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*Neutral Ground or Battleground? Hidden History, Tourism,
and Spatial (In)justice in the New Orleans French Quarter*

Lynnell L. Thomas

The National Slave Ship Museum will be the next great attraction for visitors and locals to experience. It will reconnect Americans to their complicated and rich history and provide a neutral ground for all of us to examine the costs of our country's development.

—LaToya Cantrell, New Orleans councilmember, 2015¹

In 2017, the city of New Orleans removed four monuments that paid homage to the city's Confederate past. The removal came after contentious public debate and decades of intermittent grassroots protests. Despite the public process, details about the removal were closely guarded in the wake of death threats, vandalism, lawsuits, and organized resistance by monument supporters. Work-

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1. In 2017, Cantrell was elected mayor of New Orleans; see "LaToya Cantrell Elected New Orleans' First Female Mayor," http://www.nola.com/elections/index.ssf/2017/11/latoya_cantrell_elected_new_or.html.

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ers hired to dismantle the monuments did so surreptitiously under the cloak of darkness, protected by a heavy police presence, with their faces covered to conceal their identities.² The divisiveness of this debate and the removal lay bare the contestation over public space, historical memory, and present-day public policy masked by New Orleans's tourist identity.

This essay explores some ways that this battle has played out in the French Quarter, New Orleans's most renowned tourist space. As historian J. Mark Souther notes, throughout its history, the French Quarter has been "a battleground on which residents, business owners, and street entrepreneurs mobilized to protect their competing visions of its proper use."³ Following Hurricane Katrina, this battle took on new dimensions as the Catholic Church, government officials, and tourism promoters proffered official narratives of family values, economic recovery, and public safety that aligned closely with tourism industry interests. At the same time, African American activists, reappropriated the French Quarter to attack systemic inequalities in the city. I explore these competing visions and claims on New Orleans public space through an examination of a campaign by the Archdiocese of New Orleans and an African American tour of the French Quarter offered by Hidden History Tours. Both projects invoke conceptualizations of New Orleans history to address perceived social problems in the present day. Such a comparison offers a way to historicize the public space of the French Quarter and spatialize French Quarter history, revealing the ways that New Orleans tourist practices exacerbate the racial and spatial divide and obscure ongoing histories of strife.

NEUTRAL GROUND

In New Orleans's unique lexicon, the term "neutral ground" refers to a street median, a usage commonly traced to the 1836 division of the city into municipalities that codified the separation between Creole French and Anglo New Orleans. Former council member, now Mayor LaToya Cantrell's use of "neutral ground" in the epigraph to describe the potential for historical reckoning also invokes the term's first usage in Louisiana history to designate a disputed colonial territory between France and Spain. According to cultural geographer Richard Campanella, this original neutral ground, situated in current-day southwest Louisiana between the Sabine and Calcasieu Rivers, became "an unusual cultural interstice where isolated Spanish, French, African, and indigenous peo-

2. Beau Evans, "Removal of the First of Four New Orleans Confederate Monuments Begins with Liberty Place," 24 April 2017, http://www.nola.com/politics/index.ssf/2017/04/monuments_removed_new_orleans.html.

3. J. Mark Souther, *New Orleans on Parade: Tourism and the Transformation of the Crescent City* (Baton Rouge, LA, 2013), xii.

ples interacted in a power vacuum, a space without a hegemon.”⁴ It is this notion of “neutral ground,” the liminal space beyond the oversight and authority of slave owners, government officials, and other oppressive institutional forces, that resonates with the black freedom struggle in Louisiana. The existence of such neutral grounds was not unusual in colonial and antebellum Louisiana. As numerous historians have documented about this period, New Orleans was the center of an unruly frontier society where Africans and Afro-Creoles, sometimes abetted by Native Americans and whites, exploited manifold opportunities to fight, negotiate, and litigate for various degrees of freedom.⁵

Less documented has been the twentieth- and twenty-first-century efforts by black New Orleanians to carve out neutral grounds by exploiting physical and symbolic spaces untethered to economic, political, and social forces of oppression. As Black Studies scholar Clyde Woods notes in his social justice geography of New Orleans, “The antebellum tradition of Native American, African, Afro-Creole, and African American rebellion and fugitivism shaped Louisiana, French, and U.S. history in ways not yet fully understood.”⁶ Whereas maroon settlements symbolically transformed the intricate network of canals, bayous, marshes, and trainasses into neutral grounds during the colonial and antebellum periods, the twentieth- and twenty-first-century quest for liberation takes place in the urban commons.⁷ For Woods, this “new commons” is forged in opposition to the oppressive forces of “Bourbonism, racial violence, discrimination, disenfranchisement, and ‘starve the beast’ policies.”⁸ Notably, black New Orleanians’ struggle for social justice has, in large part, sought to rename and reclaim public space in the face of segregation, police brutality, militarism, privatization, gentrification, and other enclosures. After all, as the urbanist Edward Soja argues, “Space is actively involved in generating and sustaining inequality,

4. Richard Campanella, “‘Neutral Ground,’” 64 Parishes, <http://www.knowlouisiana.org/neutral-ground>.

5. See, e.g., Caryn Cosse Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana, 1718–1868* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1997); Shannon Lee Dawdy, *Building the Devil’s Empire: French Colonial New Orleans* (Chicago, IL, 2008); Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1995); Lawrence N. Powell, *The Accidental City* (Cambridge, MA, 2012); Rebecca J. Scott, *Degrees of Freedom: Louisiana and Cuba after Slavery* (Cambridge, MA, 2005), 11–29; Daniel H. Usner, *Indians, Settlers and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1992).

6. Clyde Woods, *Development Drowned and Reborn: The Blues and Bourbon Restorations in Post-Katrina New Orleans*, ed. Laura Pulido and Jordan Camp (Athens, GA, 2017), 10.

7. The word *trainasse* is a French Louisiana term for a narrow waterway carved through the marshlands. For a theorization of the urban commons, see Amanda Huron, “Working with Strangers in Saturated Space: Reclaiming and Maintaining the Urban Commons,” *Antipode* 47, no. 4 (1 September 2015): 963–79.

8. Woods, *Development Drowned and Reborn*, 289, 121.

injustice, economic exploitation, racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression and discrimination.”⁹ The boycotts, marches, and sit-ins of the Civil Rights Movement that blocked public streets and sidewalks; the push, in the ensuing decades, to erect monuments and rename streets, parks, and public housing to memorialize civil rights leaders and local activists; the 1990s campaigns to remove slaveholders’ names from public schools and desegregate all-white Mardi Gras krewes that paraded on public streets; and the more recent grassroots efforts that resulted in the removal of monuments to white supremacy from public squares and thoroughfares made explicit the mutually constitutive relationship between “spatial justice” and social justice, between history and geography.¹⁰

Given this relationship, it becomes clear that black New Orleanians’ staking of urban neutral grounds is not limited to these official political and social movements, but also manifests in grassroots and working-class music, masking, storytelling, and parading traditions. Many scholars have illuminated the ways that Mardi Gras Indians, Baby Dolls, second line clubs, brass bands, jazz funeral processionists, and neighborhood storytellers are engaged in resistant cultural practices that, as the anthropologist Helen Regis argues, “transform urban space, creating an alternative social order.”¹¹ Through their reappropriations of public space, black New Orleanians challenge representational distortions and historical omissions, producing a public memory at odds with official historical narratives. As historian John Bodnar explains, these “vernacular expressions convey what social reality feels like rather than what it should be like. Its very existence threatens the sacred and timeless nature of official expressions.”¹² Matt Sakakeeny’s study of New Orleans brass bands offers

9. Edward W. Soja, *Seeking Spatial Justice* (Minneapolis, MN, 2010), 4.

10. Ibid., 4–5; see also Adam Fairclough, *Race and Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915–1972*, 1st ed. (Athens, GA, 1995), esp. 265–343; “Tribute to Dr. Davis Discussed,” *Times-Picayune*, July 7, 1978; Kevin Sack, “Blacks Strip Slaveholders’ Names Off Schools,” *New York Times*, November 12, 1997; James Gill, *Lords of Misrule: Mardi Gras and the Politics of Race in New Orleans* (Jackson, MS, 1997); Laura McKnight, “Take ‘Em Down NOLA Calls for Widespread Removal, Renaming of ‘Symbols of White Supremacy,’” 23 March 2017, http://www.nola.com/politics/index.ssf/2017/03/take_em_down_nola_calls_for_wi.html.

11. Helen A. Regis, “Second Lines, Minstrelsy, and the Contested Landscapes of New Orleans Afro-Creole Festivals,” *Cultural Anthropology* 14, no. 4 (1999): 472; see also George Lipsitz, “Mardi Gras Indians: Carnival and Counter-Narrative in Black New Orleans,” *Cultural Critique*, no. 10 (Autumn 1988): 99–121; Catherine Michna, “Stories at the Center: Story Circles, Educational Organizing, and the Fate of Neighborhood Public Schools in New Orleans,” *American Quarterly* 61, no. 3 (2009): 529–55; Helen A. Regis, “Blackness and the Politics of Memory in the New Orleans Second Line,” *American Ethnologist* 28, no. 4 (November 2001): 752–77; Kim Marie Vaz, *The “Baby Dolls”: Breaking the Race and Gender Barriers of the New Orleans Mardi Gras Tradition* (Baton Rouge, LA, 2013).

