Living there also were free slaves (not to be confused with the free people of color, who formed a special caste) who found the only affordable living space in the so-called "back-of-town." Through these settlement patterns, New Orleans' antebellum racial geography exhibited a thorough spatial integration of white and black, despite the severe and oppressive social segregation. In the words of geographer Peirce F. Lewis, a "racial map of the

[355] David C. Rankin, "The Forgotten People: Free People of Color in New Orleans, 1850-1870" (Ph.D. dissertation, Johns Hopkins University (1977), 81.

[356] John Kellogg, "Post-Bellum Urban Clusters in the Postbellum South," *Geographical Review* 67 (July 1977), 311.

Structural vestiges of the "back alley" (or "early Southern") pattern of black-white residential proximity are apparent in the domestic quarters appended to hundreds of surviving antebellum buildings. Some were slave quarters; others were servant quarters; still others were used for boarders, guests, or storage. *Photographs by author, 2002-2004.*

This 1860 map shows the remarkable African American distribution pattern reflective of Creole and Anglo culture. On the Creole side of town (top right, wards four through nine), free people of color increasingly outnumbered the slave population as one went downriver. But above Canal Street (lower left of map), on the predominantly Anglo side, the opposite was true: slaves consistently and greatly outnumbered free people of color. Evident in this pattern is the Creole recognition of three racial castes (white, free people of color, and enslaved black), versus the Anglo view of a strictly two-tiered racial caste system. To this day, the descendents of the free people of color, who are generally known as Creoles and often possess Francophone surnames, continue to reside below Canal Street, while most African Americans who live above Canal Street are non-Creoles with Anglo surnames. *Map and analysis by author based on 1860 Census.*

Vieux Carré [in antebellum times] would have produced a delicate salt and pepper pattern."[357] This residential proximity of the races, a by-product of urban slavery, was reinforced by an 1817 city ordinance which legislated that "no slave shall live apart from his or her owner or hirer without obtaining a ticket from the owner describing the place and specifying the time duration."[358] Geographers have described this low-density intermingling as an "early southern" pattern exemplified best by New Orleans and Charleston and to a lesser degree by Washington and Baltimore. It is distinguished from the "early northern" city patterns of intense competition between blacks and immigrants for convenient inner-city space.[359]

The housing stock of New Orleans was developed with this conveniently proximate racial stratification in mind, and still makes up extensive historical streetscapes today. One commonly sees "Slave Quarters" for rent or sale in real estate ads, a poignant reminder of both a troubled past and the ironic residential proximity of the races at a time when subjugation was most extreme.

The enslaved population accounted for about two-thirds of the African-ancestry population in antebellum New Orleans; *gens de couleur libre* (free people of color) comprised the remainder. Deeply influential as artisans, builders, and businessmen, free people of color made up 45 percent of the city's black population in the early American years, 1,950 free non-whites compared to 5,2[illegible] slaves in 1[illegible] city of 17,242 in 1[illegible]0) and 31 percent by the Civil War (10,6[illegible] free colored to 13,385 slaves in a city of 168,675 in 18[illegible]).[360] Many arrived in 1809 as refugees from Saint-Domingue, but many more were native sons and daughters of mixed racial ancestry, Catholic in faith, French in language, and Creole in culture. This "Franco-African American" caste represented a Caribbean-influenced exception to the Anglo American norm of a "rigid, two-tiered [social] structure that drew a single unyielding line between the white and not white."[361] It gave New Orleans an unusual three-caste system of whites, free people of color, and enslaved blacks. One commonly sees "f.p.c." as they were abbreviated in the population schedules, living door-to-door with locally born whites, immigrants, and black slaves, none of whom were owned by free people of color.[362] A higher economic status and the ability to choose freely led this proud population to cluster geographically in the lower French Quarter, Bayou Road, the faubourgs Treme and Marigny, New Marigny, Franklin, and those making up the present-day neighborhood of Bywater. Looking at the map, *Geography of African-American Community of New Orleans, 1860*, free people of color equaled, then numerically overwhelmed, the slave population as one went deeper into the Creole side of town (wards four through nine). But above Canal Street, on the predominantly Anglo side of town, the opposite was true: in wards three, two, one, ten, and eleven, slaves consistently and greatly outnumbered free people of color, reflecting the "rigid, two-tiered"[363] racial caste system associated with Anglo society. The uptown First Ward, for example, was home

[357] Peirce F. Lewis, *New Orleans: The Making of an Urban Landscape* (Cambridge, 1976), 44.

[358] As summarized by Claudia Dale Goldin, *Urban Slavery in the American South, 1820-1860: A Quantitative History* (Chicago and London, 1976), 135.

[359] Larry Ford and Ernst Griffin, "The Ghettoization of Paradise," *Geographical Review* 69 (April 1979): 156-57. See also David T. Herbert and Colin J. Thomas, *Urban Geography: A First Approach* (Chichester, New York, Brisbane, Toronto and Singapore, 1982), 312-14.

[360] Census Bureau, "Aggregate Amount of Persons Within the United States in the Year 1810: Aggregate Amount of Persons Within the Terrotiry of New Orleans, 1810," Government Documents, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, 82; and Joseph C.G. Kennedy, *Population of the United States in 1860; Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census* (Washington, DC, 1864), 195.

[361] Arnold R. Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon, "Introduction: Franco-Africans and African-Americans," in *Creole New Orleans*, eds. Arnold R. Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon (Baton Rouge and London, [illegible]), 189.

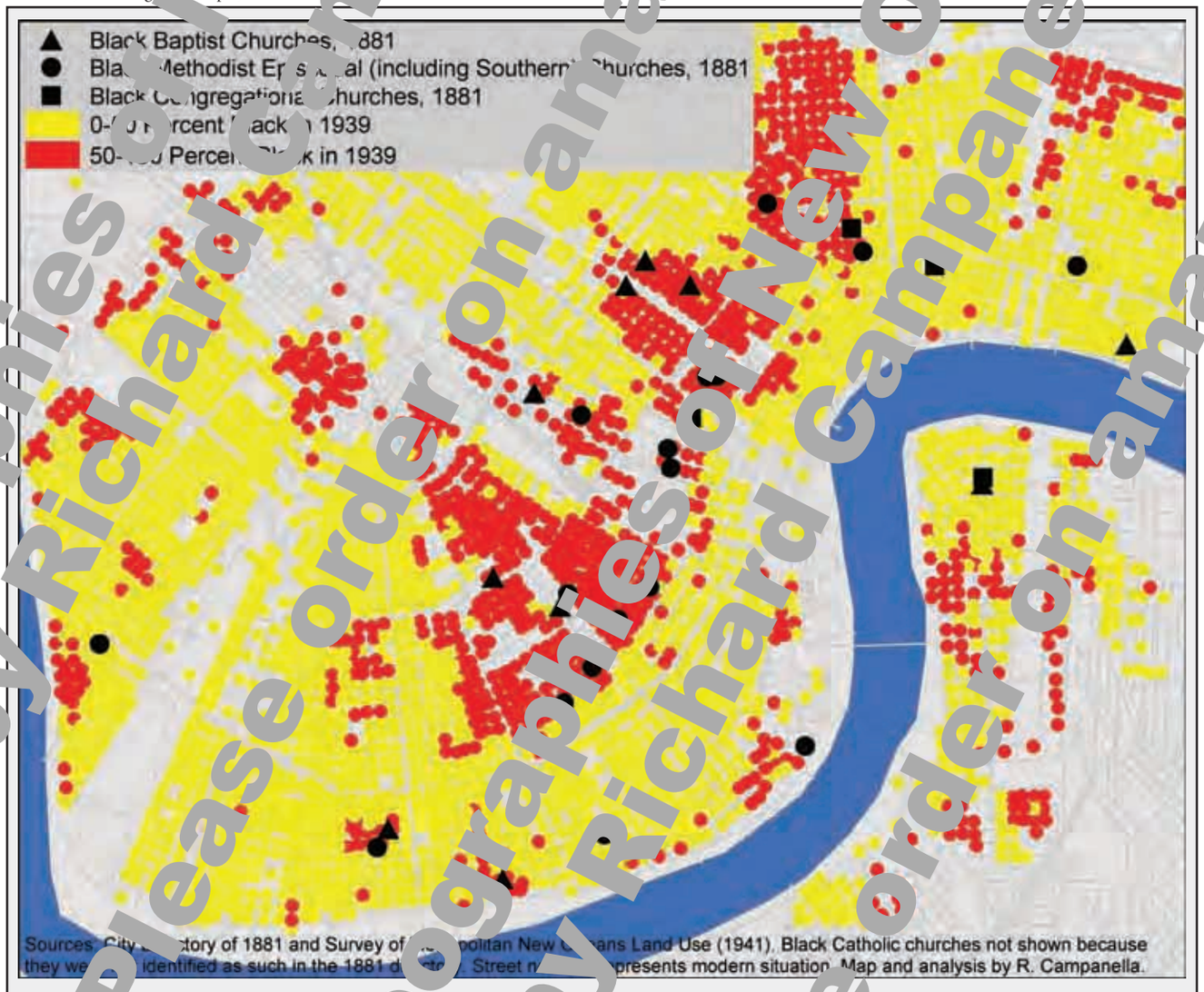
[362] Seven hundred and fifty-two free people of color—about 20 percent of all black slaveholders in the entire South—owned 2,354 slaves in New Orleans in 1830. Antebellum New Orleans was home to the nation's largest citywide population of slave-owning blacks and included some of the largest black-owned slave estates in the country. Rankin, "The Forgotten People," 153-56.

[363] Hirsch and Logsdon, "Introduction: Franco-Africans and African-Americans," 189.

to seven black slaves for every free person of color, while in the downtown Eighth and Ninth wards could be found three free people of color for every black slave.[364] Why did the gens *de couleur libre* prefer the lower city? The lower is cultural. This was the Francophone, Catholic, local descended (Creole) side of town—a historical derivative of the foundation of the city here—and it was in this environment that most free people of color found it more hospitable to live, work, raise their families, and prosper. The English-speaking world on the upper side of town was not only culturally foreign terrain, but its white inhabitants were more hostile to the very notion of a free person of color—a notion all but unknown in parts of the interior and upper South, from which many Anglos migrated.[365] Descendants of the *gens de couleur libre* still live generally on the downtown side of Canal Street, particularly in the Seventh Ward, although most have moved away from the old riverside neighborhoods and into twentieth-century subdivisions closer to Lake Pontchartrain.

One additional and especially tragic component of this human geography demands mention, despite its transient and non-residential nature: the presence of dozens of slave camps, dealerships, and auctioning sites in New Orleans, primarily in the Faubourg St. Mary. These were the dreaded temporary homes of tens of thousands of slaves known only to history by their first names and prices, as they passed in chains through the South's largest slave market and to hinterland locations. In the last year of their existence, 1861, eight slave dealerships were listed in the City Directory, of which fifteen were located at or near the Gravier/Baronne street intersection in the heart of the present-day CBD. Three others were

[364] Kennedy, *Population of the United States in 18*[illegible]
[365] Rankin, "The Forge[illegible]ple," 80.



Where did African Americans live in late nineteenth-century New Orleans? Detailed data are hard to come by, but mapping out the locations of black churches in 1881 and overlaying them on much-later (1939) racial distribution data indicate that the patterns remained fairly stable over this fifty-year span. Most black New Orleanians lived in the back-of-town, with some residing along the riverfront and others in pockets throughout uptown and downtown. Note the positioning of Congregational churches mostly in the lower city, Methodist Episcopal churches at the front edge of the back-of-town, and Baptist churches in the very rear. Reasons are unclear. (Black Catholic churches are not shown because they were not identified as such in the source material. Most would have been located in the lower city.) *Map and analysis by author based on 1881 City Directory and 1941 Survey of Metropolitan New Orleans Land Use.*

located on Chartres Street at the lower edge of the old city. No physical evidence of these dealerships survives, and only a few old auction sites still stand around town, but their familiar-sounding addresses, listed in city directories between vendors of slate and makers of soap, send chilling reminders of the realities of chattel slavery—and New Orleans' role in it.[366]

In sum, the antebellum geography of black New Orleans consisted of enslaved blacks intricately intermixed with the greater population, particularly in the upper half of the city, while free people of color predominated in the lower half of the city. Anecdotal evidence of these patterns comes from an 1843 article in the *Daily Picayune*:

> The Negroes are scattered through the city promiscuously; those of mixed blood, such as Griffes, Quadroons, &c., [Creoles of color] showing a preference for the back streets of the First [French Quarter, Faubourg Marigny and part of the Third Municipality, Faubourg Marigny and adjacent areas].[367]

With the minor exception of the back-of-town, where very poor mixed-race and black and others lived in squatter-like huts, there were no expansive, exclusively black neighborhoods in antebellum New Orleans. Even Faubourg Tremé, which is sometimes described as America's oldest black neighborhood, was racially intermixed. The factors driving these patterns were the domestic nature of urban slavery, the free will and desire to live among cultural peers in the case of the free people of color, and the availability of cheap land along the backswamp edge.

Emergence of the "Classic Southern Pattern" after the Civil War

After the violent watershed years of the 1860s, the white population of New Orleans declined by 2.5 percent to 160,925, while the black population surged by 110 percent, to 50,456. That total would increase by another 54 percent by the turn of century.[368] Almost all emigrants were emanci-

[366] *Gardner's New Orleans City Directory for 1861* (New Orleans, 1861), 489, listing under "Slave Dealers." Note: some of these downtown dealerships may have served only as offices; actual slave pens could have been located in less dense, non-commercial locations.

[367] "A Kaleidoscopic View of New Orleans," *Daily Picayune*, September 23, 1843, p. 2, col. 3.

[368] Dale A. Somers, "Black and White in New Orleans: A Study in Urban Race Relations, 1865-1900," *Journal of Southern History* 40 (February 1974): 21.

Typical back-of-town street scene, 1943. *Photograph by John Vachon, courtesy Library of Congress.*

pated slaves abandoning plantation life for the hope of the metropolis. Some came from the Creole-dominant sugar parishes of Louisiana; others came from Anglo-dominant cotton parishes such as the Feliciana and nearby counties in Mississippi. "The negroes of this parish are going to New Orleans with a perfect rush," reported a regional newspaper a year after the Civil War ended. "Many of our finest plantations are quite deserted. At this rate in another year the parish of Terrebonne will be quite clear of them."[369] They arrived to an unwelcoming city caught up in its own woes, but it provided employment opportunities far better than the hated toil of the sugar fields. In 1870, black men, who made up 25 percent of the labor force, worked 52 percent of New Orleans' unskilled labor jobs, 57 percent of the servant positions, and 20 percent of certain skilled positions.[370]

Where were these emigrants to settle? Unaffordable rent and antagonistic residents kept the freedmen from settling in most city neighborhoods. The townhouses in the inner city, recently vacated by the wealthier classes, had since been subdivided into low-rent apartments, but these hovels were more likely to be leased to poor immigrants than to poor blacks. Nor could the freedmen take refuge in the downtown neighborhoods of the former free people of color, who often scorned the freedmen as threats to their once relatively privileged (but now rapidly diminishing) social status. Destitute and excluded, most freedmen had little choice but to settle in the ragged back-of-town, where urban development petered into amorphous low-density slums and eventually dissipated into deforested swamps. The back-of-town offered low real estate costs because of its environmental nuisances, inconveniences, and lack of amenities and city services. Together with many local ex-slaves who also found themselves, for the first time, seeking their own shelter, the freedmen joined those blacks already settled at the backswamp margin in the formation of the city's first large-scale, exclusively black neighborhoods. At the same time, emancipation diminished the "old southern" intermingling pattern of black residency in quarters behind white abodes. (Irish and German servants had already replaced many domestic slaves in the 1850s, turning "slave quarters" into "servants' quarters.") Thus, in the years after the Civil War, New Orleans' historically intermixed racial patterns began to diminish in favor of a rapidly coalescing, expansive, and overwhelmingly black back-of-town pattern, pushed away from the increasingly white front-of-town.

Mapping the distribution of black churches in this era helps capture this emerging pattern. Of the thirty-two churches listed as "colored" in the 1881 City Directory, fully two-thirds were located behind the Dryades-Rampart-St. Claude line—that is, in the back-of-town.[371] To a remarkable

[369] As quoted in *Daily Picayune*, January 26, 1866, p. 3, col. 2.

[370] John W. Blassingame, *Black New Orleans, 1860-1880* (Chicago and London, 1973), 60-61.

[371] *Soard's City Directory for 1881* (New Orleans, 1881), 888-91. Of the thirty-two churches listed as "colored" in 1881, 53 percent were Methodist Episcopal, 34 percent were Baptist, and the remainder were Congregational. Interestingly, the Meth-

The location of the back-of-town shifted over time. The term originally referred to backswamp, but later took on economic, social, racial, and cultural connotations, which survive today even though the swamp does not. Louis Armstrong, who was born in the neighborhood to the center left of this photograph and was an infant when the shutter snapped in 1902, routinely described this area as the back-of-town in his recollections later in life. The area at center is now occupied by City Hall. *Southeastern Architectural Archive, Special Collections, Howard-Tilton Library, Tulane University.*

degree, the distribution spatially correlates with black residential clusters of the twentieth and twenty-first century (see accompanying map). This racial dichotomization of whites to the front-of-town and blacks to the back-of-town was not unique to New Orleans; it was occurring in many Southern cities. Historians have documented this trend in Savannah and Baton Rouge, in which patterns of racial integration in 1870 had spatially disassociated by 1880.[372] "By far the most common sites for these new Negro settlements were the bottomlands near the 1865 urban boundary,"[373] observed John Kellogg in a journal article entitled "Negro Urban Clusters in the Postbellum South." The post-emancipation movement of African Americans to the city margin "froze" the circa-1860s swamp edge in the cityscape, preserving this old physical geography in the modern racial geography of New Orleans. We also are reminded of the pattern in toponymies: it is no coincidence that Marais ("marsh") Street runs mostly entirely through black back-of-town neighborhoods. Architecture, too, manifested the geographical impact of emancipation. In the decades following the Civil War, Creole cottages, which often featured domestic ("slave") quarters in the courtyard, declined in popularity in favor of the shotgun house, a linear house type that better utilized scarce parcel space. City-wide and throughout the South, the "old southern" pattern was transformed into the "classic southern" pattern of racial geography, in which "areas of disamenity, such as a swamp close to the railroad tracks or a site near a factory, were selected by whites for blacks. Poor quality houses were built there specifically for blacks."[374] Disamenities (nuisances) in New Orleans' back-of-town included flooding, mosquitoes, "miasmas" (stagnant air associated with unhealthiness), unpaved streets, open sewage and garbage dumps, a lack of city services, distance from employment, inadequate urban infrastructure, and a lack of potable water, as explained during a drought spell in 1883:

> Parties living near the river have no trouble in obtaining water, but in the rear of the city there is serious destitution, especially among the poorer classes, who are driven to great straits, even to using water for many purposes out of the drainage canals.[375]

The back-of-town cluster was by no means the only geographical pattern exhibiting African American settlement in late nineteenth-century New Orleans. Many blacks, particularly Creoles of color, gained or maintained a middle-class

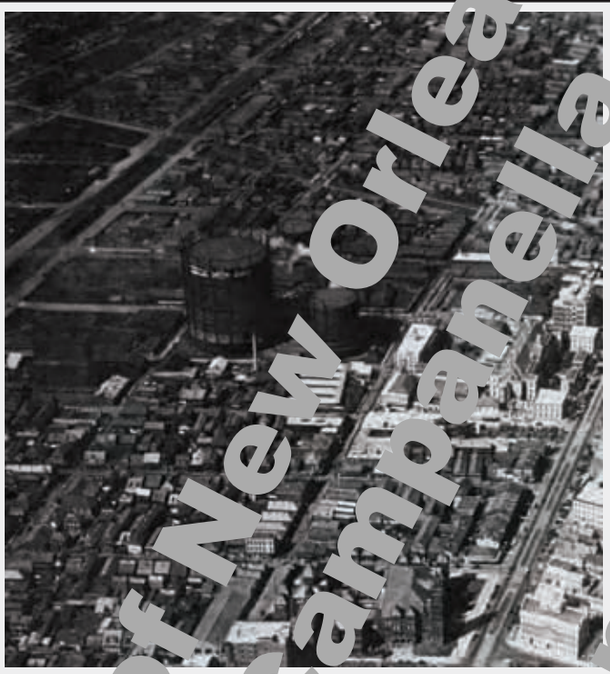
odist Episcopal churches tended to be located in the older, inner tier of the back-of-town, while Baptist churches were usually situated in the far rural fringes.

[372] Research by John W. Blassingame and Terry Seip is summarized by Geraldine Mary McTigue, "Forms of Racial Interaction in Louisiana, 1860-1880" (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1975), 194.

[373] Kellogg, "Negro Urban Clusters in the Postbellum South," 313.

[374] Ford and Griffin, "The Ghettoization of Paradise," 157.

[375] "Water Famine: Much Suffering in the City for Want of Water for Household Purposes," *Daily Picayune*, October 3, 1883, p. 2, col. 4.



Aerial view of the back-of-town in the 1920s, from Poydras to Tulane Avenue, with North Claiborne transecting the scene from left to right. Note the area's environmental nuisances, such as gasworks, smokestacks, and vacant lots, and the proximity to Charity Hospital (center right), all of which reduced the value of real estate and the cost of housing. Shacks and shotgun houses were built here in high density, occupied largely by poor African-Americans. *Southeastern Architectural Archive, Special Collections, Howard-Tilton Library, Tulane University*

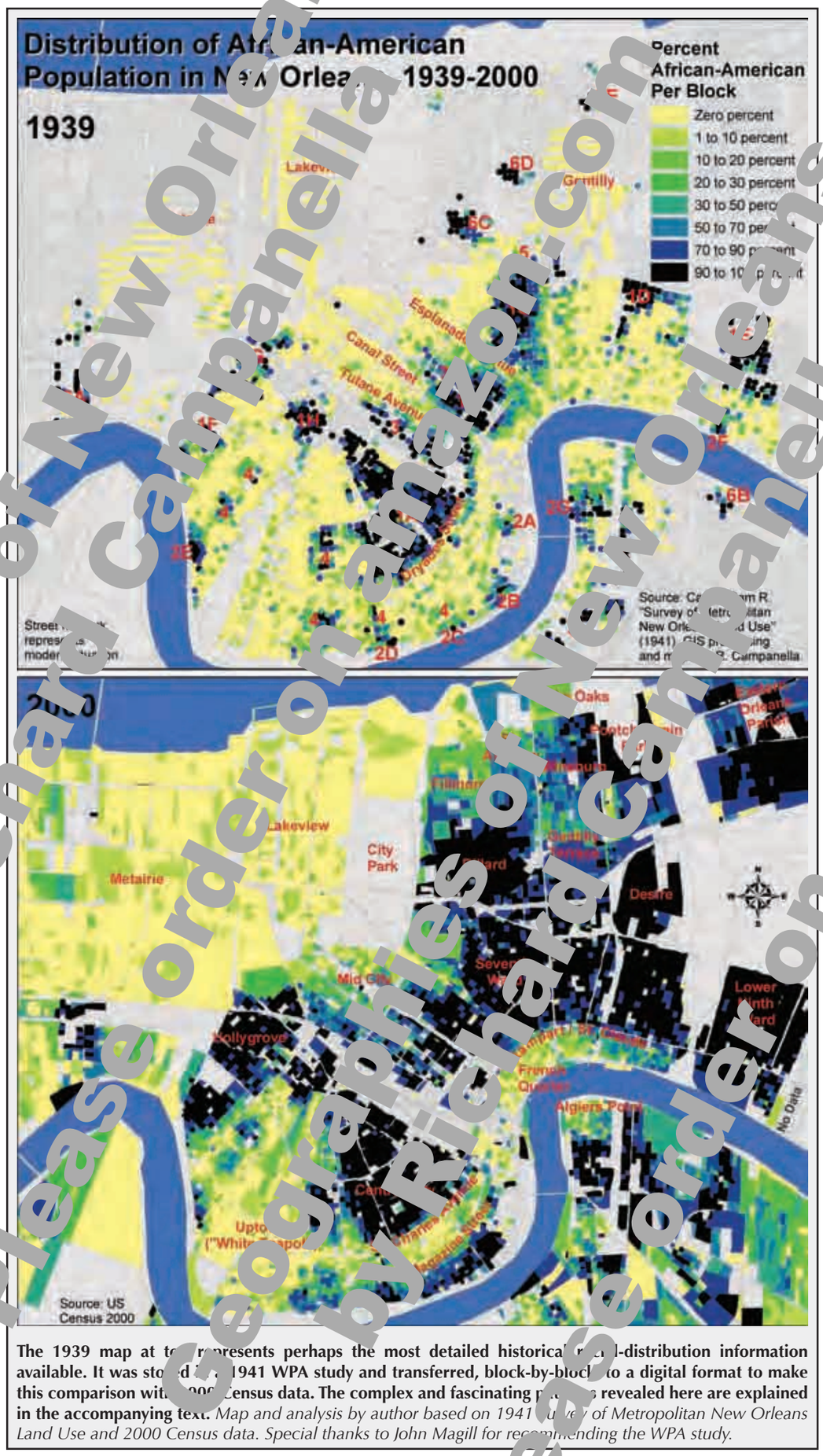
status, and, as the *gens de couleur libre* before them, chose their neighborhoods on their terms, for reasons of tradition, family, religion, culture, convenience, economics, or real estate. Some had departed for France, Caribbean islands, or Mexico, but most generally remained downtown. Other, poorer members of the black community were relegated to areas that, unlike the low-lying back-of-town, might be high on the natural levee and free from the threat of flood—but whose other environmental nuisances nevertheless rendered them low-rent and undesirable. These areas included blocks of wharves, battures, mills, warehouses, factories, industrial sites, dumps, cemeteries, and hospitals, and particularly along canals and railroad tracks. So often were slums equated with railroad tracks that the expression "the other side of the tracks" resonates in the language today. Other features correlated with black residency were the numerous irregular sliver-shaped blocks wedged in and between orthogonal subdivisions, created by the piecemeal development of upriver New Orleans from long-lot plantations. Such oddball parcels were hard to improve and ended up selling for less, attracting poorer renters and buyers who were often black. These and other areas accounted for small black enclaves interspersed throughout the city beyond the principal back-of-town cluster, which could reasonably be called New Orleans' first ghetto. One additional factor influenced the geography of African Americans in this era: because many blacks worked as domestics for wealthy whites, they (together with working-class whites) often settled in humble cottages and shotguns located in the "nucleus" of "superblocks"[376] outlined by the great mansion-lined avenues such as St. Charles, Louisiana, Napoleon, and others. Wide avenues were developed for upper-class residential enclaves for their spaciousness, magnificence, and proximity to streetcar service; smaller streets within the nucleus of the network of wide avenues were built up with much humbler housing stock. The grand avenues formed a "lattice" of upper-class whites around cores of working-class blacks and whites, who moved into the smaller quarters to be within walking distance of their employment. "Blacks typically live behind white 'big houses' on small streets surrounded by major, tree-lined, 'white' boulevards, but not really in 'ghettos,'" wrote geographers Larry Ford and Ernest Griffin of southern cities in general. "Because blacks were employed as domestic servants or gardeners and because transportation was rudimentary, complete separation by race was not desirable" by whites.[377] Peirce Lewis describes this phenomenon theoretically in *New Orleans: The Making of an Urban Landscape*, and hard data generally confirm it. The "superblock" phenomenon may be thought of as a descendent of the old "classic southern" pattern of blacks living near whites via the domestic nature of urban slavery. One important difference, of course, is that this post-emancipation pattern was one of convenience and practical necessity, not compulsion backed up with violence.

Mapping the Patterns: 1939

Numerical data depicting the spatial patterns of New Orleans' African American community lie in reams of hand-written population schedules of the decennial censuses, starting in 1870, the first census year for which Louisiana was American. These valuable records are, unfortunately, highly inaccessible for the purposes of mapping and pattern detection. Those censuses prior to 1880, for example, are unmappable because street addresses were not recorded for each household. The 1890 census was lost to fire. Even those that did properly record street addresses would require literally thousands of hours of labor to map comprehensively, a task challenged by antiquated house-numbering systems, illegible penmanship, and scratched microfilm. So geographers have had to rely on the compendium volumes of the censuses, in which raw data are aggregated into larger units—by state, parish/county, city, ward, census tract (starting in 1940), block group, and finally, at the block level, the most detailed scale, available only for recent decades. But there is an exception. Among the many valuable research projects of the Work Projects Administration in New Orleans was one by Sam R. Carter entitled *A*

[376] Lewis, *New Orleans: The Making of an Urban Landscape*, 46. Black males worked 57 to 60 percent of servant positions in New Orleans in 1870 and 1880, though they comprised 25 and 23 percent, respectively, of the labor force in those years. Blassingame, *Black New Orleans, 1860-1880*, 61.

[377] Ford and Griffin, "The Ghettoization of Paradise," 156-57. See also Herbert and Thomas, *Urban Geography: A First Approach*, 312-14.



The 1939 map at top represents perhaps the most detailed historical racial-distribution information available. It was stored in a 1941 WPA study and transferred, block-by-block, to a digital format to make this comparison with 2000 Census data. The complex and fascinating patterns revealed here are explained in the accompanying text. *Map and analysis by author based on 1941 survey of Metropolitan New Orleans Land Use and 2000 Census data. Special thanks to John Magill for recommending the WPA study.*

Report on Survey of Metropolitan New Orleans Land Use, Real Property, and Low Income Housing Area (1941), based on incredibly thorough surveys conducted in 1939.[378] The three-inch-thick volume is crammed with fold-out maps charting sundry attributes of the city's housing stock—median rents, indoor plumbing, structure age, owner occupation—at the *block level*, a level of detail valuable to urban geographers for its ability to discern microscale patterns. One map notes the "percent of total number of households of a race other than white," to my knowledge the earliest race data tabulated at the block level for the entire city. Much can be learned by processing these data into a format conducive to comparison to modern patterns and other geographical information. To make such a map, a sheet of acetate was laid upon a detailed base map of the city. Using a sharp No. 2 pencil, the percentages from each of the 1,098 blocks on the delicate original WPA map were copied onto the acetate overlay. This process took twelve hours. The acetate was then scanned into a computer and georeferenced to a standard Earth-based coordinate system, so that other digitized maps may be overlaid upon it. Using Geographic Information System, a polygon was digitized on top of each block's pencil-written percentage, which was subsequently coded into a linked tabular database. This took another twelve hours. The final product is block-by-block depiction of the geography of black New Orleans in the year 1939. The following discussion describes the main elements of that geography, numbered sequentially in the 1939 portion of the map pair entitled *Distribution of African American Population in New Orleans, 1939-2000.*

1. Back-of-Town Clusters — The premier element of African American residential geography at this time was the settlement of freedmen and their descendants at the former swamp edge during the previous two generations. This was a classic case of geographical marginalization of blacks to the low property values of the flood-prone bottomlands, seen in cities and towns throughout the South after the Civil War. Employment for these residents mostly meant unskilled public-works jobs with the city or contractors, or domestic work in white neighborhoods, for which transportation was provided by New Orleans' extensive streetcar system. The black back-of-town in 1939 comprised three sections broken up by two mostly white interstices. The main section (1A) was located behind the Dryades Street neighborhood and the CBD, and extended back into the lowlands. This was the largest black neighborhood of the era, home mostly to "Anglo-African Americans"—that is, black Protestants with Anglo surnames who descended from plantation freedmen, rather than local black Creoles with a Francophone background, who tended to live downtown. New Orleans' last major race riot occurred in this neighborhood in 1900, sparked ostensibly by a shootout with police but ultimately by economic tensions between back-of-town blacks and neighboring whites. It is striking how decisively Dryades Street and South Rampart, known for their interracial, Jewish-owned retail shops, delineated the black back-of-town from the white front-of-town. Note also the long strip of totally white blocks within this back-of-town cluster: this was a whites-only public housing complex, recently opened at the time of the survey. This cluster was separated from the rest of the back-of-town by the racially mixed Tulane Avenue/Canal Street corridor, which included Chinatown. To its east was the oldest portion of the back-of-town cluster (1B), Faubourg Tremé, located behind the original city and once home to many free people of color. Through Tremé ran the Old Basin (Carondelet) Canal, railroad tracks, two cemeteries, and the slums of the former Storyville red-light district, and once again we see predominantly black blocks adjacent to these undesirable features. The Tremé cluster also included two public housing projects built around 1940, both of which still stand today.[379] Immediately eastward, on the better-drained Bayou Road/Esplanade Ridge, was another mostly white interstice, including mansion-lined Esplanade Avenue. Finally, the third component of the back-of-town cluster (1C) occupied the rear of the Faubourg Marigny between Esplanade and Elysian Fields avenues. This cluster—the fabled Seventh Ward—was (and remains) home to most of New Orleans' black Creole and Creole of color population. It descends from the antebellum patterns seen in the previously discussed 1860 map, and thence from patterns traceable to the city's founding. Additional small, back-of-town clusters appear in the rear of the upper and lower Ninth Ward (1D and 1E, near the Industrial Canal), and the rear of Carrollton (1F, near the Municipal Water Treatment Plant; 1G, near the New Basin Canal and Cemetery; and 1H, Gerttown).

2. Front-of-Town Enclaves — The crest of the natural levee, about ten feet above sea level and fifteen feet above the back-of-town, hosted much smaller but nevertheless significant enclaves of African Americans. In 1939, these clusters were mostly stretched out along uptown Tchoupitoulas Street (2A, 2D) and into Carrollton (2E), in the lower Ninth Ward (2F), and in the West Bank neighborhood of McDonoghville (2G). These front-of-town enclaves tended to be closer to and more integrated with white populations than the back-of-town populations. What explains these pockets? One notes that these locales marked the general sites of plantation houses and slave cabins in the days when sugar plantations operated in the natural lands of present-day uptown, and Tchoupitoulas Street was the *de facto* River Road. Could these pockets represent the descendents of slave communities from these plantations? This is improbable. Most uptown plantations had been subdivided well before the Civil War, and the slaves who once labored there were presumably re-assigned or auctioned, not freed and granted lots on the

[378] Sam R. Carter, *A Report on Survey of Metropolitan New Orleans Land Use, Real Property, and Low Income Housing Area* (New Orleans, 1941), fold-out maps following page 136. I thank John Magill of The Historic New Orleans Collection for bringing this valuable document to my attention.

[379] One of these housing projects, the Iberville, was segregated for whites only, but was not yet complete at the time of this survey. The old black population of former Storyville still lived there when the survey was taken in the late 1930s.

site of their vassalage. In other words, this is a case of spatial correlation, but not causation. Another theory is that poor black squatters living on the Mississippi River batture—the seasonal sediment banks that accumulate along the levee—explain these predominantly black riverside blocks, a possible but difficult-to-verify hypothesis. Mostly, these pockets represent communities of black longshoremen, roustabouts, draymen, screwmen, yardmen, and other workers employed along the waterfront docks, wharves, warehouses, mills, and railroads. Blacks began working waterfront jobs during the latter years of the Civil War, when white males were off fighting for the Confederacy and when black labor cost less than white. "There is one feature of labor here which must have attracted the attention of all who frequent our levee," reported the *Daily Picayune* three months after Lee's surrender. "The loading and unloading of steamboats, which was once done chiefly by white labor, is now altogether in the hands of negroes."[380] It is likely that some black riverside residential enclaves formed at this time and grew in subsequent decades, amid contentious and sometimes violent relationships with white dock workers. Noisy, smelly, objectionable riverside port facilities also depreciated adjacent property values, which in turn attracted inexpensive housing and, ergo, an economically poorer class of people, both white and black. Additionally, the erratic schedules of arriving ships may have necessitated that dockworkers live nearby, prepared at any hour to unload the wares of an incoming vessel.[381]

3. "Nuisance" Areas — Railroads and canals (marked as 3), which often occupied already-undesirable areas near wharves and backswamps, tended to further reduce real estate values and thus attract the poor. The aforementioned Gerttown (1H), occupying a topographic trough between the "Carrollton Spur" and the Metairie/Gentilly Ridge, was also an industrial site replete with nuisances, once being at the crossroads of the Yazoo and Mississippi Valley Railroad, the Illinois Central Railroad, and the New Basin Canal.[382] Black families of limited means moved to this area in the 1930s, a few years after Xavier University (1927), the nation's only historically black Catholic university, was established here.

4. "Superblock" Pockets — The "superblock" phenomena—in which working-class domestic servants settled in the nuclei of "superblock" cells outlined by grand avenues—explains the African American pockets scattered between the riverfront wharves and the backswamp margins (marked as 4, also including 2E). The grand avenues and adjacent blocks tended to be developed with spacious and costly homes, while the nuclei blocks were built up with simple barge-board cottages and shotgun houses. The geography of domestic laborers, driven by their need to live close to their employers (for convenience) but not too close (for economic and social reasons), may explain other predominantly black areas in this era as well, including those near wharves and backswamps. Consider, for example, that some front-of-town enclaves were a short walk or streetcar ride to the mansions of the Garden District. Blacks were more likely to find jobs in the kitchens and nurseries of white households in non-industrial Southern cities like New Orleans than in Northern cities, where black emigrants were more likely to work in industrial plants and factories.

5. Nascent Middle-Class Suburbs — While most middle-class African American families lived in the Seventh Ward or among the general population in the front-of-town, a pioneering few formed new neighborhoods elsewhere. Tiny black communities had existed in lakeside New Orleans for quite some time: a black Baptist church operated in Gentilly as early as the 1830s and in Milneburg in the 1880s.[383] Economically well-off black neighborhoods, however, were longer in coming to these lakeside areas. One example was Sugar Hill (5, shown here in its earliest stages), a Gentilly community founded after Straight College and New Orleans University merged into Dillard University and sited its new campus—amid white protests—on Gentilly Boulevard in 1930. Black professionals, including businessmen, pharmacists, doctors, and Dillard professors, moved to this pleasant oak-shaded hamlet for its convenient location and for its attractive suburban-style attributes. Sugar Hill formed mostly in the 1940s, a few years after the 1939 survey was conducted. Although the neighborhood and the oak trees of its main thoroughfare were partially destroyed for Interstate-610 in the early 1970s, Sugar Hill and other subdivisions near Dillard University played a role in attracting the black middle class to Gentilly and the lakefront east of City Park later in the twentieth century.[384]

6. Urban Outskirts — Isolated black communities in Jefferson Heights (6A) and the Lower Coast of Algiers (6B) were, in 1939, essentially rural linear Mississippi River villages about to be enveloped by the expanding New Orleans metropolitan area. The River Road below Baton Rouge is replete with such communities, extending perpendicularly behind the levee along a single road, most of them exclusively black and very poor. Other black enclaves on the rural fringes of 1939 New Orleans include 6C (a segregated blacks-only public housing development, now the St. Bernard Housing Project), 6D, and 6E, in the largely vacant lakeside lands prior to the wave of post-World War II subdivision development.

We have focused on majority-black areas in characterizing the geography of the African American community.

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[380] *Daily Picayune*, July 15, 1865, as quoted by Eric Arnesen, *Waterfront Wokers of New Orleans: Race, Class, and Politics, 1863-1923* (Urbana and Chicago, 1994), 19-20.

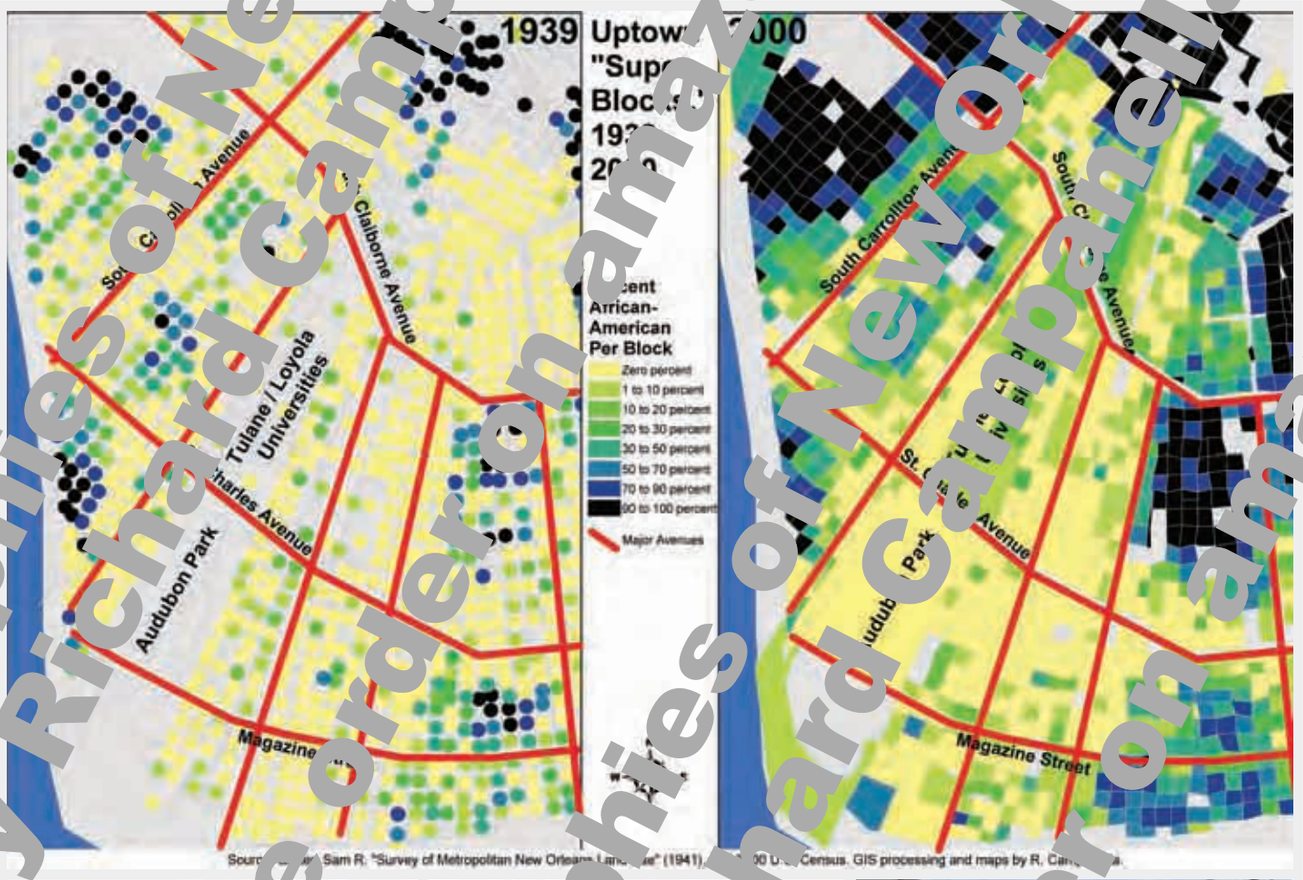
[381] Ibid., 40-41.

[382] Cheryl Q. Wilson and Darlene M. Walk, *Gerttown/Zion City Neighborhood Profile: City of New Orleans* (New Orleans, 1978), 3.04.

[383] Joseph Logsdon and Caryn Cossé Bell, "The Americanization of Black New Orleans 1850-1900," in *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization*, eds. Arnold R. Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon (Baton Rouge, 1992), 211; *Soard's City Directory for 1881*, 889.

[384] Cheryl Q. Wilson and Darlene M. Walk, *Dillard Neighborhood Profile: City of New Orleans* (New Orleans, 1978), 3.07; New Orleans City Planning Commission, *New Orleans Land Use Plan* (New Orleans, 1999), 146; Donna Fricker, "The Founding of Dillard University," *Preservation in Print* 30 (June 2003): 12-13.

But areas where blacks did *not* live are just as important to understanding the overall "where" and "why" of black New Orleans. Explanation of these absences rests heavily on two general trends: (1) whites have since the end of slavery, either passively discouraged, actively excluded, or simply fled from black neighbors, and (2) the white community has always been significantly wealthier on average than the black community. Given these realities, whites have generally gravitated to the middle-range of the backslope of the natural levee, roughly following the curve of the Mississippi River along the Royal Street/St. Charles Avenue corridor from the Ninth Ward to Carrollton. This midsection of the riverside upland kept residents far enough from the nuisances of the front-of-town wharves and railroads, yet just as far from the mosquitoes and flooding of the low-lying back-of-town. In this deltaic metropolis, where the urban landscape was not all homogenous and people were not all treated equally, those with the financial wherewithal—usually whites—monopolized better-drained, lower-nuisance, lower-risk zones, which had higher property values. Those without the means—usually blacks—had to make do with the left-over, adjacent marginal lands. The housing stock was built accordingly—substantial homes in one area, simple cottages in another—thus reinforcing the pattern, since no affluent family would move into a hovel and no poor family could buy a mansion. This was the fundamental bifurcated geography of New Orleans (and



Uptown "superblock" patterns of black residential clusters as shown above in 1939 and 2000. These clusters formed when lower-income domestic workers, black and white, needed to live within walking distance of their wealthier employers, who tended to live in mansions lining the grand avenues (Louisiana, Napoleon, State, Carrollton, etc., shown in red). Shotgun houses and cottages were thus built in the nuclei of these "superblocks." The pattern survives today, in both the structural and racial cityscape, though it may not for much longer, due to gentrification pressure from all sides. Below are examples of working-class housing stock along otherwise prosperous Coliseum Street. *Map, analysis, and 2004 photographs by author.*

of course there were gray zones between these (two extremes) until the early twentieth century. In that era, particularly between 1893 and 1915, the city installed an ambitious and sophisticated drainage system to "reclaim" the backswamp and lakeside marshes for residential development, adding a third element to the old two-tier trend. The new developable lakeside landscape was low in elevation but *also* low in nuisances and in risk—just as long as the levees kept the surrounding water bodies out and the pumps removed the rainwater from within. The comfortable middle-class subdivisions built in these former lakeside marshes early in the age of the automobile, were sold to whites often with deed covenants explicitly prohibiting sale to blacks. Lakeview, first of the major twentieth-century lakeside subdivisions, was born through *de jure* racial discrimination, as were other lakeside housing developments. The white community, formerly occupying the midsection of the natural levee and "unified" on both sides by black areas, now "leapfrogged" over the black back-of-town and settled in the low-lying yet low risk new lakefront neighborhoods. This new element of the now-trifurcated geography of New Orleans explains the other vast area (in 1939) of black absence, the lakefront.

The "salt and pepper" racial patterns instigated in antebellum times gradually diminished in the face of a rising residential separation in the early twentieth century. As Daphne Spain observed, "The 'backyard' pattern of slave residences prevented social and economic segregation from being translated into housing segregation until the turn of the twentieth century. The Jim Crow era, from the 1890s until the 1950s, was the period in which New Orleans began adopting the residential patterns of northern cities."[385] Spain saw much of this later day segregation as an unintended consequence of the federally funded public housing projects launched by Housing Authority of New Orleans starting in 1937. But the 1930 survey data discussed here show that large, exclusively black neighborhoods were well established by that time; the locations of the housing projects tended to intensify and concentrate already-existing racial geographies, not create them. In the three-quarters of a century since emancipation, white and black New Orleanians had moved away from each other *en masse*. The trend would only strengthen.

