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**Publication Date**

2018

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

“We Made It Through That Water”: Rhythm, Dance, and Resistance  
in the New Orleans Second Line

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy  
in Ethnomusicology

by

Benjamin Grant Doleac

2018

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

“We Made It Through That Water”: Rhythm, Dance, and Resistance  
in the New Orleans Second Line

by

Benjamin Grant Doleac

Doctor of Philosophy in Ethnomusicology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2018

Professor Cheryl L. Keyes, Chair

The black brass band parade known as the second line has been a staple of New Orleans culture for nearly 150 years. Through more than a century of social, political and demographic upheaval, the second line has persisted as an institution in the city’s black community, with its swinging march beats and emphasis on collective improvisation eventually giving rise to jazz, funk, and a multitude of other popular genres both locally and around the world. More than any other local custom, the second line served as a crucible in which the participatory, syncretic character of black music in New Orleans took shape.

While the beat of the second line reverberates far beyond the city limits today, the neighborhoods that provide the parade’s sustenance face grave challenges to their existence. Ten years after Hurricane Katrina tore up the economic and cultural fabric of New Orleans, these largely poor communities are plagued on one side by underfunded schools and internecine violence, and on the other by the rising tide of post-disaster gentrification and the redlining-in-disguise of neoliberal urban policy. At the same time, second lines are attracting broader crowds

and greater media attention than ever before, with film crews, journalists, smartphone videographers and scholars like me descending on the parade in droves every Sunday. Drawing from three and a half years of field and archival research and over thirty interviews with musicians, dancers, and educators, I explore the past and present of the second line, its rhythms and its participants, and how the key players in New Orleans second line culture utilize the parade to navigate the challenges of the present, to reconstruct community histories and reclaim neighborhood space, and ultimately to forge an expressive narrative of resistance and pride against the threat of cultural erasure.

The dissertation of Benjamin Doleac is approved.

Münir N. Beken

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University of California, Los Angeles

2018

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## Acknowledgements

A great number of people helped me on this journey, providing guidance, feedback, inspiration, and emotional support when I needed it. First and foremost, I want to thank my advisor, Dr. Cheryl Keyes, a Louisiana native, jazz scholar, and brilliant musician in her own right whose deep knowledge of black music history – and of the Crescent City’s rich musical and cultural history – proved invaluable as I embarked on this amorphous ethnographic and historical project, and whose level-headedness, patience, and common sense provided an anchor on the all too frequent occasions when I doubted my work and its value. The other members of my dissertation committee – Dr. Robin Kelley, Dr. A.J. Racy, and Dr. Münir Beken – have all provided critical feedback and wisdom. I could not have completed this dissertation without them.

I would also like to thank several of my colleagues and mentors at UCLA and at other institutions, including Dr. James Newton and Dr. Scot Brown; my fellow graduate students Otto Stuparitz, Darci Sprengel, Alex Rodriguez, Eric Schmidt, Deonte Harris, Marc Bolin, Rose Boomsma, Logan Clark, Alyssa Matthias, Helga Zambrano, and A.J. Kluth; Kyle DeCosde at Columbia University; Dr. Matt Sakakeeny at Tulane University; Dr. Rachel Carrico at the University of Oregon; and Dr. Connie Atkinson at the University of New Orleans.

The musicians, dancers, and educators I interviewed for this project are some of the most remarkable people I have ever met. I did not have the space to directly quote all of my interviewees herein, but they all have vital stories to tell and deserve greater public recognition for their contributions to the culture. I want to offer my gratitude to everyone I interviewed for this project here: Herlin Riley, Johnny Vidacovich, Charles Connor, Russell Batiste, Natasha

Harris, Walter “Whoadie” Ramsey, Melissa “DJ Soul Sister” Weber, Raymond Weber, Benny Jones, Gerald French, Roger Lewis, Phil Frazier, Derrick Tabb, Keith Frazier, Russell Batiste, Kenan Batiste, Brenard “Bunny” Adams, George Brown, Christie Jourdain, Darren Towns, Wilbert Rawlins, Irving “Spyboy Honey” Bannister, Floyd Gray, Ellis Joseph, Judy Hill, James Andrews, Jenard Andrews, Roderick “YF Scubble” Davis, Elsie Miller, Belden “Noonie” Batiste, James “Jams” Marotta, Lumar LeBlanc, Jerel Brown, Glen Finnister Andrews, Wilbert Rawlins, Norman Dixon, Jr., Ed Buckner, Craig Adams, Sean King, Luther Gray, Lionel Batiste, Jr., Christopher Herrero, Kerry Hunter, Alexis Pierce, Chris Tero, and Bill Summers. Thank you for your time, your wisdom and your willingness to share your stories with me.

Many of the friends I made while conducting field research in New Orleans proved to be invaluable resources, alerting me to important events and helping me make vital connections within the community. I would like to thank Mike Mastrogiovani, Nita Ketner and Dave Ankers at WWOZ, Alex Murcia, Ben Myers, Anna Scott, and Dr. Brice Miller for helping me get oriented to the city and introducing me to so many of the incredible people who keep second line culture alive.

Finally, I would like to thank my family – Mom, Dad, and Chris – for their love, support, and encouragement. You believed in me and my work even when I wasn’t sure that I did. I am forever in your debt.

This dissertation has been generously supported by three research grants from the UCLA Bunche Center for African American Studies, a summer research fellowship from the Herb Alpert School of Music, the UCLA Affiliates Scholarship, and a Graduate Student Research Fellowship from the Smithsonian National Museum of American History.

## Vita

Benjamin Doleac earned a Bachelor of Arts in English from Wesleyan University in 2001 and a Master of Arts in Music from the University of Alberta in 2011. While pursuing his doctoral degree in Ethnomusicology he served as Associate Editor of UCLA's *Ethnomusicology Review* and won a research fellowship to study the development of early jazz in New Orleans at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History. In addition, he worked as a Teaching Assistant in the departments of Ethnomusicology, Musicology, and African American Studies, and as a Research Assistant at the UCLA Ethnomusicology Archive. He will be teaching the Cultural History of Rap class at UCLA in the summer of 2018.

Doleac has been active as a performer in a variety of musical ensembles over the past 20 years, including concert choirs (Wesleyan Singers, Wesleyan Collegium Musicum), a capella groups (Quasimodal), gospel choirs (Wesleyan's Ebony Singers, Harvard's Kumbaa Singers, UCLA Gospel Choir), and several of the World Music ensembles at UCLA (the Music of West Africa ensemble, the Mariachi ensemble, the Early Music Ensemble, and the Balkan choir). His research interests include popular music and culture, the expressive cultures of the Black Atlantic, and race in American history. Doleac plans to conduct additional research on second line culture in New Orleans over the next few years, and ultimately aims to turn his findings into a published book.

## **Introduction: Second Lining in the Streets of New Orleans**

*December 6, 2015:*

*At around 11:30 on a Sunday morning, a crowd gathers on the street outside the Treme Community Center in New Orleans. Lining the uneven pavement are an assortment of drink vendors with coolers full of water and beer; a couple of food trucks with smoke-billowing propane grills; a dense throng of locals and tourists, some casually dressed and others suited up in their church clothes; and three pickup trucks pulling modestly adorned, brightly-decorated parade floats. The crowd surrounding the entrance to the community center is even denser, with a dozen young men in matching t-shirts toting brass instruments right outside the door and a smattering of photographers and videographers pointing their cameras at the entranceway. Around 11:50, the young men in matching shirts assemble and strike up a fast, polyrhythmic march tune. Four men carrying each end of two yellow ropes part the crowd to make an aisle outside the entrance. The door opens and a woman with a bright, silver sequined suit dances her way down the aisle. She is followed by a man wearing an orange and gold suit and a massive orange crown decorated with dyed feathers, green papier-mâché plants, purple musical staves and a shining purple fleur-de-lis. Behind him come several dancing men in spectacular purple suits with elaborately decorated green, purple, and orange sashes, umbrellas and feathered fans. Finally, a woman wearing an even larger headdress and a man with an enormous crown shaped like an inverted funnel come out of the building; both are attired, like the dancing men, in intricately designed purple, orange and green parade suits. The door to the Treme Community Center closes, and the band follows behind the procession. Those men and women wearing crowns take their positions on the parade floats, and many in the still-growing crowd follow behind. Neighborhood spectators now augment the brass band's rhythm section – bass drum,*

*snare drum, and tuba – with their own bells, tambourines and other improvised percussion instruments, and dancers young and old, male and female mount staircases, construction equipment, roofs and the tops of moving vans to execute fast, limber footwork in view of the entire assembled multitude. A few blocks behind, another group of marchers with silver and blue suits and fans joins the procession, followed by another brass band and a crowd of spectators. And a few blocks behind this still, yet another group of exquisitely suited marchers and another brass band follows. As the parade reaches the I-10 overpass that divides the Tremé neighborhood along Claiborne Avenue, the dense polyrhythms and blaring horns of the brass bands become an enveloping roar. Under the bridge, the bands repeat a horn call eight times, and eight times they are answered by a massive, reverberating cry from the crowd. Yet for all the electricity in the air, this is just the first of many climaxes in the parade; there are still three and a half hours and dozens of blocks worth of reverie to go.*

One can find a very similar scene on almost every Sunday in the “backatown” neighborhoods of New Orleans, from late August all the way through early June. It’s called a second line, and its origins can be traced back to West African funeral processions of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and earlier. Imported to the United States through the forced migrations of enslaved Africans, these funeral customs and the dances, songs and rhythms that accompanied them underwent a process of syncretization with the Catholic funeral traditions of New Orleans and with the brass band music that swept the city and the nation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Sponsored by black mutual aid societies known as Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs, the second line emerged as a regular Sunday tradition independent of its funeral origins by the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Though the rhythms of the parade and its accompanying dance steps have changed over the

years, the second line has retained the same basic form, function and underlying musical pulse throughout most of its history.



Figure 1: Queen Johanna Vail coming out the door of the Treme Community Center, Dumaine Street Gang 18th annual second line, December 6, 2015. Photo by author.



Figure 2: Parading through Treme, Dumaine Street Gang 18th annual second line, December 6, 2015. Photo by author.



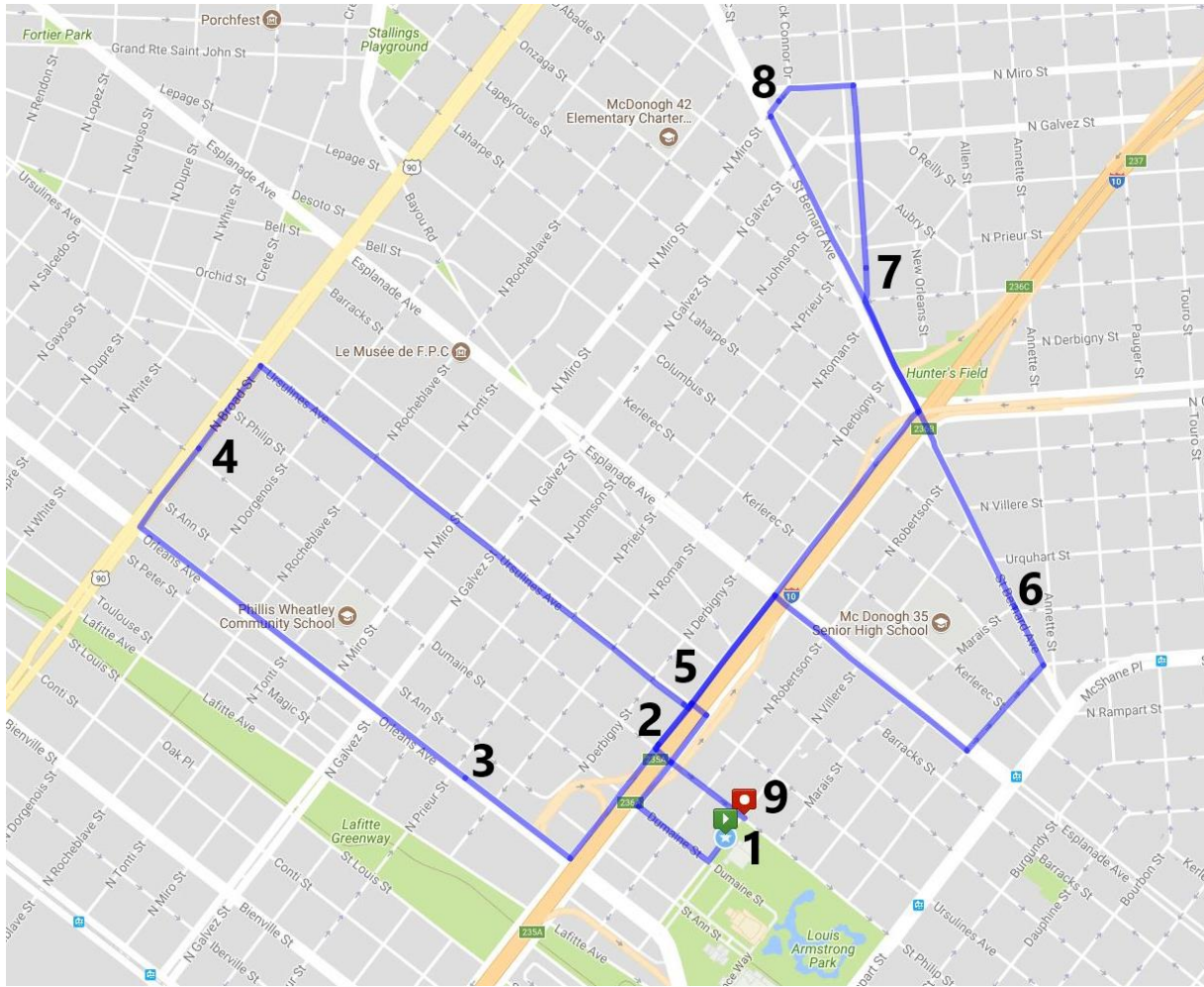


Figure 3: Dumaine Street Gang 18th annual second line parade route with stops (see legend below). Route courtesy of "Second Line Sunday: Dumaine Street Gang and Westbank Steppers," posted by Deborah "Big Red" Cotton at Gambit online, December 4, 2015 (<https://www.bestofneworleans.com/blogofneworleans/archives/2015/12/04/second-line-sunday-dumaine-street-gang-and-westbank-steppers>). Map created on Map My Ride by author, May 23, 2018 (<http://www.mapmyride.com/routes/view/2073256453>).

**Legend:**

- 1) Start: Treme Center, North Villere and St. Philip Streets
- 2) Stop: Roosevelt's, 1001 North Claiborne Avenue
- 3) Stop: Ooh Poo Pah Doo Bar (Old & Nu Style Fellas Social Aid and Pleasure Club), 1931 Orleans Avenue
- 4) Stop: Impressive Barber Shop (Family Ties Social Aid and Pleasure Club), 902 Broad Street
- 5) Stop: Revolution Social Aid and Pleasure Club, Ursulines and North Claiborne Avenue
- 6) Stop: Justin's Next Stop Bar (Sudan Social Aid and Pleasure Club), 1301 St. Bernard Avenue
- 7) Stop: A.P. Tureaud Park (Westbank Ladies of Pleasure Social Aid and Pleasure Club), A.P. Tureaud and St. Bernard Avenue
- 8) Stop: Seal's Class Act (Seal's Class Act Outreach Club and Nine Times Social Aid and Pleasure Club), 2169 Aubrey Street
- 9) End: Joseph A. Craig Charter School, 1423 St. Philip Street

Unlike Mardi Gras parades and many of the other traditional processions that mark the calendar in this most festive of American cities, the second line is a fundamentally interactive form. The band and the dancing members of the sponsoring Social Aid and Pleasure Club make the “first line,” or the main line of the parade. Typically, the parade begins with the club members dancing, or “lining out” the door of a designated venue. Once each of the club members have exited the building and gathered in formation on the street, the band organizes behind them, strikes up a lively march tune, and sets off with the club on the first leg of a pre-planned route. Marshalled by the tumbling drums and riffing horns, neighborhood revelers form a “second line” behind the first. It is this latter group for whom the parade is named.

The musicians and dancers who participate in the New Orleans second line make up a distinct, close-knit community of practice which over the twentieth century combined the rhythms of brass marching bands, the black church and Afro-Caribbean festival culture to create a musical lexicon that now underlies jazz, funk, rhythm and blues and countless other musical styles around the world. Even as the beat of the second line continues to reverberate nationally and internationally, the black neighborhoods that provide its sustenance face grave challenges. Ten years after Hurricane Katrina tore up the economic and cultural fabric of New Orleans, these communities are plagued on one side by underfunded schools and internecine violence, and on the other by the rising tide of post-disaster gentrification and the redlining-in-disguise of neoliberal urban policy. At the same time, second lines are attracting broader crowds and greater media attention than ever before, with film crews, journalists, smartphone videographers and scholars (including this author) descending on the parade in droves every Sunday. From 2013 to 2017, I studied the cultural lineage, performance practices and musical legacy of this community through ethnographic fieldwork in New Orleans, nearly thirty interviews with local musicians,

dancers and educators, and archival research at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History, Tulane University's Hogan Jazz Archive, and the Midlo Center for New Orleans Studies at the University of New Orleans. Through a synthesis of ethnography, historiography and musicological analysis, I explore herein how the key players in New Orleans second line culture utilize the parade and its rhythms to negotiate these contradictions, to historicize and reclaim neighborhood space, and ultimately to forge an expressive counter-narrative of resistance and pride against the threat of cultural erasure.

### ***The Expressive Politics of Style: Second Line Rhythm and Dance***

The economic and existential precarity that African Americans face in post-Katrina New Orleans is, of course, not a new condition; black New Orleanians have faced manifold forms of structural violence and countless traumatic upheavals in their political, economic and social situation since the earliest forced migrations of African slaves to the Louisiana colony in 1719. One of the most potent ways black New Orleanians have responded to such upheavals is through creative expression, with the second line parade just one among the several forms that have emerged as defiant rejoinders to continued race and class-based oppression. Like jazz and the Mardi Gras Indian gangs, two closely related expressive traditions, the second line makes meaning through its own expressive grammar of sound and gesture. Making sense of the parade requires some understanding of this grammar, which I analyze primarily in terms of rhythm and dance. While second line rhythms and dances are constantly changing and adapting in response to the circumstances of each new era – indeed, the dynamism and mutability of the form is arguably what has allowed it to survive and thrive for over a century – they retain several core

features that have provided the essential stylistic framework of the parade since it first emerged in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

At core, the second line beat is an Afro-Caribbean reinterpretation of the duple (1-2, 1-2) Euro-American march beat. The black brass bands that played the first second lines probably took the first step in creating this distinctly local rhythm towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by altering the standard march beat with a stronger accent on the fourth beat of every other measure, or what Wynton Marsalis refers to as the “big four.”<sup>1</sup>



Figure 4: The "Big Four." Transcribed by author.

By the 1910s at the very latest, the drummers layered accent patterns derived from Afro-Caribbean rhythms such as the *clave*, the *tresillo*, the *habanera*, and the *cinquillo* over this mildly syncopated beat. The final critical innovation of the turn of the century brass bands in New Orleans was a flexible sense of timing, with drumbeats often falling somewhere in between a duple and triple rhythmic feel. Referred to by some scholars and practitioners as playing in “between the cracks,” this mixed feel is roughly analogous to the most sublime of jazz’s foundational characteristics – what we now call “swing.” This is the roux from which not just jazz but mid-twentieth century rhythm and blues, funk, and even aspects of reggae and hip hop were concocted, and it still provides the underlying framework for the rhythm of the second line today. In all its manifestations and interpretations it serves as what Amiri Baraka (formerly LeRoi Jones) calls the “changing same,” a mutable constant that draws together the past and present of the parade, the city and the stories they contain.

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<sup>1</sup> Marsalis interview in *Jazz*, dir. Ken Burns, 2000.

The second line is an embodied tradition, defined as much by the movements of dancers as by the beats and riffs of brass band musicians, and while second line dance has proven as fluctuant as second line rhythm, it is likewise characterized by several features that have remained constant across different eras. Filmed footage of second line dancers before the 1950s is almost nonexistent, but given that second line dance styles have tended to evolve in tandem with shifts in music style, and given that there are only minor changes in musical style between the earliest sound recordings of black brass bands in New Orleans and the first sound films of second line parades in the 1950s and 1960s, it is likely that the essential features of second line dance had crystallized by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. These features include a wide-legged stance, an emphasis on the lower body (hips, knees and feet), and footfalls on the “1” and “3” of every measure, with the knees and feet syncopating and accenting the upbeats. This is the bodily archive of the second line, absorbed primarily through informal observation and participation at parades, and awakened at the start of each second line by the rolling beats of the bass and the snare drums.

The final critical feature of second line performance is the repertoire of songs, riffs and melodies that the horns play: spirituals, traditional jazz and blues numbers, rhythm and blues favorites, modern pop hits, and contemporary second line originals. Each of these melodies has the potential to conjure a particular historical period, an event, a geographical location, a person, or even a specific moment in the parade (examples of the latter include the traditional spiritual “Just a Closer Walk With Thee,” which is usually played to honor departed club members when the parade passes a cemetery; and the Hustlers Brass Band’s “Let’s Go Get ’Em,” an uptempo jaunt commonly played as the parade is about to reach its last stop). Perhaps the most potent of

these melodies is the “Joe Avery” horn call, named for the trombonist who composed it as part of a longer piece in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.



Figure 5: The "Joe Avery" horn call. Transcribed by author.

Just four notes, the “Joe Avery” signifies the climax of the parade, and is played every time a second line passes under the I-20 overpass. Once a symbol of racist structural violence and containment – its construction necessitated the demolition of several blocks in primarily black neighborhoods; sucked the economic and cultural lifeblood out of Claiborne Avenue, which had been the de facto Main Street of black New Orleans; and accelerated white flight and commercial divestment from the city – the overpass was transformed by second liners into a site of communal celebration and spiritual transcendence. It is this process of transformation and reclamation, effected through the rhythm, dance, and song of the second line parade, that I explore and try to make sense of herein.



Figure 6: "Under the bridge," or the I-20 overpass, at the climax of the Ladies and Gents Social Aid and Pleasure Club second line, January 18, 2015. Photo by author.

## ***Literature Review***

In documenting the past and present of the second line, explicating its social and political significance, and conceiving the parade as a means of resistance to racialized oppression – most specifically the shifting forms of socioeconomic marginalization, geographical containment and displacement, and state-sponsored violence and repression that New Orleanians of color have had to contend with since the city’s founding – I draw upon a substantial body of existing scholarship. The first part of the literature review herein surveys broad anthropological and historical studies of African American culture as resistance, survival tool, and expressive counter-narrative. Next, I consider works that detail the traumatic sociopolitical history of African American life in New Orleans, explicating both how race and class-based systems of oppression shifted over time and how black New Orleanians continually developed new strategies of resistance. Finally, I survey ethnographic case studies of second line culture, most of which are anchored within a particular historical moment. What I seek to do herein is to synthesize the temporal snapshots of these ethnographies with the broader perspective of cultural histories. The second line is a dynamic and ever-changing form; it deserves an analysis that can encompass those changes.

## ***Culture as Process/Culture as Memory***

I contend that the second line has served throughout its history as a means for black New Orleanians to resist continued displacement, containment, and marginalization by claiming their right to neighborhood spaces and the histories those spaces contain through rhythm, dance, and song. In making this contention I draw on Lawrence W. Levine’s *Black Culture and Black*

*Consciousness* (1977) and Sterling Stuckey's *Slave Culture* (1987) perhaps the most influential works to focus broadly on African retentions in black expressive culture. Both studies argue that African expressive forms, and music in particular, have historically served as means for African Americans to cope with, comment upon and fleetingly transcend the material realities of their lived experience.

Levine argues in *Black Culture and Black Consciousness* that the emergence of a cohesive African-American culture was facilitated more by similarities in the underlying social and epistemological orientations of African-born slaves than by shared institutions and expressive practices. He writes that culture is best understood not as a fixed product but as a process, so instead of considering the songs, rituals, religious beliefs and stories of a culture as static texts that evince the remnants and "survivals" of ancestral cultures he proposes that we examine the dynamic processes by which these expressive forms are shaped and adapted over time. In Levine's conception, music and religion remained central to the everyday lives of black slaves because they offered a means of collective self-assertion and an opportunity to negotiate, make sense of and respond to their situation. The common West African emphases on improvisation (both verbal and musical), linguistic play and collective creation were crucial to the dynamism and social import of black musical tradition. The second line, like the field hollers and circle dances of slave culture and the seminal post-Emancipation traditions of jazz and blues, is a fundamentally dynamic and responsive form, grounded in collective improvisation and continuously adapting to the challenges of the present moment. My study proceeds directly from Levine's notion of culture as process, exploring how the second line developed over time and changed in response to the realities of each new situation.



The second line meets the challenges of each new era in part through symbolic communion with the past, and by enacting this call-and-response between past and present, between the living and the spirit world, through dance, rhythm, and song it is a contemporary manifestation of the slave-era “ring shout.” As described by Stuckey in *Slave Culture*, the ring shout is a ritual in which participants drum, sing and dance in a counterclockwise, circular formation in order to honor and commune with the spirits of their ancestors. Stuckey argues that in America, the ring shout became a common means for slaves to carry on the traditions of the African tribal past in order to fulfill their “physical and spiritual, emotional and rational needs” in the present.<sup>2</sup> Samuel L. Floyd’s influential book *The Power of Black Music* (1995) posits that the ring shout is a formative manifestation of the union of “dance, drum, and song” found throughout African and African-American musical and religious practices. The ring shout and other variations of the “dance, drum, and song” complex, Floyd writes, offered blacks an opportunity to call upon “African cultural memory” through collective music-making. The spirituals that developed out of the ceremony, he notes, were a vital repository for the freedom dreams and ennobled struggles of their singers. I contend that the second line is a form through which participants call on local histories of struggle and triumph, and on the memories of departed community members – the “ancestors” of the neighborhood – for spiritual sustenance and collective, if temporary, transcendence of physical and economic constraints in the present.

In conceiving the second line as a ritual encounter with local histories, I draw upon two prior studies of “dance, drum and song” in the music of black New Orleans. Freddi Williams Evans’s *Congo Square* (2011) traces the history of New Orleans’s Congo Square marketplace as a site of slave dances and spiritual ceremonies – all manifestations of the ring shout – in the

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<sup>2</sup> Stuckey 1987:24.

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Drawing on government records, newspaper articles, and existing accounts of both observers and former participants, Evans demonstrates that the Congo Square gatherings featured rhythms, dances and instruments originating in West-Central Africa, the French West Indies, and Cuba. Crucially, she explicates the spiritual significance of the gatherings, describing how they provided a context for the spread of Vodou religion, particularly after the arrival of refugees from the Haitian Revolution at the outset of the nineteenth century. Richard Brent Turner's *Jazz Religion, the Second Line, and Black New Orleans* (2009), meanwhile, expands on Samuel Floyd's conception of the ring shout as evoking "African cultural memory" by detailing how second line brass band parades, themselves descended from circle dances, function as a cathartic bridge between the ancestral memory of slavery and the struggles and triumphs of black life in present-day New Orleans. Where Evans focuses on the origins and formal features of the Congo Square dances, rhythms and songs, Turner unpacks the symbolism and spiritual resonances of their descendants in second line parades. While both authors note that these forms are fundamentally adaptive and dynamic, neither provides more than a cursory account of how they have changed over time. I strive to provide a more detailed accounting for change in the second line herein.

### ***Culture as Discourse of Resistance***

Since this is nominally an ethnomusicological study, the reader may wonder why I devote as much space to history as I do to ethnography. My historical focus is inspired partly by the fact that the second line is an intensely history-conscious tradition; the parade itself is a sort of performative encounter with history. But I am also influenced here by Amiri Baraka's *Blues People* (1964), which argues that the cultural output of African-Americans cannot be properly

evaluated without a deep understanding of their historical predicament. *Blues People* avers that African-American music must be understood first and foremost as the African diaspora's articulation of, and response to, its experience in America. Baraka additionally argues that African-American culture does not simply exist on a continuum with its African antecedents, but is a new, adaptive form that was developed in response to the process of absolute estrangement and spiritual annihilation that characterized the African's arrival and enslavement in the new world. "The Negro's way in this part of the Western world," he writes, "was adaptation and reinterpretation."<sup>3</sup> These two approaches were intricately linked in the formulation of new expressive forms: African Americans adapted European-American religion and music and reinterpreted both through an African cultural lens. As the social status, material conditions and even the claim to personhood of African Americans underwent multiple shifts over the centuries up to the present day, Baraka suggests, so too did the frame of reference and the texts themselves change even while the interpretive devices and performative values largely remained the same. The history of the second line provides a striking example of this adaptive cultural strategy: based around an African American reinterpretation of European marching band music, the parade developed against the threat of a reemergent white supremacy, and has continued to adapt, change, and absorb new influences as the sociopolitical, legal, and economic status of black New Orleanians has shifted over time.

Following on Baraka's conception of music as a means by which blacks bridged the gap between Africa and America and coped with the new situation they found themselves thrust into, John Lovell Jr.'s *Black Song: The Forge and the Flame* (1972) details how Negro spirituals developed out of the interaction between black slave culture and Anglo-American Christianity,

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<sup>3</sup> Baraka 1963:27.

often serving as an ironic commentary on the latter. Paul Gilroy's "Jewels Brought From Bondage: Black Music and the Politics of Authenticity," from his seminal book *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993), explores how music allows diasporic blacks a means to comment upon their dual position simultaneously inside and outside Western discourses of modernity. Olly Wilson's "Black Music as an Art Form" (1974) and Mellonee V. Burnim's "The Black Music Gospel Tradition" (1980) outline staple traits and practices that unite African-American music with all African and diasporic black musics, serving to reinforce community through performance. And Joseph Roach's *Cities of the Dead* explores how expressive traditions throughout the Black Atlantic world<sup>4</sup> recreate history and bridge the living and the spirit worlds through continuous processes of substitution or "surrogation." Each of these studies emphasizes the adaptability of African cultural forms, embodying Lawrence W. Levine's concept of culture as a process and African-American culture in particular as notable for its "ability to react creatively and responsively to the realities of a new situation."<sup>5</sup>

### ***Sociopolitical Histories of Black New Orleans***

Any study dealing with black culture in New Orleans needs to take stock of those changing circumstances in order to understand the cultural and political expressions that have arisen in response. I devote two chapters herein to the sociopolitical and cultural history of black New Orleans, arguing that since black political and expressive responses to repression developed simultaneously and in many of the same social and occupational settings, they ought to be

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<sup>4</sup> "Black Atlantic" here, and elsewhere in the text, refers to the transatlantic network of African-descended cultures and populations – in the Americas, Europe, and Africa itself – that was created by the forced migrations of the Atlantic slave trade.

<sup>5</sup> Levine 1977:5.

examined in tandem with one another as part of a single historical narrative. Heretofore these two dimensions have largely been examined separately, though Evans' aforementioned *Congo Square* and Gwendolyn Midlo Hall's *Africans in Colonial Louisiana* (1992), both of which explore the origins of a distinct local black culture, manage a compelling synthesis of cultural and sociopolitical history. Based around a thorough review of colonial records, Hall's book reveals not only what specific areas and cultures slaves in Louisiana hailed from, but also details what specific aspects of their home cultures survived in the colony and why. Hall also details how enslaved Africans drew from the flexible social organization of Bambara society to establish communities and organize revolts in tandem with both indigenous tribes and with of the Louisiana colony's despised and mistreated white underclass. Such a cross-racial mobilization of Louisiana's working class would be unthinkable a century later, even in the comparatively liberal New Orleans, due to the emergence of an impermeable color line.

Histories of African Americans in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century New Orleans detail how the contours of black life were affected by constantly shifting race and class hierarchies, at the same time exploring the forms of organized resistance black New Orleanians mounted in response. Arnold R. Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon's *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization* (1992) illustrates how the color line crystallized after the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. At the moment when New Orleans became an American city, the authors point out, the city had a three-tiered racial structure closer to that found in the French and Spanish Caribbean than elsewhere in the United States. Creoles of color, products of the frequent (and often systematic) sexual congress between whites and blacks, occupied a social position somewhere between the white colonial elite and the free and enslaved blacks. When that hierarchy collapsed and was replaced by a two-tiered racial order after the Civil War, write Caryn Cossé Bell and Logsdon in the chapter "The

Americanization of Black New Orleans 1850-1900,” blacks and Creoles of color came together in a joint effort to assert their civil rights. These two formerly separate castes also congregated in schools, nonsectarian benevolent societies, and in the emerging leisure and entertainment sphere. Second lines and jazz music developed out of the same neighborhood spaces and were practiced and enjoyed by many of the same people, though these vital forms of expressive resistance merit nary a mention in the book.

Adam Fairclough’s book *Race and Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915-1972* (1995) explores how black community institutions provided the background for a new civil rights movement to emerge in the 1930s. “Neighborhoods provided the building blocks of organization and mutual aid,” Fairclough writes, noting that the insurance companies that grew out of mutual aid societies became a major source of black leadership.<sup>6</sup> Along with other forms of spontaneous protest, black civil disobedience on the city’s buses helped set the groundwork for an organized movement of nonviolent direct action, both within New Orleans and in other Deep South cities. As Kim Lacy Rogers’ book *Righteous Lives: Narratives of the New Orleans Civil Rights Movement* (1993) traces the movement through the recollections of several of its participants, explaining how members of different classes, generations, and ethnic communities played distinct roles in furthering its aims. Rogers actually devotes a few paragraphs to detailing how second lines and Mardi Gras parades became tools for effective protest. Along with Hirsch and Logsdon’s book, Fairclough and Rogers’ studies provide useful information on how the particular cultural formations of black New Orleans served as models for organized political resistance. But their analysis is essentially unidirectional, privileging politics at the expense of in-depth cultural analysis. Drawing from each of these political histories and

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<sup>6</sup> Fairclough 1995:18.

from musical histories, I illustrate how black New Orleanians' political and expressive responses to oppression have consistently informed one another.

As Fairclough and Rogers's books suggest, the reforms brought on by the Civil Rights movement did not precipitate substantive changes in the material circumstances and life options of most black New Orleanians. The income gap between blacks and whites in Louisiana actually widened between the late 1960s and the early 1990s, and with the decline of industry and middle-class communities in New Orleans, violent crime rates soared.<sup>7</sup> Lynnell L. Thomas's *Desire & Disaster in New Orleans* (2014) details the late twentieth century development of the city's tourist economy and the distorted popular image of New Orleans that it reinforces. Predicated on a simultaneous desire of and fascination with black culture (in the form of jazz, Creole culture, and voodoo) and a "denial of black history and agency," the tourist narrative of New Orleans reinforces perceptions of blacks as exotic and inferior while it conceals the historical and contemporary struggles out of which black cultural forms are born.<sup>8</sup> The latter chapters of Thomas's book detail how African Americans in New Orleans counter the racism of the mainstream tourist narrative through their own black heritage tours, community organizations and cultural celebrations.

Other important works on African Americans' experiences in post-Katrina New Orleans include John Swenson's *New Atlantis* (2011), which details the efforts to rebuild the city's musical community despite government crackdowns on black public culture, a violent crime wave, and the forced dispersal of many musicians around the country in the wake of the storm; Jordan Flaherty's *Floodlines: Community and Resistance from Katrina to the Jena Six* (2010),

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*:469.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas 2014:19.

which addresses the largely government-driven setbacks New Orleans citizens of color have faced since Katrina and the numerous forms of resistance they have mounted in response, from the community assistance and advocacy efforts of the Common Ground Collective to the formation of the raps of transgender “bounce” music performer Big Freedia; and Lewis Watts and Eric Porter’s *New Orleans Suite* (2013), which explores the multifarious ways musicians have responded to the trauma of Katrina both expressively and politically, and ponders the role of culture in rebuilding the community after the disaster. The latter book has been especially influential in my study, its interweaving of political and expressive responses to trauma providing an analytical model for my historical chapters and its consideration of culture’s reconstructive value informing many of the questions I address about second line culture in the present.

### ***Second Line Music: Historical Studies***

In weaving together the musical and sociopolitical history of black New Orleans I touch on the multiple musical streams that feed into that feed into second line culture, from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century gatherings at Congo Square and the first black and Creole brass bands to the birth of jazz in the Storyville district. Henry Kmen’s *Music in New Orleans* (1966), a broad survey of the city’s musical life in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, contains vital details about the musical activities of free and enslaved people of color beyond Congo Square in the otherwise under-documented antebellum era. Important books on early black brass bands in New Orleans include Richard H. Knowles’s *Fallen Heroes* (1996) and William J. Schafer’s *Brass Bands and New Orleans Jazz* (1977). Knowles’ book focuses largely on profiles of important bands and musicians, but he includes a useful breakdown of the roles of particular instruments in a classic brass band lineup



in the first chapter. The book is most illuminating, though, on the processes of learning and transmission enacted through the practices and performances of brass bands. Schafer's *Brass Bands and New Orleans Jazz* takes a more analytical approach. Schafer provides illuminating transcriptions of second-line drumbeats, detailing how the musicians direct the mood of the procession and involve the revelers by varying the density of the cross-rhythms, inserting stop-time figures that invite a crowd response to the band's call, and changing accent patterns throughout the march.<sup>9</sup> He also details how brass bands developed different instrumental and ensembles styles depending upon their social context, the demands of their audience, and even the acoustics of their physical surroundings.

As I explain in chapter 1, there was substantial overlap in personnel, repertoire, and style between the early black brass bands and the dance bands that effectively invented jazz in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Charles Hersch's *Subversive Sounds: Race and the Birth of Jazz in New Orleans* (2007) is perhaps the most penetrating study of early New Orleans jazz, uncovering the social meanings of the groundbreaking new style by situating it within the rapidly shifting race and class order of the era. Hersch makes the case that jazz challenged and subverted Jim Crow racism and notions of white purity as surely as did Homer Plessy, a New Orleans Creole of Color, when he boarded a whites-only streetcar and ignited a national debate on segregation in 1896.<sup>10</sup> He argues for a more complex and nuanced understanding of race and its relationship to the emergence of jazz, emphasizing the fact that racial categories and ethnic identities are inherently ambiguous and tend to shift over time. Hersch's account of the racially confounding exchanges and signifying politics of New Orleans jazz is provocative, and his theoretical

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<sup>9</sup> Schafer 1977:54-55.

<sup>10</sup> Hersch 2007:5.

approach serves as a model for my own analysis of the values and messages encoded in the dynamic call-and-response exchanges of second lines and brass band performances.

### ***Second Line Ethnographies***

I am far from the first scholar to conduct an ethnography of the second line community. Due in part to the successful repackaging of the city by business and political leaders as a living cultural museum, the musical traditions of black New Orleans have attracted increased scholarly and popular attention over the past several decades, and ethnographies in particular have proliferated since the 1990s. Jack V. Buerkle and Danny Barker's *Bourbon Street Black* (1973) is not, strictly speaking, an ethnography. But it is the first major sociological study of black musicians in New Orleans, but in describing a musical community where social institutions and overlapping networks of kinship and apprenticeship serve to enculturate musicians virtually from birth, it proved a benchmark for all studies of black New Orleans music that followed. The book makes the case that black musicians in New Orleans learn the tradition largely through processes of enculturation rather than formal instruction. Growing up amidst constant musical activity in the streets, the church and in the home, and linked to more experienced musicians through networks of kinship and apprenticeship, many black musicians in New Orleans have internalized the most fundamental rhythms, dance movements and stylistic features of local jazz and brass-band tradition by the time they are old enough to pursue formal instruction. Although it is impossible to know what each of the writers contributed to the project, the book plainly combines the approaches that their differing backgrounds would imply. Sociologist Buerkle offers the "etic" perspective, mapping the geographic, economic, and social domain of black jazzmen, whose broader community he calls "Bourbon Street Black." Barker, a musician and

member of the Barbarin musical family with strong ties to jazz musicians both young and old, inside and outside of New Orleans, offers the firsthand knowledge and experience of an insider. Barker and Buerkle's crucial methodological innovation is to center and organize their study around interviews with contemporary jazz musicians themselves, who are quoted at length throughout the book.

Barker and Buerkle emphasize the critical roles that the second line parade and the social world that surrounds it play in enculturating black musicians. The brass band musicians that play in the second line serve as role models for young black musicians, who will have internalized many of the performative elements of the culture once they are old enough to march, particularly if they are raised in larger musical families.<sup>11</sup> Formal instruction from independent teachers and informal instruction from friends and family is also crucial, since few of the early black jazz players could afford to finish high school. This fact points up the cruel inequities between blacks and whites in New Orleans that Buerkle and Barker explore in the later chapters of *Bourbon Street Black*. While African Americans in New Orleans were beginning to enjoy greater economic prosperity and opportunities for advancement in the wake of the Civil Rights movement – which is when the book was written – persistent structural inequalities were one of the main reasons a strong sense of community, represented by families, mutual aid societies and close networks of musicians, remained so important to black jazzmen then and now. Buerkle and Barker's work has been foundational to my own analysis of the overlapping social formations that define second line culture, inspiring me to widen my ethnographic field to encompass club gigs, high school brass band practices, and even church services. But each of these contexts has

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<sup>11</sup> Barker and Buerkle 1973:53.

changed significantly since Buerkle and Barker wrote nearly 45 years ago, and so my study attempts to bring the work they began into the ethnographic present.