12. John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ, 1992), 14.

a case in point: when these processions weave “through public spaces where lynchings, race riots, segregation, and gentrification have all taken place, the actions of musicians and marchers ‘give voice’ to these submerged histories.”¹³

The submersion, or erasure, of these black histories has long been central to New Orleans’s place identity, cultivated by a tourism industry that produces and exacerbates racial, economic, and geographic inequalities in the city. As other scholars of New Orleans tourism and I have written elsewhere, the city’s racialized tourism practices and rhetoric capitalize on black labor and cultural production to uphold a white supremacist historical memory, promote mythologies of racial exceptionalism, and gloss over a long history of black agency and resistance. As Mark Souther explains,

While it certainly cultivated the Old South myth in the several decades after the Civil War, New Orleans never developed the story of black freedom struggles to the extent that other regional cities did. Typical of the city’s failure to address fully the conundrums of its uneasy race relations during the height of the civil rights movement, New Orleans packaged black culture through a focus on jazz. Doing so reinforced the city’s penchant for accentuating its carefree, “laissez les bon temps rouler” mentality while masking its legacies of slavery and Jim Crow. Thus, New Orleans could obscure any connection a visitor might conjure between the racial inequities of the past and those written into a present-day social and physical landscape fractured along racial lines.¹⁴

As Souther’s assertion suggests, this tourism mythology both masked and perpetuated racial injustice and inequality.

New Orleans’s overreliance on tourism in the absence of major industry and federal investment has coincided with the “neoliberalization of public space,” whereby cities increasingly turn to privatization and criminalization to regulate the access to and uses of public spaces.¹⁵ The city’s investment in tourism,

13. Matt Sakakeeny, *Roll With It: Brass Bands in the Streets of New Orleans* (Durham, NC, 2013), 6.

14. Souther, *New Orleans on Parade*, 224; see also Kevin Fox Gotham, *Authentic New Orleans: Tourism, Culture, and Race in the Big Easy* (New York, 2007); Anthony J. Stanonis, *Creating the Big Easy: New Orleans and the Emergence of Modern Tourism, 1918–1945* (Athens, GA, 2006); Lynnell L. Thomas, *Desire and Disaster in New Orleans: Tourism, Race, and Historical Memory* (Durham, NC, 2014).

15. SETHA LOW and NEIL SMITH, “Introduction: The Imperative of Public Space,” in *The Politics of Public Space*, ed. SETHA LOW and NEIL SMITH, 1st ed. (New York, 2006), 16; see also PAUL A. PASSAVANT, “Mega-Events, the Superdome, and the Return of the Repressed in New Orleans,” in *The Neoliberal Deluge: Hurricane Katrina, Late Capitalism, and the Remaking of New Orleans*, ed. CEDRIC JOHNSON (Minneapolis, MN, 2011), 87–129.

sports, and entertainment was predicated on a disinvestment in and dissolution of black communities. Woods contends that “the new socio-spatial regime was regulated by extreme forms of daily institutional racism and violence.”¹⁶ These trends accelerated in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina as tourism became the centerpiece of New Orleans’s recovery and rebuilding efforts to the detriment of the economically and politically disadvantaged. While neighborhoods in the Lower Ninth Ward, Gentilly, and New Orleans East languished for a lack of resources, millions of dollars were poured into the French Quarter and tourism. According to the political scientist Paul Passavant, the post-Katrina prioritization of tourism development and expansion reflected a “reorientation of New Orleans infrastructure away from its residents and toward tourists.”¹⁷ This market-oriented approach to redevelopment further entrenched pre-existing racial and class disparities.

In their comparative study of post-Katrina New Orleans and post-9/11 New York, Kevin Fox Gotham and Miriam Greenberg argue, “Prior advantages or disadvantages—in access to credit, insurance, and wealth; to stable and well-paid work; and to political influence—were compounded by inequitable access to post-disaster redevelopment aid.” New Orleans followed the precedent of New York, suspending federal regulations for the disbursement of recovery funds for the benefit of the private sector, which “had the effect of driving wider market-oriented redevelopment citywide and, by leaving other needs unmet, dramatically augmented socio-spatial inequality.”¹⁸ This uneven and inequitable redevelopment, Gotham and Greenberg continue, “forecloses or undermines public sector, ‘high road’ approaches oriented toward concern for equity, social justice, and holistic community and environmental health and well-being.”¹⁹ While recovery funds were being allocated for expansive rebranding campaigns, private-sector tax incentives and subsidies for real estate development, and fast-tracked renovations on the Superdome to rejuvenate the tourism industry, displaced and disaffected New Orleanians were being asked to shoulder the burden of rebuilding their own homes, communities, and lives.

Thanks to coordinated efforts by local government, the Convention and Visitors Bureau, New Orleans Tourism and Marketing Corporation, Louis Armstrong International Airport, and the Greater New Orleans Hotel and Lodging Association, tourists and tourist spending have steadily increased since Hurri-

16. Woods, *Development Drowned and Reborn*, 202–3.

17. Passavant, “Mega-Events, the Superdome, and the Return of the Repressed in New Orleans,” 98; see also Souther, *New Orleans on Parade*, x; Lynnell L. Thomas, “New Orleans Revisited: Notes of a Native Daughter,” *The Black Scholar* 45, no. 3 (3 July 2015): 3–9; Woods, *Development Drowned and Reborn*, 276–77.

18. Kevin Fox Gotham and Miriam Greenberg, *Crisis Cities: Disaster and Redevelopment in New York and New Orleans* (New York, 2014), ix.

19. *Ibid.*, ix–x.

cane Katrina. Thus 2016 witnessed another record-breaking year, with the city attracting 10.45 million visitors who spent \$7.41 billion, a 51 percent increase in spending from 2004.²⁰ Of course, the exuberance over tourism's resurgence fails to account for all of those who have been excluded from the New Orleans renaissance. While multinational corporations and city boosters reap the benefits of a thriving tourism economy, the wealth generated by this recovery predictably has not trickled down. The most recent statistics show that income inequality between white and black New Orleanians—already egregious before Hurricane Katrina—has grown since Katrina at a rate higher than the national average. Ironically, many of the very people who sustain the tourism industry—the chamber maids, cooks, doormen, and waitstaff—have struggled to eke out a living in the tourism-based economy. A 2016 report by the Corporation for Enterprise Development (CFED) paints a picture of the post-Katrina reality for most African Americans:

In the years since [Katrina], much of the city has been rebuilt. Neighborhoods have been repopulated, the school system has been overhauled, and airports, hospitals, and the tourist economy have been restored, yet racial economic inequality in New Orleans continues, and the African American population has been largely left behind. The data show vast disparities in outcomes between White households and those of color, a result of an unequal recovery and an enduring legacy of racial inequality.

African American households in New Orleans lag across multiple measures of financial security. The median income among African American households is only \$25,806, compared to \$64,377 for White households, and there are six times as many African American households living in income poverty than White households.

Moreover, African American workers are three times more likely to be unemployed than White workers (15.3% and 5.1%, respectively), and a full 71% of African American households are liquid asset poor, meaning they lack the savings necessary to live above the poverty level for just three months if they lose a job, face a medical crisis or suffer another income disruption.²¹

Clearly, tourism has not emerged as the economic panacea for meaningful employment and tax revenue promised by lawmakers and tourism professionals.

20. Jennifer Larino, "New Orleans Hosted a Record 10.45 Million Tourists in 2016," 23 March 2017, http://www.nola.com/business/index.ssf/2017/03/new_orleans_record_tourist_cou.html; "New Orleans Breaks Tourism Records for Visitation and Visitor Spending in 2016," 22 March 2017, <https://www.neworleans.com/articles/post/new-orleans-breaks-tourism-records-for-visitation-and-visitor-spending-in-2016/>.

21. "Racial Wealth Divide in New Orleans" (Washington, DC: Corporation for Enterprise Development (CFED), October 2016), 3, https://prosperitynow.org/files/resources/Racial_Wealth_Divide_in_New_Orleans_RWDI.pdf.