Further Distancing Since World War II

Tremendous social transformations forged anew racial relationships in New Orleans since the 1939 survey. Chief among these were *Brown versus Board of Education* (1954), the civil rights movement, and the ensuing desegregation of public facilities, integration of public schools and overall increased opportunities in education, employment, and housing for African Americans. While the "Whites Only" signs came down with less opposition and violence in New Orleans compared to places like Birmingham and Jackson and Selma, residential integration did not necessarily follow. In fact, it dropped dramatically even as other forms of racial interaction increased. Suburban-style subdivisions in lakefront New Orleans, Jefferson Parish, the West Bank, St. Bernard Parish, eastern Orleans Parish, St. Tammany Parish, and even Mississippi drew white New Orleanians by the tens of thousands between the censuses of 1960 and 2000. White flight was enabled by the construction of the Mississippi River bridges (1958 and 1988), the Lake Pontchartrain Causeway (1956), and Interstate 10/610 (1966-1971), providing access to new residential areas on former marshes and swamps. In general, middle-class whites from uptown tended to move west to Jefferson Parish; working-class whites from downtown generally moved east to St. Bernard Parish and middle-class African Americans mostly moved lakeward to the neighborhoods west of City Park and then into the subdivisions of eastern New Orleans. Gentrification of historically inner-city neighborhoods, starting in the 1970s, tended to drive up rent and drive out working-class locals of both races, sending whites to white suburban neighborhoods and blacks to black urban neighborhoods. Urban renewal projects and transportation developments usually added up affecting black neighborhoods to a greater degree, in both the forced relocation of their denizens and the physical damage to their environs. The greater New Orleans metropolitan area, by century's end, had racially dichotomized into a white west and a black east, with pockets of exceptions. While a randomly selected white or black resident of the metropolitan area is now far more likely to work, shop, ride, dine or socialize with a member of the other race compared to earlier generations, he is less likely than ever to live next to him.

Perhaps the most pernicious factor of racial segregation started as a progressive city-government program designed to help those of greatest need during the Depression. In the late 1930s, the Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO) cleared a number of old neighborhoods replete with nineteenth-century architectural gems but considered unsightly slums at the time, to make room for subsidized housing to help the poor. Among the first projects completed (1941) were the Iberville Housing Projects, which the long-closed vestiges of Storyville were razed, and the St. Thomas Housing Project, which replaced a significant portion of what had become known as the Irish Channel. In accordance with the Jim Crow laws of the day, projects were segregated by race. Of the six original projects, the two whites-only developments were higher in elevation and closer to the front-of-town, while the four blacks-only projects were all in lower-elevation, back-of-town locations.[386] With the social changes of the 1960s, the projects were de-segregated, and as was happening citywide and nationwide, whites promptly left the units for other affordable-living alternatives in working-class suburbs. Poor blacks took their places. Within a few years,

[385] Spain, "Race Relations and Residential Segregation in New Orleans," 83.

[386] Carter, *A Report on a Survey of Metropolitan New*, fold-out map entitled "General Land Use for Existing Locations of U.S.H.A. Aided Projects," following page 17.

Sugar Hill was founded when Dillard University located its new campus on Gentilly Boulevard in 1930s, black professionals, including businessmen, pharmacists, doctors, and professors, moved to this oak-shaded hamlet for its convenient location and suburban-style amenities. The neighborhood later played a role in attracting the black middle class to Gentilly and other new neighborhoods east of City Park. Sugar Hill was partially destroyed for the construction of Interstate 610 in the early 1970s. *Photograph by author, 2004.*

tens of thousands of the poorest African Americans in the city became intensely consolidated into a dozen or so subsidized communities, known by this time simply as "the Projects." With that concentrated poverty came the full suite of social ills, including fatherless households, teen pregnancy, government dependency, and murders practically on a weekly basis. Again, the paradox: as social integration increases, so does residential segregation. So bad did matters get by the 1990s that the federal government, which had slowly come to recognize the disaster of public housing as concentrators and cyclers of indigence and dependency, intervened. The new philosophy, encapsulated in a scheme named Project HOPE, called for the demolition of the most troubled projects and their replacement with mixed-income housing, in which subsidized units for the poor are intermixed with market-rate houses designed for middle-class families. The designs of the new neighborhoods, under construction starting in 2003, integrate certain suburban attributes, such as lawns, setback distances, and space between houses, with urban "New Orleans Revival" historical architectural styles. In substance, the objective is to intermix the classes, rather than concentrating the poor in isolation and leaving the better-off to depart for the suburbs. In form, the concept (if successful) would replicate the "old southern" pattern of residential geography, in which the lower classes lived intermixed with the middle and upper classes. Whether Project HOPE succeeds depends on whether middle-class families of either race invest in a home and raise their children next door to very poor and uneducated families. Future racial geographies of New Orleans will be determined in part by the outcome of this social-engineering experiment.[387]

New HOPEVI construction, replicating traditional New Orleans architectural styles, replaced the St. Thomas housing project in 2003-2004. *Photograph by author, 2004.*

Mapping the Patterns: 2000

While a first glance at the distribution map of African Americans in 2000 (page 303) may give the impression of a radically changed geography, the modern patterns are really just expansions and intensifications of causes and trends established decades, even centuries, earlier. Observations:

1. **Eastern Orleans Parish.** Since the 1970s, the black community expanded most dramatically into the lands east of City Park to the far fringes of urbanized Orleans Parish, particularly along the Gentilly Boulevard corridor.[388] The 1940 map indicates that, sixty years ago, a few clusters of black residents existed in this area, particularly around Dillard University and the Sugar Hill area. These may be viewed as the origins of the modern black community of the eastern lakeside section of New Orleans. Today these neat middle-class neighborhoods include Gentilly Terrace, Gentilly Woods, and Dillard; they are adjacent to some of the most integrated neighborhoods of the metropolitan area, including Lake Oaks, Fillmore, St. Anthony, and Milneburg. It was to these lakeside neighborhoods in the seventh and eighth wards that segments of the black Creole population moved from their historical home at the river-end of these same wards. Most of these twentieth-century subdivisions were, originally, predominantly white, having transformed to integrated or mostly black neighborhoods in the 1970s and 1980s. The exception was Pontchartrain Park, a golf-course subdivision in the Seabrook section of the Ninth Ward with a distinctive curvilinear street network that is unique in the city. Financed by wealthy white philanthropists and controversial to some elements of both the white and black community, Pontchartrain Park "is significant in recent New Orleans history in that it was one of the first developments designed to provide suburban home ownership for middle and high income black families."[389] Completed in 1955 and home to

[387] See Peirce F. Lewis' synopsis of New Orleans' public housing crisis in his 2003 update of *New Orleans: The Making of an Urban Landscape* (Santa Fe, NM, and Harrissonburg, VA, 2003), 132-37.

[388] For 1970 block-level data, see Figure 17 in the map section of ibid.

[389] Darlene M. Walk, *Pontchartrain Park Neighborhood Profile: City of New Orleans* (New Orleans, 1979), 5.01; Arnold R. Hirsch, "Simply a Matter of Black and White: The Transformation of Race and Politics in Twentieth-Century New Orleans," in *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization*, eds. Arnold R. Hirsch and

Southern University since 1959, Pontchartrain Park represents a reversal of the historic trend in which black residential patterns derived from relegation, exclusion, or poverty. In its early years, residents of Pontchartrain Park were met with open hostility from white neighbors across Dwyer Road in adjacent Gentilly Woods, and into the 1970s, the subdivision was the lone black enclave on the lakefront. Since then, tens of thousands of African Americans have moved into the adjacent eastern lakefront neighborhoods, and Pontchartrain Park, as the pioneer, has become one of the most stable and pleasant neighborhoods in the city, home to doctors, civil servants, lawyers, teachers, and two mayors (the Morials). That cannot be said for two other intense clusters of African Americans in these eastern lands, the St. Bernard and (now demolished) Desire housing projects. Farther to the east, off the map, are a series of modern subdivisions—ranch-house domains with names like Lake Kenilworth, Edgelake, Little Woods, Lake Forest East, and Lake Forest West—created after Interstate 10 opened up these former marshes in the 1960s. At that time and into the 1970s, the oil boom and white flight combined to make this extremely low-lying land potentially lucrative real estate. Whites initially moved there by the thousands, but with the oil crash of the mid-1980s and the failure of the New Orleans East land-development projects, they departed in equally large numbers and were replaced by middle-class blacks. Lower-middle-class blacks followed, drawn in part by the housing opportunities created by numerous multi-family apartment complexes zoned along the Interstate 10 and Chef Menteur Highway corridors. The rapid racial turn-around of these expansive Eastern suburbs, well within a generation, represents the most dramatic recent change in the geography of African American New Orleans. In 1970, 99 percent of the 10,280 residents of the elongated Edgelake/Little Woods neighborhood between I-10 and the lake were white. Thirty years later, over 86 percent of the same area's 44,311 residents were black.[390]

2. Western Orleans and Jefferson Parish — Lands west of City Park and into Jefferson Parish stand in stark contrast to those in the east, making up the largest area of general black absence in the metropolitan area. The 1939 map indicates that these patterns, too, were well established by the early twentieth century, in part by the deed covenants prohibiting home sales or rentals to African Americans. Metairie and other municipalities in Jefferson Parish received the lion's share of relocating white New Orleanians during the 1960s to 1990s, and recently has distant St. Tammany Parish gained in this regard.

3. Former Back-of-Town — Startlingly different in the landscape is the predominant, oftentimes exclusively black presence in the former back-of-town. A century after the municipal drainage project overcame the backswamp for urban development, the community of freedmen and their descendents, relegated to the city's margins after slavery, demographically preserve the post-Pallum swamp edge in the cityscape. A closer look reveals that, in recent decades, these mostly African American areas have expanded toward the river by a number of blocks. These expansion areas were vacated by working-class whites in the 1950s to 1980s, available rentals for black families, often in the form of shotgun doubles or old frame houses converted into multiplexes. The most dramatic example of this riverward expansion is in the Ninth Ward, to which many black families were relocated for the construction of the interstates, Louis Armstrong Park and the Theater for the Performing Arts, and the Superdome. Another is the Dryades Street neighborhood, located between Dryades Street and St. Charles Avenue. Before the mid-twentieth century, blacks lived mostly behind Dryades, and whites, among them the city's Orthodox Jewish population, lived in front of that busy commercial thoroughfare. The wholesale departure of white families in the 1960s resulted in the expansion of the poor African American population to within a few feet of prosperous St. Charles Avenue. The neighborhood is now known as Central City; its cemetery Melpomene is now called Martin Luther King Boulevard, Dryades Street was renamed Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard for a local civil rights figure; the old synagogues are now Protestant churches; and no one is old enough to remember the swamp. But the landscape does not lie: the poverty of the population and blighted state of the mostly rented housing stock recall the history of exclusion in this once and still-marginalized area.

One striking phenomena that has developed in recent decades is the intense clarification of the line between the poor, black back-of-town and the wealthier, white front-of-

Pontchartrain Park, in the Seabrook section of the Ninth Ward, was one of the first suburban-style developments built for middle-class African American families. Completed in 1955, the subdivision represents a reversal of the historic trend in which black residential patterns derived from relegation, exclusion, or poverty. Until the 1970s it was the sole black enclave on the lakefront; since then, thousands of African Americans have moved to the adjacent lakefront neighborhoods. Pontchartrain Park has become one of the city's most stable and pleasant neighborhoods, home to doctors, civil servants, teachers, and two mayors. *Photograph by author, 2002.*

Joseph Logsdon (Baton Rouge and London, 1992), 22.

[390] Darlene M. Walk, *Edgelake/Little Woods Neighborhood Profile: City of New Orleans* (New Orleans, 1978), 5; U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Full-Count Characteristics (SF1), compiled by Greater New Orleans Community Data Center.

town. Note, for example, the lower Quarter, Faubourg Tremé, and Faubourg Marigny: in 1939, these neighborhoods were thoroughly integrated at the house-by-house level. But by 2000, African Americans lived almost exclusively lakeside of North Rampart/St. Claude, while whites lived riverside of it, with nearly equal exclusivity. It is noteworthy that this dramatic Balkanization occurred during—indeed, *after*—the civil rights movement. What explains this phenomena, at least in part, is class: the former residents of these neighborhoods, both black and white, were members of roughly the same working class, a commonality that unified them even as racial conventions of the day kept them segregated in streetcars and schools. "We lived cheek by jowl," recalled Cosimo Matassa of growing up in the French Quarter during the Depression. "We were integrated—we just didn't know it."[391] Most of the white working-class families in these areas departed for St. Bernard Parish and elsewhere, while blacks either moved toward the lake or stayed put. They were soon joined by a steady stream of affluent out-of-town white professionals—the "limited-pinky set," according to Matassa—enamoured with the local architecture and culture, who bought up the cheap real estate and restored the nineteenth-century homes. In their noble efforts to save historical architecture and revitalize ailing neighborhoods, the gentrifiers pumped the property values and inadvertently ousted the low-income renters living next door. Gentrification delivers many benefits to cities, and no one complains about the reduced crime rates, but the criticism that it uproots local neighborhood people seems, at least in these data, substantiated. Thus, the hard line separating black and white New Orleans from Bywater to Carrollton tend to be class lines as much as race lines. They are social lines as well. The African American side is mostly native to the city; the white side largely comprises transplants, particularly downtown. The African American side seems to be much more family-populated; the streets are filled with playing children, overseen by elders perched on porches. On the white side, many households constitute young singles, childless couples of both sexual orientations, and "empty-nesters;" white children are rarely seen except in parts of uptown. In 2000, one out of every forty-two residents of the majority-white downtown neighborhoods riverside of Rampart/St. Claude was a white child. In the majority-black neighborhoods across those streets, one out of every *three* residents was a black child. In other words, children of the predominant race were fourteen times more common in the black neighborhoods lakeside of Rampart/St. Claude than in the white neighborhoods riverside of the dividing line.[392] An unspoken and discomforting cognizance of "the other side of St. Charles,"[393] Rampart, St. Claude, and other racial dividing lines prevails among New Orleanians of both races.

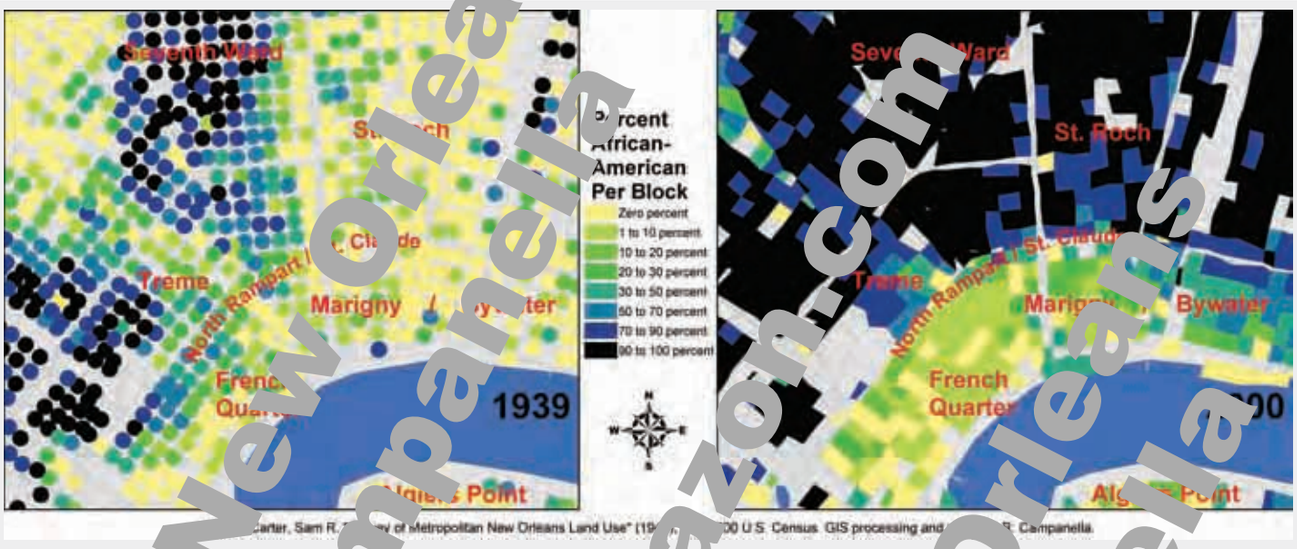
4. The "White Teapot." Another area of black residence is the teapot-shaped section formed by the greater uptown Carrollton/University area (the pot) and the St. Charles Avenue/Magazine Street corridor (the spout) into the French Quarter, Faubourg Marigny, and ending in Bywater near the Industrial Canal. When the visitor thinks of New Orleans, most of the iconic images that come to mind—iron-lace galleries, streetcars, famous restaurants, Mardi Gras parades, oak-lined streets, and columned mansions—occupy this area. The vast majority of tourists spend most of their visit somewhere in the teapot, including the taxi ride to and from the airport. This spatial phenomenon, clearly correlated to the topography of the natural levee, is the modern-day descendent of the previously discussed bifurcated geography of historical New Orleans. It represented a low-risk swath of natural levee equally far from both the riverside nuisances of wharves and railroads and the backswamp nuisances of floods, dirt roads, mosquitoes, and isolation. It also was (and remains) conveniently accessed by the streetcars of the New Orleans & Carrollton Rail Road (1835), now the St. Charles

[391] Quoted by Katy Reckdahl, "There for a Reason," *Gambit Weekly*, February 2003, p. 65.

[392] Computed from 2000 Census data at the block level. The predominantly white area spanned from Howard Avenue to the Industrial Canal between Rampart/St. Claude and the river, which had a total population of 16,620. The predominantly black area consisted from Broad Street/Florida Avenue to Rampart/St. Claude, also from Howard to the canal. The total population of this larger area was 52,978. In both areas combined, black children outnumbered white children 18,386 to 487.

[393] Natalie Hutchinson, "We're Not Even Safe in Our Own Homes," *Times-Picayune*, July 31, 2003, B7.

Examples of back-of-town housing in Central City, near Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard. Living conditions of the African American poor are sometimes strikingly reminiscent of nineteenth-century circumstances. *Photographs by author, 2002-2004.*



One striking recent development is the intense clarification of the line between the predominantly black back-of-town and the white front-of-town, particularly downtown. Whereas in 1939 the races lived in a somewhat intermixed manner, by 2000 they were separated decisively by the North Rampart/St. Claude corridor. What explains this phenomena, at least in part, is class: the poorer residents of these neighborhoods, both black and white, were members of roughly the same working class, a commonality that unified them in their residential distributions even as Jim Crow laws segregated them elsewhere. Today, white residents of these areas tend to be markedly wealthier than their black neighbors. *Map and analysis by author.*

Streetcar Line. After the installation of this passenger line, wealthy whites of mostly Anglo ancestry bought parcels and built mansions along St. Charles and in the present-day Garden District, and for the most part, the investments have retained their value. The late nineteenth-century development of Audubon Park and the universities rooted a similar presence in the upper part of the crescent, and these areas also remain prosperous, and white. The highest percentage of whites in the "spout" of the "teapot"—the French Quarter, Faubourg Marigny, and Bywater—is a more recent phenomenon, deriving from the attraction of living in a unique historical and cultural environment. Gentrification arrived to the French Quarter starting as early as the 1920s, picked up after World War II, and rendered it almost entirely white and affluent by the end of the twentieth century. The same process started in the Faubourg Marigny in the early 1970s (at which time its historical moniker was revived) and is nearly complete today. The next neighborhood downriver—Bywater, the "tip" of the spout—began gentrifying in the 1990s and is currently about one-third white and half black, with property values rising every day. African Americans thus form the minority in the "white teapot" today for historical-geographical, economic, and social reasons. Few would deny that racial discrimination, or at least perceptions of being unwelcome, also play a role. Those few pockets in which black residents are descendents of old "superblock" clusters, as discussed earlier. Many of these areas are currently experiencing intense gentrification pressure from all sides (map, *Uptown "Superblocks" 1939-2000*, page 306), as are the black clusters riverside of Magazine Street. Outward signs of gentrification—crews restoring old houses, *For Sale* signs, shining new SUVs parked next to beat-up old jalopies, and the occasional curbside pile of belongings from a recent eviction—became a common sight in this area in the late 1990s and 2000s. "Two cultures are in collision," commented the *Times-Picayune* on the socio-economic transformation playing out along Jackson Avenue between Magazine and the river in 2005. "Vestiges of the old order—illicit drugs—are openly exchanged against a backdrop of change as renovators paint old houses bright yellow, green and blue."[394] Uptown racial patterns also play out during the two dozen or so Mardi Gras parades that roll down St. Charles Avenue each Carnival season. While the racial mix of the spectators is thoroughly integrated along the parade route, afterwards, when it's time to go home, white families head toward the river and black families head in the opposite direction, toward the back-of-town.[395] The pattern is particularly noticeable between Lee Circle and Louisiana Avenue, where the line between the front and back of town is barely one block off St. Charles Avenue.

The causative forces behind the race-related residential patterns of the past are now mostly disappeared. The back-swamp is drained and no longer infested with mosquitoes; the riverfront is no more or less environmentally objectionable than the rest of the city; domestic workers no longer need to live close to their employers; and racist deed covenants are illegal. Yet the patterns persist in the cityscape, as geographical vestiges of the history and society of the city.

[394] Lynne Jensen, "Magazine Street Has Character of Its Own," *Times-Picayune*, January 24, 2005, Metropolitan Section, B2.

[395] Parade routes also reflect racial geographies. White krewes usually organize their floats on mostly white Napoleon Avenue, whereas the only major black krewe, Zulu, forms in the mostly black back-of-town (Jackson Avenue) and disperses in Tremé.

Racial Geographies and New Orleans Society

What do these shifting patterns say about New Orleans society? The question is as complex as the hundreds of thousands of New Orleanians who formed the patterns over the nearly three hundred years of the city's history. For one, New Orleans' persistent claim to uniqueness does not, in this case, seem fully warranted. The patterns played out here since antebellum times generally parallel those in other large Southern cities, and the recent spatial separation of white and black is all too familiar today. But there are some distinguishing aspects of New Orleans' experience. The large society of free people of color added a twist to the typical spatially integrated pattern of urban slave societies; their preference for the lower city helped forge their ethnic identity and complexify the ethnic landscape. The unique physical circumstances of this deltaic city, topographically restricted to a narrow crescent, compressed spatial patterns into elongated and intermingled shapes that, in other inland cities, might have sprawled outwardly. And the subsequent draining of the swamps kicked off the notable "leap-frogging" by the suburb-bound white middle-class population over the poor back-o'-town black population, creating white and black sections in both the highest- and lowest-elevation areas in this bowl-shaped metropolis.

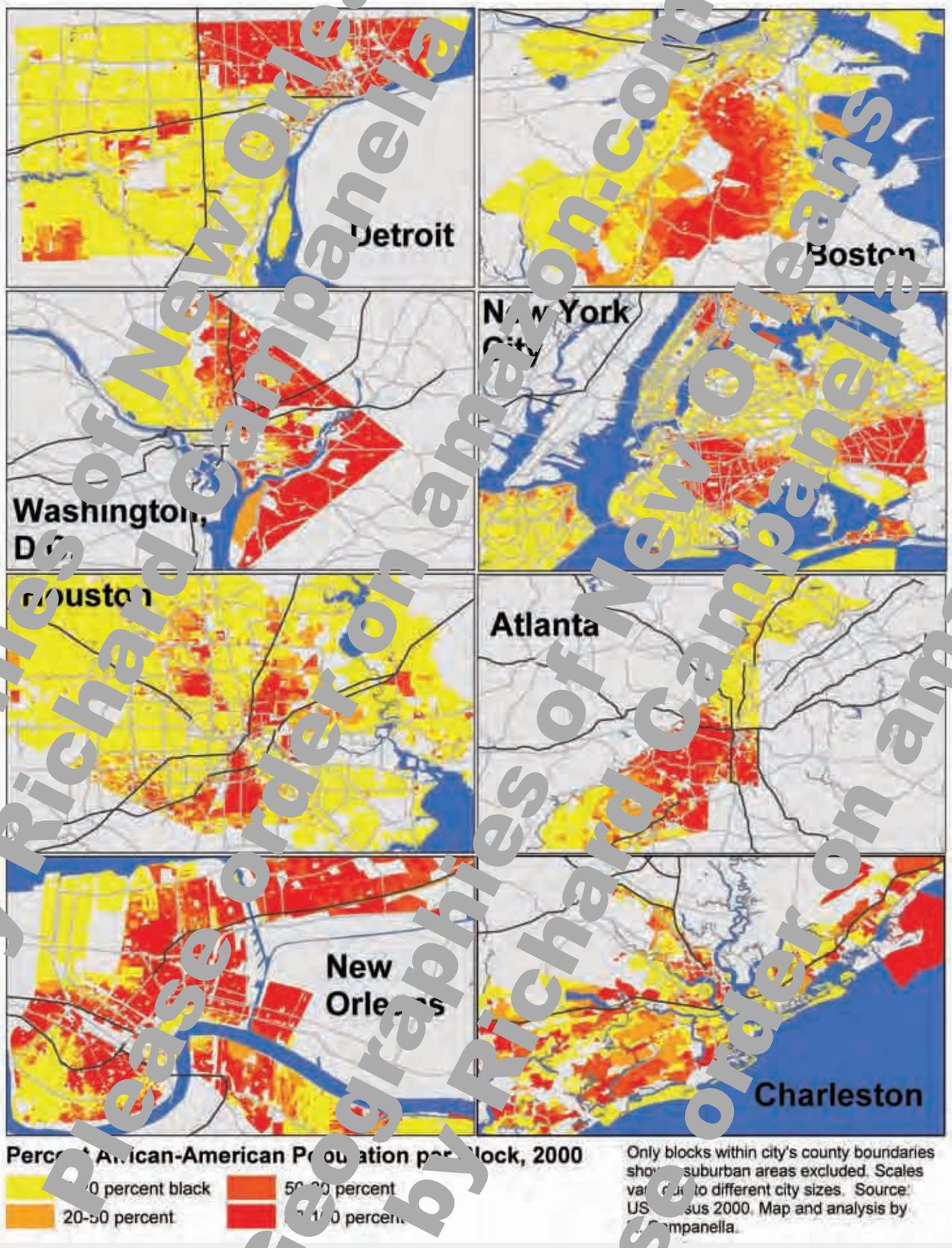
Whether the concentration of African American populations with high-nuisance areas, this phenomenon, too, is seen far and wide—so much so that it has spawned a field of social activism known as environmental justice, or environmental racism. Its adherents, who view the correlation as a product of deep-rooted social and economic inequities, point to the predominantly black River Road petrochemical corridor ("Cancer Alley") as the lollapalooza of their cause, and New Orleans' situation is not far behind. Others dispute that this phenomenon (of poor, mostly minority communities living close to polluted or vulnerable environments) insinuates injustice, arguing that different levels of income will always exist in a free capitalist society. Those who earn more will naturally seek better and costlier real estate; those who earn less must select from less, else strive to rise economically. There is no "relegation" or "exclusion," only the forces of free market economics. Causative agents aside, few dispute that African Americans bear a disparate share of the burden of living near nuisances like noisy railroads or malodorous industries, and near potential dangers like flood zones or toxic dumps. This has always been the case in New Orleans, as illustrated by the recent Agriculture Street controversy.

What do the patterns say about race relations in New Orleans? Many first-time visitors note the visibly greater proximity of black and white in New Orleans compared to big Northern cities, and take this street-level observation as evidence of better race relations in the Crescent City. Locals point out with pride that the civil rights era transpired here with relatively little violence, and that the city has not witnessed a large-scale race riot since 1900. Indeed, it is almost a cliché, at least among many whites, that the city's French and Spanish colonial heritage, penchant for revelry, and historically multicultural milieu has softened the tensions and narrowed the chasm between the races, instilling a *laissez faire* tolerance in the ethos of this society. If Atlanta is the city "too busy to hate" (or so might say, then New Orleans may be the city "too festive to hate." But, impressions aside, one cannot help but draw a critical interpretation from the underlying paradox of racial residential patterns in New Orleans: that whites and blacks are more residentially separated now than in the days of Jim Crow and even slavery.[396] Is this evidence of deep-seated racial intolerance, an unstated but absolute refusal to live together? For those who demonstrated their street protests failed to halt school integration in 1960, this may well have been the case. For others, additional variables are at play, among them perceived education and employment opportunities, violent crime, trouble in public schools, and the high cost of urban living. Many whites and blacks moved away from *those* factors, rather than from people of the other race. The resultant racial separation, in this benefit-of-the-doubt interpretation, is an unfortunate consequence rather than an original motivation of the flight to the suburbs. Scholars and pundits may berate young families for moving out to cheaper, greener, lower-crime suburban neighborhoods with better public schools, but the motivations for such relocations are compelling, and the same critics—who often do not live the lifestyles they preach—usually succumb to having views espoused for alternative solutions.

How do New Orleans' racial geographies compare to other major American cities? Researchers have devised indices to measure the segregation and integration of groups. One of the most popular is the dissimilarity index, which measures the percent of one group that would have to move to another geographical unit (block, block group, census tract, etc.) to match the distribution of the other group. Perfect integration produces a dissimilarity index of zero, while a completely segregated pair would measure as 100. Most large American cities have dissimilarity indices in the 60s, 70s, and 80s, meaning that roughly three out of four people of one group would have to relocate in order to disperse themselves evenly among the other group. Like all quantitative measures of social characteristics, the dissimilarity index is an oversimplification of a complex phenomenon, and may produce misleading results based on the quirks and nuances of the input data. Nevertheless, it is a useful tool. Compared to the nine largest American cities in which nonwhites outnumber whites,[397] New Or-

[396] Reflected one elderly New Orleanian of Chinese lineage, "I was born in the 7th Ward on Villere and Kerlerec, which was all made up of the old French families and Creoles. The blacks and whites lived right next door to each other—[and] that was before the civil rights." Arthur Tong, as quoted by Eric Elie Lolis, "Farmers' Market Cherished," *Times-Picayune*, June 2, 2004, B1.

[397] "Large cities" means population over 400,000 within the city limits, excluding suburbs, in 2000. All dissimilarity indices presented here were computed for white and black populations (only two groups at a time can be tested against each other)



These comparative maps of black residency visually indicate that racial patterns in the old southern port cities of New Orleans and Charleston remain more spatially integrated than those in other selected cities. *Maps by author based on 2000 Census data. City maps are not shown at consistent scales.*

leans' dissimilarity index of 70.6 ranked more integrated than those of Chicago (87.3), Atlanta (83.5), Washington, D.C. (81.5), Philadelphia (80.6), Cleveland (79.4), and Baltimore (75.2). Only Memphis (68.6) and Detroit (73.3) produced lower (more integrated) indices.[398] Looking to other American cities, New Orleans ranked more integrated than New York (85.3), Miami (80.3) Boston (75.8), Houston (79.5), and Los Angeles (74.0), not to mention nearby Baton Rouge (75.1) and a host of other prominent cities. But three sister cities most historically comparable to New Orleans—Mobile, Pensacola, and Charleston—were all more integrated than the Crescent City, with indices of 63.3, 67.3, and 63.8, respectively. Perhaps, in these data, we are seeing the modern-day remains of the "old southern" patterns of racial integration, especially in the very oldest Southern entrepots. According to these measures, the popular impression of relatively high racial integration in New Orleans, albeit much less than it used to be, seems founded. An inspection of the accompanying comparative city maps of black residency in 2000 also suggest that racial patterns in old Southern port cities like New Orleans and Charleston remain more integrated than big Northern industrial cities. Investigations of 1990 and 2000 census data have shown that the Northeastern and upper-Midwestern cities continually rank as the nation's most segregated in their residential patterns, while Southern and Western cities measure as the most integrated. "Studies like [these] pour cold water on the old stereotypes of a benighted South and an enlightened North," concluded one satisfied Southern journalist regarding these findings.[399] Whether these racial-integration patterns genuinely translate into better race relations—or only reflect historical patterns of subservience and poverty, the prevalence of new housing construction in the Sun Belt, or municipal-expansion tendencies of Western cities—is a tough question.

Finally, what impact do these patterns have on the New Orleans cityscape? Since whites earn roughly double the average household income of African Americans in New Orleans, racial geographies tend to correlate strongly with patterns of just about any socioeconomic phenomena that can be quantified: voting patterns, property values, single parent homes, average monthly rent, blighted housing, child health disparities, and dozens others. One can detect this correlation both in maps and in the streets, where crossing avenues like St. Claude in Bywater, St. Charles in the Lower Garden District, or Opelousas in Algiers takes the pedestrian across distinct racial and class lines, and into dramatically differing cityscapes. Visitor's guides routinely warn tourists not to cross North Rampart Street while exploring the French Quarter, and many residents in Marigny and Bywater prefer to drive miles for groceries than visit a neighborhood store a few blocks away on St. Claude Avenue. So distinct are the urban characteristics of the "other side" of these racial Rubicons that they seem almost like sub-cities, separate communities that happen to abut each other but otherwise do not interact. Often I overhear students at Tulane University, who generally come from affluent, white, out-of-state families, marvel that New Orleans is *such* a small city; one *constantly* runs into friends while dining in the Riverbend, shopping on Magazine Street, or hitting the downtown clubs. In fact, New Orleans is a major American city, thirty-first largest in a nation of almost 300 million, home to nearly half-a-million people in a metropolitan area of over a million. The reason for the "small city" impression is that, in this case, the average Tulanian spends the vast majority of his or her time within the "white teapot"—that kettle-shaped, predominantly white and well-off swath stretching from Carrollton to the water—which is *indeed* a small sub-city. One suspects the same resistance to crossing racial geographies is felt among predominantly African American communities in Central City and eastern New Orleans, and predominantly white communities such as in Lakeview and Lower Coast Algiers.

The impact of these racial geographies on the cityscape of New Orleans, then, is enormous: the patterns not only foretell a myriad and profound socioeconomic differences, but also deeply inform people's perceptions of place. New Orleans' paradoxical yet typical racial patterns have come a long way since the days when, on the levee, could "be seen people of every grade, colour and condition: in short...a world in miniature."[400]

Epilogue: The effect of Hurricane Katrina on African American neighborhoods can only be likened to the drop of a bomb. Of the nearly 230,000 blacks who resided in the contiguous urbanized portions of Orleans, Jefferson, and St. Bernard parishes, fully two-thirds saw their residences flooded immediately after Katrina, and of them, 90 percent remained flooded ten days later. Poor blacks comprised the vast majority of those stranded in the city during Katrina's week-long aftermath. For many, the traumatic evacuation marked the end of 140 troubled years in the city, starting with their arrival as emancipated slaves after the Civil War, followed by a century of Jim Crow and a generation of high crime and urban decay. Post-Katrina New Orleans may experience increased property values and more gentrification on the natural levee, which may further squeeze out black populations. Many of the historical spatial patterns described in this chapter may be radically altered in the years ahead.

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at the block-group level; indices will differ when computed for other units, such as census tracts or blocks.

[398] All indices shown here were calculated at the Social Science Data Analysis Network, University of Michigan, www.CensusScope.org; www.mumford.albany.net. Indices computed in other studies may vary slightly because of different input parameters. The University of Michigan Population Studies Center, for example, computed 68.8 for New Orleans at the block-group level.

[399] Greg Freeman, "St. Louis Is Among Most Segregated Cities—And Most of Us Are Comfortable With That," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch,* December 1, 2002, Metro Section, C3. See also Associated Press, "Old Midwest, Northeast Cities Top List of Segregated Areas," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, January 29, 1997, 4A.

[400] John Adems Paxton, *The New-Orleans Directory and Register* (New Orleans, 1822), 45-46.

Little Palermo
and the Sicilian Italians of New Orleans

Around the turn of the twentieth century, people from the Italian island of Sicily settled in New Orleans in numbers larger than any immigrant group since the mid-nineteenth-century waves of Irish and German. Poor, scorned, and unable to speak the language, the Sicilians encountered a city whose circumstances at the time—a well-developed CBD with entry-level job opportunities immediately surrounded by a ring of cheap housing—spurred the formation of ethnic enclaves. The resultant Sicilian residential cluster represented the sort of ethnic neighborhood reminiscent of turn-of-the-century Manhattan. Even with old Creole townhouses instead of Lower East Side tenements, and neighborhood galleries in place of fire escapes. *Piccola Palermo*—"Little Palermo," the lower French Quarter—figured prominently in the ethnic geography of historic New Orleans. No other enclave exhibited such a dense concentration, with as large a population, and with such a significant impression on the cityscape.

Others have told the stories of influential Italians in New Orleans such as the Matranga brothers of Standard Fruit, the Uddo family of Progresso foods, two city mayors, and the first American saint, Mother Francesca Cabrini.[401] Local Italian surnames like Montelepre, Cusimano, Liuzza, Caniglia, and Brocato are practically part of the city's cultural landscape, as are St. Joseph's Day altars, muffuletta sandwiches, and Central Grocery. Others too have shed light on the community's 1891 baptism by fire, when the presumed Mafia-associated murder of Police Chief David C. Hennessy led to the lynching of eleven imprisoned Italians, an event which shook U.S.-Italian diplomatic relations and still reverberates within the local Italian population.[402] Still others have investigated how Italian immigrants and their descendents have been viewed and categorized—in terms of race, ethnicity, and class—by Louisiana society.[403] The focus here is not the community, notable individuals, trials, tribulations, and contributions, as these are well documented in literature ranging from the reverential to the scholarly. Rather, geographical questions are raised here: From where did these immigrants come? Why did they depart and select New Orleans over other destinations; where and how did they live upon arriving; why there; how did they affect the cityscape; and why and to where did they move? What can these patterns in time and space tell us about New Orleans society, and about the Italian-American society that calls New Orleans home? And what evidence of these past cultural geographies remains in the streets of New Orleans today?

"A Constant Trickle"

Italians participated in the early European exploration and settlement of the region dating as far back as Hernando De Soto's Spanish expedition through the future American South in 1539-1543.[404] A more lasting role was played by Henri de Tonti, the Neopolitan nobleman who sailed down the Mississippi with La Salle in 1682 and witnessed his claim of Louisiana for France. After La Salle's disappearance in coastal Texas in 1684, Tonti kept alive La Salle's vision of a strategic French settlement near the mouth of the Mississippi among skeptical French officials preoccupied with other matters. His activity in the region formed a critical bridge between La Salle's explorations of the early 1680s and those of the Le Moyne brothers starting in 1699 and leading to the establishment of New Orleans in 1717-1722. Early colonial Louisiana history would be significantly different were it not for Henri de Tonti.[405]

Commencing with a few settlers in New Orleans during the founding years, Italian immigration to colonial New Orleans and Louisiana proceeded "a constant trickle."[406] Some were soldiers, many were tradesmen and artisans; others were undesirables shipped out of France. Many had social or economic ties to France's colonies, or Francophone culture. The "trickle" had picked up sufficiently by the early American years to merit one observer comment in 1809, "Make a tour throughout that city, and in every street you will encounter native Americans, native Louisianians, Frenchmen, Spaniards, Englishmen, Germans, Italians, &c. &c."[407] The population was large enough to support representatives in the local government and business community (Pietro Maspero's New Exchange coffee saloon on Chartres and St. Louis became the New Orleans Chamber of Commerce in 1806 and a rendezvous for businessmen for decades), in military and paramilitary activities (Italians fought in the Battle of New Orleans and counted among Lafitte's pirates), and in all economic and social classes. In an aggregate sense, however, Italians in early nineteenth-century New Orleans formed

[401] See Paul Anthony Cusimano, "The Italians of Louisiana: Their Cultural Background and Their Many Contributions in the Fields of Literature, Arts, Education, Politics, and Business and Labor" (Ph.D. dissertation, Louisiana State University, 1978) and Rosemary Bolgna Boneno, "From Migrant to Millionaire: The Story of the Italian-American in New Orleans, 1880-1910" (Ph.D. dissertation, Louisiana State University, 1986), for a survey of Italian community life in New Orleans.

[402] See Richard Gambino, *Vendetta: A True Story of the Most Lynching in America* (Garden City, 1977) and Marco Rimanelli and Sheryl L. Postman, *The 1891 New Orleans Lynching and U.S.-Italian Relations: A Look* (New York, 1992) for perspectives on this incident, and Joseph Mas[illegible], "Who Really Killed the Chief?" *Italian American Digest* 29 (Summer 2002): [illegible], for an example of the continued popular interest in this case.

[403] On this topic, see Louis Reynes Edwards-Simpson, "Sicilian Immigration to New Orleans, 1870-1910: Ethnicity, Race and Social Position in the New South" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1996).

[404] Among De Soto's original expedition of six hundred men were at least three Italians, who apparently were among the 322 survivors who escaped down the Mississippi River in the summer of 1543. Italians thus may have been among the first Europeans to cast their eyes upon the future site of New Orleans, probably in July 1543. Russell M. Magnaghi, "Louisiana's Italian Immigrants Prior to 1870," *Louisiana History* 27 (Winter 1986): 43-44.

[405] Richard Campanella, *Time and Place in New Orleans: Past Geographies in the Present Day* (Gretna, 2002), 17-23.

[406] Magnaghi, "Louisiana's Italian Immigrants Prior to 1870," 46.

[407] Letter from Hopkins to Governor Claiborne, October 28, 1809, in Clarence Edwin Carter, *Territorial Papers of the United States*, vol. 9, *The Territory of Orleans, 1803-1812* (Washington, DC, 1940), 855.

a small component of a large and complex [illegible], not yet large enough to be viewed as a distinct community with an extensive social network. Besides, at this time, "the Italian peninsula remained a collection of small [illegible] often warring states, many of them dominated, especially in the south, by one or another foreign power.... Italy as a nation did not inspire much loyalty from the masses of its emigrants, who continued to think of themselves in terms of native region, locality, or village."[408]

According to historian Russell M. Magnaghi, port records starting from 1820 show a "small but continuous migration of Italians to Louisiana," many of whom were transient merchants or seamen rather than immigrants. The largest recorded group during the 1820s was twenty mostly single working-class male "servants, blacksmiths, carpenters, masons, and farmers" who disembarked on February 5, 1821. A few score more—merchants, professionals, traders, and craftsmen—came later in the 1820s.[409] Enough resided in New Orleans by 1828 to catch the attention of visitor Charles Sealsfield,

[408] Humbert S. Nelli, "Italians," in *The Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*, ed. Stephan Thernstrom (Cambridge, 1980), 546. It was not until a large Italian population settled in America, 70 percent in cities, that "an Italian common heritage" was embraced.

[409] Magnaghi, "Louisiana's Italian Immigrants Prior to 1870," 51-52.

St. Mary's Church on Chartres Street was [illegible] of the pre[illegible] religious nuclei of the Italian and Sicilian community of the lower French Quarter. Built in 184[illegible] as an addition to the circa-1750 Ursuline Convent, "the Italian Church" symbolized the important role played by religious institutions in the formation of ethnic neighborhoods. *Photograph by author, 2002.*

who described the city's white population as comprising Creoles, Anglos, Germans, "English, Irish, Spaniards, and some Italians, amongst whom are several respectable houses."[410] The city's small Italian cohort represented an extension of the very old presence of Italian merchants throughout the Spanish and French colonies of the West Indies, of which New Orleans formed the northernmost node as well as a gateway to interior markets.[411] Many Italian fruit merchants relocated to the lucrative New Orleans market from Caribbean and Mexican ports, where they had previously conducted business with the booming American city.[412] Henry Didimus saw evidence of this niche in his 1835–36 visit to New Orleans, mentioning the Italians he saw in the French Market as well as "sundry heaps of West India fruit, [the] Italians staple article."[413] Other Italians took the trade to the streets: one visitor recalled seeing in 1840 "an Italian banana and orange man" who "cleared a space among the bushes and rank weeds and erected a rude fruit stall in the middle of the Canal Street neutral ground, undeveloped at the time."[414]

Italians in early nineteenth-century New Orleans originated from northern locales such as Liguria, Sardinia, Piedmont, and Ticino, as well as from central and southern regions around Rome, Naples, and Sicily. New Orleans attracted enough southern Italians in this era to distinguish it from most other American cities with Italian populations: according to Humbert S. Nelli, "only [Italian] communities that developed somewhat differently [from other American cities] were in San Francisco and New Orleans.... New Orleans attracted southern Italians from the beginning of the colony, while San Francisco remained northern Italian long after other cities were inundated with immigrants from the south."[415] Sicilians, however, were in the minority. As early as the 1830s and lasting well into the twentieth century, Italians made the Crescent City a major node in the Mediterranean/American tropical fruit trade, and it is to this commercial shipping link that the later Sicilian-New Orleans connection may be traced.

The "constant trickle" of Italian immigration gradually increased toward the middle of the nineteenth century, by which time we can measure settlement through official records, namely the 1850 census, the first to record place of birth. Unfortunately, it and just about every decennial census that followed—not to mention American immigration records, Italian statistics on departures, and other primary sources of information—used differing (and often unclear) criteria and standards in their tabulations. Italy was not a unified country until 1860, prior to this date and even af-

[410] Charles Sealsfield, *The Americans as They Are: Described in a Tour Through the Valley of the Mississippi* (London, 1828), 175.

[411] Samuel Leo Bono, "Italians in Antebellum New Orleans: The First Italian-American Community in the United States" (M.A. thesis, University of New Orleans, 1996), 1-2.

[412] Magnaghi, "Louisiana's Italian Immigrants Prior to 1870," 52.

[413] H. Didimus, *New Orleans As I Found It* (New York, 1845), 29-31.

[414] Eliza Ripley, *Social Life in Old New Orleans, Being Recollections of My Girlhood* (New York and London, 1912), 3.

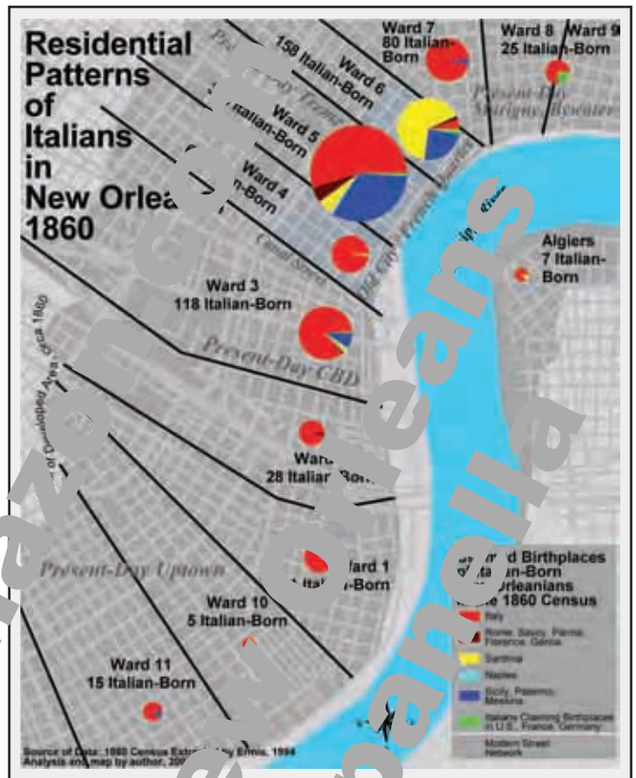
[415] Nelli, "Italians," 549.

terwards, "Italian" immigrants actually identified themselves by their region of origin, such as Piedmont, Genoa, or Sicily. Some records lumped all Italians together while others categorized by region; some included only those born in Italy while others counted American-born people of Italian ancestry. Most ship manifests and immigration records do not distinguish between those disembarking at New Orleans and those intending to stay. Turn-of-the-century numbers are equally erratic, because the seasonal flow of thousands of Sicilians between Southern plantations and Southern cities simply eluded accurate record-keeping. These problems make the citation of specific statistics subject to conditional statements. Nevertheless, enough data exist to track general patterns through time and space.