Matt Sakakeeny's *Roll With It: Brass Bands in the Streets of New Orleans* (2013), which explores the ambiguous position of black brass band musicians within the political and economic struggles of the post-industrial city and the local tourist economy, provides a useful starting point among contemporary ethnographies of second line culture. Sakakeeny details how musicians use their instrumental "voices" to navigate a cultural economy that exploits their creative labor and respond to a racialized power structure that consistently marginalizes their communities. In the streets and on the stages where they perform, brass bands turn their drums and horns into "instruments of power," mobilizing bodies and identities against forcibly circumscribed social, geographical and political spaces and constructing community through shared expression. Far from the living relics of a romanticized local past, the brass bands Sakakeeny profiles are the proud, resilient representatives and voices of a too-often silenced community, and in some cases real agents of social change.

Primarily based on two years of fieldwork in New Orleans and more than a dozen interviews with musicians and community members, *Roll With It* could have been a fairly conventional ethnography. But as Sakakeeny explains, the chain of events and responses he witnessed through fieldwork were far too multilayered, vibrant, and messy to fit into any one neat theoretical framework. Instead of freezing his portrait of contemporary brass bands in time and attempting to fix their significance, then, Sakakeeny examines it from a multitude of different angles, ultimately drawing the disparate threads of his analysis together in a discussion of how subjectivity and agency are reclaimed through the expressive instrumental "voice."

Other important second line ethnographies include Julie Raimondi's "Space, Place and Music in New Orleans" (2012), which examines the use of music in constructing social and geographic space and awakening memories and emotions connected to those spaces, and Rachel Carrico's "Footwork!" (2015) which conceives the second line as a "bodily discourse of dissenting mobility" enacted by dancers and musicians against the architecture of state violence, displacement and containment. Both studies have helped me make sense of the second line, its expressive politics, and its meanings within the space of the post-disaster city. And ultimately, I seek to expand upon Sakakeeny's, Carrico's, and Raimondi's analyses of the lived experiences and performed identities of the city's African American musicians and dancers in the present by considering how these musicians, in tandem with second line dancers, interpret and respond to present-day circumstances – and awaken collective memories and histories contained within neighborhood spaces – through the parade itself.

### ***Original Contribution and Chapter Overview***

I argue, in effect, that the second line functions as a dynamic expressive means to both sacralize a shared history and geography and to navigate, respond to, and challenge the oppressions and traumatic displacements African Americans have faced since their arrival in New Orleans three centuries ago. Furthermore, I contend that second lining is, and has always been, an explicitly political act – and one with proven efficacy. Virtually all of the social scholarship I draw upon in making this argument shares the assertion that African American music and culture provide the expressive tools of survival within, resistance to, and commentary upon the changing circumstances of African-descended peoples in the United States. Stuckey, Levine and Baraka explicate the origins, necessary transformations and ultimate significance of

African-derived expressive forms in America, focusing especially on how these forms served as a response to a new and often hostile social and cultural context. Hall, Hirsch and Logsdon, and Fairclough sketch out the shifting manifestations of that context in Louisiana and New Orleans specifically, and detail how African Americans drew upon a common core of social, spiritual and creative practices forged in the passage between Africa, the Caribbean and the United States to respond both covertly and overtly to oppressive circumstances. Evans, Sakakeeny, explore how these responses take shape in music and dancing, looking at how performers create and sustain dialogues both within the community and across the African diaspora through sound and movement.

Existing studies of second line culture are primarily ethnographic in nature. As I have already noted, ethnographies tend, for practical reasons, to be focused on a particular historical moment. But if, as Levine avers, culture is the product of interaction between the past and the present, then ethnography alone is insufficient in explicating any cultural form. Standard ethnographies often include brief histories, but the primary focus is almost invariably on the present. Studies of the second line have historically been no exception. But with a form that is constantly historicizing and referencing itself, a presentist approach is not enough. I conceive the second line as a liminal encounter between the temporalities of present and past, between the physical world and the spirit realm – a temporary yet ritually reawakened sphere where the past is always present. And so the past and present, the historical and ethnographic dimensions of my analysis are equally important and equally privileged.

The first two chapters of my dissertation present a critical history of the second line tradition, drawing primarily from the body of existing scholarship on black life and music in New Orleans from the 18<sup>th</sup> through the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Throughout these chapters, I contend that

the second line, along with the community institutions and social formations in which it flourishes, developed in direct response to the shifting race and class hierarchies and the changing forms of oppression that black New Orleanians have had to contend with since the city's founding. Spanning the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Chapter 1 begins by detailing how enslaved and free people of color forged a distinctly African-American local culture and developed forms of resistance against a succession of colonial regimes, their contrasting formulations of race and class hierarchies, and the eventual emergence of a three-tiered racial order within the city. It then explores how the institutions that would come to define second line culture – in particular the black brass bands and the Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs – took shape in the context of the city's Americanization following the Louisiana Purchase and the increasingly repressive slave regime that characterized the lead-up to the Civil War. I explain how these institutions reached full flower during the Reconstruction era and its aftermath, with the second line emerging as a distinct expressive form just as white racial terror and a new, overtly white supremacist legal regime disempowered black and Creole New Orleanians alike.

Spanning most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Chapter 2 draws from Mark Anthony Neal's conception of the black public sphere – in particular, the complimentary formations of the sacred and secular sphere, or the church and “the jook” – along with Charles R. Hersch's related notion of a black “counter-public” sphere to consider how black social institutions and organizations in New Orleans responded to the new racial order through both creative expression and political action. As I repeatedly emphasize, the institutions that make up the black public sphere in New Orleans – the church, the black benevolent societies, and the clubs and dancehalls that constitute the leisure sphere – served as the primary contexts both for the further development of local black expressive traditions, with jazz and the second line foremost among them, and for effective

political organization in the black freedom struggle. And I illustrate how musical and political movements intersected throughout these spaces and institutions in complex ways, from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (when the “ratty” improvisations of Buddy Bolden provided a means of covert expressive resistance to race and class oppression at a time when overt protest was virtually impossible) through the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> (when the Civil Rights movement gave rise to debates about the racial politics of black expressive culture, and brass band parades were transformed from a means of covert resistance to tools of overt political protest). The chapter opens at the turn of the century, when black and Creole New Orleanians increasingly responded to white racial terror and the imposition of Jim Crow by coming together through the community institutions of the church, the jook and the benevolent societies, fomenting strategies for organizing against Jim Crow just as their musical counterparts came together to create jazz. The middle of the chapter explores how jazz, the black brass bands and the second line became increasingly entrenched and self-conscious forms by midcentury, with the first written histories of these forms mostly written by cultural outsiders. It continues by detailing how the second line was shaped both by racial unrest and the increasingly prominence of black respectability politics during the Civil Rights era, with debates about racial representation intensifying just as the city began serious efforts to mine local black culture for tourist dollars. The chapter ends in similar fashion to how it begins, exploring how the collapse of the Civil Rights movement and the postindustrial economic and civic decline of many black neighborhoods spurred the revitalization of the second line, brass band, and benevolent society traditions after a period of dormancy, while at the same time the post-Civil Rights discourse of black respectability drove a split in second line culture between staunch traditionalists and innovators that continues to the present day.



Chapter 3 draws on both existing scholarship and my own ethnographic interviews to explore developments in second line culture from the 1980s through 2015. This time frame centers around Hurricane Katrina, which, as I have noted, dealt a devastating blow to the economic and cultural fabric of the city's African American community. Detailing how the state's response to the storm and subsequent flood – which turned what should have been a manageable natural catastrophe into a massive humanitarian crisis – was anticipated by decades of police repression, economic divestment, and studied civic neglect of the city's poor black neighborhoods, I draw from Henry Giroux's notion of the "biopolitics of disposability" to argue that those in power intentionally marked New Orleanians of color as disposable and unworthy of state protection; Hurricane Katrina simply provided the excuse that civic and business leaders needed to displace that community permanently. I argue furthermore that musicians, dancers, and other participants in the second line have utilized the parade, its music and its dances to resist the state biopolitics of disposability and assert their rightful claim to both the urban space and to their own civic visibility within it.

Chapters 4 and 5 are drawn primarily from my own field ethnography, detailing – through thick description and the accounts of musicians, dancers, and educators – examples of how second line culture and its practitioners have used the parade and the institutions that support it to respond to the sociopolitical challenges of the present. Largely premised upon my experiences in the Sunday parades throughout 2015, Chapter 4 offers both detailed examples of the ways second liners resist marginalization and erasure through rhythm, song, and movement, and of how they commemorate and consecrate communal and individual histories through musical allusions and verbal and visual references. The chapter furthermore acts as a narrative of

my own entry into second line culture, and details how it was only through my own bodily participation that I began to truly apprehend the meaning of the phenomenon I was witnessing.

Chapter 5 explores the other spaces where second line culture unfolds and the contexts where musicians and dancers are enculturated outside of the parade itself. The first two sections of the chapter examine the secondary performance contexts of the club and the street corner, spaces where bands and dancers refine their performances and develop their style. I also conceive these spaces as contemporary manifestations of the black public sphere, where the bonds of community are continually reconstructed through call-and-response performance, where performers and their audiences assert their own hyper-local identities through such conventions as the bounce-derived neighborhood “call out,” and where information about community events and performative responses to those events are in continuous circulation and dialogue. The next two sections look at the enculturative contexts of the high school marching band and the Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs. These institutions embody two related responses to the persistence of racial and economic inequities that still immiserate the black communities which constitute the second line’s primary context: first, the black mutual aid tradition that has funded the parade since its first emergence; second, the more recently emergent conception of culture as a reconstructive resource to rebuild the bonds of community and combat social ills. Ultimately, I conclude that some of the most potent and efficacious responses to continued racial oppression may be embodied in the performative exchanges of the parade itself.

I make no claims to present a definitive overview of New Orleans second line culture herein; indeed, one of my fears is that in attempting to explicate the development over some 300 years of the numerous intersecting institutions, social formations, physical spaces and performative conventions that constitute this culture I have not represented any one aspect of the

second line with the degree of detail and care that it merits. And as a cultural outsider there are many aspects of the second line that I will never understand on the level of its native practitioners. What I hope to demonstrate, though, is a more holistic model for the study of culture-as-resistance – or more specifically, the “hidden transcripts” of resistance in the expressive forms of oppressed peoples. Since the second line is such a complex and multi-faceted phenomenon, most analyses have focused on one specific aspect of the parade (the bands or the marching clubs; the dance or the music) and employed one or, at best, two methodological approaches (historical, ethnographic, musicological, sociological, or choreographical). But a selective analysis will inevitably yield an incomplete transcript. The transcript presented in this dissertation is still incomplete; as I explain further in my conclusion, I have also been selective in my methodology, in what aspects of the parade I explore, and in whose voices I privilege through my narrative. But it’s a start.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Roots of the Second Line: African Americans in New Orleans, 1719-1896**

The history of the second line – as an event, a custom, a rhythm and a dance – is inseparable from the broader history of the African diaspora in the city of New Orleans. This chapter, along with chapter 2, offers a wide-lens look at the city’s history from its settlement to the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, with a particular focus on the often-traumatic sociopolitical developments that shaped the lives of African descended peoples in New Orleans and their status within the city’s social order. Chapter 2 draws the lens in somewhat closer to look specifically at developments in second line culture from the 1980s to 2005, when Hurricane Katrina exposed the iniquities of race and class that divided this fundamentally multicultural city to the nation at large and irrevocably altered the city’s social, economic, and political landscape. Each of these chapters illustrate a dynamic that has repeated itself across the course of the city’s history: over and over, often-traumatic shifts in the social, economic and legal status of the city’s African-descended residents have prompted both an expressive and a political response. The expressive response inheres in part in the interlinked development of the second line parade, jazz, and the black brass band tradition, while political responses have largely been centered around community-based strategies of both direct and indirect action. I detail how these responses intertwine herein, with sociopolitical circumstances shaping both the form and meaning of the second line over the course of the city’s history and the parade itself increasingly providing the grounds for effective political action by the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## ***Black Life in Louisiana: Beginnings***

Settled by Native Americans before 3500 B.C. and first explored by the Spanish in 1542, the Louisiana colony was formally established by the claim of French explorer Robert Cavellier de La Salle in 1682 and named by La Salle in honor of French king Louis XIV. From this point until it was granted statehood in 1812, the Louisiana territory encompassed the entirety of the Mississippi River watershed. Throughout its first several decades, the colony was spectacularly unprofitable, and its economic stagnation further compounded the growing financial crisis in France. At the behest of economist John Law, a Scottish gambler and economist who had won the trust of the empire's desperate regent, Phillippe II, Duke of Orléans, the explorer Jean Baptiste Le Moyne de Bienville established the New Orleans settlement in 1718. With its location near where the Mississippi empties into the Gulf of Mexico, the city would ostensibly serve as the center of commerce for the Louisiana territory. Perhaps more significantly, it would provide the French with a bulwark against the southwestern expansion of the British to mineral-rich Mexico.

Slaves were first introduced to New Orleans in 1719, just a year after the city's founding, with a shipment of about 400 African captives from the Guinea coast. While the circumstances of their arrival and toil in the new settlement were unremittingly harsh, they were in many ways better equipped to adapt to their surroundings than the poor whites, drawn largely from the ranks of soldiers and convicts, who were sent over by the French crown to populate the colony.

Gwendolyn Midlo Hall details the situation these enslaved Africans in Louisiana faced, their often ambiguous relations, alliances, and conflicts with whites and native Americans, and the means by which they forged a distinctive culture in her book *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (1992). The relatively fluid

racial order it describes developed not just out of French colonial mores but through the common struggle of colonial outcasts under difficult conditions.

New Orleans in its early days was remarkably ill-suited for the shipping, agriculture, and commerce that would prompt its dramatic growth a century later. Shallow waters and shifting sandbars made an arduous and dangerous voyage for ships, while frequent floods and hurricanes often destroyed city neighborhoods and settlements further upriver. Additionally, the marshy soil proved unsuitable for the crops French colonists were familiar with growing. In contrast, the predominantly Senegambian slaves in the colony had experience cultivating rice, tobacco, and indigo in a similar homeland environment. Captive members of specific ethnic groups in the Senegambia region, in fact, were selected for their skill and experience with agricultural technology. When the new crops were successfully introduced, however, the wealthy colonial administrators hoarded their modest yields and sold them at exorbitantly inflated prices. Wracked by famine, exploited and otherwise repressed by the small colonial elite, blacks, poor whites and native Americans often worked together to escape the Louisiana colony. In Hall's words, "Louisiana was a colony of deserters."<sup>12</sup>

The Enlightenment conception of a natural racial hierarchy – whereby the supposedly inborn inferiority of dark-skinned people was used to justify the whole enterprise of slavery and the systematic subjugation of African-descended people – was far from solidified in early colonial Louisiana. A free black population was documented in New Orleans as early as 1722, and as barriers to manumission were substantial though still surmountable, this population grew and became an important, stable element of what for decades remained a precarious society. Blacks both free and enslaved were a far more vital part of the city's economy than the

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<sup>12</sup> Hall 1992:131.

population of white exiles, many of whom lacked any experience in skilled labor, flatly refused to work, or had given in early to drinking and other vices. Just as black skin did not inevitably mean that one was a slave or to be regarded as a social inferior, white skin did not necessarily prevent one from falling to the lowest rungs on the city's socioeconomic ladder. Moreover, both blacks and poor whites were subject to the meting out of justice by the colonial elite, who themselves were effectively immune from prosecution.

As desertions from the colony mounted, escaped slaves formed maroon communities and established alliances with local Native American tribes, ultimately mounting a series of revolts against French colonial fortifications in the late 1720s and early 1730s. The Natchez revolt of 1729 exacted a tremendous toll on the already unstable colony. In the aftermath of the uprising, the French authorities attempted to stir up conflict between blacks and Native Americans so that similar conflicts would not arise in the future. Instead, after they were recaptured and returned to their masters, those slaves who had sided with the Natchez against the colony during the revolt began to foment a spirit of resistance among the slave population, culminating in a 1731 conspiracy to kill the colonists, assume their leadership posts and take control of the region that was arrested shortly before it was to take place. In the face of continued desertions and revolts and the financial toll it was taking, the Company of the Indies, which had been entrusted with the administration of the colony, returned Louisiana to the French crown later that same year.

Slaves and free blacks alike pushed back against mistreatment by whites in French Louisiana; as Hall states, they “had a strong sense of justice and demanded their rights within the framework of slavery.”<sup>13</sup> At the time, slaves who reported abuse or violence at the hands of poor whites could reasonably expect that the latter would be subject to prosecution as long as a strong

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*:128.

case was presented. As the planters' power grew, however, slaves had to resort to other means to express resistance. In the decades after the colony was sold to the Spanish in 1763, it finally became economically productive, and as the slave population grew and increased agricultural production the large slaveholders formed a governing body in New Orleans called the Cabildo. A growing network of maroon communities flourished in the forbiddingly marshy terrain behind the large slave plantations, and as the maroons gained control of a broad area south and east of New Orleans the Cabildo attempted to stoke fears of a massive revolt by which the maroons would supposedly destroy the colony. It was not, in fact, the destruction of the Louisiana colony that white authorities had to fear, Hall writes, but the destruction of the institution of slavery.<sup>14</sup> Here in the maroon settlements, and in the slave living quarters – the only areas in the Louisiana colony that were at least temporarily hidden from the view of white society – enslaved people of African descent practiced their religious customs and adapted their cultural traditions to the new environment. It was likely in such clandestine spaces that West African-derived forms of social organization and kinship – including the black mutual-aid societies that would form the basis of second line culture – were first recreated and adapted to life in the Louisiana colony.

The growth of the maroon territory was halted in 1784 when a militia expedition captured its leaders, but just over a decade later a much larger threat was uncovered before it could be carried out. In the Pointe Coupee settlement north of New Orleans, a close and complexly organized community of whites, free and enslaved blacks, and allied local Indians had emerged against the raids of hostile native tribes. By early 1793, the settlement along with the rest of the colony was in a state of political and economic disarray due to the outbreak of war between Spain and France. Slaves seized the opportunity provided by the breakdown in trade and

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*:226.



agricultural activity to express both organized and spontaneous resistance. In New Orleans, Pointe Coupee and other settlements, white Jacobins who came from among the working class of dockworkers, merchant seamen, soldiers, and indentured servants began to spread the ideals of the French revolution, and in this context a plot was formed in Pointe Coupee to rise up and kill the local slave masters. Initially inspired by a desire to vanquish one particularly powerful and brutal slave master in the community, the plot quickly grew into an attempt to overthrow the slave system throughout the colony. Unlike many other planned slave insurrections, the Pointe Coupee conspiracy was a joint effort between people of all races, merging the longings for freedom of both the slaves and the despised, mistreated white underclass. As such it was especially dangerous in the eyes of colonial authorities, and after its discovery in 1795 the colonial slave regime became increasingly repressive.

By the time the Pointe Coupee conspiracy was discovered, a three-tiered racial order had emerged in New Orleans that was closer to the social structure found in many Caribbean societies than in the neighboring United States. White French colonists enjoyed the highest social status, while black slaves occupied the bottom of the ethnic and class order. Free people of color, the vast majority of them mixed-race Creoles, stood in between, accorded certain legal rights and protections as a corporately recognized group in the Louisiana colony. This class interacted both socially and economically with the Native American and slave populations, sometimes marrying black slaves and subsequently buying their freedom. The free Creoles of color had similar ties with whites, connected through trade, work and the emerging mistress-keeping institution of *plaçage*.<sup>15</sup> As Jerah Johnson's essay "Colonial New Orleans: A Fragment of the Eighteenth-Century French Ethos" (1992) explains, free Creoles of color began to lose their privileged status

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<sup>15</sup> Johnson 1992:53.

with the Spanish colonial authorities after the Pointe Coupee conspiracy, which convinced them to return to planters the responsibility of surveilling and policing black slaves and Native Americans. Given their precarious social status, Creoles of color would need to strengthen alliances with the city's black population, most of which was still enslaved.

### ***Black Mutual Aid Societies in New Orleans: Beginnings***

Around this time, towards the close of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, another social order began to take shape among the city's African-descended residents, largely hidden from the view of white civil society. During this period, black New Orleanians organized mutual aid societies to provide social services and welfare to its members, who by and large lacked access to the health care, municipal services and protections that white residents enjoyed. Similar societies began to emerge around the same time throughout North America, but where the memberships of organizations such as the Free African Society and the Benevolent Daughters of Africa in Philadelphia, the African Union Society of Newport, Rhode Island, and the black Masonic lodges established throughout the Northeast were drawn primarily from small populations of free black tradesmen, several mutual aid societies of New Orleans were founded and peopled by free people of color. In her dissertation "New Orleans Jazz Funerals: Transition to the Ancestors" (1998), Ardencie Hall identifies the Perseverance Benevolent and Mutual Aid Association, established in 1783, as the first black mutual aid society in New Orleans. Although the society's meeting hall would eventually play a critical role in the early development of jazz, the Perseverance society in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries served much the same function as other black mutual aid organizations, providing burial insurance and funeral services, sick pensions, life insurance, health insurance, access to medicine, and access to a variety of social activities

and celebrations for its members. Black benevolent societies soon emerged as one of the primary forms of sociopolitical organization for the city's black freedmen, particularly but by no means exclusively for Creoles of color; in the first few decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, notes Edward E. Chervenak, black Creoles in New Orleans founded more than thirty such societies.<sup>16</sup>

The early mutual aid societies were likely modeled not just on their Euro-American counterparts (e.g. the Odd Fellows, Freemasons and craft guilds, etc.) but also upon the many open and secret societies common among the Bambara, Dahomey, Yoruba and other ethnic groups in West Africa. Available studies on the origins of black mutual aid societies and on the development of black and Creole Louisiana culture before the Louisiana Purchase of 1803 focus largely on these three aforementioned ethnic groups, which Gwendolyn Midlo Hall identifies as constituting the bulk of the slave population in 18<sup>th</sup> century Louisiana. While the Bambara hail from Senegambia, the region from which most enslaved blacks were drawn in the first several decades of the Louisiana colony, the Yoruba and Fon (Dahomey) inhabit the Bight of Benin, or what is now the coastal regions of eastern Ghana, Togo, Benin and western Nigeria. While ethnic groups from the Kongo and Angola regions of Central Africa would later exert a major influence on the music and culture of New Orleans, it was not until late in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, after the earliest mutual-aid societies began to come together, that slaves from Central Africa had a significant presence in the Louisiana colony. It is therefore likely that Central African influence on the structure and function of these pioneering organizations was minimal.

The parallels between black mutual aid societies in New Orleans and their antecedents in West African cultures are numerous and striking. Ardencie Hall writes that the Dahomean

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<sup>16</sup> Edward E. Chervenak, "Power of Fraternity: The Impact of Organizational Membership on Political Participation and Social Trust in New Orleans," (PhD diss., the University of New Orleans, 1998):48.

groups (of Benin) known as *gbé* fall into two categories: social societies and mutual-aid societies. When a member of a mutual-aid *gbé* is struggling with financial loss, illness, or the death of a parent, each member donates a certain amount in order to offset expenses. For the weddings and funerals of members each member will likewise contribute a certain amount of money to help cover the cost.<sup>17</sup> Black mutual aid societies in New Orleans use a virtually identical cost-sharing structure to cover members' financial hardships, health insurance, weddings, and funerals.

From the beginning, burial insurance and funeral arrangements were the most common and vital of the services provided by black mutual-aid societies in New Orleans. As with the structure of the societies themselves, the form of the New Orleans benevolent society funeral – the same ritual that would eventually give rise to the second line parade itself – had distinct antecedents in several West African cultures. Hall explains that West African funerals feature an intense degree of social interaction, music and dancing throughout, and remembrances both serious and comical of the deceased. More significantly, the form of the funeral procession itself finds strong parallels in the New Orleans “jazz funeral.” Processions in societies such as the Akan of Ghana begin with a mournful walk to the burial site, accompanied by choral lamentations and funeral dirges. After the body is buried, Hall states, the processions erupts into “Lively drumming, singing, and dancing. At this point, the funeral becomes a celebration of life and ancestry.”<sup>18</sup>

Hall suggests that the forerunners of the New Orleans jazz funeral may have been celebrated as far back as the 1790s. She quotes Abbe Claude Robin, a French naturalist who

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<sup>17</sup> Hall 1998:25.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*:39.

wrote an account of his travels in the Louisiana colony that was later published as *Voyage to Louisiana, 1803-1805*, as stating that black funerals regularly drew crowds of whites and blacks alike. Architect Benjamin Latrobe also offered a brief description in his *Journals* of two black funeral processions he had observed in New Orleans in 1819. A seasoned traveler who visited numerous American cities in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Latrobe offers the notable observation that, at the time, the tradition of the funeral parade appeared to be unique to New Orleans. He describes the basic form of the procession as follows:

First marched a man in a military uniform with a drawn sword. Then came three boys in surplices, with pointed caps, two carrying staves with candlesticks in the form of urns at the top, and the third, in the center, a large silver cross. At some distance behind came Father Anthony and another priest, who...were engaged in loud and cheerful conversation. At some distance farther came the coffin. It was carried by four well-dressed black men, and to it were attached six white ribbons about two yards in length, the ends of which were held by six colored girls, very well dressed in white, with long veils. A crowd of colored people followed confusedly, many of whom carried candles lighted.<sup>19</sup>

Ardencie Hall identifies the large crowd holding candles at the back of the procession as second liners.<sup>20</sup> Given the lively atmosphere and the large crowds following the parades observed by Robin and Latrobe, it is likely that these early processions featured music and dance of some kind, though precisely what instruments and musical forms might have accompanied the processions is unknown; brass bands were probably not a regular presence before the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Looking to the Sunday gatherings of enslaved Africans at the marketplace known as Congo Square, now rightly recognized as a crucible for the forging of a distinctly African American musical tradition, may give us some indication of the kinds of songs and

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<sup>19</sup> Latrobe 1905:191-192.

<sup>20</sup> Hall 1998:123.

rhythms that would have been heard and dances that would have been seen at these funeral processions.

### *Congo Square*

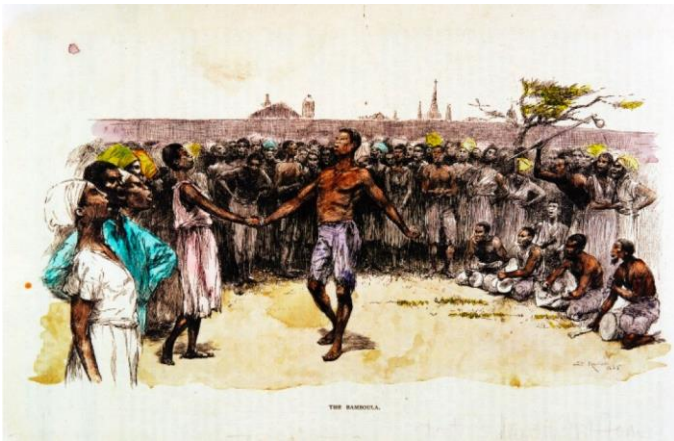


Figure 1-1: Congo Square. Engraving by E.W. Kemble to illustrate article "The Dance in Place Congo" by George Washington Cable, *Century Magazine*, February 1886. Public domain.



Figure 1-2: Contemporary drum circle in Congo Square, October 2, 2011. Photo by Bart Everson on Flickr (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/11018968@N00/6215960749>).

The site that is now commonly known as Congo Square sits just off of Rampart Street, the thoroughfare that divides the historically black neighborhood of Treme from the tourist

district of the French Quarter, which comprises the 18<sup>th</sup> century limits of the original French city. Serving alternately as a marketplace where slave auctions were sometimes held, a recreational space for sports like raquette, and a fairgrounds for bullfights, horse shows, cockfights, fireworks exhibitions and other entertainments, Congo Square was until 1817 just one of many places throughout the city where slaves would gather to practice traditional songs, dances and other African-descended forms of expression and worship. The French *Code Noir*, or Black Code, of 1724 established Sundays as a day of rest and leisure for all colonial subjects, including the enslaved. In Louisiana, as in other French colonies such as Haiti, enslaved Africans assembled on their plantations and in public spaces on Sundays to dance and worship in their ancestral traditions. With the influx of refugees fleeing the Haitian revolution – both slaveowners and their slaves – after 1791, and refugees from Cuba after the outbreak of war between France and Spain in 1809, the black population of New Orleans both free and enslaved expanded dramatically. With the new emigrees bringing both the spiritual traditions (vodou) that had been utilized to foment revolt and a potentially revolutionary spirit to the city’s black community, city officials began to fear potential slave uprisings. In January 1811, their fears were realized with a slave revolt on the German Coast region just north of the city. Described by Joseph Roach as “the best-organized slave revolt in American history,” the 1811 uprising demonstrated conclusively that the contagion of liberty had spread beyond Haiti and to the enslaved African population of the United States itself. Among the leaders of the uprising was Charles Deslondes, a Haitian-born mulatto who had been taken by his master, Manuel Andry, to the United States following the Haitian Revolution. Together with a small group of conspirators from nearby plantations, Deslondes covertly marshaled a company of some 15 slaves on the Andry plantation on January 6, striking two days later with axe attacks on Manuel Andry and his son Gilbert. While only the

latter attack proved fatal, the rebels quickly moved downriver, and as advance word of the rebellion had spread rapidly between slave quarters throughout the region, their company had grown to at least 200 (and, by some estimates, as many as 500) by nightfall. The rebellion was finally put down by a planter militia on January 11, and the surviving insurgents executed shortly thereafter.

In response, legislation was passed by the city government that restricted the assembly of enslaved blacks on Sundays to locations designated by the mayor.<sup>21</sup> A second ordinance in 1817 limited the lawful assembly of slaves on Sundays to the site of present-day Congo Square. Though slave gatherings had taken place at the site virtually since the city's founding, it was at this point that Congo Square began to assume its present-day eminence. Derived from West African festival culture, the performances at Congo Square would prove formative to black New Orleans culture in their blending of the sacred and secular, their incorporation of "African dance, dress, song, music, and instrumentation," and their frequent use of processions and masquerades.<sup>22</sup>

The importance of New Orleans as the only American city where, throughout its antebellum history, black slaves were allowed to openly practice their ancestral traditions should not be underestimated. As drummer and leader of the Original Tuxedo Jazz Band Gerald French reminded me in an interview, it is the only city in America where the African drums were never silenced.<sup>23</sup> And drums were indeed the most critical type of instrument found at the Congo Square gatherings, utilized by players to call people to the square, signal dance movements, and

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<sup>21</sup> Evans 2011:25.

<sup>22</sup> Walker 2004:4.

<sup>23</sup> Gerald French, interview with author, July 24, 2013.



establish the central rhythm upon which songs and dances would be produced. Drawing on an early 19<sup>th</sup> century account from Latrobe's journal, Freddi Williams Evans states in her 2011 book *Congo Square*, the drums observed at the gatherings included "a square, stool shaped, frame drum, a wooden hollow gong that was struck with a stick, and a calabash with a round hole studded with nails and beat upon with two sticks."<sup>24</sup> Other drums at the gatherings noted by Latrobe and other contemporaneous observers included hollow drums carved out of logs, a cylindrical drum that the drummer sat astride and played with his fingers, and a barrel drum known as the tam tam or tom tom.<sup>25</sup> Although they served as the lead instrumental voice, drums were not the only instruments that the Congo Square gatherers played. Alongside the drums, prominent instruments at the gatherings included the banza, the prototype of the modern banjo; the jawbone, which a player would scrape with a key or a stick to produce a rattling sound; panpipes fashioned from joints of cane, which were known as the "quills"; and versions of the African thumb piano, akin to the contemporary *mbira* and *kalimba*.<sup>26</sup> Later on, gatherers added European-derived instruments such as the fiddle, the tambourine, and the Jew's harp.

Alongside the wide-scale migration of free and enslaved blacks from Haiti and Cuba, the early late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century saw a major shift in the cultural background of the slave population of New Orleans. As previously mentioned, the preponderance of enslaved Africans in 18<sup>th</sup> century Louisiana hailed from West Africa, with Senegambia forming the most important slaving region in the early part of the century and the Bight of Benin serving as a major source of slaves around the midcentury outset of the Spanish colonial period. A minority of slaves

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<sup>24</sup> Evans 2011:63.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*:63-65.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*:65-71.

imported during both periods were of Kongo-Angola (Central African) origin. From the late 19<sup>th</sup> century forward, however, many of the slaves imported to New Orleans came in transshipments from the Caribbean islands, their numbers reinforced by the refugees from Haiti and Cuba. As Evans notes, it is unlikely that most of the enslaved blacks shipped from the French and Spanish Caribbean were born or extensively acculturated in the colonies; most had probably been taken very recently from Africa.<sup>27</sup> And most of those slaves taken from Africa to the Caribbean in this period hailed from the Kongo-Angola region. As early as 1820, slaves of Kongo-Angola origin comprised a large majority of the enslaved population in Louisiana.

Perhaps the most significant and certainly the best-known contributions of the Kongo-Angola slaves in Congo Square were the dances they brought with them. Among their dances were the Congo, the bamboula, the juba and the calenda. While the exact steps of these dances are not fully known, several accounts describe the Congo as a courtship dance characterized by an “advance and retreat” between the male and female partners.<sup>28</sup> During the male partner’s advance, both partners would move their hips, and ultimately they would thrusting their pelvises towards one another to initiate the retreat. Other Congo Square dances featured a similar emphasis on the hips and lower torso, and indeed this emphasis carries over to second lines and New Orleans hip-hop dances today. The Calinda or Calenda, first observed on the island of Martinique by Jean Baptiste Labat in 1698, featured leaping movements by both male and female dances in addition to the hip movements and advance and retreat form that characterized the Congo dance.

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*:47.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*:95.

The bamboula, another popular Congo Square dance, would leave a profound mark on black music in New Orleans. The dance and its accompanying rhythm exemplify the intimate relationship between drumming and dance forged in Congo Square which characterizes the music of New Orleans to the present day; as Evans notes, the word “bamboula” actually “referred to a drum, a dance, dancers, and a rhythm in some cases.”<sup>29</sup> No detailed descriptions of the dance known as the bamboula are known to exist, but Camille Nickerson suggests that it was closely related to both the Congo and the Calinda. The accompanying bamboula beat is essentially a displaced version of the Afro-Cuban *tresillo* rhythm, as shown in the figures below:



Figure 1-3: Bamboula beat. Transcribed by author.



Figure 1-4: Tresillo pattern. Transcribed by author.



Figure 1-5: Clave rhythm. Transcribed by author.

The tresillo – a pattern of beats with a duration of 3-3-2 (in 4/4, a quarter note followed by two dotted quarter notes) – comprises the first half of the what is known as the *clave*. In full, the clave looks like this:

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*:102.

Though most popularly associated with Afro-Cuban *son* and *rumba*, the clave and tresillo likely derive from the bell patterns that function as a “timeline,” or what Richard J. Ripani defines as “a short rhythmic pattern that serves as a reference rhythm for the entire ensemble” in many West African musical traditions.<sup>30</sup> These rhythmic patterns or cells are ubiquitous in Afro-Caribbean music, along with related patterns such as the *habanera* and the *cinquillo*:



Figure 1-6: Habanera rhythm. Transcribed by author.



Figure 1-7: Cinquillo rhythm. Transcribed by author.

Afro-Caribbean rhythmic cells would ultimately serve as one of the critical building blocks for New Orleans second line rhythm, with drummers laying variations of the clave, tresillo, and bamboula beat on top of standard 1-2-1-2 march rhythms. Since detailed musical descriptions of early black marching bands’ performances in New Orleans are effectively nonexistent, it is impossible to know at what point these bands began to draw upon African-derived rhythmic cells in their interpretations of popular march tunes. Retrospective interviews of early 20<sup>th</sup> century jazz and brass band musicians suggest, however, that African-derived concepts of rhythm, timing, timbre and texture were audible in black brass band performances by the 1890s at least.

Dating from the earliest years of the city, the Sunday gatherings at Congo Square appear to have persisted relatively unimpeded through the 1830s. In the two decades leading up to the

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<sup>30</sup> Ripani 2006:50.

Civil War, growing fears of slave revolts and of rising abolitionist sentiments prompted city leaders to place greater restrictions on both free and enslaved blacks, and a series of government ordinances put a halt to the gatherings for extended periods throughout the 1840s and 1850s.

### ***Black Musical Life in the Antebellum Period***

While Congo Square was likely more critical to the forging of a distinctly African-American music than any other single site in antebellum New Orleans – and perhaps even the whole of the antebellum United States – it was far from the only site where free and enslaved people of color were making music and developing new traditions during the 18<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. By the time of the Louisiana Purchase, New Orleans was already an uncommonly musical city, and blacks were involved in all aspects of the city’s musical life. With its French and Spanish Catholic heritage, New Orleans was far more open to dancing as a form of leisure than most other American cities, where Protestant morality linked the activity with sin. Balls and masquerades were frequent and widespread throughout the city and across all segments of society. While social dances were officially segregated in New Orleans as elsewhere in the United States, black musicians often provided the soundtrack for white, black and Creole balls and soirees alike. And official prohibitions on blacks and whites dancing together certainly did not mean it didn’t happen. Henry Kmen states in his seminal musical history of the city, *Music in New Orleans*, that formal balls held for free people of color were frequented (illegally) by both enslaved blacks and by whites despite occasional raids.<sup>31</sup> At one raid on a small dancing room in the 1830s, three slaves were arrested and charged with the crime of dancing with white people. Slaves also regularly attended, danced and made music at local bars and taverns on the

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<sup>31</sup> Kmen 1966:230.

weekends, as indicated by newspaper reports dating as far back as 1809. Free and enslaved blacks also frequented opera performances, musical plays and orchestral concerts at the city's major theatres, though they were consigned to segregated sections that were usually far from the stage.<sup>32</sup> The enslaved steadfastly sought out all of the same entertainments, both "high" and "low," that were available to whites; attempts to bar slaves from the opera upon the 1815 opening of the Orleans Theater, for instance, were evidently unsuccessful.<sup>33</sup> Eventually, free people of color began to organize their own musical societies and build venues so that they could enjoy such "high" culture performances without having to endure the indignity of separate and inferior seating.

Just as New Orleanians of color were able to attend nearly all of the same performances that whites did, absorbing the full range of musical styles that could be heard throughout the city in public and in private, free blacks had a wide array of avenues through which to pursue formal musical education. Many well-to-do Creoles of color sent their children to conservatories in Europe for formal study, and those who came back professional musicians often became music teachers for black and white students alike or organized and led their own bands and orchestras. Those who could not afford study abroad took lessons at local music stores, which by the 1850s were numerous. Musicians who did not have the money to purchase their instruments outright would rent from the music stores, most of which were owned by German immigrant families. Among the most notable was Werlein's on Canal Street, founded by German-born Philip P. Werlein. Those who practiced diligently might graduate to public performance and eventually earn enough to buy their instrument outright.

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*:232.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

It is unlikely that many enslaved blacks in New Orleans enjoyed the same access to formal training that free people of color had, though the many informal musical gatherings of slaves in Congo square and elsewhere would have provided ample opportunity for budding musicians to observe and learn. And many slave masters in fact prized a talented musician. During the precious little time that slaves were granted away from their masters' employ, those with musical ability could make money for themselves playing dances and other gigs. Some who ran away took their instruments and virtually nothing else along with them.

Free black and Creole musicians put their often-formidable training to practical use by forming musical ensembles. The marching band craze that gripped America throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century reached a particularly feverish pitch in New Orleans, where militia bands were inescapable by the 1820s. Most of these bands developed out of the local and state militias that, until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, were the primary reserves supplying the U.S. Army in domestic and foreign wars. As in other American cities, virtually every neighborhood in early 19<sup>th</sup> New Orleans had its own militia. And each militia typically had its own band. As most neighborhoods were enclaves for one migrant or native ethnic group or another, there were German bands, French bands, Italian bands, Irish bands, black Creole bands, and black bands. Notable black militia musicians included Jordan Little, who drummed the American troops into formation at the Battle of New Orleans in 1815 and led his own military band by the outset of the Civil War.<sup>34</sup>

Surviving details about the composition, repertoire and public performances of black marching bands during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century are scant, and by the 1840s the city's increasing restrictions on the open assembly and recreational activities of free blacks and slaves alike would have limited the activities of black bands just as they did the gatherings in Congo Square. The

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*:233.

shift to viewing the economically powerful and politically assertive free black population as a threat to the social order had begun to accelerate substantially after the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. Arnold R. Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon's collection *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization* looks into how a three-tiered racial system was transformed into a two-tiered structure of racial domination after New Orleans became an American city. An influx of white American migrants in the early 1800s precipitated decades of social and political conflicts between the city's English and French-speaking residents, culminating in the partitioning of the city into three municipalities, two predominantly French and one mostly American, in 1836.