Yet, despite the powerful stranglehold of the tourism-industrial complex, alternative storytelling and tour guiding practices, discordant with dominant tourism narratives, are working to tell a history from below. These alternative practices might be viewed as part of, what the scholar Clyde Woods calls New Orleans's "Blues sustainable tradition," characterized by "direct action, economic transformation, collective decision making, community survival programs, cultural autonomy, and self-defense."²² In her study of Students at the Center (SAC), an independent collaborative writing project based in New Orleans public schools, Catherine Michna chronicles one such Blues tradition to memorialize counterhegemonic New Orleans histories. Reflecting on the social, political, and geographic implications of the organization's work to establish a memorial to Homer Plessy, Michna writes that the community effort to narrate its own history "intervenes in lived, spatial practices in a way that encourages city residents of all class, gender, race, and ethnic backgrounds to come together and think critically about the historical structures underlying present-day inequalities."²³ By unearthing the submerged history of the black New Orleanian freedom struggle, these types of grassroots endeavors are not ancillary to the historiography of New Orleans, but in conversation with it. As Renee Romano and Leigh Raiford remind us, "Representations of the past matter. Representations of the past can be mobilized to serve partisan purposes; they can be commercialized for the sake of tourism; they can shape a nation's sense of identity, build hegemony, or serve to shore up the political interests of the state; and they can certainly influence the ways in which people understand their world. . . . The effort to determine what is known and remembered about the past, then, is an effort to claim and exert power."²⁴ Representations of the past are particularly salient in New Orleans, a city whose tourism industry packages history as part of its distinctive brand.²⁵ To disrupt the tourism imaginary and, by extension, the tourism practices that have been so detrimental to marginalized communities, is to usurp and wield power in the city. In New Orleans, this struggle for power is likely to involve conflicts, contradictions, and reconceptualizations of the French Quarter and its potential to be a "neutral ground for all of us to examine the costs of our country's development."²⁶

22. Woods, *Development Drowned and Reborn*, 192.

23. Michna, "Stories at the Center," 530.

24. Renee C. Romano and Leigh Raiford, "Introduction: The Struggle over Memory," in *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory*, ed. Renee C. Romano and Leigh Raiford (Athens, GA, 2006), xxi.

25. Gotham, *Authentic New Orleans*, 133-41.

26. Quoted in "City Leaders Approve Plan for National Slave Ship Museum," Fox8Live, 14 May 2015, <http://www.fox8live.com/story/29070944/city-leaders-approve-plan-for-national-slave-ship-museum>.

BATTLEGROUND: JACKSON SQUARE

At a news conference on Ash Wednesday in March 2011, Gregory Aymond, the archbishop of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of New Orleans, inaugurated a prayer campaign to curb violence and hatred in the city. Dubbed “The New Battle of New Orleans: Violence, Murder, Racism,” the campaign was inspired, according to Aymond, by the “miraculous victory” of General Andrew Jackson and the United States military over the British in the 1815 Battle of New Orleans (fig. 1). According to church history, the Ursuline nuns successfully led the city in prayers to Our Lady of Prompt Succor that ultimately spared the city of New Orleans from imminent British invasion.²⁷ Nearly a century later, flanked by New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu and police chief Ronal Serpas, Archbishop Aymond called on the city to again pray to Our Lady of Prompt Succor, the patron saint of Louisiana invoked “in times of war, disaster, epidemic, and illness,” to intercede on behalf of New Orleans “in the battle of today against violence, murder, and racism.”²⁸ The campaign included the distribution of prayer cards and yard signs, the launching of a parenting and mentoring program, and an extension of Christmas vacation time for archdiocesan employees.²⁹ According to Archbishop Aymond, these initiatives were intended to assist “parents [who sometimes] are not fulfilling their responsibilities and are not passing on human values to their children.”³⁰

Ignoring the structural inequalities undergirding violent crime, the archdiocese placed the onus of originating, perpetuating, and eradicating violence,

27. Archbishop Gregory M. Aymond, “New’ Battle of New Orleans Requires Prayer, Patience,” *Clarion Herald*, 3 January 2012, <http://clarionherald.info/clarion/index.php/archbishop-aymond/801-new-battle-of-new-orleans-requires-prayer-patience>; For a history of the cult of Our Lady of Prompt Succor, see Michael Pasquier, “Our Lady of Prompt Succor: The Search for an American Marian Cult in New Orleans,” in *Saints and Their Cults in the Atlantic World*, ed. Margaret Cormack (Columbia, SC, 2006), 128–49.

28. “The New Battle of New Orleans: Violence, Murder, Racism,” Archdiocese of New Orleans, 9 March 2011, <https://www.arch-no.org/articles/the-new-battle-of-new-orleans-violence-murder-racism-1>.

29. “Archbishop Aymond Officially Announces Start of the ‘New Battle of New Orleans’ Prayer Campaign,” Archdiocese of New Orleans, 9 May 2011, <https://www.arch-no.org/articles/archbishop-aymond-officially-announces-start-of-the-new-battle-of-new-orleans-prayer-campaign-1>; “The New Battle of New Orleans: Violence, Murder, Racism”; “Archdiocese of New Orleans Takes the ‘New Battle of New Orleans’ to the Streets,” Archdiocese of New Orleans, 15 October 2012, <https://www.arch-no.org/articles/archdiocese-of-new-orleans-takes-the-new-battle-of-new-orleans-to-the-streets-1>; Archbishop Gregory Aymond, “A Call for the End of Violence: Archbishop Gregory Aymond,” 16 July 2011, http://www.nola.com/opinions/index.ssf/2011/07/a_call_for_the_end_of_violence.html; Aymond, “‘New’ Battle of New Orleans Requires Prayer, Patience.”

30. Aymond, “‘New’ Battle of New Orleans Requires Prayer, Patience”; see also Aymond, “A Call for the End of Violence: Archbishop Gregory Aymond.”

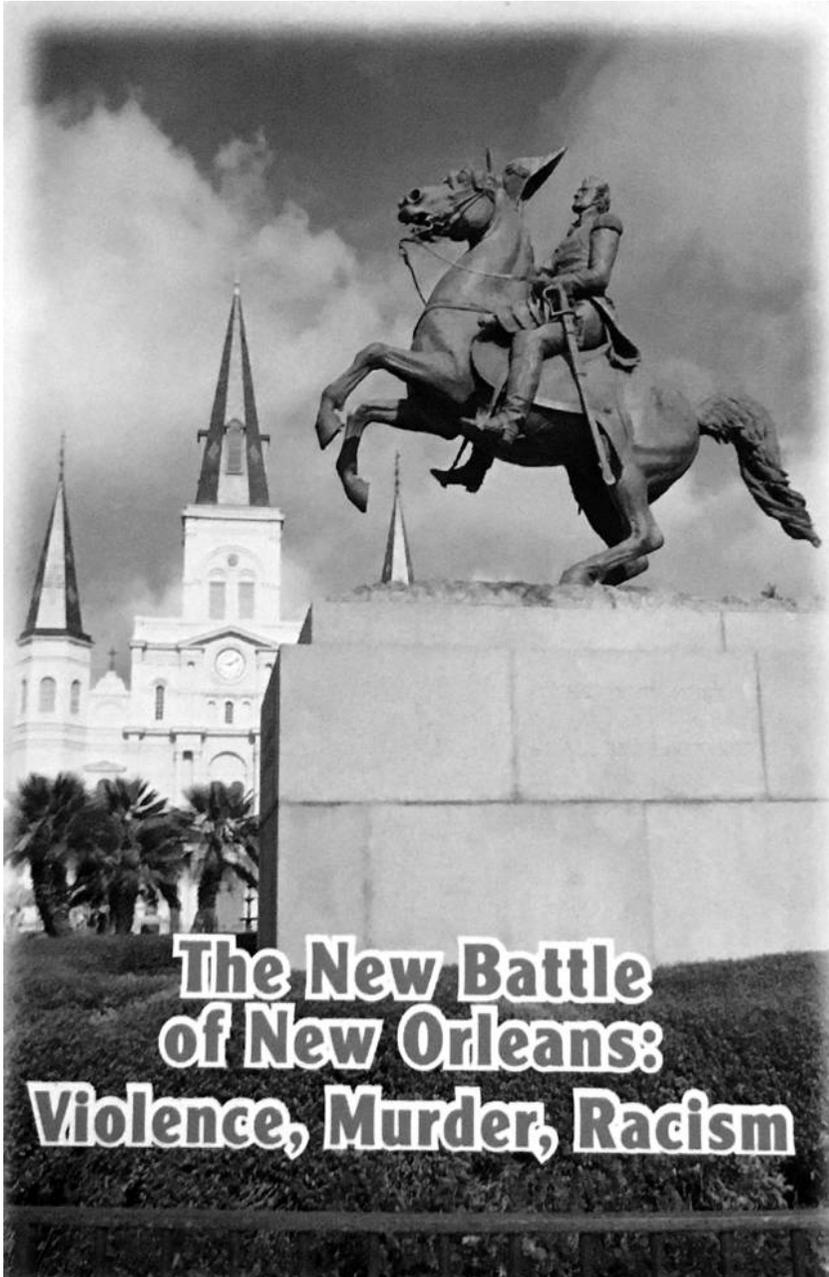


Figure 1. A prayer card distributed by the Archdiocese of New Orleans as part of its campaign against violence, murder, and racism. Photograph by author, June 3, 2018. Color version available as an online enhancement.

murder, and racism on the families themselves. The “New Battle of New Orleans” campaign focuses on instilling family values, presumably in the poor and working-class black communities that bear the brunt of systemic social and economic disparities. “If family life became more prominent and central in this community,” Aymond postulates, “these things would not be happening.”³¹ The prayer concludes with an entreaty to Henriette Delille, the nineteenth-century freewoman of color who is currently being considered for canonization for her ministry to enslaved and poor people of color, to “pray for us that we may be a holy family.”³² Echoing the 1965 Moynihan Report’s characterization of the black family as pathological, “The New Battle of New Orleans” wages war not on the structural inequality that inheres in employment, educational, health care, environmental, and criminal justice systems and practices, but on the families and communities most vulnerable to these disparities.³³ Seen in this light, the archdiocese’s battle against “a deadly, dysfunctional culture” is yet another iteration of other neoliberal crusades—the war on crime, the war on drugs, the war on terror—that mobilize state power to target marginalized populations for surveillance and containment.