Italians in Antebellum New Orleans

In 1850 Italian-born people in New Orleans were outnumbered three-to-one by Irish-born immigrants, seventeen-to-one by those born in Germanic states, and eleven-to-one by those of foreign French. There were even more Scots than Italians in that year. Nevertheless, the 658 Italian-born New Orleanians outnumbered those in any other city except New York, which had about fifty more, despite its sevenfold-larger population.[416] This figure 658 may be an underestimate: one researcher counted 711 Italians in the 1850 population schedules for New Orleans (compared to only 578 in much larger New York City), while another put the New Orleans figure at 915.[417] Whatever the exact count, New Orleans had by far the highest per-capita population and possibly the highest absolute number, of Italians of any American city in 1850. Louisiana as a whole had more Italians than any other state. It comes as no surprise that at least one researcher has described New Orleans in the 1850s as "the first significant Italian settlement" and "first Italian-American community" in the United States.[418]

That researcher, Samuel Light Bono, shed new light on this little-known pioneering community by tabulating statistics from the 1850 and 1860 censuses. Bono found Italian New Orleans in 1850 to comprise 711 individuals, most of whom arrived during the 1840s. Ship manifest data confirmed that "very few Italians entered the port of New Orleans in 1840,"[419] suggesting that those few who did arrive earlier came mostly from the Caribbean basin and therefore were not specifically recorded as hailing from Italy. Sicilians made up only 14 percent of the 1850 Italian community; others cited "Italy" or any one of a half-dozen regions, states, or cities as their birthplace. This Sicilian percentage would



Contrary to popular belief, the French Quarter hosted a sizable Italian population before the Civil War. Of the 893 heads-of-households of Italian birth listed in the 1860 census, almost two-thirds lived in French Quarter-based Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Wards; the Fifth Ward had the highest Italian-born population in the city. Over three-quarters lived below Canal Street, reflecting a preference for the more Catholic, Latin side of town over the predominantly Protestant, Anglo upper city. (Note: the Italian regions of origin depicted in the pie charts were reported erratically and inconsistently by immigrants in 1860.) *Map and analysis by author based on 1860 Census population schedules, prepared by genealogist Rosemary Sodolak Ermis and used with permission.*

reverse almost precisely a half-century later. In their residential distribution, Bono found that over 83 percent of Italians settled below Canal Street, and just over 50 people settled in the First Municipality—that is, mostly in the French Quarter, with some in the Faubourg Treme directly behind it. Despite the geographical concentration, the Italian population still fell short of representing a cohesive, settled community intent on remaining in the city. Its members were more likely to be young, male, single, with fewer-than-average children if they had any at all, and relatively uninterested in sending those children to school. In fact, most Italians in New Orleans in 1850 were transients, making money in the bustling port and then moving elsewhere. Bono found that only 3.5 percent of the Italians in New Orleans in 1850 remained there in 1860.[420]

A cohesive and permanent Italian community seems to have formed in New Orleans during the 1850s, as captured in the 1860 census. All entries in the 1860 census with Italian or Italian-provincial birthplaces were analyzed, along with their ward of residence, claimed birthplace, age, and gender,

[416] J.D.B. De Bow, *Statistical View of the United States: Compendium of the Seventh Census* (Washington, DC, 1854), 395-99.

[417] Bono, "Italians in Antebellum New Orleans," 1, and Joseph Logsdon (erroneously cited to James Dormon) in Joel Gardner, *A Better Life: Italian-American in South Louisiana* (s.l., 1983), 15.

[418] Bono, "Italians in Antebellum New Orleans," 1.

[419] Ibid., 5.

[420] Ibid., 3-15.

to produce the map *Residential Patterns of Italians in New Orleans, 1860*, and the following observations.[421]

- 893 heads-of-households of Italian birth were listed in the 1860 census population schedules of New Orleans.
- 61 percent recorded "Italy" as their birthplace, curiously down from 78 percent in 1850, in spite of the unification forces underway in Italy.
- 16 percent cited Sicily as their birthplace, and another 2 percent specified Palermo. This percentage represents a tenfold increase of Sicilians since 1850, probably reflecting the increasingly busy shipping lines and tropical fruit trade between Palermo and New Orleans. By century's end, Italian immigration to New Orleans would become almost 99 percent Sicilian.
- 14 percent were born in Sardinia, from which there had been a popular exodus in 1858-1859.
- The remaining 9 percent claimed birthplaces of Rome, Savoy (Savoie), Naples, Parma, Florence, Genoa, Messina, and Calabria. These cities, regions, nations, and kingdoms illustrate the various allegiances felt in 1860 by peoples now recognized collectively as Italians.
- Males outnumbered females by a three-to-one ratio, not as high as in 1850. Among the males were many sailors and merchants, as well as married men who had not yet brought their families over. Among the females were women overseeing the home and children while the husband worked away. In all, Italians in 1860 were less likely to be male, and more likely to (1) be married, (2) have children and more of them, and (3) send them to school, than their counterparts in 1850. These are all indications of an increasingly permanent and less transient community.
- 64 percent of entries (574) listed a French Quarter-based wards four, five, and six. The fifth Ward, between St. Louis and St. Philip streets, had the highest Italian-born population in the city, 256 households. Bono further found that the densest Italian settlement occurred on Dumaine Street between Chartres and Dauphine, the lower blocks of Bourbon and Dauphine, and Decatur Street, called Old Levee at the time.[422] These residential clusters would grow and intensify by century's end.
- 76 percent of respondents lived below Canal Street, and 23 percent resided above it, showing that Italians still strongly preferred the lower city in 1860, though not quite as much as in 1850. The remaining 1 percent—seven male-headed households with an average age (forty-three) eight years older than their compatriots—lived in Algiers.[423]

This residential pattern refutes popular notions that the French Quarter was overwhelmingly French and Creole before the Civil War, and did not host a sizable Italian population until the century's end. Reasons for the early Italian concentration here were economic and cultural. Along the French Quarter levee were the "old food wharves"[424] where Italians found employment for the trades they possessed. Opportunities abounded at the French Market, where Italians—who throughout urban America "were attracted to distributing fresh food from the central wholesale markets"[425]—practically invented the local fruit trade. Anecdotal evidence indicates that the Italian presence in the French Market dates to at least the early 1840s, if not earlier. Wrote an observer in an 1843 article in the *Daily Picayune*, "The Italians live in the dirty, dingy streets, near the market, that smell strongly of maccaroni."[426] Enough Italians lived around Chartres Street, described as the "St. Giles of New Orleans," for A. Oakey Hall to observe in 1851 "Italians chattering up and down" as well as "Frenchmen...gesticulating" and "Dutchmen jabbering...."[427] The 1850s also saw the initial departure of the wealthy from the inner city for Esplanade Avenue and elsewhere (a trend that would surge in upcoming years), which opened up apartments for those of more modest means. Some Italians might have been drawn to the Catholic, Latin ambience of the lower section, feeling more at home among Catholic Creoles of French culture than Protestant Americans of Anglo culture. Only one in six Italians settled in the predominantly Protestant, Anglo and immigrant wards above Canal Street, where, interestingly, Italians were more likely to Anglicize their names.[428] This was after all, the era of the Know Nothing Party and the wave of nativist sentiment against immigrants in general and Catholics in particular. A number of anti-Catholic, anti-immigrant riots occurred in New Orleans in 1852 and 1853; newly arrived Catholic immigrants from southern Europe may have sought refuge in the old Latin sector to escape this sentiment. Indeed, Catholics and immigrants formed a political coalition with Creoles during the mid-1850s municipal elections, and this alliance may have drawn Italian immigrants to the Creole dominant neighborhoods.[429] Additionally, Italians attended mass at St. Louis and St. Mary's churches (the latter appended to the old Ursuline Convent on Chartres Street in 1845), both of which were located in the heart of the French Quarter. About 157 probable Italian surnames (about 7 percent) are listed among the approximately 2,125 baptisms carried out in St. Mary's Church

[421] These entries were entered into a computer file by genealogist Rosemary Ermis, who graciously granted me permission to analyze them for this study. These results are shown here. Two years later, I encountered the research of Samuel Bono, who ran similar tabulations; our independently compiled figures strongly corroborate the other's.

[422] Bono, "Italians in Antebellum New Orleans," 2.

[423] Analysis by author using digital files of 1860 census prepared by Ermis. Bono's computations are found starting on page 16 of his thesis.

[424] Bono, "Italians in Antebellum New Orleans," 7.

[425] David Ward, *Cities and Immigrants: A Geography of Change in Nineteenth Century America* (New York, London, and Toronto, 1971), 107.

[426] "A Kaleidoscopic View of New Orleans," *Daily Picayune*, September 23, 1843, p. 2, col. 3.

[427] A. Oakey Hall, *The Manhattaner in New Orleans; or Phases of "Crescent City" Life* (New York, 1851), 102-03.

[428] Bono, "Italians in Antebellum New Orleans," 6.

[429] Leon Cyprian Soule, *The Know Nothing Party in New Orleans: A Reappraisal* (Baton Rouge, 1961), 30; Roger Baudier, *The Catholic Church in Louisiana* (New Orleans, 1939), 479.

during 1845-1855.[430] In the early 1860s, because "New Orleans was receiving many immigrants, especially from Italy,"[431] a chapel and infirmary were established near the foot of Esplanade Avenue, again in this general area of increasing Italian preference. The *Società Italiana Di Mutua Beneficenza*, founded in 1843, erected in 1857 an elaborate $40,000 tomb in St. Louis Cemetery No. 1 behind the Quarter—a strong indication of an established community with plans of staying put. Thus, with these institutions both reflecting an Italian presence and drawing new Italian immigrants to the area, we see in the late antebellum era the development of a *bona fide* community and the provenance of its late nineteenth-century intense concentration in the lower French Quarter.

The Great War

In 1860-1861 secessionist sentiment swept the Southern states, leading to the establishment of the Confederate States of America and a violent, history-altering struggle over slavery and states' rights. The Civil War all but destroyed Louisiana's "sugar civilization," leaving hundreds of its manorial plantations in ruin and completely ending its traditional system of labor—slavery. Many freedmen "considered themselves emancipated not only from slavery but also from the status of manual laborers,"[432] and subsequently emigrated to cities to the North or west to Kansas for better-paying jobs beyond South's plantations. For years to come, Southern planters would grapple with the issue of a steady, reliable source of labor. An 1867 conference to address this and other Southern economic woes encouraged "establishing steamship intercourse with the nations of the Mediterranean Sea," and suggested the Mediterranean region for not just a source of labor, but of new crops, cultivation expertise, and commercial markets for Southern exports:

> The northern shores of the Mediterranean, embracing Italy, Sicily and Sardinia, with Greece, are teeming with a population of fifty millions. The climate is the same of that of the Southern States. Their farmers would be at home in the sunny fields of the South. The climate which the Northern emigrant shuns they are accustomed to.... [T]hey would bring with them, and introduce, the modes of producing their various fruits and wines. The waste lands, now deserted, would, under their patient labor, become fruitful with the grape, the olive, the fig, the orange, the lemon and kindred products....[433]

Five thousand miles away, on the dry, rocky Mediterranean island of Sicily, events ran in the opposite direction of the South. Poverty-stricken countrymen overcame millennia of foreign rule and eventually unified politically with the mainland, making Sicily Italian and brightening the hopes of impoverished masses living in practically medieval circumstances. Instead, conditions only worsened, and within two years of unification, Sicilian troops occupied the island, martial law was declared, promises of land redistribution were broken, and taxes were raised. Worse, prosperous northern Italians looked down upon the Sicilians and openly alleged a racial inferiority. Political corruption and organized crime only exacerbated the sense of hopelessness. Sicilians looked elsewhere.[434]

Twelve Genoans destined (according to their ship manifest) for the Confederate States of America disembarked at New Orleans on May 11, 1861, the last of the antebellum arrivals. The Civil War years saw only a few score more arrive, but from 1866 to the end of the decade, almost 200 Italians, two-thirds from Genoa, arrived to the occupied Crescent City. Many moved on, those who remained helped form their Italian-born community of 1,571 individuals by 1870.[435] Also in this decade, the local press starting reporting on the establishment of organized Sicilian criminals in the city, where in 1869 appeared an offshoot of the Mafia known as the Stoppagherra Society.[436] Organized crime would plague the city and stigmatize the Sicilian and Italian community for decades to come, into modern times. Despite that the criminal element comprised a negligible percent of Sicilian New Orleanians, nearly two-thirds of the local press articles about this community between 1849 and 1963 related to criminal activity.[437]

The pace of Italian immigration to New Orleans gradually increased in the 1870s. When 238 men and women from four Sicilian cities applied to emigrate to America in 1870, almost three-third (seventy-three) specified their destination as New Orleans. "When asked for their reason for travel," wrote Sicilian Louise Reynes Edwards-Simpson, "they responded, to seek my fortune, 'to meet relatives,' 'to find work,' and 'to exempt self from military conscription.'"[438] They came from coastal and interior villages mostly in the agricultural provinces of western Sicily, primarily from Corleca, Bisacquino, Termini Imerese, Poggio Reale, Corleone, Cefalú, Palazzo Adriano, Trapani, Chiusa Sclafani, Trabia, and the port city of Palermo. They also came from Contessa Entellina, a Sicilian village with an Albanian ethnic heritage that contributed disproportionately to New Orleans' Sicilian population.[439] Almost all boarded ships in Palermo on direct lines to New

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[430] Hewitt Lamar Forsyth, "Index of Baptisms, St. Mary's Church in New Orleans, La., 1845-1855," *New Orleans Genesis* 5 (September 1966): 345-348 and 6 (January 1967): 51.

[431] Baudier, *The Catholic Church in Louisiana*, 372.

[432] J. Carlyle Sitterson, *Sugar Country: The Cane Sugar Industry in the South, 1753-1950* (Lexington, 1953), 221.

[433] "Remarks on the Importance...of Establishing Steamship Intercourse with the Nations of the Mediterranean Sea," (1867), as quoted by Jean Ann Scarpaci, "Italian Immigrants in Louisiana's Sugar Parishes: Recruitment, Labor Conditions, and Community Relations, 1880-1910" (Ph.D. dissertation, Rutgers University, 1972), 34.

[434] Edwards-Simpson, "Sicilian Immigration to New Orleans, 1870-1910," 16-18.

[435] Zena Valenziano, "From Italy to New Orleans by Barks, Brigs, and Steamships," undated research paper, American-Italian Heritage Foundation Research Library and Museum, New Orleans, LA, 25; Nelli, "Italians," 548.

[436] Herbert Asbury, *The French Quarter: An Informal History of the New Orleans Underworld* (Garden City, 1938), 406.

[437] Computed by counting newspaper articles filed under "Italians" and "Italians in the United States" in the New Orleans newspaper catalog (which covers articles from 1804 to 1963) in the Louisiana Room of the New Orleans Public Library-Main Branch. Of eighty-six articles (the earliest in 1849 and the last in 1963), fifty-six related either to organized crime or specific violent crimes.

[438] Edwards-Simpson, "Sicilian Immigration to New Orleans, 1870-1910," 39-40.

[439] Cited from a 1905 Italian consular report by Louise Edwards, *Yellow Fever and the Sicilian Community in New Orleans, 1905* (New Orleans, 1989), 12-13.

Orleans. About two out of every three would never permanently return.

That same year, 1870, an influential Irish-born planter and sugar-industry advocate named John Dymond hired a Sicilian laborer, Antonio Musacha, to work on his Bayou sugarcane plantation in Plaquemines Parish. The hiring, coordinated by a New Orleans labor agent, represented the latest attempt to resolve post-war agricultural labor problems in the wake of emancipation. A few hundred Chinese immigrants had been sent in from Cuba, San Francisco, and Hong Kong in 1866-1871, but the program failed, in part because, as the *National Geographic Magazine* stated in 1905, "the South will not tolerate the introduction of large numbers of Chinese, for fear of possible race complications."[440] Some laborers from the Iberian peninsula were recruited into Lafourche Parish in the early 1870s, but Spain and Portugal soon denied entry to labor recruiters. A brief attempt with Scandinavian laborers gathered from Midwestern cities also failed.[441] This particular Sicilian, however, proved to be a good employee and Dymond hired more from the New Orleans population. Other planters did the same. The word spread among their colleagues in the lower river region, and to cotton planters in the interior, that Italians may solve their pressing labor-shortage problems, which soon "came to rank alongside politics and the weather as a favorite subject of genteel conversation."[442] Throughout the lower Mississippi River region in the 1870s, "planters conducted experiments which compared Negro and immigrant productivity as agricultural laborers. In every one of the 'scientific' studies," wrote historian Jean Ann Scarpaci in 1972, "the Italian worker won praise for his industry, thrift and reliability, [whereas] the Negro worker received a poor rating as shiftless, unreliable, and lazy."[443]

New Orleans' small, established Sicilian and Italian population was already gainfully employed, mostly in the fruit trade, and held little interest in spending field work in rural parishes. Planters turned to recruit immigrants, who upon finding work, relayed the message home, but even this flow could not satisfy the demand for labor. Between 1877 and 1890, the sugar industry formed recruitment organizations such as the Iberia Immigration Society and forged alliances with the Louisiana Bureau of Immigration, which sent agents overseas to find workers.[444] Increasingly, the Louisiana agricultural industry would collaborate with the state to open the flow of immigrants to supply its labor needs. While demand increasingly "pulled" subsistence farmers out of the old country, conditions in Sicily only worsened, thus intensifying "pushing" the peasants toward making the immigration decision. More came to Louisiana via New Orleans and headed for work in the sugar fields. Each new arrival served as a potential communicant to others contemplating a move from the troubled Italian countryside.

The increased flow of Sicilians through New Orleans starting in the 1870s was just that—*through* New Orleans, and on to the sugar parishes of southeastern Louisiana. For this reason, immigration statistics of arrivals at the Port of New Orleans are not an accurate guide to the size of the city's Sicilian-Italian population. That information is only somewhat better derived from the census. The 1880 census recorded 1,995 individuals born in Italy residing in New Orleans, out of 41,157 foreign-born and 174,[illegible] native-born residents.[445] The trend of Italians moving to downtown neighborhoods continued, as almost 60 percent lived in the blocks between St. Louis Street and Elysian Fields Avenue (Wards five, six, and seven), and of them, 61 percent lived in the lower French Quarter (Ward six).[446] Overshadowing these numbers was the skyrocketing Sicilian population in the sugar parishes. Wrote historian Donna Gabaccia, "As planters sought harvesters for their plantations after 1877, the Italian settlements of the sugar parishes gradually surpassed those of New Orleans Italian community in size and importance. Many migrants landed in New Orleans but soon left for the cane fields; others traveled directly to the plantations from their ships." During the next two decades, the Sicilian-Italian experience in Louisiana shifted from urban to rural: "While only 15 percent of Louisiana's Italian-born residents lived in sugar parishes in 1880 and only 47 percent did so in 1890, by 1900 almost 90 percent of the state's Italian residents lived there."[447]

In 1881, the Louisiana Sugar Planters Association formed the "Shoot Louisiana Immigration Association to work with state officials to facilitate the flow of peasants from the rocky hills of Sicily to the alluvial soils of Louisiana. Over the next few decades, other industries joined the effort to bring southern Italians into the Louisiana labor force. They set up offices locally and overseas, sent *padroni* into Sicilian wheat fields to recruit, distributed brochures in Italian to port cities and towns, and, most importantly, arranged for affordable and convenient passage from Palermo to New Orleans.

The immigrants came largely from coastal and inland wheat-growing villages in Sicily and boarded ships in Palermo for the three-week voyage to the "back door to the land of plenty."[448] The peak migration spanned, according to an amalgam of data sources, from 1890 to 1908, when at least 42,568 entered Louisiana or listed Louisiana as their destination, and in particular 1898 to 1904, when upwards of

[440] Walter Fleming, "Immigration to the Southern States," *The National Geographic Magazine* 16 (November 1905): 518.

[441] J. V. Scarpaci, "Labor for Louisiana's Sugar Cane Fields: An Experiment in Immigrant Recruitment," *Italian Americana* 7 (Fall/Winter 1981): 19; Scarpaci, "Italian Immigrants in Louisiana's Sugar Parishes," 16-21.

[442] Hair, as quoted in Scarpaci, "Italian Immigrants in Louisiana's Sugar Parishes," xvi.

[443] Ibid., xv-xvi. One federal study in 1909 went so far as to quantify the "tests," concluding that Italian workers produced 85 percent more than black workers. Gambino, *Vendetta*, 53.

[444] Giordano, "The Italians of Louisiana," 165.

[445] Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Statistics of the Population of the United States at the Tenth Census* (Washington, DC, 1883), 512.

[446] Interpreted from Virginia Fargo Treat, "Migration in Louisiana, 1834-1880" (Ph. D. dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 1967), 258, 719-34.

[447] Donna Gabaccia, *Militants and Migrants: Rural Sicilians Become American Worker* (New Brunswick and London, 1988), 102-03.

[448] Phrase used by Frederick Marcel Spletstoser to describe New Orleans as an immigrant port, 1820-1860.

3,000 to 4,000 arrived nearly annually (2,1[illegible] arrived during a single week in 1903). Over 98 percent hailed from southern Italy—that is, Sicily.[449] "ANOTHER BATCH OF SURLY SICILIANS Arrives in Port and Undergoes the Ordeal of Inspection" groaned a *Daily Picayune* headline in October 1898. "The *Bolivia* Brings Nearly Fourteen Hundred of Them, Who Hope to Find Here the Land of Promise and Plenty."[450] They landed at the wharves at the foot of Esplanade Avenue or Toulouse Street, where some remained for a while and most eventually headed upriver to the sugar parishes. Along the River Road between Baton Rouge and New Orleans—the apex of Southern sugar culture and iconic locale of antebellum slavery—"the Italian laborer [had] largely displaced the negro, and the same [was] true of many other localities."[451] The image of thousands of Southern European immigrants laboring in the shadow of columned mansions is one that eludes modern notions of Louisiana's plantation mystique. Figures vary widely regarding how many Italians worked the cane fields in the turn-of-the-century: most evaded census enumerations and other permanent records, and because they came from various places (as far away as New York and Chicago, not just from New Orleans), records at particular ports are also inadequate. The situation is not unlike estimations of Mexican migrant workers on American farms today. By Dominic Gabaccia's estimate, 60,000–70,000 Italian field hands arrived in Louisiana every October to harvest and grind cane.[452] Historian John V. Baiamonte put the number at around 14,000, noting that "there were 50,000 cane workers [in the sugar parishes in 1910], consisting of Negroes, French Creoles, and Italians."[453] According to conservative census data, there were 17,577 Italian-born people residing in Louisiana by 1900, of which over 90 percent were Sicilians and about 15,000 were sugar workers. The total number for Louisiana nearly doubled to 30,000 in 1904, and as many as 100,000 Sicilians and other Italians labored in fields throughout the lower Mississippi Valley, Louisiana included.[454]

Cane cutters could earn daily wages of $1.10 to $1.50 during good seasons, plus free standard housing (often in old slave cabins) and sometimes the opportunity to grow vegetables on a tiny plot of land.[455] After *la zuccarata* (the autumn sugar harvest, when sugar operations ran nonstop) concluded in January, the Sicilians scattered to find other work. A few planned to settle in these rural parishes. Trains transported them far and wide to other agriculture and other towns throughout the Deep South, and many of the iniquitous late nineteenth-century Southern "railroad towns," centered around the station and tracks, figured prominently in these Italians' early experiences of their adopted nation. Many more came to New Orleans to reside temporarily with family or friends; according to one account, "planters sometimes organized weekly transportation by box car"[456] between New Orleans and the plantations. Others returned to Sicily or headed for northern ports but did so by first returning to New Orleans. Come next sugar season, many Sicilian men would return to the plantations, leaving their growing families behind in New Orleans. In this manner, the turn-of-the-century Italian population in New Orleans swelled and shrank with the seasonal cycles of Southern agriculture. The difficulty in measuring this population is evident in official statistics: U.S. Census Bureau data for 1880, 1890, 1900, and 1910 list the number of Italian-born residents in New Orleans at 1,795; 3,622; 5,866; and 8,060, respectively. Italian consular reports cite more realistic estimates of 10,000–12,000 in the city in 1892; 16,000 in the city and 80,000 in Louisiana in 1903, and about 15,000 Italians in New Orleans in 1907.[457] In 1920, Italians constituted fully 3 percent of the foreign-born population in the Bayou State; though their absolute numbers could not compare with those in the Northeast, this rate was triple the proportion (1.6 percent) among foreign-born at the national level.

The story of thousands of Italian immigrants toiling in the cane fields did not last long. Sugar planters could hardly keep many immigrant laborers for more than two seasons, because, as one 1902 source noted, "by that time they have laid by a little money and are ready to start a fruit shop or a grocery store at some cross-roads town. Those who do not establish themselves thus strap packs and peddle blue jeans, vests and red handkerchiefs to the Negroes."[459] Italians' desire to own land for truck farms (small, intensively cultivated plots) pushed them out of the sugar parishes, where planters might at best lease them a parcel, but resisted selling.[460] Concluded a Federal Immigration Commission report in 1910, "Where land is cheap and where opportunities for economic and social advancement are many[,] the Italian rural laborer... will not outlast the first generation [and] seems destined to become a property owner, rather than an agricultural laborer."[461] Occasional financial panics and hard times in the sugar industry "pushed" other Italians to abandon their plantation jobs for better opportunities elsewhere, which "pulled" them with the lure of higher wages and better conditions. By some assessments, the movement stemmed from Italians' rejection

[449] Data compiled from numerous sources by Scarpaci, "Italian Immigrants in Louisiana's Sugar Parishes," 107-08; see also Giordano, "The Italians of Louisiana," 166.

[450] *Daily Picayune*, October 26, 1898, p. 9.

[451] Fleming, "Immigration to the Southern States," 291.

[452] Gabaccia, *Militants and Migrants*, 103.

[453] John V. Baiamonte, Jr., "Immigrants in Rural America: A Study of the Italians of Tangipahoa Parish, Louisiana" (Ph.D. dissertation, Mississippi State University, 1972), 14.

[454] Fleming, "Immigration to the Southern States," 291.

[455] Giordano, "The Italians of Louisiana," 166.

[456] Patricia Beauvais, *Italian Immigrants in Louisiana: Their Contribution to the Cultural, Social and Economic Development of the State* (New Orleans, 1993-1994), 14.

[457] As cited by Edwards-Simpson, "Sicilian Immigration to New Orleans, 1870-1910," 50-51.

[458] Luciano Iorizzo, "The Padrone and Immigrant Distribution," *The Italian Experience in the United States*, ed. Silvano M. Tomasi and Madeline H. Engel (New York, 1977), 48.

[459] "Labor in Louisiana," *Man. Rec.* (July 17, 1902): 466, as quoted by Scarpaci, "Italian Immigrants in Louisiana's Sugar Parishes," 211.

[460] Giordano, "The Italians of Louisiana," 166.

[461] As quoted in Gambino, *Vendetta*, 55.

of the lowly social status, laced with racial implications, relegated to them by Louisiana society. "Italian immigrants initially bore no ill-will against their Negro co-workers. They had no reason to dislike the Negroes and regarded them with curiosity. However, once the newcomers realized that they shared the socio-economic position of the black who was relegated to the lowest position in southern white society, the foreigners decided to leave the plantation; thus, they avoided further association with black Americans."[462] For these reasons, Sicilian immigrants emigrated to new destinations—geographical, social, and economic—a few years after their initial arrival. Most of the tens of thousands of Sicilians who circulated seasonally in the Louisiana sugar bowl departed the state altogether, seeking better social and economic options in the North or West. Some who stayed in Louisiana went on to found truck farms throughout the rural parishes surrounding New Orleans, notably the so-called Strawberry Belt of Tangipahoa Parish, which still thrives today under significant Sicilian-American ownership. These family farms produced the sort of delicate fruits and vegetables that, in those days, had to be grown near major sources of demand. The produce was shipped across the lake to New Orleans and through the New Basin and Old Basin canals to be peddled in corner groceries and municipal markets, principally the French Market, where their compatriots worked. Sicilians in droves left the sugar plantations for urban areas, principally New Orleans, where many had familial or business connections and where new transcontinental railroad lines dramatically augmented the city's Sicilian-dominated banana and tropical fruit trade. The Sicilian experience in Louisiana again became a predominantly urban one.

WHY SICILY?

The Crescent City ranks as "the only American city whose Italian population is almost exclusively of Sicilian origin."[463] Why? It was both a case of Sicilians selecting Louisiana and Louisianians selecting Sicilians, from the 1840s to the 1910s. The reasons behind the mutual attraction:

Early Commercial Interchange — Shipping lines had been in place between Palermo and New Orleans since the early nineteenth century. Cotton and other Southern exports were shipped to the Mediterranean region, and citrus fruits and other dry-land agricultural products came in return, often accompanied by Sicilian merchants and some families. This circa-1840 commercial tie is not the origin of most Sicilian-American families in the area today, for only a small number arrived at this early stage, but it is the origin of the relationship between the two cities.[464] "Because a New Orleans-Palermo trade route was already in place," wrote sociologists Anthony V. Margavio and Jerry Salomone, "it was a natural mechanism for handling the immigrants who chose to come to Louisiana. And come they did."[465] The American tropical fruit industry can be traced to New Orleans, which in turn can be traced to Sicilian and Italian merchants in the antebellum era.

Recruitment — Satisfaction among planters with Sicilian labor on sugar plantations in 1870 accounts for much of the transfer of peoples from Sicily to Louisiana. "The solution" to the South's labor problems, stated *National Geographic* in 1905, "seems to be to induce the Italians to come as farm laborers, with the prospect of becoming land owners on a small scale....Much to the surprise of all, they have proved successful farmers on the cotton and sugar plantations. The great lumbering companies are also employing them. . . ."[466] The marketing effort was coordinated and financed by professional Louisiana labor recruiters, railroad and shipping lines, industry associations, and the Louisiana Department of Agriculture itself—one of the New South's state efforts to sponsor immigration. For a while, the state's agricultural agency was so involved in recruiting foreign labor that its name was changed to the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Immigration.[467] "How can we secure the proper kind of foreign immigration for Louisiana?" Louisiana State Commissioner of Agriculture and Immigration Col. Charles Schuler responded in 1906:

> The only answer that I can give is to advertise. Advertise in every possible way. Furnish your immigration office with sufficient means to that agents familiar with the resources and possibilities in Louisiana can come in personal contact with the prospective homeseeker.... Let this agent…distribute Louisiana's literature, translated in the immigrants' native language. Show the people of the old world in every possible way that Louisiana is the ideal State for a new settler...[S]how them...the magnificent opportunities [in] agricultural pursuits...the thrifty and progressive towns and cities…the health and hospitality of Louisiana, the schools and religious advantages, the splendid transportation facilities... Talk up Louisiana by telling the truth about her, tell about her magnificent soil and climate.[468]

Direct, Cheap Shipping Access — In the early 1880s, the state and sugar-industry labor recruiters augmented the decades-old direct-shipping line between Palermo and New Orleans to thrice monthly, to accommodate increased numbers of immigrants. Direct lines from Trieste and Naples to New Orleans were also added. Steerage rates cost around $40 per passenger, but competition would sometimes reduce fares to less than half that amount. Many traveled back and forth

[462] Based on interviews and other observations by Scarpaci, "Italian Immigrants in Louisiana's Sugar Parishes," 152-53.

[463] Ethelyn Orso, "Sicilian Immigration into Louisiana," in *The Louisiana Purchase Bicentennial Series in Louisiana History*, vol. 10, *Refuge for All Ages: Immigration in Louisiana History*, ed. Carl A. Brasseaux (Lafayette, LA,, 1996), 604.

[464] Scarpaci, "Labor for Louisiana's Sugar Cane Fields: An Experiment in Immigrant Recruitment," 20-21.

[465] A. V. Margavio and Jerry Salomone, "The Passage, Settlement, and Occupational Characteristics of Louisiana's Italian Immigrants," *Sociological Spectrum* 1 (October-December 1981); 348.

[466] Fleming, "Immigration to the Southern States," 518.

[467] Edwards-Simpson, "Sicilian Immigration to New Orleans, 1870-1910," 37-39.

[468] Col. Charles Schuler, *Crop Report of the Louisiana State Board of Agriculture and Immigration* (Baton Rouge, 1906), 6.

to the old country according to seasonal work opportunities.[469]

Chain Immigration — Immigration is frightening and risky plunge into the unknown, particularly for the uneducated rural poor. The peril abates when kin await at the destination, and when other countrymen are clustered in a specific area, along with religious and cultural institutions, risk is further reduced. In the traditional image of Italian family cohesiveness, many immigrants cited the desire to join relatives as among their top reasons to migrate. Though "chain immigration," the arrival of pioneering individuals to Louisiana was followed by adventurous young single males ("birds of passage," usually recruited by a *padrone* who in turn encouraged family and friends to come. As the chain lengthened, the reputation of New Orleans as a favored destination strengthened.[470] Traditional gender relationships often dictated that the male head-of-household's decision to immigrate meant that the wife, children, sisters, and mother came in tow, consensual or not. Chain immigration, or network immigration, "explains how...persons from the small village of Contessa Entellina in western Sicily's remote interior, eventually created a distinct identity and established influence among Sicilians living thousands of kilometers away in New Orleans. Migration networks also partially accounted for the uneven emptying of the island of Sicily in the decades prior to the First World War."[471] Earnings from the French Market or elsewhere were often sent home as remittance payments, which helped pay for steerage-class tickets to New Orleans.[472]

[469] Giordano, "The Italians of Louisiana," 166; Edwards-Simpson, "Sicilian Immigration to New Orleans, 1870-1910," 44.

[470] Gabaccia, *Militants and Migrants*, 84.

[471] Edwards-Simpson, "Sicilian Immigration to New Orleans, 1870-1910," 37.

[472] Gambino, *Vendetta*, 55.

The Italian presence in the French Market dates to at least the 1830s. It was here that Sicilians and other Italians practically invented the local tropical-fruit trade, helping draw Sicilians to the "Little Palermo" that was the lower French Quarter. Shown here in the early 1900s are the Bazaar (dry goods) Market at left; the river side of the market complex at loading time (right); and the main thoroughfare of Little Palermo, Decatur Street (lower left). *Southeastern Architectural Archive, Special Collections, Howard-Tilton Library, Tulane University.*

Louise Reynes Edwards-Simpson cites evidence that some letters extolling the virtues of the Bayou State were written under false pretenses, under the watchful eye of plantation owners intent on increasing their labor force.[473]

Business Opportunity — Some Sicilian immigrants' interest in New Orleans stemmed from their expertise in the international trade of tropical and semi-tropical fruit, an enterprise which local Italians dominated for over a half a century. *Harper's Weekly* alluded to this specialization a year after the Civil War, when licenses for fruit sales in the French Market became

> a monopoly in the hands of a few Italians, who buy in the cheapest market, and sell at exorbitant prices. How well are these estimable foreigners organized that a man coming into port with a cargo of fruit has to take the first offer made to him, or run extreme risk of selling at all.[474]

A remarkably influential 1890 *Daily Picayune* article, entitled "The Obligation Due the Italians" and written in the midst of the Hennessy murder controversy, cited the Italian domination of this business:

> It is mainly through Italian enterprise and capital that the importation of foreign fruits [the port of New Orleans] has been developed from a mere peddling business conducted in a few sailing schooners to the dignity and proportions of a great commercial interest employing a score and more of steamships, hundreds of thousands of dollars of capital. New Orleans today through the efforts of native citizens of Italian parentage or of Italian [birth]...is...become a leading market for the importation and distribution of tropical and foreign fruits of all descriptions. Italians from the coast and islands of the Mediterranean have turned their attention to New Orleans and our gulf region, and they have found here so much that encourages them that they must look for a constantly increasing immigration. Here they have an interior sea, another Mediterranean, reaching to the tropics, and furnishing every possible facility for their maritime operations in fish and fruits.[475]

Cultural-Geographical Similarity? — It is often said that Sicilians were attracted to the New Orleans area for its Mediterranean ambience and aesthetics. In fact, this factor played no significant role in the Sicilian-New Orleans connection. Uneducated, poverty-stricken people living thousands of miles away, ignorant of all but the most basic information about their options, do not make major life decisions on such esoteric factors. Besides, most Sicilians came from villages, not cities, and were destined for the rural sugar parishes, not the narrow streets of the French Quarter. Other observers, including contemporaries, have supposed that a physical-geographical parallel between Italy and Louisiana accounted for the connection. One researcher, for example, states that the main reason behind Louisiana's success in attracting immigrants was the close resemblance of the state's climate to that of the Italian peninsula and Sicily.[476] Another source states that "Italians found in Louisiana a climate and crops very similar to those of the [regions south of Rome]," that "the United States also presented the same division that existed in Italy, between an industrialized North and a rural South," and that Italian immigrants "instinctively felt more attracted by what they were familiar with."[477] Even the deeply anti-Italian Mayor Joseph Shakespeare bemoaned how "our congenial climate" attracted "emigrants from the worst classes of Europe, Southern Italians and Sicilians" to Louisiana.[478] These environmental explanations are overstated. While immigration promoters did indeed cite among the state's attributes a supposedly similar climate and agriculture with Italy, and targeted Sicily in part with this supposition in mind,[479] the only real commonalities were that crops were raised and soils were rare. To compare a dry, rocky, rugged island in the Mediterranean climate to humid, alluvial, flat plantation country in the sub-tropics is to compare agricultural opposites. Even if the climates were somewhat similar, it would not explain why neighboring Mississippi, Texas, and Arkansas *combined* attracted only half the Italian immigrants than did Louisiana,[480] or why hundreds of thousands of other Italian immigrants settled in cold, northern climates. And the "instinctive" attraction of Italian immigrants to the rural South as opposed to the industrialized North flies against the fact that the vast majority of Italian immigrants to America headed for industrialized cities in the Northeast—a climate, living condition, and economy that was alien to them on every level. That said, immigration promoters did cite cultural and religious conditions (the Latin atmosphere and Catholic predominance in Louisiana society) as appealing aspects of the state. It's probable that some immigrants were persuaded, or at least comforted, by this notion, and even more likely was the friendly compatibility of the host culture in southern Louisiana" that would eventually benefit Italian immigrants once settled. One previously cited researcher ranked Louisiana's "cosmopolitan tradition"[482] as the third most important reason for its success in attracting Italian immigrants, behind climatic similarity (which I dispute) and the presence of the port.

Little Palermo

People seek refuge among their own when transplanted to foreign environs, be they wandering Americans in Paris or immigrants in American cities. Little Italys—like Chinatowns, Dutchtowns, Little Haitis, Greektowns, and other

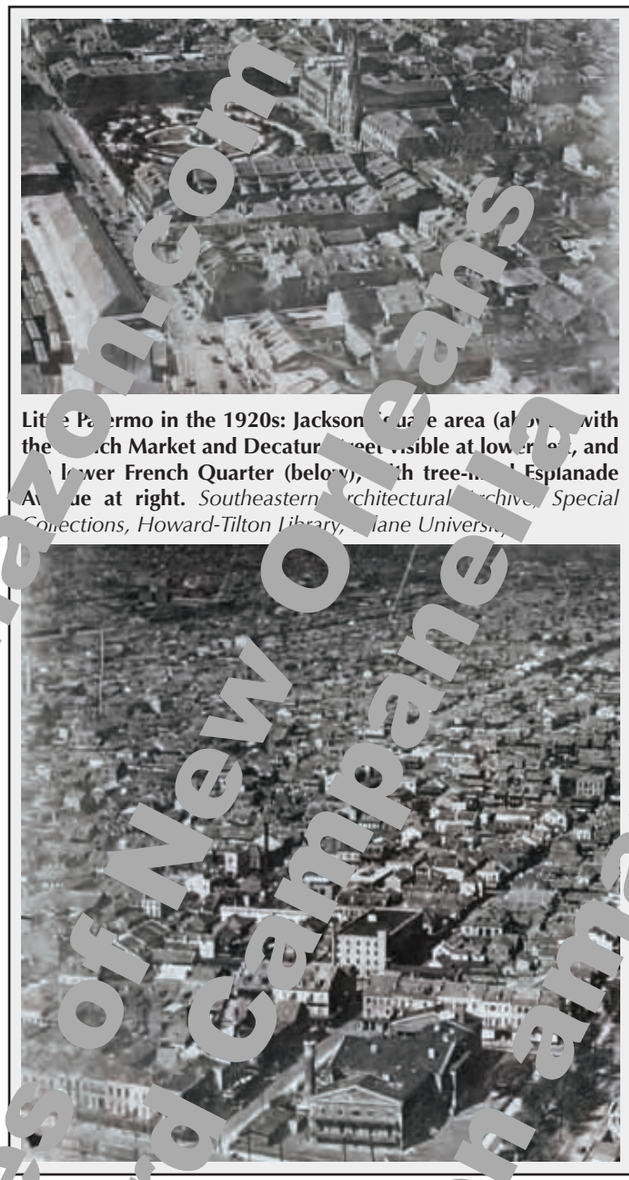
[473] Edwards-Simpson, "Sicilian Immigration to New Orleans, 1870-1910," 50.
[474] "Pictures of the South: The French Market, New Orleans," *Harper's Weekly*, August 18, 1866, p. 526, col. 1.
[475] "The Obligation Due the Italians," *Daily Picayune*, November 12, 1890.
[476] Giordano, "The Italians of Louisiana," 162.
[477] Beauvais, *Italian Immigrants in Louisiana*, 14.
[478] As quoted in Gambino, *Vendetta*, 142.
[479] John Dymond himself claimed in 1881 that "this exceptional opportunity to encourage immigration [from Italy] to this State *from similar climate* demands our most careful consideration." As quoted by Scarpaci, "Italians Immigrants in Louisiana's Sugar Parishes," 21 (emphasis added).
[480] Louisiana attracted 22,[illegible] Italian immigrants between 1880 and 1920, while Texas drew 22,802, Mississippi 5,508, and Arkansas 3,908. Giordano, "The Italians of Louisiana," 162.
[481] Margavio and [illegible]one, "The Passage, Settlement, and Occupational Characteristics of Louisiana's Italian Immigrants," 345.
[482] Giordano, "The Italians of Louisiana," 162.

ethnic enclaves—"served to soften the transition from the old country to the new," wrote sociologists Margavio and Molyneaux, "insulating and sheltering Italian immigrants from a sometimes harsh and often indifferent world."[483] New Orleans' version of this residential clustering tendency was one of the few that was dubbed not "Little Italy," but "Little Palermo."[484]

Little Palermo formed in the lower French Quarter, from about St. Peter Street to Esplanade Avenue and spilling into the neighboring faubourgs of Marigny and Treme.[485] Fewer Sicilians lived in the upper Quarter because it was and remains predominantly commercial. Little Palermo is traceable to the 1840s and 1850s, rose in earnest in the 1880s, peaked during 1890s to 1910s, stabilized, then fell steadily in the mid- to late twentieth century, by which time the lower French Quarter could no longer be identified as a distinctively Italian neighborhood.

The "main street" of Little Palermo was lower Decatur Street, from about St. Ann to Esplanade, where Italians clustered at least since the 1850s. (Some called Decatur "Dago Street," and certain blocks (Dumaine to St. Philip, by one account; adjacent Madison Street by others) were dubbed "Vendetta Alley," in the sensationalistic local lexicon of the day.[486]) Lower Decatur was central to Little Palermo because of its heavy traffic, its multi-story storehouses conducive for commercial/residential use, and its frontage with the French Market, *the* major focal point of Sicilian New Orleans.

Life in Little Palermo would have seemed familiar to countless other poor immigrants in turn-of-the-century urban America. During the peak era, Sicilian men influxed in and out with agricultural seasons, ship and train schedules, dockside work, and other cycles of portability, leaving mostly women and children in the hovels, courtyards, and streets of the inner city. Those men with no families stayed in crowded boarding houses—"as many transients as ten, twenty, or even thirty odd are frequently accommodated in one room over night,"[487] awaiting transportation back to the cane fields. Conditions in Little Palermo were miserable: crowding was extreme, sanitation was as bad as the notorious tenements of lower Manhattan, and disease and crime were rampant. In 1905, one representative block of seventy-one houses contained 493 rooms, in which were crammed the 517 families



Little Palermo in the 1920s: Jackson Square area (above) with the French Market and Decatur Street visible at lower left, and the lower French Quarter (below), with tree-lined Esplanade Avenue at right. *Southeastern Architectural Archive, Special Collections, Howard-Tilton Library, Tulane University*

of 144 families. Almost three-quarters of the people in this block were women and children, and 29 percent were foreign-born, mostly from Sicily. Most families shared common toilets and water supplies (sometimes infested with arboviral discharge came from leaky, exposed cisterns. Such conditions helped create the darkest time in Little Palermo's history, summer 1905, when what would become the city's last yellow fever epidemic afflicted the community and cost its residents an enduring contempt from the rest of the populace. The four blocks in the absolute heart of Little Palermo—Dumaine to Barracks, between Decatur and Chartres, an area that included St. Mary's Italian Church—saw 219 cases of yellow fever, or 8 percent of the total cases in the entire city. Italian-born people made up slightly more than 2 percent of the city population in 1905, but suffered 39 percent of the yellow fever deaths that year, with locally born Italian Americans accounting for an additional 6 percent.[488] New Orleanians had long the residents of Little Palermo for the

[483] Anthony V. Margavio and Jay Lambert Molyneaux, "Residential Segregation of Italians in New Orleans and Selected American Cities," *Louisiana Studies* 12 (Winter 1973): 640.

[484] Written use of the terms *Little Palermo* or *Piccola Palermo* was particularly common. One example appears in a 1905 journal article entitled "Notes on the Yellow Fever in Little Palermo," by Eleanor McMain. Use of other terms is exemplified in a *Times-Democrat* photographic essay published on June 2, 1907, entitled "Scenes and People of the Italian District of New Orleans." "Italian Quarter" or "Italian section" were also commonly used at the time.

[485] Historical faubourg names fell out of use by the early 1900s, and were revived by preservationists in the 1970s. The French Quarter was often referred to as the French Quarters," "the old French section," "the old city," and other colloquial terms. One still hears "the Quarters" today.

[486] Gambino, *Vendetta*, 50; John E. Coxe,"The New Orleans Mafia Incident," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 20 (October 1937): 107.

[487] Eleanor McMain, "Behind the Yellow Fever in Little Palermo," *Charities and the Commons* 15 (October 1905-March 1906): 158.

[488] Ibid., 156-59; Edwards-Simpson, "Sicilian Immigration to New Orleans, 1870-1910," 135-3

1905 epidemic, as well as for violent crime and the general decay of the city's oldest neighborhood. An interview with an elderly Irish Channel resident in 1941 captured the perceptions commonly held for the Sicilians of Little Palermo vis à vis the 1905 outbreak:

> It's a wonder we didn't have worse than yellow fever—bubonic plague the way them dagoes lived. I remember over on Ursuline Street they were tearing down a place and what families were living in one room—sleeping on straw. And next to this—on the third floor, lived a big family all in one room and they kept two goats in the same room to furnish them milk! Dagoes! My God! we never had anything like that in the Irish Channel![489]

The scorn directed toward Sicilian immigrants certainly predates the 1905 epidemic and was not limited to the working class, as evidenced by this 1891 attack by Mayor Joseph Shakespeare's administration in the wake of the Mafia-related lynching incident:

> We find [Southern Italians and Sicilians] the most idle, vicious and worthless people among us.... They monopolize the fruit, oyster and fish trades, and are nearly all peddlers, tinkers or cobblers.... They are filthy in their persons and homes and our epidemics nearly always break out in their quarter. They are without courage, truth, pride, religion or any quality that goes to make the good citizen. New Orleans could well afford (if such thing were lawful) to pay for their deportation.[490]

As Shakespeare suggested, the disdain held for the Sicilians was also directed at their neighborhood, which some New Orleanians, particularly uptowners, would have happily razed in the name of slum-clearance and economic progress. Elderly Sicilians today rightfully decry the use of the pejorative and judgmental word *slum* to describe the lower Quarter in the Sicilian era, but prime real estate it was not.