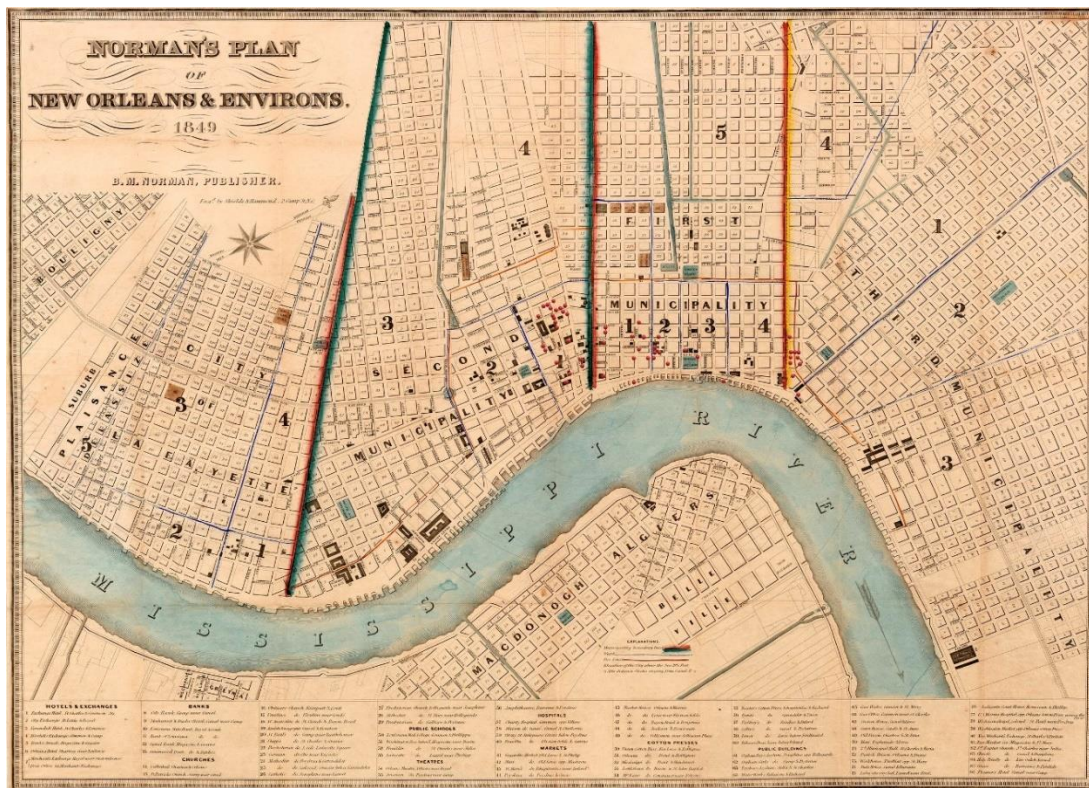


Figure 1-8: The three municipalities - Norman's Plan of New Orleans and Environs, 1849; hand-colored engraving by Shields and Hammond, engravers; Benjamin Moore Norman, publisher. Courtesy of the Historic New Orleans Collection, gift of Boyd Cruise, 1952.29. Image obtained from "Sighting The Sites Of The New Orleans Slave Trade," by Laine Kaplan Levinson (<http://wno.org/post/sighting-sites-new-orleans-slave-trade>).



Once New Orleans was reunited in 1852, English speakers had begun to dominate the area through economic expansion and sheer force of numbers, augmented by a steady stream of European immigrants attracted to the competitive and enterprising American way of life. Weakened in numbers and influence, white Creoles came to adopt the racial mores of the rest of the white South as the sectional and racial conflict that would ultimately lead to the Civil War continued to escalate in the 1850s.

### ***The Reconstruction and the Emergence of Second Line Culture***

Paranoia about the growing contagion of abolitionism and the black Creoles' continued agitation for the recognition of their rights and their dignity led authorities in New Orleans to suppress the organizational and expressive activities of all of the city's residents of color, free and enslaved alike. The Reconstruction era (1865-1877) that followed the end of the Civil War gave new forms of economic and political power to New Orleanians of color, but it was precisely for this reason that the white population here as everywhere else in the South acted quickly to suppress this power by every means possible. With the South's economic and political power drastically diminished, Louisianans partook in the widespread falsification of the antebellum past, which contributed to the myth of Creole purity. Having lost the battle against Americanization, white Creoles clung to their skin color as the sole remaining source of social standing, and sought consolation in the myth of a glorious and refined past in which race mixing and the English language were equally unknown. White Creoles had a vested interest in denying Creole identity to those of mixed race; if the latter were allowed to define themselves by that same term, white Creoles feared that "they might be confused as blacks."<sup>35</sup> Soon after the war's

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<sup>35</sup> Hirsch and Logsdon 1992:173.

end, then, the government in Louisiana established laws that legally defined anyone with African ancestry as black, thereby reducing Creoles of color to the same legal status as the newly freed blacks who comprised the most subordinate class in society. In 1874, white Creoles and Anglo-Americans banded together to establish the White League, attempting to seize state government for the purposes of reestablishing white supremacy in the wake of Reconstruction in a bloody demonstration on September 14.

Despite a rise in antiblack violence and the even further legal and economic entrenchment of white supremacy in New Orleans, it was during the Reconstruction era that the city's black expressive traditions and cultural institutions found their full realization and began to assume their present form. After the Union troops captured New Orleans in 1862, the number of black benevolent societies in the city grew dramatically. As William J. Schafer notes, P.B.S. Pinchback, a black man who served and then led the state's Reconstruction government as lieutenant governor and acting governor in 1872-1873, exhorted freedmen in a speech months after the end of the war to "Form Societies of Benevolence," to meet once a week and discuss the issues of the day, which he hoped would ultimately lead to a more informed black public.<sup>36</sup> Facing both an encroaching tide of white supremacist violence and a drastic reduction in their social status, Creoles of color likewise formed a multitude of new social and benevolent organizations as well in the same era. Already established as social and business leaders in the city's black community and assertive in the pursuit of a black Jacobin-derived conception of universal human rights, black Creoles unsurprisingly emerged as the leaders of the civil rights movement in New Orleans after the Civil War. Working in coalition with white radicals and blacks, Creoles of

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<sup>36</sup> Schafer 1977:9.

color like Paul Trevigne, E. Arnold Bertonneau, and Jean Baptiste Roudanez led the push for black suffrage, and ultimately set the national agenda for the movement. Faced with their white radical collaborators' sometimes overly cautious attitudes, these men remained steadfast in their push for an entirely new social and political order. Among the organs they employed to generate support for their efforts were the newspapers *L'Union* and the New Orleans *Tribune*, the latter of which attacked the patronizing approach of the Garrisonians who stopped short of endorsing black suffrage.

While schisms persisted in political and social mores between black Creole Catholics and the largely Protestant black migrants and freedmen, the sustained efforts of the black Creoles ultimately led both groups to unite behind a common agenda, winning suffrage in 1866 and integration of public and private spaces in 1868. Many of their organizing efforts began within voluntary and benevolent associations, which typically excluded non-Creole blacks from membership. Despite the carefully maintained separation between Creole and non-Creole benevolent societies, however, organizations within both communities frequently commissioned brass bands to play at their social functions, parades and funerals.<sup>37</sup>

By the 1870s, black brass bands were an essential feature of the city's social and cultural life. In *Music and Some Highly Musical People*, a pioneering 1880 survey of black music and musicians across the United States, James M. Trotter cites the St. Bernard Brass Band, under the leadership of "Mr. E. Lambert," and "Kelly's Band," led by a Mr. Thomas S. Kelly, as two of the leading black brass bands in New Orleans.<sup>38</sup> Ardencie Hall additionally identifies "Frank Dodson's, Louis Martin's, Vinet's, Wolf's and Richardson's" brass bands as among the notable

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<sup>37</sup> Schafer 1977:12.

<sup>38</sup> Trotter 1880:348-351.

ensembles during this early period. One of the first black brass band to gain significant newspaper coverage was the Pickwick Brass Band, led by Norman and Jules Manetta of Algiers; although the band first earned mentions in the city's black press in the middle of the 1880s, Richard H. Knowles suggests in *Fallen Heroes: A History of New Orleans Brass Bands* that Pickwick formed as early as the late 1870s.<sup>39</sup> And Black street bands were almost certainly among the many ensembles that played the enormous funeral parade for assassinated president James Garfield in New Orleans on September 27, 1881.

Fueled by the post-Civil War dissemination of army band musicians and their instruments throughout the United States, vast technological improvements in the design, intonation, and sounding mechanisms of brass instruments themselves, and the rise of virtuosic traveling bands such as those of John Philip Sousa, the period from 1880 to 1910 (some say 1920) has been referred to by Schafer and other historians as a golden age of brass bands in America.<sup>40</sup> It is in this period when the most celebrated black brass bands in New Orleans, the groups that provided major breeding grounds for the rise of jazz, first emerged. From the 1880s to the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – coinciding roughly with Schaefer's "golden age" – the two most popular black bands in New Orleans were the Onward Brass Band and the Excelsior Brass Band. Although both bands were originally made up entirely of Creoles of color, they played for social functions throughout the black and Creole community. As Schafer notes, by the late 1880s black newspapers in New Orleans carried notices of brass band performances almost every week – "at social club or fraternal order meetings, at church dances and festivals, at private parties and street

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<sup>39</sup> Knowles 1996:28.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*:2.

parades.”<sup>41</sup> The Excelsior Brass Band was already famed enough to undertake a national tour in the spring of 1887, as reported in the March 30<sup>th</sup> issue of the *Weekly Pelican*, one of the city’s several black newspapers of the postwar era.<sup>42</sup>

Both oral and written accounts from early jazz musicians indicate that the traditional form of the black brass band funeral procession in New Orleans – the “jazz funeral” in popular parlance – was established at some point before 1900.<sup>43</sup> The same form persists, with only slight modifications, in New Orleans brass band funerals to the present day. Schaefer describes the procession as follows: At first the band would assemble at the clubhouse with the society members, the band at the front (led by a marshal), officials holding banners and, most commonly, an American flag behind the band, and behind that other club members. The band would play a slow hymn at the clubhouse at the speed of a dirge, and then the procession would move to the funeral home, church, or whatever place where the body was awaiting burial to the strains of a medium tempo march from the band. At the church the band would play a hymn that was generally chosen by the family and then wait outside for the service to conclude. As pallbearers carried the body to the hearse at the end of the service, the band would play a dirge, and then continue to play dirges as the procession reformed and moved to the cemetery. At the cemetery the band would split into two lines on opposite sides for the hearse to pass through while the snare drummer played a long roll. This was called “turning the body loose” and was where the band would signal the conclusion of the processional segment. Then the band might play hymns at graveside if specified by the family. As the final funeral rites were performed the

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<sup>41</sup> Schafer 1977:28.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*:29.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*:68.

band would regroup outside the cemetery and the snare drummer would tighten his snares which had been muffled during the dirges. On the way back from the grave site, once the band was an appropriate distance away, the band would strike up popular songs and uptempo march tunes, and people from the neighborhood would join behind the procession in a “second line.” Finally at the clubhouse the band members would disperse, sometimes taking a moment to eat and drink at the hall before returning to their homes.<sup>44</sup>

It is difficult to determine whether the procession we know today as a “second line” – a parade that is virtually identical in form to the procession away from the cemetery in a traditional jazz funeral – developed out of the jazz funeral itself or simply parallel to it. By 1887, anniversary second lines thrown by local mutual aid organizations were already being reported by black newspapers in New Orleans.<sup>45</sup> Such reports indicate that the basic form second lines take today, in the now-annual Sunday parades of the many marching clubs, benevolent societies and Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs across the city, was already well-established before the turn of the century.

### ***Creole and Black Brass Bands at the Turn of the Century***

The pioneering black brass bands in New Orleans, the groups that played second lines, funerals and other community events before 1900, were almost entirely Creole. Many members of these bands were classically trained, studying in the French Quarter with members of the orchestra at the French Opera House. Some were light-skinned enough that they could “pass” as white, and moonlighted in high-paying white bands. Versatility and a talent for sight-reading

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.:68-69.

<sup>45</sup> Johnson 1992:51-52.

were essential virtues for a musician who wished to play in one of the Creole bands, as they nearly always played from sheet music. It would be misrepresenting these groups to say that they played jazz, or even that they played in a proto-jazz style. In fact, many turn-of-the-century Creole musicians disdained the loose, improvisatory style, developed largely by black musicians whose training differed substantially from the European orchestral model, that would eventually give birth to jazz as a self-contained tradition.

Although the Excelsior, the Onward and their ilk may have looked down upon jazz, many alumni of these groups are now recognized as pioneers in the style or as mentors for the first generation of jazz greats. Prominent musicians who passed through the Excelsior Brass Band's ranks included the Mexican-born brothers Lorenzo and Luis Tio, clarinetists who, together with Lorenzo's son Lorenzo Jr., introduced classical playing techniques to such luminaries as Sidney Bechet, Johnny Dodds, Barney Bigard and Jimmie Noone; bass drummer John Robichaux, whose Creole dance orchestras proved the chief competition to pioneering jazz cornetist Buddy Bolden in the notorious Storyville district throughout the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; snare drummer Dee Dee Chandler, who Herlin Riley credits, along with Robichaux, as one of the inventors of the modern drum kit; clarinetist Willie Humphrey; trumpeter Peter Bocage, who played alongside Bunk Johnson, King Oliver and Louis Armstrong through a six-decade career with an astonishing array of the city's leading brass bands and jazz orchestras; clarinetist Alphonse Picou, whose lightly syncopated and ornamented playing style directly influenced Johnny Dodds, Jimmy Noone and many other early jazz clarinetists; and snare drummer Louis Cottrell, whose development of the press roll on the "2" and the "4" of the bar proved nearly as critical to the emergence of a distinct New Orleans jazz drumming style as the "push" beat syncopation, just before the "4," that originally set New Orleans brass bands apart.

Newspaper reports indicate that Excelsior emerged sometime during or before 1881, and under the leadership of Theogene Baquet and later Peter Bocage, the band would stick resolutely to a conservative, score-oriented style with minimal improvisation even while the “Hot” sounds of black brass bands eventually eclipsed the Creole style in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A number of myths and misconceptions have developed around the emergence of this playing style that led directly to jazz, in large part because most of the available information about the early black bands comes from the recollections of surviving New Orleans musicians in interviews conducted a half-century or more after the fact. Chief among these possible erroneous perceptions is the idea that black brass musicians in New Orleans developed a looser and more improvisatory style because they didn’t read music. In truth, many of the early black brass bands were trained readers. James Humphrey, a self-taught black trumpeter hired by former Louisiana governor Henry Clay Warmouth to teach music to workers on his Magnolia Plantation, served as a mentor to several black bands formed in the countryside around New Orleans between the 1890s and 1910s. Humphrey’s rehearsals with country bands, which ran from three to four hours, included extensive training in reading from complex written arrangements that older musicians would retrospectively refer to as “heavy music.”<sup>46</sup> Magnolia’s most notable group was the Eclipse Brass Band, which Humphrey took to play in New Orleans on major holidays and which later spawned several notable players in the city’s brass band scene of the 1910s and 1920s, including trombonist Sunny Henry and cornetist Harrison Barnes.

Through the first decade of the 1900s at least, the leading brass bands in New Orleans, black and Creole alike, were likely “reading” bands, or groups that played chiefly from written scores. Even then there was some latitude in interpretation of the notes on the page. It is true that

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<sup>46</sup> Knowles 1996:76.



many of the musicians who made up the so-called “country” brass bands, largely based in the rural areas of southeastern Louisiana, were more or less self-taught. Weaned on spirituals, jubilees and other vocal music of the black church, these musicians learned to play by ear. According to jazz scholar Frederic Ramsey Jr., who recorded two such bands in Alabama and interviewed members for a Folkways LP in 1954, the ensemble style developed by the country brass bands was looser and more heterophonic than that of the established bands in New Orleans, with horns crying and wailing in imitation of the voices in a church choir.<sup>47</sup> Even the best of the country musicians who sought work in the leading New Orleans brass bands would have had to develop strong sight-reading abilities. What distinguished the predominantly black ensembles that emerged at the turn of the century and are now commonly referred to by historians as “non-reading” bands was that they played from “head” arrangements – a rough outline of the chords and melody of a piece, learned by ear and stored in the musicians’ heads rather than on paper – and used these rough arrangements as springboards for collective improvisation. The head arrangement and the improvisatory passages that followed from it would together become the standard for jazz ensemble playing in New Orleans by the 1920s and everywhere else in the bop era of the 1940s and 1950s. But most of the leaders and many of the other players in these bands were competent sight readers.

### ***Jim Crow and the New Racial Order***

The increasing integration of black and Creole musicians in the proto-jazz ensembles of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century mirrored the increased social interaction between the black and Creole communities of New Orleans in the same time period. It was a trend that grew not from a

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<sup>47</sup> Schafer 1977:13-14.

narrowing of cultural differences but from economic and political necessity. Despite their continued power and influence within the city, Creoles had lost their short-lived leadership in state and national black politics with the catastrophic defeat of James G. Taliaferro and his black Creole running mate, the war hero Major Francis Dumas, in the Republican primary for governor in 1868. Immediately following the collapse of federal Reconstruction in 1877, Democrats successfully moved to resegregate city schools and public spaces, with the passage of a new Louisiana constitution in 1879 giving state sanction to the new Jim Crow laws. School segregation even came with the endorsement of former Lieutenant Governor P.B.S. Pinchback, who accepted the new law in exchange for the establishment of the all-black Southern University. Even while city and state law had reduced them to the same second-class legal status as blacks, Creoles maintained a degree of economic power and social prestige in the city through the early 20<sup>th</sup> century that was still unavailable to black New Orleanians. Remaining at the forefront of civil rights efforts through the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Creoles fought against a series of defeats that included the racial segregation of the railroads in 1890, the prohibition of interracial marriage in 1894, and the loss of the right to vote through a “grandfather clause” written into the state constitution in 1898.

Among the most notable Creole political leaders in post-Reconstruction New Orleans was publisher Rodolphe Desdunes, who pushed aggressively for civil rights through his newspaper, the New Orleans *Crusader*, and through his political organization, L’Union Louisianase. With the support of the close-knit family networks and benevolent societies of the city’s Creole community, Desdunes formed a new organization, the Comité des Citoyens, to challenge the color line imposed by Jim Crow in the early 1890s. In a series of test cases designed to attack the segregation of the railroads, the Comité sent Creoles of color – many of

whom were otherwise able to pass for white – to attempt to board the “white” train cars. For the first of these cases, they selected Daniel Desdunes, a musician who occasionally played baritone horn with the Onward Brass Band. While the charges against Desdunes were dropped on a technicality, the Comité mounted a second and far more consequential challenge in 1892. On June 7, a shoemaker named Homer Plessy boarded a “white” car in New Orleans. Plessy, who had one black great-grandparent, would almost certainly have been able to ride in the car without arousing suspicion, but in order to make their challenge explicit the Comité had already informed the railroad of Plessy’s intent to board. He was immediately arrested by a private detective and the case was heard by judge John Howard Ferguson, who denied the argument that Plessy’s civil rights had been violated and ruled that the state of Louisiana had the power to regulate – and, by implication, to racially segregate – the railroads within its borders.

The defeat of *Plessy vs. Ferguson* had a chilling effect on organized resistance efforts by black New Orleanians for the next several decades. Soon thereafter, they lost the right to vote and were deprived of access to public education. And though blacks and poor whites both faced massive unemployment during a nationwide economic crisis that lasted throughout the 1890s, the depression only increased working-class racial tensions; by 1900, notes Charles Hersch, most of the city’s trade unions had excised one of the last opportunities for interracial collaboration and organizing by excluding blacks from membership.<sup>48</sup> With the segregation of the labor force, jobs that had commonly been held by African Americans were largely taken over by German and Irish immigrants. Blacks’ opportunities for economic mobility decreased, and effective mobilization against discrimination became increasingly perilous; the white ruling class guarded against challenges to Jim Crow with violence and threats of same. As black and Creole New

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<sup>48</sup> Hersch 2007:24.

Orleanians were systematically stripped of their economic power, their political influence and their ability to mount aboveground challenges to white supremacy, they turned to covert forms of organization and resistance in social networks and neighborhood spaces that were largely hidden from the view of white authorities. In dance halls, at social clubs and in the church, New Orleanians of color discussed their everyday struggles as well as the broader structural challenges to civic participation, economic well-being, dignity and safety that they faced under Jim Crow, and began to formulate ways to fight back. And it was in these same spaces and through these same networks that both jazz and the second line tradition developed and flourished. I explore how these political movements and expressive traditions intertwined and responded to the changing face of white supremacy in New Orleans as the 20<sup>th</sup> century progressed in chapter 2.

## Chapter 2

### Traditions in Transition: Second Lining and the Black Public Sphere in New Orleans, 1896-1985

With political and economic conditions growing increasingly hostile to all New Orleanians of color at the turn of the century, blacks and Creoles found refuge in neighborhood institutions like the church, the Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs and benevolent associations, and in spaces of leisure. Charles Hersch argues that together these spaces and institutions constituted a black “counter-public” sphere where those citizens whose voices were silenced in mainstream (effectively meaning white) public spaces were able to share ideas and expressive forms, support one another, stay informed about sociopolitical developments and forge strategies for both overt and covert forms of activism and resistance.<sup>49</sup> Mark Anthony Neal further elaborates on this space, which he calls the “black public sphere,” in his book *What the Music Said*, dividing it into the “church” and the “jook” – respectable spaces of organization and worship and disreputable spaces of leisure and vice both serving a similar function.<sup>50</sup> Jazz and the second line emerged from, and were deeply influenced by, both types of spaces.

As in most major American cities up through the mid-twentieth century, the central social institution in black New Orleans was the church. Just as the clandestine worship meetings in the slave era had provided an opportunity for blacks to gather and share common values, sentiments and largely African-derived forms of expression away from the eyes of white masters, the black church during the Jim Crow era gave African Americans a refuge from the everyday humiliation and dehumanization of living under white supremacy, a space for unfettered, often ecstatic

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<sup>49</sup> Hersch 2007:24-25.

<sup>50</sup> Neal 1999:4.

communal expression and collaborative performance, and a chance to be valued, to break the suffocating silence. Moreover, the church inspired worshipers to take pride in their appearances and bodies, and in donning the finest clothes they could buy they cultivated the respectability that white society would never grant to them. For the predominantly Catholic Creoles, dressing well and maintaining strictly defined musical, verbal and sartorial traditions both within and outside of the church was a means to recover – if only symbolically – some of the esteem and prestige they had lost with the official institution of the color line at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

By fomenting and carefully maintaining adherence to specific community traditions – social and religious rituals, along with standards of dress and conduct – black Protestant and Creole Catholic churches and the mutual aid organizations they sponsored helped give rise to a discourse of respectability that still permeates the music and culture of black New Orleans, and many of the most persistent schisms and conflicts that still divide the community. Yet the performance practices of black and Creole churches would themselves become major sources for a new musical style that upset traditional notions of respectability. Black religious gatherings, both during and after the slave era, served as perhaps the foremost means by which African-derived performance practices survived in the United States – and eventually shaped the development of jazz. As the social hub of the community, regularly visited by the entire family, the church was one of the primary contexts in which black and Creole children in New Orleans were exposed to music, and where they learned not just traditional African American expressive practices but the locally specific variants of those practices. The early jazz musicians picked up numerous features of black church music and made them into fundamentals of jazz performance practice. Such features included melisma and a vocabulary of other spontaneous vocal and instrumental ornamentations; a close relationship between song, rhythm and dance; “rough”

voices, “shouting,” “wailing” and other transformations of timbre; and above all, participatory, “call-and-response” relationships and exchanges between the leader and the larger ensemble.

While these elements are characteristic of black church music not just in New Orleans but across the United States, black churches in New Orleans also developed unique performance practices and worship styles that would have a profound impact on jazz. Sanctified and, somewhat later, Spiritual churches had a particularly strong presence in the city, and unlike other denominations they did not consider the use of musical instruments in worship to be sinful. With their congregations largely drawn from the ranks of the poorest blacks, the services of the two sects created a charged, highly emotional and transformative atmosphere through the charisma of the preacher in combination with drums, tambourine and occasional piano alongside the handclaps, foot stomps and singing of the parishioners. Master drummer Herlin Riley, born into a family with deep roots in the Spiritual church, described the transcendent power of the rhythms that drive these services in an interview I conducted with him in 2013:

Rhythm is very, very powerful..When I talk about the power of rhythm and repetition in rhythm, growing up in the Spiritual Church, I would see ladies – because we played the rhythm for so long, 20 minutes, 30 minutes of the same stuff – people would go into a trance. I actually, literally saw that. I saw women shout – I saw people shout and go into a trance where you have to put smelling salts on their nose, that you’d bring ’em out of the church, they’d be stiff as a board. I mean, they’d lay out – somebody would actually pick them up and hold them by their – if a man could hold them by their butt, by their waist, their bodies would be stretched out like a board, they would be that stiff. And I knew it was something that was real, because I would literally see people hit their heads on the pews. And they’d wake up – when they come out of it, it’s like they would be ripped, like they went through a whole tornado or something. But they wouldn’t have any pain, they’d just be so drained, exhausted when they would wake up...I experienced that many, many, many times as a child growing up.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Interview with author, July 31, 2013.

The backbeat accent of the snare drum, tambourines and handclaps, so critical to building and maintaining transcendent peaks in the service of Sanctified and Spiritual churches, finds its analogue in the basic snare pattern of the second line parade. Whether the backbeat was an established feature of black church services before the era of black marching bands, and whether indeed its presence in both contexts is a result of cross-pollination or simple coincidence is probably impossible to determine, but certainly the feel of the backbeat in jazz and in New Orleans brass bands of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was inflected by church rhythms. Where the traditional European marching bands and the most conservative Creole marching bands hewed to the straight rhythms of the written score, black brass bands, dance bands and church bands alike pointed the way towards jazz by imbuing the beat with the temporal push-and-pull that would come to be known as swing.

### ***Storyville, Buddy Bolden, and the First Jazz Bands***

It was the dance bands that played working class clubs and halls in the Storyville neighborhood, led largely by young blacks for whom marching band gigs were only a secondary pursuit, that would fuse the disparate strands of the city's Euro-Afro-Latin musical heritage into the first distinct jazz style. In the process, they would transform the sound of the street bands that played second lines, furnish a substantial portion of the traditional brass band repertoire that is still heard in street parades today, and ultimately set the stage for the city's transformation into a tourist mecca and a living historical museum, for better and for worse. A red-light district specifically created by the city government in 1897 in an effort to contain vice (and race mixing) to one designated area away from putatively respectable white neighborhoods, Storyville only existed for 20 years, but figures prominently in the popular image of New Orleans and in jazz



lore to the present day. While the black dance bands of Storyville drew heavily from the musical practices of the black church, the environment of the clubs in which they played – many of which doubled as brothels – represented an outright rejection of the respectability cultivated within the church walls. At halls like the Red Onion and Dago Tony's, the bands of Buddy Bolden and Bunk Johnson provided the soundtrack for live sex shows, gambling, knife fights, profane lyrics and toasts, and overtly sensual dance moves that emphasized the lower body. Storyville clubs also flouted the racial order imposed by Jim Crow, as many were frequented by whites seeking both the forbidden thrill of interracial sex and the excitement of a raucous new musical form. Wealthy white customers were treated more favorably at Storyville establishments, where owners generally declared the prostitutes off limits to black patrons. On the dance floor, however, jazz syncopation and the new sense of time it created would open up a liminal space where blacks, whites and Creoles alike congregated and mingled, bumping and grinding in an exploration of body movement that would never have been possible within the strictures of mainstream public spaces. The second line parades, where jazz's early innovators found a side gig, eventually became – and remain – another such liminal space.

The crucial intermediary in this relationship between the music of the church, the ragged rhythms of the dancehalls and the beat of the street parades was the blues – or the sinful twin to the sacred black spirituals. Both spirituals and the blues developed from the work songs and field hollers of the slave era, where communion with the divine and the promise of deliverance from earthly suffering pervaded virtually all musical expression. In slave culture, as in the West and Central African societies from which most New World slaves were originally taken, there existed no strict division between the sacred and secular spheres. As Lawrence W. Levine writes in *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, black slaves believed that the gods and other ancestral

spirits were constantly with one through life, to be called upon for aid or solace through song or other expressive forms in times of difficulty or transition. Where white American Christians often saw heaven and the Biblical past as distant realms, black slaves collapsed the celestial sphere and the mythic past onto the trials of the present, giving order, narrative shape and the dignity of spiritual redemption to lives of unceasing hardship and toil.<sup>52</sup> It was not until the decades following emancipation, when blacks found a small but still significant degree of geographic and socioeconomic mobility, that the sacred and secular began to crystallize as separate spheres in black American life – or what Neal refers to as the church and the jook.<sup>53</sup> The blues form that emerged in the jook shared numerous features with folk spirituals, including the use of blue notes, rough (complex) vocal and instrumental timbres, a singing style characterized by cries and shouts, and figurative, often coded lyrics. Where spirituals and the blues differed was mainly in lyrical focus, and in the context of their performance. As with the music, the essential lyrical *style* of both was virtually identical, employing double entendre, repetition, call-and-response and numerous aspects of African-derived verbal Signifying. But their subjects, and the perspective with which those subjects were addressed, were distinct. Spirituals called upon God and anticipated the reward of the afterlife in order to endure the struggles of the present; the blues found a kind of release by simply naming those struggles. The realist, earthbound focus of the blues meant that no realm of human experience was off limits. The carnal, the unlawful and the profane – fucking and fighting, hustling and drinking – were not just openly addressed in blues lyrics, they were celebrated. Celebrating the disreputable and the taboo was a means of

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<sup>52</sup> Levine 1977:33.

<sup>53</sup> Hersch 2007:93; Neal 1999:4.

cultural survival; with the imposition of Jim Crow, black existence itself was marked as disreputable and marginal.

The figure who more than any other single musician brought the feeling of the blues into the dance halls of Storyville – and thus tipped off a musical revolution that soon reached the ranks of the semi-professional marching brass bands – was a young black cornetist named Clarence “Buddy” Bolden. An active performer for barely a decade, Bolden never made a record and died in 1931 to little notice. Two years later, however, Bolden’s contributions to the development of jazz were written into the broader historical narrative through a series of articles in the *Louisiana Weekly* by black journalist E. Belfield Spriggins. With the accounts given in interviews with his surviving contemporaries for Frederic Ramsey’s seminal *Jazzmen* (1939), the Bolden legend flowered. The web of myth, legend and hearsay around the alleged “First Man of Jazz” has been woven so thick over the past three-quarters of a century that it is virtually impossible to definitively separate fact and fiction. Nevertheless, the basic details of Bolden’s life are by now well established. Born in 1877, Bolden took up the cornet under the instruction of Manuel Hall around 1895. By about 1900 he had become one of the most popular musicians in the city through regular performances at the Odd Fellows and Masonic Hall and at Funky Butt Hall. If the midcentury recollections of his surviving contemporaries are to be believed, Bolden made his name by blowing his cornet louder than any other horn player in New Orleans, with a “ratty” sound that was wholly his own. While Bolden could almost certainly read music, his band learned and developed blues arrangements largely by ear. This approach gave Bolden’s band the interpretive latitude to play with the harmony, melody and – especially – the rhythm of existing works, thereby setting the stage for the improvisatory style upon which jazz is founded.

Over a slow, dragging rhythm – the only pulse at which the blues was played at the turn of the century<sup>54</sup> – Bolden’s cornet cries mimicked the human voice, echoing the shouts of a Sanctified church pastor. Bolden’s loud, proudly unrefined cornet sound was matched by the often lewd subject matter and profanity-laced lyrics of the songs he played. One song, “Don’t Go ’Way Nobody,” paid tribute to the ribald dancing of prostitutes looking to attract johns in the halls of Storyville, exhorting them: “Oh you bitches, shake your asses.” Another tune, the “Funky Butt,” was apparently composed by Bolden himself, and likewise featured lyrics that made sidelong reference to the lower strata of the body. Jelly Roll Morton made what is likely the first recording of the song at a session for Folkways Records in 1939, under the title “Buddy Bolden’s Blues.” Though never actually mentioned in the lyrics, the “funk” of the song’s title referred to flatulence and body odor, among a litany of undesirable qualities associated with poor blacks:

I thought I heard Buddy Bolden say,  
You’re nasty, you’re dirty, take it away  
You’re terrible, you’re awful, take it away  
I thought I heard him say.  
I thought I heard Buddy Bolden shout,  
Open up that window and let that bad air out.  
Open up that window and let that foul air out.  
I thought I heard Buddy Bolden say.  
Thought I heard judge Fogarty say,  
Thirty days in the market, take him away.  
Give him a good broom to sweep with, take him away.  
I thought I heard him say.  
Thought I heard Frankie Dusen shout,  
Gal, give me the money, I’m gonna beat it out.  
I mean give that money like I explain you,  
I’m going to beat it out.

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<sup>54</sup> Brothers 2007:151.

'Cause I heard Frankie Dusen say.<sup>55</sup>

The song proved so popular that Union Sons Hall, where Bolden regularly played, was unofficially renamed “Funky Butt Hall” in his honor. The “Funky Butt” also gave its name to a hip-thrusting dance, typical of the overtly eroticized dance movements that regularly accompanied Bolden’s performances. As with other steps popular in Storyville like the Turkey Trot and the Grizzly Bear, the Funky Butt featured low to the ground movements centered on the hips, buttocks, knees and feet. Yet sexual display was far from the only animating force behind such movements. They shared a grammar with many of the West and Central African dances observed nearly a century earlier at Congo Square, and thus served as a continuation of the kind of performance practices by which enslaved Africans kept their cultural identities alive. And it was through countless permutations of that elemental bodily grammar that a distinct dance style would develop around the second line parade. Bolden himself played in the streets regularly, and in a retrospective interview conducted with Danny Barker in the 1950’s, Bolden’s contemporary Dude Bottley states that a group of black youths would stage impromptu dance competitions at all of the cornetist’s outdoor performances.<sup>56</sup> More than a century later, second liners young and old continue to engage in friendly footwork competitions at every Sunday parade and at stationary brass band performances throughout the city.

With his “ratty” playing style, his raucous horn cries and suggestive syncopations, and the lascivious dancing, bodily displays, daring dress styles and curse words that accompanied his

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<sup>55</sup> Jelly Roll Morton, “Buddy Bolden’s Blues,” on *Last Sessions: The Complete General Recordings*, 1997 (Rec. 1939), Verve 403.

<sup>56</sup> Barker 2001:18.

performances, Bolden waged what Thomas Brothers calls “a kind of class warfare.”<sup>57</sup> Every Sunday afternoon, Bolden took his war on respectability and class boundaries to the stage through a series of competitions with John Robichaux’s orchestra. A Creole dance band that hewed to the pages of the written score, Robichaux’s group typically played in Lincoln Park, while Bolden’s band played four blocks away in Johnson Park. Bolden would frequently show up on the sidewalk just outside of Lincoln Park and blast his cornet through a hole in the fence in order to draw patrons away from the Robichaux performance. He would then point his cornet uptown and blow a tremendously powerful cornet call towards the black neighborhoods. According to Louis Armstrong’s autobiography, Bolden’s call was so loud that it could be heard from as far away as Armstrong’s own neighborhood three miles away. Refusing to be silenced by Jim Crow or by the position he was born into at the bottom of the socioeconomic order, Bolden projected his voice loud and clear through his cornet calls, and for that he was a hero among the black poor. Cultivating a “bad man” image through gangsterish suits and hats with no tie around his neck, Bolden was something like a rock star in his time. But his voluminous call was ultimately silenced when he fell victim to mental illness, possibly brought on by alcoholism. In March of 1906 Bolden was arrested at home for attacking his mother with a water pitcher, and a year later he was confined to an insane asylum, where he would remain until his death in 1931.

### ***Backlash and Breakthrough***

For the increasingly wary stewards of public morality, the ragged timbres and bluesy improvisations of the music that would become jazz appeared as grave a threat to the entrenched racial and sexual order as the dancing, fighting and fornicating it accompanied inside Storyville’s

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<sup>57</sup> Brothers 2007:152.

houses of disrepute. As early as 1890, a local newspaper complained about the volume of the music coming from Franklin Street – soon to become the heart of the district – and offered disapproving yet salacious descriptions of the clubs and gambling halls that lined the thoroughfare. To editorial columnists and other outside observers, jazz appeared only to heighten Storyville’s atmosphere of sexual degradation and racial boundary crossing.

Creoles and wealthier, more conservative blacks were among the music’s most ardent detractors. For Creoles in particular, denouncing jazz was a way of defending a sense of social privilege that by 1900 was on the verge of eroding completely. With the successive legal defeats of the Jim Crow era in New Orleans, the overt resistance efforts of the Creole radicals began to fall out of favor, and were gradually replaced by the favor-based, accommodationist politics of leaders like black Republican businessman and activist Walter Cohen. In the face of continued campaigns of racial terror and city and state governments that were at best intransigent on the subject of racial equality, turn-of-the-century politicians like Cohen relied entirely upon the goodwill of the white ruling class in advancing the interests of their constituents, accepting benevolent paternalism as the best that they were likely to get. In part because they had only recently enjoyed a degree of socioeconomic influence that didn’t always require such concessions in pushing for reform, Creoles of color in New Orleans were endlessly frustrated by such tactics. And if many rightly felt that racial accommodationism was beneath them, so were the “ratty” sounds of the new music emerging out of the city’s black working class. Jim Crow had dealt serious economic and legal blows to what was once something of a cultural elite, and finding themselves now lumped indiscriminately with blacks of all classes, Creoles resisted all association with the culture of those on the lowest rung of the socioeconomic ladder.

By around 1910, even the most conservative Creole orchestras could no longer afford to ignore the impact of Buddy Bolden's voluminous cornet call. The voluntary segregation of black and Creole musical ensembles in New Orleans could not and did not last. The "hot" new music pioneered by Bolden, Johnson and others was in high demand after 1900, and by the early 1910s several black musicians were playing with the city's top brass bands. The Onward Brass Band, which had emerged in the mid-1880s as the Excelsior's closest competitor among Creole brass bands, proved more musically flexible than their rivals, recruiting the black cornetist Joe Oliver sometime after 1910 and, according to drummer Paul Barbarin, favoring a more "ratty" sound than the Excelsior.<sup>58</sup> By the early 1920s the Onward had become arguably the most popular brass band in New Orleans. But even the Excelsior had begun to recruit young black players, who came to the city in droves from the countryside between about 1910 and 1915.<sup>59</sup> Many of these players had studied under the great teacher James Humphrey, whose eclectic repertoire gave them the flexibility that was essential to finding steady work in a city already flush with accomplished musicians. The best of Humphrey's former students might find work in dance bands, marching bands, and in the church. It was in the last of these contexts that many black brass players from the countryside had the most extensive experience, and as the vast majority came from Baptist congregations on rural plantations, they played a major role in integrating black Protestant musical traditions with the Catholic church heritage that the Creole bands drew upon.

As brass bands like Onward began to absorb some of the pioneering black jazz musicians into their ranks by the 1910s, the music they played at social functions, memorial services and

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<sup>58</sup> Knowles 1996:51.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*:38.



the annual Sunday second lines that were becoming customary for the city's black and Creole benevolent societies inevitably began to take on a looser, more swinging and improvisatory feel; in short, second line music was turning into jazz. Poor documentation leaves us little indication of how 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century second lines were received by the community – black, white, or Creole – but by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the parade stood revealed as a liminal, “impure” space, a site of social, racial and sexual transgressions minor and major – a Mardi Gras in microcosmic form. And for as long as they survived – with arguably the last of the greats, the banjoist, bandleader and historian Danny Barker, living until 1994 – the early Creole jazz musicians remained ambivalent about both the aesthetic worth of jazz and the social worth of the black musicians who created it and the earliest audiences who responded to it. In an interview conducted in 1959, Creole jazz violinist and trumpet player Peter Bocage (born 1887) even set up an opposition between “jazz” and “music, describing early players like Buddy Bolden and Bunk Johnson as musically illiterate and unschooled. “They didn’t know nothing about phrasing, nothing in music,” he told interviewer William Russell in 1959. “They just made up their own ideas.”<sup>60</sup>

Contrary to Bocage’s assertions, most of the great early black jazzmen in New Orleans could read schools and had at least some degree of formal musical education. But unlike the strictly reading Creole bands of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the new players were not afraid to diverge from the printed score, or even to dispense with it entirely. Beginning with Buddy Bolden’s wildly popular group, black bands demonstrated the economic viability and creative vitality of using “head” arrangements as a springboard for collective improvisation. While the old guard stuck to the score, the new jacks stole much of their audience by playing fast and loose with the

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<sup>60</sup> Bocage, interview with William Russell, January 29, 1959.

established dance band repertoire. Their reinterpretations drew from the same basic syncopations – and the same organizing principle of a fixed rhythmic foundation underlying a voice or voices that provide variable counter-rhythms – from which the piano style known as ragtime emerged in 1890s St. Louis. The new music that the black bands were playing was itself referred to as ragtime until “jazz” became an accepted term in the late 1910s. And while the ragtime of the New Orleans dance bands must have drawn extensively from the St. Louis-based style, which had become a nationwide phenomenon by 1900, many of the basic rhythmic features of the two regional variants were shared by a plethora of already-established American musical traditions both black and white. The foundational syncopation of ragtime – an emphasis on beats two and four of a 4/4 measure – is the same accent that provides the backbeat in black church music and the basic snare pattern in Euro-American marching band music. Unlike traditional marching band music, both forms of ragtime emphasize the fundamentally African principle of repetition with variation. The “big four” accent employed by black brass bands and “ragtime” dance bands in New Orleans provided a second layer of syncopation that distinguished their music from the St. Louis style.