Although at least one New Orleans visitor expressed discomfort with the archdiocese’s “uncritical reference to the attribution of a military victory to divine intervention” and pointed out “the irony of using this as a starting point for such a powerful prayer for peace and life,” the campaign’s incorporation of militaristic language and symbols, in fact, recuperates a long, contentious history of church- and state-sanctioned violence against the poor and dispossessed black inhabitants of the city.³⁴ Despite the emphasis that historiography places on the Catholic Church’s liberal racial attitudes and practices toward New Or-

31. Aymond, “‘New’ Battle of New Orleans Requires Prayer, Patience.”

32. “The New Battle of New Orleans: Violence, Murder, Racism”; Carol Glatz, “Pope Brings African-American Foundress One Step Closer to Sainthood,” Catholic News Service, 29 March 2010, <http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/1001298.htm>; see also M. Shawn Copeland, *The Subversive Power of Love: The Vision of Henriette Delille* (Mahwah, NJ, 2008); Virginia Meacham Gould, “Henriette Delille, Free Women of Color, and Catholicism in Antebellum New Orleans, 1727–1852,” in *Beyond Bondage: Free Women of Color in the Americas*, ed. Darlene Clark Hine and David B. Gaspar (Champaign, IL, 2004), 271–85.

33. For recent evaluations of the legacy of the Moynihan Report, see Daniel Geary, *Beyond Civil Rights: The Moynihan Report and Its Legacy* (Philadelphia, PA, 2015); Susan D. Greenbaum, *Blaming the Poor: The Long Shadow of the Moynihan Report on Cruel Images about Poverty* (New Brunswick, NJ, 2015); Stephen Steinberg, “The Moynihan Report at Fifty: The Long Reach of Intellectual Racism,” *Boston Review*, 24 June 2015, <http://bostonreview.net/us/stephen-steinberg-moynihan-report-black-families-nathan-glazer>.

34. Julia Smucker, “The New Battle of New Orleans,” *Vox Nova* (blog), 15 February 2012, <http://vox-nova.com/2012/02/15/the-new-battle-of-new-orleans/>.

leans's enslaved and free black and Afro-Creole populations, the church played an integral role in the maintenance of slavery and Jim Crow racism throughout its history in New Orleans.³⁵ The historical record provides ample evidence of the Catholic Church's slave ownership, pro-slavery attitudes and support of secession from the Union, and enforcement of racially exclusionary and segregationist policies within its parish churches, schools, religious orders, and benevolent societies.³⁶ True to its origins as a "state-sponsored religion," the Catholic Church in New Orleans has long reflected and reinforced prevailing racial ideologies codified in law and public policy.³⁷

The 2011 joint press conference uniting the highest officials of the archdiocese, municipal government, and police force reenacted a centuries-old drama of policing black bodies in the interests of New Orleans's propertied class and political elite. Tracing this drama to the reactionary Bourbon regime, Woods ties the "militariz[ation] of race relations and public space" historically to the implementation of postwar "black codes," a brutal convict leasing system, violent anti-labor practices, Jim Crow legislation, and discriminatory urban planning projects.³⁸ Locating the contemporary legacy of Bourbonism in mass incarceration, disinvestment in public services, and subsidization of private industry, he argues that "many of the fundamental principles of Bourbonism have

35. For an example of the portrayal of the Catholic Church's liberalism in regard to slavery, the historian Caryn Cosse Bell contends, "the church's assimilationist policies reinforced the city's lax social regimen and guaranteed black New Orleanians a measure of acceptability that eased the transition to freedom. The city's Latin European religious culture and the racial makeup of the city's slave and free black populations provided the basis for the emergence and empowerment of an aspiring class of free people of color"; see *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition*, 15.

36. R. Bentley Anderson, *Black, White, and Catholic: New Orleans Interracialism, 1947-1956* (Nashville, TN, 2008); James B. Bennett, *Religion and the Rise of Jim Crow in New Orleans* (Princeton, N.J., 2005), 136-228; Donald E. DeVore, *Defying Jim Crow: African American Community Development and the Struggle for Racial Equality in New Orleans, 1900-1960* (Baton Rouge, LA, 2015), 63-72; Thomas N. Ingersoll, "Free Blacks in a Slave Society: New Orleans, 1718-1812," *William and Mary Quarterly* 48, no. 2 (April 1991): 187; Thomas N. Ingersoll, "Slave Codes and Judicial Practice in New Orleans, 1718-1807," *Law and History Review* 13, no. 1 (April 1995): 31; Pasquier, "Our Lady of Prompt Succor," 131-32; Robert C. Reinders, "The Churches and the Negro in New Orleans, 1850-1860," *Phylon* 22, no. 3 (September 1961): 242-43.

37. Bennett, *Religion and the Rise of Jim Crow in New Orleans*, 138.

38. Clyde Woods, "Katrina's World: Blues, Bourbon, and the Return to the Source," *American Quarterly* 61, no. 3 (2009): 436; see also William Ivy Hair, *Bourbonism and Agrarian Protest: Louisiana Politics, 1877-1900* (Baton Rouge, LA, 2008); Justin A. Nystrom, "Bourbon Louisiana," in *KnowLA Encyclopedia of Louisiana*, ed. David Johnson (Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities, 18 August 2011), <http://www.knowla.org/entry/841/>; Justin A. Nystrom, *New Orleans after the Civil War: Race, Politics, and a New Birth of Freedom* (Baltimore, MD, 2010), 193.

emerged on the national and global stage as neoliberalism.”³⁹ Throughout this historical trajectory, Jackson Square has endured as the city’s most iconic setting for the policing of race and space.

Fittingly, an image of Jackson Square figures prominently on “The New Battle of New Orleans” prayer card. As its colonial names Place d’Armes and Plaza de Armas suggest, Jackson Square originated as a space dedicated to military exercises and rituals, including the celebratory rally and mass of thanksgiving attended by soldiers and citizens following the victory at the Battle of New Orleans.⁴⁰ Jackson Square had served as the seat of power in the city beginning in 1734 after it became the official home of the Catholic Church, the military, the court, and the municipal government.⁴¹ Despite changes in the city’s colonial status and administrative arrangements, the square’s centrality in the city did not diminish. As the cultural geographer Rebecca Sheehan explains, “Even when, after the Louisiana Purchase, the economic core began shifting from the French Quarter to the American area uptown, Place d’Armes still remained the symbolic center of the city.”⁴² As in other public spaces throughout New Orleans, order and progress in Place d’Armes was achieved through “restrictive measures,” often leveled against enslaved and free people of color.⁴³ The public square was the site of spectacular rituals of torture and execution for those who ran afoul of the colonial government. The ghastly display of suspected slave insurrectionists’ decapitated heads staked on poles at Place d’Armes and along the river was a recurring scene in what one scholar calls New Orleans’s “theater of violence.”⁴⁴

The rededication of Place d’Armes as Jackson Square in 1851 and the subsequent unveiling of the equestrian statue of General Andrew Jackson were also potent symbols of the violent militarization of race and space.⁴⁵ Although

39. Woods, “Katrina’s World,” 429; Nystrom argues similarly that “many of the basic flaws of Bourbonism . . . endure into the twentieth century” (“Bourbon Louisiana,” <https://64parishes.org/entry/bourbon-louisiana>).

40. Pasquier, “Our Lady of Prompt Succor: The Search for an American Marian Cult in New Orleans,” 130.

41. Gilbert C. Din, “The Offices and Functions of the New Orleans Cabildo,” *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 37, no. 1 (January 1996): 5–30; Rebecca Sheehan, “Negotiated Geographies of New Orleans’s Place d’Armes, 1789–1852,” *Historical Geography* 39 (2011): 223.

42. Sheehan, “Negotiated Geographies of New Orleans’s Place d’Armes, 1789–1852,” 223–24.

43. *Ibid.*, 224, 226.

44. Dawdy, *Building the Devil’s Empire*, 193; Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 96–118, 343–74; Daniel Rasmussen, *American Uprising: The Untold Story of America’s Largest Slave Revolt*, 1st Edition (New York, 2011), 147–48; Albert Thrasher, *On to New Orleans!: Louisiana’s Heroic 1811 Slave Revolt* (New Orleans, LA, 1996), 64–65.