Hardships and all, Little Palermo played a central role in the experience of the region's Italian immigrants, as a sort of home port, base camp, and central marketplace, around which satellite communities of Italians (field laborers, fruit and vegetable farmers, fishermen, dockworkers, market vendors) orbited for over half a century. It was the figurative "capital" of not just Italian New Orleans, but Italian Louisiana. An Italian consul estimated in 1905 that between one-third and one-half of the roughly 30,000 residents of the French Quarter were Italian immigrants or their offspring.[491] Concentrated as it was, Little Palermo, according to census researchers, was not as centralizing to the local Italian immigrant population as were little Italy's in other major American cities. New Orleans was also unique in the nation for the high level of *integration* of Italian immigrants with the rest of the white population.[492] Indeed, census data as far back as 1850 show that Italians could be found throughout the city and almost always in various degrees of integration with whites and blacks. And in 1910, when Little Palermo was at its height, only 35 percent (2,815 of 8,000) Italian-born New Orleanians lived in those wards covering the French Quarter.[493] But an ethnic enclave need not harbor 100 percent of a particular group in a city, nor comprise exclusively that group, to form a focal point and cultural hearth of the population.

Sicilian ascendancy into the middle class led to the decline in Little Palermo. The 1940 census tabulated 292 Italian-born people resident in the little Palermo census tract, more than any other in the city. Presumably most were elderly who shared households with New Orleans-born children and grandchildren. The number declined to 156 by 1950, probably due mostly to natural death, though this figure still exceeded that of other wards. The 1960 census tally increased to 316; it is not clear whether this unexpected rise was from

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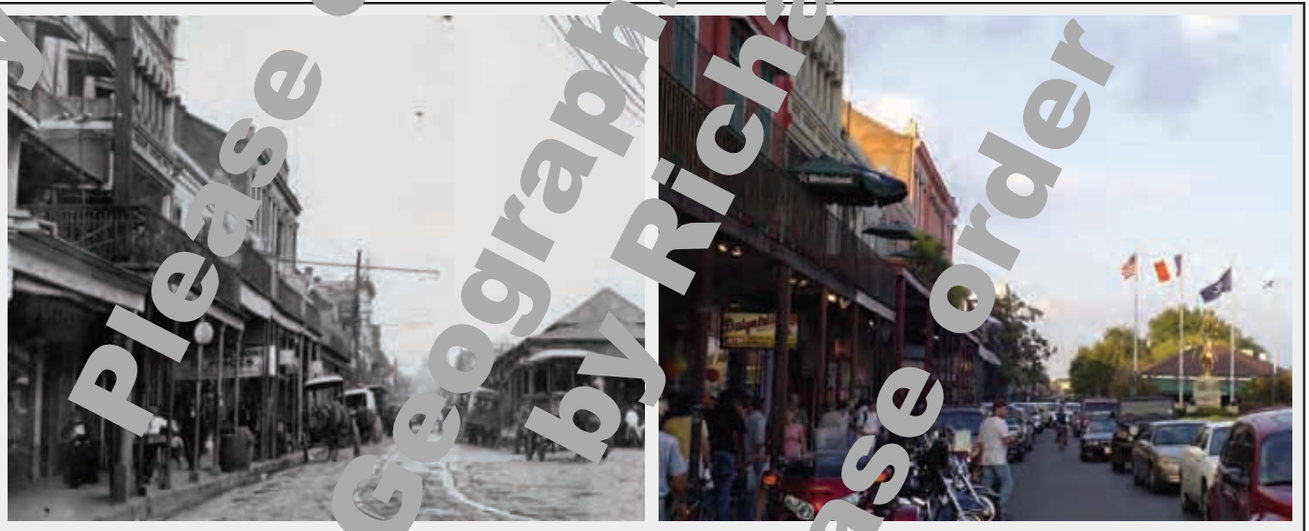
[489] "The Irish Channel," April 29, 1941, Lyle Saxon interview manuscript, Federal Writers' Project Folder 81, 4.

[490] Letter from office of Mayor Joseph Shakespeare to Charles H. Grosvenor, June 5, 1891, as reproduced in Gambino, *Vendetta*, 142-43.

[491] Another 40 percent were black Americans, and the remainder were white Creoles, according to this contemporary source. Edwards-Simpson, "Sicilian Immigration to New Orleans, 1870-1910," 70.

[492] Margavio and Holy Cross, "Residential Segregation of Italians in New Orleans and Selected American Cities," 639-45.

[493] U.S. Census, *Population 1910: Reports by States, with Statistics for Counties, Cities, and Other Civil Divisions, Alabama-Montana* (Washington, D.C., 1913), 793.



Decatur Street scene viewed in early 1900s and in 2004. *Southeastern Architectural Archive, Special Collections, Howard-Tilton Library, Tulane University; photograph by author, 2004.*

Streetscapes of the lower French Quarter today, a century after the heyday of Little Palermo. Unlike New Orleans' other historical ethnic enclaves, former Little Palermo still manages to evince a subtle but palpable ethnic ambience. Even first-time visitors sense that "something different" transpired here, compared to opulent Royal, rowdy Bourbon, and quiet Burgundy streets. Urban planners might do well to study how this transpires, in an effort to breathe new life into New Orleans' other disappearing ethnic cityscapes. *Photographs by author, 2005.*

new immigration or a change in enumeration standards.[494] In any case, the number dropped to ninety-eight by 1970, a few years after St. Mary's Italian School closed. Enough Sicilians remained connected to the lower French Quarter into the late twentieth century to make Italian names in business- and home ownership still fairly common. Even today, one occasionally sees elderly neighborhood folks of possible Sicilian descent strolling the quieter streets of the Vieux Carré attending Sunday morning Mass at St. Mary's Church or St. Louis Cathedral. They are the exception: most old Sicilian families, like the Creoles before them, departed downtown New Orleans for suburban environs, though a fair number still own properties and businesses in the district. (By one count, people of probable Italian ancestry own almost 9 percent of the Quarter's properties.[495]) The mid-century decline of Little Palermo coincided with the suburbanization and rise of gentrification and mass tourism in the French Quarter; since then, the Quarter has increasingly become a commercial district dedicated to tourism, and a residential district for affluent, innovative professionals. What was once a neighborhood associated with working-class Italians is now known for its high gay population.

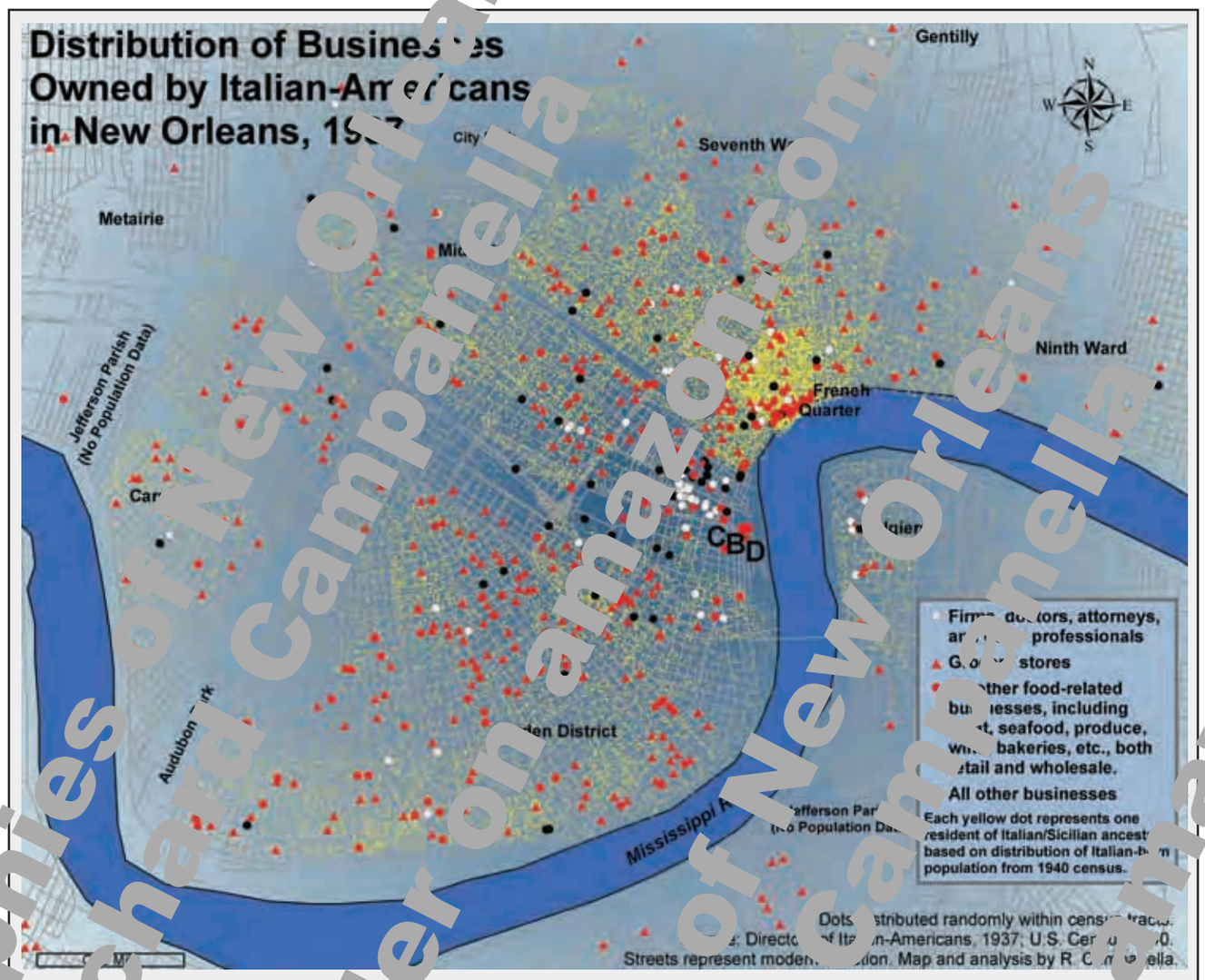
The Why Behind the Where

That an enclave like Little Palermo would form is easily understood. Geographical clustering of immigrants provides safety, support, convenience, a familiar cultural and linguistic environment, *campanilismo* (parochialism), economic opportunities, and proximity to religious and social institutions. That it formed within the general environs of downtown New Orleans can be explained by the phenomena of the "immigrant belt" (see chapter, "An Ethnic Geography of New Orleans"), a loosely concentric ring of high ethnic diversity that formed around the downtowns of many major American cities a century ago. This zone provided the right mix of convenience and opportunity on one hand, and housing availability and cheap cost-of-living on the other. Theoretically, an enclave like Little Palermo could have formed anywhere in this amorphous belt surrounding New Orleans' commercial core. Why did it end up in the lower French Quarter?

A small colony of Italians had settled here by the 1840s and 1850s, supplementing the seed from which an enclave of thousands would later grow. The area may also have been

[494] Census tract #38 data from U.S. Census publications released in 1942 (23-45); 1952 (7-14); and 1961 (13-28).

[495] A perusal of the 2003 Orleans Parish Assessment Roll for the French Quarter revealed 236 probable Italian/Sicilian surnames among the owners of 2,718 parcels in the district, or 8.7 percent. A roughly equal number (8.9 percent) had Francophone surnames.



As hand-vendering businesses helped distribute Chinatown denizens throughout New Orleans, corner grocery stores played the same role for the Sicilians of Little Palermo. Both enterprises benefited from broad geographical dispersion, to minimize competition and maximize convenience to the customer. This map shows the 1937 distribution of 740 Italian American owned businesses, from shipping firms to refreshment stands, overlaid upon the 1940 distribution of Italian-born New Orleanians. Fifty-two percent of these businesses were grocery stores. *Map and analysis by author based on Directory of Italian Americans in Commerce and Professions (1937) and 1940 Census.*

"seeded" in the sense that many vessels bearing Sicilian immigrants unloaded their human cargo barely a stone's throw from Little Palermo, at the foot of Esplanade and Elysian Fields avenues. Immigrants thus had immediate exposure to this part of the city, unlike the German and Irish immigrants who disembarked in Lafayette and the Third District—and ended up living there—a half-century earlier.

Departure of wealthy white Creole families from the lower Quarter around the time of the Civil War opened up hundreds of old townhouses and cottages for rent. Subdivision of spacious antebellum mansions into tiny apartments ("cribbing") maximized profit for landlords. With shelter available, two other major needs—employment and convenience—had to be satisfied for an enclave to form. The French Market, which at the time lined the levee from St. Ann to Ursulines, offered both to Sicilian immigrants. The market's 550 stalls, distributed throughout its beef, fruit and vegetable, and bazaar (dry goods) sections, made it by far the largest and most important market in the city in 1880, a status it held since its founding and still does today.[496] The end of the workday in the French Market, wrote Lafcadio Hearn in a 1885 publication, offered "an opportunity to study the peculiar habits of the 'dagoes'—the Italian fruit and onion dealers, who make up so important and picturesque an element in the market."[497] By 1892, up to one thousand Sicilian vendors sold fruit and vegetables from market stalls or loaded their peddle carts there or made in the streets. Just as the Sicilian-run market fed the city, the Sicilian-owned Macheca Shipping Line fed the market with a steady stream of fresh produce.[498] In addition to employment, the circa-1791 mar-

[496] George E. Waring, *Report on the Social Statistics of Cities, Part II: The Southern and the Western States* (Washington, DC, 1887), 280.

[497] S. Frederick Starr, *Inventing New Orleans: Writings of Lafcadio Hearn* (Jackson, 2001), 24.

[498] Edwards-Simpson, "Sicilian Immigration to New Orleans, 1870-1910," 58; Gambino, *Vendetta*, 50.

ket offered foods and basic necessities at rock-bottom prices just a few blocks from home. It is no coincidence that Little Palermo existed among those Quarter blocks located squarely behind the market.

The French Market was not the only employment source drawing Sicilians to the lower French Quarter. The shipping industry, across the levee from the market, needed cheap, reliable labor ("roustabouts") almost as much as did the planters in the sugar parishes. Standard Fruit and Steamship Company, a local Sicilian-owned firm which helped make New Orleans the world's largest importer of fruit in the early 1900s, hired many Sicilians, as did the cotton shippers and the sugar men on the upper levee. In some cases, it was the better pay and convenience of dock jobs that drew Sicilians away from the plantations and helped plant their roots in Little Palermo.[499]

Important institutions of Roman Catholicism, social aid and benevolence, and enterprise also drew Sicilians to the lower French Quarter. St. Mary's Church on Chartres Street, as well as St. Louis Cathedral, provided religious and social focal points for the immigrants of this era. Both were within the confines of Little Palermo; St. Mary's—"the Italian Church"—was in the geographical center. Italians also created their own mutual-aid societies (the circa-1843 *Società Italiana Di Mutua Beneficenza* may be the oldest Italian society in the nation[500]) to help members through costly crises of health or employment. These societies, of which there were thirty in New Orleans by 1910—collaborated to purchase a large edifice on Esplanade Avenue and form the *Unione Italiana* in 1912, a political and social center of Little Palermo. Additionally, Italian-language newspapers operated offices in the district, and did financial and bureaucratic services catering to the immigrants.

Little Palermo was conveniently served by streetcars passing near or through where could take residents anywhere. Passenger trains on Basin Fields or the levee could transport residents to the lake or rural parishes in a few hours. It was almost impossible for newly arriving immigrants *not* to be exposed to the area, and hard for them not to establish some tie to it. In sum, the lower Quarter offered a plethora of benefits at a minimum of costs for Sicilian immigrants, who responded accordingly. They moved out when that ratio of benefits-to-costs reversed.

Many observers cite the Mediterranean ambience of the French Quarter as a reason for the Italian clustering here. Some Sicilian immigrants may have felt at home among the narrow streets, balconies, and courtyards of the old city, and one cannot help but see visages of picturesque Italian port cities in turn-of-the-century photographs of the Vieux Carré.

But poor immigrants are universally pragmatic; they do not seek new abodes with an eye toward taste and charm. Sicilian immigrants—who were mostly country folk—prioritized for frugal living, social stability, geographical convenience, and economic opportunity in their efforts to establish themselves permanently in America or return to their homeland. They would have settled anywhere in the city to achieve these goals; Little Palermo simply delivered them most effectively. Later generations may well have invented the "Mediterranean ambience" platitude—which is very popular in secondary sources and from their own assessments of those poignant old photographs of Little Palermo (bustling market scenes; laundry hanging from balconies), and often related anecdotes (pigs and chickens in stately courtyards; a cow on the second floor of the Pontalba Building), concluding that the Mediterranean ambience of the French Quarter simply *must* explain the Sicilian presence in it.

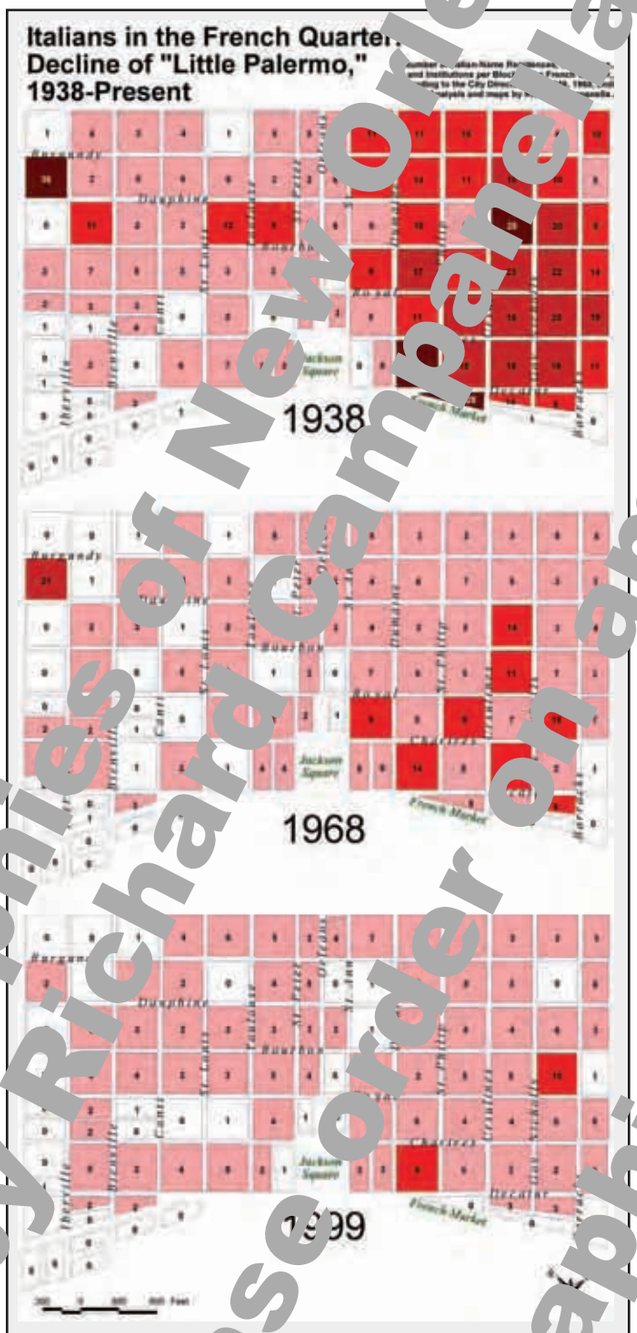
Sicilian Cityscapes

The Sicilian era in the French Quarter influenced the cityscape in a number of ways, many of which are discernable today. Sicilians may have played an inadvertent role in the

Italians formed numerous mutual-aid societies to help members through costly crises of employment or health. These societies, of which there were thirty in New Orleans by 1910, collaborated to purchase this edifice on Esplanade Avenue and form the *Unione Italiana* in 1912, a political and social center of Little Palermo. The magnificent building now contains condominiums. *Photographs by author, 2004.*

[499] Edwards-Simpson, "Sicilian Immigration to New Orleans, 1870-1910," 50.

[500] Official communication from Robert Ariatti, secretary of the *Società Italiana Di Mutua Beneficenza*, dated June 3, 1933, provided by Joseph Maselli of the American-Italian Research Library and Museum. This letter indicates that the New Orleans-based *Società Italiana Di Mutua Beneficenza* was incorporated in 1852 but founded in 1843, making it the oldest such organization in the United States.



"Little Palermo" originated in the late antebellum age, rose in earnest in the 1880s, peaked around 1900, and declined steadily to the mid- to late twentieth century. These maps track the latter stages of the ethnic cluster's dispersion by counting residents and business owners with probable Italian surnames in city directories. By century's end, most had moved to the suburbs. Note the unusually high number in the block by Burgundy and Iberville. Most of these were dentists, doctors, and other professionals with offices in the upper floors of the Maison Blanche Building.
Map and analysis by author based on city directories of 1938, 1968, and 1999.

very preservation of the famed district, bringing economic value to deteriorating old townhouses by renting the cheap apartments subdivided therein. When no preservation laws intervene, aged structures that do not perform an economic service are likely to be demolished for something more practical. Without the rent paid by frugal Sicilian immigrants, it is likely that many of these architectural gems might have been lost. Many in fact were, replaced usually by the ubiquitous Victorian Italianate shotgun houses seen throughout the lower Quarter and adjacent neighborhoods. To the extent that many of these shotgun houses were occupied by Sicilian families, the prevalence of this housing type in the residential blocks of the Quarter may also be an indirect impact of the Sicilians upon the cityscape.

Another lasting impact of Little Palermo is the differentiating nature of lower Decatur from other Quarter streets, much as upper Decatur, Chartres, and Royal Decatur, "a jumble of Italian signs and Italian sounds," was home to landmark Sicilian-owned businesses and restaurants, catering to neighborhood people as well as to French Market vendors and shoppers. The flow of cash coming out of the market, and the reputation for frugality among working-class Italians, led to the siting of a number of prominent banks on Decatur, most of which still stand. On Decatur Street, the Sicilian dialect predominated, facades and interiors were often renovated with the visual styles favored by Sicilian culture; advertisements with Italian names were painted on walls; Sicilian cooking aromas emanated from kitchens; and Sicilian children were part of almost every street scene.

Though the Sicilians are gone, that sense of place survives today. There are no historical markers or "welcome centers," but even first-time visitors to the French Quarter, strolling the standard Bourbon-Street-Jackson-Square-French-Market tourist corridor, sense that, upon attaining Decatur Street, something different prevailed here. The sense comes from the handful of Italian restaurants here, from Central Grocery and its neighbors, and from the sliced muffuletta in the "Famous Window" of Frank's Restaurant (a stretch of Decatur lightheartedly described as "the known universe's capital of muffuletta production and consumption"[502]). It emanates from the beautiful tile doorway graphics, the Italian names in pavements and palimpsests, the white tile interiors and facades of certain buildings, and from the bustle of the French Market, where certain signage uses the tricolor of the Italian flag.[503] It can be found in Matassa's on Dauphine and St. Philip, founded in 1924 and now among the last Italian

[501] Gambino, *Vendetta*, 50.
[502] Brett Anderson, "Closing and a Reopening," *Times-Picayune*, December 30, 2003, F1.
[503] The visual "Italianness" of the area may increase in the near future: the French Market Corporation in 2004 devised a revitalization plan to create "the feel of an Italian plaza" in the French Market. For St. Joseph's Day 2004, its marketing branch encouraged people to "Celebrate Our Italian Legacy—To Accurately Describe It, We'd Have to Use Both Hands," and even used the term *Little Palermo* to describe the French Market area. Lynne Jensen, "French Market Takes 1st Steps in Upgrade," *Times-Picayune*, March 18, 2004, B1; *Times-Picayune*, March 12, 2004, *Lagniappe* section, p. 11.

corner groceries, and in Pap's Cleaners & Laundry, running since 1947 on the corner of Barracks and Burgundy. Sicilian/Italian landmarks such as the world-famous Monteleone Hotel. St. Mary's Catholic Church, and the magnificent *Unione Italiana* on Esplanade Avenue punctuate the otherwise subdue presence. The influence on the city's scene goes far beyond—and above—the French Quarter. Italian-American real-estate investors and construction companies are responsible for a significant portion of the city's built environment, including approximately half of New Orleans' skyscrapers.[504]

[504] The city's most influential real-estate developer in recent decades is Joseph C. Canizaro, responsible for the former Lykes Building, Texaco Center, Canal Place, and numerous other major projects.

Modern Geography of Italian New Orleans

The thousands of Sicilians who arrived in poverty a century ago rose to the ranks of the middle-class practically within a generation. UNO sociologists Margavio and Salomone explain this rapid rise, achieved in the face of discrimination, as a product of two overriding factors. First, the sheer number of Italian immigrants was sufficiently large and concentrated to create a self-identifying community. Large numbers, ethnic solidarity, and geographical concentration translated to economic demand for the very goods and services that the particular group knew how to supply, particularly in foodstuffs such as pasta, olive oil, Mediterranean fruits, and wines. (For decades, a number of macaroni factories operated in the French Quarter, illustrating how Italian immigrants supplied their own demands. By 1937, over 76 percent of

Italian-owned businesses still operate in former Little Palermo, helping keep a sense of that place in the modern cityscape. Some are recent enterprises; others have been around for generations, namely Central Grocery, which maintains an authentic early twentieth-century interior and vends specialty products from Italy. It is famous for its muffaletta sandwiches. Matassa's on Dauphine is among the last Italian corner grocers, catering to a local crowd; Pap's Cleaners & Laundry has been in business since 1947. *Photographs by author, 2002-2005.*

the 740 Italian-American-owned business in New Orleans dealt with the preparation, retailing, or wholesaling of food or beverage.[505]) Second, Italian immigrants possessed a number of old-country cultural and social values, particularly in business relationships, which equipped them well for their challenges in New Orleans. Margavio and Salomone also cite "the friendly compatibility of the Sicilian culture in southern Louisiana,"[506] reflected in family unity, business ethic, central role of food, and other factors, for the rapid socio-economic rise of local Italian immigrants.

The economic ascent of Sicilian New Orleans coincided with the era—roughly between the world wars—when New Orleans rapidly expanded into the recently drained backswamp toward Lake Pontchartrain. These attractive new lakeside homes beckoned to Sicilian-Americans still living in crowded and *paesani* Little Palermo. Business opportunities also beckoned elsewhere: 89 percent of the 740 businesses owned by Italian-Americans in New Orleans, listed in 1937 *Directory of Italian-Americans*, were located beyond the confines of the French Quarter.[507] Sicilian-Americans thence began to migrate out of the lower French Quarter at first into adjacent areas and later into the twentieth-century subdivisions of Gentilly, Lakeview, and what is now called Mid-City. The

[505] *Directory of Italian-Americans in Commerce and Professions* (Chicago, 1937), 124-35.

[506] Margavio and Salomone, "The Passage, Settlement and Occupational Characteristics of Louisiana's Italian Immigrants," 345.

[507] *Directory of Italian-Americans in Commerce and Professions*, 12...

Clues to an Italian past are overhead and underfoot in the lower French Quarter and adjacent areas today. Tile façades, interiors, and mosaics in doorways and sidewalks were especially popular in Sicilian culture. *Photographs by author, 2002-2004.*

dispersion to new areas of Orleans Parish was followed by a spread to the outer suburbs of Jefferson and St. Bernard parishes during the 1960s through 1980s, when working- and middle-class whites fled the city by the tens of thousands. According to the 2000 census, 83,080 residents of the greater New Orleans metropolitan area (excluding the north shore) claimed "Italian" as their primary ancestry (another 20,000 claimed secondary Italian ancestry), more than any other local white ethnic group except French. Sixty-three percent (52,020) of them lived in suburban Jefferson Parish, while only 19 percent (15,695) remained in New Orleans, the city that was once home to nearly all of their ancestors. St. Bernard and Plaquemines parishes were home to another 13,444 and 1,921 Italian-Americans, respectively.[508] Like those of Greek, German, Irish, and other ancestries, the modern-day distribution of those of Italian ancestry in greater New Orleans can be gleaned simply by looking at the overall distribution of whites. There is, however, some variation in the distribution. According to the 2000 census, those claiming Italian ancestry lived in relatively higher numbers (three to four times the census-tract average) in certain pockets of Jefferson and St. Bernard parishes. In Jefferson Parish, these tracts included the neighborhoods around Clearview Parkway from West Napoleon Avenue to West Metairie Avenue, where 1,857 out of 6,604 residents claimed Italian ancestry, and around the Bonnabel/West Esplanade intersection, where the figures were 1,598 out of 5,860. In St. Bernard Parish, which, with job opportunities at now-closed Kaiser Aluminum, received the lion's share of former Quarter-area residents, three tracts in Chalmette counted 4,103 Italian-ancestry residents out of 14,767 total population. The single most Italian census tract in the metropolitan area in 2000, in both absolute (1,399) and relative numbers (33 percent), was located north of Judge Perez Drive and east of Gallo Drive in Chalmette. Names of many streets, such as Palmisano, Campagna, Lena, and Ventura, seem to reflect a significant Italian presence. Within Orleans Parish, Italian Americans lived in largest numbers in the Lakeview neighborhoods between City Park Avenue and Lake Pontchartrain, with West End registering the most (784 out of 4,724). Only 378 people living within French Quarter census tracts claimed Italian ancestry (of whom 128 lived in the lower Quarter), but many, probably most, were recent transplants who had come to be Italian American, rather than local Sicilian Americans who can trace their roots to the days of Little Palermo.[509]

The 150,700 Louisianians who claimed Italian as their primary ancestry in 2000 resided throughout 90 percent of the state's 1,206 census tracts. In roughly one-third of these tracts with Italian Louisianians concentrated in above-average numbers. Those tracts tended to be in larger cities, especially greater New Orleans, as well as in the old sugar

Not all Sicilian immigrants were recruited as sugar laborers. Antonio Monteleone arrived around 1880, started a cobbler shop on Royal Street, and soon invested in a small hotel. Today, the much expanded Hotel Monteleone, still family-owned, is one of the nation's great historic hotels. *Photograph by author, 2005.*

parishes and the truck-farming belt beyond the perimeter of the metropolitan area. This geography can be traced back to the late nineteenth-century diaspora of Sicilian immigrants in Louisiana. Outside New Orleans, the census tract with largest Italian population in 2000, both in absolute (1,328) and relative (28 percent) numbers, was the small Tangipahoa farm community of Independence.[510] A trip to Independence visually confirms the Italian presence revealed in the Italian names in ads and signs, in the downtown Italian bakery, and in the water tower, painted in the Italian tri-color to promote the town's annual springtime Italian festival.

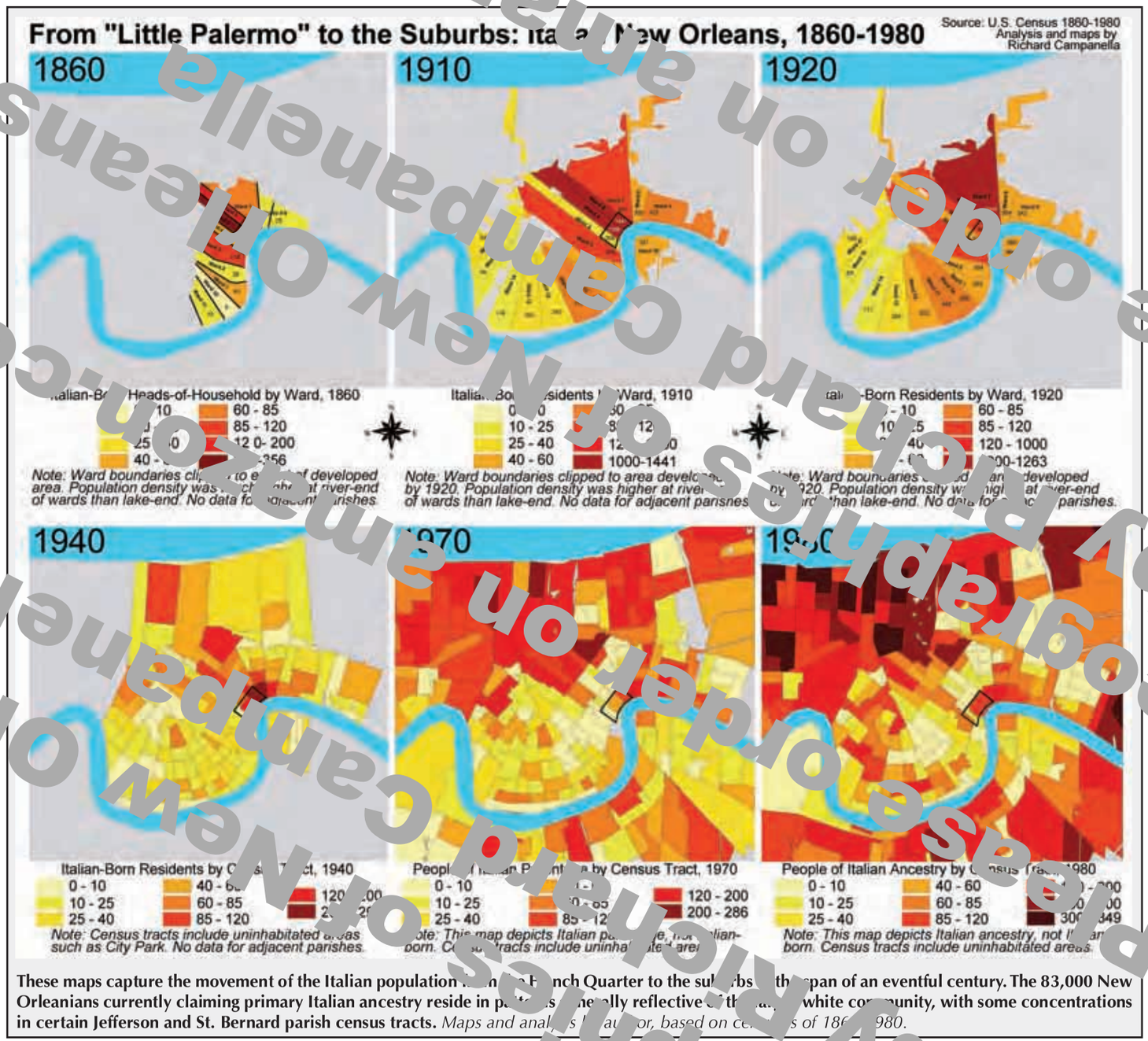
The historical geography of Italians in the Crescent City divulges certain trends and traits about New Orleans society and the Italians within it:

- The antebellum trade between Palermo and New Orleans exemplifies New Orleans' close association with the Latin Mediterranean region, traceable to its colonial roots and deeply influential in its modern-day character.
- That New Orleans had perhaps the nation's largest Italian population and first Italian community by 1850 shows the strength of this connection, and of antebellum New Orleans' overall attractiveness to immigrants.

[508] These data were based on statistical samples. U.S. Census Bureau, *Profile of Selected Social Characteristics, 2000, Summary File 3*.

[509] Analysis by author based on U.S. Census Bureau, *Profile of Selected Social Characteristics, 2000, Summary File 3*.

[510] Computed from 2000 U.S. Census data on primary ancestry (based on statistical samples, not actual counts), at the census tract level.



These maps capture the movement of the Italian population from the French Quarter to the suburbs over the span of an eventful century. The 83,000 New Orleanians currently claiming primary Italian ancestry reside in patterns generally reflective of the area's white community, with some concentrations in certain Jefferson and St. Bernard parish census tracts. *Maps and analysis by author, based on censuses of 1860-1980.*

- The movement of Italians into the French Quarter can be traced to before the Civil War—definitely by the 1840s-1850s and possibly earlier—contradicting popular perceptions that the Italianization of this district did not transpire until the postbellum era. In fact, the French Quarter in the late antebellum era had a large and diverse immigrant population in which Italians were a significant part.
- Sicilians came to New Orleans in large numbers after the 1870s because they were actively recruited by sugar planters, differentiating them from most other immigration waves.[511] Were it not for this organized, state-supported effort, New Orleans may not have attracted *any* significantly sized immigrations after the Civil War. As it turned out, Sicilians were the last.
- The antebellum Palermo-New Orleans connection and the postbellum sugar recruitment made New Orleans home today to the nation's highest per capita population of Sicilian Americans. As much as 97 percent of the local Italian-ancestry population is Sicilian.

[511] Laborers were recruited in large numbers out of Ireland in the 1830s to excavate the New Basin Canal. Today, immigrants are recruited out of Mexico and other Latin American countries to work in agriculture and in food-processing plants located in Tennessee, Arkansas, and other Southern states. Massive Latino immigration into the interior South in the 1990s and early 2000s may be viewed in the context of the similar Sicilian experience in the Deep South a century earlier.

Beyond metropolitan New Orleans, the Louisiana census tract with the largest Italian population in 2000 was the Tangipahoa farm community of Independence, an example of the rail-accessible "truck farming" towns settled by Sicilian/Italian immigrants near New Orleans in the early 1900s. Their produce was often distributed citywide by Italian vendors and grocers. A trip to Independence visually confirms the Italian presence. *Photograph by author, 2002.*

- Little Palermo developed predictably within the "immigrant belt" of turn-of-the-century New Orleans. It was among the largest, most concentrated, and longest-lived immigrant clusters in the city's history. But compared to other Little Italys in urban centers throughout the nation, New Orleans' Little Palermo was relatively short-lived and harbored a relatively small percentage of the city's total Italian population, who were generally integrated throughout the predominantly white areas of the city. This testifies to the ethnically intermixed and integrated residential geography of historic New Orleans.
- The citywide dispersion of Italian families via the once ubiquitous Italian grocery store is displayed on the accompanying map, *Distribution of Businesses Owned by Italian-Americans in New Orleans, 1937*. Corner groceries were to the Italians as laundries were to the Chinese: a popular and easy-to-start family business which served to disperse members of each group citywide (to avoid competition) yet tie them to each group's ethnic enclave (for supplies). Although both Little Palermo and Chinatown are gone today, some Italian grocers and Chinese laundries still operate, even in the French Quarter.
- It is difficult to overstate the role of the French Market in helping to form Little Palermo in the lower French Quarter. It was a major source of demand for Sicilian shipping firms' produce and created opportunities for Italians to own their own enterprises and accumulate savings, and it drew Italian truck farmers to the city to vend their produce. The French Market is arguably the premier landmark in the history and geography of the Sicilian/Italian diaspora throughout Louisiana and the Deep South.

Unlike the former ethnic enclaves of Chinatown, Dryades Street, Little Saxony, and others throughout New Orleans, former Little Palermo still manages to evince a subtle but palpable ethnic ambience. Urban planners might do well to study how this transpires, in an effort to breathe new life into New Orleans' other disappearing historical ethnic cityscapes.

- Even beyond the muffaletta, said to be a Little Palermo invention, Sicilian New Orleans' food culture has diffused to every American supermarket and most American households. Locally founded Progresso Foods was, in the late 1940s, the first company to market its Sicilian and Italian foods directly to supermarkets (rather than to small delicatessens), and originated the idea of reserving sections of shelf space for specialty foods, now standard practice in food retailing. According to one source, "this was the whole start of the ethnic foods that you see today."[512]

[512] John Taormina, President of Progresso founder, as quoted by Joel Denker, *The World on a Plate: A Tour Through the History of America's Ethnic Cuisine* (Boulder, 2003), 25.

For decades, even during its decline, Little Palermo formed a cultural home base to which many Italian Louisianians were tethered. Margavio and Salomone noted that the practice "boarding"—staying in a relative's home for extended time—was commonly practiced in the New Orleans Italian community of 1900, providing "the recently arrived Italian a friendly haven in a foreign land."[513] World War II revived the practice, as some quarter Italians returned for war-industry jobs and stayed with their city cousins in Little Palermo and elsewhere. "Boarding" would continue among shoppers visiting the city for supplies, relatives in town for a religious ceremony, college students attending classes, and even newlyweds who selected their ancestral hometown for weddings and honeymoons. While the researchers made these observations in a discussion on family relationships, a geographer may interpret in them the relevance of place in this ethnic group's historical memory. The lower French Quarter is central to that memory. The Italian American Marching Club, for example, draws its membership region-wide, but on the most important Sicilian feast, St. Joseph's Day, it parades down the heart of Little Palermo. And when a genuine farmer's market returned to the otherwise tourist-oriented French Market in 2004, one of the first farmers to participate was a fourth-generation Sicilian vegetable and citrus grower from St. Bernard Parish who, in his childhood, used to ride his father's mule-drawn wagons into Little Palermo. In his senior years, he returned.[514]

Epilogue: Structurally, Little Palermo fared well during Katrina, its sturdy historical housing stock and high elevation protecting it from wind and water. But many former denizens who moved to St. Bernard Parish in the mid- to late-twentieth century saw their suburban homes destroyed by storm surge from the MR-GO and industrial canals. The single most Italian census tract in the metropolis, plus a number of others with sizable Italian populations, were decimated. It is unknown to what degree St. Bernard Parish will rebuild, and how the Sicilian Italian population will re-settle.

The French Market was renovated into permanent tourist-oriented shops in the 1970s; only the flea market section, created in the 1930s when Gallatin Street was eliminated, retains the sense of an open stall market. Italian truck farmers sold produce here until a few decades ago, and some recently returned for the new Wednesday Farmer's Market. Note the colors of the Italian flag on the sign. *Photograph by author, 2002.*

[513] Anthony Margavio and Jerry Salomone, "Notes on the Americanization of the Italian Family in New Orleans," in *Perspectives on the Family in New Orleans* (New Orleans, 1981), 79-80.

[514] Doug Curry, "French Quarter Revival: The Independent City Farmers Market Goes Back to Where It All Began," *Times-Picayune*, March 11, 2004, F1.

Chinatown, New Orleans

For six decades straddling the turn of the twentieth century, a tiny Chinatown at the edge of downtown New Orleans anchored members of the Chinese American community scattered throughout the Crescent City. As one of the very few genuine Chinatowns in the nineteenth-century South,[515] New Orleans' Asian enclave, and the few thousand Chinese-Americans who have called New Orleans home ever since, attest not only to this port city's international nature but also its position at the apogee of the Caribbean region. For it was the Greater Antilles island of Cuba, during the new world order following the demise of slavery, that supplied early groups of Chinese workers to the banks of the lower Mississippi. The New Orleans region shared sundry aspects with Caribbean societies—to this day the city's Caribbean aesthetic is palpable—but one in particular set the stage for the arrival of a few hundred Chinese in the years after the Civil War: the sugar cane industry and its post-emancipation labor shortage. That need for field hands would lead southern planters and New Orleans merchants to look eventually beyond Cuba and the Caribbean to California and the ports of China itself. The effort failed within five years but succeeded in enriching New Orleans with an Asian presence, which in turn created a little-known downtown slave within the city's complex turn-of-the-century ethnic cityscape. New Orleans' Chinatown is extinct in both form and function today, but recounting its story sheds light on the cultural geography of the Caribbean region, New Orleans' role in the world network of port cities, and the sense of place that aggregates, disaggregates, and yet persists in the streets of the Crescent City today.

Antebellum Chinese and the Caribbean Connection

Little is known of the few Asians who lived in the New Orleans region prior to the Civil War. The Quong Sun Company is said to have constructed a shrimp-drying platform on Bayou Defond (Du Fon) as far back as 1840, and one Quong Su Lee was recorded in St. Bernard Parish marriage records in 1857—this in a region where, it is believed, the first Asian (that is, Filipino "Manilamen") settlement in the present-day United States was founded near the shores of Lake Borgne in the 1760s.[516] One early mention of a tiny Chinese colony in antebellum New Orleans comes from an 1843 *Daily Picayune* article entitled "A Kaleidoscopic View of New Orleans:"

> The natives of China are located in the neighborhood of Congo Square, where you may see, any day the wind is high enough, Hong-Kong, Choo-Loo, Pom-Poo, and several other Celestials, flying pretty, parti-colored paper kites.[517]

A bit more can be gleaned from the 1860 census schedules for New Orleans, which recorded around thirty people of Chinese birth residing in the city. Some worked as cigar makers, stewards, lace makers, cotton mill workers, merchants, and mariners; others may have been guests escorted by Christian missionaries. Still others represented intermediary companies trying (unsuccessfully) to contract Chinese laborers from Gold Rush-era California and the Caribbean to work in Louisiana. Some anglicized their names to the likes of "John Robinson" or "John Young," others (particularly the cigar makers) hispanicized them to "Vicente Dias" or "José Martín," indicating a prior stint in Cuba or other Spanish-speaking countries. Most were family men; some married Caucasians and started their families in northeastern cities before moving to New Orleans; all were classified as white.[518]

This tiny Chinese community in antebellum New Orleans was separated from its homeland by half-a-planet of maritime travel, but other brethren resided not quite so far away. Countries and colonies of the Caribbean Basin, which, like Louisiana, depended on sugar production almost as much as sugar production depended on slavery, grappled with new sources of labor as the prospect of emancipation loomed throughout the region. Starting in 1845, Chinese indentures by the shipload arrived to Cuba, Peru, Hawaii, Trinidad, Sumatra, Jamaica, and elsewhere in the plantation tropics. Eight hundred Chinese "coolies" reached Cuba in 1847, followed by 124,835 more from 1853 to 1874, destined for the island's vast sugar cane fields. One contemporary observer suggested that up to 200,000 Chinese were imported to Cuba between 1853 and 1860 alone. Most came from the Portuguese colony of Macao; others were from Canton, Hong Kong, and elsewhere. The English, who oversaw colonies both on the demand side and supply side of labor, also exploited this labor pool: in the eighty years after the 1833 abolition of slavery throughout the British Empire, 13,533 Chinese and 238,909 South Asian Indians were brought to British Guiana (present-day Guyana) alone. Conditions under the indentured labor system were so close to traditional African bondage, in its economics as well as its brutality, that many plantations in Cuba smoothly transitioned from one system to the other.[519] "I find it to be the universal impression," wrote abolitionist traveler John S.C. Abbott in 1859, "that in Cuba the Coolie trade is merely a Chinese slave-trade under the most fraudulent and cruel circumstances."[520] American observers took note of the phenomena in the 1850s, and pondered its

[515] A study in the 1940s listed New Orleans as the only city in the heart of the South (excluding places such as San Antonio and Baltimore which established Chinatown. Rose Hum Lee, "The Decline of Chinatowns in the United States," *American Journal of Sociology* 54 (March 1949): 423.

[516] Betsy Swanson, *Historic Jefferson Parish, From Shore to Shore* (Gretna, 1975), 138; Center for the Pacific Rim, University of New Orleans, *The Asian Peoples of Southern Louisiana: An Ethnohistory* (New Orleans, 1990), 3-7; Moon-Ho Jung, "Coolies and Cane: Race Labor, and Sugar Production in Louisiana, 1852-1877" (Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 2000), xxi.