As younger, predominantly black musicians began to steer the music away from strict adherence to the printed score in the 1900s and 1910s, and as the number of opportunities for employment in local clubs and dance halls increased, the lines between the large marching brass bands and stationary, typically smaller dance bands began to blur. Indeed, the dance floor arguably emerged as a more important context for experimentation and innovation than the streets where brass bands traditionally played. As William Schafer points out, early New Orleans

jazz greats like Joe “King” Oliver and Louis Armstrong were dance band musicians first and foremost; marching brass band gigs were for them a secondary occupation.<sup>61</sup>

Joining the Onward Brass Band some time shortly after 1910, King Oliver was among the first black musicians, and probably the most influential, to bridge the divide that separated the black dance bands playing the “ratty” new music and the far more conservative Creole marching bands. Born in Abbeville, Louisiana, a small town in the countryside north of New Orleans, in 1885, Oliver moved to the city with his family as a child. Although his first instrument was the trombone, Oliver switched to the cornet and began playing with local bands by his late teens.<sup>62</sup> Around 1907, he joined the Melrose Brass Band and began to read music, gaining enough experience over the next few years to take a job as a leader with the orchestra at Storyville cabaret the Big 25.<sup>63</sup> But more important than Oliver’s experience was his sound and style. Despite his more restrained tone, Oliver’s versatility and pioneering use of the plunger mute to achieve an enormous array of new sounds and effects made him their heir apparent to Buddy Bolden and Bolden’s successor Freddie Keppard – the most celebrated black cornetist in New Orleans during the decade before any black jazz band made a record. And he was available for hire.

Oliver’s impact on the Onward Brass Band was immediate, as the recollections of Paul Barbarin and Louis Armstrong attest, with the Creole musicians in the band incorporating aspects of his “ratty” style when they saw how popular it was with black audiences. The young Armstrong was especially impressed by Oliver, and would soon become an acolyte of the older

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<sup>61</sup> Schafer 1977:46.

<sup>62</sup> Charters 2008:162.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*:163.

cornetist. But despite Oliver's advances, veteran member Peter Bocage insisted in later interviews that Onward did not play jazz. Under the direction of Creole cornetist Manuel Perez until around 1915, the band still represented the relative conservatism of the Downtown brass bands. At most parades, Onward would take the position of elder standard-bearers near the front, playing the "heavy serious, marches" for the officials of the club, while the younger, rattier black bands from Uptown brought up the back.<sup>64</sup> According to Danny Barker, younger club members would sometimes become impatient with Onward's stately marches and request "barrelhouse" numbers.<sup>65</sup>

Like the gambling houses, brothels and speakeasies of Storyville, the streets during a second line could sometimes turn violent. Clashes between Downtown Creoles and Uptown blacks were relatively common, with all manner of territorial rivalries making the parades hazardous for both bands and marching clubs. Occasionally, musicians like drummer Black Benny turned their instruments into weapons to defend themselves.<sup>66</sup> As I detail in chapter 3, second lines can turn violent even today, though the overwhelming majority of contemporary parades proceed without incident. Since marching clubs of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century were not afforded the protection of a police escort, it is safe to assume that second lines were more vulnerable to violence then than they are now.

Ultimately, confrontations with police and with the white residents were a far more serious threat than turf battles between New Orleanians of color. White racial terror reached a horrific peak in the Jim Crow South of the early twentieth century, by turns tolerated and

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<sup>64</sup> Barker and Buerkle 1973:50; Hersch 2007:54.

<sup>65</sup> Barker and Buerkle 1973:34.

<sup>66</sup> Hersch 2007:53.

steadfastly defended by the authorities even in this putatively cosmopolitan city. The terror exploded in New Orleans with the Robert Charles riots of 1900. The riots were touched off after an incident on July 23, when police questioned and then beat Charles in response to reports of “suspicious looking negroes” loitering in a mostly white neighborhood. Charles fled to his home, and when he shot and killed a police officer who attempted to apprehend him on the morning of July 24, mobs of white residents gathered and set out for blood. For four days the mobs terrorized the city’s black population; in a contemporaneous book about the incident, journalist and anti-lynching activist Ida B. Wells reported that the mobs chased black residents through the streets, pulled black men off street cars and shot them, and broke into the homes of black families and beat them to death.<sup>67</sup> In addition, two black schools were burned to the ground.

### *Accommodation, Integration and Organization*

Combined with the severe constraints on economic and geographical mobility of Jim Crow, the ever-present threat of white racial terror forced black communities in New Orleans and their leaders into an accommodationist relationship with the white elite. Arnold R. Hirsch cites the political activities of businessman Walter Cohen, the most prominent black civic leader in New Orleans during the early twentieth century, as an example.<sup>68</sup> As the secretary of the Louisiana State Republican committee and one of the few black politicians to hold federal office after Reconstruction, Cohen secured small concessions to the black community through paternalistic personal relationships with white civic and business leaders.<sup>69</sup> But he was also a

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<sup>67</sup> Ida B. Wells, “Mob Rule in New Orleans” (1900).

<sup>68</sup> Hirsch and Logsdon 1992:264.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*:264-265.

product of the mutual-aid tradition that now underlaid all aspects of black and Creole civic life in New Orleans. Cohen maintained memberships in several black fraternal orders and benevolent societies throughout his political and business career, and in 1910 he founded the second black life insurance company to be incorporated in New Orleans.<sup>70</sup> First established as a mutual benefit society, the People's Industrial Life Insurance Company was incorporated as a business by Cohen in 1922, with a board of directors consisting almost equally of blacks and Creoles of color.<sup>71</sup>

With the black and Creole communities in New Orleans increasingly finding common cause, benevolent societies and social clubs became the local foundation for the collective action and community organizing – initially through black civic leagues and the NAACP – that ultimately gave rise to the modern Civil Rights movement. Not only did social clubs offer a venue for citizens of color to engage with issues that were directly impacting their communities, but they also provided a bridge between black and Creole New Orleans; where churches remained largely self-segregated, social clubs like the Autocrat Club boasted both black and Creole members. In fact, it was at the Autocrat that the Seventh Ward Civic League, one of the first black civic leagues in New Orleans, was founded in 1927. And the Autocrat would remain an organizing base for early civil rights efforts in New Orleans for decades to come. Lawyer A.P. Tureaud, who led the early civil rights effort in New Orleans as an attorney for the NAACP,

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<sup>70</sup> Sharlene Sinegal DeCuir, "Attacking Jim Crow: Black Activism in New Orleans, 1925-1941," PhD diss., Louisiana State University (2009), 68.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*:69.

served as the club's president for most of the 1930s.<sup>72</sup> He was succeeded in the position later in the decade by physician J. Edwin Wilkins, another early civil rights activist in the city.<sup>73</sup>

Founded in 1915, the New Orleans branch of the NAACP drew its power base from the same affluent professionals – most of them still Creoles from the Downtown district – who frequented clubs like the Autocrat. The organization's early successes in the struggle against Jim Crow were limited. In 1927, an ordinance that mandated residential segregation in New Orleans was struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court after it was appealed by local NAACP president George Lucas. In another triumph, the organization secured a murder conviction against Charles Guerand, a white man who had sexually assaulted and killed a 14-year-old girl in 1930. But these turned only to be symbolic victories; the segregation of housing and public space actually intensified over the following decade, Guerand won a new trial in 1936, and incidents of lynching saw a spike in the early 1930s.<sup>74</sup> Effective resistance to white supremacy would require the New Orleans NAACP and other early activist groups to abandon the color-based elitism that still divided blacks and Creoles in the city.

Where the political and business leaders of black New Orleans remained a solidly Creole bloc for some time to come, black musicians by the early 1920s were regularly breaking into the ranks of the Creole musical elite. The first “integrated” bands had started off with all-Creole lineups, hiring the cream of the black musicians whose blues and church-inflected style so many disdained only when changing public tastes demanded it. But in 1917 a band emerged that would turn the tables. Formed by William “Bebe” Ridgley and Oscar “Papa” Celestin, black migrants

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<sup>72</sup> Hirsch and Logsdon 1992:264-267.

<sup>73</sup> Fairclough 1995:58.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*:19; 25.

from the rural plantations outside of the city, the Tuxedo Brass Band soon achieved such local renown with their “ratty” style that they could afford to hire respected Creole players like Alphonse Picou and Isidore Barbarin.<sup>75</sup> By the late 1910s, their chief competitors were another integrated band from Uptown. Formed by the Creole trombonist Kid Ory early in the decade and co-led by King Oliver from around 1916 or 1917, the band played all over town, for white, black, and Creole audiences, at social functions for benevolent societies, fish fries, Storyville dives, elite white-only yacht clubs, school gymnasiums, and on and on. Though a dance band rather than a marching band, the Ory-Oliver group established the sort of all-purpose role that 21<sup>st</sup> century brass bands would continue to fill in the local economy. The band could play smooth or rough. And in this band the greatest musical talent New Orleans ever produced would find the most critical professional experience of his young career.

Louis Armstrong loved to second line. Born in stark poverty to a father who worked in a turpentine factory and a mother who, like forty thousand others, had migrated to New Orleans from the plantations of rural Louisiana late in the nineteenth century, Armstrong grew up in a neighborhood at the heart of the Storyville district that was aptly nicknamed “The Battlefield”.<sup>76</sup> When money ran out – a frequent occurrence, since his parents had split when he was an infant – his mother was often forced to turn to prostitution. While she was out working the district, Louis was free to roam the streets of the neighborhood, past the gambling halls and honky tonks of “Black Storyville” where the earliest jazz bands were plying their trade. In these streets, Armstrong often encountered musical parades, and soon began nurturing an ambition to play in a marching band someday. Already he had gained an early musical grounding in the Sanctified

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<sup>75</sup> Brothers 2007:28.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*:xvi.



Church, where he first learned to sing and participated in the “ring shout” – the same ecstatic, communal worship ritual of “dance, drum, and song” that provided a formal antecedent for the second line parade.<sup>77</sup> He formed a vocal quartet with friends from the neighborhood around the age of ten; probably they were one of many amateur ensembles in the immediate area, where music was a communal passion, barriers to informal performance were few, and the poor made do with the few instruments that they could afford to purchase.

Despite a lack of parental supervision, Armstrong’s movements were circumscribed both by territorial rivalries and, more significantly, by watchful law enforcement. Storyville proper was off-limits to youths; when Armstrong and his singing colleagues dared to enter the neighborhood on New Year’s Eve 1912, recognizing a lucrative opportunity to perform for tips, he was arrested, charged with firing a gun and sent to the Colored Waifs’ Home for Boys. While temporarily cut off from the limited neighborhood space he had been free to roam, the year and a half he spent in reform school did the opposite of putting Armstrong in his place as a young black man; instead, it dramatically increased his social and, ultimately, his geographical mobility. For the first time Armstrong had regular access to musical instruments; he took up the cornet, and by the time he emerged from the Waifs’ Home he was good enough to be hired straight off for a nighttime gig at a local honky-tonk. Armstrong’s persistence and precocious natural gifts were not the seed of his genius alone; he also had the fortune of growing up around a multitude of brilliant players, a succession of whom served as his early musical mentors. Charters identifies Bunk Johnson, a cornetist whose place in early jazz history is still mired in controversy, as probably the earliest of Armstrong’s models; Armstrong repeatedly praised Johnson’s tone as “the sweetest” of all New Orleans cornetists in *Satchmo* (1954), his first

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<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*:32.

autobiography, and he certainly picked up some of his facility for the blues from Johnson's playing.<sup>78</sup> But it was with Joe Oliver that Armstrong would serve his most consequential musical apprenticeship.

From the time of his first regular gigs after leaving the Colored Waifs' Home, Armstrong's special prowess as a blues player put him in high demand in the honky-tonks of black Storyville, where the genre was wildly popular. Few veteran players took him seriously, however, until Joe Oliver started showing up at his late-night shows. Until the closure of the Storyville district and several run-ins with law enforcement compelled him to leave for Chicago in 1918 – thereby establishing a professional route that nearly every elite black jazz musician in New Orleans would follow over the next few years – Oliver remained Armstrong's foremost advocate and protector in a musical community that could sometimes be treacherous. As one of the first black musicians to break into the ranks of the Creole brass band elite, and as co-leader of the hottest dance band in the city, Oliver offered Armstrong a degree of social and professional mobility that few of his peers in Black Storyville would ever enjoy. Oliver's lessons in the Uptown musical style and in collective improvisation were essential to Armstrong's musical development. But it was not until Oliver left for Chicago that Armstrong secured his first big break, when Kid Ory selected the 16-year-old cornetist to replace the beloved Oliver in his band. Less than a decade earlier, it would have been remarkable for a Creole bandleader to take on unproven black musician, let alone one who was only halfway through his teens, but as John McCusker states in his recent biography of Kid Ory, "the old divisions between the downtown Creole bands and the uptown gut-bucket bands" were largely irrelevant by 1918 "because Creoles born in the mid-1880s and after – like Jelly Roll Morton, Sidney Bechet, Jimmie Noone,

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<sup>78</sup> Armstrong 1954:149.

and the members of the Original Creole Orchestra – fully embraced jazz as their own music.”<sup>79</sup> Armstrong’s developing mastery of the gap-spanning musical genre soon took him far afield from his hometown, first with Fate Marable’s riverboat bands that entertained up and down the Mississippi, and then to Chicago in 1922. But while it was in the latter city that Armstrong would first rise to national prominence through a series of groundbreaking recordings, he was never happier than when he officially joined the esteemed Tuxedo Jazz Band a year before his departure from New Orleans.

I relate this account of Armstrong’s early musical life mostly because it shares so many striking features with the musical histories related to me by contemporary brass band and jazz musicians in the city. Like many of the musicians I interviewed, Armstrong had his earliest informal musical training in the church; followed second lines and other brass band parades through neighborhood streets until he was old enough to parade himself; formed impromptu musical ensembles with other neighborhood youths before he had reached his teens; picked up many aspects of his style from observing the brilliant performers who gigged and in many cases lived around the block; and rose through the ranks of the music scene by apprenticing with many of these same performers after a period of formal musical schooling in his adolescence. Armstrong inhabited the same enculturative sphere described by Jack Buerkle and Danny Barker in their 1973 book *Bourbon Street Black*, the same world described by his predecessors, contemporaries and successors in New Orleans jazz and rhythm and blues in retrospective interviews – a world that, if my conversations with contemporary brass band and jazz players are anything to go by, remained intact to a remarkable degree nearly a century later. Together with the dual performance contexts of the street and the “jook,” the networks of kinship and

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<sup>79</sup> McCusker 2012:129.

apprenticeship engendered by the black church, the brass bands, and black mutual-aid societies continue to provide an environment where musicians absorb and learn to master the language of local traditions. Critically, each of these settings also provides a space for black New Orleanians to respond both creatively and politically to the struggles of the present moment – and it is in these responses, whether individual or collective, spontaneous or organized, that new musical forms and political movements are born.

Given socioeconomic inequities that persist along lines of color in New Orleans to this day, the institutions that make up second line culture have long operated in a state of scarcity and precarity, surviving only through adaption to ever-changing circumstances. And the “jook” – or the indoor club context where brass bands ply their trade – comprises an especially precarious world. The closure of the Storyville district in 1917 fundamentally altered that world for New Orleans musicians, though contrary to popular myth it was far from a catastrophic development. Paying gigs still abounded at parades, social clubs, formal events, parks, and the dozens of bars and dance halls that still operated all over the city. And Fate Marable established the first of his steamboat bands in the same year that Storyville closed, offering jazz musicians both a plum gig and an opportunity to spread the new musical language far beyond the bounds of the Crescent City. Still, the color line put many new economic opportunities opened up by jazz’s popular ascendancy out of reach of the style’s best players. In enjoying both frequent musical interactions with black musicians and the privileges afforded by their skin color, white jazz bands in New Orleans were in a position to reap prestige and financial rewards that the originators of the style wouldn’t find until decades later. Famously, the first jazz band to make a commercial recording was the white Original Dixieland Jazz Band, whose “Livery Stable Blues” was released in 1917.

It's useful to remember here that jazz bands (the earliest of which I have sometimes referred to as "dance bands" in this chapter, in keeping with the terminology of the era) and brass bands are not and were not one and the same, even in this early period. Even the smallest jazz combos generally had a piano and often a banjo, while only brass bands employed a tuba. But they were very much complimentary traditions, with countless influential musicians playing regularly in both types of ensembles. It is impossible to state categorically that jazz's crucial innovations were developed strictly in a dance-band context, or for that matter in the marching brass bands alone; quite likely they emerged piecemeal from every type of band in which the music's pioneers played. The jazz style emerged through a continuous process of cross-pollination – not just between black and Creole, Uptown and Downtown, reading and non-reading musicians, but between the street and the stage. By the 1920s, then, virtually all of the musicians who played in black and Creole brass bands could be called jazz musicians.

The most critical innovation that the jazz bestowed upon the New Orleans brass band tradition was a rhythmic and melodic flexibility that opened up a space for players to develop distinct individual styles. Brass band musicians developed their unique instrumental voices not just through observation and solitary practice but through creative competition in a live performance setting; where pianists had "cutting contests," brass bands had informal "bucking" competitions. And through the stylistic developments and variations such spirited exchanges produced, the pulse of the parades continued to shift and mutate from the ground up. The bass drum, in particular, began to assume a prominence heretofore unknown in the Western brass-band tradition, with players like Black Benny and Ernest Trepagnier adding numerous accents and syncopations to what had previously been a one-beat-to-the-bar instrument.<sup>80</sup> Just as the

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<sup>80</sup> Koenig 1990:2-3.

dance steps emphasized the lower half of the body – the hips, knees, and feet – the accompanying music stressed the low end of the sonic spectrum, with the bass drum and the tuba cresting into an earth-shaking roar at peaks of the parade. There is no way to know precisely how bass drummers played in this period; there are no publicly available recordings of black brass bands from New Orleans before the 1950s, and even if such recordings existed it is likely that technical limitations of the era’s recording equipment would have rendered the instrument faint or inaudible.

Bass frequencies were and are prized in New Orleans music for their range and power; they literally move people. This power to fill and transform physical and aural space gives brass band musicians immensely forceful instrumental voices, which together in an ensemble are even more overwhelmingly powerful. The voice of the brass band became increasingly vital during the Depression era, because African Americans had virtually no civic voice in 1930s New Orleans. While black brass bands were enjoying a golden age, and jazz bands spread the sound of the second line around the world, black New Orleanians were at their lowest ebb, economically and politically, of any time after the slave era. While the entire country was immiserated by the Great Depression, African Americans were hit especially hard; with the combined forces of economic decline and Jim Crow making it nearly impossible for blacks in New Orleans to find jobs, most were dependent upon federal relief funds by the early 1930s. With the city government controlling the coffers, blacks received smaller relief payments than whites, and by 1937 the city began kicking black families out of relief programs.<sup>81</sup> The New Orleans branch of the NAACP, still dominated by the Creole elite and was unable to repeat the mostly symbolic court victories of the late 1920s in the decade that followed. A rare legal

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<sup>81</sup> Fairclough 1995:42.

triumph in 1934, when the local and national branches of the NAACP acted in consort to challenge white supremacist mob justice, ended in tragedy. Jerome Wilson, the son of a black farmer in Washington Parish, was tried for the murder of a deputy sheriff during a scuffle on the Wilson family farm. With little time for his lawyers to prepare an adequate defense, he was convicted and sentenced to hanging just a week later as an angry white mob surrounded the courthouse. The NAACP appealed and won a new trial for Wilson, but before the second trial could begin a group of white men entered the jail where he was held and killed him with a hammer while the local sheriff stood by.

As lynchings continued in the 1930s, Louisiana governor Huey Long maintained the prevailing race and class hierarchies under the veneer of a putatively black-friendly working-class populism. After the Jerome Wilson case, the New Orleans NAACP did little but stage the occasional protest. It would take the rise of the organized labor movement and the insurgency of a group of young black activists at the end of the decade to spur the organization to action again. These were not unrelated developments: the Committee for Industrial Organization, the International Longshoremen and Warehouse Union, and the Communist Party of the United States all staged major organization drives throughout New Orleans in the mid- to late-1930s, helping to radicalize young working-class and middle-class blacks. Increasingly frustrated by the failure of the New Orleans NAACP to challenge the suppression of the black vote and the continued epidemic of lynchings across the state, A.P. Tureaud and a group of young black activists mobilized in the early 1940s to take over the organization's board. Over the next two decades, they mounted a series of legal challenges to the segregation of public schools and public spaces. A crucial base of support for their efforts emerged in the climate of World War II, when a new national mood of militance prompted African Americans to more aggressively assert their

rights as citizens. Alongside legal battles against desegregation, a major forum for the expression of resistance was provided by the city's public transit system, which became a "public theater" for challenging Jim Crow through refusals to sit in race-designated seating sections and vocal confrontations with hostile bus drivers. Ultimately, spontaneous protests in public settings like buses provided a template for nonviolent direct action, a major component of the national civil rights movement that emerged in the 1950s. And as I detail later in this chapter, musical parades would become an important front in the battle to desegregate public space in New Orleans.

### ***Migrating Rhythms at Midcentury: Professor Longhair and New Orleans R&B***

While the NAACP and other burgeoning civil rights groups fought against the severe circumscriptions on black education, civic participation, and socioeconomic mobility under Jim Crow, new generations of black musicians navigated a cityscape where racial divisions often weren't as cut and dry as the legal system made them out to be. Though residential segregation continued to advance, blacks and whites still lived side by side in many neighborhoods throughout the early twentieth century, and casual social relations persisted in informal contexts. Clarinetist and bandleader Harold Dejan, who was born in 1909, recalled in a 1994 interview that the first band he formed as a child had two white members, and noted that when he turned professional as an adult, black and white musicians would frequently jam together after hours at local clubs.

During public performances, of course, the color line remained firm. While the most accomplished black bands played all over town, black audiences were not allowed into most of the higher-profile clubs around Canal Street and the French Quarter until the late 1960s. There, throughout the 1940s and early 1950s, dance orchestras catered to tourists and smaller combos



played before a growing audience in the heyday of the “hot” jazz revival. In the central city nightclubs where African Americans were welcomed, meanwhile, young musicians were developing a radically new style. With pianist Roy “Professor Longhair” Byrd leading the charge, the New Orleans variant of what came to be known as “Rhythm and Blues” would not only provide a stylistic bedrock for both rock and funk music; it would also give national exposure to features of second line music that had never before made it to record. And the innovations of the new style would, in turn, be reabsorbed into the New Orleans brass band tradition.

Roy Byrd did not invent New Orleans R&B singlehandedly any more than Buddy Bolden created jazz out of whole cloth. But if the recollections of his contemporaries are to be taken seriously, he was the grand influence on a generation of local musicians. His blend of the blues form with rhythms derived from calypso and rumba – and from brass band parades – is most celebrated for siring a lineage of virtuosic piano players. But Professor Longhair’s influence on drummers and on the future course of second line rhythms was equally acute. For local timekeepers, playing in his band became almost a rite of passage; in retrospective interviews, drummers as noteworthy as Earl Palmer, Charles “Hungry” Williams, Zigaboo Modeliste, Ed Blackwell, and John Boudreaux have all stressed how much they learned from playing with or listening to Byrd. And two great drummers who I interviewed early in the course of my fieldwork – former Little Richard drummer Charles Connor and veteran jazz player Johnny Vidacovich – spoke to me at length about how their experiences playing with Byrd shaped their musical style.

How did a piano player come to be such a formative influence for New Orleans drummers? Part of the answer may be that drums were Byrd’s first instrument. “I started off

beating on these trunks and tin pans and things. I was around seven, eight or nine years old,” he told interviewer Hudson Marquez in 1979.<sup>82</sup> By his teens, Byrd was playing drums for medicine shows and other street performances, and he soon began supplementing these gigs by tap dancing for tips around the French Quarter. It was only then that he took up the piano. A decade before he achieved local renown, then, Byrd probably had more embodied knowledge of local rhythms and the dances that accompanied them than any other pianist in the city. As Charles Connor, who occasionally played with him as a teenager, recalled in 2013, Byrd would keep time by kicking the bottom of the piano. “He couldn’t read music, but he was gifted with that feeling, man,” Connor said. “So that’s how I got the feel of funk in the rhythm.”<sup>83</sup> Connor’s remarks echo earlier statements by legendary pianist Dr. John, who in 1986 stated to Jason Berry that “Fess put funk into music.”<sup>84</sup>

What is this funky feeling in Roy Byrd’s music? In part, it was an extension of the syncretization of Afro-Caribbean, African-American, and Euro-American musical features that had characterized black music in New Orleans – and the second line tradition in particular – since its inception. But it was also derived from foregrounding the specifically Afro-Caribbean features of Byrd’s primary rhythmic innovation was to layer clave, tresillo, and habanera bass figures underneath the eight-to-the-bar pulse of piano boogie-woogie; the “piano rumba” or “rumba boogie” that resulted is perhaps best represented by his first recordings of “Go to the Mardi Gras” (1949) and “Tipitina” (1953). On the former, the left hand bass figure is a straightforward tresillo, accompanied by the left hand is essentially playing is essentially playing

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<sup>82</sup> Professor Longhair (Roy Byrd), interviewed by Hudson Marquez, May 30, 1969, Series 1, Item 505 (.WAV file recording on CD), Hogan Jazz Archive Oral Histories, 1943-2002.

<sup>83</sup> Interview with author, October 23, 2013.

<sup>84</sup> Berry, Foose and Jones 1986:20.

a habanera bass figure, although it is obscured someone by a walking acoustic bass line that plays straight quarter notes; on the latter song, the left hand bass figure is a straightforward tresillo.<sup>85</sup> The right hand on “Tipitina” plays broken chords and suspensions in a straight-eights rhythm, interspersed with anticipatory sixteenth-note ornamentations and 32<sup>nd</sup>-note trills and glissandos. On “Go to the Mardi Gras,” the tresillo bass of the left hand is offset by a samba-like pattern of chords in the right hand.

The complex layering of different rhythmic pulses in Byrd’s piano playing was mirrored by the drum accompaniment. Earl Palmer’s drumbeat on “Tipitina” is a straight lift of a typical second line pattern. But where the drummers on most New Orleans jazz recordings over the previous three decades tended to simplify a beat that in its original performance context was supplied by two separate musicians, Palmer actually does a fair job of replicating the dense four-handed rhythms of the parade. The beat demonstrates the dense cross rhythms of bass and snare, the subtly swung bass drum accent before the third beat of the bar, and the most critical local ingredient – the “big four,” or the strongly accented eighth note after the fourth beat of the bar:



Figure 2-1: "Tipitina" drum pattern. Transcribed by author.

<sup>85</sup> Both of these patterns were soon appropriated by producer Dave Bartholomew and his piano-playing protégé, Fats Domino, on a series of mid-1950s hits that established the New Orleans R&B sound nationally.

The elaborate rhythmic layering of Longhair's 1950s records not only anticipated the increasing rhythmic complexity of second line brass band music over the second half of the twentieth century, it also provided a template for the repetitive, groove-based music genre that would come to be known as funk.

### ***Brass Bands at Midcentury: Bunk's Brass Band, Eureka and Olympia***

The first publicly available recordings of a traditional New Orleans brass band were not made until 1945, four years before "Tipitina" but more than three quarters of a century after the first black brass bands in the city came together. In that year, jazz historian Bill Russell organized a band around the then-65-year-old Bunk Johnson to record several local brass band standards. Black brass bands in New Orleans would likely have remained unrecorded for several years more if not for a series of developments in the decade and a half leading up to Russell's recordings – developments that would shape how the musical heritage of New Orleans, and African American musical tradition in general, would be understood, studied, critiqued and commodified up to the present day.

The 1930s saw the emergence of jazz criticism and jazz history as a field, largely through the writings of "hot" jazz collector-enthusiasts in Paris and New York. French critics Hughes Panassié and Charles Delaunay, who brought a mostly white, university-educated coterie of jazz enthusiasts together with the founding of the Hot Club de France in 1931, established the basic critical stance from which much jazz writing still proceeds today. They valorized the blues-based "hot" jazz of black New Orleans musicians as authentic, unmediated expressions of feeling and disparaged the largely white "sweet" bands as commercialized and artificial.<sup>86</sup> It was a

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<sup>86</sup> Raeburn 2009:24.

perspective shared by Panassié and Delaunay's counterparts in New York. Like the Parisians, Charles Edward Smith, Frederick Ramsey, William Russell, and their colleagues were white, university-educated writer-collectors whose relationship to New Orleans jazz was cultivated entirely through recordings. With prompting from a visiting Panassié, they organized the Hot Record Society in 1938 for the purpose of preserving and reissuing classic jazz recordings. Their most influential endeavor, however, was the 1939 book *Jazzmen*.

Edited by Ramsey and Smith, *Jazzmen* was the first major published history of the genre. Drawn in significant part from the recollections of pioneering jazz musicians themselves, the book not only grounded the development of jazz in its practitioners' lived experiences, it also cemented New Orleans as the music's point of origin. Just as consequential – for jazz scholarship and criticism, and for a budding local culture industry that would soon center on the city's image as the “birthplace of jazz” – was the authors' framing of jazz in New Orleans as a rise-and-fall narrative. As has so frequently been the case with white cultural outsiders documenting a historically marginalized (and often nonwhite) expressive tradition, the authors of *Jazzmen* cultivated a preservationist mindset, and saw themselves as defending a once-pure, now-contaminated form from further degradation. By their reckoning, the “hot” jazz of the early New Orleans bands was the most authentic iteration of the style, a pure expression of the player's innermost feelings, and the process of dispersion and commercialization that accelerated in the 1920s – most notably embodied by the “sweet” bands, for whom the book's authors have only undisguised contempt – served mostly to rob the music of its original potency.

To be fair, the New Orleans jazz scene was in a state of near-abeyance by the late 1930s. Most of the music's leading lights had long since migrated to Chicago, New York and Los Angeles, which one after the other would succeed New Orleans as the de facto jazz capital after

the early 1920s. The best players who remained found little work on the concert stage. Through interviews conducted by *Jazzmen* contributor William Russell, these semi-retired musicians contributed nearly as much to the portrait that *Jazzmen* paints of New Orleans jazz as the authors themselves. White scholars and critics used their preservationist project to accumulate cultural capital, but for many black and Creole musicians – including not just several of the men interviewed in *Jazzmen* but their traditionalist successors up to the present day – the preservationist impulse would become intimately tied to both race pride and economic survival, particularly as the hot-jazz revival reshaped the local tourist industry in the coming decades.

The most prominent native voice in *Jazzmen* was cornetist Bunk Johnson, whose recollections provided much of the material for the New Orleans chapters. While later scholars discovered that Johnson's stories contained numerous exaggerations and several outright fabrications – mostly about the veteran trumpeter's musical activities and innovations around the period of jazz's turn-of-the-century emergence – the book that resulted soon sparked a revival of interest both in Johnson and in traditional New Orleans jazz as a whole. By 1943, Johnson had a new career both on the stage and – for the first time in his life – as a recording artist. And it was in the effort to relaunch Johnson's career that William Russell organized the very first professional recording of a New Orleans brass band around the veteran musician.

As Richard H. Knowles points out, the Russell sessions were an attempt to recreate the sound of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century brass bands and were not especially representative of the contemporaneous brass band style in the city. Still, a clearly defined, locally specific second-line brass band style – with features that would carry over through the end of the century – is readily apparent. The music is audibly distinct not just from the Euro-American brass band tradition but also from the “hot” jazz of Armstrong, Oliver and Ory. The most notable distinction is the

foregrounding of the bass drum, which is not just louder but also more active than the snare. While the snare ornaments a basic press-roll pattern on the 2 and the 4 of the bar, the bass drum essentially follows a 4-bar cycle centered on the 1 and 3, with pickup notes ornamenting an increasingly dense flurry of strokes that culminates in the “big four” accent at the end of the cycle.

Six years after the Bunk Johnson recordings came the first substantial recordings of a working brass band in New Orleans. In 1951, Harvard students Aiden Ashforth and David Wyckhoff traveled to New Orleans to record the Eureka Brass Band which had for the preceding twenty years – the same period when New Orleans jazz was reputed to have died out – been the the most popular brass band in the city. Produced by jazz historian Samuel Charters for Folkways Records, *Music of New Orleans, Vol. 1* comprised field recordings from the streets of New Orleans dating back over the previous four years. Two somewhat dim recordings of brass band parades on Mardi Gras day in 1957 are featured, though only one of the recordings appears to feature a black band. No band name is given, but several group members are identified in a photo included with the LP. Far more illuminating is the second volume of *Music of New Orleans*, released later in the same year. The latter LP is devoted entirely to the music of the Eureka Brass Band. Immediately apparent is the beat on several songs, which is similar – though not identical – to the rhythm laid down by Earl Palmer on “Tipitina” in 1953.



Figure 2-2: Album cover of "The Music of New Orleans, Vol. 2: Music of the Eureka Brass Band" (Folkways LP, 1958). Artwork by John Gundelfinger. Image courtesy of Smithsonian Folkways online (<https://folkways.si.edu/the-eureka-brass-band/music-of-new-orleans-vol-2/jazz-raqtime/album/smithsonian>).

The Eureka Brass Band had first formed in 1920 to play parades for the Hobgoblin Club, a marching group based in the Uptown section of the city. At that time they were known as the Hobgoblin Band. With the marching club short on money to pay their band, the group soon accepted a job playing for the local Odd Fellows Lodge and took on the name under which it would rise to the top of the local brass band scene. Throughout its most successful period, in the 1940s and the 1950s, Eureka was led by trumpeter Percy Humphrey. Knowles credits Humphrey with modernizing the group's sound through the introduction of the saxophone (and the abandonment of the baritone horn and clarinet, which fell out of favor except among the most traditionalist brass bands after World War II) and the development of a new trumpet solo style.<sup>87</sup> Laying jazz-inflected instrumental solos over an increasingly funky ensemble style, the group

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<sup>87</sup> Knowles 1996:196.



also continued the general move away from written arrangements; where once they had played almost entirely from written scores, by the time of their first recordings in the 1950s the band only had a handful of paper arrangements – mostly dirges and traditional marches – left in their repertoire. Active until 1975, the Eureka sustained the New Orleans brass band tradition through the lean years of the city’s jazz scene and became the first local brass band to record regularly. Just as crucially, Eureka indirectly spawned the band that would carry the torch for the brass band tradition and become its international ambassadors in the critical transitional period of the 1960s and 1970s.

In 1958, half a decade after Eureka made its first recordings, erstwhile saxophonist Harold Dejan organized the Olympia Brass Band. A minor figure and journeyman musician in the city’s brass band scene before he established the Olympia, Dejan nevertheless had more than 30 years of experience and numerous connections to draw upon when he organized the group. Like most local brass bands, the Olympia made a name for themselves playing parades and funerals. But while traditional marches and dirges would form the core of their repertoire, the band broke soon with their forebears by incorporating rhythm and blues numbers into their performances. Olympia cultivated a broad audience that cut across racial and class divisions not just by expanding their repertoire but through a weekly gig at Preservation Hall – a venue that did as much as any New Orleans institution to establish traditional jazz as the linchpin of the city’s burgeoning tourist economy – and, later in the 1960s, through national and international tours that sold the “birthplace of jazz” as a unique and lively tourist destination.<sup>88</sup> In their role as cultural ambassadors the Olympia did much to revitalize the city’s brass band scene, to bring international attention to black neighborhoods in New Orleans and their expressive traditions,

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<sup>88</sup> Souther 2006:124.

and to make music a viable career choice for black youth as blue-collar job opportunities in manufacturing, shipping and trades dwindled. But the band was also unavoidably complicit in promoting an idyllic vision of the city as a carefree multicultural playground that papered over the ugly iniquities of life under late Jim Crow. Every brass band that has earned an extra-local following in Olympia's wake has grappled with a similar set of contradictions.

Olympia rose to prominence against a sociopolitical context that threw the ambiguous politics of second lining – and the fraught nature of representing black traditions in a segregated city – into sharp relief. Peaking in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the nationwide Civil Rights movement, in which New Orleans represented only one front, politicized all forms of black cultural expression. And with movement groups turning buses, streets, and all other public spaces into a massive theater for resistance, it was inevitable that the very public spectacles of Mardi Gras and second line parades would become sites of contestation. The fight over parades also reopened old divisions between the black and Creole communities. In 1957, several black and Creole marching clubs canceled their parades in order to protest continued racist violence and white resistance to school desegregation, and to show solidarity with the national movement.<sup>89</sup> The Zulu Social Aid and Pleasure Club, host of the most popular black Mardi Gras parade in the city then and now, was among the organizations that bowed to public pressure and canceled their parade, but when the processions returned in the following years as racial strife continued many local Civil Rights groups began to grow nervous; while originally intended as a subversive mockery of the white parades' regal pretensions, the Zulus' blackface, grass skirts and coconuts began to look to politically conscious blacks and Creoles like a regression to the minstrel-show past. In 1961, civil rights groups in New Orleans pressured Zulu to once again

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<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*:139.

cancel its Mardi Gras parade; though the Zulus initially agreeing to cancel the parade, panicked Mayor deLesseps Morrison – who was afraid that public perception of continued racial tension might upset tourism – convinced the club to march as usual for the good of the city.<sup>90</sup> Despite an unusually subdued procession guarded by an expanded police detail, the Zulu parade became an ever more important component of Mardi Gras festivities in the years that followed; in 1969 Zulu became the first black Mardi Gras krewe to be granted a parading permit on the traditional St. Charles to Canal route that white krewes had used for a century. Though this was a major step in desegregating Mardi Gras festivities, complaints that Zulu was perpetuating demeaning racial stereotypes also persisted, as many black businesses pulled their support from the parade by the late 1960s.

Like Zulu, the Olympia Brass Band enjoyed generous support from white businesses and from city leaders; krewe and band alike were something close to officially-sanctioned cultural ambassadors, and in helping its white benefactors sell New Orleans as a tourist paradise while racial strife and violence continued unabated, Olympia opened itself up to the same charges of “tomming” that Zulu faced. Olympia’s European tours were sponsored by the New Orleans chamber of commerce and by local tourist organizations, and were explicitly designed to draw wealthy foreigners to the city. At one German festival, the group played in a picture-perfect recreation of the French Quarter.<sup>91</sup> And the group’s appearances in mainstream media, though they were among the first mass-broadcast and mass-produced representations of second line culture, also drew consternation from some civil rights groups for portraying a rich and proud expressive tradition as light entertainment and happy-go-lucky spectacle. In 1967, Olympia

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.:124.

performed in a Mardi Gras-themed halftime show for the inaugural New Orleans Saints game that met with some criticism from the local NAACP. Nevertheless, producer Tommy Walker staged a similar halftime production – with Olympia at its center – when New Orleans first hosted the Super Bowl three years later. But while these shows and the band’s later appearances in films, television, and in theater inevitably flattened and sanitized the second line tradition, they were largely successful in drawing new tourists to the city and to jazz and brass band performances in particular. Indeed, the unfettered expansion of a local tourist economy that had always been built upon live entertainment was arguably the economic spark of the city’s late 20<sup>th</sup> century brass band revival.

Olympia didn’t just help to create the economic foundation for the brass band revival, however; they also revitalized the tradition creatively. By including rhythm and blues numbers and more uptempo songs than the traditional bands generally played, Olympia attracted more young people from the neighborhood than any brass band had in decades. The group was also among the first of their kind to invite young musicians to “sit in” with them during sets, a common jazz practice that is now standard for local brass bands. The key figure in modernizing Olympia’s repertoire and sound was Milton Batiste, a young trumpet player who joined in 1962. Unlike the older musicians who made up most of the Olympia, Batiste had grown up on the R&B of Louis Jordan and local legend Professor Longhair, and gained most of his early performance experience playing on the chitlin’ circuit with the likes of Little Richard, Big Joe Turner, and Clarence “Frogman” Henry. And along with Dejan and Danny Barker, Batiste would emerge as one of the most important mentors for the new generation of players who revolutionized the New Orleans brass band sound in the 1970s and 1980s.