45. According to Henry A. Kmen, Place d’Armes was then relocated to Congo Square, an expropriation of the public space where enslaved New Orleanians created and sustained a vibrant

Jackson's leadership in the Battle of New Orleans earned him the designation "the savior of New Orleans," his legacy for people of color is far more sinister. The Battle of New Orleans, fought days after a peace treaty had already been signed by the United States and Britain, is viewed by many as an unnecessary military battle. For enslaved and free black New Orleanians who were conscripted to fight or compelled to do so by Jackson's promise of remuneration, their service was rewarded by being returned to their owners or being denied the 160 acres of land granted to white soldiers. Not waiting for the outcome of two colonial powers to determine their fates, hundreds of other enslaved Afro-Louisianians took their chances and escaped for freedom.⁴⁶ As a two-term president, Andrew Jackson has been credited as the architect of "Jacksonian democracy." A committed slave owner and trader who resorted to violence to reprimand his bondmen and women and whose ruthless assaults on Native Americans culminated in the 1830 Indian Removal Act, Jackson's view of democracy, as the historian Daniel Walker Howe chronicles, upheld "slavery and white supremacy and opposed the inclusion of nonwhites and women within the American civil polity."⁴⁷

The contrast between the professed ideals of Jacksonian democracy and the realities of slavery and Indian removal found its complement in the dissonance between Place d'Armes's image of elegance, refinement, and order, and the concerted—though never completely successful—efforts of elites to exclude or contain "undesirables."⁴⁸ The prioritization of Place d'Armes and, later, Jackson Square for maintenance, repairs, and aesthetic improvements had its origins in the colonial period but intensified in the late twentieth century as the city moved decisively toward a tourist economy.⁴⁹ In post-Katrina New Orleans, Jackson Square—and the French Quarter more generally—has retained its symbolic significance in the city and has benefited disproportionately from resources dedicated to rebuilding efforts.⁵⁰

The stark contrast between the revitalized French Quarter and devastated neighborhoods in the Lower Ninth Ward, New Orleans East, and Gentilly illuminates the aesthetic, economic, and social disparities generated and prolifer-

Afro-Creole culture. Henry A. Kmen, "The Roots of Jazz and the Dance in Place Congo: A Re-Appraisal," *Anuario Interamericano de Investigacion Musical* 8 (January 1972): 12.

46. Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815–1848* (New York, 2007), 9, 14–16, 72.

47. *Ibid.*, 4; see also Andrew Burstein, *The Passions of Andrew Jackson* (New York, 2007); Mark R. Cheatham, "Andrew Jackson, Slavery, and Historians," *History Compass* 9, no. 4 (April 2011): 326–38.

48. Sheehan, "Negotiated Geographies of New Orleans's Place d'Armes, 1789–1852," 238.

49. Souther, *New Orleans on Parade*, 159–84.

50. Gotham and Greenberg, *Crisis Cities*, vii–viii.

ated by the tourism-industrial complex. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, media, political, and business elites militarized rescue, recovery, and rebuilding efforts, criminalizing the city's poor and working-class black residents to protect and profit from tourism interests. In 2015, a wealthy French Quarter businessman financed, with government support, a private French Quarter police task force to patrol the neighborhood using a potentially racist mobile application that allows private citizens to report suspicious people and activity. At the same time, the New Orleans Convention and Visitors Bureau committed \$2.5 million to finance additional state police troopers in the neighborhood, augmented by a neighborhood sales tax approved by French Quarter voters.⁵¹ This privatization and surveillance of public space is consistent with the acceleration of the neoliberalization of public space after 9/11. Scholars Setha M. Low and Neil Smith note that “the clampdown on public space, in the name of enforcing public safety and homeland security, has been dramatic.”⁵²

This outsourcing of public services to root out crime and undesirable elements from New Orleans's most iconic tourist neighborhood perpetuates the spatial and socioeconomic inequalities of the neoliberal state and reinforces what the sociologists Kathleen Tierney and Christine Bevc identify as “the expansion of *militarism as an ideology* guiding government practice” following Katrina.⁵³ In her study of tourism in Hawai'i and the Philippines, Vernadette

51. David Amsden, “Who Runs the Streets of New Orleans?,” *New York Times Magazine*, 30 July 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/02/magazine/who-runs-the-streets-of-new-orleans.html>; “Analysis: No Abatement of Crime in FQ,” *Louisiana Weekly*, May 16, 2016, <http://www.louisianaweekly.com/analysis-no-abatement-of-crime-in-fq/>; Associated Press, “New Orleans Tourism Industry to Pay \$2.5 Million for Extra Louisiana State Police Patrols,” 4 February 2015, http://www.nola.com/crime/index.ssf/2015/02/tourism_pay_for_state_police.html; Ethan Chiel, “The Problem With Neighborhood Policing Apps,” *Fusion* (blog), May 3, 2016, <http://fusion.net/story/297417/uber-for-cops-app-new-orleans-st-louis/>; Jennifer Larino, “Four Reasons the New Orleans Tourism Industry Is Getting Political,” 4 May 2015, http://www.nola.com/business/index.ssf/2015/05/new_orleans_tourism_political.html; “Mayor Landrieu, Law Enforcement, Business and Resident Leaders Announce a Plan to Improve French Quarter Safety,” City of New Orleans, 25 March 2015, <http://www.nola.gov/mayor/press-releases/2015/20150325-french-quarter-pr/>; Richard Rainey, “French Quarter Public Safety Sales Tax Approved,” 24 October 2015, http://www.nola.com/politics/index.ssf/2015/10/french_quarter_public_safety_s.html; John Simerman, “For \$100K, Sidney Torres Fighting French Quarter Crime Again, This Time with Smart Cars, New App,” *Advocate*, 2 June 2016, http://www.theadvocate.com/new_orleans/news/article_ffabe38b-a5cf-5147-a5fc-30cfrf31c3b5.html.

52. Low and Smith, “Introduction: The Imperative of Public Space,” 1.

53. Kathleen Tierney and Christine Bevc, “Disaster as War: Militarism and the Social Construction of Disaster in New Orleans,” in *The Sociology of Katrina: Perspectives on a Modern Catastrophe*, ed. David L. Brunzma, David Overfelt, and J. Steven Picou (Lanham, MD, 2007), 51; see also Gotham and Greenberg, *Crisis Cities*; Passavant, “Mega-Events, the Superdome, and the Return of the Repressed in New Orleans.”

Gonzalez concurs that “tourism and militarism are today interwoven into the everyday and taken-for-granted routines and logics of local and global life, becoming matter-of-fact explanations for themselves and each other.”⁵⁴ The New Orleans French Quarter bears this out: an increasing reliance on private policing, surveillance, and racially biased law enforcement measures primarily target black people to protect white residents and visitors, while upholding a whitewashed version of New Orleans history packaged for tourist consumption. Yet, despite the imbalance of state power and resources committed to this aim, an insurgent tourism “from below” exposes, critiques, and challenges the history and legacy of racialized state violence and the mainstream tourism industry’s erasure of that history.

BREAKING (NEW) GROUND: LEON WATERS AND “AFRICAN LIFE IN THE FRENCH QUARTER” TOUR

Meeting Leon Waters for the first time, one would be hard pressed to imagine the soft-spoken, unassuming family man as a Marxist-Leninist activist who once called for a separate black nation.⁵⁵ Dressed conservatively in slacks, a button-down shirt and tie, and wire-rimmed glasses, with a gray close-cropped haircut, he seems more grandfatherly than revolutionary. However, once he begins his “African Life in the French Quarter” walking tour, flashes of that revolutionary fervor resurface. “African Life in the French Quarter” had its genesis in Leon Waters’s decades of radical political activism that included sustained efforts to promote, popularize, and institutionalize suppressed histories of African Americans and workers. Like other New Orleans activists of the “protest generation,” Waters, a New Orleans native, was “inspired by the cultural nationalism of the black protest movement in the mid-1960s [and] focused increased energy on cultural affairs in the black community” in the ensuing decades.⁵⁶ For Waters, this included co-founding grassroots organizations; running for public office; participating in protests; joining the fight to rename public schools named for slave owners; and developing educational programming for public school commemorations of the 1811 slave revolt.⁵⁷ His history of activism and the values that sustained it are reflected in the tour.

54. Vernadette Vicuña Gonzalez, *Securing Paradise: Tourism and Militarism in Hawai‘i and the Philippines* (Durham, NC, 2013), 4.

55. Alan Citron, “Three Candidates Suffer Same Money Problems,” *Times-Picayune*, 28 January 1982.

56. Kim Rogers, *Righteous Lives: Narratives of the New Orleans Civil Rights Movement* (New York, 1995), III.

57. Fari Nzinga, “Exit the Matrix, Enter the System: Capitalizing on Black Culture to Create and Sustain Community Institutions in Post-Katrina New Orleans” (PhD diss., Duke University, 2013); phone interview with Leon Waters, 15 June 2016.