[517] "A Kaleidoscopic View of New Orleans," *Daily Picayune*, September 23, 1843, p. 2, col. 3.

[518] As analyzed by Lucie M. Cohen, *Chinese in the Post-Civil War South: A People Without a History* (Baton Rouge, 1984), 20, and other sources.

[519] Franklin W. Knight, *Slave Society in Cuba During the Nineteenth Century* (Madison, Milwaukee and London, 1970), 117-19; Gary Y. Okihiro, *The Columbia Guide to Asian American History* (New York, 2001), 69.

[520] John S.C. Abbott, *South and North; or Impressions Received During a trip to Cuba and the South* (New York, 1860), 50.

extension into the American South as a way to supplant costly slave labor with relatively cheaper contract workers. But such a policy could undermine slavery—and the investment it represented for Southern planters—at a time when "the peculiar institution" ranked as one of the most divisive issues in the nation. Advocacy of the recruitment and importation of Chinese laborers was not only viewed in favor of the *status quo*, but "overshadowed by arguments in favor of reopening the slave trade."[521] A traumatic decade later, the defeat of the Confederacy in the Civil War and the emancipation of slaves deprived the Southern planter elite of the luxury of the choice. Freedmen, more often than not, turned their backs on further toil on plantations and emigrated to cities and towns, leaving their former masters scrambling to fill the labor void.

Louisiana sugar planters, reeling from the devastation of their industry, looked to their British, French, and Spanish peers throughout the Caribbean Basin for guidance. "Southerners formulated and implemented their original plans for the recruitment of Chinese by drawing heavily on their ideological and cultural borrows with the West Indian societies," wrote anthropologist Lucy M. Cohen, granddaughter of a Chinese immigrant in Central America and a pioneering researcher on Chinese emigration to the South. "They compared their experiences in a reorganized post-emancipation period with similar past events in the British and French Antilles."[522] Particularly they looked to Cuba, the world's greatest sugar producer which had done well with contracted Chinese laborers. Prominent planters and journalists with connections in both Louisiana and Cuba encouraged the idea through articles in regional newspapers and in its 1866 "After the War" reports, the influential New Orleans-based business journal *De Bow's Review* furthered the concept in an article entitled "Coolies as a Substitute for Negroes." The piece described the importation of primarily South Asian Indians to the English colonies of Guiana and Trinidad, with statistical evidence that post-emancipation sugar harvests were "much more than in the years of slavery," illustrating "the advantages of the coolie system...a system that has raised [these colonies] from almost entirely ruin[ed] to highly flourishing dependencies."[523] A similar article in the *Daily Picayune* in the fall of that year, entitled "The Cooly Question: A Mongolian Invasion," reviewed the Caribbean experiences of the English and French and the contemporary situation in California, but assumed an ambivalent stance on Chinese immigration to the South. It coldly concluded that "however hideous and revolting this population may be[,] we cannot, by legal discriminations, drive them away, [thus] it would be well to consider

best means of making the most of their industrial powers and incurring the least mischief from their social vices."[524]

First Arrivals, 1867

In 1866, a few laborers from the Philippine Islands were brought to Louisiana by one T. Edmondson. The next year, Jules H. Normand, a planter with Cuban connections, brought fifteen Chinese laborers from Havana and Matanzas, with names such as Francisco, Migel, Cirilo, and Seraphine, through New Orleans and delivered them to two cotton growers in Natchitoches Parish. Other Chinese laborers whose contracts had expired in Cuba were offered arrangements to come to Louisiana and fill the plantation labor void. They would be paid around $12 to $14 per month plus subsistence rations for a period of eighteen to twenty-four months. Normand and planter Benjamin W. Burnett brought approximately fifty-five more Chinese to New Orleans by March 1867, of which twenty were destined for Natchitoches cotton fields and the rest for Mississippi River sugar plantations. The two agents started a company in New Orleans to ship in more Chinese and advertised nationally to appeal to labor-starved planters. The competition was another Louisiana planter with Cuban connections, Edward T. Wyches, who, using a fill-in-the-blank contract form printed in Spanish and English, imported fifty Chinese to the Bayou Lafourche region in the spring and summer of 1867. "A cargo of twenty-three coolies arrived at New Orleans on July 25," reported a national magazine, possibly in reference to Wyches' group, "and several others, who had arrived previously, were already at work on the plantations."[525] A local journalist visiting one such plantation was privy to a remarkable Bayou Sara ethnic amalgamation. Here in the heart of Acadian Louisiana, a Spanish-speaking Creole oversaw Spanish-speaking Chinese laborers brought to Cuba from the Portuguese colony of Macao and then re to the United States to replace recently emancipated African American slaves.[526] That summer, *Harper's Weekly* reported that 2,000 "coolies...whose terms of service have expired in Cuba, are to be introduced into Louisiana, and it is a matter to which public attention should be intelligently directed."[527]

The importations were briefly interrupted in late 1867, when the federal government, fresh from waging four years of civil war, intervened on the basis that the shipments violated an 1862 law against the "coolie trade" and came disturbingly close to re-instituting a form of slavery. The shipments resumed when the government grudgingly agreed that the Chinese were coming voluntarily as free agents and not as "coolies," but the State Department continued to keep a disapproving eye on the operation for the next few years.

[521] Cohen, *Chinese in the Post-Civil War South*, 36-37.
[522] Lucy M. Cohen, "Entry of Chinese to the Lower South from 1865 to 1870: Policy Dilemmas," *Southern Studies* 17 (1978): 7.
[523] "Coolies as a Substitute for Negroes," *De Bow's Review*, After the War Series 2 (August 1866): 217.
[524] "The Cooly Question: A Mongolian Invasion," *Daily Picayune*, October 28, 1866.
[525] "Domestic Intelligence: News Items," *Harper's Weekly*, August 10, 1867, p. 499, col. 3.
[526] Cohen, *Chinese in the Post-Civil War South*, 50-58.
[527] "The Coolie Importation," *Harper's Weekly*, August 31, 1867, p. 546, col. 4.

Wyches shipped twenty-three more Cuban Chinese to New Orleans in August 1867 and an additional twelve in November, accompanied by an ordained minister named Tye Kim Orr, a Christian Chinese missionary and naturalized citizen with connections throughout the Caribbean and East Asian.

Then, starting in 1868, Cuba, engaged in what would be called the Ten Years' War, increased its bound Chinese "coolies" to Cuban plantations, thus restricting their movement across the Gulf of Mexico.[528] Within a year, the flow of Chinese from Cuba to Louisiana ended. Nevertheless, the idea of the Chinese labor solution was planted, borne on the circum-Caribbean sugar world, of which Louisiana was a part. The next step, from the planters' perspective, was to look to the Pacific Rim.

Second Wave, 1869-1871

Interest in Chinese labor skyrocketed in 1869, when planters discussed and debated the issue at regional meetings throughout the South and at big commercial conventions held in Memphis, New Orleans, and Louisville. Voices concerned about the importation of foreign "heathens" were only slightly outnumbered by those who saw the Chinese as a likely and worthy labor source. The Memphis meeting resulted in the formation of the Mississippi Valley Immigration Labor Company, dedicated to bring "as many Chinese immigrant laborers as possible, in the shortest time,"[529] to the United States. Planters' eyes shifted from Cuba and its restricted pool of Chinese, to California and its larger (but costlier) supply, and then to China itself, with its unlimited supply and wide selection of new workers. George W. Gift of Arkansas was first to make the trip, traveling to California, where the labor market was too competitive, and then to British colonial Hong Kong, where he navigated legal gray zones and suspicious authorities. He eventually persuaded 389 Chinese to board the *Ville de Lo*, journey across the Indian Ocean, around the Cape of Good Hope, across the Atlantic, into the Gulf of Mexico and up the Mississippi River to New Orleans, arriving June 1, 1870. It may have been the first emigrant ship arriving to New Orleans directly from East Asia. The newcomers were shipped up river to Mississippi and Arkansas cotton plantations to serve their three-year labor contracts; there, many Southerners, both white and black, would encounter Asian peoples for the first time. Four months later, a larger group of 2[illegible] Chinese, assembled by Nathan Williams and the missionary Tye Kim Orr, arrived to New Orleans and thence to Louisiana plantations.[530] Asian faces became an increasingly familiar sight in sugar-parish towns such as Donaldsonville, where Chinese sugar workers would congregate in such numbers on Lafayette Street in the early 1870s that the local newspaper referred to it as 'the precincts of "China Town."'[531] Between 1869 and 1870, another 1,200 Chinese were brought in to work on railroads in neighboring states. Many first disembarked at Gretna en route to Texas, and hundreds others would eventually be lured away from railroad construction in Alabama to plantation labor in Louisiana, and in particular to cotton milling jobs in Baton Rouge. When the Alabama and Chattanooga Railroad folded, this largest group of Chinese in the South, plus new Chinese laborers from California, dispersed to other labor-demanding areas in the region, one of which was the large Millaudon/Merrill sugar plantation in Jefferson Parish. Of the 141 Chinese who arrived there in July 1870, only twenty-five remained in 1871, the rest having departed for various reasons of dissatisfaction.[532] In this manner, the forty thousand Chinese laborers initially brought via Cuba, California, and China circulated from job to job throughout the Deep South and Midwest in constant turnover. Fewer and fewer new recruits arrived into the 1870s. Planters lost interest in Chinese labor and looked elsewhere across the globe to replace the replacements of the emancipated slaves.

The Failure of Chinese Recruitments to Louisiana

Reasons on both the supply and demand sides explain the failure of Chinese recruitment to the South. On the supply side, the three major sources of Chinese immigrants all proved problematic. In 1868, Cuba, as previously mentioned, restricted Chinese laborers' freedom of movement in response to revolutionary threats to the sugar industry's dependency on slave and coolie labor. Two years later, British colonials in Hong Kong banned Chinese labor recruitment to non-British colonies. California, the third source of Chinese labor, offered wages with which Southern planters could not compete. Chinese in California were more likely to emigrate on their own accord to better pay and opportunity in the industrializing Northeast than to be recruited to less of both in the rural South. It was a tough sell, and few Chinese bought it. Also, restriction of labor supply vis-à-vis high labor demand explains the rampant turnover and relocation among those few Chinese who did come to the South: a laborer on a railroad in Alabama might be a cotton miller in Baton Rouge a few months later; a cotton picker in Natchitoches one season might be a sugar harvester in Houma the next.

On the demand side, planters were displeased to discover that the apparently docile Chinese were in fact perfectly cognizant of the stipulations of their contracts, and ready and willing to fight for what was rightfully theirs. "John Chinaman seems to entertain a very lively sense of his own interest

[528] Jung, "Coolies and Cane: Race, Labor, and Sugar Production in Louisiana, 1852-1877," 193-201.

[529] As quoted in Cohen, *Chinese in the Post-Civil War South*, 67.

[530] This group included a contingent of seventeen French-speaking Catholic Chinese from the French sugar island of Martinique. Cohen, *Chinese in the Post-Civil War South*, 70-81, 107; and Cohen, "Entry of Chinese to the Lower South from 1865 to 1870," 16-31.

[531] Donaldsonville *Chief*, March 14, 1874, as quoted in Cohen, *Chinese in the Post-Civil War South*, 143.

[532] "Chinese Plantation Hands," *New Orleans Republican*, July 3, 1870; "The Chinese Laborers," *New Orleans Republican*, July 26, 1870; and Wesley Jackson, "Letter Helped Open Door to Christianity for Chinese," *Times-Picayune*, December 23, 1973, sect. 3.

in any bargain he makes," observed the *New Orleans Republican* of the Millaudan plantation laborers just two weeks after their arrival. "The man of the Flowery Kingdom is not a whit behind the descendants of Canaan's conquerors in business shrewdness."[533] Withheld wages, coerced contract changes, convenient mistranslations, disparate law, altered numbers, and ill treatment were met not with docile compliance but confrontations, work stoppages, walk-outs, lawsuits, rebellion, and self-defense. Planters "attributed their labor problems to the stereotypical Chinese character," wrote Lucy M. Cohen, but the real problem was the contract labor system and its abuses. "When the Chinese protested or rebelled, the qualities of fidelity and exactitude for which they had formerly received praise became cunning and craftiness."[534] In many areas, particularly the cotton country of the interior South, contract labor declined in favor of sharecropping. Planters abandoned "John Chinaman" and vice versa.

Additionally, Southerners were increasingly hostile to the notion of "another" racial group in the tense social landscape of postbellum society, particularly one of a completely different culture. For every opinion extolling the industrious and disciplined Chinese was one condemning the Asian as "heathens," "Mongols," "a demoralizing blight to any community," "filthy, thievish and infamously vile."[535] *Harper's Weekly* warned that "these people are the lowest and in every way the least desirable portion of nations the most alien to us and our civilization."[536] In his recent dissertation Moon-Ho Jung saw parallels between the contradictory prejudices from the 1870s and the later representations of Asians in America as either "model minority" or the "yellow peril."[537] In the postbellum South, it was the "yellow peril" interpretation that predominated. Some Southerners also opposed Chinese labor for fear that it would breath new life into the fallen aristocracy and re-isolate the former Confederacy from its efforts at economic restoration.[538]

Finally, the 1862 Act to Prohibit the Coolie Trade and the experience of the Civil War made the U.S. Government anything but an advocate of what it saw as a dangerous slave substitute for slavery. While the government only investigated and temporarily involved in the South's recruitment of Chinese, never did it actively support or encourage it. Nor did the state of Louisiana lend a hand, as it would in upcoming decades for other immigrant labor groups. The U.S. government would explicitly exclude Chinese immigration in later years, from 1882 to 1965, contributing to the paucity of Asian immigrants to the South and elsewhere.

As sharecropping failed to take hold in sugar country,[539] Louisiana sugar planters in the 1870s continued to experiment with contracted laborers—Spanish, Portuguese, Scandinavian, and other—to fill the void created by emancipation and left open by the Chinese experience. Perhaps they would have also considered South Asian Indians or other Asian-Caribbean peoples, as did the British in Trinidad and Guyana starting in the 1840s, if the colonials allowed it. Satisfactory replacements were eventually found in Sicily, and for the remainder of the nineteenth century, thousands of Sicilians were recruited to Louisiana plantations, adding yet another ethnic component to the region in the aftermath of the Civil War. Within a few years, Chinese and Sicilian immigrants would graduate from the cane fields, move into cities and climb the social and economic ladder, settling for a while in two particular neighborhoods at opposite ends of downtown New Orleans.

Chinese in Postbellum New Orleans

The few thousand Chinese working and travelling throughout the Southern plantation country, and rapidly losing interest in its scant opportunities, began by 1870 to gravitate toward larger towns and cities. New Orleans attracted the lion's share, in part because it was home to a number of Chinese importing firms, but mostly because it was a big, accessible, opportunity-rich port city to which most Chinese had been exposed upon their arrival. That same year the first shipments of Chinese merchandise reached the city directly from China. In 1871, Fou Loy and Company opened a pop-up store at 98 Chartres Street (present-day 408-412 Chartres) while supplying provisions to Chinese in the field and attempting to coordinate more immigration from the West Coast. The store was "a centre of attraction for hundreds who delight to gaze upon the curious manufactures of China, and the picture of John himself."[540] A similar operation run by Yu Long was located at 40 Royal, while a Chinese laundry operated on Carondelet Street. The *New Orleans Bee*, whose office was located a block from Fou Loy & Company, commented on its new neighbors:

> "*Chinese Merchants*—The Celestials have a real tact for business, and the merchants of the Flowery Kingdom are among the keenest in the world. A year ago we had no Chinese among us; we now see them everywhere in the streets of New Orleans, and they have opened two large stores for the sale of Chinese articles, one in Royal and other in Chartres street. The latter is owned by Fou Loy & Co., who have just effected... an insurance for twenty thousand dollars of their stock. This looks, indeed, like business."[541]

It was in 1870 that people of Asian descent—specifically Chinese—established themselves in the city in sufficient

[533] "How the Chinese Live. Visit to a Plantation," *New Orleans Republican*, July 24, 1870.

[534] Cohen, *Chinese in the Post-Civil War South*, 101, 106-32.

[535] Quoted from a number of sources, including "The Importation of Coolies, 362.

[536] "The Cooly Importation," *Harper's Weekly*, August [illegible], 1870, p. 547.

[537] Jung, "Coolies and Cane: Race, Labor, and Sugar Production in Louisiana, 1862-1877," 333.

[538] Wrote sugar planter Henry J. Hyams on the potential impact of imported Chinese plantation labor, "We will have again a fat and pampered aristocracy, worse than ever it ever was, and far more haughty and overbearing. It will then be 'how many Coolies does he work?' instead of 'how many negroes does he own?' so commonly used *antebellum*." Ibid., 331.

[539] This is the interpretation of ibid., xx.

[540] "John Chinaman," *New Orleans Times*, June 28, 1871.

[541] *New Orleans Bee*, December 5, 1871, "City Intelligence" column.

numbers to become a noticeable presence in the streets. Contemporary newspaper articles considering the newcomers (whom the local press referred to generically as "the Celestials," "John Chinaman," or simply "John," or derisively as "Coolies" or "Chinks") divulged feelings ranging from condescension to curiosity to admiration. These excerpts taken from an article entitled "John Chinaman" in the *New Orleans Times* of June 28, 1871, reveal certain aspects of Chinese life in New Orleans interpreted by one not-quite-worldly local journalist:

> ...John has come to be looked upon as a well behaved member of society in our city.
>
> The *outre* style of dress worn by the Celestial attracts notice wherever he appears on the street, and truth to tell, his long white blouse, shaven poll and extended queue tail, together with the extraordinary shoes worn, present him in an aspect decidedly opposite to our ideas of elegance. Still he holds on the "even tenor of his way"...and we conclude, from observation, that he has learned that most difficult of all accomplishments—the minding of his own business.
>
> One wise-looking old chap [illegible] the Fou Loy & Co. shop on Chartres Street is constantly engaged in pretending to write in a large ledger-like book, with a view no doubt to delude himself and the public into the belief that business is heavy.
>
> An interview with John's family fails to reveal the existence of any of the female portion of Chinese humanity, and we doubt much if any lovely woman have yet made their appearance in our Southern country. However, the "heathen" is so thoroughly a domestic animal that housekeeping suffers none per consequence of the absence of the fair ones.
>
> In New York, where certain Chinese engage in the selling of cigars on the banquettes in front of the city post, the street Arabs have contracted a vicious habit of playing jokes upon them, one of which consists in a party slipping behind and the iron fence and tying the Chinaman's pig tail there, thus entailing the most unpleasant consequences when he attempts to change his position. Let the New Orleans John take warning. However we wish the Celestials all success, and hope no doubt that in the course of time they will contribute much to the prosperity of our city. Good-bye John.[542]

Lucy M. Cohen, citing 1880 census data, characterized the ninety-five Chinese living in New Orleans that year (there were 489 in Louisiana) as a segment of the city's white immigrant society, primarily comprising single men residing in boarding houses and apartments. Less than a dozen were married at one point or another, and only two wedded Chinese women; the others, whose spouses representative of New Orleans' ethnic mix, The most common occupations related to laundering, making or selling cigars, and cooking, but many other vocations were listed and no one predominated. At this time, "there was no tightly knit 'Chinatown' in New Orleans such as existed in the urban centers of San Francisco and New York," noted Cohen. "The store and other business establishments owned by the Chinese were not close to their residences."[543] The lack of geographical cohesion derived from the small size of the Chinese community, its highly transient nature, and the extreme lack of Chinese women. Nevertheless, by the mid-1870s, we see early evidence of a Chinese presence in the Third Ward neighborhood that would eventually flourish as New Orleans' Chinatown for the next half-century. It came in the form of the Loung Sing Laundry at 41 South Rampart (present-day 1001 South Rampart, recently demolished), recorded in the *Soard's City Directory* of 1874 and depicted in the Sanborn Insurance Map of 1876. Two other Chinese laundries operated nearby, at 117 and 153 Carondelet. The 1880 census for the area bounded by Canal, Baronne, Julia, and South Liberty lists four Chinese-born males in their twenties, possibly brothers, working in the aforementioned laundry at 41 South Rampart. A few blocks away lived a shoemaker named Chee Wing Sing, a boardkeeper named John Ali, and a laundryman named Wing Ling, all born in China, all twenty-five to thirty years old, and all living in ethnically mixed blocks. Unlike earlier censuses, which listed Asians as white, these immigrants were racially categorized as Chinese. Their white neighbors were mostly American-born, though some hailed from Ireland, Germany, and England. Their neighbors of African ancestry were listed as either mulattos or black.[544] By 1880 there were thirteen new Chinese-owned laundries in the city, of which two were located in the geographic confines of future Chinatown, another two nearby in what we now call the Central Business District, and the remaining nine across Canal Street, in the French Quarter.[545]

The Emergence of Chinatown

In 1881-1882 a Maine-born missionary from Boston named Sarah Saunders recently arrived to New Orleans and teaching at the Freedmen's School, began offering classes in English, American culture, and Christianity in her home to a group of five Chinese immigrants. The popularity of the classes caught the attention of the Canal Street Presbyterian Church, which in 1882 incorporated the effort as part of its mission to foreigners. As the costs of sponsoring the charitable effort grew, the Presbytery of New Orleans took over responsibility for the mission, funding it at $600 a year. Miss Saunders' Chinese Sunday school would become an officially sponsored Chinese Mission in New Orleans.[546] At this time, the Canal Street Presbyterian Church worshipped in a circa-1852 edifice at the corner of Canal and Derbigny, but its previous home—when it was known as the Fourth Presbyterian Church—was a much grander church on the corner of South Liberty and Gasquet (present-day Cleveland, between Canal Street and Tulane Avenue), built in 1860.[547] It was next to

[542] "John Chinaman."

[543] Cohen, *Chinese in the Post-Civil War South*, 137.

[544] 1880 census, enumeration districts 19 and 20, as transcribed by Patricia Ann Fenerty and Patricia Whitten Fernandez, *1880 Cencus of New Orleans*, vol. 3 (New Orleans, 1993), 3:93-239, passim, 108, 112, 116.

[545] Sanborn Insurance Maps of 1876; *Soard's City Directory of 1874, 1876, and 1882*. Chinese businesses were identified by name in earlier directories; the entries were not categorized under "Chinese" as they would be in later years.

[546] February 12, 1882, the founding date of the Chinese Mission, according to the modern-day Chinese Presbyterian Church.

[547] Canal Street Presbyterian Church, *100 Years Canal Street Pesbyterian Church New Orleans, La., 1847-1947* (New Orleans, 1947), 10-15.

This early-1900s detail of the Chinatown area (at center, looking up Tulane Avenue) captures the Presbyterian Church (steeple at upper right center) and the Chinese Mission to its immediate left. *Southeastern Architectural Archive, Special Collections, Howard-Tilton Library, Tulane University*

this building that Miss Saunders rented a property for the Chinese Mission, a large, 77x120-foot American-style center-hall raised cottage with an airy gallery and twin exotic quarters numbered as 40 South Liberty according to the old addressing system and later 215 South Liberty. It was a "roomy old house ideal for teaching purposes, with its large rooms offering adequate space for classes of any size, and for entertaining of groups large and small. There were rooms where the scholars could have [a] 'home away from home....'"[548] The Presbytery of New Orleans later purchased the house and three lots for $2520, making it the permanent home of the Chinese Mission.[549] The pier-supported structure was later raised even higher for the installation of a ground-floor room that was a chapel, giving it an imposing street elevation.

Lena Saunder's mission served over 200 Chinese and other Asians (the first convert was a "Corean") in the mid-1880s and became the hub of the transient Chinese community in the Crescent City—a place to feel welcome, learn English and be among friends. "Find some school at 40 Liberty Street," advised a returned Chinese immigrant to his New Orleans bound brother in 1887, "and go every week;" he insisted, "having attended every session since his arrival."[550] Visitors included Chinese merchants en route from California and cities in the South and Caribbean, field laborers returning to New Orleans, and Chinese New Orleanians putting down roots in their adopted home. Some students even formed a Chinese society of the King's Sons, a benevolent organization to help brethren in need. (One Chinese Mission student was ten-year-old Lee Bing, brought to New Orleans by his father in 1913. The Lee family would later open a laundry in Algiers and then at 1232 Carondelet Street, where the parents and six children "lived in the back room that barely held two double beds and a single canvas cot." One of those children would become one of the most popular public figures in the region today. Jefferson Parish Sheriff Harry Lee, born in 1932, recalls visiting Chinatown many times as a child and even living there briefly in 1941, after the merchants had left for Bourbon Street.[551])

Lena Saunders tireless work in establishing the Chinese Mission in New Orleans was matched by her vocal opposition against the Chinese exclusion laws of 1882-1892, which not only severely restricted immigration of persons of Chinese descent but curtailed the rights of those already arrived. The laws also started a thriving trade in smuggling Chinese immigrants into the country, particularly to the labyrinthine Louisiana coast.[552] Passage of the exclusion laws crushed Miss Saunders; she fell into ill health, died in a mental hospital in 1896, and was mourned by over one hundred Chinese as she was laid to rest in Metairie Cemetery.[553]

In establishing the Chinese Mission, Miss Saunders unwittingly helped make the Third Ward neighborhood near 215 South Liberty, at the fringes of the business district immediately upriver from Canal Street, the geographical hub of the Chinese community. In 1900, the *Times-Democrat* estimated that 150-175 Chinese, representing roughly 25 to 30 percent of New Orleans' Chinese community, received

[548] Walter Dale Langtry, *Chinese Presbyterian Church of New Orleans, 1882-1982* (1982), 50-51.
[549] Ibid., 15.
[550] *Southwestern Presbyterian*, October 20, 1887, as quoted by ibid., 24.
[551] Personal communication, Sheriff Harry Lee, June 16, 2004, and June 14, 2005; Betsy Peterson, "Inside the Chinese Community," *The Courier*, November 8-14, 1973.
[552] Will A. Branch, "The Dual Life of Chinatown," *Daily Picayune*, August 14, 1910.
[553] Cohen, *Chinese in the Post-Civil War South*, 137-40.

instruction at the Chinese Mission.[554] Others not enrolled in classes nevertheless visited the mission as a kind of community social center. Newspaper articles of the day referred to the "Chinese colony" of the South Liberty Street/Tulane Avenue area, a reference not just to the Chinese Mission but the Chinese community growing up around it. Other churches sponsored classes and evangelism for the New Orleans Chinese community, including the Coliseum Baptist Church, Lafayette Presbyterian Church, Methodist missions on St. Charles and on Carondelet, and the First Baptist Church.[555] But the Presbyterians' operation on South Liberty Street was the original and biggest, and attracted the largest number of Chinese newcomers to its neighborhood.

An institutional hub is one factor that helps form ethnic enclaves; families are another. A woman named E.P. Radford, who took over the Chinese Mission in 1894 after Saunder's incapacitation, helped transform a transient group of Chinese males into a permanent community of residents when she escorted Chinese women from San Francisco to be a bride in the Chinese Mission's first marriage. "This was the beginning of the trend that made the [Chinese Presbyterian Church] possible, the permanence of the Chinese presence in New Orleans."[556] Earlier years had seen primarily young men arriving to make money and return to the homeland, an instinct so strong that the bodies of those who died here were shipped back to China. "But when families began to be established, the end of that custom was bound to come. [New Orleans] now would eventually be 'home.'"[557] Because of the Chinese exclusion laws, women of Chinese descent usually came to New Orleans from other American cities, primarily San Francisco.

As the Chinese Mission welcomed immigrants to its doors, it also exposed them to its neighborhood, playing a critical role in the development of Chinatown. In 1886, for example, when there were fifty-seven laundries with Chinese names operating in the city, ten operated in the vicinity of the Chinese Mission and another eight were nearby—despite the fact that laundries were usually dispersed citywide for the convenience of their clientele.[558] Starting around 1892, the cluster known as Chinatown began to develop a core. In that year, On Yick & Co. and Yee Lee & Co. opened two grocery stores in what was then enumerated as 249 and 251 Tulane Avenue, next to where a Chinese laundry had operated a few years earlier.[559] (The modern address system was adopted in 1894, turning the 200 block of Tulane Avenue into the 1100 block. It was and remains a very short block, barely 150 feet between South Rampart Street and the Saratoga/Basin/Elk Place corridor on the odd-numbered downtown side, and twice that length on the even-numbered uptown side. Some street locations and names in this area have since been changed.) By 1895, the Soong Wolee merchandise store set up shop nearby at 1009 Tulane, and by 1898, three additional Chinese shops opened on the 1100 block, while the Jung Sing Long Co. relocated from the corner of Tulane and South Claiborne to 1112 Tulane. The Underwriters Inspection Bureau recorded fifty-eight Chinese-owned business uses in all of New Orleans in 1898 (forty-five laundries, twelve merchandisers, and one restaurant), of which fully sixteen were located on or within a block of 1100 Tulane. In 1900, seven Chinese markets, groceries, and merchandise shops filled the short block in its entirety.

What did Chinatown look like? Period photographs of 1100 Tulane Avenue are exceedingly rare. I have found only a circa-1930s image in a *New Orleans States and Item* article, a 1911 interior view of a Chinatown curio shop, some photographs of adjoining streets which partially cover Chi-

[554] "Chinese Missions: Religiously Interesting Branch of Local Religious Work," *Times-Democrat*, February 11, 1900, p. 3, col. 5.

[555] Ibid.

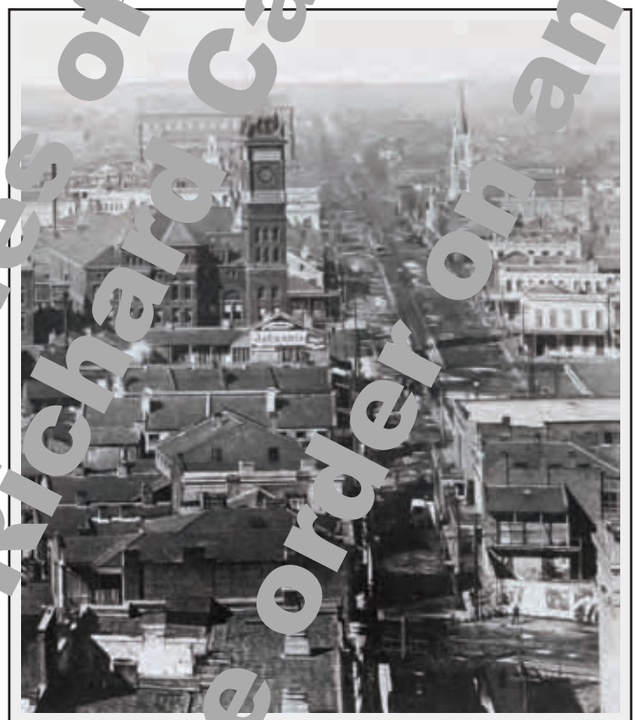
[556] Langtry, *Chinese Presbyterian Church of New Orleans, 1882-1982*, 3.

[557] Ibid., 36.

[558] *Soard's City Directory of 1886*. One of New Orleans' first Chinese restaurants, Kee Sing, was located on the present-day 200 block of Dauphine in this year. The city may have been the eatery that Lafcadio Hearn wrote about in 1878: "There is in the oldest portion of the oldest quarter of New Orleans a cheap Manila restaurant—hidden away in a court, and supported [by] Spanish and Indian sailors.... The *menu* is printed in Spanish and English; the fare is cheap and good. Now it is kept by Chinese..." Hearn lived near the Chinese Mission and reportedly tried to learn Chinese from a local restaurant owner; he would later achieve worldwide fame for his writings explaining Japanese culture to the West. S. Frederick Starr, *Inventing New Orleans: Writings of Lafcadio Hearn* (Jackson, 2001), xiv and 89.

[559] *Soard's City Directory of 1893*; Sanborn Insurance Maps of 1885-1886.

[560] Based on analysis of Underwriters Inspection Bureau of New Orleans street numbered slips (1897) and *Soard's City Directories* of *1880, 1883, 1887, 1890, 1893, 1895, 1898*, and *1903*, under sections for Laundry and Variety Stores, Grocers, Laundries, and other categories. Chinese shops were identified by name and by specification in a variety sources of the era.



This circa-1902 detail, looking up Common Street as it widens into Tulane Avenue, captures Chinatown at center, on both sides of the first wide block of the avenue. The towering Criminal Courts Building (1893) overlooked the bustling intersection. *Southeastern Architectural Archive, Special Collections, Howard-Tilton Library, Tulane University.*

natown, a sketch in a 1950 Coca-Cola ad, and in the low-elevation aerial photographs taken in the 1920s.[561] They show, on the downriver side of the block, a one-story, seven-unit market-like structure with a low hip roof and an oversized parapet adorned with dentils. According to the Coca-Cola ad—admittedly not a particularly reliable record—the word CHINATOWN was spelled out on the roof, visible to shoppers on Tulane Avenue. Its most distinctive feature was its wrap-around permanent awning, which gave the block the pavilion-like appearance of a market. Inside was a solid line of Chinese grocers specializing in their unique foodstuffs and merchandise. It was not, however, a municipal stall market. The upriver side of 1100 Tulane was a bit less cohesive, comprising about ten units in seven irregularly shaped storehouses of one to two stories. Most structures on the block appeared to date from the late antebellum age or from the decade following the war. Chinatown at the turn of the century thus comprised a small but dense core along 1100 Tulane Avenue—the only place where a genuine wall-to-wall Chinese streetscape prevailed—adjoined by a lower-density cluster of Chinese-related institutions, businesses, and upper-story residences in the blocks enclosed by Tulane, South Rampart, Canal, and South Liberty. There were, of course, no hard boundaries to the district; one modern source described the district as "amoeba-shaped," for its sundry components scattered between the markets of 1100 Tulane and the Chinese Mission of 215 South Liberty.[562] Others, such as the *Times-Picayune* in 1920, restricted it to the core zone: "Squatting dingily along Tulane Avenue, between South Rampart and Saratoga streets, Chinatown extends on both sides of its one block of existence," although the article later acknowledged the influence of the nearby Chinese Mission.[563] One *Daily Picayune* article in 1910 alluded to the amorphous shape of the enclave as well as its residential perimeter:

> Chinatown, as it is commonly called, is clustered at the [illegible] of Elk's Place, in the vicinity of police headquarters [present-day site of the New Orleans Public Library], and a round-up would reveal there types of the Oriental as "peculiar" as any ever dreamed of..., from the rich Tulane Avenue merchant, who has waxed prosperous through the bondage system [payments to sponsors by immigrants smuggled in illegally], to the most efficient gun-man of the largest tong [a clan of families]. And just down the avenue, and around the corner in South Franklin Street, lives little Mrs. Fung John and her brood of five children...[564]

According to the Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of 1908-1909 and city directories of that time, the Chinese colony in this thoroughly interracial neighborhood included a Chinese Club House (home at times to the Chinese Mission House as well as the anti-Manchu Dynasty Chee Gung Tong organization[565]) at 145 Elk Place; a Chinese restaurant directly across the street at 156-158 Elk Place, another at [illegible] South Rampart, and a "Chinese and American Restaurant" around the corner at 1204 Canal; a Chinese laundry at the corner of South Villere and Canal; and the aforementioned merchants of 1100 Tulane. These businesses were scattered within two to three blocks of the Chinese Mission and School at 215 South Liberty.[566] The year 1916 stands out as one of the peak years of New Orleans' Chinatown, when fifteen institutions and businesses were recorded in various sections of the *Soard's City Directory* of the following year.[567]

- Chinese Mission Presbyterian Church, 215 South Liberty
- Chinese Mission Presbyterian School, 215 South Liberty
- Chinese National League, 207 South Rampart
- Chinese Republican Association, 145 South Basin
- [illegible] & Young Co., Grocer, 1113 Gasquet (Cleveland) Street
- [illegible] Sing [illegible] & Co., Grocer, 1112 Tulane Avenue
- Kee Nau Him & Co., Grocer, 1113 Tulane Avenue
- Ben H[illegible] Low, Chinese Restaurant, 156 South Basin Street (Elk Place)
- On Yick & Co. Grocer, 1107 Tulane
- Quan [illegible] & Co., Grocer, 1108 Tulane Avenue

[561] Herman Drezinski, "Rubble All that Remains of Old N.O. Chinatown," *New Orleans States and Item*, December [illegible], 1958, p. 9; "New Orleans' Chinese Captains of Industry," *Daily Picayune*, July [illegible], p. 14; and Coca-Cola advertisement, *Times-Picayune/New Orleans States*, October 15, 1950, sec. 7, 12.

[562] New Orleans Jazz Commission, *New Orleans Jazz History Walking Tours: Business District/Back O'Town* (2000), pamphlet.

[563] "Chinatown of New Orleans Fast Becoming Americanized," *Times-Picayune*, January 11, 1920, p. 16.

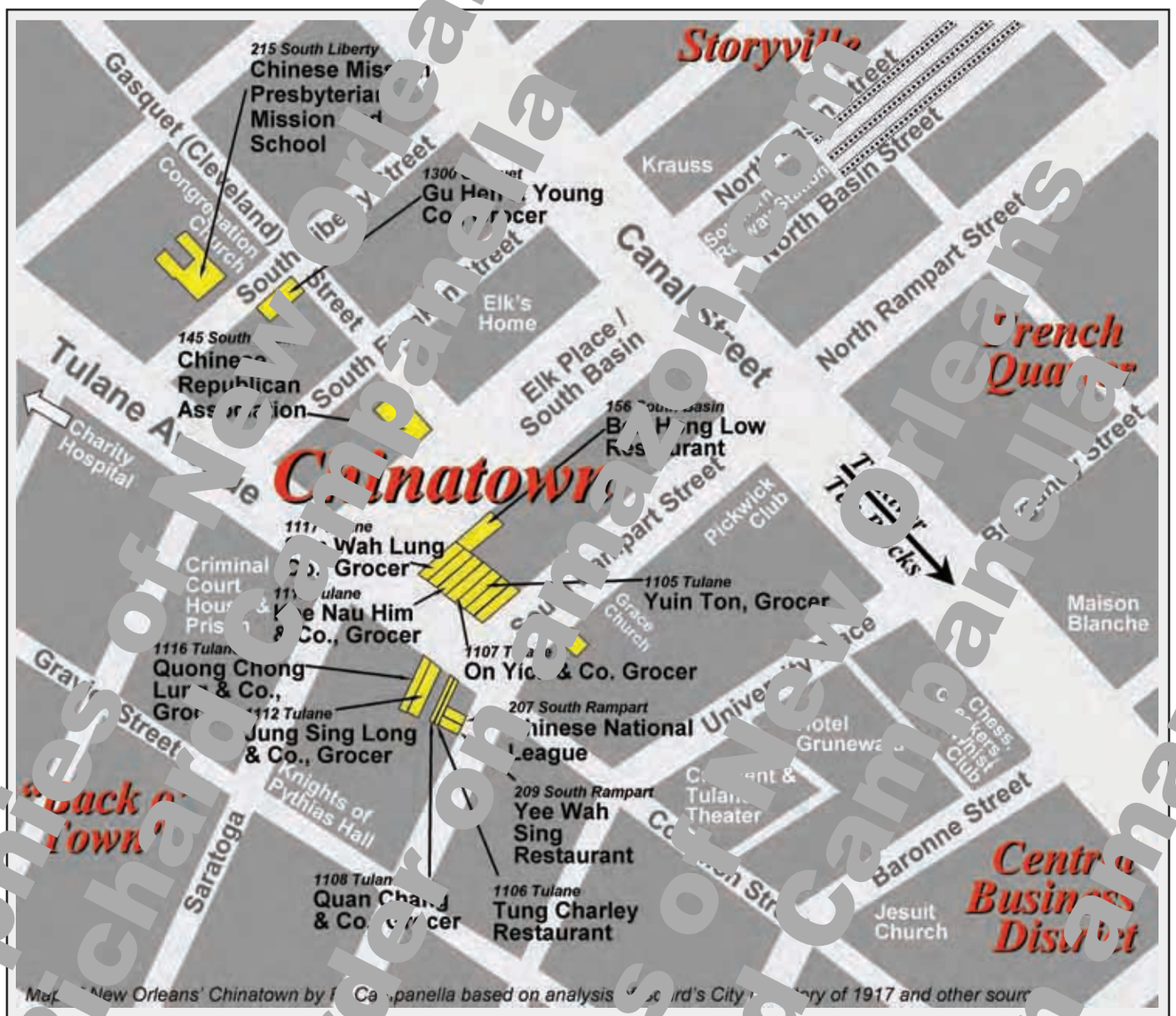
[564] Branan, "The Dual Life of Chinatown."

[565] "[illegible] Chinese Temple Here Is Rich in Decorations," *Daily Picayune*, June 25, 1906, p. [illegible] I thank Mark Tullis for bringing this article to my attention.

[566] Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1908-1909; and *Soard's City Directory of 1910*.

[567] *Soard's City Directory of 1917*. Some listings appeared under the "Grocers" section, others were under "Restaurants," still others were listed by name in the main alphabetical section. In other years, the "Fancy and Variety Goods" section records some Chinese businesses.

Had the photographer tilted his camera slightly downward, this 1909 panoramic image would have captured Chinatown perfectly. The roof of the main Chinatown market structure is visible at extreme bottom left center, between Basin and South Rampart streets. Storyville appears in the distant upper left. *Courtesy Library of Congress.*



Map of New Orleans' Chinatown by Richard Campanella based on analysis of Soard's City Directory of 1917 and other sources

New Orleans' Chinatown emerged in the 1870s and rose in earnest in the 1880s, when missionary Lena Saunders started a Chinese mission at the nearby Canal Street Presbyterian Church. The operation exposed Chinese immigrants to this area, which afforded retail economic opportunities and reasonable rent. Chinatown lasted until 1937, when its core structures were demolished. *Map and analysis by author based on 1917 City Directory.*

- Quong Chong Lung & Co., Grocer, 1116 Tulane Avenue
- Sun Wah Lung Co. Grocer, 1117 Tulane Avenue
- Tung Charley, Chinese Restaurant, 1106 Tulane Avenue
- Yee Wah Sing Chinese Restaurant, 209 South Rampart Street
- Yuin Ton, Grocer, 1105 Tulane Avenue

Chinatown was also, to a degree, a residential neighborhood, with several households residing above or near the stores and others dwelling here but working elsewhere. Ling L. King operated a Chinese restaurant at 240 North Franklin in the Faubourg Tremé, but lived at 150 South Basin in Chinatown. Chin Chou Poo managed the well-known Fou Loy & Company Chinese merchandise shop at 53 Chartres, founded in 1871 as the first store of its type in the city, but lived at 1128 Tulane Avenue, in Chinatown's "main drag."[568] Those Chinese who came of age overseas often continued to wear their traditional garb, speak their native tongue, and practice homeland customs, while their locally-born offspring adopted the language, dress, and practices of the only environs they knew. Some elders refrained from donning their kimonos in public for the curious attention they drew, and the sight soon disappeared from the streets. So too did the "pig tails," which caused local journalists endless amusement in the early years. As is often the case in cultural assimilation, food preferences proved to be among the most tenacious customs. "Most of the Chinese cling to their native dishes, even when they discard Oriental costume. Rice is their staple food, in season and out, but fish, birds, and other delicacies are imported from China. They drink tea as Americans do water."[569] The growth

[568] *Soard's City Directory of 1917.*
[569] Branan, "The Social Life of Chinatown."

The main Chinatown structure, 1100 Tulane Avenue is visible to the left of the turning streetcar at the center of this 1920s aerial photograph. South Rampart Street, which runs horizontally through the middle of this scene, was lined with Jewish-owned shops catering to an African American clientele. *Southeastern Architectural Archive, Special Collections, Howard-Tilton Library, Tulane University*

of the community, which totaled around 200 in the city in the early 1900s, was continually held down by a lack of Chinese women: there were only five married Chinese women recorded in New Orleans in 1910. According to one outside observer, "Chinese wives are treated with the utmost consideration, and they are overindulged in the treatment of their children."[570]

Chinatown's denizens voiced their politics through organizations such as the Chinese National League at 2[illegible] South Rampart and the Chinese Republican Association at 145 Separ Basin. It was that latter location convened perhaps the most exotic entity in the district. There, "in the heart of New Orleans," as the *Daily Picayune* proclaimed dramatically in 1908, "the very center of a great modern city where western civilization has reached its highest development, stands a small two-story brick dwelling, within the walls of which the Orient has crowded out the Occident and only the things suggestive of the mysterious Far East are to be found." This was the headquarters of the Chee Gung Tong, the revolutionary organization advocating the philosophy of Sun Yat-Sen, the religion of Ming Chow, and the overthrowing of the Manchu Dynasty. The upper floor of this building, at the present-day corner of Cleveland and Elk Place, contained a magnificently appointed temple, which the local newspaper described as "dedicated to the worship of heathen dieties" and "constructed along the lines of barbaric picturesqueness."[571] A block and a half away, at South Rampart and Tulane, convened the local branch of the Bow Wung Wei, an organization of Chinese expatriots established in numerous large Western cities and dedicated to spreading reformism in China. Most of New Orleans' Chinese community, including both the Chee Gung Tong and the Bow Wung Wei, supported reform in the homeland, hoping soon to see the land of their birth take her place among nations as the leading paternal government of the world."[572] In front of the shops on 1100 Tulane, recalled a newspaper many years later, "congregated nightly Chinese merchants, laundrymen and philosophers to discuss the... sing-song Cantonese, everything of moment in China from the days of Sun Yat-Sen's attempts to make China a republic to Chiang Kai-Shek's attempts to keep it one." Chinatown also had merchant's associations, fraternal organizations and clubs, and even a cremation society.

As the 1890s witnessed the development of the heart of Chinatown, it also saw Chinese immigrants and migrants citywide rise from the status of boarding house transients to find their niche in the social society and economy. In other Southern cities, that niche was grocery stores and food preparation, but perhaps because Sicilians and other groups had locks on those markets, Chinese families in New Orleans found their specialization in laundering. According to one observer in 1910, "the fascinating pursuit of other people's clothes for the purpose of cleaning them for a nominal charge."[574] Hand laundering—the ubiquitous Chinese laundry—was denied everywhere in this fashion-conscious town, with all commercial and business functions, all one needed was the smallest of capital outlays for a specialized iron,[575] a board, washing equipment, and a low overhead—which could double as a home. Chinese domination of the hand laundering market was predicted as early as 1871, when Chinese began to settle in the city in significant numbers. "The peculiar *forte* of the Chinaman," wrote the *New Orleans Times*,

> is that of laundryman. In this particular branch of trade he excels to a remarkable degree, and in San Francisco, where Chinamen abound, there are hundreds of laundries, which, through the extreme neatness and scientific attainments of that race, have almost exclusive control of the washing trade of the city.... The versatile talent of the Chinaman is well known, and it would not surprise us to see the festive individual... becoming a fixed institution in New Orleans, even as he is in other cities.[576]

The journalist was right: the 1876 city directory recorded two laundries with Chinese names. That number rose to thirteen Chinese laundries in the 1882 directory, fifty-seven in the 1886 directory (which also recorded possibly New Or-

[570] Ibid.
[571] "Only Chinese Temple Here Is Rich In Decorations."
[572] "Chinese for Reform: Local Colony Follows the Example of Other Cities," *Daily Picayune*, January 14, 1907, p. 4, col. 4.
[573] William H. Fitzpatrick, "Old Chinatown Shifted as Aged Buildings Razed," *Times-Picayune*, September [illegible]937, p. 1.
[574] Branan, "The Dual Life of Chinatown."
[575] "Instead of a flat iron [such Chinese use] an implement the exact counterpart of what housekeepers term a 'spider,' and this, filled with coals, is moved to and fro over the garment. John ever and anon sprinkles the same by sending a fine spray of water through his teeth, which operation, though strange to the uninitiated, is yet most entertaining to behold." "John Chinaman."
[576] Ibid.

leans' first Chinese restaurant, Kee Sing, at 2[illegible] (Dauphine), and seventy-three in the 1892 directory, which listed three Chinese restaurants. By 1898, those numbers more than doubled to eight restaurants and 198 laundries.[577] So we see that the Chinese control the laundry business that the 1898 city directory listed them separately as "Chinese" laundries as opposed to "Steam" laundries. Although steam laundries were larger operations requiring more capital and servicing larger institutional clients (the Chalmette Laundry near Charity Hospital was one of the largest in the world), Chinese laundries outnumbered them that year by nearly seventeen-to-one. While eighteen of the 198 Chinese laundries (and four of the eight restaurants) operated in or near the Chinatown area in 1898, the vast majority—91 percent—were scattered throughout residential and commercial neighborhoods of New Orleans. In this pre-automobile age, a laundry had to be located within convenient distance from its middle- and upper-middle-class clientele, but not too close to other competing laundries. So important was this need to spread out that one family might own a number of laundries distributed evenly along a single street. Early-1900s city directory listings for "Chinese Laundries" are complete with multiple listings of names like "Lee Sam," "Lee Sing," "Wah Sing," and "Hop Lee," each with various addresses. Since family members often lived near, above, or behind the laundry, the laundering industry geographically dispersed the Chinese community throughout New Orleans, particularly in uptown residential areas. For example, there were in excess of three times more Chinese laundries on Magazine Street in 1898 than there were in Chinatown[578] (see map, *Chinese New Orleans, Circa 1900*).