Young players drawn to the tradition by Olympia's increasingly R&B-based sound gained critical experience not just by following second lines but by sitting in on the group's local performances, and later in a series of junior ensembles organized by Batiste. Around 1982, Batiste took a group of teenage brass musicians who called themselves the Bucket Men Brass Band under his wing. Formed under the aegis the Tambourine and Fan organization, a Treme-group organized by veteran Civil Rights activist Jerome Smith to keep black youths engaged and out of trouble by educating them in local folkways and cultural traditions, the Bucket Men named themselves after Tambourine and Fan's marching club. Batiste renamed them the Junior Olympia Brass Band, and for the next decade the young group would essentially serve as both a school for promising young players and as a farm team for the parent band. A few years later, Batiste also founded the Olympia Kids band. Members of these groups would go on to form the New Birth, Mahogany, and Soul Rebels Brass Bands, although in forging a new style they often met with disapproval from their tradition-minded mentors. And the foundation they built upon had already been established by the alumni from an even more influential youth ensemble nearly a decade earlier.

### ***Danny Barker's Fairview Band***

Banjoist Danny Barker spent the formative years of his life in the Seventh Ward just as the backbeat of the Black church, the howl of the blues and the subtle swing of the black marching bands were coalescing into jazz. Initially touring across the South with his own ensembles, Barker moved to New York in 1930 and spent the next three and a half decades performing with Cab Calloway, Jelly Roll Morton, Lucky Millinder, and numerous other great jazz and swing bandleaders. He returned to New Orleans in 1965 to find a jazz scene newly

resurgent and increasingly flush with tourist dollars, but with few young participants to carry on and reinterpret the homegrown tradition. Around 1970, Reverend Andrew Darby of the Fairview Baptist Church approached Barker about forming a junior band in affiliation with the church in order to keep neighborhood youths occupied and out of trouble. Barker jumped at the opportunity, and by early 1971 he began to build a group around 13-year-old trumpeter Leroy Jones, who lived just down the street. Thus began a band whose alumni would shape the forked growth of the contemporary New Orleans brass band scene; spark new rows in the debates over tradition, innovation, cultural decline and respectability; and, through international touring, musical experimentation and creative collaboration, take the whole world and the gamut of popular music and culture within the purview of the second line.

The Fairview Baptist Church Christian Band made its first public performance at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival in 1971. Although the band was soon gigging as regularly as any of the older elite brass bands that remained active, Danny Barker conceived Fairview first and foremost as a training ground for future music professionals. Unlike probably any scholastic marching band director, Barker did not teach songs off of sheet music. Perhaps recognizing that his proteges learned the music they loved – predominantly R&B and rock – by ear, Barker sat the young musicians down and taught them by playing classic jazz records or by performing the songs on his banjo. After a few listens, he would have the musicians play along. Barker gave his charges an education not just in the music itself, but in the business of music, performance ethics, and cultivating both respect for the tradition and a respectable image. “He taught us how to be as musicians – to have character, to be a gentleman, act like you want to be there when you’re onstage,” remembered Herlin Riley in 2013.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Interview with author, July 31, 2013.



Figure 2-3: Danny Barker and the Fairview Baptist Church Christian Band, 1971. Courtesy of the Hogan Jazz Archive.

Through Barker's tireless promotional efforts, formidable professional connections, and high-profile performances not just at local festivals but at a Kennedy Center tribute to Louis Armstrong in Washington, D.C., Fairview quickly became one of the most in-demand brass bands in New Orleans. "We were the hottest thing on the second line circuit," Jones recollected in 2006.<sup>93</sup> With a lineup that had swelled to nearly 30 members by 1973, Fairview met increased demand by splitting into smaller ensembles for local performances, which enabled them to book multiple gigs under the Fairview name at the same time. But the band's local ubiquity didn't sit well with many older musicians, who began complaining to the musicians' union that Fairview

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<sup>93</sup> Burns 2006:24.

was monopolizing local gigs.<sup>94</sup> Furthermore, the fact that the band itself was nonunionized left Barker open to charges of exploitation. While Leroy Jones specifically refutes the rumor that Barker was using the band as cheap labor for personal gain, and none of the group's other alums have offered any credence to this notion in retrospective interviews, Barker's professional reputation took a hit from such claims. With many of the band members now experienced enough to form their own groups or join established ensembles, Barker decided to disband the original Fairview in 1974, although different lineups of young musicians would continue to play under the same band name for a few more years.

The list of musicians who played with Barker's Fairview Baptist Church Christian Band between 1971 and 1974 reads like a "who's who" of New Orleans jazz and brass band music over the last four decades. Some Fairview alums emerged as major innovators; others became staunch traditionalists; and still others kept a foot in both camps. Barker's band is probably best known today for indirectly spawning Charles and Kirk Joseph's Dirty Dozen Brass Band, who revolutionized the New Orleans brass band sound with a riff-based, funk-inflected approach that still provides the basic template for the contemporary brass band style today. But Fairview was also an early proving ground for trumpeter Wynton Marsalis, almost certainly the best-known advocate of traditional jazz in the world for three decades now. Fellow Fairview alum and sometime Marsalis drummer Herlin Riley, on the other hand, is a born eclectic, an innovator on his instrument with a deep appreciation of New Orleans jazz tradition who is equally comfortable playing hot jazz standards and funk music.

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<sup>94</sup> Matt Sakakeeny, "Fairview Baptist Church Band." *Roll With It: Brass Bands in the Streets of New Orleans* (website). <https://mattsakakeeny.com/roll-with-it/brass-bands/fairview-baptist-church/>. Accessed December 9, 2017.



It bears remembering that Riley, Marsalis and the rest of Fairview's alums were the first musicians to come of age with traditional jazz and traditional brass band music as clearly defined styles. All of these musicians came into their own in a post-Civil Rights period when New Orleans second line culture, brass band music and jazz as a whole began to accrue substantial cultural capital – and when the cultures around these expressive traditions became more conscious of themselves and their value, both economic and symbolic. With the Olympia Brass Band, community organizations like Tambourine and Fan, and local civic and business leaders seeking to both revive brass band music and make it the centerpiece of the city's expanding tourist economy in the 1960s and 1970s, the tradition attracted not just tourist dollars but a measure of newfound prestige for its practitioners. And with the civil rights struggle making all black cultural forms fair game in debates around cultural representation and respectability, many performers and community leaders began to embrace a strictly-defined "traditional" brass band style as an emblem of black dignity and cultural integrity.

That a clear, politically charged distinction between "traditional" and "contemporary" approaches to these expressive forms began to emerge around the time when the Fairview Band was active, and that the divide between these approaches has only grown in the ensuing decades, is hardly coincidental. Since the majority of performers and culture bearers in New Orleans belong to the city's most socioeconomically vulnerable class, the traditions they represent have been vested with political meaning. To position oneself on one of the other side of the traditional/contemporary divide was and remains a political act. But it was the succession of bands that came out of Fairview from the mid-1970s to the early 1980s that arguably made that divide concrete.

After Danny Barker disbanded the Fairview Band in 1974, trumpeter Leroy Jones quickly assembled the remaining members into a new group under his own direction. With their name inspired by a remark from Barker about their massive sound, the Hurricane Brass Band quickly established a local presence through appearances at Jazz Fest and as an opening act for national touring artists at the Saenger Theater and the Municipal Auditorium (Jacobsen 82). Initially, the band followed the Olympia model, performing mostly traditional numbers mixed with a few rhythm and blues songs from the 1950s and 1960s. With the addition of Anthony “Tuba Fats” Lacen, trumpeter Gregory Davis, and the Joseph brothers, however, the Hurricane Brass Band began to develop the kinds of funky, riff-based tunes, centered around Lacen’s tuba, that the Dirty Dozen would soon develop into an entirely new brass band style. Unfortunately, there is little documentation available of this nascent sound; the band’s one album was recorded in early 1975 and reflects their more conservative early style.

Though the Hurricane Brass Band was intermittently active in one configuration or another up to 1980, the group began to disperse after Jones started college on a music scholarship in 1976. Over the next several years, Jones toured with a number of rhythm and blues performers before settling into a series of club gigs in and around the French Quarter. Virtually all of the good gigs were with traditional jazz and swing groups, and when the prodigiously gifted Jones, schooled in the old style by a surviving master, realized he could make a decent living as a hot-jazz revivalist, his career trajectory was sealed. Today Jones leads his own traditional jazz group, playing regularly at Preservation Hall and frequently touring in Europe, where the audience for traditional jazz has not diminished to the extent that it has in the United States. Jones’ pivot towards traditional jazz (or rather, towards playing exclusively in the traditional style) does not appear to have been ideologically motivated. His former bandmates

Gregg Stafford and Michael White, however, gravitated rather pointedly towards the traditional style, and have emerged as some of the most prominent critics of the more casual and hip-hop-inflected contemporary second line style.

### *The Dirty Dozen and the Brass Band Renaissance*

As Jones, Stafford and White staked out their positions as musical preservationists, the exponents of a local musical heritage that attracted ever-increasing amounts of capital and prestige as the twentieth century drew to a close, several of their Fairview alums united to radically reshape the New Orleans brass band tradition. Around 1977, bass drummer Benny Jones brought together members of the former Hurricane Brass Band – now playing as the Tornado Brass Band – and several other local musicians for a series of loose rehearsals. At the time, trumpeter Gregory Davis explained in a retrospective interview with Mick Burns, opportunities for brass band gigs were nearly nonexistent at local clubs and bars were nearly nonexistent (Burns 71).<sup>95</sup> These rehearsals, then, offered virtually the only opportunity for young brass band musicians to play regularly. Through such practices and sporadic appearances at baseball games and other local events, the musicians coalesced into a band and developed a sound that owed as much to black popular music of the 1960s and 1970s as it did to the traditional brass band style. When a local Social Aid and Pleasure Club contacted Jones and asked him to put a brass band together for their annual second line, he enlisted his new ensemble and dubbed them the Original Sixth Ward Dirty Dozen Brass Band. With a growing number of

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<sup>95</sup> The Dirty Dozen's formative years in the late 1970s coincided with the popular peak of disco; most Bourbon Street clubs featured either disc jockeys playing the popular dance songs of the time or tradition jazz ensembles. In developing a radically new brass band style, the Dirty Dozen found few venues willing to gamble on their sound before it could be demonstrated that there was an audience for it.

performances at second line parades, the band finally began to secure indoor gigs, mostly at black clubs and bars around the Treme. Through their Monday night slot at the Glass House, a small bar in Central City, the Dirty Dozen steadily built up a local following in the late 1970s and early 1980s. By 1982, they had amassed a sufficiently high profile to begin touring internationally, and two years later they released their seminal debut album, *My Feet Can't Fail Me Now*. Within a decade they had become international cultural ambassadors for New Orleans on an even bigger scale than the Olympia had ever been, playing around the world and collaborating with numerous popular and jazz musicians while a succession of bands back home ran with the new style they had pioneered.

The Dirty Dozen excited more interest in brass band music among local youths than any band had done for nearly half a century, and then introduced a new, homegrown New Orleans brass band style to the world for the first time in just as long. The band's sound provides the basic template for every notable local brass band that has followed them – with the exception of self-consciously traditional ensembles like the Treme Brass Band – for the past three and a half decades. So what distinguished the Dirty Dozen's style, and why did it catch on so quickly?

Many second liners and musicians point to tempo as the most important feature that separates the Dirty Dozen's music from that of their predecessors. Particularly in their early years, the group played far faster than the traditional brass bands; songs like "Blackbird Special" and "Do It Fluid," both from *My Feet Can't Fail Me Now*, are 30 to 50 beats per minute faster than a typical uptempo number by the Olympia or the Eureka. But while it was the Dirty Dozen's breathless pace that had the most obvious impact on the second line parade, both in terms of its pulse and its accompanying dance steps, it was in their approach to song structure and rhythm that the group broke most decisively with their forebears. Taking their cues from the 1960s and

1970s funk of James Brown, Parliament-Funkadelic, and New Orleans hometown heroes the Meters, the group shifted focus from chord changes and harmony to repetitive, interlocking horn riffs centered around Kirk Joseph's tuba vamps. The drums, meanwhile, began to shift the emphasis further towards the iterations of the clave and tresillo beats that had long overlain the standard 1-2-1-2 march pulse in New Orleans second line music, with the accents of the straight march beat themselves beginning to recede into the background.

The Dirty Dozen's innovations mirrored Brown's explosion of traditional song form on his 1960s hits, a trading of harmonic for rhythmic development that had changed the direction of popular music utterly a decade prior to the band's emergence. This was the bedrock of funk, a style that became the basis for most popular black dance music in the 1970s and beyond. The Dirty Dozen's assimilation of funk-style rhythm and arrangements, then, bred a brass band style that felt contemporary and connected to the popular music of the day. Furthermore, the quickened pulse and increasing rhythmic density called for a new dance style – which, fortuitously for the band, was already developing in Treme and its environs. Once word got around town about the hot new group at Daryl's (and, later, the Glasshouse), young dancers looking for a fresh context in which to develop their moves began showing up at the Dirty Dozen's shows in groups. An atmosphere of creative competition quickly developed, and drove both band and dancers to greater heights. The dancers would bring their new steps to each gig, and the Dirty Dozen would be inspired to come up with new material to challenge the dancers further. The process repeated week after week in a symbiosis that, Gregory Davis suggests, precipitated the emergence of the now-ubiquitous “buck jumping” dance style<sup>96</sup>, which Rachel

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<sup>96</sup> Burns 2006:72.

Carrico describes as an energetic style defined by dramatic vertical leaps, drops, and carefully timed pauses.<sup>97</sup>

In 1984, the Dirty Dozen put their transformative sound on wax with the release of *My Feet Can't Fail Me Now*, their debut LP, on Rounder Records. Although the title phrase originated with the black vaudeville performer Stepin Fetchit, the members of the Dirty Dozen likely picked it up from the song “One Nation Under a Groove” by George Clinton’s Parliament-Funkadelic collective, a formative influence on the entire contemporary brass band scene in New Orleans. But wherever it came from, the emphasis on “feet” in the title is telling; it was fast-moving feet, rather than the low-swiveling hips and bent knees of parades past, that would come to define the second line dancing style of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. By the time the record came out, the band was spending more and more time touring, and their local presence necessarily decreased. While the Dirty Dozen was off playing to a rapidly expanding international following, brothers Philip and Keith Frazier led the nascent Rebirth Brass Band into the broach.

By the time Rebirth entered the scene in the early 1980s, New Orleans had gone through a pronounced demographic shift. Due in large part to deindustrialization, the population of the city as a whole declined after 1960. As in many major American cities in the latter half of the twentieth century, large swathes of the middle and upper class in New Orleans, the majority of them white, moved out to the expanding suburbs. White families relocated not just due to rising crime rates and the shift of the job base away from the urban core, but also to keep their children out of the newly desegregated Orleans Parish School District; the result was a de facto resegregation of public schools. For the first time in the late 1970s, New Orleans had a black-

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<sup>97</sup> Carrico 2015:180.

majority population, and in 1978 Ernest “Dutch” Morial was elected as the city’s first black mayor. But despite the increase in black political power, economic and social conditions in black neighborhoods deteriorated markedly throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The city’s economy went into a tailspin in the mid-1980s when the Louisiana oil industry collapsed, and with a decimated middle-class tax base important civic services began to dry up or disappear altogether (Carrico 184). Compounding the problem were the Reagan administration’s massive cuts in federal aid to cities and escalation of the War on Drugs (really a war on the black poor, as many commentators have since pointed out), along with cuts to municipal police funds that led to a spike in crime, particularly in the city’s overcrowded public housing projects. Cut off from the street grid, these environments reflected the fragmentation of black social life in New Orleans and the imposed restrictions on mobility that were initialized by urban renewal projects in the 1960s.

In the midst of socioeconomic catastrophe, the Sunday parades that had sustained black New Orleans through Jim Crow only grew in size and number. As the Dirty Dozen began to play second lines regularly, the young dancers drawn to their club shows followed them out to the streets. By the early 1980s, local youths were turning out to second lines in numbers not seen since the heyday of the Onward and the Eureka some 50 years earlier. A host of new Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs and marching clubs emerged, including Sudan, the Original Big Seven, the Furious Five, and the Lady Buckjumpers. The latter two groups recruited Rebirth to play their parades, and with the Dirty Dozen increasingly away on tour by the middle of the decade, the young band succeeded their stylistic forebears as the biggest band on the street just as they had done in the club.<sup>98</sup> As new marching clubs multiplied, the length of the second line season mushroomed from three months to ten. And with the growing crowds and expanded parade

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<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*:186.

calendar came the first stirrings of what some have half-derisively called the “third line,” or the photographers, journalists, academics, and other chroniclers – many of whom are white and outsiders to the tradition – who now comprise a sizable portion of the crowd each Sunday.

One of the first outsiders to document the parades, in their faster late-20<sup>th</sup> century iteration at least, was noted ethnomusicologist Alan Lomax. A short film Lomax made of a funeral parade played by the Dirty Dozen in 1982 offers a striking contrast with the pace and bodily movements of earlier second lines captured on celluloid. Where dancers in many of the earlier parades swiveled their hips and kept close to the ground, emphasizing the horizontal dimension of the low-lying landscape, the young steppers in the Dirty Dozen parade execute rapid footwork and stunningly plotted leaps and falls – a bodily articulation of the desire to transcend and rise above vertical constrictions.

The accelerated tempo of the parade matched the urgency of the times. Led by Rebirth, the new generation of brass bands began progressively to draw upon the sound, lyrical stance and sensibility of hip hop. As with the rappers, DJs and “b-boy” dancers who invented the form in the Bronx a decade before, the musicians and dancers who remade second line culture in the 1980s forged the new style largely against the backdrop of the city’s public housing projects. Overcrowded, physically isolated from the street grid and largely bereft of police protections, these spaces quickly became notorious for gang violence and the drug trade, but the same adverse conditions that drove young men to seek protection and purpose in gang life also spurred a creative response. On the weekends, disc jockeys and dancers honed their craft at block parties in the courtyards of the projects. Some of the young dancers formed “breaking” crews, and inevitably, their moves would get picked up and adopted in second lines. The music that DJs at these block parties developed – the rapid-fire, 808 drum machine-driven local hip hop variant



known as “bounce” – would also grow to inflect the beat of the second line by the 1990s. By the end of that decade, contemporary brass band music and local hip hop had become inextricably intertwined.

By the time Rebirth and their contemporaries first took their nascent hip-hop brass band sound to the streets, the second line had been a local staple and a source of spiritual sustenance for black New Orleans for more than a century, providing a means of responding to adversity and trauma both individual and collective, to the symbolic violence of civic neglect and the physical violence of white racial terror. And through jazz and funk the music of the second line had spread across the world. But even while the parades drew broader recognition and support at the turn of the millennium, state and market powers were undermining the communities in which second line culture lived and thrived in a multitude of ways. While media coverage of the Hurricane Katrina disaster briefly exposed the gross race and class inequities that had resulted from the neoliberal state’s policies of socioeconomic marginalization, containment, and civic neglect – policies that were intended to destroy the agency and political power of a community that, ironically, also furnished most of the cultural forms and expressive traditions upon which the city’s tourist economy is founded. The next chapter draws from the accounts of musicians who weathered the disaster to explore how this community has utilized the expressive legacy of the second line to counter the state’s biopolitics of disposability and systematic attempts at cultural erasure by asserting its presence, its humanity, and a spirit of creative resistance that remains undimmed.

## Chapter 5

### No Calm Before the Storm: The Second Line Before and After Katrina, 1985-2014

To Be Continued Brass Band drummer Darren Towns learned that his grandfather was dead from watching the evening news. Although his body and face were covered by a white sheet, Towns and his family recognized the older gentleman immediately. Forced to flee the city for Atlanta and leave their patriarch's hospital bedside in the wake of the storm, the family went a week without knowing whether he was dead or alive. After hearing from acquaintances still in the city that he had passed away, the family received horrific confirmation from a fleeting image on television. "It's real fucked up," Towns told me in 2015, holding back tears.<sup>99</sup>

The Towns family's experiences of separation and loss due to civic neglect were hardly unusual among Katrina refugees, particularly poor people of color. But between decades of rising residential segregation and the emergence of a corporate mediascape that alternately obscured or sensationalized human suffering beyond any sense of reality, the struggles of families like theirs had become all but invisible to the American cultural mainstream by the turn of the millennium. The Katrina disaster and its attendant media coverage briefly pulled back the veil obscuring poor black communities in New Orleans even while marking the residents of those communities as dangerous, disorderly and therefore less worthy of state protection (Watts and Porter:39). Within a year, however, such communities remained "marked" as the veil was drawn once again. By the reckoning of civic and business leaders on both the local and national level, these communities were, in a word, disposable. Henry Giroux refers to the invisibilizing force of the neoliberal state that marks and then obscures disadvantaged communities as a

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<sup>99</sup> Interview with author, July 10, 2015.

“biopolitics of disposability,” a cleansing form of systematic violence that confers upon underprivileged populations a kind of civic death.

Where Giroux sees the biopolitics of the state as fundamentally destructive when wielded against poor and minority communities, he expresses hope that an “oppositional biopolitics” can arise from these communities as a reconstructive force. Focalized in large part through the triumphs and tragedies Towns and his band faced before and after Katrina, this chapter analyzes New Orleans second line culture since the late twentieth century as a form of resistance to the biopolitics of disposability, constantly reconstructing and reproducing the bonds of community and the histories within it that the state seeks to repress and erase. I hesitate to align second line culture too closely with the “oppositional biopolitics” that Giroux conceives, which is predicated on an explicitly leftist critique of authoritarianism and neoliberal power relations. In fact, the groups, individuals and institutions that make up the second line culture operate within and not necessarily against a neoliberal cultural economy in which growing inequalities and the dismantling of social welfare programs have been obscured by an emphasis on arts and culture programs as restorative ends in and of themselves. But I argue that bands and dancers have continued to resist the state biopolitics of disposability through acts of resistance both coded and explicit. As systems of race and class-based oppression change in order to obscure how they operate, so too do oppressed communities continually adapt resistance strategies to changing circumstances.

*To Be Continued: A Brass Band in the Postindustrial City*



Figure 3-1: *To Be Continued* Brass Band on the cover of their self-titled 2013 album. Drummer Darren Towns is at center; the figure in the clouds is former saxophonist Brandon Franklin, who was killed during a domestic dispute in 2010. Image courtesy of *To Be Continued* Brass Band.

“9 minus 7 equals 2 Be Continued,” says former TBC tuba player and leader Jason Slack in the 2008 documentary *From the Mouthpiece on the Back*, by way of explaining the band’s name. The 9 is for the 9<sup>th</sup> Ward, where Slack, saxophonist Brandon Franklin, trombone player Joe Maize, trumpeter Sean Roberts, and trumpeter Edward “Juicy” Jackson came together under the mentorship of marching band director Wilbert Rawlins. And the “7” is for the 7<sup>th</sup> Ward, where Darren Towns and trumpeter (now tuba player and leader) Brenard “Bunny” Adams came up and played in the John F. Kennedy High School band under the direction of Wilbert’s brother Lawrence. In a city where neighborhood provenance is a source of intense pride and territorial

rivalries can sometimes erupt into violence, TBC's crosstown math equation makes a simple and powerful statement about unity against state and media forces that seek to divide black communities against themselves. The group has persevered through a series of traumatic displacements and deaths which neither began nor ended with Hurricane Katrina – upheavals occasioned by state violence and negligence wielded against what authorities saw as an expendable population. In response, TBC has developed a potent musical and lyrical style, inflected by hip-hop, that counters the biopolitics of disposability with expressions of protest and community pride.

Darren Towns remembers that the 7<sup>th</sup> Ward and 9<sup>th</sup> Ward musicians who eventually made up TBC first began to play together on street corners outside Jazz Fest in 2000. Many young musicians get early performance experience in this same setting, forming ad-hoc bands and playing for tips outside the festival grounds during what has become the city's busiest tourist season, when the foot traffic of visitors with lots of disposable income is heaviest on the ground. Separately or together, the members would also play frequently on the streets of the French Quarter. But while the musical hustle offered one path forward for the young musicians, some of their friends and schoolmates were making money a lot faster by selling drugs. Wilbert Rawlins remembers encountering some of the future TBC members – who at the time made up the core of his marching band at Carver – late at night in the French Quarter some years ago. What were they doing out at this hour? “Look, Mr. Rawlins, we're hustling,” explained trumpeter Glen Preston. It took some discussion the next day in school for him to convince the young musicians that the legal hustle could offer a good living:

[I asked one of the guys] “Hustling is relative. Hustling means what to you?” “Getting my paper.” “OK, getting your paper. Now, there are some ways in which you can get paper without it being illegal. Let's do some legal hustling.” “What we gonna do?” I say, “Why don't y'all pick up them horns for me?” So we hit marching band. We played

marching band tunes, [and] I said, “Percussion, bass drum, come here.” Doom-chk, doom-chk, doom-chk, duh doom-doom, doom-chk, doom-chk, doom-chk, doom-chk, duh doom-doom doom. I say, “This is the basis of the brass band.” You know, snare – [*in clavé rhythm*] dak, dak, dak, dak, dak-a, dak, ta-dak, ta-dak, dak, dak-a. “You know, y’all [can] play around – ooh, ak-a-do, a-chk-a, dak-a-chk, a-chk-a dak-a.” I say, “We’re missing something, buddy. We’re missing the cymbal. So bass drummers, you’re gonna have to play.” Now, I know what I’m looking for, but they have not probably seen this, so I fasten the cymbal to it, so now we got “Boom-chk, a doom-chk, a doom-chk, a doom dom – doom chk-a-do, ch-chk-a, do chek a-chek.” “Stay in that pocket, but you can add flavor to it – “rrrun, ack-a duh, a-chk-a, ack-a-ch, ack, dutak-a.” “Ok, you got it. OK, now let me hear you play your marching band song with this new beat.” And it wound up being something like the Maze song “Before I Let Go” – “Bam-bam, ahh ahh ahh – ooh, ack, ooh, chak-a,” you hear that? And they had fun and just played the part that they already knew, because they knew [it from marching in band].

So we did about eight songs like that, and we wound up playing for the school. There was homecoming, and the kids came out of the band room door. They’re a brass band. They didn’t have a name – it was just the Carver Rams Brass Band. And they got the damn student body with just – it was lunchtime. The student body was floored...And then they walked and paraded to school with the kids all around the school. And the principal, he was just so in amazement...the lunch bell was about to ring. And I said, “OK guys, the bell is about to ring in about two minutes. We’re gonna shut it down.” The principal came up and said, “Mr. Rawlins, if you shut this down, I’ll fire you.” I was like, “What do you mean?” He was like, “Man, this is probably the biggest thing that has happened in this school in a very long time. Let this just play out. Let those kids play, let them walk, and what we’ll do is we’ll bring them inside the building so that all the children will follow them, and then when the band cuts off they’ll be already in the building. They’ll just go to class.”

They went up to the second floor and they second lined and kids danced. And I mean, it was – shit, it was beautiful, dude. At the end of it, the kids came and said, “I like that. That was good.” I said, “Well, you were just performing.” I said, “Now let me tell you something. You just played for about half an hour. That’s about six or seven hundred dollars. So it’s like eight of you guys, nine of you guys, you divide that money up for half an hour. Now, on a Friday night, you can do five parties. That’s hustling. A hustler is doing something. That’s hustling.” That worked out, they started to make money. Then they came down, we brought them down on Bourbon and Canal, right by the Foot Locker. And that was the first time we had been out. And they played their hearts out and they put this bucket out, and they might have made about \$2000, man, in about two hours. Wasn’t no turning back now. ’Cause now they’re saying, “Man, we ain’t make this much money selling dope. And I’m having fun, people are enjoying me. I’m working for the city of New Orleans without getting paid from the city of New Orleans. I’m carrying on the heritage and history, I’m providing an atmosphere right on the corner of Bourbon and Canal, and people are coming to this still, they’re leaving their jobs. They want to hear the music. I like this, Mr. Rawlins.” I said, “This seems to like you also, so what’s gonna be -” We’ve got to get a name of the band, ’cause we have to get cards

made. People wanted to start hiring them for weddings and gigs and everything. And this was without any traditional brass band music. And they came up with the name “To Be Continued.”<sup>100</sup>

Rawlins’s anecdote frames the New Orleans brass band tradition as a vital resource that can be utilized both for economic advancement and community building. First, Rawlins illustrates the economic value of the tradition, showing the band how the musical hustle offers a safer, more respectable, and potentially more lucrative alternative to the underground hustle. At school, he illuminates its social value, with a second line parade through the halls bringing the student body together in one exuberant display of pride – and then leading them into their classrooms. Finally, he demonstrates the civic value of the brass band tradition, as street performances give the burgeoning young group the opportunity to represent and reproduce their city’s cultural heritage in a vibrant public context.

In explicating the multifaceted value of the brass band tradition to young practitioners, their communities, and their city, Rawlins here exemplifies what George Yúdice calls “the expediency of culture.” Yúdice argues that in recent decades culture has increasingly been conceived of as a resource to be wielded against extant sociopolitical and economic problems. As conservative politicians in the United States sought to curb federal expenditures on welfare, education and social programs, authorities at every level increasingly looked to the realm of arts and culture to redress society’s ills. In New Orleans, where divestment and the shrinking of the social welfare net did irreparable damage to many neighborhoods decades before Katrina struck, the notion of culture as a constructive and reconstructive resource gained currency as early as the 1970s. For Rawlins and his peers, music education fills a social, economic and cultural vacuum

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<sup>100</sup> Interview with author, March 30, 2015.

that young people in underprivileged communities face – a vacuum that might otherwise be filled by joining a gang and dealing drugs.

Darren Towns echoes Rawlins' notion of the band as a productive alternative to delinquency, stating that music ultimately kept him and his bandmates out of trouble: "Thank God we did have [music], because it kept us out of the hood, out of the streets, and it was very time consuming," he says.<sup>101</sup> It was during their second year playing outside of Jazz Fest, in 2001, that the young musicians from Carver and Kennedy solidified into a real band. Still teenagers, the band didn't have the money to obtain their instruments through "honest" means, so Wilbert Rawlins quietly flouted Carver's rules and lent them the marching band's instruments. Towns explains that Rawlins justified this action with the rationale that the band was staying out of trouble by playing gigs. Initially, the group played in and around Jackson Square, where then as now there were often one or two other bands competing for tips in the same area. Towns says that the group often got complaints from their rivals and other street musicians for playing too loud, but they were young and confident; like Buddy Bolden a century before, TBC used the sheer overpowering volume of their horns to signal that they were ready to battle all comers.

Soon the group realized that they might earn a better take away on a block that wasn't already thick with performers, and by 2002 they had established a regular stomping ground at the intersection of Canal and Bourbon streets, just outside of what used to be a Foot Locker. This is a prime location for busking, situated next to most of the big hotels and at the entrance to the most famous nightlife district in the country after the Las Vegas Strip. TBC played here almost daily for nine years – with the exception of the months after Katrina when they were scattered in different cities – and for most of that time they had few problems with the police. Occasionally,

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<sup>101</sup> Interview with author, July 10, 2015.



officers would order the band to stop playing when the crowd surrounding them grew to the point where it was blocking the street, but Towns says that other officers regularly “showed love” to them and let them play. More even than the band room at Carver or the street corners outside Jazz Fest, it was at Canal and Bourbon where the To Be Continued Brass Band began to master their trade. The sound they forged on that busy street corner was TBC’s own twist on a musical fusion that their forebears had pioneered a decade earlier.

### ***Brass Band Fusions: Hip Hop and Bounce***

TBC’s music is heavily informed by hip-hop, and puts drums and percussion before horns in its sonic tapestry. The group is part of the first generation of bands born into the brass and hip-hop fusion that was forged by older groups like the Soul Rebels and Rebirth in the 1990s. For TBC and its peers in groups like the Young Fellaz, the Free Agents, and Da Truth, the fusion comes naturally; it was already in the air as these musicians were coming up in school and learning their instruments. Hip hop also proved not only a more potent form in terms of sexual explicitness and sexual politics but in terms of its potential as a protest music. And the horns themselves arguably took a backseat to the percussion, as bands began to incorporate more cowbells and other percussion instruments.

A brass band/hip hop fusion was probably first realized by a now-obscure group known as DEFF Generation. Formed by younger members of the fabled Neville family and their acquaintances, the DEFF Generation’s 1991 song “Runnin’ With the Second Line” was possibly the first brass band recording to include rapped verses.<sup>102</sup> Despite their considerable promise, the

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<sup>102</sup> Sakakeeny, “Running With the Second Line: How New Orleans Brass Band Went Hip Hop,” *Red Bull Music Academy Daily*, October 13, 2013 (<http://daily.redbullmusicacademy.com/2013/10/running-with-the-second-line-how-brass-band-went-hip-hop>) (accessed June 1, 2018).

group disbanded after a single album, with members eventually cropping up in a variety of still-active local bands. The Soul Rebels got their start realized a similar fusion with several tracks on their 1994 debut album *Let Your Mind Be Free*, are still performing nearly 30 years after forming in the late 1980s. But arguably the most influential hip-hop/brass band crossover took shape on two albums by the elder statesmen and standard bearers of the contemporary brass band scene. Matt Sakakeeny describes Rebirth Brass Band's albums *We Come to Party* (1997) and *Hot Venom* (2001) as “essentially hip-hop transposed to horns and marching drums,”<sup>103</sup> and together with the Soul Rebels' 1998 album *No More Parades*, the sound the group established on these two records has effectively become the blueprint for New Orleans brass band music in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. *We Come to Party* decisively shifted the rhythmic thrust of the brass band from the 4/4 march beat to the tresillo patterns of Keith Frazier's bass drum and placed the percussion section front and center, while *No More Parades* added bounce-style chants and refrains to the mix. *Hot Venom* made the hip-hop connection explicit, with guest appearances from New Orleans rappers Soulja Slim on “You Don't Want to Go to War” and Cheeky Blakk on “Pop the Pussy.”

Bounce music – a frenetic, drum-machine driven New Orleans variant of hip-hop – itself became a vital part of the aural world that TBC and their peers inhabited growing up in the 1980s and 1990s. In much the same way as jazz had first emerged nearly a century earlier, the style first developed well outside of the recording industry in leisure spaces that were almost exclusively black and working-class: block parties, dances at schools and community centers, and rap-oriented nightclubs.<sup>104</sup> As a participatory, outdoor community event that combines music, vocal call-and-response, and dance to repurpose and reclaim often-blighted neighborhood space, the

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<sup>103</sup> Sakakeeny, *Roll With It*, 44.

<sup>104</sup> Miller 2012:52.

block party is a spiritual cousin to the second line, and provides another space for dancers and aspiring musicians to hone their skills and engage in creative competition. At early hip-hop block parties in New Orleans, the musicians who provided the soundtrack were DJs. In the mid-1980s, the first homegrown New Orleans rap records began to emerge, some of them making an effort to capitalize on the city's distinctive Carnival heritage, but it wasn't until the duo of Gregory D and Mannie Fresh began issuing singles late in the decade that a definitively local style started coming into place. The foundation of the New Orleans bounce sound, as in all variants of the "bass music" style that came to define Southern hip-hop from the mid-1980s onward, was the spare and synthetic sound of the Roland TR-808 drum machine. The machine's most prized feature was its immensely powerful kick drum sound, which if tweaked could blow out speakers. In the founding Miami bass style, the thundering beats of the 808 were topped by scratched samples, lyrical exhortations to dance and often-explicit sex rhymes. Mannie Fresh, Gregory D, J Ro' J, and other bounce pioneers added to this formula "shout outs" to New Orleans neighborhoods, driving rhythms inspired partly by the bass and snare beats of second line parades, and repetitive call-and-response chants up top.<sup>105</sup> The record that synthesized all of these key elements and cemented the bounce music style, writes Matt Miller, was MC T. Tucker's "Where Dey At," released in late 1991.<sup>106</sup> Most crucially, "Where Dey At" was based on a sampled 808 rhythm from the New York-based showboys' 1986 single "Drag Rap." With the deep kick and punchy snare offset by a cowbell and a xylophone-like ostinato figure, the "Drag Rap" sample – popularly known as the "Triggerman" beat – would go on to become the most widely used break in bounce music.

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid.:90-91.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.:75.

The “Triggerman” is to bounce music what the “big four” march beat is to New Orleans brass bands. And since the inception of the bounce music style, it has developed in a symbiotic relationship to contemporary brass band music. Both genres freely borrow chants and musical motifs from one another, both make extensive reference to popular local dance moves, and both are rooted in the intense neighborhood pride that characterizes New Orleans second line culture as a whole, for better and for worse. J’ Ro’ J’s 1988 single “Let’s Jump” is built in part upon samples of songs from Rebirth Brass Band’s 1984 debut album *Here to Stay!*, and references the “buck jump,” a dance typically performed at the climax of the second line. Mannie Fresh and Gregory D’s “Buck Jump Time” (1989) celebrates the same dance, and is set to a swinging second line beat. Bounce artists like Da Sha Ra (“Bootin’ Up,” 1995) and 2 Blakk (“Second Line Jump,” 1995) would continue to mine Rebirth’s records for sampled riffs and grooves throughout the 1990s, while the upstart Soul Rebels and Rebirth itself would move in an increasingly hip-hop inspired direction in the latter half of the decade. In the same period, New Orleans-based record labels No Limit and Cash Money brought the bounce sound to a national audience, churning out a succession of platinum albums at the turn of the century. Led by the Stooges and the Hot 8, the next generation of New Orleans brass bands took the Soul Rebels and Rebirth’s fusions as a starting point and actively sought exposure through rap magazines like *The Source* and *XXL*. By the time To Be Continued emerged with yet another crop of young bands in the next millennium, the hip-hop brass band fusion was well established both aesthetically and commercially.

### *Conflicts: Tradition vs. Innovation*

Together with bounce music, the beats, chants and riffs of Rebirth, the Soul Rebels and their progeny have now ruled the streets of New Orleans for the past two decades, dominating the repertoire not just during street corner gigs but at a majority of Sunday second lines as well. This development has not sat well with many older musicians and benevolent society members, who view the incorporation of hip-hop as a betrayal of the pride and community values inherent in the second line. In an interview with Matt Sakakeeny, Fred Johnson of the Black Men of Labor – a social aid and pleasure club formed in 1994 with the intent to preserve and perpetuate an orthodox version of the second line parade – blames recent incidences of violence at parades on the negative themes in the new musical style: “As a result of the wrong music getting played, then you have the wrong people showing up. That’s my theory.”<sup>107</sup>

For Johnson and many other cultural stewards who grew up during the Civil Rights era, black pride and the advancement of community interests depend on dignified, “positive” representations of black culture and traditions. The respectability politics of Johnson and the Black Men of Labor is predicated on the idea of a cultural fall from grace, with the deteriorating of the black public sphere and intracommunity relations after the 1960s linked to a perceived degradation in black culture and expressive forms. The response is to adhere to the older, putatively purer forms of local expressive traditions, which in the case of the second line means presenting the parade as it looked – and sounded – before the 1980s. For the Black Men of Labor’s annual club parade, the Treme Brass Band wears a uniform of black slacks, white dress shirts, white band caps, and black dress shoes.<sup>108</sup> This is the same outfit that most parade bands

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<sup>107</sup> Sakakeeny, *Roll With It*, 128.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*:129.

donned up until Harold Dejan's Olympia Brass Band ditched the formal wear for matching t-shirts in the early 1970s.<sup>109</sup> The repertoire, too, is strictly pre-1970, comprising not only spirituals and second line standards like "Basin Street Parade" but some of the popular 1950s and 1960s R&B standards that were assimilated into the tradition by Dejan and his contemporaries. The band plays these songs at a moderate tempo, in contrast to the increasingly fast pace of most other second lines since the 1980s. Along with breaks between songs, the more leisurely pace allows the club members to maintain their carefully choreographed formations.<sup>110</sup> While its musical repertoire stresses respect for the past, reprising those portions of local black musical heritage that decades ago attained mainstream respectability and cultural acceptance, the sartorial and choreographic presentation of the Black Men of Labor's annual parade additionally emphasizes order and dignity.