In 1979, Waters and other black radicals with roots in the Communist Party, USA formed the Afro-American Liberation League. The Liberation League galvanized public support to bring to justice police officers accused of retaliatory murders of four people in a public housing project in New Orleans.⁵⁸ As part of this effort, Waters filed an ethics complaint against Mayor Dutch Morial's office for illegally hiring private attorneys to defend the police officers.⁵⁹ Demonstrating his belief that Morial, the city's first black mayor, had betrayed his black constituency, a thirty-two-year-old Waters launched a bare-bones campaign against the incumbent in the 1982 mayoral election. Despite his decisive defeat, Waters was the only candidate to focus on issues of concern to poor black people, according to one veteran reporter for the *Times-Picayune*. For instance, when asked during a debate to comment on the preservation of New Orleans's historic districts, Waters turned the discussion to the neglect of the city's public housing complexes: "I'll tell you what the historic districts are. . . . They're the Desire Project, the Algiers-Fischer Project, the Florida Project."⁶⁰ With a campaign slogan of "Jobs and Justice! Make the Rich Pay!," Waters's platform included an \$8 minimum wage for people working in the tourism industry.⁶¹ Waters made two subsequent unsuccessful campaign bids for at-large city council and US Congress seats.⁶²

Waters shifted his focus away from electoral politics when he joined the African American History Alliance of Louisiana (AAHAL) in 1995. According to Fari Nzinga, "its mission was to popularize Black history and inspire a new generation of leaders to struggle for freedom as their ancestors had."⁶³ By this time, Waters had been researching his own ancestors' history, tracing his family's roots to Senegalese people who were brought to upriver Louisiana plantations in the 1700s.⁶⁴ Inspired by stories passed down by his elder cousin Clara "Kizzi" Duncan, Waters began to investigate the 1811 slave revolt, the largest slave revolt in US history. He recalls, "In the late 1950s when I was still very young . . . cousin Kizzi told me about a big slave revolt that took place around

58. Nzinga, "Exit the Matrix, Enter the System," 251–52.

59. Bill Lynch, "Ethics Panel Will Hear Anzelmo Nepotism Case," *Times-Picayune*, 21 December 1983; Jack Wardlaw, "Ethics Panel: Nominee Has Conflict," *Times-Picayune*, 13 January 1984.

60. Quoted in Iris Kelso, "Election's Unargued Issues," *Times-Picayune*, 7 February 1982.

61. Citron, "Three Candidates Suffer Same Money Problems"; Nzinga, "Exit the Matrix, Enter the System," 252. Louisiana adheres to the federal minimum wage rate, which was \$3.35 in 1982; see "Minimum Wage—Wage and Hour Division (WHD)," US Department of Labor, <https://www.dol.gov/whd/minwage/chart.htm>.

62. Kevin Bell, "Familiarity Breeds Support in Polls," *Times-Picayune*, 29 January 1994; "Q & A: The Candidates on Crime: Council at Large," *Times-Picayune*, 1 February 1994.

63. Nzinga, "Exit the Matrix, Enter the System," 253.

64. Rhonda Bell, "Retraced Roots Lead to Site of Slave Revolt," *Times-Picayune*, 21 January 1996.

Montz, Louisiana. She remarked that ‘the slaves would just rise, tear up.’ There were others from that area . . . who also told of slave revolts and said that when they would be put down, the slaves’ heads were cut off and put on poles along the River Road.”⁶⁵ However, beyond these oral histories, there was little official public or historical record of these acts of resistance against slavery in Louisiana. The historian Gwendolyn Midlo Hall attributed the dearth of historical scholarship on the 1811 uprising to a reticence to grapple with the brutality of the slave system. She explained, “There’s been a historical amnesia about anything that showed a really bitter exploitation and violence directed on the slave and former slave population. . . . A lot of historians didn’t want to talk about it and a lot of the public didn’t want to hear about it.”⁶⁶ This history was also expunged from public memory, including in depictions of slavery at the very plantations where the uprising originated. As Waters noted, “It’s typical for plantations not to include a true representation of slavery in their tours. . . . The average person has no idea of what these landmarks actually mean.”⁶⁷ The romanticized portrayal of slavery that he encountered was at odds with his cousin Kizzi’s declaration: “We took advantage of every opportunity to strike a blow for freedom.”⁶⁸

With the backing of AAHAL, Waters began conducting amateur educational tours retracing the steps of the 1811 revolt from St. John the Baptist Parish, thirty miles downriver from New Orleans. He also contributed to the publication of a documentary history of the revolt and began presenting the story in public schools and lectures throughout the region. Soon AAHAL was devoting all of its resources to promulgating unheralded revolutionary black histories and to purging the legacy of white supremacy that was memorialized in monuments, statues, and school and street names throughout the New Orleans area. Waters and AAHAL successfully lobbied the New Orleans School Board to hold annual commemorations of the 1811 slave revolt for public school students. For Waters, these parades were a powerful rejoinder to the annual segregated John McDonogh Day festivities of his childhood. Waters considered 1811 revolt leader Charles Deslondes a much more worthy role model for black public school students than the white school benefactor John McDonogh, who owned slaves and whose bequest was used to build segregated schools throughout the city. Not surprisingly, Waters rebuffed some schools’ initial perfunctory announcements about the 1811 uprising. He insisted on organized events: art proj-

65. Quoted in Thrasher, *On to New Orleans!*, 1–2.

66. Quoted in Littice Bacon-Blood, “The Largest Slave Revolt in U.S. History Is Commemorated,” 3 January 2011, http://www.nola.com/politics/index.ssf/2011/01/the_largest_slave_revolt_in_us.html.

67. Quoted in Bell, “Retraced Roots Lead to Site of Slave Revolt.”

68. Interview with Waters.

ects, essay contests, and parades to rival the compulsory citywide John McDonough Day events.⁶⁹ As he explained, “We told them that’s not what we fought for. We want this damn thing institutionalized. . . . [Y]all gave all that attention to John Mac—[We want the] same thing for the people who fought against them, people who fought against people like John Mac.”⁷⁰ From 1995 through 2004 with an annual schoolwide commemoration of the 1811 slave revolt, Waters brought his vision to fruition, leading many to regard him as “the single-most influential person in keeping the history of the 1811 Slave Revolt alive in the present day.”⁷¹

The AAHAL’s new focus on the 1811 slave revolt eventually led to a shift in political strategy for the organization. Like other activists of the protest generation who responded to increased government violence and surveillance with new forms of activism, the AAHAL evolved into the Louisiana Museum of African American History (LMAAH) in 2003 with Leon Waters as its board chairman.⁷² Commenting on police resistance to his more overtly political activism, Waters explained, “they don’t want [anybody] to know our history because they can see how much strength we get from our history . . . and that’s why we’re using a cultural form so-to-speak to popularize true history. It’s [an] indirect way of bringing up political questions.”⁷³ Nzinga, who held a seat on the LMAAH board at the time of her study, concurs that the new cultural form retains the old political objectives, namely, “to cut through the tourist trap portrayals of so many smiling Black faces. Knowledge of ‘true and authentic history’ which rightfully identifies and celebrates African heroes and revolutionaries is made available to everyday people like students, teachers, public and private workers, as well as elders, artists, and activists in the hopes that they will use their righteous indignation to agitate for social change and transformation.”⁷⁴ In this way, LMAAH is “a legatee of the Black Power and Black Arts movements.”⁷⁵

Waters declared the objective of the new museum is “to make known what is hidden. . . . The exhibits will combat revisionist history and expose many of

69. Nzinga, “Exit the Matrix, Enter the System,” 252–53; interview with Waters; Waters contributed to the publication of Thrasher, *On to New Orleans!* New Orleans’s first major modern civil rights protest was the 1954 boycott of John McDonough Day by black students and educators; see “1904: John McDonough Donates Half His Fortune to New Orleans Schools,” 8 October 2011, http://www.nola.com/175years/index.ssf/2011/10/1904_john_mcdonogh_donates_hal.html.

70. Quoted in Nzinga, “Exit the Matrix, Enter the System,” 93.

71. *Ibid.*, 87.

72. *Ibid.*, 154.

73. *Ibid.*, 269.

74. *Ibid.*, 249.