Chinese New Orleanians went to Chinatown for social and institutional functions, for specialty items from the homeland, for laundering supplies and equipment, and for Chinese food, both from the markets and prepared in restaurants. A Tulane Avenue grocer would stock "the queer Chinese wares, the embroideries, the tiny sandals, the dried shrimps, the jars of fiery confections and preserves" over which hung "a sinister atmosphere, to the foreigner."[579] Not so sinister: New Orleanians of all backgrounds regularly visited the district for Chinese merchandise, exotic foodstuffs and lunch plates. The Yee Wah Sen Restaurant on South Basin, for example, catered to both the "tough" specimens of the underworld and "respectable members of...polite society," serving both blacks and whites (in segregated seating), such that "the aristocrat...rubs elbows with the hoi polloi." The curio shops specialized in linen, ivory, teak wood tables, silk kimonos, and mandarin coats popular with uptown debutantes, but also offered "tom-toms, cymbals, large gongs"[581] for musicians, and narcotics for the denizens of nearby Storyville. Recalled jazz musician Jelly Roll Morton, "I was personally sent to Chinatown many times with a sealed note and a small amount of money and would bring back [for the prostitutes in Storyville] several cans of chop. There was no slipping and dodging and you had to do was walk in to be served." Among the drugs available for delivery to Storyville were "opium, heroin, cocaine, laudanum, morphine, etcetera."[582] Opium in particular was offered in cans in a number of Chinese grocery stores, which was the target of occasional raids originating from the police station and ending up in the parish prison, both located diagonally across the intersection from Chinatown. Everyone from jazzmen to journalists knew about Chinatown and used that moniker to refer to it: a headline in the *Daily Picayune* following the San Francisco earthquake read "CHINATOWN ANXIOUS About Fate of Fellow Countrymen in Frisco." Others referred to

[577] Counts of laundries with Chinese names were conducted on the *Graham's City Directory of 1870* (when there were no Chinese laundries), and *Soard's City Directory of 1878, 1882, 1886, 1892*, and *1898*.

[578] *Soard's City Directory of 1898*, 968-69. There were twenty-six Chinese laundries with Magazine Street addresses, eight in the Chinatown area, and another ten near Chinatown. Jefferson Parish Sheriff Harry Lee's father, Lee Bing, recalled fifty Chinese laundries along the seventy-five or so blocks of Magazine Street, from Canal to Audubon Park, in 1913. Peterson, "Inside the Chinese Community."

[579] "Chinatown of New Orleans Fast Becoming American...," *Times-Picayune*, January 11, 1920, p. 16.

[580] "New Orleans Chinese Captains of Industry," *Daily Picayune*, July 2, 1911, p. 14. I thank Mark [illegible] for bringing this article to my attention.

[581] New Orleans Jazz Commission, *New Orleans Jazz History Walking Tours: Business District/Back of Town* (2000).

[582] As quoted in Alan Lomax, *Mister Jelly Roll: The Fortunes of Jelly Roll Morton, New Orleans Creole and "Inventor of Jazz"* (New York, 1950), p. 65.

Street-level photographs of Chinatown are exceedingly rare. This sketch of the main Chinatown building at 1100 Tulane Avenue comes from a nostalgic 1950 Coca-Cola ad. An International-style office building was built on the site in 1950; it now houses facilities for Hibernia Bank. *Coca-Cola sketch from the* Times-Picayune/New Orleans States*; photograph by author, 2004.*

Two aerial perspectives of Chinatown in the 1920s: above, the main structure appears at the right of the streetcar at center; the Chinese Masonic Hall and former Presbyterian Church are visible in the upper left. All three structures are visible in the lower image, which also captures the Hibernia Bank cupola under construction. *Southeastern Architectural Archive, Special Collections, Howard-Tilton Library, Tulane University.*

the "Chinese colony" or specifically to "the Chinese shops on Tulane Avenue." [583]

Surrounding Chinatown were some of Victorian-era New Orleans' most fascinating back-of-town neighborhoods, home to working-class folk of all races and ethnicities living and working at the geographical backslope of the Crescent City. Along South Rampart Street, tangent to the heart of Chinatown, was a great number of tailor shops, clothiers, stores, jewelers, and other businesses owned by Orthodox Jews who catered to a predominantly black clientele. Nearby was the so-called "uptown district" of Storyville, a.k.a. "Black Storyville," a.k.a "the Back ground," counterpart to the much bigger and more famous red-light district located across Canal Street from 1897 to 1917.[584] On the corner of Xavier and Saratoga, only one block from Chinatown, stood the elegant Knights of Pythias Temple (1907), once the largest black-owned building in the nation. (It still stands today, at 237 Loyola, masked by a modern façade.) Dispersed throughout this area were important places associated with the emergence of jazz, particularly around the South Rampart/Perdido intersection, only two blocks from Chinatown.[585] Jazz musicians in their golden years, interviewed in the 1950s and 1960s, commonly recollected this general district and much of the colorful lore from the early days of jazz are stories of this area. In a city famous for the bustling excitement of its street life, the sights, smells, and sounds of this back-of-town district must have been superlative. Louis Armstrong, born on nearby Jane Alley in 1901, reminisced warmly about the area (circa 1907) in his elder years:

> The neighborhood was consisted of Negroes, Jewish people, and lots of Chinese.... The Chinese finally moved in a little section of their own and called it *China Town*, where a few little *beat* up restaurants serving *real* food on the *Chinese menu* of their Chinese dishes. I used to hear the Negroes braggin about their *Lead Beans* and *Lima*. That's the way a Chinese waiter would order it for you.... Mother + my *Step*-father used to take *me* + *Mama* Lucy (my sister) down in Chinatown + have a Chinese meal for a change. A kind of *special* occasion.[586]

Chinatown by the Numbers: The 1920 Census

A survey of the blocks bounded by Canal, South Rampart, Poydras, and South Liberty in the 1920 census reveals the presence of a clear and distinct Chinatown, but not a substantial Chinese residential neighborhood.[587] Only forty-eight of the 1,903 people living in this area were listed as Chinese in color or race, compared to 644 whites and 1,212 blacks or mulattoes. This represents a decline from 1910, when there were eighty-five Chinese-lead households in this same area, most of them comprising single men (median age forty-one) living alone, of whom 89 percent were born in China and the remainder in California.[588] Among whites in 1920, there were significantly more Sicilians and Eastern European Jews than Chinese; the neighborhood as a whole was extraordinarily diverse and intermixed. Judging from the mother tongue of the individual's father, the non-Asian white community was 38 percent Italian (Sicilian), 12 percent Jewish (Yiddish speaking), 6 percent German, and 4 percent Spanish-speaking, with another 5 percent claiming French-, Irish-, British English-, Greek-, Hungarian-, Indian-, and Norwegian-speaking fathers. Only about one-third of the white community comprised English-speaking Americans with no recent immigrant history. The black population, which outnumbered whites two-to-one, lived mostly in

[583] "Chinatown Anxious About the Fate of Fellow Countrymen in Frisco," *Daily Picayune*, May 3, 1906, p. 4. See also May 3, 1906 (p. 3) and January 8, 1907 editions of the *Daily Picayune*. A number of Chinese-Americans left homeless by the San Francisco earthquake of 1906 took refuge and eventually resettled in New Orleans' Chinatown. I thank Mark Tullis for bringing these articles to my attention.

[584] The black counterpart to Storyville was established in 1917, the same year Storyville proper was closed. This "Negro District" was bounded by Perdido, Franklin, Gravier, and Locust (Liberty) streets, a few blocks from Chinatown. Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration, *New Orleans City Guide* (Boston, 1938), 216.

[585] Donald M. Marquis, *In Search of Buddy Bolden: First Man of Jazz* (Baton Rouge and London, 1978), 49-52.

[586] Louis Armstrong, *Louis Armstrong in His Own Words: Selected Writings*, ed. Thomas Brothers (Oxford, England, 2006).

[587] Department of Commerce-Bureau of the Census. *Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920—Population* Enumeration Districts 31, 34, and 35. ED 31 was checked only for the river side of South Rampart and lake side of South Liberty; no Chinese residents were found on these streets.

[588] Based on analysis of digitally transcribed 1910 Census population schedules for Enumeration District 31 only, which covered from Canal to South Rampart to Poydras to South Liberty.

the rear of the district, and was predominantly Creole in its ethnicity, with many born out-of-state. Despite their small (and likely undercounted) numbers, the forty-eight Chinese residents were tightly clustered around the 100 block of Tulane Avenue. The census tells us that this population was:

- Overwhelmingly male and single. Only two adult Chinese women lived in the area, both married to Chinese men, mothers, and probably housewives. One Chinese man had a white wife; their five children were all classified as Chinese. Nineteen of the thirty-five adult men were single or widowed. Indeed, most young Chinese families lived elsewhere in the city, often in association with a laundry business. Chinatown, with its rough reputation and proximity to vice, was not an optimal place for young families.
- Not particularly young. The oldest residents were in their forties; another twelve were in their fifties and sixties. Eleven were between twenty and thirty-nine, and an equal number were children, including some infants.
- Mostly Chinese-born and Chinese speaking. Only one adult man was born elsewhere, in California. Nine of the eleven children of the community were born in Louisiana; the others were born in China and California, suggesting their parents' recent arrival to New Orleans. Interestingly, there were no Chinese who were born in Cuba, or whose fathers were born in Cuba, indicating that the early post-Civil War waves of Cuban Chinese had departed the Chinatown area.
- Mostly alien in their status. Only two individuals provided to the census enumerator their years of immigration (1910 and 1914), which may reflect tensions involving the Chinese exclusion laws. None except the children could claim status as naturalized citizens. This indicates that the older Chinese population from the late 1880s had moved elsewhere.
- Generally literate. Almost all adults were able to read and write, but none save the children had attended school in the past year.
- Industriously employed. Of the thirty-four Chinese men in the area, all were employed mainly by Chinese-owned enterprises. Twenty-one retained Chinese mer-

In the pre-automobile age, a laundry had to be close to its clientele to maximize convenience but far enough from other laundries to minimize competition. Citywide dispersal was the solution. Since family members often lived near, above, or behind the laundry, the laundering industry geographically dispersed younger Chinese families throughout the city. Middle-aged single Chinese males, on the other hand, were more likely to cluster in Chinatown, usually to retail Chinese merchandise and groceries. *Map and analysis by author based on numerous sources.*

chandise, groceries, or "notions," located nearly in Chinatown. Another seven worked in Chinese restaurants in the area, as owners, cooks, or cashiers. Three were seamen; two were launders (located on the periphery of the Chinatown area), and one worked as a Chinatown watchman.

- Living in circumstances of convenience. Many men—brothers, cousins, business partners, employers and employers—shared apartments; others boarded in group houses or with families. Not a single Chinese was a property owner; all were renters, a situation which would not bode well for the future of Chinatown.

Why There?

Younger Chinese men families in early twentieth-century New Orleans were more likely to disperse themselves throughout the city. This pattern can be explained by the nature of the laundering business. Middle-aged single Chinese males, on the other hand, were more likely to cluster in Chinatown, usually to retail Chinese merchandise and groceries. What explains the location of Chinatown? An analogy of seed, soil, and water aids in answering this question.

Chinatown's "seed" was the Chinese Mission. This was the institution that initially drew significant numbers of Chinese to this area, expanding them to a likely neighborhood and even likelier locale to start a business. The Chinese Mission in turn was so located because its patron, the Canal Street Presbyterian Church, had operated in this general vicinity since 1866. While it is important to note that a few Chinese businesses existed in this area six to eight years *prior* to the founding of the Chinese Mission, a cluster did not really form until after the mission was operating.

Chinatown's "soil" was the abundance of reasonably priced, structurally appropriate commercial real estate in this section of the Third Ward. The area was close enough to downtown to maximize convenience, yet far enough away to remain economical. It was well within walking distance of the commercial, cultural, and political heart of New Orleans, yet close enough to the undesirable back-of-town to keep the rent down. The double lanes of electrified streetcars on South Rampart Street and Tulane Avenue connected it with the rest of the city; in fact, the Tulane Belt streetcar line looped immediately around the Chinese merchants on 1100 Tulane and connected them with all of uptown. Chinese families operating laundries throughout the city could reach Chinatown for foodstuffs and laundry supplies by means of the streetcar lines. It was as good a place as any for a business-minded immigrant group to get its start—just as long as the "soil" was "watered."

The *water* that helped New Chinatown was the steady stream of Chinese countrymen who visited the mission, and the greater stream who patronized the shops and institutions once Chinatown was established. When a critical mass was reached, Chinatown became its own "seed," and those Chinese migrants who came afterward did so simply because other countrymen were already there. Additionally, and perhaps more significantly from an economic perspective, the local black community on the back-of-town, excluded by Jim Crow laws from visiting stores on Canal Street and elsewhere, provided an important customer base for Chinese shops and restaurants. (The WPA *New Orleans City Guide* described South Rampart Street as the "Harlem of New Orleans," and the area bordered by South Rampart, Claiborne, Canal, and Louisiana Avenue, which included Chinatown, was one of the most predominantly black sections of the city in the 1930s.[589]) In this sense, Chinatown shared the same

[589] Louis C. Hennick and E. Harper Charlton, *The Streetcars of New Orleans* (Gretna, 2000), 82-83, 99.

[590] Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration, *New Orleans City Guide*, 44, 53.

Traditional Chinese laundries are mostly gone from the New Orleans cityscape, victims of wash-and-wear clothing and changing tastes in apparel. Many laundry families reinvested in dry-cleaning enterprises and restaurants. Shown here is a laundry still operating in Tremé (left, photographed on Mardi Gras), a closed laundry on Freret Street (center), and a unique former laundry on Bayou Road and North Dorgenois. *Photographs by author, 2004.*

commercial interface along South Rampart Street, between the predominantly white front-of-town and the mostly black back-of-town, that Jewish tailors and merchants occupied.

In sum, an enclave like Chinatown could have formed anywhere within the "immigrant belt," that medium-density, medium-priced, mixed commercial/residential zone that lay between the city's expensive high-density commercial core and its residential perimeter.[591] This fascinating zone stretched loosely from the lower French Quarter and the Faubourg Marigny, through the Faubourg Treme, through the Chinatown/back-of-town area, to Dryades Street, and around to the uptown-riverfront area known loosely as the Irish Channel.

"Strange, Wild, Picturesque:" The Asian Shrimp Dryers of the Louisiana Coast

Orbiting the Chinese community of New Orleans was a network of Asian shrimp dryers living and working in the remote saline marshes of coastal Louisiana. While shrimp canning had been practiced elsewhere for years, it was Louisiana's Asian immigrants in the Barataria Bay and the marshes of St. Bernard, Plaquemines, and Jefferson parishes who introduced the practice of shrimp drying here, producing a much cheaper and thus more popular product than the canned delicacy. The process involved boiling the crustaceans in salty water, then raking them upon a platform under the sun to dry. Members of the community would then wrap their feet in burlap and ritually dance upon the thickly packed shrimp to the rhythm of a chant, creating a motion that removed the heads and shells from the salted, dried catch. The final product was then packed 220 pounds to a barrel and shipped to New Orleans. The industry may have dated from the 1840s in Louisiana, but grew in earnest in the 1870s, with the attention of a rice-plantation investor from San Francisco named Lee Yam and his son, Lee Yat. The son, by the early 1900s, owned over 700 acres of marsh plus platforms, dwellings, and warehouses. He employed as many as eighty people, ran some of the largest shrimp seines in the world, and oversaw his operation like a "feudal landlord."[592] Shrimp drying produced a unique built environment—"stilt villages" built on wooden platforms—surrounded by an inhospitable natural world, a sight more reminiscent of southeast Asia than southeast Louisiana. One such community, Saint Maló in the wild eastern marshes of St. Bernard Parish, was described by Lafcadio Hearn in 1883 as "strange, wild, picturesque."[593] Another example was Manila Village, founded by Filipino and Chinese shrimp dryers in 1873 roughly twenty miles south-southeast of Lafitte.[594] This description of an unspecified community was written in 1899:

> Here on the low grass-covered islands, whose surface is scarcely above the sea level, lives this queer colony of Chinese shrimpers in ragged huts curiously constructed of palmetto, bamboo and other light material. Huge platforms are built over the entire surface of the islands about four feet above the water level. Around the outer edge of these structures are arranged the houses of the colonists forming what may be called "grand plazas." On these platforms all the work of the colony is done. These ingenious mortals from the Flowery Kingdom have [also] made for themselves many floating gardens, which might very appropriately be likened to the "Hanging Gardens of Babylon." These consist of huge boxes filled with earth and set above the surface in the same manner as their houses, [in which are raised] Chinese plantations and other peculiar vegetables known only to the Celestials.[595]

The Chinese predominated on the Bassa Bassa platform, while Filipinos and Chinese together operated at least ten other sites throughout what one ethnographer characterized as the "Asian Coast" of Barataria Bay.[596] While the fresh garden produce grown on the platforms sustained the Asian shrimpers, their dried catch was shipped to New Orleans for sale in Chinatown's grocery stores and/or export worldwide. Around the turn of the century several hundred Asian immigrants subsisted in this manner throughout southeastern Louisiana, roughly equal in size to the New Orleans Chinese population.

The Decline of Chinatown

One *Times-Picayune* journalist noticed in 1920 a cultural assimilation among the Chinese that, as it turned out, foretold Chinatown's decline. "The Chinatown of New Orleans is passing," he noted. "The honored ancestors...in the Flowery Land must turn in their sleep if they know how their descendents who crossed the world have taken up the language and customs and methods of their adopted country within the last few years." Chinese merchants acquired telephones, cash registers, and account ledgers to replace their abacuses. Children and entire families learned English at the Chinese Mission, and huddled around English textbooks while tending their Tulane Avenue shops. Opium and games of chance, once widespread, became as scarce in the district's shops as chopsticks in the enclave's restaurants. In 1920, "the only atmosphere left [was] the exotic scent of the East that is as inseparable to the Orient [as] garlic to the Latin races."[597] Exclusionary immigration laws on the books since 1882 had greatly restricted the flow of new immigrants directly from China, rendering the Chinese American population of New Orleans decreasingly Chinese and increasingly American. Nevertheless, even as the number of Chinese laundries halved

[591] Sociological theory in 1949 described Chinatowns in America as "having a dependent economic structure but attached symbiotically to the larger economic, political, and social base" of the host city. This relationship, in the era before suburbanization, usually meant a location at the fringes of downtown. Lee, "The Decline of Chinatowns in the United States," 423.

[592] "New Orleans' Chinese Captains of Industry," *Daily Picayune*, July 2, 1911, p. 14.

[593] Starr, *Inventing New Orleans: Writings of Lafcadio Hearn*, 86.

[594] Swanson, *Historic Jefferson Parish, From Shore to Shore*, 137-38.

[595] "A Chinese Colony On the Swampy Lands Bordering the Gulf, That Lives by Drying Shrimp," *Times-Picayune*, November 12, 1899.

[596] Michael Caro, "The Chinese," *Mississippi Delta Ethnographic Overview* (Baton Rouge, 1979), 365.

[597] "Chinatown of New Orleans Fast Becoming Americanized," 16.

When Chinatown was demolished in 1937, some merchants relocated to the French Quarter. For decades, a few Chinese retailers, restaurants, and laundries operated around the 500 block of Bourbon Street. Today, only the On Leong Chinese Merchants Association sign remains. *Photograph by author, 2004.*

throughout the city from 1898 to 1921 (perhaps due to market saturation), the Chinese merchants of 1100 Tulane Avenue remained integral, so much so that the city directories in the 1920s started to list them separately in their own "Chinese goods" category. Many Chinese laundry operators would convene in Chinatown on Sunday mornings—the Sabbath for their Christian clients and thus an off day for them—to stock up on laundry supplies and catch up on news. In 1925, a shopper could browse and buy at Kwong Sang & Co. at 1105 Tulane, On Yick & Co. at 1107 Tulane, or Sun Wah Lung & Co. at 1117 Tulane, while across the street were Quong Wing On & Co. at 1108 Tulane and Lee Ming Tin Co. at 1120 Tulane.[598]

In 1926, the Presbytery of New Orleans sold the 215 South Liberty property and moved the Chinese Mission to a double-gallery house at 223 South Roman Street. The new building was criticized by the congregation as an inferior structure in an undesirable location—perhaps reflecting the fact that such a move would extract the operation from the Chinatown area—but the money saved allowed for further investment in the mission. Concurrently, the Chinese American community rose from its status at the margins of New Orleans immigrant society to that of a native, stable middle-class. The citizens were now more mobile—economically, geographically, and literally, in the sense that automobiles increased their access to the suburbs—and less dependent on a downtown district to fulfill social and retail needs. The next few decades saw the lifting of Chinese exclusion laws (an effect of the China/U.S. alliance against the common enemy of Japan in World War II), which increased Chinese immigration in general and slowly augmented the local Chinese community. Recent immigrants followed in the steps of the established Chinese American community, steps that led *away* from downtown, and away from Chinatown.

Although exact year-to-year counts are difficult because city directories used inconsistent categorization standards each year, the number of Chinese businesses in Chinatown remained fairly stable into the early 1930s—enough, in 1932, to warrant the local branch of the national On Leong Chinese Merchants Association at 1112 Tulane Avenue. But the aforementioned trends took their toll, and by 1937 only two remained. The final blow came in September 1937, when the main seven-unit section of Chinatown on the downtown side of 1100 Tulane was slated for demolition. Being renters rather than owners, the merchants of Chinatown were at the mercy of their landlords. "Chinatown is moving lock, stock, and herb barrel from Tulane avenue to the 500 and 600 blocks of Bourbon street," announced a front-page article in the *Times-Picayune*. On Monday, September 20, 1937, "Chinese merchants...started moving their pungent bales and barrels of stock, their Chinese clothes, nuts and herbs, dried fruit, firecrackers and noodles...their chestnuts and mushrooms and bamboo shoots from their old headquarters on Tulane avenue between South Rampart street and Elk Place, because the shuttered stores are to be razed soon to make way for a parking lot."[599] After roughly sixty years in the Tulane Avenue area, the last Chinatown merchants relocated to two fresh, if small places, the heart of Bourbon Street. On Yick & Company, Chinatown's first merchant from forty-five years earlier, moved to 605 Bourbon Street, next door to Tom Luen's Chinese Laundry. By 1938, only one Chinese-related entity, the Kuo Min Tang Association, remained in the former heart of Chinatown, at 1116 Tulane, across from the demolition site. Its neighbors on the block included a pharmacy, a dentist, and a physician—indicative of the growing medical-service industry that would soon encroach upon Chinatown and its surviving structures—not to mention a barber and a restaurant owned by Italians.[600] By the early 1940s, the last Chinese had left old Chinatown, and the district became a memory. Late in 1958, the razing of much of the upriver side of 1100 Tulane was recorded in a nostalgic article entitled "Rubble All that Remains of Old N.O. Chinatown."[601] Relocation, structural demolition, and socio-economic change put an end to New Orleans' Chinatown. It died because—to complete the seed-soil-water analogy—the "seed" (Chinese

[598] *Soard's City Directory of 1925.*

[599] Fitzpatrick, "City Chinatown Shifted as Aged Buildings Razed."

[600] Determined from sections of various sections of *Soard's* city directories and *Polk's City Directory of 1917, 1922, 1927, 1932, 1938,* and *1942,* as well as earlier years.

[601] Drezinski, "Rubble All that Remains of Old N.O. Chinatown," 9.

Mission) was relocated, the "soil" was destroyed by demolition of Chinatown structures and exodus of the area's working class), and the "water" (steady stream of local clientele) had evaporated. Reflecting the same geographic patterns of New Orleans' other ethnic communities, the Chinese American community gradually moved from urban New Orleans in general and from its downtown area in particular, outwardly toward the inner suburbs, and hence to the outer suburbs. This is reflected in the movement of the Chinese Mission: in 1952, it moved from 223 South Roman Street at the residential fringes of downtown, to the Mid-City location of 2525 Bienville, where it built a modern church for $58,000. On February 13, 1957—seventy-five years and one day after its foundation by Lena Sarpy—the Chinese Mission formally organized as the Chinese Presbyterian Church.[602] This Mid-City neighborhood deteriorated over the next three decades, forcing the relocation of most members to Jefferson Parish by the 1980s. The church followed them in 1997, moving to its fourth and current home—2900 West Esplanade Avenue in Kenner—in 115 years.

The "new Chinatown" on the 500-600 blocks of Bourbon Street started in late 1938, when Bourbon had its share of bars and jazz clubs but had not yet become the world-famous strip that World War II would make it. Even with the eventual complete destruction of the first nine blocks of Bourbon for nightlife tourism—or perhaps because of it—this tiny Chinatown lasted for a remarkably long time. There were barely more than a half-dozen Chinese retailers, restaurants, and laundries, plus the On Leong Chinese Merchants Association, operating on or within one block of the 500 block of Bourbon. In a way, the On Leong Association, which "closely [bound] the city's Chinese businessmen together and through its social activities [preserved] some Fisetan customs," unified the new Bourbon Street Chinatown and the Chinese Mission and together the Chinese of the old Tulane Avenue Chinatown.[603] Also on Bourbon was Dan's International Restaurant, which "helped to introduce Chinese cuisine to the city," started in 1946 by Young M. Gee, a Cantonese-born Chinese American just back from service in the Pacific.[604] There were six Chinese American-owned businesses around the 500 Bourbon in 1970, five in 1980, and three in 1990. By 1993, only the On Leong Association remained.[605] Dan's, too, was gone by the end of the 1990s, a decade which saw the folding of scores of local institutions and their displacement by tourism establishments. Though it was a fraction of the size and not nearly as culturally significant as the Tulane Avenue Chinatown, the Bourbon Street enclave lasted almost the same length of time, about sixty years. The only apparent vestige of it is the hand-painted "On Leong Chinese Merchants Association" lettering above a doorway at 530 Bourbon, neighbored by a tourist-oriented Cajun trinket shop and a Creole restaurant. The enclave did not escape the notice of Tennessee Williams, who once lived nearby at 722 Toulouse and probably patronized the shops. In *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Blanche DuBois symbolically shades the glare of a naked light bulb with a Chinese paper lantern—purchased, she explains, "at a Chinese shop on Bourbon."[606]

The last remaining structure of Chinatown is the two-story building at center, seen here with a white modern facade, on the Uptown side of 1100 Tulane Avenue. Ironically, a Vietnamese-Chinese restaurant operates next to it. *Photograph by author, 2003.*

Shrimp-drying in the southern Louisiana's "Asian Coast" also faded away during the early twentieth century, with refrigeration and other technologies sapping the demand for dried shrimp and hurricanes wiping away their stilt villages. Manila Village was probably the last best example of a shrimp-drying community, with its raised wooden shotgun-like houses built over a network of wooden platforms and planks a few feet above brackish water and marsh grass. It was abandoned after Hurricane Betsy in 1965 and later destroyed by storms and coastal erosion. "The only evidence of the homes, camps and drying platforms [today] are two sets of pilings, rising above the water like bones from a graveyard."[607]

Gone too are the scores of Chinese laundries from the New Orleans streetscape, victims of wash-and-wear clothing and changing tastes in apparel. A few traditional operations still manage to hang on, but most often the only thing still hanging are the colorful old signs over shuttered storefronts. Many laundry families reinvested in dry-cleaning enterprises and the restaurant business and carry on successfully today in the suburbs.

Chinatown Today

Chinese Americans, New Orleanians, those with deep roots in the city as well as those who arrived after the repeal of Asian exclusion laws in 1965, now live throughout suburban New Orleans. The 2000 census enumerated 3,581

[602] Langtry, *Chinese Presbyterian Church of New Orleans, 1882-1982*, 93-96.
[603] Elsie Brupbacher, "Kipling Was Wrong: New Orleans Can Blend East With West," *New Orleans States*, December 12, 1953, p. 14.
[604] "Young M. Gee, Owner of Chinese Restaurants," *Times-Picayune*, Thursday, June 10, 2004, B4.
[605] Based on *Polk's City Directory of 1971, 1981, 1991, 1994,* and *1999.*
[606] Tennessee Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire* (New York, 1947), 55.
[607] Bob Marshall, "Village Lives On, For Now," *Times-Picayune*, May 20, 2005, D8.

Old Chinatown is today the most utterly obliterated of New Orleans' historic ethnic enclaves. *Photograph by author, 2003.*

people of Chinese ancestry in the seven-parish metropolitan area, mostly dispersed in a pattern generally reflecting the larger white population. They are concentrated most heavily in Jefferson Parish, and particularly in a Metairie census tract (with 154 Chinese residents) near the West Esplanade Avenue/Division Street intersection. Together with 14,863 people of Vietnamese ancestry, 3,800 residents from India, 2,370 Filipinos; 1,204 Koreans; and 707 Japanese, these Chinese New Orleanians form the region's growing and increasingly influential Asian American community.[608] In 2003, plans were even in place for a new Chinatown of thirty stores, a large restaurant, and an Asian Market at 925 Behrman Highway in Algiers.[609] Old Chinatown, meanwhile, is today the most utterly obliterated of New Orleans' historic ethnic enclaves. The reason: it had the misfortune of being located precisely between modern New Orleans' two most dynamic economic districts. On one side is the Central Business District, which experienced extensive demolition and new construction from the 1950s to the end of the oil boom in the 1980s. On the other side is the expansive "medical district" along Tulane Avenue, consisting of vast research, teaching, and care facilities affiliated with numerous institutions. Add to this the demand for parking space and the lack of historic-district protection for this area, and, structurally speaking, Chinatown did not stand a chance. Not only have the original Chinese Mission and the adjacent circa-1860 Presbyterian Church been demolished, but their entire block on South Liberty—street and all—is also gone, subsumed by Tulane University Medical Center. The castle-like Criminal Courts Building that dominated this area since 1893 was demolished in 1949; its site is now partially occupied by the main branch of the New Orleans Public Library. Major arteries have been widened, and street names have been changed.

Lena Saunders' Chinese Mission at 215 South Liberty helped form Chinatown by exposing scores of Chinese immigrants and transients to the area. They walked down this street, past the circa-1860 Presbyterian Church, to attend Miss Saunder's classes. The entire block has since been subsumed by the Tulane University Medical Center. *Photograph by author, 2002.*

Starting in 1957, the Tulane/South Rampart/Loyola/Elk Place intersection was reengineered to accommodate the widened streets and increased traffic, reducing the widths of former Chinatown's broad sidewalks. All but a handful of surviving nineteenth-century buildings have been cleared away, replaced by functional modern medical structures and office buildings. At the obtusely angled corner of South Rampart and Common streets stands, in partial demolition,[610] a series of late nineteenth-century Italianate commercial structures that housed Chinese and Jewish occupants a century ago. A building next to them—160 South Rampart, recently demolished—was the site of the Loung Sing Laundry, recorded in the *Soard's City Directory of 1874* and the Sanborn Insurance Map of 1876 as perhaps the earliest Chinese establishments in what would become Chinatown.[611] The parking lot

At South Rampart and Common stood this late nineteenth-century Italianate-style commercial building, home to Chinese and Jewish occupants a century ago. It was demolished in 2004. An adjacent building at 160 South Rampart was once the site of the Loung Sing Laundry, possibly the earliest Chinese establishment of Chinatown. *Photograph by author, 2003.*

[608] Joan Treadway and Coleman Warner, "East Meets West," *Times-Picayune*, August 6, 2001, 1-7. The concentration in the Metairie census tract is partially explained by its proximity to Grace King High School, whose academic reputation attracts many Chinese."

[609] ... Mensch, "Chinatown Planned for West Bank," *Times-Picayune*, July 31, 2002, B3; ... Soong, "Modern Chinatown is Setting Up Shop," *Times-Picayune*, May 22, 2003, Downtown Picayune section, 5.

[610] These buildings were finally destroyed on August 30, 2004.

[611] Proposed demolition of these last structures became a controversial issue in 2000-2001. Asked Shaie-Mei Temple in a brochure by Operation Lotus Roots entitled *Discovering the Forgotten Chinese Quarter*, "Why has it come to this in a city that

that paved over the lower side of 1100 Tulane in 1937 was replaced in 1950 by the International-style office building of the California Company oil firm. It is now the computer center for Hibernia Bank. Across the street, the high-rise Oil and Gas Building was erected in 1960 on the site of a number of former Chinese establishments. Only one structure from Chinatown days remains on the 1100 block of Tulane; though its façade is modernized, its old brick sidewall is still visible.[612] Next to it, in splendid irony, stands a new Chinese-Vietnamese restaurant, its owners and patrons probably oblivious to the history of their location. Strangely, a number of other Chinese lunch spots are scattered throughout the former Chinatown area today: in 2002, seven were located in the blocks between the Canal/Bus Line intersection up to Tulane/Claiborne Avenues. By comparison, only one currently serves the entire French Quarter. Granted, some were closed and others served Vietnamese as well as Chinese food; indeed, the cluster surely just reflects the large lunch crowds from nearby hospitals and universities. Probably zero relationship exists between these new establishments and those of "the Celestials" from a century ago. But the gigantic sign reading CHINATOWN at one such spot at 1005 Canal Street, only two blocks from the heart of the old enclave, makes one wonder.

take so much pride in our rich and diverse heritage? How could this be in a city where preserved historic landmarks form the cornerstone of its vibrant tourism industry, [and] multi-cultural tourism is all the rage? Why the silence in a city with a well-established Southern Chinese-American community? How could it be that we have already lost touch with that part of our collective past?" Tragically, Temple died suddenly of meningitis in 2002.

[612] The last structural vestige may also soon disappear. In 2004-2005, the city approved its demolition to make room for the garage for a planned hotel. Bruce Eggler, "Last vestige of Chinatown May Fall," *Times-Picayune*, October 16, 2004, B1; and "Final vestigant of City's Chinatown Cleared for the Ax," *Times-Picayune*, January [illegible]05, B1.

The Soon Hing receiving vault in Cypress Grove Cemetery, built in 1904, was used for ceremonies and temporary entombment until remains were ready for shipment back to China. When this old custom faded away, Greenwood Cemetery became the final resting place for many in the local Chinese community, in below-ground graves. *Photograph by author, 2002.*

On Canal Street. *Photograph by author, 2002.*

The Vietnamese of Versailles
Ethnicity at the Suburban Periphery

The Vietnamese community of [illegible]eastern New Orleans neighborhoods known collectively as Versailles contests the overriding trends of New Orleans' historical ethnic geographies. Most local ethnic distributions exhibit patterns of integration and dispersion; the "Versailles Vietnamese," on the contrary, are both intensely clustered and physically isolated from the main population. Most immigrants once lived within a nebulous belt immediately encircling downtown; the Vietnamese reside at the suburban[613] periphery of the metropolitan area. Most foreigners setting foot in New Orleans since 1803 were immigrants. The Vietnamese were refugees—the largest wave received by the city since the Saint-Domingue exodus of 1809. Versailles stands alone among local enclaves in that it has been the subject of nationwide scholarly attention—among geographers, social scientists, and writers such as Robert Olen Butler, whose collection of Versailles residents' stories, *A Good Scent from a Strange Mountain*, won the 1993 Pulitzer Prize. And most significantly, while almost all ethnic enclaves in New Orleans history are just that—history—the story of the Versailles Vietnamese unfolds today. Extraordinary as this is, the Vietnamese community's "Little Saigon"[614] helps complete the picture of the complex ethnic geography of the Crescent City.

Origins

The Catholicism of French colonialism brought to the deltas of Vietnam in the seventeenth century and to the delta of the Mississippi in the eighteenth century formed the link that brought Vietnamese refugees to New Orleans at the close of the twentieth century. Catholicism arrived as a minority religion in predominantly Buddhist Vietnam for hundreds of years, despite persistent persecution by native governments. In some pockets, particularly in the Red River Delta region downriver from the northern city of Hanoi, comprised an exclusively Catholic population and were rigorously targeted for harassment. In response to this and other factors, these communities formed "self-contained, self-centered settlements... wherein priests organized land clearance and the mission provided welfare services, education, and an environment of social cohesion. Called *chrétientés* by the French,"[615] The rise of the Communist Vietminh government in the twentieth century further threatened the Catholics, pushing them to side with the French during the war for independence. Communist victory in 1954 and the resultant partitioning of the East Asian nation found the Catholics of the *chrétientés* in the increasingly hostile territory of North Vietnam. An exodus began, aided by relief groups and the French and American governments, and over the next few years hundreds of thousands of North Vietnamese refugees, 80 percent of them Catholic, relocated to South Vietnam. For a few thousand refugees of the Red River Delta *chrétientés* it was the beginning of a long and perilous journey that would eventually lead them to Chef Menteur Highway.

The refugees resettled in Mekong Delta villages in the vicinity of Saigon, reconstructing the defense of physical space in the new region with similarly self-sufficient hamlets adorned with statues of the Virgin Mary and flying the white-and-yellow flag of the Vatican. Many villages were encircled by palisades for protection against the same Communist insurgents who forced them from their ancestral lands. Other Catholics in Saigon formed a privileged class, more attuned to Western values and favored by the Diem regime.[616] With the fall of Saigon in 1975, the Vietnamese Catholic exodus both urban and rural areas once again [illegible] accompanied by thousands of their non-Christian countrymen deemed enemies of the reunified Communist state. The first wave of refugees derived mostly from the urban South Vietnamese establishment associated with the American military presence during the war, for which the U.S. government felt a primary protective responsibility. Together deliberately chosen military bases—in California, Florida, Pennsylvania, and Arkansas—the refugees were sent.[6

The Louisiana Connection

The United States Catholic Conference Migration and Refugee Services led relief agencies nationwide in settling the Vietnamese refugees into American society. Criteria for selecting settlement sites were set out, among them "a good economy, a [illegible]isting Vietnamese community, higher welfare benefits, and warm weather."[617] Although New Orleans offered [illegible]one of the desired attributes it gained favor on other grounds. The city and region offered a similar brand of conservative, Vatican-reverent Catholicism practiced by Vietnamese Catholics, possibly because of the similar Franco-Latin heritage and isolation from their larger respective national cultures. Its fishing industries, from harvest to processing to distribution and preparation, offered potential employment. And most importantly, it offered local advocacy, in the form of a strong relief agency (the Associated Catholic Charities), the sponsorship of the Archdiocese of New Orleans, and the leadership of Archbishop Philip M. Hannan.

In spring 1975, a New Orleans representative of the Associated Catholic Charities met with Catholic refugees from the hamlets of Vung Tau and Phuc Tinh at Eglin Air Force

[613] These neighborhoods fall within Orleans Parish borders, thus are technically not suburban, are "sub-urban" in their appearance and design.

[614] A Lexis-Nexis database search finds that the term *Little Saigon* was used to describe this neighborhood in five *Times-Picayune* newspapers between 1993 and 2003. Like most such monikers, *Little Saigon* is more likely to be used by outsiders than by the residents themselves. "Versailles," on the other hand, appeared sixty-six times between 1993 and 2004.

[615] Christopher A. Airriess, "Creating Vietnamese Landscapes and Place in New Orleans," in *Georgraphical Identities of Ethnic America: Race, Space, and Place*, eds. Kate A. Berry and Martha L. Henderson (Reno and Las Vegas, 2002), 232.

[616] Ibid., 230-34, and other sources.

[617] As quoted in Min Zhou and Carl L. Bankston, III, *Growing Up American: How Vietnamese Children Adapt to Life in the United States* (New York, 1998), 76.

Base in Pensacola, Florida, "telling them that the Crescent City had a warm climate and plenty of good fishing nearby. This information seemed very appealing to a great many refugees in the camp and...a large number of Vietnamese [applied] to go to New Orleans under the aegis of ACC."[618] On May 26, 1975, the first group of refugees sponsored by the archdiocese, two families numbering seventeen plus two single men, arrived from Eglin A.F.B. to the Trailways Bus Station in downtown New Orleans. Hundreds more were on their way. Working with urgency in the spring and summer of 1975, the Associated Catholic Charities surveyed the region "to locate adequate housing in advance of the arrival of the refugees,"[619] primarily seeking contiguous unoccupied low-cost rental units as well as opportunities for employment, education, health care and amenities. One such opening was a 405-unit subsidized apartment complex, the Versailles Arms, built in the early 1970s in the semi-rural eastern outskirts of Orleans Parish. To its immediate west were circa-1960s developments known as Versailles Gardens and Village de l'Est. The original residents of these subdivisions were middle-class locals, many of whom worked at the nearby NASA facility at Michoud. Rapid social and economic change, including contractor layoffs at Michoud, sent many residents packing for the western suburbs, leaving the Versailles Arms in particular with low occupancy rates and cheap rents. The Associated Catholic Charities acquired units within the complex for the settlement of about 1,000 refugees (at an average cost of about $330 per refugee), thus "seeding" the development of modern New Orleans' most distinctive ethnic enclave. An additional [illegible],000 refugees arrived in 1976 and were settled mostly in Versailles Arms. These arrivals plus others in 1977, mostly middle-class Catholic anti-Communist political refugees, formed the "first wave" of Vietnamese arrivals to New Orleans.[620] The second wave, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, were "boat people"—poor rural Vietnamese farmers and fishermen as well as Sino-Vietnamese merchants—who arrived under much more arduous conditions than the earlier so-called "elites." By 1978, the Associated Catholic Charities had acquired seventy-one units in the Woodlawn Estate complex in Algiers, eighty-nine units in the Normandie Apartments in Bridge City, plus other complexes in Marrero, Harvey, and Gretna to accommodate the thousands of new New Orleanians.

THE *WHY* BEHIND THE *WHERE*

All settlement sites were located in the peripheral zone of the metropolitan area, rather than the inner city or older suburbs, because only there could be found large contiguous blocks of low-cost apartments. The city was in the midst of an oil boom at the time, making housing high in demand and short in supply. That this particular site was selected within that peripheral zone was largely incidental: Versailles Arms just happened to be available at the right time and price. "Our agency was looking for vacant housing," recalled Susan Weishar of Associated Catholic Charities, "and that's why the Vietnamese ended up at Versailles Arms: available, affordable housing."[621] That the refugees ended up in the New Orleans region, however, was a by-product of the centuries-old Catholic culture of this area, and the invitation of Archbishop Hannan. That connection was first acted upon at the spring 1975 meeting at Eglin. About 75 percent of Vietnamese in greater New Orleans today are Catholic, as are 80 to [illegible] percent of those residing at Versailles, while nationwide, roughly 70 percent of Vietnamese-Americans are Buddhist.[622] Did environmental factors—specifically the similar climate and coastal fishing opportunities—play a role in the selection of New Orleans? Certainly. But while anxious, traumatized refugees and pragmatic, financially strapped relief agencies may take into consideration such geographical parallels, they generally do not prioritize for them. Else we would not see large Vietnamese communities in Orange County, California, or suburban Washington, D.C. Environmental factors did play a stronger role in the settlement (or re-settlement) patterns of second-wave Vietnamese immigrants and migrants. Speaking of both early and later arrivals, the Indo-Chinese Refugee Resettlement Task Force listed, in order of importance, four reasons "which drew [Vietnamese] to New Orleans and predict their remaining here: a strong Catholic organization funded for resettlement and social services programs, a Catholic and French cultural ambience, proximity to fishing opportunities, and climatic similarities with their homeland."[623] To this we may add group support and family reunification: most later arrivals were drawn here to join friends and family already established.

By May 1978, 7,141 Vietnamese refugees had arrived in Louisiana, of which 5,656 individuals in 80[illegible] households settled in metropolitan New Orleans. Main clusters by August 1978 included Versailles (2,063) on the east bank, and, on the West Bank, 780 in Woodlawn in Algiers, 571 in Bridge City at the foot of the Huey P. Long Bridge, and another five hundred in pockets elsewhere in Jefferson Parish. Nearly two-thirds of the entire refugee population was below the age of eighteen, and only one in twenty-eight was elderly.[624] Most were destitute, few had skills to offer, and even fewer spoke English. Despite limited employment opportunities and tensions with the local black community,[625] the refugees stabi-

[618] Joan Treadway, "Resettlement Begins Here for Nineteen Vietnamese," *Times-Picayune*, May 27, 1975, A1.

[619] Indo-Chinese Refugee Resettlement Task Force, *Impact Analysis of Indo-Chinese Resettlement in the New Orleans Metropolitan Area: A Task Force Study* (New Orleans, 1979), Appendix A: Indo-Chinese Refugee Program.

[620] Airriess, "Creating Vietnamese Landscapes and Place in New Orleans," 233.

[621] As quoted by Marc Leepson, "Delta to Delta," *Preservation* 52 (January-February 2000): 46.

[622] Ibid., 46; and Airriess, "Creating Vietnamese Landscapes and Place in New Orleans," 237.

[623] Indo-Chinese Refugee Resettlement Task Force, *Impact Analysis of Indo-Chinese Resettlement*, 10-11.

[624] Wade R. Ragas and Vincent Maruggi, *Vietnamese Refugee Living Conditions in the New Orleans Metro Area: Working Paper No. 111* (New Orleans, 1978), 6.