For the club and other second line traditionalists, many aspects of the contemporary second line signify a betrayal of these values, and nowhere is this more evident than in the overtly sexualized and sometime violent rhetoric of the hip-hop that contemporary second line bands have adopted as their own. But for the most popular parading bands from Rebirth to TBC, hip-hop is just another thread in the city's rich musical tapestry. There is no small irony in traditionalists' rejection of hip hop brass band music, as the heralded Olympia Brass Band itself helped establish the practice of drawing on contemporary black popular music to keep the tradition alive and relevant in the 1950s and 1960s. And just as Olympia had incorporated rhythm and blues, the Dirty Dozen revolutionized brass band music in the 1970s and 1980s by

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid.:34.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.:128.

drawing on the riffs and beats of funk music. For brass bands in the 1990s, incorporating hip hop was both a logical next step in the evolution of the style and a smart business decision.



*Figure 3-2: The Soul Rebels Brass Band. Drummer Lumar LeBlanc is at top left. Image courtesy of Soul Rebels Brass Band (<http://thesoulrebels.com/media/>).*

The Soul Rebels discovered the value of contemporizing their style before they even had a name of their own. Originating as the Young Olympians, a junior offshoot of the Olympia Brass Band schooled in the traditional repertoire by trumpeter Milton Batiste, the future Soul Rebels began to deviate from their mentors' expectations at gigs in the early 1990s by sneaking hip hop and funk tunes in at the end of their sets. When the band went to collect their money at the end of the show, drummer and bandleader Lumar LeBlanc told me in 2013, the club owners would offer them future gigs on one condition: "I want to hire you, but I want you all to play more of that music that you played at the end, with that uptempo [feel]. That really got the

people going.”<sup>111</sup> Such requests created a dilemma for LeBlanc and his bandmates; as the Young Olympians, they were expected to stick to traditional music. A temporary solution was found when the group elected to perform more contemporary material under a new name while continuing to play traditional gigs as the Young Olympians. It was Cyril Neville, former percussionist of the Meters, who bestowed the name “Soul Rebels” on the young band after inviting them to open for his son’s group the DEFF Generation at Tipitina’s. Derived from the title of an album by Bob Marley and the Wailers, the name signaled their commitment to what LeBlanc calls “freedom music” – a cross section of politically potent black music that includes not just hip-hop but the reggae of Marley and other luminaries. Eventually, however, the situation became untenable, with LeBlanc and his bandmates straining against the objections of their tradition-minded forefathers. “Still today, New Orleans is a traditionalist place,” LeBlanc told me. “We wanted to be with New York and L.A. – we wanted to do what they were doing, to get the attention that they got.” Soon the band split from their mentors in the Olympia Brass Band and began performing exclusively as the Soul Rebels.

Initially, the Soul Rebels continued to play in second line parades, but as the group’s 1998 album *No More Parades* and its defiant title track indicated, they opted by the end of the decade to focus their energies exclusively on the concert stage. While it took their peers in Rebirth, who still parade on several Sundays a year, a few more years to attempt an overt hip-hop brass band fusion, a hip-hop sensibility had arguably underlain the group’s sound since its formation. As tuba player Phil Frazier told me, the band emerged just as hip-hop began to reach the national consciousness, and Rebirth sought to build on the Dirty Dozen’s innovations by

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<sup>111</sup> Interview with author, October 7, 2014.



incorporating “the funk, the backbeat, the groove [that hip-hop] had.”<sup>112</sup> Where the Dirty Dozen had driven the shift from chord-based song forms to funk’s emphasis on repeating, riff-driven grooves, Rebirth dissolved the breaks between discrete songs, with one song flowing into the next for the duration of an entire set in the same way hip hop and disco DJs blend records to create one long, continuous groove. And just as a New Orleans DJ might use the “Triggaman” beat as the rhythmic foundation of a live mix, Rebirth’s sets are tied together by the tresillo of Phil Frazier’s bass drum. Not for nothing are Phil and Keith nicknamed the “Bass Brothers”; the band also shares with bounce music an emphasis on low-end frequencies. As Sakakeeny writes, the band gives detailed instructions to the soundman before every show in order to give the bass as much presence as possible. At a Rebirth concert, one can physically feel the rhythm section; the bass literally moves the crowd. Rebirth also drew upon the brisk tempo of bounce and early 1990s hip hop in establishing their signature groove, accelerating beyond even the relatively fast pulse the Dirty Dozen had set a decade before. New approaches to second line dancing emerged in response to Rebirth’s heady pace; I can attest from experience that when Rebirth plays a second line there isn’t a lot of time to swivel your hips without getting left behind. As a result, dancers have moved the center of gravity from the hips to the feet.

Where Rebirth’s initial borrowings from hip-hop helped to revolutionize the sonics and instrumental performance style of New Orleans brass bands, the Soul Rebels precipitated a transformation in vocal and lyrical approaches. Picking up where the DEFF generation left off, the Soul Rebels made rapped verses and group chants a regular feature of the contemporary brass repertoire. Drawing on the street- and nation-conscious rhetoric of rap groups like Public Enemy – who LeBlanc specifically cites as a formative influence – the Soul Rebels also introduced an

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<sup>112</sup> Interview with author, July 6, 2013.

overt political stance to the brass band tradition with the monologue that introduces the title and opening track on *Let Your Mind Be Free*, the band's 1994 debut LP. "Soul Rebels early on was kind of militant," LeBlanc told Matt Sakakeeny, and that militancy is evident throughout the whole LP, from the history-checking plaint of "Culture in the Ghetto" to the Panther-style call to arms of "Black Juke."<sup>113</sup>

By the turn of the millennium, Rebirth had assimilated the rap lexicon as thoroughly as the Soul Rebels, though their usage of hip-hop politics has generally been subtler. And few younger bands have been as straightforwardly militant as the early Soul Rebels. The "Nation-conscious" hip-hop – a subgenre that drew explicitly on Black Nationalist politics – that the Soul Rebels drew upon for *Let Your Mind Be Free* had declined in popularity after a boom in the beginning of the 1990s, perhaps as a result of the mainstream music industry's unease with its message. But while contemporary brass band music shares some of the excesses of rap music's subsequent turn towards gangsta – primarily in the form of lyrical references to turf-wars and casual misogyny – bands like the Hot 8, the Stooges and the New Birth have also refocused the political rhetoric of the Soul Rebels from a national to a local level. LeBlanc noted in an interview with the website My Spilt Milk that brass band music and hip hop share origins as street music, and songs like the Hot 8's "It's Real" (about striving for respect and a living wage as a brass band musician), the Stooges' "Why Dey Had to Kill Him" (a lament and protest against the 2004 police killing of trombonist Joseph "Shotgun Joe" Williams), and the Free Agents' "We Made It Through That Water" (an account of persevering through loss after Katrina) take the music back to the streets, addressing the struggles that black New Orleanians face every day. If, as I have argued, second line music and dance serve a communicative and

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<sup>113</sup> Sakakeeny, *Roll With It*, 132.

regenerative function within the neighborhood, and if these forms are constantly changing to address the needs and struggles of the present moment, it makes sense that at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the second line tradition would absorb the most politically and commercially potent African American musical form of that moment – a form predicated on verbal communication. Chuck D once called hip-hop the “Black CNN,” a reference to the music’s ability to raise awareness about issues and events that directly impacted African American lives. And the moment demanded greater awareness, as black communities in New Orleans were in a state of crisis.

### *Social Realities and Community Responses in Turn-of-the-Millennium New Orleans*

Bounce music and hip-hop style brass band music both took shape in tandem with – and, arguably, in response to – the same processes of deindustrialization, “white flight,” urban decay and renewal, and racial ghettoization that drove the emergence of hip-hop in New York a decade earlier. Once among the most residentially integrated major cities in the United States, the New Orleans cityscape had by the 1970s begun to resemble the “hyper-segregated” geographies of Northern cities like Chicago and Detroit. For most of the first half of the twentieth century, notes historian Daphne Spain in a report cited by the Brookings Institute, there were no majority-black neighborhoods in the city.<sup>114</sup> But by the end of the 1970s, the level of residential integration in the city had decreased drastically, with neighborhoods such as the Ninth Ward almost 90 percent black. Residential segregation coincided with the city’s population decline after 1960, when the city’s industrial base in shipping and oil supply began to collapse. Though political and business leaders spurred a shift towards a service and tourism-based economy, the loss of thousands of

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<sup>114</sup> Spain 1979:90.

jobs in manufacturing and shipping was not adequately compensated by the growth in service industry jobs, which were both fewer in number and substantially lower paying on average. As in many of the “Rust Belt” cities in the Midwest and Northeast, the construction of interstate highways drove thousands of middle-class residents – most of them white – to newer developments and high-paying jobs in the surrounding parishes, while the less-educated workers who remained faced dwindling job opportunities in the urban core.

The highway network through New Orleans was completed through an act of structural violence, permanently reconfiguring a historically black neighborhood against the will of its residents. As Sakakeeny notes, the construction of the I-10 overpass in 1965 was the apex of a citywide redevelopment project that began four decades earlier and relied upon the implicit notion that the urban poor – who were increasingly black – and their neighborhoods were disposable.<sup>115</sup> The project began with the construction of the Municipal Auditorium on the site of the former Louis Armstrong Park in 1926 but ramped up considerably in 1964, when the city displaced 122 families and destroyed nine blocks in Treme to make way for what would eventually become Louis Armstrong Park. Numerous community institutions, including several music halls, were demolished in the process. A year later the I-10 overpass was built over Claiborne Avenue, the main thoroughfare in the community. The new overpass effectively bifurcated the neighborhood; renamed “Historic Treme,” by the Historic Faubourg Treme Association – an organization formed by wealthy neighborhood residents and landlords – the area surrounding Armstrong Park still and still adjoining the French Quarter began to gentrify by

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<sup>115</sup> Sakakeeny, *Roll With It*, 27.

the late 1980s. The larger portion of the neighborhood on the other side of the highway remained largely black and poor.<sup>116</sup>

Similar redevelopment projects reconfigured race and class geography across the city, ultimately creating highly concentrated pockets of black poverty. At the same time that the overpass was built, developers began targeting historically black neighborhoods like Algiers Point and the Irish Channel for renovation; housing prices in these areas skyrocketed as a result, forcing many poor and elderly residents out.<sup>117</sup> Public housing projects in the Seventh and Ninth Wards, originally built in the 1930s and 1940s, had by the 1960s become home to the highest concentration of black residents in the city. By 1970, the projects also had the highest percentage of families living below the poverty level.<sup>118</sup>

In the “hyper-segregated,” post-industrial city, neighborhoods aren't merely defined along race and class lines, but racialized communities effectively become invisible to one another. And it is generally within the interests of the powerful to maintain that mutual invisibility – to keep privileged and disadvantaged communities out of one another’s daily lives. While Mardi Gras and other festivals in New Orleans provide a liminal space for the temporary suspension and even subversion of the prevailing socioeconomic order, theoretically allowing for increased visibility and interaction across race and class lines, these carnivalesque rituals are still *de facto* segregated along racial lines even today.

As Rachel Carrico writes, New Orleans was more racially segregated by the end of the twentieth century than it had been at the start of the nineteenth; in other words, the city had

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid.:29.

<sup>117</sup> Spain 1979:95.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.:94.

become more racially stratified in the post-Civil Rights period than at the height of the slave trade. Black residents had to contend not just with the economic obstacles – namely a lack of blue-collar job opportunities – but with the new physical barriers and dividing lines epitomized by the I-10 overpass. The rapidly expanding population of the city’s public housing projects was in fact doubly cut off from the physical environment – and, by extension, the civic life – of the rest of the city; separated from other neighborhoods by new infrastructure, the projects were also cut off from the city street grid and hence partially isolated from the surrounding neighborhood. Such isolation forced residents to find other avenues for economic sustenance and social support; not just Social Aid and Pleasure clubs, whose welfare function was significantly reduced by legislation in the 1910s and 1920s<sup>119</sup>, but the gangs that had developed around the city’s growing drug trade. Involvement in the underground economy, of course, carried its own risks to life and liberty, not least of which was the danger of becoming permanently ensnared in the rapidly expanding carceral state. And the structural violence of mass incarceration was only compounded by police brutality and the increased militarization of law enforcement. As President Richard Nixon implemented the War on Drugs in the early 1970s, the emerging prison-industrial complex developed into a pipeline that would undermine the very foundations of the black community by removing millions of young black men from civil society.

Second lining, now as ever, provided a way to mobilize against oppression, and to transcend – at least momentarily – the barriers society continued to erect against black advancement, liberty and prosperity. Musicians and benevolent societies had staged the earliest second lines against the legislative framework of white supremacy known as Jim Crow; a century later, they paraded against the policies of divestment, containment, and mass

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<sup>119</sup> Carrico 2015:216.

incarceration – a *de facto* rather than explicit legislative framework upholding white supremacy – that together constitute what Michelle Alexander calls the “new Jim Crow.”

Highly concentrated areas of black poverty were, of course, hardly unique to New Orleans in the latter half of the twentieth century; many major American cities suffered from industrial decline and white flight during the same period. But community responses to adverse socioeconomic conditions and the physical fragmentation of black neighborhoods in New Orleans were unique. Educators like Danny Barker, jazz banjoist and founder of the Fairview Baptist Church Band, came to see the local culture as a reconstructive end in itself – a resource that could be wielded to fight the poverty, joblessness and crime that seemed to be tearing their communities apart. In offering young people – almost exclusively young men – a rigorous training in the brass band tradition, Barker and his peers saw themselves as producing responsible, productive adults and citizens. The idea was that by learning proper conduct, critical professional skills and the time-honored values of forebears who themselves had managed to sustain thriving communities under adverse circumstances, these young men would have the wherewithal to rebuild broken neighborhoods and rise above the mounting physical and economic barriers that now contained a more or less permanent black underclass.

Edwin Hampton’s Saint Augustine High School band, popularly known as the “Marching 100,” offered an early model for musical pedagogy as a means to build lives and rebuild communities. Established by Hampton in 1952, a year after the school opened, the St. Augustine Band drew citywide attention for the military-style discipline and precision it exhibited at halftime shows and parades. Hampton, a native of Texas, drew on the marching band’s roots in military ensembles to institute a boot camp-style training program at the school. As the documentary “Bended Knees: the Story of the Marching 100” relates, Hampton’s intention with

the boot camp was to build students' self-esteem and confidence in their abilities to succeed, and to create an unbreakable bond between band members. The Marching 100's booming sound and intricate yet flawlessly executed formations also made them a symbol of black progress and respectability in the 1960s and 1970s, perhaps no more so than during Mardi Gras in 1967. On that day, St. Augustine became both the first black marching band to play for the hugely popular parade of the almost exclusively white Rex krewe, and the first black band to march down Canal Street. As Dr. Michael White, an alumnus of the Marching 100, states in the documentary, "It kind of reminded you of a military victory...for a lot of people in New Orleans, black and white, St. Aug marching up St. Charles Avenue, drums thundering, horns blazing, was like a victory march for Civil Rights."

The Marching 100's dazzling precision drills inspired many other local high schools and colleges to institute marching band programs modeled on Hampton's rigorous, regimented approach. Danny Barker's pedagogical approach with the Fairview Baptist Church Band, which he formed at the behest of Reverend Andrew Darby in the late 1960s, was altogether more casual. More even than Hampton, though, Barker taught with the specific intention of turning his pupils into respected professionals and responsible adults. "We considered the band a self-help program where young boys could learn to do something for themselves," he stated in 1973.<sup>120</sup>

By the time the Dirty Dozen came to prominence, youths in neighborhoods like the Sixth Ward needed all the outside guidance they could get. Local social programs and grassroots community activism were hobbled by federal legislation in the 1970s, which both shrank the welfare safety net for vulnerable families and substantially reduced the already-meager political

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<sup>120</sup> Burns 2003:19.



capital that poor neighborhoods wielded during the Civil Rights era.<sup>121</sup> And those same neighborhoods fell even further into destitution when an economic depression hit New Orleans in the 1980s and 1990s. With legitimate opportunities to earn a living wage almost nonexistent in the city's poorest communities, many young people turned to the underground economy for sustenance. The city's murder rate soared, increasing more than fivefold between the end of the 1960s and its peak in 1994. But while most victims were young black males killed by other young black males, black youths in New Orleans had as much reason to fear police violence as they did violent confrontations with their neighbors. Inevitably, media reports on the city's crime epidemic sensationalized the effect without much attention to its causes, and only strengthened public support for the reactionary law-and-order policies that had prevailed across both the state and the nation since the onset of the War on Drugs. New Orleans led the nation in complaints of police brutality for more than two decades, with officers disproportionately targeting black residents. Arrest and incarceration rates skyrocketed as well; by the outset of the twenty-first century, so many black and poor New Orleanians had been locked up that the state of Louisiana had the highest incarceration rate in the nation.

Mass incarceration is one of the primary technologies of the state biopolitics that had become a dominant governing paradigm in New Orleans and across the country in the years before the storm; it is an expedient means to make an underprivileged – and, in the eyes of the state, disposable – community invisible to the rest of society. Forced displacement of such communities – as was seen with the permanent dislocation of many poor black residents and the demolition of public housing projects that many had called home – is another. It is this second example of invisibilizing that I turn to now; I contend that, in response to these state practices of

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<sup>121</sup> Germany 2007:308.

invisiblizing, the second line is a way of making-visible-again for those individuals and communities that the state has labeled disposable.

### *The Storm Hits*

Darren Towns knew that nothing would be the same when he returned to New Orleans in December 2005, but he was still shocked to find it a virtual ghost town. Staying at his aunt's house while TBC prepared to play for a parade, Towns found the power still out even though the neighborhood hadn't flooded. As he sat freezing in the house one night, he couldn't shake the feeling that there had to be *somebody* out in the streets. He and his bandmates had returned to "bring some life back into the city," but it couldn't really be as dead as it looked. Towns went outside and sat on the curb for two hours, and not a single vehicle passed by. "Not a car in sight, not a person passed, no nothing," he recalled to me. "That's when it hit me, once I got back home. That shit took a toll – a massive toll."<sup>122</sup>

The toll Katrina took was far more severe in the neighborhoods where Towns and his bandmates grew up than in wealthier, whiter areas. The structural racism of the city's residential segregation patterns combined with governmental neglect, anti-black police violence and other factors – including deindustrialization, the decline of social welfare programs and the rise of the prison-industrial complex – to ensure that black neighborhoods would be both the hardest-hit during the storm and the least-equipped to recover. It is this confluence of factors, which made the outcome of the storm a virtually foregone conclusion, that leads Rachel Carrico to call Hurricane Katrina a "choreographed disaster."<sup>123</sup> The disaster unfolded the way it did not simply

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<sup>122</sup> Interview with author, July 7, 2015.

<sup>123</sup> Carrico 2015:68.

because civic institutions and protective structures failed, she writes, but because of *deliberate* inaction and *studied* neglect.<sup>124</sup> To label the hurricane and subsequent flood as a “natural” disaster, as federal agencies accounts continue to do, is to obscure the extent to which its path of destruction was man-made.<sup>125</sup> And most of the decisions that precipitated this un/natural disaster – decisions that were made by local, state, and federal governments along with private business interests over many decades – were predicated on an unstated belief that some lives were worth more than others. As if according to plan, the choreographed disaster wreaked its greatest toll on those whose lives were considered disposable.

Carrico’s coinage of “choreographed disaster” reflects her dance-studies orientation; for my purposes, the term “orchestrated disaster” is equally apposite. And the orchestration of the Katrina disaster begins with its man-made race and class geography. Despite numerous upheavals and expansions over the past three centuries, New Orleans has long been a (literal) vertical hierarchy, with poor and largely black neighborhoods lying lower than the wealthier, predominantly white areas near the banks of the Mississippi River. Long susceptible to flooding, the low-lying “backatown” areas were occupied only by manumitted slaves in makeshift shacks and others too poor to live elsewhere until water pumps and newly constructed levees opened up the land to development in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>126</sup> With successive waves of residential segregation, poor blacks were once again concentrated in low-lying areas like the Lower Ninth Ward by the end of the century. Knowing that such neighborhoods would suffer the worst during a flood, city and state governments could have taken steps to ensure that in the event of a natural

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.:108.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.:271.

disaster the levees wouldn't be breached. Instead, insufficient maintenance and inspection of the city's levee system were compounded by funding cuts to federal disaster relief and flood protection programs.<sup>127</sup> Such reforms, writes Henry Giroux, exemplify the neoliberal biopolitics of disposability in eliminating "all vestiges of the social contract, the welfare state, and any other public sphere not governed by the logic of profit."<sup>128</sup>

The Katrina disaster was orchestrated not just through studied neglect but through the systematic violence of law enforcement and the carceral state. Both systems long predate the storm; the ways these systems were wielded as the disaster unfolded severely compounded the trauma inflicted upon victims, but as Lydia Pelot-Hobbs writes, they were entirely consistent with "the logics of confinement and containment that have shaped New Orleans's approach to public safety for centuries."<sup>129</sup> Also falling under the rubric of public safety is the city's levees-only flood protection system. All of these systems work together to circumscribe public safety as a privilege available only to a select population, and to keep black poor and working-class residents – those deemed disposable – away from the privileged.

One of the key ways the state creates a "disposable" population – a group against which exclusion, containment, and other forms of systemic violence are justified – is by marking that group as inherently dangerous and criminal. Numerous critical commentaries on Katrina have noted how the media branded black and poor victims as "looters," violent "thugs," drug addicts and rapists undeserving of government aid and protection, while white victims escaped such condemnation. Fox News and other right-wing media outlets fortified their talking points by

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid.:113.

<sup>128</sup> Giroux 2006:28.

<sup>129</sup> Lydia Pelot-Hobbs, "Of Levees and Prisons: Failures of Containment, Surges of Freedom," in *Unfathomable City: A New Orleans Atlas*, ed. Rebecca Solnit and Rebecca Snedeker (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013):61.

reporting numerous cases of black crime in the aftermath of the storm that later turned out to be entirely unsubstantiated.<sup>130</sup> But the criminalization of blackness that was so apparent in media coverage of Katrina had of course begun centuries before, and in 21<sup>st</sup> century New Orleans it was only strengthened by Louisiana's massively expanded carceral state. With thousands of young black men trapped in the state's penal system, broken homes and a critically hobbled workforce were the norm in the city's black neighborhoods before the storm hit, and made recovery all the more difficult.

The criminalization of blackness had still more devastating effects on police treatment of black storm victims. On September 4, 2005 – less than a week after the levees broke – members of two black families stranded in eastern New Orleans by the flood attempted to cross the Danziger Bridge, which spans the Industrial Canal that divides the neighborhood from the rest of the city. Two brothers, Lance and Ronald Madison, were making the trip to their mother's house after the flood had left their home almost completely submerged. The Bartholomews, a family of five, were headed to a local supermarket with a teenaged family friend, James Brissette Jr., to pick up cleaning supplies and medicine for their sick grandmother.<sup>131</sup> On the other side of the bridge were seven plainclothes police officers, all armed with assault weapons. At least two of the officers had incidents of misconduct in their past; one had recently beat a second degree murder charge after shooting and killing black man, while another had been suspended by the department twice. At first sight of the group crossing the bridge, the officers ran to their truck and opened fire. Six of the seven civilians were wounded in the ensuing melee, two of them

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<sup>130</sup> Giroux 2006:50.

<sup>131</sup> Ronnie Greene, "Shots on the Bridge: Inside a Post-Katrina Police Massacre," *Al Jazeera America*, August 18, 2015, <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/8/18/inside-a-post-katrina-police-massacre.html> (accessed August 23, 2017).

fatally. The NOPD's handling of the massacre in the ensuing months and years is an all-too-familiar story; instead of taking responsibility for the murder of innocent civilians, the department engaged in a massive cover-up. It was not until eleven years later – with the victims' families' tireless pursuit of justice eventually leading to a federal investigation and two criminal trials – that the officers responsible were sentenced for their crimes. All five received reduced sentences.

Police pursued an aggressive antiblack strategy of containment not only through direct physical violence but also through threats of the same. Three days before the Danziger Bridge shootings, on a bridge just a few miles uptown, police in a New Orleans suburb on the other side of the Mississippi River used their firearms to make plain that Katrina refugees weren't welcome in their community. On September 1, police chiefs Arthur Lawson of Gretna and Harry Lee of Jefferson Parish ordered a barricade of the Crescent City Connection bridge, which connects the east bank of New Orleans with Gretna and the New Orleans neighborhood of Algiers. Earlier in the day, word had spread among survivors trapped in the Central Business District that there were buses on the other side of the bridge waiting to take evacuees to a rescue shelter. But when the group of nearly 200 survivors – which eyewitness Larry Bradshaw estimated was about 95 percent black – began to cross the bridge, they were met by a line of police blocking the road.<sup>132</sup> When the group continued to advance, at least one officer fired gunshots in the air as a warning.<sup>133</sup> “This is not New Orleans,” one officer shouted at the group. “We’re not going to have any Superdomes over here.” In response to public outcry after the incident was reported in

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<sup>132</sup> Carol Kopp, “The Bridge to Gretna,” *60 Minutes* online, December 15, 2005, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/the-bridge-to-gretna/> (accessed May 30, 2018).

<sup>133</sup> “Crescent City Connection Blockade After Hurricane Katrina Wasn’t Illegal, U.S. Justice Department Says.” *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, September 30, 2011, [http://www.nola.com/politics/index.ssf/2011/09/us\\_justice\\_department\\_says\\_pol.html](http://www.nola.com/politics/index.ssf/2011/09/us_justice_department_says_pol.html) (accessed August 25, 2017).

the national press, both Lawson and Lee claimed the barricade was erected when disaster resources were stretched beyond the breaking point and denied that the race of evacuees played any role in their decision.

Beyond the two “bridge” incidents described herein were dozens of other abuses of power by police, and when law enforcement and members of the Louisiana National Guard were augmented by federal and privately contracted troops in the days after the flood, survivors remaining in the city faced an atmosphere of intimidation and paranoia. But the most widespread form of violence against Katrina’s survivors had already been inflicted through the studied neglect of the government’s delayed relief efforts. In line with their neoliberal efforts to privatize social and civic services, the Bush administration had slashed funding for disaster management and crucial infrastructure projects – including a plan to enlarge and reinforce the levees – in the years leading up to Katrina. As a result, not only did the levees break, but the Federal Emergency Management Agency was woefully underprepared to deal with the resultant disaster. For four days after New Orleans flooded, there was no organized federal response. Henry Giroux argues that the Bush administration’s market-driven disdain for government sponsorship of social welfare, health and other civic services – an attitude that he says directly precipitated the disaster – amounted to a severing of the social contract, effectively pushing minorities and the underprivileged outside the bounds of civic society.<sup>134</sup> It is through this enforced social death that the state creates a disposable population, causing real death during crises like Katrina.

Darren Towns’ grandfather was one among many casualties of the government’s malignant neglect. Inundated by flood waters that ruined life-saving equipment while awaiting rescue efforts, hospitals like the one where Towns’ grandfather was staying faced wrenching

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<sup>134</sup> Giroux 2006:46.

choices about who to evacuate first and how. The majority of the estimated 1400 victims who died in the storm were over 65, and of those elderly victims, dozens were patients of hospitals and nursing homes that had yet to be evacuated.<sup>135</sup> Those who survived and evacuated often spent weeks in overcrowded relief shelters with insufficient water supplies. Many, like the members of TBC, lost everything but traumatic memories of death and destruction. Recalling the devastation he witnessed in the documentary *From the Mouthpiece on Back*, TBC trumpeter Christopher Davis calls out the civic neglect that precipitated a humanitarian crisis. “They could have saved our city,” he says. “They could have told our people to get out of there. And why’d they take that long to get them people out of there anyway?”

Both TBC and their city persevered through hardships to flourish in the decade after the storm. Many of the city’s cultural traditions became more widely known outside the city than ever before, in part due to the international attention Katrina and its aftermath brought to New Orleans. Brass bands became more numerous and arguably more popular than at any point prior to Katrina. But while many media stories trumpeted the city’s remarkable economic growth in the ensuing decade, the truth on the ground was that many of the old racial and economic disparities were actually worsening. I address the contradictions of the post-disaster era and how musicians, dancers and educators responded to them in the section below.

### ***After the Storm: 2005-2014***

Almost as soon as they had fled the city, TBC began making plans for their return. *From the Mouthpiece on the Back* documents that period in the immediate aftermath of the storm, with

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<sup>135</sup> Mark Schleifstein, “Study of Hurricane Katrina’s Dead Shows Most Were Old, Lived Near Levee Breaches,” *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, August 27, 2009, [http://www.nola.com/hurricane/index.ssf/2009/08/answers\\_are\\_scarce\\_in\\_study\\_of.html](http://www.nola.com/hurricane/index.ssf/2009/08/answers_are_scarce_in_study_of.html) (accessed August 28, 2017).



then-bandleader and tuba player Jason Slack leading the effort to regroup less than a month after the disaster. When the film opens, Slack is driving back to New Orleans from his temporary home in Dallas to retrieve whatever instruments and band memorabilia remain in his severely damaged 9<sup>th</sup> Ward home. Although most of the group's instruments have been destroyed, Slack finds upon his return to Dallas that several other jazz bands have donated instruments to the group. He presents a new trombone to 16-year-old bandmate Edward "Juicy" Jackson, who is living nearby and attending David W. Carter High School, and the two quickly get in contact with other bandmates who are dispersed around the country. Slack mails instruments to Darren Towns and trumpeter Glen Preston, who are staying some 800 miles away at an aunt's house in the Atlanta suburbs. In interview clips, Towns reveals that the band is already planning to reconvene in Dallas. A month later, Towns, Preston, and snare drummer Tyrone Brown – who had been staying nearby – make the 17-hour bus trip to Texas, while Slack goes to pick saxophonist Brandon Franklin up in Houston. After a jubilant reunion, the band is forced to confront the reality of their situation; the only gig they can find around Dallas is at a tiny bar in the suburbs. To truly succeed, the band will need to go back to New Orleans. The opportunity arrives just a few weeks later, when the band gets word about a parade gig taking place in November. Slack and Towns call up their old mentor, Wilbert Rawlins, who agrees to help them secure the gig. The film ends with TBC triumphantly blasting out a cover of the Temptations' "Just My Imagination" near the French Market, moving in sync with the bells of their horns pointed towards the sky, as an appreciative crowd claps and dances.

TBC's early return to New Orleans after the storm was unusual, but the group's immediate, concerted efforts to rebuild social and professional networks outside the city were not. Some bands regrouped in other cities before returning, while others came together for the

first time. Realignments and leadership changes were numerous. In Houston, tuba player Janine Waters of the Pinettes Brass Band reunited with snare drummer Christie Jourdain after relocating from Dallas. As part of what is still the only female brass band in New Orleans, they got word as numerous other bands began to regroup and wondered why their own group couldn't do the same thing. Waters and Jourdain called the two women who had run the band before the storm and got nowhere, so they took it upon themselves to rebuild the Pinettes from the ground up. In Atlanta, bass drummer Ellis Joseph and snare drummer Floyd Gray, both up-and-comers in the city's brass band scene, reunited and hatched a plan to start a new band of their own. The group they formed, the Free Agents, is a regular presence at the city's bars, clubs and second lines today, while both Joseph and Gray maintain day jobs as music teachers.

For their part, when TBC returned to its old stomping grounds on Bourbon Street and resumed playing nightly, they were relieved to find signs of life as a small but growing contingent of tourists and locals again began to frequent the area. Their living arrangements were still precarious, and with the power out across so much of the city as winter was coming on, they decided to pool their resources and rent a hotel room downtown for the time being.

While TBC's members moved from one temporary living arrangement to another as they strategized for an uncertain future, the public sphere in which they grew up was being radically reconfigured by outsiders who saw the storm not as a crisis but as an opportunity. In the weeks and months after the levees broke, corporate lobbyists swooped into the half-abandoned city and seized on the breach in civic order to completely overhaul public education and public housing in New Orleans. As market-oriented experiments in social engineering enacted upon a disadvantaged population, both projects exemplify the neoliberal biopolitics that reshaped the

city and further immiserated the black underclass after Katrina. Naomi Klein refers to such projects, implemented rapidly in the wake of catastrophe, as “disaster capitalism.”<sup>136</sup>

Acting quickly, before victims of a disaster can recongregate and try to rebuild their lives, is the key to the strategy that disaster capitalists employ in implementing reforms – a strategy that Naomi Klein calls “shock doctrine.” Cut off from the social networks and spaces that constitute the black public sphere, the most disenfranchised residents of New Orleans were powerless to stop the radical remaking of their schools and homes. By the time evacuees began to return – even those, like the members of TBC, who were only gone for a few months – changes that many would likely have resisted were already well underway. As Klein notes, “Most people who survive a devastating disaster want the opposite of a clean slate: they want to salvage whatever they can and begin repairing what was not destroyed; they want to reaffirm their relatedness to the places that formed them.”<sup>137</sup> But instead of salvaging existing institutions, disaster capitalists destroyed and remade them completely.

The first post-Katrina project of the disaster capitalists was initiated by a bill that then-governor Kathleen Blanco passed in the fall of 2005, which called for the New Orleans Public School District to be dismantled and replaced with independently operated charter schools under the newly created Recovery School District (RSD). It was effectively implemented behind the backs of the families whose children would essentially become human test subjects, a development that would foreshadow the RSD’s difficult relationship with the communities it serves. Schools that had served as community hubs and gathering spaces were completely overhauled and reorganized, with children already traumatized by the storm facing additional

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<sup>136</sup> Klein 2007:6.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*:8.

difficulties in adjusting to a completely new social and educational order. Ten years later, parents and teachers lamented that local schools were no longer accountable to families and communities. In the interval since the charter takeover, the city's school voucher program – which putatively gives parents greater agency by allowing them to choose from different schools across the city – has made schools even more segregated than they were before the storm. In the meantime, private ownership of the schools has made for fewer black teachers. New Orleans Public School District teachers were laid off en masse when the system was reorganized and had to reapply to teach in the new charter schools. Many were replaced by young white teachers newly arrived in New Orleans after Katrina, largely idealists with good intentions but little prior connection to the city or its culture. Parents have since complained that, with no history in or understanding of the communities they serve, many of these new teachers are ill-equipped to meet the needs of their students.

A socially alienating school environment was compounded by the new charter schools' widespread adoption of a “no excuses” educational philosophy, characterized by strict rules and a zero-tolerance policy towards infractions.<sup>138</sup> Suspensions under New Orleans charter schools employing a “no-excuses” philosophy have been unusually high; during the 2012-13 school year, some 69 percent of students at Carver Collegiate Academy – established on the former site of the school where TBC Brass Band had formed – were suspended at some point during the year.<sup>139</sup> Even so, conflicts between students simmered and in many cases worsened under the new system. With the introduction of the voucher program and the closure of numerous schools in

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<sup>138</sup> Kimmitt, Colleen. 2015. “10 Years After Katrina, New Orleans' All-Charter School System Has Proven a Failure.” *In These Times*, August 28. <http://inthesetimes.com/article/18352/10-years-after-katrina-new-orleans-all-charter-district-has-proven-a-failur> (accessed August 29, 2017).

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

response to the vastly reduced size of the post-storm student population, many students were now being bused to schools in unfamiliar and potentially hostile neighborhoods. Territorial conflicts and gang rivalries flared in response to the sudden arrival of students from other parts of town, with the long-standing Uptown-Downtown rivalry turning deadly. One victim caught in the crossfire was Hot 8 Brass Band snare drummer Dinerral Shavers, gunned down in December 2006 after being mistaken for a stepson who had recently transferred from an Uptown school to John McDonogh High School in the Downtown neighborhood of Mid-City.<sup>140</sup> Citing several of these factors, community groups in New Orleans filed a federal civil rights complaint against the RSD in 2014.

For a few years, the combined effects of the storm and the massive overhaul of the city's educational system left the New Orleans high school marching band tradition effectively moribund. With the return to the city of band directors like Wilbert Rawlins and the growth of private foundations that supplied much-needed instruments, school band programs began to rebuild. Since 2010 the city's high school marching bands have experienced something of a renaissance. But with the new iniquities of the charter system, many schools are still struggling for resources. When I conducted my field research in 2015, elementary and middle school music programs remained scarce. At one school I visited while interviewing a brass-band drummer and music educator, students in a newly-established drumline were practicing with nothing more than drumsticks; the instruments would arrive, hopefully, in two or three months. For decades, immersion and schooling in the city's musical traditions from early childhood was critical to local musicians' development. Today, even with economic growth and more tax dollars to draw

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<sup>140</sup> Sakakeeny 2013:162.

from, market-based reforms have meant that in many schools there aren't enough funds available to rebuild such an environment.

The second project – the demolition of multiple public housing projects, which was done over several years – had been in the planning stages long before Katrina hit. In 1992, the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) had initiated the HOPE VI program, a nationwide redevelopment plan that was ostensibly intended to deconcentrate poverty by replacing old public housing projects with mixed-income developments. The new developments would be home to both middle-class tenants and a smaller population of subsidized low-income residents.<sup>141</sup> By 2005, several housing projects in New Orleans had already been torn down and completely redeveloped under HOPE VI. As in every city where the program was implemented, however, the new developments in New Orleans had significantly fewer low-income units than the projects they replaced, and left many poor blacks permanently displaced. Critics alleged that in displacing so many of the black poor, HOPE VI was effectively subsidizing gentrification.<sup>142</sup>

Political and business elites in New Orleans had less than charitable reasons for overhauling public housing in New Orleans: several of the projects were situated in close proximity to tourist areas and desirable real estate, and removing these distracting reminders of the city's social and racial dysfunction would pave the way for lucrative commercial and residential development. The Katrina disaster and the physical damage it wrought gave city leaders the pretext they needed to ramp up demolition and redevelopment of the remaining

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<sup>141</sup> Kelly D. Owens, "The Challenges of Getting Home Quickly and Fairly: Successes and Failures of Housing Recovery Efforts," in *State of Black New Orleans 10 Years Post-Katrina*, ed. Erika McConduit-Diggs (New Orleans: Urban League of New Orleans, 2015), 148.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*:148-149.

projects. It was in fact a rather weak rationale – damage to most remaining housing projects was minimal, and could easily have been repaired – and aroused suspicions about city leaders’ motives in pursuing the demolition. An offhand comment from one local politician just 10 days after the storm only gave further fuel to the impression that the resultant displacement of underprivileged residents of color was entirely deliberate: during a now-infamous exchange at a meeting on public housing shortages, Republican representative Richard H. Baker of Baton Rouge told lobbyists, “We finally cleaned up public housing in New Orleans. We couldn’t do it, but God did.”

The second line community was hard-hit by the demolition of the projects; many musicians and benevolent society members grew up in public housing, including most of the members of TBC. The group recorded a pointed critique of the demolition, “Nagin (Give Me My Projects Back),” on their 2013 album *To Be Continued*. When I asked Darren Towns about the song, he was unequivocal in his condemnation of the city’s actions, noting the injustice of abruptly removing a population from the only living environment they had ever known:

That’s where we all come from. A lot of people couldn’t come back, and here we are. It wasn’t their fault that they grew up in this environment. It’s not like they were able to pick who their fucking parents were. So now, y’all created this thing, a project...and then you wanted to strip them away. There you go, you’re fucking up everybody’s lives. You’ve got all of these people – they don’t even know how to function outside of a fucking project. Because they were so big and just comfortable, everybody just hung in the project...So people gotta live outside of that now, and they ain’t doing too good, and motherfuckers are getting killed. And they refuse to open the motherfuckers back [up]. So that’s why we kind of relate that to [Nagin], you know? Give us our project back, bitch.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Interview with author, July 10, 2015.

Like the city's public schools, the projects were rife with social dysfunction, but as Towns notes, forcibly removing those who grew up in that environment without warning only compounds the injury done by putting them there in the first place.



Figure 3-3: Former residents "reinvade" the C.J. Peete Public Housing Complex with the Hot 8 Brass Band, February 10, 2007. Image courtesy of Common Ground Media (<http://neworleans.indymedia.org/news/2007/02/9709.php>).

Where TBC pushed back against the demolition with their music, other former residents mobilized in the street and at City Hall in an effort to try and save the developments they had called home. With the help of several volunteers, former tenants "reinvaded" the C.J. Peete Housing projects on February 10, 2007, retrieving valuables from apartments where the government had forbidden re-entry and canvassing the neighborhood to build support for the movement. Later, the Hot 8 Brass Band led participants a second line to celebrate the symbolic victory of the event, concluding with a song that revolved around the lyrics, "I don't know what you've been told/But the projects is livable!"<sup>144</sup> Seven months later, despite continued public

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<sup>144</sup> Residents of Public Housing, "Public Housing Residents Take Back Their Homes," press release, February 11, 2017, <http://www.peoplesorganizing.org/archives.html#time> (accessed September 1, 2017).



protests, the City Council voted unanimously to demolish C.J. Peete and the three other major public housing projects still standing in New Orleans. Police responded to the hundreds of citizens who turned up at City Hall to speak out against the demolition with tasers and pepper spray.<sup>145</sup>

The City Council's actions carried the implicit message that tenants of the projects were a disposable population. But the inequitable outcomes of other redevelopment efforts in the years immediately following the storm suggested that it wasn't only project dwellers who were to be excluded from the city's recovery. Mayor Ray Nagin's Bring New Orleans Back committee produced a report in late 2005 suggesting that rebuilding low-income neighborhoods "might not be economically or environmentally feasible."<sup>146</sup> The committee's plan instead favored redeveloping wealthier (and whiter) neighborhoods. Nagin eventually abandoned the plan for a program that would allow displaced residents to make use of government grants, loans and insurance payouts and weigh the costs and benefits of returning. In turn, the more residents who decided to return to a neighborhood, the more the city would reinvest in its infrastructure. Inevitably, the program provided only limited incentive for residents of the poorest neighborhoods to return, and likely contributed to the growing economic and structural inequities between city neighborhoods in the decade following the storm.