75. *Ibid.*, 251.

its misconceptions.”⁷⁶ However, without a permanent home, professional staff, or financial backing, the grassroots museum’s existence was precarious from the start. Even with these constraints, LMAAH still launched a makeshift exhibit on the 1811 slave uprising, collaborated with other nonprofit organizations to produce public programming, and continued its annual commemorations of the 1811 revolt in public schools.⁷⁷ Yet, these gains were stalled or reversed after Hurricane Katrina, and Waters was faced with the challenge of “starting all over again.”⁷⁸

Following Katrina, Waters resumed his activism as a founding member of the People’s Hurricane Relief Fund (PHRF), a coalitional organization fighting for the right of return for displaced residents and exposing human rights violations against Katrina survivors. Building on the foundation of the city’s radical activist communities, PHRF sought “to build a reconstruction movement that would organize Black, low-income New Orleanians to challenge a looming State- and corporate-driven recovery.”⁷⁹ While the city’s recovery resources were being invested in revitalizing the tourist infrastructure and recirculating tourist narratives of rebirth and racial romanticism, Leon Waters also turned to tourism to advance a wholly different racial project. In 2008, Waters took a professional tour guide course to meet the city’s licensure requirements. Waters described the course curriculum as “a sham history” that “was really an insult.”⁸⁰ He helped to found Hidden History Tours to challenge this official narrative of the city’s history and to break new ground in an industry and an urban space that historically marginalized or excluded African Americans. An examination of Waters’s political trajectory makes clear that Hidden History Tours was a continuation of, not a departure from, Waters’s radical political activism. Waters followed the model of other New Orleans protest generation activists whom the historian Kim Rogers noted “moved from positions as community organizers to post-movement careers that replicated the values, if not the activities, of their experiences within the movement.”⁸¹ Waters’s political values take center stage in Hidden History’s “African Life in the French Quarter” walking tour.⁸²

76. Lili LeGardeur, “Museum Tells Other Side of the Story,” *Times-Picayune*, 6 February 2003.

77. Nzinga, “Exit the Matrix, Enter the System,” 261–76.

78. Interview with Waters.

79. Rachel E. Luft, “Beyond Disaster Exceptionalism: Social Movement Developments in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina,” *American Quarterly* 61, no. 3 (2009): 503.

80. Interview with Waters.

81. Rogers, *Righteous Lives*, 196; see also Nzinga, “Exit the Matrix, Enter the System,” 124.

82. Hidden History also offers a French Quarter walking tour of the 1811 slave revolt. The company website provides the following description: “Tour emphasizes the hero Gilbert Andry, who led the revolt inside the city, as well as the conditions, the history, and the outcome of the

“African Life in the French Quarter” identifies sites of Afro-Louisianan struggle and resistance from the colonial period to the present. The tour is an extension of Waters’s years of activism and community outreach in the AAHAL and the LMAAH. As in his public lectures, Waters uses the tour to educate and agitate his audience, prompting them to use their knowledge about New Orleans’s black liberation movement to continue the unfinished struggle. The Hidden History website description describes these early black radicals as models of resilience and progress: “With determination, militant leadership and proper organization, Africans and African Americans always endured and made gains.”⁸³ Waters’s use of the French Quarter as the setting for this political education is itself a radical act for two primary reasons. One, the French Quarter (and New Orleans more generally), despite its tourist-driven historic preservation ethos, has not preserved or memorialized important sites of black history and culture.⁸⁴ As a result, Waters guides his group to buildings long since demolished or repurposed and monuments never erected to give histories of Charles Deslondes, the 1811 slave insurrectionist who led the rebellion to New Orleans; Henriette Delille, who founded the black Catholic Sisters of the Holy Family religious order; *L’Union* and *La Tribune*, two nineteenth-century bilingual Afro-Creole newspapers that supported the platform of the Radical Republicans; and the New Orleans 1892 General Strike, the first interracial strike in the country.⁸⁵ Furthermore, the French Quarter has been coded as a white space since the mid-twentieth century when “the city’s preservationist causes . . . clearly sought to shape public memory and heritage tourism by imposing a high-born white order on the Vieux Carré.” By contrast, Souther argues, “the city’s African American community evinced a very different sense of the French Quarter, one that reflected a lack of nostalgia for a place where blacks were welcomed only as service workers and entertainers catering to

1811 revolt by visiting some of the targets of the revolt”; see “Hidden History Tours,” <http://www.hiddenhistory.us/walking-tours>.

83. Ibid.

84. Souther, *New Orleans on Parade*, 38–72; Thomas, *Desire and Disaster in New Orleans*, 29–30, and Lynell L. Thomas, “Tourist Sights, Sights, and Sleights-of-Hand in Treme,” in *HBO’s Treme and Post-Katrina Catborsis: The Mediated Rebirth of New Orleans*, ed. Dominique Gendrin, Catherine Dessinges, and Shearon Roberts (Lanham, MD, 2017), 65.

85. In April 2018, the Louisiana Creole Research Association placed a marker on the building that once housed *L’Union* and *La Tribune*. Waters now incorporates the story of obtaining the marker into his tour; see “The First Black Newspapers in New Orleans: Forum and Unveiling,” <http://neworleans.carpediem.cd/events/6824652-the-first-black-newspapers-in-new-orleans-forum-unveiling-at-williams-research-center/>; Jared White, “LEH Announces Awards for Keep It 300! Grants,” *LEH* (blog), 21 February 2018, <https://www.leh.org/leh-announces-awards-keep-300-grants/>; Leon Waters, “African Life in the French Quarter Tour,” New Orleans, LA, 31 May 2018.

tourists.”⁸⁶ Because African Americans continued to face discrimination and police harassment in the French Quarter into the twenty-first century, Waters’s regularly operating tour stakes a claim on white urban space.⁸⁷

The tour’s alternative histories of slavery, state-sanctioned violence, segregation, and sexual exploitation also challenge the “utopian narratives of cultural diversity” that tourism promoters retooled and recirculated as part of post-Katrina rebranding efforts. As Gotham and Greenberg illustrate, “this rebranded landscape has served to frame, reify, and (to a degree) legitimize the controversial, contested, and uneven spatial and political interventions of crisis-driven urbanization.”⁸⁸ From the outset, Waters attempts to reorient the tourist gaze, reinterpreting familiar landmarks to reveal the historical and contemporary inequities manifested in the urban landscape. By reimagining European explorers as “conquerors” who usurped Native American lands; recasting New Orleans as a major “slave depot” on the domestic slave trade; emphasizing strikes, rebellions, slave revolts, and other resistant practices; and highlighting examples of corruption, racism, and class inequality, Waters uses his tour to disrupt popular tourist depictions of New Orleans’s system of slavery, laissez-faire cultural and social permissiveness, and racial and class harmony.⁸⁹

No place is this disruption more pronounced than during Waters’s tour stop at Jackson Square, the symbolic center of the city (fig. 2). Waters references histories of violence and exploitation at each of the most prominent tourist landmarks in Jackson Square: the Cabildo, the Presbytere, the St. Louis Cathedral, and the statue of Andrew Jackson. He emphasizes that the Cabildo—the seat of municipal government in colonial New Orleans—derived and dispensed its power from its function as a slave depot where Africans were sold outside to settle debts and close successions. Notably, Waters levels the same type of rebuke at the Catholic Church, diverging entirely from the Archdiocese’s depiction in its prayer campaign. Waters uses the site of St. Louis Cathedral to provide a counternarrative to the Catholic Church’s liberalism by implicating the church in the maintenance of the slave system. In the cathedral foyer, Waters

86. Souther, *New Orleans on Parade*, 58, 57.

87. Examples of harassment and discrimination in the twenty-first century include the killing of a young black man by bouncers, the release of a report detailing racial bias in Bourbon Street bars, and a widely circulated video of a police assault on a black man; see Brendan McCarthy, “Federal Lawsuit in Beating of Man by Police in French Quarter after Katrina Is Settled by City,” 7 August 2009, http://www.nola.com/news/index.ssf/2009/08/federal_lawsuit_in_beating_of.html; James Varney, “Bourbon Street Bar Bias Detailed,” *Times-Picayune*, 17 May 2005.

88. Gotham and Greenberg, *Crisis Cities*, 22.

89. Leon Waters, “African Life in the French Quarter Tour,” New Orleans, LA, 17 March 2015.



Figure 2. Leon Waters addresses his “African Life in the French Quarter” tour group in Jackson Square with the statue of Andrew Jackson in the background. Photograph by author, May 31, 2018. Color version available as an online enhancement.

points to a plaque with the names of rectors he refers to as slave owners. Departing from a typical discussion of the adjoining Presbytere’s architectural symmetry to the Cabildo, he emphasizes instead the buildings’ shared slave history. He identifies the Presbytere as a place where Catholic priests kept the African teenage girls that they owned. As these examples show, slavery is omnipresent on the tour, mapped onto the tourist landscape and into the interstices

of New Orleans's political, economic, cultural, and social history.⁹⁰ On Waters's tour, the enslavement, dehumanization, sexual exploitation, and violent repression of Afro-Louisianans and other vulnerable populations are not subordinate elements in New Orleans's history, but foundational to the city's emergence, development, and advancement.