[625] This conflict arose from the circumstance of two poor groups living in proximity and competing for limited resources. An overview of the differing perspectives

The Vietnamese enclave at Versailles formed in 1975, when the Associated Catholic Charities helped settle refugees from Communist Vietnam in an apartment complex at the eastern fringes of the metropolis. Immigrants joined the refugees in the 1980s and 1990s. Within a few years, Versailles had become home to the largest Catholic Vietnamese congregation in America, one of the nation's densest Vietnamese concentrations, and the hub of the regional Vietnamese community. As exotic as the neighborhood may seem to visitors, it embodies many traits typical of its south Louisiana surroundings. *Map by author based on 2000 Census.*

A[illegible] Fortier B[illegible]rd is the social and economic [illegible]nter of New Orleans' (a[illegible]d the region's) Vie[illegible]namese universe. Only five hun[illegible]t long, the s[illegible]t is lined with twin strip malls crammed with Vietnamese-o[illegible]d and operate[illegible] grocery stores, video and elect[illegible]ics retailers, me[illegible]al and legal services, gift shop[illegible] bakeries, cafés, and restaurants. Lac[illegible] of space and [illegible]er factors have led to the [illegible]ening of additi[illegible] Vie[illegible]namese businesses along nea[illegible] Chef Menteur Highway. *Ph[illegible]tographs by [illegible]uthor, 2003.*

ized ther[illegible]selves in their new environs–[illegible]if[illegible] part by re-creating thei[illegible] old environs. Only two m[illegible]ths after their arrival, the re[illegible]gees were responsible for thei[illegible] ow[illegible] rent; within a few y[illegible] "the majority of Vietnames[illegible] had jobs, many had au[illegible]mobiles...an increasing numbe[illegible]ned their own homes, [and] approximately 200 of th[illegible]ere enrolled at the Uni[illegible]versity of New Orleans."[626] Sc[illegible]s of employment in the [illegible]rly years of Versailles and the West Bank enclaves incl[illegible] co[illegible]mercial fishing, sewi[illegible]g, welding at the Avondale ship[illegible]yards, and food services i[illegible]aurants, the seafood indu[illegible]try and processors/retailers [illegible]as Schwegmann's.[627] By the ca[illegible] 1980s, the Versailles V[illegible]namese assumed from the [illegible]s[illegible]at-

ed Catholic Charit[illegible] role of sponsoring agen[illegible]. Families began moving into their first homes, some of them devel[illegible]d by Vietna[illegible]se businessmen for Vietnam[illegible]se buyers on stre[illegible]ts with V[illegible]na[illegible]nese names. Poverty and [illegible]ocial problems [illegible]re (and re[illegible]main) no strangers in Versailles, but considering that this refuge[illegible] community started "lo[illegible]-in[illegible]ome and low-skilled[,] [illegible]n[illegible]centrated in the poorest part of a poor area in a poor city in a poor state,"[628] its p[illegible]ogress was impressive. W[illegible]h[illegible]a[illegible]ew years, Versailles had be[illegible]e home to among the larg[illegible]t concentrated Vietname[illegible] populations in America, an[illegible] th[illegible] hub of Vietnamese resid[illegible] scattered throughout the [illegible]entral Gulf Coast region.[62[illegible]] also the largest Catholic V[illegible]namese community in A[illegible]a, home to many of the [illegible]ighly 10,000 parishione[illegible] who make New Orleans the largest Vietnamese Roman Catholic diocese in the nation. By no means was or is the g[illegible]ate[illegible] Versailles area exclusively Vietnamese (though certain sections come close): in 1980 it was occupied evenly by b[illegible]cks, whites, and Vietnamese, and by 2000 had split bet[illegible]en Asian (4,655, or 43 percent, mostly Vietnamese, but [illegible]ome Chinese and Laotians) and African American (5,55[illegible]or 51 percent), with a small white popula-

appears in a series of repo[illegible]ts[illegible]ed in the late 1970s by the mayo[illegible]ffice, which felt that the incoming V[illegible]namese refugees did not significantly i[illegible]ct the housing and employment situ[illegible]io[illegible]d the Urban League, which felt d[illegible]ere[illegible] See Ragas and Maruggi, *Vietnam[illegible]ugee Living Conditions in the New [illegible]s Metro Area*, and Rose W. Bu[illegible] *Critique of the Ragas-Maruggi Study: Vi[illegible]nese [illegible]ugee Livi[illegible] Conditions in [illegible] Metro Area* (New Orleans, 1979). Similar[illegible]ensi[illegible]s between whites and Vietna[illegible]se [illegible]se in Avondale in the early 1990s. Katy [illegible]d Sandra Barbier, "Avondale[illegible] Asian Families Are Strangers in Clos[illegible]arters," *Times-Pi[illegible]*, September 18, 1[illegible], A1.

[626] Alma H. Young, "Vietnamese-Black Interaction in [illegible]Orleans: A Preli[illegible]y Assessment," in *Perspectives on Ethnicity in New [illegible]le[illegible]* ed. John Cooke (New Orleans, 1980), 55; Indo-Chinese Refugee Reset[illegible]me[illegible]k Force, *Impact Analysis of Indo-Chinese Resettlement*, 12-14.

[627] Martha C. Ward and Zachary Gussow, "The V[illegible]namese in New Orleans: A Preliminary Report," in *Perspectives on Ethnicity in New Orleans*, ed. John Cooke (New Orleans, 1979), 39-40.

[628] Zhou and Ban[illegible]on, *Growing Up American*, 81.

[629] Ward and Gusso[illegible] "The Vietnamese in New Orleans: A Preliminary Report," 38-40.

tion, including Asian Indians, forming the re[illegible]er.[630] The map *The Vietnamese of Versailles* shows the sp[illegible]al distribution of these populations at the block leve[illegible] 2000, when the area was home to 10,883 people.

As Versailles grew, the ethnic clust[illegible] became [illegible] own cause for the clustering, drawing Vi[illegible]namese nat[illegible]wide to join family or to partake of the [illegible]munity's opp[illegible]tunities and resources. Environmental f[illegible]tors [illegible]so attract[illegible] new residents. One particular family learned of balmy V[illegible]rsailles from relatives already residing there, and soon relo[illegible]ted from their original settlement site in frig[illegible] Minnesota.[631] Other Vietnamese Americans, living unhappily in n[illegible]rthern climes but aware of Versailles and its nearby commercial fishing industry, gravitated to south[illegible]rn Louisiana a[illegible]d el[illegible]where along the Gulf Coast during the 1[illegible]80s and 1990s. (Today, Vietnamese Americans own rough[illegible]alf the region's offshore fishing vessels.) Since 1983, [illegible]least 413 peo[illegible]e of Asian descent—Vietnamese as well as fifty Cambodians, the largest concentration in the regio[illegible] have settled i[illegible] the lower Mississippi River communities of Buras, Empire, and Boothville, workin[illegible] mostly as i[illegible]dependent [illegible]rimpers. This Plaquemines Pa[illegible] community maintains clo[illegible]es with Versailles; its Cat[illegible]olic Church celebrates Mass in Vietnamese once a month.[632] Said one V[illegible]namese shri[illegible] about his adopted sou[illegible]astern Louisiana home,

> [illegible]t is like Vi[illegible]m, very much. You have the Missi[illegible]—like the Mekong, big river. And you have all the bayou[illegible]—exactly like Vietna[illegible] [illegible] you have thunderstorms in the afternoon, and mosquitoes. You have rice paddies and sugar cane.[633]

The Vi[illegible]na[illegible] experience in southeaster[illegible] Louisiana may be one of the [illegible]st local examples of envi[illegible]mental similarity as an ex[illegible]an[illegible]ion for the arrival and set[illegible]nt patterns of a parti[illegible]ular [illegible]nic group.

Tele[illegible]one books offer useful d[illegible] to track patterns of c[illegible]lt[illegible] indicators over time. Am[illegible]ng the Vietnamese, freq[illegible]y of the name *Nguyen*—accounting for about one-third of early Vietnamese refugees n[illegible]tio[illegible]wide—reflects trends in the arrival and distribution of this group. *Nguyen* is wh[illegible] Westerners would call a "first name," but because it co[illegible] second in the Vietnamese n[illegible]ming convention, it has bec[illegible] the *de facto* surname of tens of thousands of unrelated V[illegible]namese Americans. In [illegible], only one *Nguyen* app[illegible]d in the New Orleans tel[illegible]hone book; two years later, t[illegible]e were sixty-six. This figu[illegible]e to 149 in 1977; 256 in [illegible]978; 318 in 1979; and 751 in 1990. By 2002, *Nguyen* listing[illegible] in the telephone book n[illegible]bered 1,229. This corr[illegible]ate[illegible] with the rise of the [illegible]l Vietnamese population in the seven-parish area, fro[illegible] mere handful in 1975 to 14,363 according to the 2000 census. A perusal of *Nguyens'* addresses indicated a geographical clusterin[illegible] Versailles on the east bank and in the aforementioned [illegible]ts on the West Bank.[634]

Each Vietnam[illegible] "village" in greater New Orleans maintains its own ide[illegible]y and sense of place, and views itself as distinctive from the others. According to o[illegible] 1990 study, three major Vietnamese settlements in the [illegible]gion had acquired their [illegible]wn Vietnamese names: Ve[illegible]sailles was called *Hung Vuong Village* after the mythic dy[illegible]y of the mother country; Woodlawn was dubbed *Hung[illegible] Village* in honor of a m[illegible]tary hero, and the Avondale [illegible]mmunity in Harvey becam[illegible] *Tu Du Village*, meaning free[illegible]n.[635] While Alcée Fortier [illegible]oulevard in Versailles is the u[illegible]questioned c[illegible]mmercial/re[illegible]il epicenter of the regional [illegible]tnamese [illegible]pula[illegible]on, the West Bank boasts its own Viet[illegible]amese retail [illegible]luste[illegible] near the [illegible]umpf Boulevard intersecti[illegible] wi[illegible] the West B[illegible]k Expressway in Gretna. Here, th[illegible] Pho Tau Bay R[illegible]staurant, started around 1980 and named [illegible] popular Ho[illegible]hi Minh City restaurant chain, has attracted a numbe[illegible] o[illegible]her Vietnamese businesses, making that [illegible]rip mall the de[illegible]st cluster of Asian businesses on the We[illegible] Bank.[636]

The Vietn[illegible]ese Lan[illegible]cape at Vers[illegible]illes

Landsca[illegible]ording t[illegible] geographer Christopher Airriess, impli[illegible]e "commo[illegible]place visual elements of a co[illegible]munity that residents create to satisfy their needs, wants [illegible]d desires. [illegible] is "a visual [illegible]anifestation of the culture th[illegible]reated it, [which] can [illegible]e in[illegible]preted or read as a cultu[illegible] autobiog[illegible]phy."[637] On[illegible] equipped with this enlightene[illegible] perspective can one appre[illegible]a drive down raffish Ch[illegible] Menteur Highway.[638] The corridor stems from historic Gentilly Boule[illegible], which [illegible]ws the slightly elevated G[illegible]ntilly Ridge, the product o[illegible]mer channel of the Miss[illegible]ippi River and la[illegible]er the pa[illegible] of one of its distributaries. It [illegible]umes the enigmatic nam[illegible] *Chef Menteur*—"big liar," fo[illegible] re[illegible]ons explained only by l[illegible]gend—after the Peoples Avenue intersection, where Gentill[illegible]'s California bungalows and [illegible]eautiful canopy of live oa[illegible]ve way to a gritty, automobile-de[illegible]inated commercial scen[illegible]. Large boxy retailers, dating fr[illegible] the 1960s and 1970s a[illegible]d n[illegible]t without a certain [illegible]itschy appeal, offer domestic [illegible]ares to a mostly lower-middle-c[illegible]s populace. The section nea[illegible] the Interstate 10 overpass [illegible] something of a red-light district, lined with stripteas[illegible]ints, X-rated bookstores, and seedy motels. Past the i[illegible]terstate, Chef Menteur assumes a stature that an urban pl[illegible]ner may call "suburban" but a so-

[630] Compu[illegible]n 2000 US Census block data for th[illegible]eneral Versailles [illegible] area bordered by [illegible]I-510 overpass, the hurricane pro[illegible]ction levee, and [illegible]ilroad south of Chef Menteur Highway. See also Joan Trea[illegible]and Coleman [illegible], "East Meets West," *Times-Picayune*, August 6, [illegible]1-16.

[631] Zhou and Bankston, *Growing Up American*, [illegible]7-7[illegible].

[632] Coleman Warner, "Many Asians Drawn to [illegible]ty's Seafood in Waters of Lower Plaquemines Parish," *Times-Picayune*, August 6, [illegible], A1.

[633] Reena Shah, "A Touch of Vietnam on the Mississippi: Refugees Push to Succeed in Louisiana," *St. Petersburg Times*, December 25, 1988, 1A.

[634] Sandra Barbier, "Nguyen [illegible] Common Viet Name," *Times-Picayune*, March 20, 1980, section 2, p. 2; Sou[illegible]tel Bell (1990-1991), and BellSouth (2002-2003).

[635] Center for the Pacific Ri[illegible]versity of New Orleans, *The Asian Peoples of Southern Louisiana: An Ethn[illegible]y* (1990), 247-48.

[636] Joan Treadway, and [illegible]n Warner, "East Meets West," *Times-Picayune*, August 6, 2001, A1-7

[637] Airriess, "Creati[illegible]namese Landscapes and Place in New Orleans," 228.

[638] "The Chef's" [illegible]s *Highway* was recently changed to *Boulevard* as part of a well-intentioned [illegible] probably futile effort to improve the strip's image. Nearly everyone still [illegible] Chef Menteur Highway.

ciologist "inner city." The area seems to suffer the afflictions of both environments sans the blessings of either. Overgrown yards, outdated billboards, and weary 1960s-era commercial architecture commingle with Cyclone fencing, lots, hardscrabble businesses, and mundane 1970s-era residential architecture. A troubled subsidized-housing complex incongruously abuts a lush hardwood forest. Children amble dangerously close to speeding cars, as there are no sidewalks to speak of. Crime is a problem, and a general malaise hangs over the litter-strewn thoroughfare. It was not always this way: Chef Menteur Highway (part of the trans-coastal Highway 90) was once the main ingress and egress of New Orleans to all points east along the Gulf Coast. Viewed by real estate investors as a potential goldmine. The construction of Interstate 10 in the late 1960s, coupled with social and economic setbacks and the bankruptcy of the New Orleans East land development project, isolated "the Chef" from the city's principle flows of traffic, and set it on a gradual decline.

Predicaments aside, a reading of the cultural landscape discloses a deeper relevance belying the sense of placelessness a visitor can't help but feel. One notes the well-kept Sisters of the Holy Family campus, the St. Paul the Apostle Church and School, and St. Mary's Academy, all in close proximity: we are not just anywhere in the South, but along its Catholic coast. Ledge—black Catholicism, so fundamental to Creole ethnic identity. Across the street from Holy Family is the Henriette Delille Inn, named for the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Family's much admired co-foundress, complete with a portrait of the Creole nun. Nearby street names like *Chantilly*, *Almonaster*, and *Evangeline* evoke elements of the local past: we are not just anywhere near the Gulf Coast, but in coastal Louisiana. Near the Read Boulevard intersection is "Readeaux's Body Shop," and a few blocks away is the "Smokin' for Jesus Ministries" and "Tremé Massage Therapist," named for the historic Creole faubourg behind the French Quarter. Mom-and-pop restaurants lure passersby with announcements of boiled crawfish, fried seafood, and "overstuffed" po' boys. We are in New Orleans after all. These clues give way to forest, field, the Interstate 510 (Paris Road) overpass, and a similar physical landscape on the other side. But culturally, the landscape transforms into that of southeast Louisiana to that of southeast Asia. The first indicator is the conspicuous Van Hanh Buddhist Center, an exception in an exceptional place in that it is one of the few Buddhist elements in this otherwise exceedingly Catholic Vietnamese landscape. Retail and service businesses with Vietnamese names and messages start to appear, along with American and Vietnamese flags flying from twin flagpoles. Only the not the Communist yellow-star-on-red, but the bold banner of Free Vietnam— three red stripes on a field of gold, the same colors used for the sign of the Van Hanh Buddhist Center. We then reach the crowded commercial strip perpendicular to the north side of Chef Menteur Highway. It is Alcée Fortier Boulevard, the social and economic center of the region's Vietnamese universe. Though only five hundred feet long, the twin strip malls are crammed with Vietnamese-owned and operated businesses catering to every need of not only the local Vietnamese, but African Americans who also live in Versailles. Grocery stores, video and electronics retailers, medical and legal services, gift shops, bakeries, cafés, and restaurants compete for attention with verbose, colorful signs mostly in Vietnamese. Supermarkets carry imported foods and delicacies from Asia, from seaweed and bottled spices to canned seafoods, and usually offer local prepared bakery items as well as produce and meat. Vietnamese soap operas and variety shows play on ceiling-mounted television sets, and behind the counter stands the sort of religious shrine one might expect to see in a Latin market or home. This is "downtown" Versailles Village, and researchers one hundred years from now will look back upon this present day heyday with the same fascination that New Orleanians feel today for Chinatown, Little Palermo, Irish Channel, Faubourg Treme, Little Saxony, and other ethnic enclaves of the past.

Immediately beyond the Alcée Fortier business district is a sluggish inlet called Michoud Bayou, cluttered, clogged with invasive water hyacinths, and lined with disheveled squatters' camps, the waterway appears to be a squandered resource. It is not: Vietnamese residents cultivate the banks of this bayou with elaborate polycultural market-gardens, creating an agrarian landscape reminiscent of their former lifestyles and unique within the metropolitan area. Leafy greens, tubers, legumes, squashes, herbs, natural medicines, and fruits grow, intermixed and intricately layered, on lattices and chicken-wire fences, which line a network of foot paths demarcating parcels. The hyacinth-choked bayou adds to the display of exuberant tropical vegetation, and when a rooster crows not too far away, the sense of being in the Mekong Delta is palpable. Refugees from that region commenced gardening shortly after their arrival in 1975, using lawns and backyards in and around the Versailles Arms apartment complex and the Versailles Garden subdivision. Those plots in Versailles Arms met with the disapproval of management and were eventually relocated to an area behind the hurricane-protection levee near Bayou Pratt, which was cleared of forest through a 1981 agreement negotiated by charitable and government agencies. (This may be the last example of forest-clearing for agriculture on the east bank of New Orleans, a land-use transformation which first occurred locally in 1708 along Bayou St. John.) Backyard gardens along Michoud Bayou in Versailles Gardens were expanded into the public easement and right up to the water's edge. It is these projects that are most visible due to their proximity to the Alcee Fortier commercial district. Aerial photographs of both market-garden areas in Versailles show a patchwork quilt of plots, paths, lattices, shades, and other elements of traditional, low-technology market gardening. It is a cultural landscape that is not only transplanted from a different place, but a different time.

Ecological similarity, an agrarian heritage, and the difficulty of obtaining favorite Old World vegetables explains partially why the refugees have invested much time and energy into these verdant hanging gardens. More significantly, the cultivations—which are large enough and commercial enough to be considered market gardens rather than hobbies—are the handiwork of community elders. It is the older generation, uprooted from the homeland while well into adulthood, that struggles the most with adaptation to a new land and culture. Intensive gardening in the tradition of their ancestors allows community elders to recreate the senses of place, personal responsibility, dignity, and physical stamina remembered from their youth. Viewed in this manner, the horticultural landscape of Versailles is as much a poignant commentary on the plight and humanity of the refugee as it is an element of the East Asian landscape transplanted to similar environs in subtropical America.[639] Like many traditions brought over by refugees and immigrants to new environs, the market gardens of Versailles will probably disappear from the New Orleans landscape—and the cultural reservoir of the local Vietnamese—upon the passing of the elders. Versailles youth show about as much interest in maintaining these backbreaking traditions as an American teenager may feel about holding a quilting bee with her grandmother. It is fortuitous that the refugees had the opportunity to garden in the first place: had the Archdiocese of New Orleans not secured the semi-rural Versailles area for resettlement in 1975, instead locating them in a more urban environment, the tradition may never have taken root locally.

Geographers Christopher A. Airriess and David L. Clawson counted forty-three plants cultivated in the gardens of Versailles during their field research in the early 1990s. The more exotic cultivars included taro, water spinach, Malabar nightshade, tumeric, ginger, Vietnamese coriander, and Oriental melon. But there were also sweet potato, collard and mustard greens, and sugar cane, making a Louisianian feel right at home.[640] Some produce is consumed domestically; the rest is consigned to grocery stores on Alcée Fortier or to vendors who sell them to the public at the social and economic apex of the Versailles week: the Saturday morning outdoor market. There, starting at dawn and lasting until mid-morning, women vendors wearing traditional garb and conical sun hats crouch beside their vegetables, fruit, seafood, and other offerings laid out upon sheets. Sellers and buyers, who come from local and regional

[639] Christopher A. Airriess and David L. Clawson, "Vietnamese Market Gardens in New Orleans," *Geographical Review* 84 (January 1994): 19-20; and Airriess, "Creating Vietnamese Landscapes and Place in New Orleans," 240-43.

[640] Airriess and Clawson, "Vietnamese Market Gardens in New Orleans," 20-21.

Vietnamese refugees commenced gardening shortly after their arrival at Versailles in 1975. First in backyards, then along the bayou and fields, raising fruits, leafy greens, tubers, legumes, squashes, herbs, and natural medicines. The market-gardens are the handiwork of community elders, who, uprooted from their homeland, struggled with adaptation to a new land and culture. Intensive gardening in the tradition of their ancestors allows them to re-create the senses of place, personal responsibility, dignity, and physical stamina remembered from their youth. Versailles' horticultural landscape is thus as much a poignant commentary on the humanity of the refugee as it is an element of the East Asian landscape, transplanted to similar environs in subtropical America. *Photographs by author, 2003; analysis based on research by Airriess and Clawson.*

Vietnamese enclaves, engage not only in bu[illegible] and marketing but in socializing, recreating, and wor[illegible]ping at the nearby Catholic church, where a specially sc[illegible]duled Ma[illegible] is celebrated. The Saturday morning Asian [illegible]ket at Vers[illegible]les is one of the last genuine outdoor marke[illegible] in a city [illegible]e famous for them. It is one of the grea[illegible]ultural exp[illegible]nces of modern New Orleans.

What also strikes the visito[illegible] about Versailles' [illegible]rt cultural customs is the tiny vegetable ga[illegible]dens growi[illegible] in so many back yards, side yards, and front yards—and [illegible]t just around humble ranch houses. Many e[illegible]borate new [illegible]mansions along Willowbrook Drive, where [illegible]ntuary lions g[illegible] front doors and SUVs stand in driveways, still save [illegible]oom for carefully nurtured vegetables. St[illegible]k[illegible], too, is th[illegible] pr[illegible]valence of fences throughout Versail[illegible]s G[illegible]dens and Villag[illegible]e l'Est. Perhaps it is "keeping up with[illegible] Nguyens"; perhaps it is a response to the threat of c[illegible]e; or perhap[illegible] it [illegible] a carry-over of Old World customs. The enclosures bri[illegible]g to mind the palisades that once su[illegible]rounded their a[illegible]cestors' self-sufficient hamlet[illegible] in Vietnam; that vegetable[illegible] are [illegible]ultivated intensively with[illegible] the fenced [illegible]rds makes [illegible]e pa[illegible]llel that much more intri[illegible]ing. Versailles fences con[illegible] a wide variety: simpler ab[illegible]des have Cyclone fences; fancier ones have prefabricated iron ones w[illegible] g[illegible]ometric c[illegible]s, painted white or beige [illegible] black. Fishi[illegible] boats rigged [illegible]h nets are parked within so[illegible]e fenced co[illegible]rtyards, illust[illegible]ing the community's ties wit[illegible]h the coastal f[illegible]hing and shrim[illegible]ping economy. Many front y[illegible]ds [illegible]so have flagpoles in the [illegible]h[illegible]pe of ship masts, from which flutter both the Free Viet[illegible]m flag and Old Glory, and s[illegible]rines to the Virgin Mary, Jesus, a saint, or sometimes an en[illegible]e permanent nativity sc[illegible]ne, rendered in concrete at [illegible]e si[illegible]e. Fences, religious ic[illegible]ns, flags, horticulture: the [illegible]nse[illegible] ethnic place established in Catholic Vietnamese ga[illegible]en[illegible]s not unlike those se[illegible] in Latin American immigrant [illegible]o[illegible]unities in Texas and [illegible]e[illegible]er country.

[illegible]atholicism at Versailles is [illegible]acticed devoutly and ex[illegible]pressed outwardly, salient in [illegible]e landscape even against a [illegible]ckdrop of Catholic south Louisiana. The community fo[illegible]cal point is Mary Queen of Vietnam Church, a temporary structure on a compo[illegible]d that also features an outdoor stage and ancillary buildi[illegible]. Bulletin boards inside post architects' designs for a new p[illegible]manent house of worship, an impressive edifice with two [illegible]oda-like towers bearing a faint resemblance to St. Lo[illegible]is C[illegible]athedral before its 1850 [illegible]construction. All these elem[illegible]nts render the Versailles cultu[illegible]l landscape as Catholic as [illegible]y place in rural Acadiana. O[illegible]ven occasionally spots tree trunks pained white, a t[illegible]dition usually explained [illegible]a way to keep insects off tr[illegible] but possibly with deeper [illegible]ltural and religious significan[illegible]e (s[illegible]e below). One set of tre[illegible] near Mary Queen of Vietn[illegible] Church is painted in the [illegible]me white and pastel-blue co[illegible]sed for V[illegible]n Mary st[illegible]ues. The toponyms of Versa[illegible]s too, m[illegible] the [illegible]ultures: [illegible]a[illegible] Drive. St. Helena Place. My Viet D[illegible]ive. [illegible]and Bay-[illegible]Drive. Vanchu Drive. [illegible]it Bayou Lane. Bu[illegible] the elderly women wearing sandals, loose linen pant[illegible], and traditional Vietnamese conical hats s[illegible]d securely u[illegible]er the chin remind outsiders that this is still very mu[illegible] a place apart.

Since the first refug[illegible]es arrived in 19[illegible], the Vietnamese in the general Versai[illegible]s area have d[illegible] westward through three sections, form[illegible]g a triangle. A[illegible] the easternmost corner stands the s[illegible]dized Versa[illegible]es Arms apartment complex, original ho[illegible] of the first w[illegible]s of Vietnamese. As the community's e[illegible]omic prosp[illegible]ose, most residents moved out of Ve[illegible]es Arms and [illegible]ward into Versailles Garde[illegible]s, a subdivision o[illegible] modest ra[illegible] houses on standard suburban lots. V[illegible]ailles Arms tod[illegible] mostly poor and black, an[illegible] the dividing li[illegible] between th[illegible]ersailles Gardens and V[illegible]sailles Arms is [illegible]arked n[illegible] only in the racial geography but in the landsc[illegible] as well. [illegible]hin fence runs between th[illegible] districts, and Saigon Drive actually reverses directions at th[illegible] Rubi-[illegible] jarring [illegible]rise to a motorist even with the WRONG WA[illegible] signs. [illegible]e Vietnamese homeowner liv[illegible]g [illegible] the fence [illegible]e oriented his front-lawn Virgin Mary statue to appeal directly to the c[illegible]mmunity across the way. V[illegible]sailles Gardens is mostly, [illegible] not entirely, working-class Vietnamese, and the housing stock and neighborhood infrastructure resemble



Catholicism at Versailles is practic[illegible] d[illegible]ly and expressed outwardly, salient in the lands[illegible]ape even against the backdrop of Catholic south Louisiana. Statues of the Vir[illegible] M[illegible]y, Jesus, and nativity scenes are common [illegible]t yards, and religious shrines stand behind the counters of many stores. From flagpoles fly the American flag and the banner o[illegible] Fr[illegible] Vietnam: three red stripes on a field of gold (background of photograph at left). *Photographs by author, 2003.*



The religious hearth of Versailles is Mary Queen of Vietnam Catholic Church, since replaced by a more elaborate permanent edifice. Vietnamese residences in this area since 1975 have drifted westward through three subdivisions, first in Versailles Arms, later Versailles Gardens, and then into prosperous Village de l'Est. The community's religious infrastructure traces this westward movement: the first place of worship, Church of the Vietnamese Martyrs (1978), abuts Versailles Arms, while Mary Queen of Vietnam (1986) is located a half-mile to the west. Buddhist Vietnamese immigrants have also settled in Versailles, and recently built the Van Hanh Buddhist Center on Chef Menteur Highway (right). *Photographs by author, 2003.*

white neighborhoods of the same class in Chalmette or Kenner. Continuing westward to the other side of the bayou is Village de l'Est, the most prosperous of the three sections. This subdivision resembles Versailles Gardens, but parts of it, particularly Willowbrook Drive, are opulent in the manner often seen among immigrants indulging in their hard-earned success for the first time. With increased prosperity, then, the Vietnamese community since 1975 has gradually relocated and spread westward from its original Versailles Arms hearth. The community's religious infrastructure marks this westward path: the first place of worship, Church of the Vietnamese Martyrs, built in 1978, abuts Versailles Arms, while the later and much larger May Queen of Vietnam, built in 1986, is located a half-mile to the west, between Versailles Gardens and Village de l'Est. There is "little movement of residents out of the Versailles Village 'ghetto,' but the ethnic cohesiveness of this community appears quite stable now and into the foreseeable future. "We can think of Versailles as a cultural island," commented Christopher Airriess. "Being surrounded on three sides by swamp, canals, or bayous affords Versailles residents a degree of cultural isolation" from the rest of New Orleans, making them "the only community based upon a shared religious economy, and most important, a common historical experience...."[641]

The Versailles landscape fuses Vietnamese, American, and Francophone elements. A French colonial legacy is shared by both Vietnam and Louisiana. *Photograph by author, 2003.*

The Vietnamese Experience in New Orleans Ethnic Geography

The recent arrival, the intensive clustering and isolation of its enclave, the role of cultural and environmental similarity, and the uniqueness of the cultural landscape all serve to distinguish the Vietnamese experience from those of the city's earlier groups. The distinction may be traced in part to the Vietnamese status not as immigrants but as political and religious refugees. Immigration is voluntary; seeking asylum from violent oppression is anything but voluntary. Immigrants generally choose the destination, timing, and nature of their voyage; refugees are uprooted with little preparation and released into an unwelcoming world at the mercy of larg-

[641] Airriess, "Creating Vietnamese Landscapes and Place in New Orleans," 236.

Versailles Arms today is mostly poor and black, while Versailles Gardens and Village de l'Est are better-off economically and mostly Vietnamese. A high fence separates the two areas; Saigon Drive even reverses directions at the line (right; note WRONG WAY sign). One homeowner living at the fence line oriented his front-lawn Virgin Mary statue (left) to appeal directly to the community across the way. *Photograph by author, 2003.*

One of the most outstanding Vietnamese cityscape elements—the pagoda-like spire to Our Lady of La Vang adjacent to a church of the same name—is located not in Versailles but on Robert E. Lee Boulevard near Elysian Fields Avenue. The common thread of Catholicism connected a few hundred Vietnamese refugees with New Orleans a generation ago. Today, over 15,000 Vietnamese Americans call the city home. *Photograph by author, 2004.*

r forces. Immigrants traditionally assimilate and integrate faster with the host society; refugees tend to maintain old ways and cluster longer, for safety and security. Immigrants are often eager to part with Old World ways—they left, after all, willingly—whereas refugees often long for their homeland and try to replicate their cultural traditions. "Possessing a stronger spiritual attachment to their home country," notes Ainless, "refugees thus produce a landscape...evoking 'attachment to place' associated with the almost total loss of identity once leaving their homeland."[642] Much of the relocation of human beings in the modern world is motivated by the seeking of refuge from political oppression, influencing the ethnic geographies of cities and countries worldwide. The Vietnamese made New Orleans one of those affected cities.

The Vietnamese are also distinguished by their settlement in the classic suburban periphery of the metropolis. Observed nationwide, this recent trend of immigrants settling in suburbia contrasts markedly from the pattern of a century ago, in which immigrants settled outside the inner commercial core, and charter groups moved outward toward the suburban periphery. The next chapter, "An Ethnic Geography of New Orleans," puts the Vietnamese experience in this larger context. It will become clear that an understanding of New Orleans' historical ethnic geography is incomplete without consideration of the Versailles Vietnamese of Chef Menteur Highway.

Aside: On the Whitewashing of Tree Trunks

Ordinary street scenes and landscapes can serve as Rosetta Stones of culture and history. Consider, for example, the tradition of whitewashing the lower portions of tree trunks, seen throughout New Orleans and the Gulf Coast region. Little scholarly research has been conducted on this peculiar custom, but personal (unscientific) observations throughout the Americas suggest three hypotheses. Asked Louisianians why they do it and most will offer a pragmatic environmental reason: to keep potentially harmful bugs off the tree. And this may well be true, especially if lime-based whitewash (toxic to insects) is used. Others see the painting as protection against sun scald and wintertime freeze/thaw cycles. When telephone poles and lamp posts are given the same treatment, public safety (marking of traffic obstacles) probably explains the phenomenon. But there may also be a deeper significance here. Throughout Latin America whitewashed tree trunks are seen in *plazas centrales*, along grand avenues, in schoolyards, and in courtyards. Asked about the tradition, many Latinos will explain that it gives a clean, manicured, *bonito* appearance to vegetation that, if left unchecked, could become overgrown, unruly, and *feo*. French geographer Elisée Reclus seemed to prescribe to this aesthetic explanation in his 1855 critique of New Orleans society:

> Under the pretext of art, rich individuals confine themselves to whitewashing the trees in their gardens. This luxury has the double advantage of being pleasing to their sight and of costing very little.[643]

Whitewashing tree trunks may represent a controlling of nature, a taming of its ragged and potentially threatening edge. It may be a product of the same cultural instinct that makes Americans spend untold hours and countless dollars curbing grass and trimming hedges. Yet unlike mowed lawns, whitewashed tree trunks are not evenly distributed throughout the United States. They are rare in the northern and central parts of the country, but common in certain neighborhoods in the urban Northeast and the border country from Texas to California, in southern Florida, and in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast. They are also typical of societies of the Mediterranean region and other parts of Europe and Russia. The tradition may be a Mediterranean-region aesthetic trait which diffused primarily into areas colonized by France and Spain, and, later, into areas where immigrants from the Mediterranean region settled. This may explain why whitewashed tree trunks are found throughout the Latin world,

[642] Ibid., 229.

[643] Elisée Reclus, "An Anarchist in the Old South: Elisée Reclus' Voyage to New Orleans, Part II," trans. Camille Martin and John Clark, *Mesechabe: The Journal of Surre(gion)alism* 2 (Winter 1993-1994): 22.

What explains the whitewashing of tree trunks in south Louisiana? These examples in Shell (top left), on the River Road (top right), on Esplanade Avenue around 1900 and elsewhere in New Orleans in 2003 and 2004, may simply reflect attempts to thwart insect infestations or to mark traffic obstacles. But the example on North Carrollton Avenue (middle right) and in the Vietnamese neighborhood of Versailles (bottom) suggest a deeper cultural significance. Note the shrine-like appearance of the North Carrollton example, and the pastel-blue-and-white colors used for both the trees and Virgin Mary statues. *Photographs by author, 2003-2004; historical photograph from Library of Congress.*

in both cool, dry mountain environments and hot, moist, coastal environments, but less so in the Anglo world, regardless of environment. They are also found in many tropical East Asian societies.

Which brings us to the Vietnamese neighborhood of Versailles in eastern New Orleans, where whitewashed tree trunks also appear. Did these Catholic East Asian peoples adopt the tradition recently from their Louisiana neighbors, or did they pick it up long ago from French colonizers and bring it here when they immigrated to the Catholic world of southern Louisiana, which also happened to have a French heritage? Or did they develop it independently for pragmatic environmental reasons? Note in the accompanying photograph that the Vietnamese trees are painted the same pastel-blue-and-white colors used for Virgin Mary statues. Is this to deter insects or marking traffic obstacles? Not likely, or at least not entirely, as evidenced further by the example on North Carrollton Avenue, which incorporates a whitewashed tree trunk into a religious shrine.

In this seemingly mundane landscape feature, we may be seeing a centuries-old tradition that informs on topics ranging from European colonization and immigration, to the spatial extent of the Latin and Anglo worlds, to religion and public religious expression, to the relationship between people and nature. Mapping this phenomenon would add to understanding of the cultural geography of the United States. And it might well place New Orleans—Versailles and all—in the heart of America's Latin southern tier.

Epilogue: Two to seven feet of filthy brackish water inundated Versailles in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, swamping houses, destroying gardens, and stranding hundreds of residents at Mary Queen of Vietnam Catholic Church. Storm surge in the Intracoastal Waterway and MR-GO, coupled with the area's low elevation and geographical isolation, put Versailles in a particularly bad position for the catastrophe. Like thousands of former political refugees evacuated from their thirty-year place of refuge, the future of Versailles at first appeared in question. But later in the autumn of 2005, community and determination to rebuild made Versailles the only bright spot in the dismal destroyed east. "Before Katrina, when we said homeland, we mean Vietnam," the Rev. Nguyen Van Men of Mary Queen of Vietnam told the Times-Picayune in October '22. "Now when my people say homeland now, they mean New Orleans. It's a radical shift in the people's mentality. It's a very pervasive sense." Still, we may see a Vietnamese population shift from Versailles to the West Bank, particularly with the opening of a major new Asian Market complex on Behrman Highway a month before Katrina. It remains to be seen whether community elders will replant their famous hanging gardens, once a relic of their lives in Vietnam, now possibly a relic of their lives in pre-Katrina Versailles.

An Ethnic Geography of New Orleans

People do not distribute themselves randomly across the cityscape. They gravitate toward areas that, first and foremost, are available to them, and locations that are perceived to maximize their chances of success in terms of housing, employment, services, amenities, convenience, and existing social networks), while minimizing costs and obstacles (such as price, distance, crime, discrimination, noise, and environmental nuisances). The resultant spatial patterns, which range from intensely clustered to thoroughly dispersed, are complex and dynamic varying by group, place, and time. The ethnic patterns analyzed in this book together limn three major eras in New Orleans' historical ethnic geography, starting with the antebellum era, when American migration and foreign immigration rendered post-colonial New Orleans arguably the nation's most diverse city in America.

Antebellum Ethnic Geographies

Prior to industrialization, prosperous members of charter groups usually resided in the inner city, with domestic servants and slaves living in adjacent quarters, and middle- and working-class families residing in a ring of adjacent neighborhoods. Indigents, among them immigrants, tended to settle at the city's ragged outskirts or waterfronts. The pattern is an ancient one—"in many medieval cities in Europe, the city centres were inhabited by the well-to-do, while the outer districts were the areas for the poorer elements of the population"[644]—and it carried over to most colonial cities in the New World. The force behind the pattern was the lack of mechanized transportation, which made inner-city living a convenient and expensive luxury. In antebellum New Orleans, charter groups mostly comprised the upper classes of French Creole, *Français de France*, and Anglo American society, who tended to live in townhouses in the French Quarter and the Faubourg St. Mary. Observed Elisée Reclus in 1853, the oldest district of New Orleans, the one usually called the French Quarter, *is still the most elegant of the city*," where houses had been "mostly purchased by American capitalists."[645] Encircling this original desirable commercial/residential inner core was an annulus of middle- and working-class faubourgs. Further out, along the wharves, canals, backswamp, and upper and lower fringes of the city, was a periphery of muddy, low-density village-like developments—shantytowns in some places—to which gravitated the unestablished and the poor. During the first great wave of immigration to New Orleans (the 1830s to 1850s, corresponding to national trends), laborer families mostly from Ireland and Germany and [illegible] the thousands and settled throughout this semi-rural periphery. They predominated in the riverside upper fringe (upper Faubourg St. Mary and into Lafayette), the backswamp around the turning basins of the New Basin and Old Basin canals, and the lower faubourgs (the "Poor Third" Municipality). Also living here, particularly along the backswamp, were freed blacks[646] and others too poor to afford residency in the city proper. While these periphery denizens congregated more in certain areas and less in others, rarely did they cluster intensely, and while they generally avoided the inner city, rarely were they wholly absent from any particular area. Dispersion, not intensive clustering, was the rule for immigrants in antebellum New Orleans. While low-skill employment in this era—dock work, flatboat, wharf jobs, warehousing, cotton, sugarhouse and tannery work, public-works projects, canal excavation, railroad construction—lay scattered throughout the outer fringe, rather than in the offices and shops of the exclusive inner core, wherever were assigned these grueling and dangerous hard-labor tasks, not because they yielded higher profit on sugar plantations, a niche opened for poor unskilled immigrants. Between the 1830s and 1840s, white immigrants mainly from Ireland and Germany took the majority of the hard labor, dock worker, drayman, cabman, domestic, and hotel servant jobs from blacks (both free and enslaved). While some jobs were downtown, the lion's share of hard-labor jobs were on the outskirts. Antebellum immigrants thus dispersed throughout the outskirts for the employment opportunities and for the cheap, low-density, cottage-scale housing, which also afforded open lots for tiny

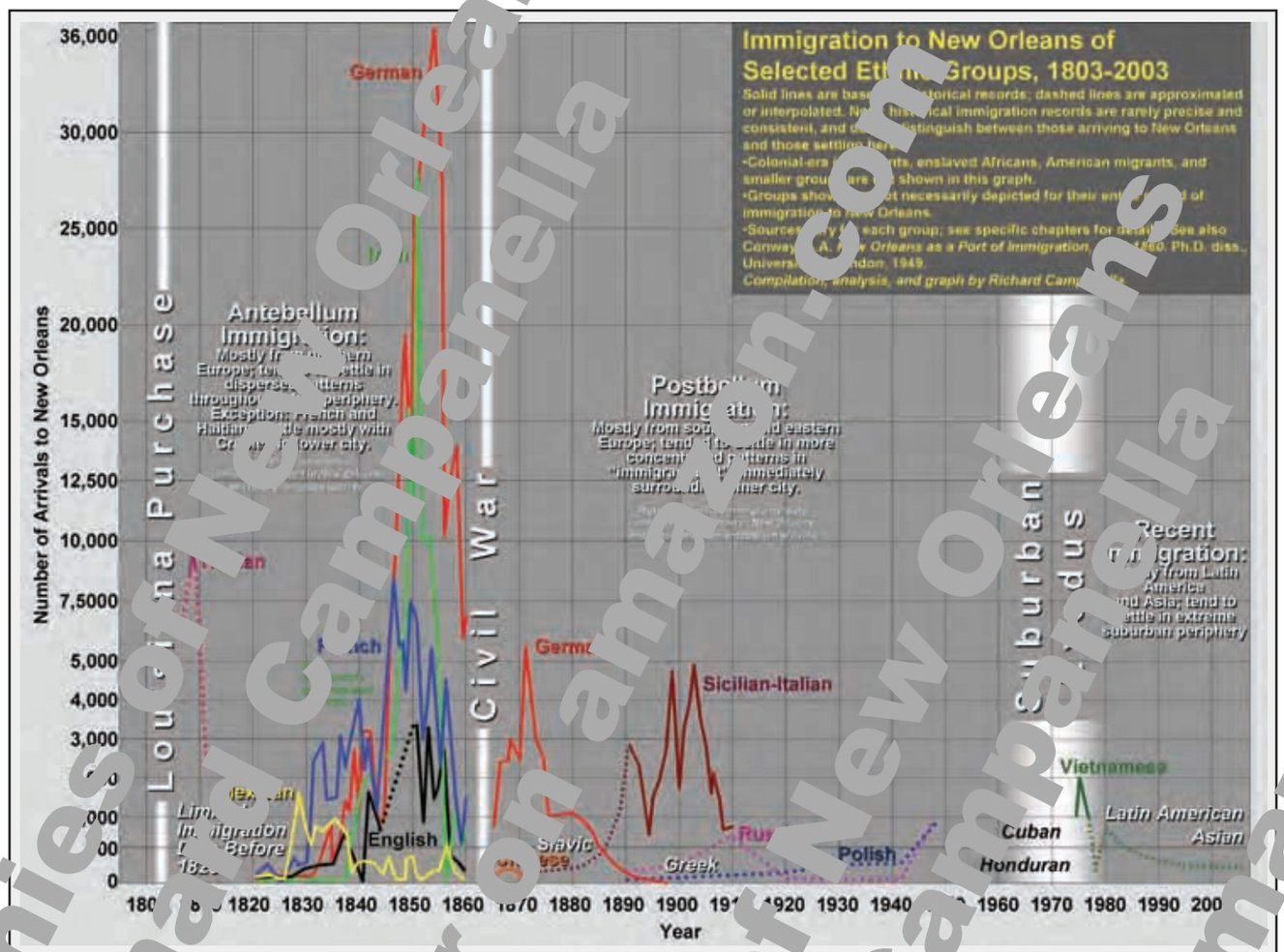
[644] Ronald Van Kempen and A. Sule Özüekren, "Ethnic Segregation in Cities: New Forms and Explanations in a Dynamic World," *Urban Studies* 35 (1998): 1631.

[645] Elisée Reclus, "An Anarchist in the Old South: Elizée Reclus' Voyage to New Orleans, Part II," trans. Camille Martin and John Clark, *Mesechabé: The Journal of Surrg(gion)alism* 12 (Winter 1993-1994); 20 (emphasis added).

[646] Not to be confused with the free people of color, who formed a special caste in New Orleans.

[647] Sir Charles Lyell, *A Second Visit to the United States of North America*, 2 vols. (London, 1850), 2:160-61.

The antebellum ethnic geography of uptown remains written in brick today. The former St. Alphonsus Catholic Church (left), attended by Irish immigrants, sits across Constance Street from still-active St. Mary's Assumption, built for German immigrants. The proximity of the two Redemptorist churches, both dating from the late 1850s, reflects the similar settlement patterns of these two largest immigration groups of antebellum times. The third largest group, Foreign French, worshipped in nearby Notre Dame de Bonsecours, also built by the Redemptorists in the 1850s. *Photograph by author, 2004.*



This graph tracks immigration trends of selected ethnic groups to New Orleans during the past two hundred years. Different residential-settlement geographies are associated with three discrete historical immigration eras: (1) the antebellum, particularly 1820s-1850s, when immigration was highest; (2) the postbellum, particularly around the turn-of-the-century; and (3) during and after the suburban exodus, when sizable numbers of Latino and East Asian immigrants arrived to the metropolis. *Graph and analysis by author based on numerous sources.*

"truck farming" operations, a favorite extra-income activity particularly among Germans. They avoided the inner city for its lack of unskilled-labor employment, its high real estate prices and crowding, and because mechanized transportation (early horse-drawn streetcars) for commuting was limited and costly. Better-off Irish and Germans, who likely arrived earlier (such as the "lace-curtain" Irish establishment of the Julia Street area), worked in downtown-based professions and lived in costly downtown dwellings, generally keeping in with the charter elites and rarely rubbing shoulders with poorer Irish and German immigrants. The ethnic geography of antebellum New Orleans, then, comprised:

- a commercial nucleus around the upper Royal and Chartres intersections with Canal Street;
- a mostly Creole and Francophone culture population below the commercial nucleus, local nativity, Latin culture; Catholic in faith, French in tongue, and white or mixed in race;
- a mostly Anglo-culture population living above the commercial nucleus, born in the North or the northern South, Protestant (and in lesser part Jewish) in faith, English in tongue, and white in race;
- elite residential living (townhouses) in the inner cores of both the Creole and Anglo sections;
- slaves and domestic servants residing in close proximity to wealthier residents of both the Creole and Anglo sections, often in quarters appended to townhouses;
- a widespread dispersion of Irish and German immigrants throughout the periphery and waterfronts of the city, particularly Lafayette and the Third District, with very few living in the inner city;
- smaller numbers of southern European and Caribbean immigrants, particularly French, Italians, and Haitians, settled in the Creole area for its language, culture, and Catholic environment;
- a poor free black (manumitted slave) population along the backswamp edge.