Musicians and other members of the city's black working class who were able to surmount the obstacles placed in their way by inequitable recovery programs faced additional economic and cultural struggles on their return to New Orleans. For a few years after their

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<sup>145</sup> Roberta Brandes Gratz, "Who Killed Public Housing in New Orleans?" *The Nation*, June 2, 2015, <https://www.thenation.com/article/requiem-bricks/> (accessed June 1, 2018).

<sup>146</sup> Porter 2013:23.

triumphant return to New Orleans, TBC Brass Band continued to play nightly outside the Foot Locker on Canal Street without incident. That changed in the summer of 2010, when the city suddenly began to enforce a long-forgotten noise ordinance that forced the band – many of whose members relied on the income from their regular street corner gig, which Towns told *Gambit* averaged about \$80 a head per night – into conflict with the authorities. When I spoke with him in 2015, he added that the Bourbon Street gig had begun “going sour” before the band was hit with the noise ordinance. There were those from TBC’s neighborhoods who would show up to cause trouble or to steal from the increasingly full tip box, and if one of the band members deigned to confront a troublemaker it wouldn’t necessarily be clear from the security camera footage afterwards who started the altercation; all the authorities saw were fights breaking out. The group continued to play the corner in protest, but despite the support of fellow brass band musicians like Rebirth’s Glen David Andrews, they were evicted from the area for good by police in January of 2012.

Along with the crackdown on street performances, New Orleans police waged a quiet war on the second line itself after Katrina, erecting increasingly forbidding barriers against clubs looking to stage their annual parades. In response to a shooting at one Sunday parade in early 2006, the NOPD increased the fee for a parade permit from \$1200 to \$4445. After months of failed negotiations between the Social Aid and Pleasure Club Task Force – an organization founded by VIP Ladies president Tamara Jackson shortly after the storm in order to represent the interests of local parade clubs – and the NOPD failed to secure a more reasonable fee, the American Civil Liberties Union stepped in and filed a lawsuit on behalf of second liners, alleging

that the fees infringed upon paraders' First Amendment rights by denying them the right to free expression. The ACLU prevailed and settled for a more reasonable fee.<sup>147</sup>

The struggles over parade fees and street performances point to a recurring problem with the public image of the second line and its participants. Fueled both by the sensationalistic news reports and by the second line community's often-contentious relationship with local law enforcement, a widespread perception in New Orleans remains that second lines are violent. There have, in fact, been instances of violence at second lines in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, most notoriously a shooting at a Mother's Day parade that left 18 participants injured, with one victim dying due to after-effects of her injuries four years later. But such outbreaks are exceedingly rare; several incidents that initial reports tied to Sunday second lines in the past decade turned out to have actually occurred after the parade was over or in a nearby location, not during the parade itself.

Violence is an ever-present fact of life in New Orleans, where the homicide rate has remained among the highest in the nation for decades. The many musicians and benevolent association members who live in the poorest neighborhoods are among the most vulnerable. Second liners also face the constant threat of police brutality and intimidation. A year before the storm, Stooges Brass Band trombonist Joseph "Shotgun Joe" Williams was cornered and fatally shot by police while attempting to enter his car on the way to a jazz funeral. Noting that Williams had an arrest history, the NOPD classified the killing as a "justifiable" homicide and declined to investigate further. Still framing second lines and their participants as dangerous and disorderly after Katrina, law enforcement also targeted the impromptu neighborhood parades that traditionally follow the death of a prominent brass band musician or club member. In October of

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<sup>147</sup> Watts and Porter 2013:40.

2007, police came out in full force to halt a memorial procession led by two dozen brass band musicians for tuba player Kerwin James. When officers threatened arrest if the band continued to play, the musicians responded by putting down their instruments and singing the spiritual “I’ll Fly Away.”<sup>148</sup> Musicians Glen David Andrews and Derrick Tabb were quickly arrested and charged with parading without a permit, though the charges were ultimately dropped.

Club members and supporters of the second line tradition argue that, in giving underprivileged communities a venue for creative expression and collective exuberance, second lines actually deter violence rather than encourage it. Additionally, Second lines often serve as creative and spiritual responses to gun violence. In the wake of an alarming uptick in violent crime after Katrina, second line organizations and community groups staged several anti-violence marches. When filmmaker and activist Helen Hill was murdered during a home invasion just three weeks after Dinerral Shavers’ killing, her colleagues partnered with Shavers’ sister Nakita to organize a march on City Hall. Shavers’ former colleagues in the Hot 8 walked at the head of the procession, but instead of lifting their instruments in mournful or angry song, they led a silent protest. If second lines provide a voice for the black working class and sustenance for the cultural life of the entire city, the march suggested, municipal authorities were silencing that voice and snuffing out that life through a combination of indiscriminate brutality, incompetence, and studied indifference. The march attracted an estimated five thousand participants, with some later calling it the city’s largest public protest since the Civil Rights era.<sup>149</sup> Two weeks later, Tamara Jackson’s Social Aid and Pleasure Club Task Force staged a second parade called the March for Peace and Celebration of Hope. Winding through the Central

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<sup>148</sup> Raimondi 2012:172.

<sup>149</sup> Watts and Porter 2013:47.

Business District in view of photographers and reporters, the first portion of the parade was once again silent. Once the parade reached the Central City neighborhood and most of the media had departed, however, it was joined by the Hot 8, Free Agents, and Rebirth brass bands and turned into a jubilant second line. As Matt Sakakeeny notes, the divide between the two halves of the parade was strategic; the first half broadcast a somber and unambiguous message to the broader public, while the second half was a cathartic outpouring of hope by and for the second line community itself. The parade was a success, winning front-page coverage in the *Times-Picayune* and a lead story on the evening news.<sup>150</sup>

Why are second lines, second liners and street performances still perceived as a threat? The second line tradition belongs to the black working class and the black poor, and Henry Giroux argues that these populations are considered inessential or detrimental – and thus disposable – by the neoliberal state. By criminalizing the black poor, the police render them effectively invisible. Julie Raimondi suggests that law enforcement’s antipathy to second line culture has deeper roots, however. Citing historian Dennis C. Rousey’s scholarship on policing in 19<sup>th</sup> century New Orleans, Raimondi notes that the city’s police force developed out of the colonial militias whose primary responsibility was to control the city’s enslaved African population and suppress potential revolts. While the police shifted away from paramilitary tactics in the mid-twentieth century, Raimondi suggests that traces of the militia mentality and approach still persist in the present-day NOPD. The perception of African Americans as “wild” and threatening to the established societal order is deeply ingrained in law enforcement culture, and the NOPD’s actions at second lines and during the Katrina evacuee crises bear out Raimondi’s assertion that “the narrative that the police must control large crowds of ‘wild people’” persists.

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<sup>150</sup> Sakakeeny 2013:172.

But while the policing of second lines may in part reflect the authorities' desire to contain a "disposable" population, the city's leadership cannot afford to suppress the second line tradition itself. And therein lies the central paradox that defines the relationship between second liners and the authorities: though practitioners of the second line tradition may be regarded by political and business leaders as expendable, the second line itself is anything but. New Orleans needs second lines just like it needs jazz and Creole cuisine; black expressive culture is at the heart of the city's tourist economy, with musicians and other cultural workers comprising the most vital segment of its labor force.

Despite their importance to the city's economy, musicians are not paid any better than their fellow service workers, who constitute a labor class that is larger and more economically precarious than any other in the city. Many supplement their performance income with day jobs as music educators or manual laborers. Those who are able to subsist entirely off of performing generally have a regular gig at an upscale venue – such positions are hard to come by – or spend months out of the year on tour. This is not an unusual situation for musicians in any major American city, but it is remarkable that musicians remain near the bottom of the economic ladder in a city whose prosperity depends so heavily on their creative labor. Over and over in interviews I conducted during the course of my fieldwork, musicians lamented that they are not compensated adequately for their performances. Several who had toured nationally or internationally noted that they were paid better outside the city than at gigs in town. The problem extends beyond club gigs to Jazz Fest – where for years musicians and parading clubs have complained that they are paid only a fraction of what major national acts earn from their appearances – and to second lines themselves, which several veteran bands have stopped playing due to the often-meager pay. Part of the problem is that while the number of active brass bands

in New Orleans has increased since Katrina, performance opportunities have fallen number. With so many black families more or less permanently displaced from the city, many venues in black neighborhoods have been forced to close. Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs have fewer active members and thus fewer funds available to pay second line bands.

With performance opportunities scarce and their livelihoods imperiled even while the city continues to experience economic growth, New Orleans musicians have had to develop a strong code of professional ethics, a sophisticated understanding of music business economics, and a variety of new income streams in order to survive. Original Tuxedo Jazz Band drummer Gerald French makes a point of dressing well and always showing up to a gig at least 30 minutes ahead of show time. Maintaining a certain standard of professionalism allows him to charge a higher premium for his services, which experienced club owners will gladly pay. As he told me in 2013, venues that balk at his asking price and hire a cheaper band often end up regretting it: “They call you back a week or two after the event – the band was late, they didn’t dress properly, sounded like shit, nobody showed up on time. I’m like, ‘Well, that’s what you pay for.’”<sup>151</sup>

French’s tenacity has paid off, as he regularly plays hotels and other upscale venues around the French Quarter. But in these venues French and his band play traditional jazz; the pricier clubs and hotels rarely host contemporary brass bands. Though some of these groups have weekly gigs in clubs around tourist-friendly Frenchmen Street, the most established modern brass bands make the bulk of their money on the road and elsewhere. Shrewd business sense isn’t just a plus for these groups; it is vital to having any kind of sustained career. Tuba player Walter Ramsey, who leads the Stooges Brass Band, described how he had bucked the largely cash-based economy of the brass band scene in the band’s early days by always requesting to be

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<sup>151</sup> Interview with author, July 24, 2013.

paid in checks. He was also quick to incorporate the Stooges as a business. “They thought I was crazy,” Ramsey says of other musicians at the time, but for established brass bands such arrangements have now become standard practice. He has also developed other important income streams for the Stooges, relating to me how the band parlayed a performance at the wedding of a high-powered Los Angeles music manager into gigs with nationally successful pop and hip-hop acts along with two publishing deals and a contract to produce music for ESPN.<sup>152</sup> Rebirth has also collaborated extensively with pop and R&B artists, while the Hot 8 Brass Band recently appeared in a commercial for Wild Turkey Bourbon.

The above bands make a living almost exclusively through their music. All are well-established veterans with roots that extend back a decade or more prior to Katrina, however, and have gradually built extensive professional networks and dedicated management teams working on their behalf. In contrast, few of the bands who have emerged in the 21<sup>st</sup> century even tour regularly. Some, like TBC, are in such high demand locally that they simply don’t have time to play out of town. But for many bands whose members spent years rebuilding their lives and their families after the storm, the idea of once again being uprooted from the city for months out of the year may be too distressing to contemplate. So they exist on the edge of precarity, with many young brass band players pulling double or triple duty in different groups. Others – like the all-female Original Pinettes Brass Band, who cannot tour regularly due to several members’ family commitments – work day jobs or attend school. Pinettes bandleader Christie Jourdain, who seeks to build upon her band’s hard-won rise through the local music scene, is currently enrolled in a music industry degree program at a local community college.

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<sup>152</sup> Interview with author, July 17, 2013.



For the many youths who aspire to music careers, there are a handful of local schools and nonprofit programs in New Orleans that both provide formal music training and teach essential professional skills. The most celebrated of these programs to emerge in the post-Katrina era is the Roots of Music, launched by Rebirth Brass Band snare drummer Derrick Tabb in 2008. Tabb conceived the Roots of Music, an afterschool program that combines music instruction with academic tutoring, as a way to continue the work of his mentor Donald Richardson. “My junior high band director basically saved my life by letting me into his band,” Tabb says of Richardson. At the time when he entered the band at A.J. Bell Junior High School, Tabb was grappling with the death of his grandmother and on the verge of succumbing to the lure of the neighborhood drug trade. He credits Richardson with steering him towards music and away from the streets, and aims with the Roots of Music to provide the same sense of direction to talented but at-risk youths:

It’s just a make-sense program, I wanna keep kids off the street... I felt like I knew the answer to why all the kids was getting in trouble for dropping out of school and committing crimes. I come from the environment that they come from, so I understood what they were going through, and if that’s all you see, that’s all you gonna do. So I wanted to take them out of that environment and put ’em in a different environment, and give them a craft that they could use to maybe go to college, and, you know, that [could] pay for their college tuition for nothin’, blowing a horn. It’s just trying to make an easier way for ’em, and no matter what it is, they could always fall back on it.<sup>153</sup>

Tabb employs much the same rhetoric and themes in describing the value of his program – music as a means of keeping youth productive and out of trouble, music as a means to promote economic self-sufficiency, and music as a means to solve pressing societal problems – as band director Wilbert Rawlins and his proteges in TBC. And other organizations like the Jazz and Heritage Foundation, the Tambourine and Fan Organization and Tipitina’s Foundation are

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

likewise premised on the idea of music and culture as constructive resources. All do vital work and provide much-needed services to a community that is still broken and devastated in many ways. But the fact that such organizations are so plentiful in New Orleans – and that their combined efforts are still not enough to remedy persistent socioeconomic problems – is an indictment of the neoliberal state’s abandonment of the social contract and the resurgent, unspoken policy of studied neglect towards disadvantaged populations that pervades the local, state, and federal government. And this is one reason why the second line itself remains a vital tool of resistance.

Where nonprofits like the Roots of Music demonstrate one way that second line culture can be utilized to build community and empower citizens, much of the tradition’s reconstructive potency and political efficacy still resides in the actual event of the parade. The past decade has demonstrated as much: After the parades organized to protest the city’s violence epidemic in 2006 came numerous other second line protests, including a March 2009 second line against the school-to-prison pipeline of the city’s criminal justice system<sup>154</sup>, a mock-jazz funeral protest of budget cuts at the University of New Orleans in 2010<sup>155</sup>, a march against the War on Drugs in June 2011<sup>156</sup>, a second line against noise ordinances and the police crackdown on live entertainment in 2013<sup>157</sup>, and numerous marches against police brutality and in support of removing Confederate statues from the city in 2016 and 2017.

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<sup>154</sup> Porter and Watts 2013:52.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.:53.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Jan Ramsey, “New Orleans Music Community Protests Cultural Regulation With Second Line April 25,” *Offbeat Magazine* online, April 24, 2013, <http://www.offbeat.com/new-orleans-music-community-protests-cultural-regulation-second-line-april-25/> (accessed September 14, 2017).

The second line remains so politically potent in part because it is a figurative reenactment of the black freedom struggle, a multisensory act of remembering loss and adversity and triumphing over both, if only temporarily. At its best, the parade refutes the biopolitics of disposability that immiserated and displaced so many of its practitioners with one massive, unified voice that rings out, “We’re still here and we’re still moving. And we don’t forget.” Indeed, the decade following Katrina demonstrated decisively that even in the face of the community’s diminished numbers and a widening economic divide that threatened to further isolate the black poor, second line culture would survive and thrive. While the media and a profusion of outside scholars and documentarians would all bring that culture to broader national attention than ever before, the results for the community would be decidedly mixed; despite the now country-wide recognition of the second line parade and its music, most of the old struggles and iniquities that had long plagued the second line community were nowhere nearer to resolution. In 2015, the city government once again co-opted the sights and sounds of the second line as New Orleans prepared to memorialize the Hurricane Katrina disaster on its tenth anniversary, flattening the parade’s mixture of exuberance, sorrow and defiance into the generic message of “resilience” that pervaded official statements as the date approached. In the meantime, cultural outsiders – myself and several of my friends included – showed up to second-line parades and brass band performances in ever-growing numbers, attempting to document and support to the tradition even as they/we moved into the former homes and neighborhoods of displaced second liners. What does the second line mean in the face of these developments? Where does second line culture unfold today, and how does it make meaning? Does the second line signify differently to the populations on both sides of the socioeconomic divide that it brings

together every Sunday afternoon? Drawing from my own fieldwork experiences in 2015 and 2016, I address several of these questions in the next chapter.

## Chapter 4 The Contemporary Second Line: A First-Person Look

### *Entering the Field*

My research on second lines began in early 2013 as part of a much broader and more loosely defined exploration of black music in New Orleans and the roots of funk. It was not until nearly a year and a half later, however, that I actually witnessed a traditional second line. I would spend another nine or ten months in the field, now believing that I was writing a dissertation about drummers in New Orleans, before narrowing the scope of my research to focus chiefly on the parade itself. I was just coming off of a master's thesis project on George Clinton and his Parliament-Funkadelic collective when I began my doctoral program at UCLA, and a little disillusioned to find that I no longer had the heart to pursue a subject that once seemed inexhaustible. One possibility for my next project had opened itself up to me in the course of my P-Funk thesis, when I wrote a chapter on the history of "funk" as both descriptive term and musical style. My historical readings for the chapter pointed me to turn-of-the-century New Orleans, when pioneering jazz cornetist Buddy Bolden composed a song known alternately as "Buddy Bolden's Blues" or the "Funky Butt." While I wove a brief history of early jazz and its popular reception from Buddy Bolden on through the 1920s in the chapter, the term "second line" and what it meant – both as a piece of the funk puzzle and as its own tradition – were still foreign to me.

Still figuring that my doctoral research would be an extension of my master's thesis and still interested in uncovering the "roots" of funk music, I came across another New Orleans connection when I purchased R.J. Smith's excellent James Brown biography, *The One*, in the spring of 2012. Smith, looking to answer some of the same questions I had about the sources and

antecedents of the polyrhythmic, groove centered style that Brown pioneered, asked two of Brown's early drummers about the key ingredients of funk rhythm. Charles Connor, who moonlighted in Brown's band in between his regular gig backing Little Richard in the 1950s, and Clayton Fillyau, who served as Brown's regular drummer in the early 1960s, both cited their common schooling in the rhythms of the second line as critical to Brown's efforts at forging the funk sound. Two sources cited by Smith – Alexander Stewart's "Funky Drummer" and Jim Payne's book *Give the Drummer Some* – came to similar conclusions about the second line influence in James Brown's work. Yet I still didn't know what a "second line" was. A trip to the city for an academic conference in November of 2012 and an offhand suggestion from Professor James Newton to look into the second line tradition prompted me to follow Payne's and Stewart's arguments to their source. At that point I postulated that second line rhythms were at the root of funk music, and traveled to New Orleans for a month in the summer of 2013 to test my assertion.

Porning through old interviews with local jazz and R&B legends at Tulane University's Hogan Jazz Archive, and conducting my own fieldwork and interviews with their musical descendants in the city's contemporary live scene, I soon discovered a few problems with my question and the way that I had framed it. First, I had assumed there was a straightforward evolutionary trajectory from second line brass band music to funk, when in fact genealogies of influence and the development of musical styles are always messy; second-line rhythms were a demonstrable influence on the work of several funk drummers, but features of gospel and the blues contributed to the new style as well. Without even considering the ultimate value of trying to trace funk music back to one specific place and time, attempting to establish second-line brass band music as the major stylistic forerunner of funk would require a highly selective and

distorted reading of historical and contemporary evidence. The bigger problem with my hypothesis was that “funk” was not a particularly useful epistemological category in analyzing the social life of music in New Orleans. Indeed, to pay too much heed to genre labels, which are largely the ex post facto creations of critics and historians rather than meaningful categories by which musicians orient their work, would be to miss the point entirely of how the city’s musical scene functions. It would take until about six months through my next major fieldwork trip to the city, in 2015, that I realized what I was really after; the story I wanted to tell was about the parade itself. This is my attempt to narrativize my experiences in the primary context of New Orleans second lines, along with the secondary contexts of club shows, street corner performances and scholastic brass band performances and competitions that essentially serve as training grounds and experimental contexts for the second line – the beat, the music and the dances – to develop over time. This chapter is also my attempt to explain the second line as an expressive narrative in itself, a dynamic response to the struggles and triumphs of the past and the challenges of the present in dance, drum and song.

### *Writing About the Parade*

Trying to describe a second line parade in words is like trying to paint a clear picture of a hummingbird in flight. Attempting to balance one’s roles as participant and observer in the course of a second line is still more difficult. Making neat work out of observing, participating in and documenting a tradition that resists conventional Euro-American notions of order and control is virtually impossible.<sup>158</sup> With costumed and casually clothed dancers, drink vendors,

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<sup>158</sup> I should note that there is absolutely a consistent order and form to the second line – a complex, richly detailed, and dynamic form with a long history, as I hope my work demonstrates. It is just a different kind of order than one

musicians and truck-drawn floats encircling you, the strains of drums, horns, tambourines and 808 bounce beats ringing in your ears and rippling through your body, the smells of sweat, cannabis and tobacco coalescing into a vaporous funk around you, and your own urge to shake your hips and move your feet intermittently overruling your powers of sober and detached observation, there is simply too much going on at any given moment to direct your attention to any individual element for very long, to try and capture the totality of the event in words or sound or images, or to build a single coherent narrative out of what you have just witnessed. If you want to understand the second line, you have to be there, not just watching and taking notes but actively participating in the event. If you are constantly looking down to write notes or scoping out opportunities to take pictures or video, you're not really present. If you don't take notes during the event, on the other hand, you risk losing details of the experience. This is the classic participant-observer dilemma, of course, but an event as joyously frenetic and enveloping as the second line presents an especially formidable challenge. I grappled with the dilemma in a variety of ways. I abandoned the standard pocket-size field notebook part of the way through my first extended research trip to New Orleans in the summer of 2013; trying to scribble notes in the dimly lit environs of clubs and bars where brass bands frequently perform is a challenge of its own, and I often wanted to remain relatively inconspicuous. On the not-infrequent occasion, usually at smaller neighborhood venues, when I was one of only a handful of white people in the crowd, I wasn't necessarily going to blend in anyway, at least not for the first few months. But I didn't want to appear as a cultural tourist or interloper, even if in sense that's what I was. Pencil and paper might serve as a barrier to interaction; by removing that barrier, I figured I would more

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would get at, say, a symphony orchestra performance. The order of the second line, as with so many other African American expressive forms, is set but not static; it is fundamentally responsive to the conditions of the moment.



easily be able to integrate myself into the social fabric of these settings through repeated visits. Since observing parades requires you to be moving and looking ahead of yourself constantly, moreover, taking handwritten notes simply isn't feasible. So whether I was at a club or at a parade, I typically used the Notepad app on my iPhone, jotting down terse observations during breaks in the procession.

The first real second line that I witnessed came at the end of my first fieldwork trip to the city, in August 2013. Staged as part of Satchmo Summerfest, a late-summer showcase for traditional New Orleans jazz that takes place at the Old U.S. Mint in the Marigny neighborhood, the procession featured several prominent parading clubs, with the Dumaine Street Gang and the Treme Sidewalk Steppers among them, and half a dozen brass bands, including the Hot 8 and the Treme Brass Band. Although it took place on a Sunday, this was not a typical second line; the parade was sponsored by the festival rather than any one particular marching club, it lasted about an hour and a half rather than the usual four hours, and – perhaps most critically – it was targeted as much towards spectators as participants, including such grand but atypical parade divisions as an entire line of umbrella-wielding (and mostly white) festival-goers at the front, and the spectacular Shaka Zulu Stilt Walkers towards the middle of the procession. Still, the parade gave me my first chance to witness the characteristically wide-stepping, loose-limbed dance moves of the parade on the streets and in person. In a pattern that has repeated itself for virtually every second line I've attended in the three years since, I spent about the first hour of the parade racing back and forth between the various divisions and trying to take everything in before throwing up my hands and joining the hip-shaking throng as we approached the home stretch.

When I returned to New Orleans a little over a year later to attend the Young Men Olympians' annual miniature second line – still not exactly a typical second line, if only because

of its two-hour duration – I had not yet assimilated the basic shape and pulse of the parade into my own bodily rhythms. I arrived at the site of the parade, in the Central City neighborhood, about 10 minutes before it was scheduled to roll. It was early September, but as is fairly typical well into “fall” in New Orleans, the weather was brutally hot and humid. There were already a number of vendors lining the street, most selling alcoholic beverages and water but one or two serving fruit (I have rarely seen any refreshments that healthy at a second line before or since). After a few moments of apparent confusions, scattered yells and whistles began to emerge from the crowd and within maybe five more minutes we were in line and off along the route. At the time, it was difficult for me to perceive the order amid an apparently chaotic scene, which had more to do with my inexperience in that social setting than with any actual disorder. In fact, second line musicians and marchers all follow specific musical or verbal cues that alert them when it’s time to line up at the start or following a particular parade stop.

As I followed the procession I made a rather clumsy attempt at dancing. No matter how awkward I might have looked, I had plenty of encouragement from revelers nearby. As I became more confident in the basic bodily grammar of the second line over the next year and a half, exhortations from paraders around me became more exuberant, and eventually I even got the occasional compliment. In conversations with veteran second line dancers – all of whom had far more command of the style and a far broader repertoire of movements than I probably ever will – during the months that followed, I heard again and again that there is no one “correct” way to second line, and the encouraging comments that even awkward first-time second liners get from local attendees who have been second lining all their lives seem to bear out the discursive stance that Rachel Carrico calls “Do Whatcha Wanna”: the notion that second lining is essentially

whatever you feel like doing in response to the music and the moment.<sup>159</sup> But even an uninformed observer can see that while the dance is open to an infinite number of variations and interpretations, there is an underlying form – what I will refer to as a basic bodily attitude or grammar – to the second line, and numerous local paraders who have grown up with the tradition have mastered it. You can see that bodily attitude manifested in a multitude of different ways, from the fleet-footed children and teenagers who dance on the front steps of high schools, churches, and apartment buildings as the parade rolls by to the brightly suited fifty- and sixty-something marching club members who step slow and low to the ground. Particular steps change but the basic skeleton of the dance remains the same. The essential framework of the music that accompanies the parade is essentially the same as it has been for over a century, too, with the drummers laying down a combination of 1-2-1-2 march beat and Afro-Caribbean clave over which the horns weave a polyphonic tapestry.

Although an intentionally small-scale procession, the 2014 Young Men Olympia Jr. second line was a lot like most later Sunday parades in that it grew and grew in size as it went on. Looking at the few pictures I shot that day, I am struck not just by the many then-unfamiliar faces that I can attach names to now, but by how crowded the frames get after the parade hits Claiborne Avenue. It was along that critical stretch of road – a thoroughfare that bisects “backatown” New Orleans and provides the climax of almost every parade both uptown and downtown – where I first witnessed the second line phenomenon that dance scholar Rachel Carrico refers to as “summiting.” Perhaps the most visceral physical demonstration of how second liners lay claim to the city streets and the spaces between them, summiting is what happens when a second liner – almost always male – climbs any structure or object – a house, a

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<sup>159</sup> Carrico 2015:19.

van, a construction crane, a billboard, even a tomb – and dances upon it. As we were parading down Claiborne that Sunday afternoon, a short man summited a bus stop shelter, a structure just high enough for him to dance in full view of the still-growing crowd. Cheers and the snaps of cell phone cameras ensued. I worried that the summiting dancer would fall off the shelter's roof, no more than six feet by three feet and sloping downwards on both sides. He never fell, and neither did any summiting dancer I witnessed over the next year and a half, no matter how tall the structure or how precarious the footing looked to be.

Returning to the city in January 2015 for the longest phase of my field research, I still wasn't sure how broad or narrow my focus would turn out to be, or whether the second line would be my primary research context. Still, I turned out for as many Sunday parades as I could. My first second line of the year was the Sidewalk Steppers 21<sup>st</sup> annual parade on February 1<sup>st</sup>. When I first approached the second line around 1:40 PM it was stopped outside the Avenue Barber Shop, where several club members and other community members were inside. Derrick Tabb, drummer of Rebirth, was playing rolls on his snare while waiting for the parade to start up again, sometimes chatting with an acquaintance who approached him as well. After about 10 minutes people began pouring out of the barbershop, many of them costumed members of the club. Several whistles were blown just before the parade started up again, though it was the tuba of the New Birth Brass Band, which marched in front of the Sidewalk Steppers while Rebirth marched behind them, that got the procession moving again with a few repetitions of a riff. Well in front of New Birth were the Sidewalk Steppers' parade floats.

I later learned that the position of the two bands in the procession was not random but adhered to a loose tradition: in a two-band second line, the younger band will generally play just behind the first division of the marching club, while the older and more established band will

bring up the back. The members of New Birth are not significantly younger than those in Rebirth; with Rebirth forming in the 1980s and New Birth coming together in the early 1990s, both groups can rightfully claim the status of elder statesmen in the local brass band scene. But Rebirth was already well established when the New Birth Brass band emerged as a loose offshoot, and with the Dirty Dozen Brass Band having retired from street parades more than a decade ago, Rebirth they are now the city's most successful and respected second line brass band. I dashed back and forth between the New Birth front line and the Rebirth back line. New Birth had a lighter and somewhat tighter sound, with the snare playing a rolling shuffle march and the bass different variations of the clave patterns pioneered by Keith Frazier. Rebirth's playing wasn't only harder and more bass-heavy; they were also faster than the more trad-jazz minded New Birth, the near-breakneck tempo belying the band's age. Part of the way through the parade, rain suddenly began to fall; to my surprise, the entire procession erupted in cheers. I broke out my umbrella, and as a woman hustled under it for a minute she offered me a drag on a joint.

Weaving their way through the crowd at this and other Sunday second lines were a panoply of vendors, most pushing coolers stocked with beer, soda and water. At each parade stop – which for this abbreviated second line meant only the start and the finish, without the periodic stops at local bars and clubhouses that are customary during the full four-hour parade – the mobile vendors are augmented in number by food trailers and people selling liquor out of the back of pickup trucks. Some of the vendors use megaphones to hawk their refreshments. One vendor I remember seeing at every parade could always be heard over the din of the crowd selling his “Good ol’, good ol’ Henessy” or his “good ol’ good ol’ Peach Ciroc.” In effect, the vendors constitute an informal neighborhood economy, providing a vital income stream to local

residents. The same patchwork of vendors turns out in full force out on the street during Jazz Fest, Mardi Gras, and every other major festival occasion.

While I never got the name of the “Good ol’, good ol’” man, I made the acquaintance of a couple of other regular vendors. At the Keep-N-It Real second line on March 8<sup>th</sup>, I bought a hand towel – which I sorely needed with a couple more hours to go in the sweltering heat – from a woman in her fifties, whose real name was Linda but who commonly went by “Butterfly.” “Hey Curly Top,” she called out to me that day, recognizing me and my mop of hair from several previous parades. Introducing me to her friend Kathy, Butterfly asked me if I remembered seeing her on Washington Street at the last second line. I didn’t, but Butterfly pulled out a hand towel and offered it to me as a freebie. Despite her generosity I offered Butterfly a dollar for the towel. “My first customer!” she exclaimed, and thanked me. With only a bag of cheap hand towels it’s unlikely that Butterfly made much money that day, but I wouldn’t be surprised if she sold out her supply every time she attended a parade. Although I saw her at numerous subsequent parades and events, all I knew about Butterfly over the course of my stay was her name. When I returned for the Young Men Olympians parade in September of 2016, however, I had a chat with Butterfly at the YMO Clubhouse during their annual pre-parade rally. After exchanging greetings with one another, she told me she was just about to celebrate her 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, that she played the violin, and that she had a son who was currently living and working in the Los Angeles area.

Another vendor I saw regularly I knew only as “Doocy,” a woman in her thirties or early forties who pushed a cooler stocked with beer, bottled water, and Gatorade at most parades. One way that second line vendors ensure a solid take from beverage sales at each parade is to build friendships and make regular customers out of those social bonds; if you see a vendor you’ve

chatted with before amidst the throng as you're parading, you buy from that vendor. It becomes almost expected, such that if you don't buy a drink from that person when you see them it's a bit of a faux pas. Befriending Doocy had another upside for a cultural outsider like me; as with many other contacts I made, Doocy would alert me to events I hadn't heard about. Musicians themselves often alerted me to community events as well; when up-and-coming musician Trumpet Black, a pillar of the local brass band scene, died in May, it was Alexis Pierce, cowbell player for the Free Spirit Brass Band, who told me to be on the lookout for a memorial second line coming through the Treme later that afternoon.

### ***Rest in Peace, Trumpet Black***

With the increased availability of the internet generally, and social media in particular, staying informed about cultural events in New Orleans, including parties, memorials and performances that are predominantly attended by local natives and other cultural insiders, is easier now than ever before. It still helps tremendously to make friends and acquaintances within the community, however, as important events are often organized on short notice or otherwise unadvertised except at prior social events. As 2015 progressed and I met more brass band musicians, music teachers, second liners, Mardi Gras Indians, the number of events I learned about increased dramatically. It was during my observation of the events memorializing local musician Trumpet Black, almost four months into my stay, that I finally began to feel like a part of the community. Just as DJ Soul Sister's tip about the TBC Brass Band's Wednesday night shows at Celebration Hall – which were not yet listed on community radio station WWOZ's website – had introduced me to the hottest young brass band in the city and a live show that was the closest thing to a second line aside from the parade itself during my first summer of

fieldwork in 2013, Doocy's tip almost two years later gave me a way into the workings and dynamics of second line culture, and in particular how the community memorializes the departed and takes care of its own in the wake of unexpected loss. While I was embarrassed that I had known virtually nothing about the former Travis Hill prior to his sudden demise, I quickly learned that in New Orleans, no matter who you are or how tenuous your connection to the deceased may be, showing up to a memorial event is typically viewed not as an intrusion but as a gesture of support.

Too many young black musicians in New Orleans have fallen victim to the city's murder epidemic, as the late Hill would bemoan in his own "Trumpets Not Guns," which after his passing grew through repeated tributes into something of a local brass band standard. Hill's death, however, came not from bullets but from a freak occurrence made crueler by how quickly it transpired. In Japan for a tour, Hill developed an infection from a minor dental procedure. The infection spread rapidly over just a few days, and soon after being admitted to a Japanese hospital he died on May 4, 2015. As I learned in short order after hearing the news, Hill was a member of the Andrews family, one of the famed "musical families" that make up the nucleus of the local musical scene. His notable relatives included his grandfather, Jesse Hill, who scored a major R&B hit – and future Mardi Gras standard – with "Ooh Poo Pah Doo" in 1960; Glen David Andrews, a former member of the New Birth and Lil Rascals brass bands and now a successful solo artist; Glen Finnister Andrews, snare drummer for the TBC Brass Band; Derrick Tabb, snare drummer of the Rebirth Brass Band; Glen Andrews, trumpeter with Rebirth; and Troy "Trombone Shorty" Andrews, whose fusion of brass band music, hard rock and hip hop has made him the biggest star on the contemporary New Orleans jazz scene. At the time of his death, Travis Hill did not have the same commercial clout as Trombone Shorty – nobody did – but his



star was on the rise after early troubles with the law had sidelined him for nearly a decade. A musician since his early childhood, Hill learned the fundamentals of New Orleans jazz alongside his cousin Troy during summers at the Louis Armstrong Jazz Camp. When the teenaged Troy Andrews put together the Trombone Shorty Brass Band, adopting his stage name in the process, he tapped his cousin Travis to play trumpet. Like most other young brass band musicians, Hill maintained full- or part-time membership in several different groups, playing frequently with the New Birth, Lil Rascals and the Hot 8. At 17, Hill's career came to an abrupt halt when he was arrested and then convicted on a charge of armed robbery. Serving nearly nine years in prison – “Being black, it was like going back four hundred years,” he remarked to one interviewer – Hill spent his days “picking cotton and beans” while Hurricane Katrina ravaged his community and his cousin Troy rose to national and then international fame<sup>160</sup>. Upon his release in 2011, Hill worked tirelessly to reestablish himself and make up for lost time, touring with cousin Glen David Andrews' band and with the Hot 8 before joining Corey Henry's Treme Funktet for a regular Wednesday night gig at Vaughan's Lounge in the hip Bywater neighborhood. In 2013, Hill formed his own band, Trumpet Black and the Heart Attacks, and when his aunt Judy and cousin James Andrews – also a prominent local musician – opened the Ooh Poo Pah Doo Bar in Treme, Trumpet Black's name was right there on the marquee out front between those of Andrews and Trombone Shorty. With the Heart Attacks playing regular gigs at Vaughan's and Ooh Poo Pah Doo, Hill earned an extensive profile in the *Times-Picayune's* “New Orleans Entertainers to Watch in 2015” feature just months before he died. While still on the road, he had planned to finish mixing his debut album as a bandleader, cut in late 2014 with the Heart Attacks

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<sup>160</sup> Anthony Taille, “The Jazz Funeral of a New Orleans Rising Star,” *Medium*, June 16, 2015, <https://medium.com/human-parts/trumpets-not-guns-8e2ba9bf1834#.2ki09jn7k>.

and an all-star cast of local luminaries. And just like that, half the world away from the community that had welcomed him back to the stage with open arms, he was gone.

When an important cultural figure from New Orleans dies, the tributes and memorials last for days – or in Trumpet Black’s case, for several weeks. Late in the evening of May 4<sup>th</sup>, I heard the news of his death and the tributes that were pouring in throughout the city. At least one memorial second line had already taken place in Treme that afternoon; the parades would continue nearly every day over the next couple of weeks, in part to offset grief and longing that would be compounded by the lengthy and expensive process of returning his body home from abroad for a proper burial. And at brass band shows throughout the city, musicians would invoke Trumpet Black’s memory day in and day out through shout-outs, chants, and covers of “Trumpets Not Guns.” The first such tribute I witnessed was at the Rebirth Brass Band’s weekly Tuesday night show at the Maple Leaf on May 5<sup>th</sup>. After opening with a few traditional numbers, trumpeter Chadrick Honoré led the packed house in a chant: “When I say Trumpet, you say black!”

After Alexis Pierce tipped me off about the second line the following afternoon, I headed over to Tuba Fats Square, a tiny patch of green grass at the heart of Treme named for another leading light of the New Orleans brass band scene who died too young. It was about 4 PM and there was no sign of a parade, just a handful of people out on their porches waiting to see when – and if – the second line was going to start. After maybe half an hour I grew bored waiting around and seeing no activity, and began to wonder whether the parade might be taking place in some other part of the neighborhood. I climbed onto my bicycle and rode to CVS to pick up some water, sunscreen and a snack. When I returned to the square about 20 minutes later, a small crowd had begun to gather, but there was still no sign of a procession. I asked a local man if he

knew whether the parade had started, and he advised me to take a look around the corner. Sure enough, the second line was rolling down Dumaine Street, a few blocks to the other side of Claiborne Avenue. As I approached the procession I was greeted Floyd Gray, bass drummer for the Free Agents Brass Band, who I had interviewed about a month earlier. The parade was small, with only about 30 or 40 people at most, but among those gathered and playing for Travis Hill were numerous familiar faces from the city's brass bands, including Hill's cousins Jenard Andrews (of New Birth), Glen Finnister Andrews, and Derrick Tabb; Bennie Pete of the Hot 8; Darren Towns of TBC; and Adolph "Copper" Sorina of New Birth. There were others I recognized but whose names I didn't know. Dancing at the front of the parade were several members of the Sidewalk Steppers Social Aid and Pleasure Club. As the procession hit the Claiborne Avenue overpass, the sound of the ad-hoc, all-star band – already a much larger ensemble than the typical brass band, with musicians doubling, tripling, even quadrupling on some instruments – crested into a roar. The sudden loss of a young musician had turned into a joyful celebration of his too-short life. And there would be many more bittersweet tributes and processions to follow. When the parade reached Tuba Fats Square, I spotted Butterfly, who told me that there would be a second line for Trumpet Black every night until his burial. "Day three!" I overheard one dancer exclaim to another after the parade resumed, marking the third day of second lines since Trumpet Black's death. He added that they had to keep their energy up. A halfhearted procession is no way to honor the deceased, no matter how many memorial parades have preceded it.

The second line arrived at the Ooh Poo Pah Doo Bar, Trumpet Black's former home base and a venue I had only recently heard about, and several of the musicians filed in. Outside the bar was a small crowd that included master drummer Herlin Riley. I would not have been

surprised in the least if still more notable musicians came to the bar to pay tribute later that evening, but I refrained from entering the bar as I thought it might be some sort of family affair. I was still trying to navigate the boundaries between public and private spheres in second line culture, which turned out to be far looser and more permeable than in the culture I knew. The parade resumed shortly thereafter, dispersing after a few more blocks outside the Carver Theater. Though I could have stuck around to see how the rest of the evening unfolded, I ultimately decided to head home.