Deviating from the tourist script of New Orleans exceptionalism, "African Life in the French Quarter" resituates New Orleans at the nexus—spatially and discursively—of national and transnational practices of settler colonialism, empire, and white supremacy. For example, at the equestrian statue of Andrew Jackson, Waters discredits Jackson's heroism at the Battle of New Orleans and denounces him for orchestrating the Trail of Tears. Yet, Waters is as much concerned with using his tour to promote justice in the present moment as he is with using it to revise history. Like other black heritage and justice tours, "African Life in the French Quarter" traces the historical roots of systemic inequality to chart a path to contemporary resistance and reparations. Such tours invoke a usable past that enables "local communities to speak for themselves and tell their own stories of current oppression and occupation."⁹¹ Waters uses Andrew Jackson's past as a slave owner and white supremacist to enter into contemporary debates over replacing Jackson's image on the twenty-dollar bill. Not satisfied simply to retell Jackson's history, Waters calls into question the very process and practice of memorializing the past. His critique is particularly compelling at a time when US communities are reassessing their public monuments for the values they impart and the histories that they invoke and obscure.

For instance, in recent years the research findings produced by academic scholarship and public history projects has helped to reconstruct the physical and cultural geography of slavery in New Orleans: identifying sites of slave pens, markets, and auction houses; unearthing the proliferation of fugitive slave advertisements; and revealing the quotidian pervasiveness of urban slavery as it played out in discussions and transactions in barrooms, hotels, and public spaces.⁹² As a member of the New Orleans Committee to Erect Historic

90. New Orleans's slave history is interpreted at other sites in the French Quarter, including the Omni Royal Orleans Hotel, the Original Pierre Maspero's restaurant, and the State of Louisiana Court of Appeal; Waters, "African Life in the French Quarter Tour" (2015), and "African Life in the French Quarter Tour" (2018).

91. Rami K. Isaac and Darlene Hodge, "An Exploratory Study: Justice Tourism in Controversial Areas: The Case of Palestine," *Tourism Planning and Development* 8, no. 1 (2011): 103.

92. Examples of scholarship and public history projects on New Orleans slavery include the Historic New Orleans Collection's 2015 exhibit "Purchased Lives: New Orleans and the Domestic Slave Trade, 1808–1865"; the digital database of fugitive slave advertisements Freedom on the Move; and Walter Johnson's award-winning history of New Orleans's antebellum slave market. See

Markers on the Slave Trade, Leon Waters played an integral role in the installation of two markers in the French Quarter acknowledging the city's role in the transatlantic and domestic slave trades (fig. 3). Since the markers have been erected, Waters incorporates them into his tour, highlighting the reciprocal relationship between New Orleans's tourist identity and its public memory.⁹³

Waters's work to erect monuments to the slave trade continues the decades-long crusade of AAHAL and the LMAAH to remove vestiges of white supremacy from the city's landscape. This project gained new momentum in 2014 following a string of high-profile killings of unarmed black people when a group of young activists formed Take 'Em Down NOLA to push for the removal of all "monuments, school names and street signs dedicated to white supremacists."⁹⁴ Take 'Em Down NOLA's leadership was inspired by public lectures given by Leon Waters and fellow LMAAH member and Hidden History tour guide Malcolm Suber. Their influence on the movement is clear in the young activists' explicit connection between the city's symbolic memorial landscape and persistent structural inequality. In an "Open Letter to the Residents of New Orleans," Take 'Em Down NOLA explains,

Some people believe that the struggle to remove white supremacist symbols is a deflection from the more meaningful struggle to end present day discrimination. They couldn't be further from the truth. They do not understand that it is the white supremacist ideas, represented by these symbols, which permeate USA society and result in actual discrimination and murder. That is why policemen with white supremacist conceptions of young Black people can murder them so easily. This [is] why the so-called criminal justice system can practice mass incarceration of Black people with the ap-

Erin Greenwald, *Purchased Lives: New Orleans and the Domestic Slave Trade, 1808–1865* (New Orleans, LA, 2015); John Pope, "Slavery in New Orleans Is the Subject of a Harrowing Exhibit at the Historic New Orleans Collection," 27 March 2015, http://www.nola.com/arts/index.ssf/2015/03/slavery_in_new_orleans_is_the.html; "Freedom on the Move," <http://freedomonthe.move.org/>; Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, MA, 2001).

93. The New Orleans Committee to Erect Historic Markers on the Slave Trade plans to place four additional markers throughout the city. See Faimon Roberts III, "Efforts Underway to Mark New Orleans Sites Where Slaves Were Bought and Sold," *New Orleans Advocate*, 5 May 2018, http://www.theadvocate.com/new_orleans/news/article_8aed1be2-4f00-11e8-a466-abb24fcc56c2.html; Jessica Marie Johnson, "New Orleans Historical Markers," *Diaspora Hypertext* (blog), 24 April 2018, <http://dh.jmjafrx.com/2018/04/24/new-orleans-historical-markers/>; Waters, "African Life in the French Quarter Tour" (2018).

94. Clint Smith, "The Young Black Activists Targeting New Orleans's Confederate Monuments," *New Republic*, 18 May 2017, <https://newrepublic.com/article/142757/young-black-activists-targeting-new-orleans-ss-confederate-monuments>.



Figure 3. This marker describing the transatlantic slave trade to Louisiana was placed adjacent to the Mississippi River by the New Orleans Committee to Erect Historic Markers on the Slave Trade in 2018. Photograph by Sedric McClure, May 31, 2018. Color version available as an online enhancement.

proval of most white people. This is why we have over 50% unemployment for Black men in New Orleans and there is no editorial outcry by the white ruling class press.⁹⁵

The New Orleans City Council ultimately voted to remove three monuments of Confederate leaders and the Battle of Liberty Place Monument that honored

95. "Why It Matters," #TakeEmDownNOLA, <http://takeemdownnola.org/why-it-matters/>.

the reactionary paramilitary white league's 1874 attempted overthrow of the city's Reconstruction government.⁹⁶

Before it was removed in April 2017, the Battle of Liberty Place Monument was a stop on the "African Life in the French Quarter" Tour. Standing before the monument, Waters gave the history of the nineteenth-century battle that stripped black New Orleanians of political power, as well as the history of the twentieth-century battle by black New Orleanians to wield their hard-won political power to fight for the monument's removal. "African Life in the French Quarter's" emphasis on the pernicious legacy of white supremacy and the valiant, but unfinished struggle against it is not easily reconciled with New Orleans's tourist identity. The historian Casey Nelson Blake explains, "An 'objective' past that hurts, that scars its victims, that haunts their memories and disrupts their sleep decades later is a past that cannot be easily mobilized in the service of tourism and impression management. A past that forces us to work through the pain it has inflicted may be a usable past, but it will not be a comfortable one."⁹⁷ Waters's tour appeals to a new market of New Orleans tourists and residents who reject the comfort of a sanitized "tourism from above" for a more painful, participatory "tourism from below."⁹⁸ Following the vanguard of New Orleans activists, heritage tourists, and post-Katrina disaster tourists, volun-tourists, and eco-tourists, this new market is willing to transgress the geographic, imaginative, and narrative boundaries of tourist New Orleans in search of a more authentic, if not more socially conscious, experience.⁹⁹ Waters's tourism activism wages a new battle over New Orleans on the city's most renown urban commons, highlighting the reciprocal relationship between symbolic and structural violence and the necessity for spatial and social justice. Not surprisingly, Take 'Em Down NOLA's next target for removal is the statue of Andrew Jackson in the heart of the French Quarter.¹⁰⁰

The Catholic Archdiocese of New Orleans's "The New Battle of New Orleans: Violence, Murder, Racism" prayer campaign and Hidden History Tours' "African Life in the French Quarter," both appropriate the history and symbolism of the French Quarter to confront racism and violence in New Orleans.

96. Daniel Victor, "New Orleans City Council Votes to Remove Confederate Monuments," *New York Times*, 17 December 2015.

97. Casey Nelson Blake, "The Usable Past, the Comfortable Past, and the Civic Past: Memory in Contemporary America," *Cultural Anthropology* 14, no. 3 (1999): 430.

98. Kevin Fox Gotham, "Authenticity in Black and White: The Rise of Tourism in the Twentieth Century," in *Authentic New Orleans*, 7-12.

99. Thomas, *Desire and Disaster in New Orleans*, 127-57.

100. Aviva Shen, "The History behind New Orleans' Long Fight to Remove Its Confederate Monuments," *Think Progress* (blog), 13 March 2017, <https://thinkprogress.org/new-orleans-fight-confederate-monuments-1596a7d2618d/>.

While the church's campaign has echoes of the black pathology and cultural inferiority statements of the late 1960s, the tour draws on Leon Waters's history of radicalism and black nationalism from the same period. Both endeavors present visions of New Orleans's future that are dependent on divergent constructions of the city's past, competing claims on public space, and negotiations of New Orleans's tourist identity. With their focus on Jackson Square, the city's most renowned tourist site, the prayer campaign and walking tour exemplify the ways that the city's tourism practices rhetorically and structurally reproduce inequality, as well as the potential for tourism to facilitate resistance to injustice. Jackson Square, and the French Quarter more generally, has never been a neutral ground in New Orleans, but it continues to be an important site to wage the battle over public memory and spatial (in)justice.