The antebellum dispersion pattern explains why, to this day, the location of the Irish Channel remains a hotly debated subject, and why no one particular neighborhood claims a German sense of historical place. (It's hard to pin down the

exact location of something that was never [illegible] down to an exact location.) The antebellum clustering of the wealthy in the inner city is also evident today: elegant townhouses outnumber humble cottages in the French Quarter, while the reverse is true in the adjacent faubourgs of Marigny and Tremé. Racially, one of the most fascinating spatial patterns of antebellum times was the numerical predominance of free people of color over slaves in the Creole lower city and the exact reversal of this ratio in the Anglo upper city. This trend reflects the Creoles' adherence to a Caribbean-influenced three-tier (white, free people of color, and enslaved black) racial caste system, versus the Anglos' recognition of a strict white/black dichotomy. To this day, the descendents of the free people of color (who may be thought of as "Franco-African Americans") generally remain downtown, particularly in the Seventh Ward, while "Anglo African Americans" predominate uptown, mainly in Central City.

Turn-of-the-Century Ethnic Geographies

The millions of southern and eastern Europeans who arrived in the United States (and the thousands who came to New Orleans) during the second great wave of immigration, 1880s to 1920s, encountered a rapidly transforming urban landscape. By this time, industrialization, the installation of urban streetcar networks, and the rise of centralized, high-rise business districts triggered two important new trends. First, in New Orleans, the gentry moved out of the inner city and resettled in "garden" suburbs, particularly St. Charles Avenue, uptown, Esplanade Avenue, and the City Park area. In some cases, wealthy families moved out of their opulent townhouses because they lost their fortunes to the Civil War or stumbled economically in its aftermath; in other cases, they simply moved away from new nuisances and toward new amenities. Unsightly and smelly breweries, warehouses, and sugar refineries arose in the French Quarter in this era, a block or two from once-elegant mansions. Faubourg St. Mary began to look less like a faubourg and more like a downtown. City living lost its appeal. With convenient streetcar lines affording rapid access to professional jobs in downtown offices, why not move to a spacious new Victorian home in a leafy suburban park? This exodus, which can be traced back to between the 1830s and 1850s but was mostly a postbellum trend, opened up scores of spacious inner-city townhouses as potential apartment housing for working-class people. As recently as 1939, fully 78 percent of the city's antebellum-era dwelling units were occupied by tenants rather than owners, and most of these units were located in or near the inner city.[648]

Second, employment opportunities for the unskilled poor moved from the semi-rural periphery, where they were in the agrarian days before the war, to the urban core, where post-war industrialization and modernization created new opportunities. Labor-intensive jobs disappeared from the periphery because those very lands were being developed into the garden suburbs for the relocating upper class, and because much of the needed infrastructure (canals and roads) was already in place. Whereas an 1830s Irish laborer may have been drawn to the backswamp to dig a canal, an 1840s German worker to unload flatboats on the Lafayette wharves, a Sicilian, Russian, Polish, or Chinese immigrant in the 1890s gravitated downtown to market housewives, peddle fruit, prepare food, or sell notions. Newly arrived immigrants not only had new reasons to settle close to downtown, but availability of affordable apartment to rent there as well. Thus, unlike their predecessors, immigrants of the late nineteenth century eschewed the semi-rural periphery, favoring instead to live not in the absolute commercial heart of the city (which was simply non-residential) *but in a concentric zone of neighborhoods immediately beyond the inner core*. This "immigrant belt" offered enough amenities (proximity, convenience, housing) to make life easier for impoverished newcomers, but suffered enough nuisances (overcrowded conditions, decaying old building, noise, vice, crime) to keep the rent affordable. It offered to poor immigrants a place to work, a nearby and affordable abode in which to live, and (after an enclave developed) a social support haven, including religious and cultural institutions. The immigrant belt ran loosely from the lower French Quarter and Faubourg Marigny, through the Faubourg Tremé and into the Third Ward back-of-town, around the Dryades Street area, through the Lee Circle area and toward the riverfront in what is now called the Irish Channel. In this amorphous and fascinating swath, immigrants and their descendents clustered in a fairly intense manner almost into the mid-twentieth century, such that their enclaves earned

This circa-1910s aerial photograph captures the belt around the CBD where immigrants, in the late 1800s and early 1900s, settled in large numbers. *Southeastern Architectural Archive, Special Collections, Howard-Tilton Library, Tulane University.*

[648] In 1939, there were 5,941 dwelling units within the 2,204 surviving pre-1860 buildings, of which 4,605 were rented to tenants. William Carter, *A Report on Survey of Metropolitan New Orleans Land Use, Real Property, and Low Income Housing Area* (New Orleans, 1941), 36 and 52.

popular monikers ("Little Palermo," "Chinatown") or strong people-place associations, such as "the Orthodox Jews of the Dryades Street neighborhood."

The postbellum era also saw the migration of thousands of emancipated slaves into the city from nearby plantations. Destitute and excluded both *de facto* and *de jure*, their settlement patterns were driven in large part by the topography of environmental nuisances. Flooding, mosquitoes, swamp "miasmas," noisy railroads, smelly wharves, canals, unsightly warehouses, industrial buildings, odd-shaped lots, pollution, lack of city services, inconvenience: nuisances such as these drove down real estate prices and thus formed the lands of last resort for those at the bottom rung. The natural and built environment of New Orleans dictated that most nuisances were located at the two lateral fringes of the metropolitan area: the immediate riverfront and the backswamp edge. Poor African Americans, most of whom were culturally "Anglo" rather than Creole, clustered in these troubled areas, particularly the back-of-town, while others settled in the nuclei of "superblocks," living within walking distance of their domestic employment jobs in uptown mansions. Creoles, particularly Creoles of Color, remained in their historical location in the lower city, and migrated lakeward as drainage technology opened up the backswamps of the Seventh Ward and adjacent areas. Other sections of the new lakefront subdivisions laid out in the early twentieth century explicitly excluded black residency through racist deed covenants. By that time, wealthier whites resided in the convenient low-nuisance swath sandwiched between the riverfront and the backswamp (particularly uptown, along the St. Charles Magazine corridor), and in the new lakeside neighborhoods, while working-class whites intermixed throughout the city, especially in downtown wards.

The following are some observations on the "immigrant belt" era in New Orleans, starting after the Civil War and ending to around World War II:

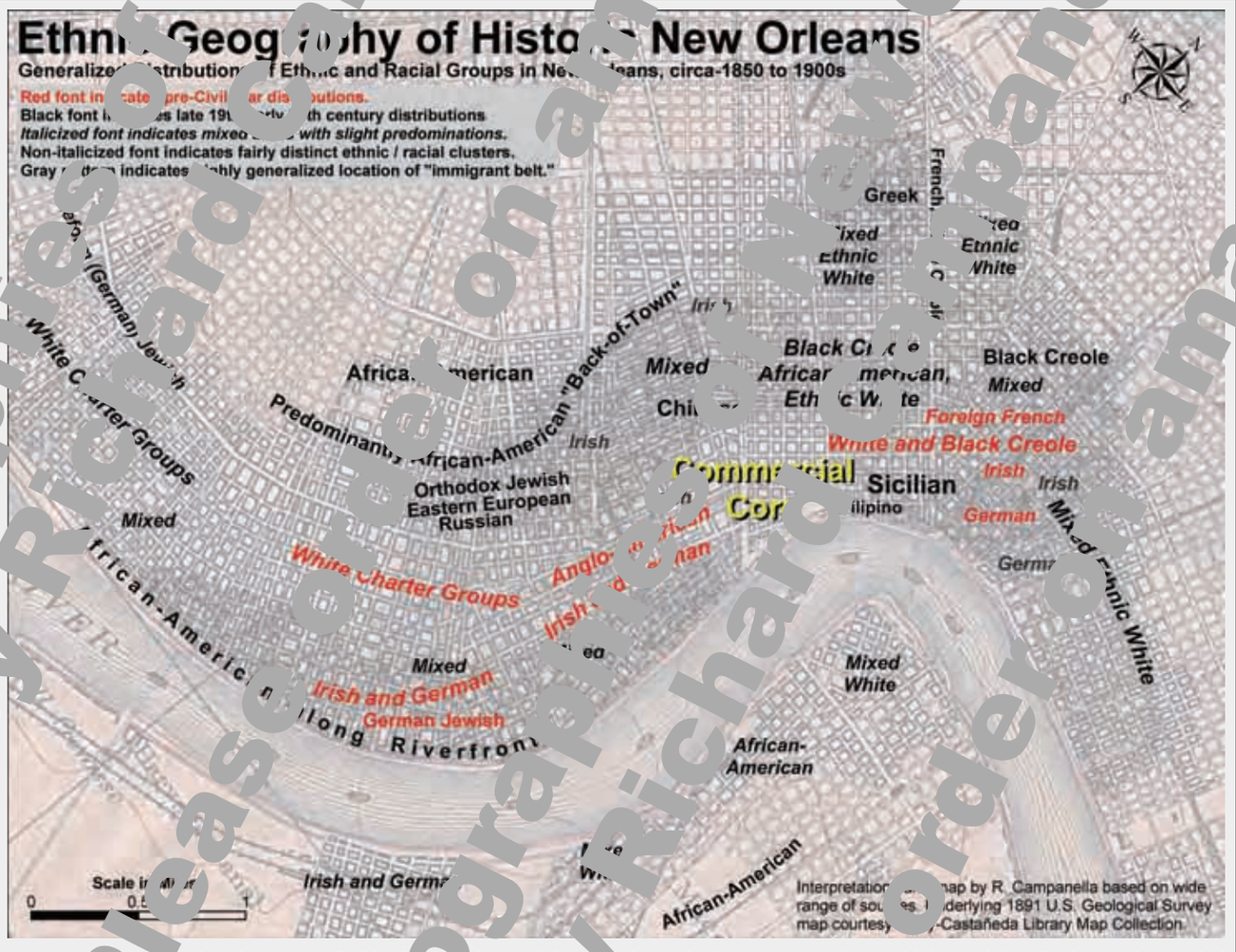
Not Unique — New Orleans prides itself on its uniqueness, sometimes to the point of extolling particularities where none exist. In fact, the Crescent City's ethnic distributions mimic those observed in other American cities, from antebellum times to today. The expression of immigrant enclaves,

This map illustrates how various levels of "risk costs" (risks such as floods and mosquito-infested swamps; nuisances such as smelly wharves, noisy railroads, muddy streets, and industry; conveniences like proximity to streetcars and commercial districts) were distributed across the cityscape. The patterns affected property values, which in turn affected residential distributions, in terms of class, race, and ethnicity. *Map and interpretation by author based on topographic and other inputs.*

wrote one social geographer, "takes the form of a concentric zone of ethnic neighbourhoods which has spread from an initial cluster to encircle the CBD."[649] In *Cities and Immigrants: A Geography of Change in Nineteenth Century America* David Ward comments that researchers are "generally able to agree that most immigrants congregated on the edge of the central business district, which provided the largest and most diverse source of unskilled employment."[650] The concentric-ring phenomenon is standard material in urban-geography literature, where it appears diagrammatically as Ernest W. Burgess' classic "Concentric Zone Model," part of the so-called "Chicago School of Urban Sociology," which first viewed cities as social ecosystems in the 1920s. According to Burgess' model, a theoretical city's central business district was surrounded first by a "zone in transition," then a "zone of workingmen's homes," a "residential zone," and finally a "commuters' zone." In that transitional zone could be found "deterioration, rooming house districts" and "slums," populated by "immigrant colonies" such as "Little Sicily, Greektown, Chinatown—fascinatingly combining old world heritages and American adaptations." In the zone of workingmen's homes, Burgess predicted Germans, German Jews, and other second-generation immigrants would settle, and in the residential and commuter zones, he found restricted residential districts and bungalow suburbs. Burgess had Chicago in mind when he devised his Concentric Zone Model, but to a remarkable degree, he could have been describing circa-1900 New Orleans. Little Palermo, Chinatown, the Greek area and the Orthodox Jewish neighborhood all fell within Burgess' transitional zone (which I am calling the "immigrant belt"). Germans, German Jews, Irish, and other earlier im-

[649] Paul Knox, *Urban Social Geography: An Introduction* (Essex, England and New York, 1987), 256.

[650] David Ward, *Cities and Immigrants: A Geography of Change in Nineteenth Century America* (New York, London, Toronto, 1971), 96.



In antebellum times, immigrants settled in the periphery of the CBD drawn by low-cost housing and laborer jobs. The inner city tended to be wealthier, with Catholics of Creole and German culture generally settling downtown, and Protestants of Anglo culture gravitating uptown. After the Civil War, the wealthy migrated the inner city for new "streetcar suburbs" just as the second wave of immigrants arrived. Unlike their antebellum predecessors, the new immigrants gravitated to a concentric zone immediately outside the CBD. This "immigrant belt," depicted here in shaded pattern, offered enough advantages (proximity, convenience, quality housing) to make life easier, but suffered enough nuisances (crowding, decay, noise, vice, crime) to keep the rent affordable. Areas where advantages outweighed nuisances (such as the land halfway between the riverfront and back-of-town) tended to be settled by better-off white charter groups; areas where nuisances outweighed advantages (such as the immediate riverfront and back-of-town) were more likely to be settled by poor African Americans. *Map and analysis by author based on numerous sources.*

migrants and their descendents settled in the Back of the Kingmen's zone (former Lafayette, the Third District, and other areas of the old semi-rural periphery). And Burgess's restricted residential zone and commuter zones describe the leafy garden suburbs (often called "trolley suburbs" in other cities) for the developmental role played by streetcars) of upton Esplanade Avenue, Lakeview, and Carrollton—right down to the bungalows.[651]

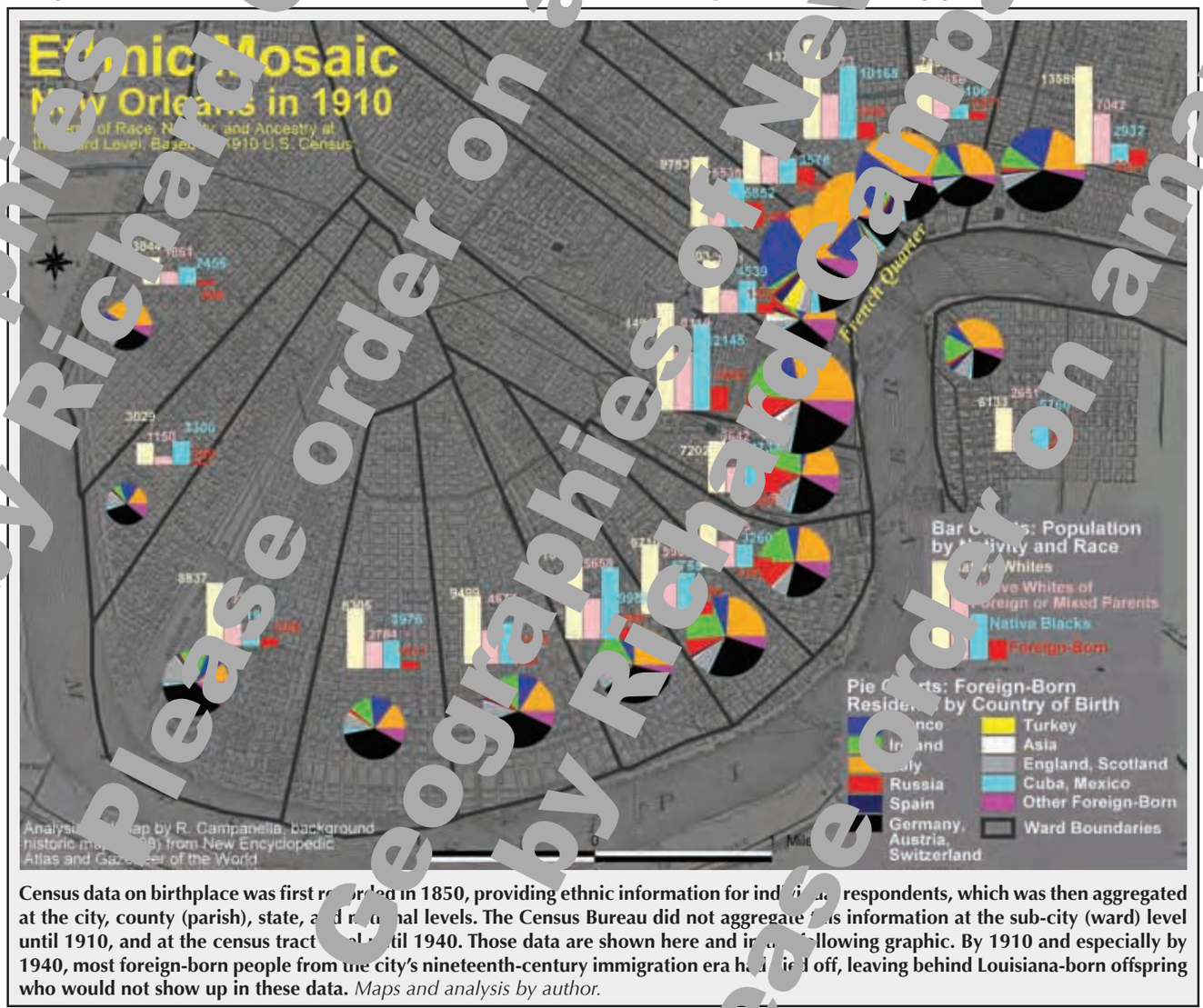
Not Really a Belt — A glance at the ethnic maps in this volume may evince the question, *what belt?* Of course, this is a theoretical belt, one formed by the various physical and infrastructural constraints of specific cities. New Orleans' restriction to the upraised natural levee softened the theoretical belt to an irregular and blade-shaped configuration, thicker in some areas, thinner in others, and interrupted by canals, highways, and variations in land use and housing stock. These interstices distorted parts of the belt into wedge-shaped areas of various ethnic composition, called sectors. Only a theoretical city on a piece of paper would produce a perfect belt. This amorphousness has also been seen elsewhere: "such [ethnic] zones are often patchy, the discontinuities reflecting variations in the urban fabric...."[652]

Not Particularly Clustered — It would be a serious mistake to conclude that ethnic groups in New Orleans were intensely and exclusively clustered within the immigrant belt. "Cluster," "concentration," "congregation," "community," "enclave," "ghetto"—these are all subjective terms, despite urbanists' attempts to formalize them into jargon. Even the line between "integration" and "concentration" is blurred. "If a neighborhood is inhabited by 10 different groups, each accounting for 10 per cent of the total population," pointed out one researcher, "we might call it a residentially mixed area. But if all of the Chinese of that particular city live in that neighborhood...., it is also a concentration area for the Chinese."[653] The Greek community of the Lower Dorgenois Street area and the Orthodox Jews around Dryades Street are good examples of neighborhoods that may be described

[651] Ernest W. Burgess, "The Growth of the City: An Introduction to a Research Project," in *The City*, eds. Robert E. Park, Ernest W. Burgess and Roderick D. McKenzie (Chicago, 1925), 52.

[652] Knox, *Urban Social Geography: An Introduction*, 2.

[653] Van Kempen and Özüekren, "Ethnic Segregation in Cities," 1633.



Census data on birthplace was first recorded in 1850, providing ethnic information for individual respondents, which was then aggregated at the city, county (parish), state, and national levels. The Census Bureau did not aggregate this information at the sub-city (ward) level until 1910, and at the census tract level until 1940. Those data are shown here and in the following graphic. By 1910 and especially by 1940, most foreign-born people from the city's nineteenth-century immigration era had died off, leaving behind Louisiana-born offspring who would not show up in these data. *Maps and analysis by author.*

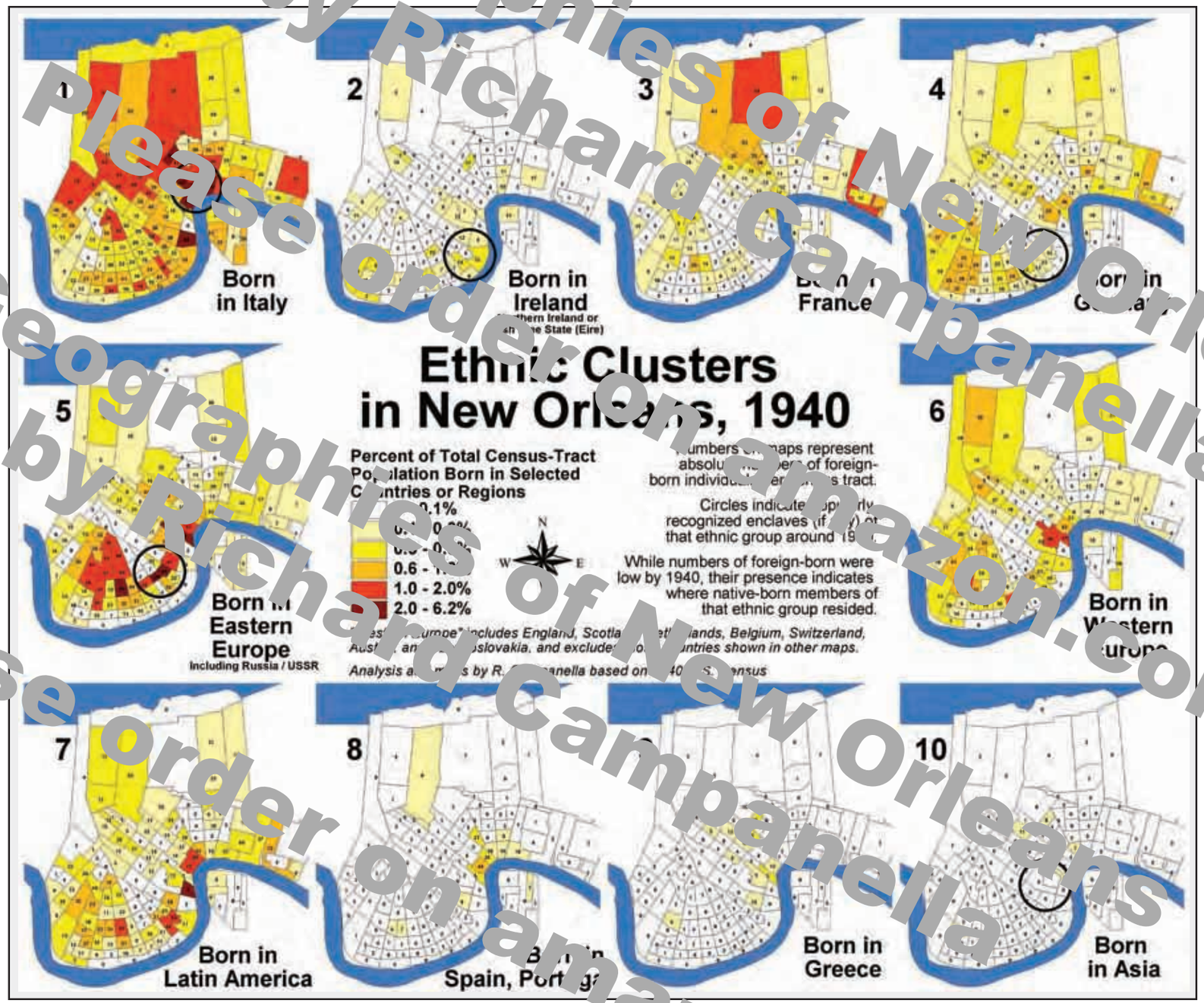
paradoxically as "ethnically mixed ethnic clusters," and other groups described in this volume are not far behind. Although ethnic clustering was more intense in the postbellum immigrant belt than in the antebellum semi-rural periphery, ethnic intermixing still predominated over intensive spatial clustering. With the exception of certain black back-of-the-yards areas, rare was the block or neighborhood in which only one group could be found. Page after page of census population schedules record Sicilians living next to African Americans, Irish sharing a double with Greeks, Filipinos living across the street from Mexicans—even in enclaves in which a particular group numerically predominated. If New Orleans' ethnic cityscape were compared to a natural landscape, it would form gently rolling hills rather than jagged peaks and plunging valleys—that is, slightly different mixtures of ethnic backgrounds from block to block rather than extreme concentrations and complete absences. Indeed, the distinguishing aspect of New Orleans' historical ethnic geography may be not the fascinating enclaves, which are prototypical, but the remarkable dispersion and integration of the various ethnicities in this cosmopolitan port city. Ethnic intermixture is an integral childhood memory of most New Orleanians who came of age prior to the 1960s, and it is striking how often this observation comes up in oral reminiscences and anecdotes.

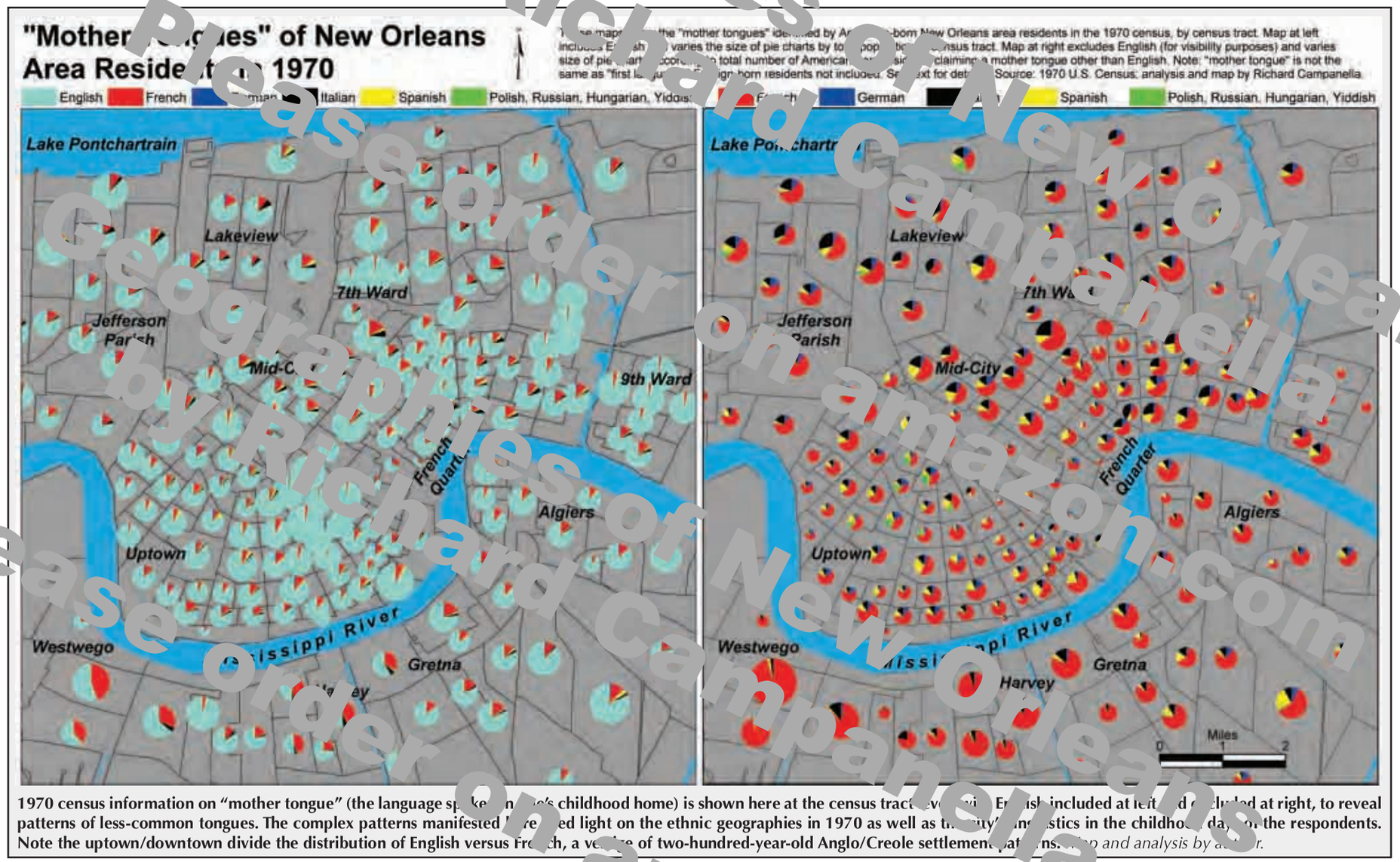
Modern Ethnic Geographies

Even as ethnic enclaves thrived in the early twentieth century, the overall ethnic geography of New Orleans began to transform massively. The first change was effected by the municipal drainage system installed during 1893-1915, which opened up the backswamp and marsh for new urban development. With this two hundred-year-old topographic restriction finally lifted, middle-class whites "leapfrogged" over the predominantly black backswamp and settled in new lakeside suburbs (which were closed to black ownership through racist deed covenants and other discriminatory mechanisms). As the century wore on, more and more whites from old neighborhoods made the move to new lakeside developments such as Lakeview and Gentilly. The second stage of twentieth-century ethnic geographical transformation occurred with the great social and structural changes of the 1950s and 1960s, enabled by the rise of the automobile and highway infrastructure since the beginning of the century. New Orleans' "white flight" experience was similar to those of dozens of other American cities, only delayed by a decade or so. Between the 1960s and the 1980s, most of the old white ethnic enclaves dispersed for the suburbs of Jefferson, St. Bernard, and eastern Orleans parishes. Even those who left lakeside subdivisions in Orleans Parish earlier in the century often left again for Jefferson Parish. Reasons were typical: on the "push" side were the precipitous decline of public schools, increasing crime rates, and urban decay; on the "pull" side were good school districts, safety, suburban lifestyles, less congestion, and a lower cost of living. Resistance to school integration drove many white families out, particularly from the working-class Ninth Ward, which relocated into adjacent St. Bernard Parish. New interstates and bridges provided access between new suburban bedrooms and old downtown offices, which, in time, would often relocate to the suburbs as well. Into the old ethnic enclaves moved commercial interests (in the case of Chinatown), poor black residents (in the case of the Irish Channel, the Greek Northern Gorgenois area, and the Jewish Dryades area), and affluent white professionals and Bohemians (in the case of Little Palermo, Faubourg Marigny, Bywater, and parts of the Irish Channel). Middle-class African Americans, too, relocated into the new subdivisions, mostly to the eastern and lakeside sections of Orleans Parish, while poorer blacks remained in neighborhoods they had inhabited since the late nineteenth century, or were concentrated into Depression-era public housing projects.

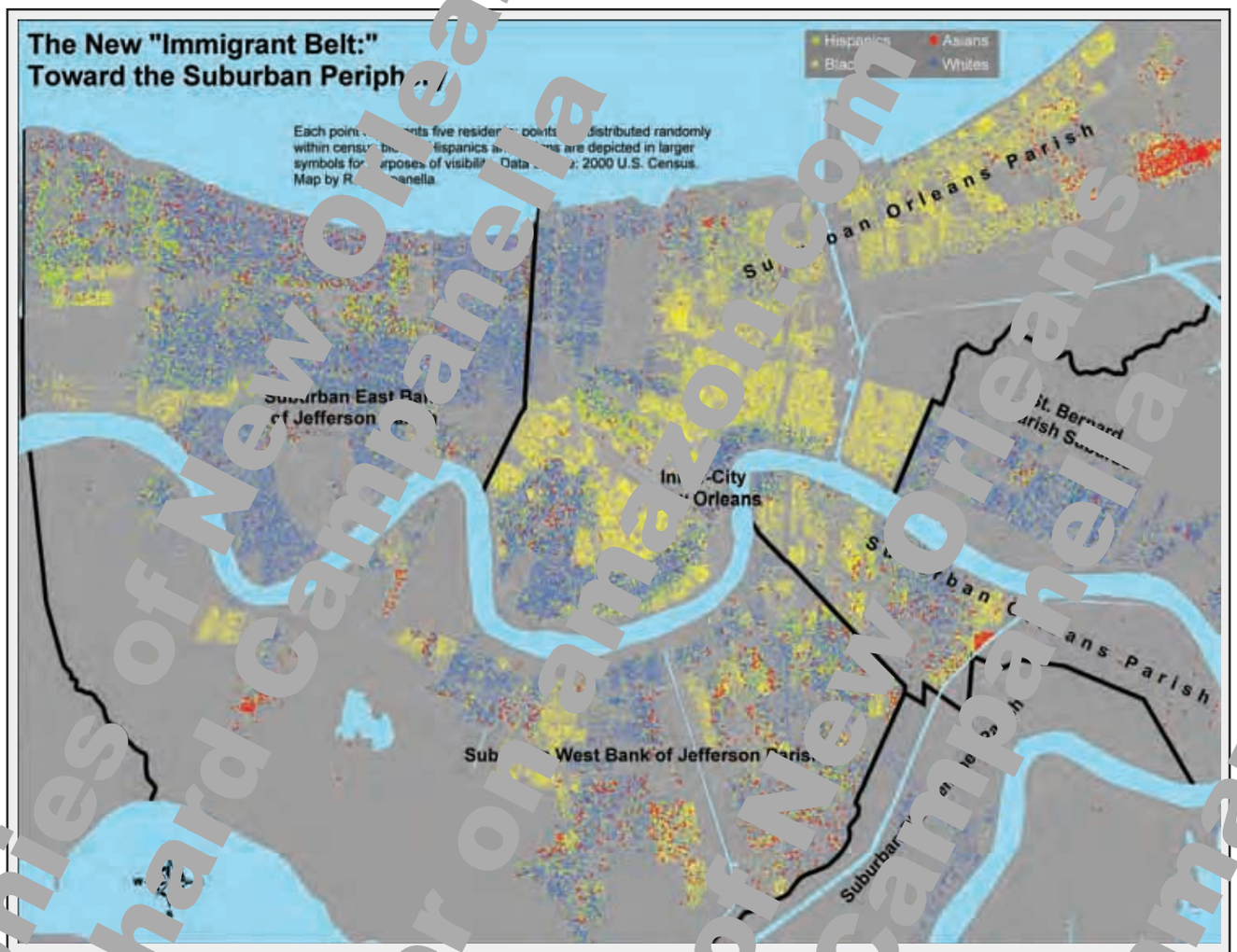
In the closing decades of the twentieth century, the factors that once drew immigrants that amorphous belt around the CBD diminished or evaporated entirely and reappeared in very different form, very far away: the new subdivisions and strip malls of suburbia. Immigrants in New Orleans today—few in numbers yet enough to form patterns—generally settle far away from the inner city: in the extreme western suburban periphery of Kenner (the site of "Little Honduras"), or Versailles in the extreme eastern Orleans Parish ("Little Saigon"), or on the fringes of the West Bank. Others live in Metairie and elsewhere in Jefferson Parish. It is in these modern ranch-house/strip-mall suburbs that new immigrants find affordable housing, maximized economic opportunities, and minimized obstacles, including a decent environment to raise and educate their children. Once again, New Orleans is not alone in this remarkable trend: it is playing out in most major American metropolises. "In 1900," stated a recent *Preservation Magazine* cover article entitled *The New Suburbanites*, immigration meant taking a ferry from Ellis Island to a tenement on the Lower East Side. Today, it often means taking the airport shuttle to a three-bedroom house in the suburbs."[654] A drive along Williams Boulevard in Kenner finds a plethora of Latino and Asian businesses, a cityscape of ethnic diversity that makes downtown New Orleans look monocultural by comparison. Same trend nationwide. Suburbs are on their way to becoming the most common place of residence for Hispanic and Asian-Americans: "53 percent of the nation's Hispanics, and 53 percent of Asian Americans, live in suburbia, both up by about 10 percent from 1990.[655] That most immigrants in greater New Orleans live in relatively comfortable suburban conditions attests to the fact that while this metropolis attracts few from foreign lands, most that do come are fairly economically stable and arrive into established and nurturing communities. There are no immigrant slums in modern New Orleans, and one almost never sees a Hispanic or Asian or Indian among the city's large homeless

[654] Brad Edmondson, "The New Suburbanities," *Preservation* 52 (January-February 2000): 31.
[655] Ibid., 32





1970 census information on "mother tongue" (the language spoken in one's childhood home) is shown here at the census tract level with English included at left and excluded at right, to reveal patterns of less-common tongues. The complex patterns manifested here shed light on the ethnic geographies in 1970 as well as the ethnicity/linguistics in the childhood days of the respondents. Note the uptown/downtown divide the distribution of English versus French, a vestige of two-hundred-year-old Anglo/Creole settlement patterns. *Map and analysis by author.*



By the late twentieth century, the factors that once drew immigrants to neighborhoods surrounding the CBD shifted to the suburbs. Immigrants to New Orleans today generally settle far from the inner city, in the extreme western suburbs of Kenner (home of "Little Honduras") to Versailles in extreme eastern Orleans Parish ("Little Saigon") or to the fringes of the West Bank. Others live in Metairie and elsewhere in Jefferson Parish. It is in these modern ranch-house suburbs that new immigrants find affordable housing, maximized economic opportunities, and minimized obstacles. These 2000 census maps show that immigrants today generally reside at the very fringes of the metropolitan area, while the descendents of nineteenth-century immigrants live in nearby suburbs, principally in Jefferson Parish. So utterly reversed is the present-day ethnic geography of New Orleans that formerly lily-white Metairie—Fat City, no less—ranked in 2000 as the most ethnically diverse census tract in the metropolitan area, while the lower Ninth Ward, once practically the Brooklyn of the South, ranked the least. *Maps and analysis by author.*

ulation. In other cities that attract far larger numbers of much poorer immigrants such as New York, Washington, Chicago, and Los Angeles, the traditional immigrant belt is alive and well, and social problems are rife. New Orleans, however, simply does not offer a sufficiently robust economy to attract large numbers of poor immigrants; thus its old inner-city immigrant belt has vanished and most immigrants opt for suburban lifestyles. An inspection of a 2000 census map of greater New Orleans' ethnic groups (now recorded as "ancestry") shows an even dispersion throughout the metropolitan area *beyond* old New Orleans. Immigrants today—the Hispanic community and Asian Indians in Kenner, the Chinese of West Esplanade Avenue in Metairie, the large Vietnamese community of the Versailles neighborhood, the Filipinos on Lapalco Boulevard on the West Bank[656]—generally reside on the very fringes of the metropolitan area. Ironically, they often live next door to descendents of circa-1900 immigrants; West Esplanade Avenue in particular abuts a number of census tracts in which high concentrations of locals of Sicilian, Greek, Chinese, and Jewish ancestry may be found. So utterly reversed is the present-day ethnic geography of New Orleans that formerly lily-white Metairie—Fat City, no less—ranked in 2000 as the most ethnically diverse census tract in the metropolitan area. Even more stunning was the least diverse tract: the lower Ninth Ward, once practically the Brooklyn of the South.[657] The same trend is seen in public schools: most in New Orleans are racially homogeneous—overwhelmingly African American—whereas those in the

[656] Manuel Torres and Matt Scallan, "Outward Migration: Statistics Show Orleans Parish May Be Losing Its Appeal to Hispanics, But During the 1990s, Communities Boomed in the Suburbs, Especially Kenner," *Times-Picayune*, July 9, 2001, p. 1; and Joan Treadway and Coleman Warner, "East Meets West," *Times-Picayune*, August 6, 2001, A7.

[657] Coleman Warner and Matt Scallan, "Going to Extremes," *Times-Picayune*, September 3, 2001, A8.

once all-white suburbs are now held up as "exemplars of successful integration."[658] Equivalents of this statistical irony can be found in most other modern American metropolises. "So vast is the change taking place in the suburbs of many of our cities that the definition of suburbia needs rewriting."[659]

One highly visible immigrant presence still exists in the historic heart of New Orleans, in fact within the confines of former Little Palermo. Every day hundreds of South Asian, African, East Asian, Hispanic, and European immigrants gather in the French Market flea market to set up their stalls for a day of vending to tourists. Today, as one hundred years ago and as two hundred years ago, the French Market remains one of the most ethnically diverse plots of land in the city, at least from the vendors' perspective. But come nightfall, when the market closes and the vendors pack up their wares, most point their minivans and SUVs not for the adjacent faubourgs, but for Interstate 10 and the subdivisions of suburbia.

Distinguishing Characteristics of New Orleans' Experience

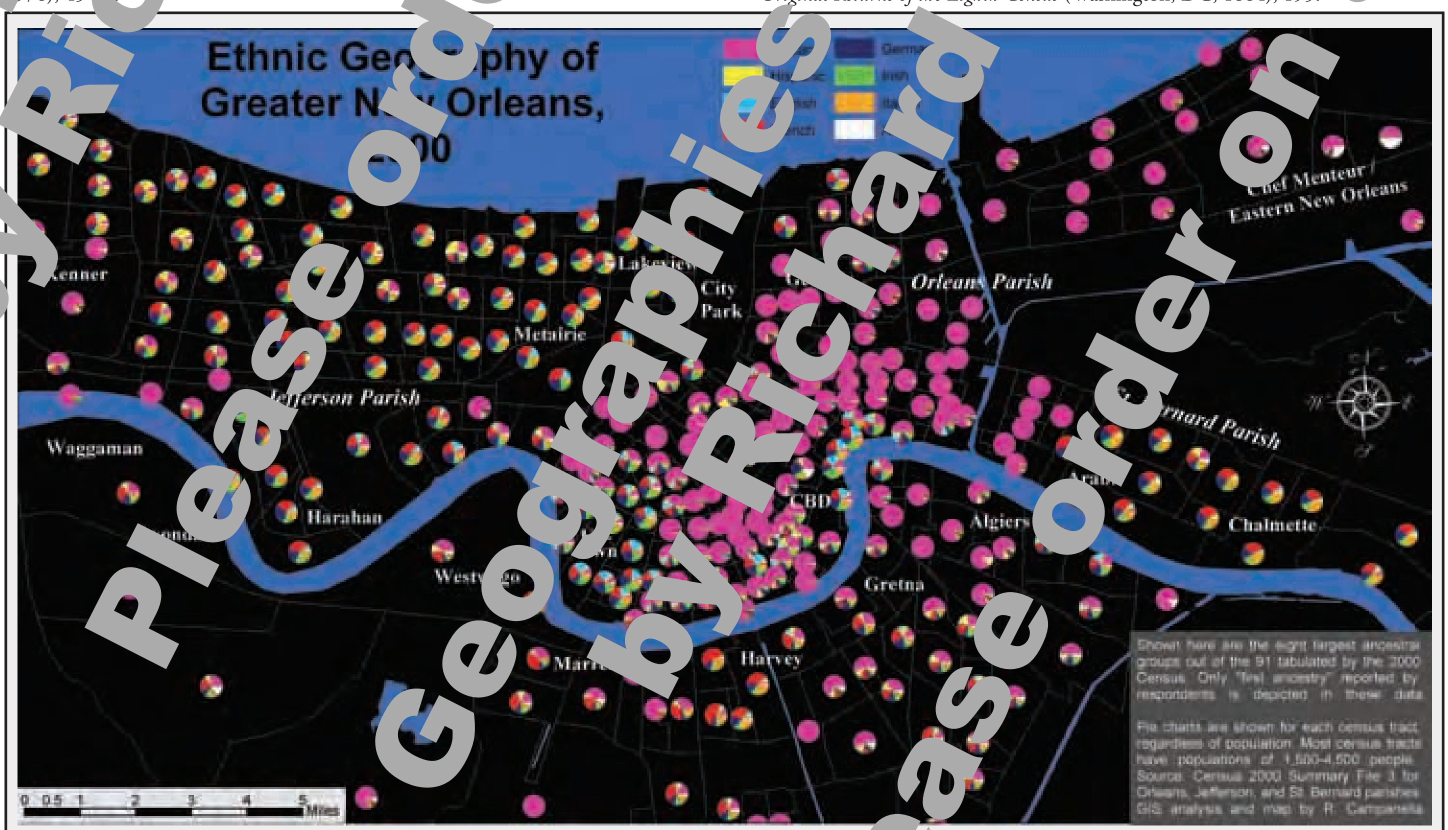
Wrote geographer Peirce F. Lewis, "It is easy to conclude...that New Orleans' urban growth...obeyed special rules which applied only to it—and nowhere else. It is a tempting conclusion, but untrue."[660] Indeed, an important lesson to be drawn from New Orleans' shifting ethnic geographies is that they generally parallel those observed elsewhere. The centrifugal pattern of immigrant settlement in antebellum times, the centripetal clustering in the turn-of-the-century era, and the centrifugal suburban settlement after World War II have all been witnessed in other large American cities. Nevertheless, some unusual aspects distinguish New Orleans' experience from the norm. The Crescent City is arguably the oldest genuinely multicultural city in the nation, and may well have witnessed certain ethnic spatial patterns before other cities saw similar trends on grander scales. Its Franco-Hispanic colonial heritage, deeply influenced by Caribbean culture and further rendered by sheer isolation, spawned the enigmatic notion of *Creole*, a homegrown ethnicity that in time would manifest itself in spatial patterns of New Orleans. (How many cities render their own ethnicity?) Sudden political Americanization, followed by gradual cultural Americanization, would create perhaps the greatest ethnic geographical chasm in New Orleans history: the downtown Creoles and the uptown Anglos. This principal dichotomy informed the residential geographies of numerous other groups: Saint-Domingue refugees, foreign French, and Italians, for example, gravitated to the Creole side, while Jews, Scandinavians, and emancipated African Americans settled on the Anglo side. New Orleans was also one of the few places in America to harbor a three-tier racial caste system, which further differentiated the Creole and Anglo sides of town. The Creole side, for example, had a three-to-one ratio of free people of color to slaves in 1860; the Anglo side of town had the exact opposite.[661] Physical geography also differentiated New Orleans' experience: its unusual deltaic topography constricted urbanization to the narrow natural levee between riverfront

[658] Brian Thevenot and Matthew Brown, "School Segregation 50 Years Later: From Resistance to Acceptance," *Times-Picayune*, May 19, 2004, A1.

[659] Edmondson, "The New Suburbanites," 31.

[660] Peirce F. Lewis, *New Orleans: The Making of an Urban Landscape* (Cambridge, 1976), 45-.

[661] Joseph C.G. Kennedy, *Population of the United States in 1860; Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census* (Washington, DC, 1864), 195.



wharves and the backswamp, creating a bifurcated environment in which empowered groups gravitated to the more desirable middle ground, and the disenfranchised poor clustered along the high-nuisance, high-risk margins. These aged patterns—akin in theory, if not perfectly in form, to the *cinturónes de miséria* (misery belts) surrounding Latin American capitals—are still vividly apparent in modern racial distributions. In some areas, the interface between black and white neighborhoods today marks the edge of the backswamp at the time of emancipation. Many cities have natural barriers which constrict development in certain areas, but New Orleans' backswamp constraint was adjustable: with drainage, it receded and eventually disappeared, leaving behind only its imprint in the distributions of humans.

The ethnic geographies of New Orleans are notable, too, vis-à-vis the city's cultural source regions. This was a city that looked not to England and northern Europe to inform its society and people its land, as did most elder cities of this nation, but to France and Spain, the Caribbean, Latin America and Africa. This was and is a Catholic city in a Protestant nation, a mixed legal jurisdiction in a land of common law, a historically racially integrated society in a nation that traditionally distinguishes strictly between white and black, an apogee of the Caribbean Basin and a gateway to the Mississippi Basin. New Orleans represented the expanding American nation's first major encounter with foreignness. From the perspective of *Americas* ethnic geography, then, New Orleans plays a starring role.

It has been said that America Americanized New Orleans. But it may also be said that New Orleans Americanized America.

Despite New Orleans' historical reputation as a multicultural city, the most ethnically diverse populations in the metropolis today are found in Metairie, Kenner, and other suburbs. Seen here is Williams Boulevard in Kenner, where many Hispanic and Asian immigrants live and work. *Photograph by author, 2*