My hesitation to enter the Ooh Poo Pah Doo bar that evening in Treme points up a self-imposed problem that I have repeatedly run up against in my fieldwork, not just through the course of this project but in previous ethnographic endeavors as well. I have never been a particularly assertive or pushy personality, and when I'm in new social situations or around new people I worry more than is probably necessary about appearing rude or intrusive. In trying to gain entry into second line culture, there were the additional complicating factors of race and class privilege. What does it mean for a white man from an upper-middle-class background in the Northeast to be studying and writing about a musical tradition that originated with, and is rightfully claimed by, a marginalized black working class in a city where the? How does one approach this culture and document it – after two or three years' observation, without in some way exploiting it or at least implicitly asserting some sort of ownership over it? Making inroads into this cultural context was in some respects a balancing act; as I learned to let go of my self-consciousness and reservations, and to not let race and class-based guilt hold me back from approaching people, I also needed to maintain constant awareness of that privilege. That meant listening to people, contributing money at fundraisers and volunteering at events, and being receptive to interviewees' concerns. I still don't feel like I've done much of anything to really

help the community beyond supporting local businesses and occasionally informing friends about local events. But in my conscientious attempts not to intrude and “be a vulture,” as I phrased it to my friend and fellow enthusiastic (white) outsider Mike Mastrogiovani, I may have occasionally missed opportunities to really connect with people and see the inner workings of second line culture. When I did finally muster up the nerve to attend funeral services and wakes where I wasn’t actually invited, I was never treated as an outsider or intruder.

Later in the evening of May 6, I went to TBC’s regular Wednesday night show. “Rest in peace, Trumpet Black,” shouted DJ Action Jackson as the band started their set. TBC opened with “Over in the Glory Land,” a spiritual that is traditionally played at jazz funerals and second lines in honor of someone who has just passed away. The song is not a dirge like “Just a Closer Walk With Thee,” but a rousing, uptempo number; like “I’ll Fly Away,” “Over in the Glory Land” is meant to lead the bereaved from lamentation to a celebration of the deceased’s life and of the spirit’s safe passage into the afterworld.

I returned to Treme for another second line in honor of Trumpet Black two days later. Walking through the neighborhood, I encountered a man on a bicycle with a cloudy eye and bad teeth who was wearing a Trilby hat, an off-white jacket and pants, and a washboard. He introduced himself as “Windex Pete.” After learning that I was going to the Trumpet Black second line, he offered some of his own thoughts about the young trumpeter’s death. Pete, who I later learned had acquired a reputation as something of a local treasure, turned out to be a fount of stories: his long narrative touched on his history with the Andrews and Hill families, his early years as a washboard player with a ragtag band called the Can’t Hardly Play Boys, and a chance encounter a couple of years back with Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg, who Pete claimed preferred to be called “Zucky.” I thought I remembered seeing Windex Pete a couple of times at

the Candlelight Lounge – one of the longest-standing neighborhood bars in Treme, situated right next to Tuba Fats Square – during my preliminary fieldwork in 2013, but after our conversation this Friday evening in May I began to spot him everywhere. He was never without his washboard.

A few different people had told me that the second line was supposed to start shortly after 5 PM, but since this was New Orleans it was almost 7 before the parade got underway. Standing outside the Carver Theater in Treme as the brass band awaited an absent bass drummer, I was approached by a homeless man who asked me to buy a beer for him and his friend. Somehow, I mistakenly thought that the man was offering to buy *me* a beer, and though I ended up buying beers for both in the end, the interaction only made me feel more like a parasite and an interloper. I needn't have worried; shortly thereafter the parade was underway. Opening with the traditional gospel tune "Lord, Lord, Lord," the band then launched into a medley of spirituals both sacred and secular that spanned over half a century: Puff Daddy's "I'll Be Missing You," a tribute to slain rapper the Notorious B.I.G. that hit #1 on the U.S. pop charts in 1997, led into "I'll Fly Away" (written in 1929), which in turn gave way to Ben E. King's "Stand By Me" (a #4 hit in 1961 and one of the most enduring songs in American pop history). The songs were linked not just through similar chord progressions (the original recording of "I'll Be Missing You" even quotes a portion of "I'll Fly Away") and the common theme of endurance through suffering and grief, but by the rolling cross-rhythms and the cascading horn riffs through which New Orleans brass bands lay claim to the panorama of American musical history – a river of song with the Crescent City as both source and tributary. Confounding the real or perceived boundaries between the sacred and secular, between different time periods and styles, through such medleys

is standard in brass band performances. And the band later touched on another local tributary with a rendition of the Mardi Gras Indian standard “Ooh Na Nay.”

Starting with the usual smattering of local musicians and vendors alongside the few neighborhood folks who turn out for every parade, the procession made its first stop a few blocks from the Carver outside Travis Hill’s childhood home. By the time it started up again and headed towards Claiborne, the crowd had already grown much larger than what I’d seen on Wednesday – probably because it was the start of the weekend. I spotted Doocy, one of the Baby Dolls among others. At first only a few people in the procession were dancing. Then we hit Claiborne, and instead of crossing to the other side of the overpass, the second line proceeded along the thoroughfare under the bridge. As the horns and drums echoed off the concrete, I looked around and saw that the crowd had mushroomed in size. There were at least 100, maybe 150 people under that bridge, as many as you see at some Sunday second lines. Whistles and cowbells joined the torrent of sound, while at the head of the procession strode Roderick “Scubble” Davis and Craig Adams, two of the finest young second liners in the city, their arms outstretched towards the sky. Upon reaching the intersection of Claiborne and St. Bernard Avenue – where, due to a fork in the highway, the open concrete floor under the overpass reaches its widest point – the procession lingered for a few minutes. As the music reached a climax, two dance circles opened up on opposite sides of the thickening crowd, the best second liners jumping into the middle of each circle and strutting their stuff on the makeshift dancefloor. While the tubas held down a steady bassline, some of the horns continued to riff while others wailed and cried, trumpets and saxophones reaching into their highest registers and above. As if to emphasize the symbolic communion with the spirit world, several trumpeters pointed the bells of their instruments towards the sky. Meanwhile, the drums rolled and tumbled, with fills and off-beat accents

increasing with every measure. Finally the parade turned around and headed back down Claiborne towards Tuba Fats Square, where the music and dance continued as night fell.

The tributes continued with second lines through Treme every day and with a benefit concert, Trumpet Black Fest, on May 11<sup>th</sup>. In less than a week, the community had pulled together an all-star lineup of local musical luminaries, complete with food and drink vendors, an emcee and coverage from local radio station WWOZ. The event took place on a stage that was set up in the street next to the Ooh Poo Pah Doo bar, which had been Trumpet Black's home base as a performer as he staged his reemergence and rise through the local music scene over the past few years. Though dedicated specifically to Trumpet Black's memory, the festival also served as a celebration of the Treme neighborhood, the Andrews/Hill family, and the neighborhood bar the family had opened just two years earlier that was quickly emerging as a nexus of sorts for a tapestry of local musical traditions. Ooh Poo Pah Doo proprietors Judy Hill (Trumpet Black's aunt) and James Andrews (his cousin) literally occupied center stage intermittently throughout the evening, while the deceased trumpeter served as the spiritual locus. Of course, the festival also had the practical purpose of raising money to pay for the return of Trumpet Black's body to the United States – a lengthy and complicated process, as mentioned before, which would likely cost his family several thousand dollars – and to help defray the costs of his funeral service and burial. This was not a money gig for anyone – the festival was nominally free, with donations and proceeds from refreshment sales going to the family. The participation of bands with busy touring schedules like Rebirth and the Hot 8, then, gave some indication of just how much Travis Hill had meant to the local music community. Between performances, Action Jackson and members of Hill's family paid him tribute and emphasized the



importance of raising funds for his return to New Orleans, while a jar was passed through the crowd so that audience members could make additional donations.

The performances themselves were both broad-ranging in style and emblematic of the communal spirit that still animates the New Orleans musical scene. As I would soon learn, the Ooh Poo Pah Doo bar – while rooted in the midcentury rhythm-and-blues sound of performers like Fats Domino, Allen Toussaint, and Hill-Andrews family – has become something of a nexus for the kind of musical cross-pollination and inter-genre collaboration that I witnessed at the festival. The New Breed Brass Band opened the concert with Derrick “Kabuki” Shezbie from Rebirth sitting in on trumpet, while the Hot 8 were accompanied by Windex Pete and his washboard. Tributes to Trumpet Black didn’t come just in between songs and sets; invocations of the deceased trumpeter’s spirit were everywhere in the music, from shout-outs to spirituals to participatory chants. “Rest in peace, Trumpet Black,” called out trombonist Caleb Windsay at the start of the New Breed Brass Band’s opening set, while on “Ooh Na Nay” he exhorted us to put our hands up for the trumpeter as his bandmates raised their arms to the sky. As if summoned from the ether, Big Chief Monk Boudreaux and several fully-suited members of the Golden Eagles then stepped onstage to finish the Mardi Gras Indian standard.

The communal atmosphere of the concert was sustained throughout the next few hours as the Ooh Poo Pah Doo house band took the stage and backed a rotating lineup of local musicians, including Brother Tyrone, trumpeter Kid Merv, and zydeco musician Rockin’ Dopsie (whose explosive performance channeled James Brown). Closing out this portion of the concert was Cyril Neville, who launched into a series of Mardi Gras Indian songs with guitarist June Yamagachi and guests that included trumpeter Shamarr Allen, Monk Boudreaux, and Bo Dollis, Jr. of the Wild Magnolias. But the crowd erupted when Rebirth took the stage for a closing set.

Illustrating just why they remain the most popular and esteemed brass band in the city, Rebirth put the second line in the music like no other band on that stage. With Derrick Tabb's snare a burbling flurry of sixteenth notes alternating between the rim and the center of the drum, tattooing out a clave with a heavy emphasis on the "big four," founding brothers Keith and Phil Frazier held down the booming bass, and the horns weaved calisthenic sequences of riffs, building up and then stripping down to the rhythm instruments before launching into another run of riffs. During one of the rhythm breaks, trumpeter Chadrick Honore started a chant: "We gonna bring it down for Trumpet Black." All around me, the veteran, middle-aged second liners from the neighborhood – always the first to start dancing when a groove kicked into motion – began to break out loose-limbed moves.

At Louis Armstrong Park later that week, James Andrews paid tribute to Trumpet Black once again with his performance for the "Jazz in the Park" series, offering a brief verbal tribute to his cousin before the band joined him onstage and opening his set, like the TBC Brass Band a week earlier, with "I'll Fly Away." Trumpet Black's aunt Judy Hill, still in mourning, mustered up the strength to perform a rendition of the blues standard "Stagger Lee," which within a few months would become her signature song in shows at the Ooh Poo Pah Doo bar. A few hours later at Vaughan's Bar in the Bywater, Corey Henry and his Treme Funktet mourned their fallen bandmate with a dirge-like take on "Amazing Grace." Kabuki from Rebirth sat in on trumpet, just as he had with the New Breed Brass Band at the benefit concert a few days earlier. Picking up tempo immediately thereafter – just like when the body is "cut loose" at a second line – the band went into Hill's own "Trumpets Not Guns." For this and several other songs throughout the set, verses and instrumental sections were broken up by chants of "Trumpet Black," with Henry saying his name and the audience repeating it back to him. The call-and-response repetition of

Black's name calls to mind the African-derived principle of *Nommo*, which Molefi Asante describes as "the generative and productive power of the spoken word"; the late trumpeter's spirit emerged somewhere in the space between the call and the response. I witnessed Henry's group three more times over the next week, and throughout each performance the trombonist put the *Nommo* principle into full effect, conjuring the late musician through repetition of his name. At another benefit concert for Trumpet Black the following week, where an expanded lineup of the Funktet took the stage alongside the Wild Magnolias, James Andrews and the New Breed Brass Band, Henry invoked the trumpeter's name again and again in participatory chants. Overcome by the emotion and energy of the moment, he tore into one fierce trombone solo after the other before several Mardi Gras Indians took the stage. In another performance at Vaughan's, Henry initiated a chant of "Trumpet Black, Trumpet Black, who you rollin' with," and then, in the middle of the song, he called for a moment of silence.

Climaxing more than two weeks of musical eulogies for Travis Hill was a public memorial service and tribute concert held at the Carver Theater on May 22, four days after the trumpeter's body was finally returned to his family in New Orleans. Like Trumpet Black Fest a week and a half earlier, the concert doubled as a fundraiser for the family. More pertinently, it was an intensely public and communal outpouring of emotion. I wasn't used to this way of dealing with death and grief. I had brought along a friend who happened to be in town and had never witnessed a second line before. We arrived at the theater after dinner to find a crowd of hundreds waiting to get inside. Lit up prominently above the crowd was the theater's marquee, which read "TRUMPET BLACK 'OUR HERO.'"

At the back of the rather spartan auditorium, its black walls appropriate for the event, rose a small stage, and directly in front of it was Travis Hill's open casket, with white flowers

surrounding it, brightly colored portraits of Hill placed next to the casket and on both sides of the stage, and two life-sized cutouts of the musician, one next to the casket and the other on the right side of the stage. Judy Hill, who I'd never met before but would come to know over the next several months, personally thanked me and my friend for coming out and showing our support. The musicians who played the service, many of them relatives or former bandmates of Hill, were all dressed in white. Many audience members also wore white, as is customary at a New Orleans wake. While the New Breed Brass Band, the Stooges Brass Band, Cory Henry, Shamarr Allen and Troy "Trombone Shorty" Andrews all played and paid their respects, the proceedings were dominated by Hill's cousins James and Glen David Andrews. Over a rolling funk groove, Glen called out to neighborhoods both Uptown and Downtown, bringing the two halves of the city together in a communal celebration of life. Later, he brought the audience to life with the call-and-response of traditional gospel tunes like "Jesus on the Main Line." Several people in the crowd shook tambourines. Finally, Glen reminisced about his cousin, noting sorrowfully that he never would have imagined he'd be playing Travis Hill's wake, his voice began to break. "We didn't lose a trumpet player," he proclaimed, "Heaven gained a trumpet player." Perhaps the most powerful moment came at the end when James Andrews ordered the stage hands, "Take the ropes down – let everybody come touch the casket." As we filed through and many gave their blessings, Shamarr Allen's trumpet rang out with the melody of "Stand By Me." Then the band and audience filed out onto the street and danced a short second line for the trumpeter. As the crowd poured out onto Broad Street, bass drums thundered and the patter of dancing feet was accompanied by whistles, cowbells, and a thickening matrix of snares. Once we hit the Ooh Poo Pah Doo bar, YF Scubble and another dancer got up on top of a car and proceeded to buck jump in full view of the overflowing crowd. Scubble doffed his shirt.

The funeral and second line for Trumpet Black proceeded from the same venue on the following morning. My understanding was that the funeral service itself was limited to friends and family of Hill, though I may have misunderstood whatever message had come through; I later found that, in most cases, any admirer of a deceased New Orleans musician would be welcome to attend their funeral service regardless of whether the admirer knew the musician personally. Since I had never met Trumpet Black and was only vaguely aware of his existence before he passed, I assumed that it would be more respectful to the family if I did not attend the funeral. Though encouraged by the warmth of strangers at various memorial services over the next year, I still felt like attending the funeral of someone who didn't know me was crossing a line.

The crowd outside the Carver Theatre on the morning of May 23<sup>rd</sup> was teeming, again with many mourners dressed all in white. Other spectators wore their street clothes, their brightly colored t-shirts and hats forming a rainbow tapestry with the equally vibrant colors of the parasols scattered throughout the assembled mass. Standing on nearby street corners were many neighborhood folks waiting for the second line to begin. Though it was just 11:30 AM, a handful of street vendors was at the ready and some people were already drinking beers. At the sound of several whistles, the bereaved friends and family, all dressed in black, marched into the theater. With the assembled mass growing into few hundred, the crowd so dense that it completely choked off the intersection of Orleans Avenue and North Johnson Street for fifty yards in every direction, musicians began to assemble in front of the marquee, with the bells of several sousaphones poking above the heads of the crowd. Just after 1:00 PM, the other horn players lifted their instruments and rang out with the familiar minor-key refrain of "Trumpets Not Guns."

A little after noon, the mourners processed out of the theater and shortly thereafter the line assembled. Pallbearers parted the crowd and a black horse-drawn carriage pulled to the front of the line with Travis Hill's casket in tow. The band, which by now must have numbered well over twenty musicians, struck into "Just A Closer Walk With Thee" with the force of the floodwaters breaking the levees. I had heard the funeral standard dozens of times before, at clubs and passing by the cemeteries during Sunday parades, but never with such a depth of feeling – nor with such sheer physical power. The bass drums thundered on every downbeat and the snares played something in between a march beat and a blues shuffle; trumpets and saxophones followed the song's arcing melody and gave forth with cries and sighs. With so many drummers in the ensemble, the rhythmic density thickened with accents and rolls and the tempo inevitably began to accelerate. From the Carver Theater the parade progressed down Orleans Street and the band moved shifted gears into "I'll Fly Away," which is often the first uptempo number played at a funeral second line. This instant shift in mood and tempo, cutting the dirge portion of the parade down to just a few minutes, is standard in contemporary second lines in large part due to changes in the city's geography and demography. Most cemeteries within the New Orleans city limits have been full for decades, so because the burial almost always takes place outside the city, funeral parades in New Orleans and burial services are typically separate events. With the hearse and other vehicles carrying bereaved friends and family leaving the procession for the cemetery at some predetermined point, usually near a highway intersection just outside the neighborhood of the deceased, the parades tend to be a lot shorter today than they were in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and whether because of the increased presence of cultural outsiders or the quickening pace of life in general, second liners today often seem anxious to get to the fast part of the funeral procession. In the middle of "I'll Fly Away," the band made a right onto

Galvez and stopped outside Travis Hill's Treme home, where more cardboard cutouts of the trumpeter were held aloft near the front stoop. For the first time I noticed members of the Treme Sidewalk Steppers Social Aid and Pleasure Club among the crowd, many of them spectacularly suited in pink and yellow suits.<sup>161</sup> Umbrellas, baskets and other assorted ornaments on poles, all elaborately decorated, were hoisted throughout the crowd.



Figure 4-1: Travis "Trumpet Black" Hill's funeral second line reaches the newly-painted Trumpet Black mural, May 23, 2015. Photo by author.

As the parade moved towards the Claiborne overpass, the mood went from celebratory to near-ecstatic, as if the crowd were possessed by the spirit of Travis Hill himself. The “Joe Avery” horn call issued forth as we passed under the bridge, and as the crowd shouted a response to each iteration of the call, trumpets and trombones squalled and wailed through the breaks. The parade rolled onward past Tuba Fats Square, with dancers fanning out onto the lawn next to the

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<sup>161</sup> The outfits designed and worn by Social Aid and Pleasure Club members, it should be noted, are often nearly as ornate and vivid as the suits sewn each year by the Mardi Gras Indians.

Treme Center while the snares pirouetted and the horns weaved in and out of the driving riff of the Dirty Dozen's "My Feet Can't Fail Me Now." The procession doubled back towards the Claiborne overpass, this time pushing downtown towards a tiny park next to an apartment complex just before Treme gives way to the Seventh Ward. There, beneath the concrete of the on-ramp to the I-10 highway, a two-story, twenty-foot-wide wooden canvas stood between two lengths of iron fence that separated the apartments from the park. Freshly painted on the canvas was an enormous mural depicting Trumpet Black, wearing sunglasses and smiling towards the sky with his horn, its bell also pointed up towards the heavens, clasped against his chest. The trumpeter's likeness, painted in light and dark shades of blue, was set off by a striking orange background and a yellow sun framing his head like a halo. As the procession approached the mural, a suited member of the Dumaine Street Gang and a few other folks – apparently colleagues or family members of Hill – strode up to the painting and set themselves in front of it as if standing guard. Others arriving ahead of the crowd danced or snapped photos of the mural. When the band finally reached the park, it shifted back to a slower tempo for "It's So Hard to Say Goodbye to Yesterday." Originally appearing in the 1975 film *Cooley High*, the song was most famously covered by vocal group Boyz II Men in 1991, and has since become a staple of black funerals. In the hands of the ad-hoc brass band assembled for Travis Hill's funeral, "It's So Hard" became a wailing midtempo lament, with trumpets and trombones bawling as the snares made time stop with triplet fills. In the midst of this outpouring came one of the most stunning and heart-rending displays I witnessed during my time in New Orleans. The pallbearers stepped forward and brought the casket up to their shoulders, and the band launched again into "Trumpets Not Guns," this time with all the cathartic power they had marshaled on "Just a Closer Walk With Thee" at the start of the parade. With the peals of trumpets and rolls of snares



now echoing off the surrounding concrete, doubling or tripling the sound of the near-orchestra-sized band into a thunderous barrage, the pallbearers pushed toward the mural and raised the casket up towards the sky. I never met Trumpet Black in my life, but I was overwhelmed by the pathos of the moment. One of the pallbearers climbed up on top of the casket and raised his arms, and the rattling of nearby tambourines could be heard. The final union of Travis Hill's soul – captured in a flash of sunlight on the canvas – and his physical body was fleeting, as the pallbearers once again lowered the casket.

After the second line dispersed, I entered the Ooh Poo Pah Doo bar for the first time. The inside of the bar had been made into what I can only describe as a shrine to Trumpet Black, with one of the cardboard cutouts from the memorial service leaned up against a mirror behind the small stage and a vivid painting of the trumpeter leaned against the adjoining wall, along with. Adorning the painting were hundreds of signatures and condolence messages (In a few months, the “shrine” would be moved to an area towards the back of the bar where musicians, relatives of the Hill family and older patrons often sat on two well-worn couches). Seated inside the bar, a modest space about 40 feet long by 20 feet wide, were an assortment of musicians, family members and other locals. A small blues combo played while I spoke to some of the regulars, several of whom played sporadically in the Ooh Poo Pah Doo's house band. One, Ernest “Box” Fontenot, had been Fats Domino's touring drummer for twenty years before the rock and roll great retired in the 1980s. Fontenot told me that he played a regular Sunday gig on Bourbon Street as part of a trio led by guitarist Guitar Slim, Jr. Another local musician, the bass player in a Cajun band, remarked that he'd seen me all around town recently. Although it was no later than 4 PM, I was starting to get drunk, so after we struck up a conversation I headed over with him to the Quarter and watched his band play a set. I have never been much of a fan of Cajun music or

zydeco despite my best efforts at appreciating the two related styles, but on this Saturday afternoon I found myself scraping a washboard to the sound of his band in a grimy Bourbon Street bar. The following day, I ventured to Prohibition, another tourist bar in the French Quarter, to catch Guitar Slim, Jr.'s trio on Fontenot's suggestion.

***“STILL ON THE MAP”: Second Lining on the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Katrina***

As a forum for memorializing both individual (as in funeral second lines like that of Trumpet Black) and communal histories, the second line is a powerful tool in responding to collective trauma. Three months after the events honoring Travis Hill, a concatenation of events honoring the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Hurricane Katrina culminated in two large Sunday second lines. Dancing along the fault lines of life and death and invoking both triumph and tragedy while passing slowly by cemeteries before ramping up the tempo to hit the bar, the parade's uniquely New Orleanian ambivalence was well suited to the sorts of upheavals that had affected the members of the second line community, displacements and deaths alongside small victories, these anniversary parades communicated neither the complaisant “resilience” touted by city officials nor the clear-cut resistance activists and progressives both carpetbagging and homegrown might have hoped for. What they mourned – or most of it anyway – was obvious to all; what they celebrated was the mere fact of survival.

I took the bus to get to the Lower Ninth Ward on the morning of August 29<sup>th</sup>, though it was about a 10 minute walk from where the bus dropped us off to the site of the levee breach where the parade would begin. The section of Galvez Street leading to the rebuilt embankment provided a surreal before-and-after panorama, still-abandoned shotgun houses and overgrown lots giving way to a row of neatly kept, garishly out-of-place contemporary homes and back

again to the ruins of the flood's wake before hitting the concrete barrier. Gathered at the edge of the levee itself were almost as many photographers as spectators and community members. The parade would begin as something like a protest march, with an offering to the storm's victims setting a tone of solemn anger. Members of the Ashe Cultural Arts Center, one of the few local nonprofits directly promoting Afrocentric history and black diaspora consciousness through its community programs in this most African of American cities, were on hand to guide the ceremony and provide the beat of the march on a variety of percussion instruments. For a while the crowd, which was thoroughly mixed in both age and ethnicity, milled about, and then the first drums sounded. A slightly modified version of "Indian Red," the Mardi Gras Indian devotional that begins and ends every Indian practice, opened the ceremony. The song served to center the event in historical traditions that remain dear to the neighborhood: the Ninth Ward is home to several Indian gangs, and where second lines and funky brass bands have spread to upscale precincts throughout the city and indeed throughout the world, the Mardi Gras Indian culture remains defiantly black, working class, and local despite outsiders' continued efforts to profit off of its painstakingly crafted suits. After the singing of a spiritual and a short prayer, the eulogist had pointed words for city officials: "We know they blew the levees to try and wash away the African people from downtown." His comments were in line with the increasingly accepted contention that the flood and its catastrophic aftermath were planned – or what Rachel Carrico terms a "choreographed disaster." Rapper and community activist Mia X lamented the still-lingering psychological effects of that disaster on displaced and impoverished youth, noting that "Our children are hurting more than anybody...because they were in the water with dead bodies and dead animals...and no one did anything for their mental health." Excoriating the negligence of elected officials and health professionals that had further broken the city's hardest-

hit communities, she invoked an expression that has been uttered by civil rights leaders for a century: “Either we are at the table or we are on the menu.” With that, the Ashe Cultural Heritage Foundation’s drummers struck up the Mardi Gras Indian *cinquillo* beat, and Yellow Pocahontas flag boy Belden “Noonie” Batiste led a modified version of the Indian song “Shallow Water Oh Mama.” The titular refrain now became “Lower Ninth Still Matters,” signifying upon and underscoring the event’s spiritual links to the then-growing Black Lives Matter movement. The song’s call-and-response radiated through the crowd, which took to the streets to begin the two-mile march to Hunters Field in the Seventh Ward. I stopped to film a short iPhone video about ten minutes later; walking past the hollowed-out, graffiti-tagged shells of storm-ravaged homes still blighting dozens of blocks, marchers held up placards and bore t-shirts outlining a variety of linked causes: “Take down Robert E. Lee!! And all symbols of white supremacy!!” “BA [Black Africa?] Speaks: Revolution! Nothing Less!” “Save our coast.” “Rebel. Resist. Renew.” Two marchers held a large banner displacing the faces of African Americans killed by police and the slogan “Stop Murder by Police” with the hashtag #RiseUpOctober.

The recent wave of protests against anti-black police violence and terror carried special relevance in a second line through the Lower Ninth Ward; victims of police killings over the previous decade had included both members of the brass bands that play second lines and residents of the Lower Ninth Ward fleeing the storm. On August 3, 2004, Hot 8 Brass Band trumpeter “Shotgun” Joe Williams was cornered by police officers after getting into his truck outside of a convenience store in the Treme neighborhood. When he attempted to exit the vehicle, arms raised in surrender, the officers riddled his body with bullets and he was killed instantly. Williams was unarmed. Exactly thirteen months later, and a week after Hurricane Katrina touched down in the city and unleashed the floodwaters of the Mississippi, eight black

residents of New Orleans stranded after the storm attempted to cross the Danziger Bridge to get groceries when, without warning, they were fired upon by a group of police officers in plainclothes. Two of the civilians were killed – both still in their teens, one of them mentally handicapped – and four others were severely injured. The officers who were involved in the incident, along with other members of the New Orleans Police Department, engaged in a cover-up that initially stymied the investigation. When investigators uncovered detailed evidence implicating several officers in the shooting and the cover-up, the officers involved in the shooting were indicted for murder and attempted murder.

After maybe 30 minutes, the parade crossed the Claiborne Avenue Bridge, which connects the Lower and Upper Ninth Ward and is downstream from the Danziger Bridge on the Industrial Canal. The parade paused briefly as the bands amassed to join the procession, and I took the occasion to look around. The atmosphere was strange: many participants met up with friends and family and conversed, but the mood I read on peoples' faces was tentative and uncertain; we didn't know whether to laugh or cry, and moreover I and the other newcomers to the city and to this parade, an annual event since 2006, probably didn't know how we were *supposed* to act and react. New Orleanians are enculturated in just these sorts of ambiguous encounters and rituals, and embrace the ambiguity with relish; it is the animating principle of the Carnavalesque spirit that pervades every aspect of the city's cultural life. But while jazz funerals allow for the simultaneous mourning of life lost and celebration of the spirit living on – and that ambivalence at the crossroads of life and death lives on in the Sunday second lines, where tributes to the deceased are built not just into routes that routinely pass cemeteries but into eulogies that are sown into club members' clothing and displayed on floats, and where music memorializes overtly and covertly, in songs sacred and secular, uptempo and downtempo –

today's bittersweet pangs were both more encompassing and somehow more personal. Whole neighborhoods forever scarred by the storm but still pushing and struggling forward, their remaining denizens crying "we exist" – this was their joy and their pain.



Figure 4-2: Katrina 10th Memorial Second Line, August 29, 2015. Photo by author.

Those of us not directly affected by the failure of the levees could not experience this event in the same way, nor should we have expected to. Already during this brief stop, however, a couple of men in casual dress were dancing on the neutral ground (the local term for the elevated patch of grass running down the middle of city streets that is typically referred to in other parts of the country as a “median”) to the warm-up beats of the band’s rhythm section, one of them waving his cap around and shouting exhortations. It was around this point, in fact, after we’d crossed the bridge out of a storied and much-lamented black neighborhood, that a lot of black locals showed up and the parade actually seemed to become a community affair. I didn’t interview participants to see who had actually been through the storm, but much of the crowd at

the markedly more somber start of the parade was young and white, many of them probably recent migrants to the city like me. Within a block of the bridge crossing, the parade had become an exuberant and decidedly black event. Among the many placards hoisted by marchers, the most striking were several that read “STILL ON THE MAP,” kicking home the overarching message and animating spirit of the event.

As the parade surged onward the familiar pattern of joy bursting forth from sorrow asserted itself. Two Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs from the Ninth Ward, the Original CTC (Cross the Canal) Steppers and the Nine Times, took to the center of the procession as the band thundered forth. Both clubs had children’s divisions that were prominently featured in the parade. Many of these youths exuberantly laying claim to the city’s streets had not yet been born when the levees broke. But the horizontal crossroads of the asphalt surface wasn’t the only axis on which dancers played and asserted their presence; this parade also made use of vertical space like no other second line I’ve witnessed before or since. With each successive parade stop, dancers found higher and higher landmarks to scale. Half a mile down the road from the bridge crossing, the CTC’s banner carrier, several junior members of the club, and two of the city’s best young dancers – Roderick “Scubble” Davis of the Sudan Social Aid and Pleasure Club and Craig Adams – ascended and fanned out across the steps to Arise Academy, one of the many charter schools to open in the city after the public school system was discontinued in the aftermath of Katrina. Formerly Frederick Douglass High School, the building looked newly renovated, though the money spent on cosmetics might have better been used elsewhere; my cursory research indicates that it’s one of the poorest-performing schools in the city. But the CTC steppers rose up, positioning themselves atop the railings and above the grounds of a monument to neoliberal urban policy. While the dancers raised their arms to the sky, the clarion call of the “Trumpets

Not Guns” horn riff gave way to a percussive breakdown before TBC Brass Band drummer Glen Finnister Andrews pushed the tempo into overdrive for a rendition of the Dirty Dozen’s “Blackbird Special.” The crowd responded to this sudden acceleration by literally jumping up and down, waving handkerchiefs, shouting and whistling their approval.

A few more blocks down the street, another dancer extended the vertical space of the parade 10 feet further towards the sky by summiting a 20-foot cantilever railroad crossing. Finally, with the parade reaching its final stop underneath the I-10 overpass at the intersection of Claiborne and St. Bernard Avenue, a dancer provided the parade’s literal apex by summiting the billboard atop the Circle Foods store. This billboard is the only vantage point in a several block radius from which one can look *down* on the overpass rather than up at it; as with summiting the steps of Arise Academy, the gesture served to place the dancer above the imposing structures of urban renewal and the race- and class-based systems of oppression they often reinforce. Underneath the overpass, another summit was reached while the band, the dancers and the massed crowd drove the parade into an extended climax.





Figure 4-3: Dancers summit a moving van under the bridge, Katrina 10th Memorial Second Line, August 29, 2015. Photo by author.

As the sound of the TBC and Hot 8 brass bands bounced off the surrounding concrete, Scubble, Craig Adams and several other buck jumping youths climbed on top of a Hertz moving truck, creating an impromptu stage on a roof that couldn't have been more than 10 by 15 feet. As more and more dancers climbed on top of the truck, all somehow finding space to execute fast and fluid footwork, I became more and more fearful that the roof would collapse and someone would get hurt. But it never happened; buoyed by the crowd's enthusiasm and the electricity of the moment, Scubble, Adams and the other dancers seemed to defy gravity.

Over and over during the rally and concert that followed, performers and speakers from the community and from nationwide activist groups stressed the importance of black unity and the need for African Americans to take up their own fight. The common theme of in-group solidarity emerged not just from calls for intra-ethnic organization but from evocations of home

and common customs in the city's African American community, the ineffable force that drew more fortunate evacuees back to New Orleans in the months and years after the storm. The concert opened with Rebirth playing a rendition of "It's So Hard to Say Goodbye to Yesterday," the same modern-day black funeral standard that had soundtracked the "cutting the body loose" portion of Trumpet Black's funeral procession a few months earlier. Other performers invoked home through shout-outs to specific neighborhoods both Uptown and Downtown.

After about an hour at the rally I needed a respite from the heat, so I left and trudged over to a nearby café in Tréme. There would be an even larger parade beginning a few blocks over at 5 PM. Culminating a week or two of hand-wringing debate, mourning and defiant celebration at community forums, lectures, film screenings, conferences, concerts and charity events across the city, the "Katrina 10" second line – as it was called – would find sustenance in the call-and-response of drums, horns and bodies in motion and in the creative struggle of getting over, just like always. Each stop in the parade was fraught with historical significance, either as an important site in the aftermath of the storm or in the broader history of black New Orleans. The event began as two separate parades, one originating uptown and one kicking off downtown, which would join near Canal Street, the historic dividing line between the historically black/Protestant (uptown) and Creole/Catholic (downtown) halves of the city. The downtown parade ran from Congo Square, the mythic birthplace of African American culture in New Orleans; ironically, the restoration of the square and the development of the surrounding Armstrong Park resulted in the dislocation of many New Orleans families of color and the partial destruction of the historically black and Creole Treme neighborhood, with eight blocks of houses leveled to make way for the new park in the 1960s. The uptown parade began from the former Booker T. Washington High School, a predominantly black school in the Central City

neighborhood that closed its doors after Katrina battered the building. Like most schools in the city's black neighborhoods, Booker T. Washington figured prominently in the cultural memory of the surrounding community and was a major source of identity and pride for its alumni. But like Congo Square in the 1970s, the school grounds are now at the center of a controversial urban renewal project. Booker T. Washington was originally built on the site a former toxic waste dump, and now the city plans to build a new school in the same location. Citing safety concerns and the city's long, shameful history of building black schools and homes on contaminated sites (a history mirrored by structurally racist building policies in cities across the country), residents and community activists have mounted protests even as the new school officially broke ground in late 2016. Together, Booker T. Washington School and Louis Armstrong Park symbolize the seemingly contradictory impulses and effects that have been wrapped up together in so many of the city's revitalization projects since the mid-twentieth century: cultural preservation and racialized socioeconomic marginalization, community empowerment and de facto segregation, cultural sustenance and displacement.

Protected by a large police escort and supported by some of the same businesses and civic leaders complicit in the "enforced displacement" of so many of the city's black poor after Katrina, the evening second line embodied many of these same contradictions. I joined the parade outside Congo Square, where it came together less like the ordered procession of the morning but more in the apparently haphazard fashion of a typical Sunday second line. With its late-afternoon start time, there was no somber prelude to the revelry of this second Sunday procession; dancers set to hopping and buck-jumping almost as soon as it kicked off. As the parade crossed Canal Street into the Central Business District, the Stooges Brass Band launched into a fiery rendition of the O'Jays' classic 1972 single "Back Stabbers." Atop skittering snares

and booming bass drums, the band and many in the surrounding crowd sang the chorus: “They smile in your face/All they want to do is take your place/The backstabbers.” What did it mean? Was it a subversive jab at gentrifiers who took the place of many musicians and their families in the city’s historically black neighborhoods – many of the same young white folks marching in today’s parade – in the wake of the flood? Was it a shot at the underhanded practices of civic and business leaders who paid lip service to the arts and culture while implementing policies that made it ever more difficult for displaced artists and musicians to return to the city? Or was it simply a catchy song with a good beat? Whatever the intended message – if in fact the band intended to convey a message at all through their choice of material – the song perfectly captured the still-unresolved tensions and quandaries that still boiled underneath the city’s libertine façade in 2015.

The parade route through the Central Business District provided a glimpse of the mixed fortunes of the post-disaster city. Before joining with the uptown procession, the parade wound through the BioDistrict, the 1500-acre site of a massive and ongoing economic development project. With the influx of federal recovery funds that followed the storm, the city saw a boom in the healthcare and bioscience industries, although the windfall in jobs and the local economy that resulted – and kept the city solvent while most of the country was weathering a major recession – ended up mostly benefitting those who were the least vulnerable after the disaster. Few new jobs have gone to the residents of the hardest-hit neighborhoods, the very same people who sustain the city’s cultural life and continue to make it a major tourist destination. So it made sense that a procession representing populations and customs that had literally been pushed to the margins of the cityscape by the “choreographed disaster” of the storm and by neoliberal urban development policies – with the sprawling new glass and concrete edifices of the BioDistrict embodying the

latter – would rally outside the crumbling façade of a now-shuttered public hospital, one of the last vestiges of a bygone civic sphere. The oldest free hospital in the city and once the second-largest in the entire country, Charity Hospital served some two-thirds of the city’s uninsured population before Katrina, who were disproportionately poor and black. Despite the heroic efforts of hospital personnel to keep stranded patients alive and safe after the building was flooded and damaged during the storm, and an equally admirable volunteer effort to get the hospital back in working condition in the first months of the city’s recovery, the state bowed to pressure from LSU – who wanted to move on longstanding plans to build an expensive new facility outside of the downtown core – and closed Charity Hospital permanently.

It was outside Charity Hospital that the Uptown and Downtown parades converged, and from there an expanded cavalry of natives and recent arrivals, the displaced, the newly returned and the gentrifiers alike, rolled toward the Louisiana Superdome. 10 years before, the arena had been converted into an emergency shelter for stranded New Orleans residents immediately following the storm. With vital supplies and rations running low as tens of thousands huddled inside, the Superdome became the site of another humanitarian crisis within just a few days. But today the plaza outside the arena would play host to a massive block party and a joyous affirmation of cultural survival. I took a short video of the procession as it pushed westward on Loyola Avenue towards the Superdome. In it, one can glimpse a small group of Mardi Gras Indians, three of them in their full feathered suits, striding along to the accompanying rhythms of a marching percussion section. The insistent *cinquillo* rhythms of the Indians quickly give way to the loose-limbed, displaced clave of the Hot 8 Brass Band as several aging dancers step and swivel their hips between the swinging beats. Another brass band – the Stooges – would bring up the rear of the procession. After 10 blocks or so we reached the Superdome; an underground

street tunnel connected the plaza to the main thoroughfare and provided the space for an under-  
the-bridge style climax, the “Joe Avery” horn call prompting the massive crowd’s shouted  
response and the dancers seeming to defy the force of gravity with daringly wide-legged moves.  
But it turned out that this was just the prelude to the parade’s actual climax.



Figure 4-4: "Battle of the bands," Katrina 10th Memorial Second Line, August 29, 2015. Photo by author.

What happened next was unlike anything I’d seen at a second line before or since. As the  
Stooges and Hot 8 Brass Bands approached the center of the plaza that separated the Superdome  
from the more recently completed Smoothie King Center, the tempo of the underlying beat  
continued to increase. The Stooges, their numbers augmented by several journeyman players  
from the local brass scene, then split into two ad-hoc ensembles and stood facing each other in  
the middle of a circle that opened up in the crowd. For the next twenty minutes, the two  
makeshift bands challenged each other, a horn riff from one answered by an elaboration on the  
same figure from the other, one beat answered by a trickier rhythm from the opposing drummer,

and so on, while the dancers got down and the crowd shouted its approval. Here, where the waters of the Mississippi had threatened to wash away one of the great forges of American culture, sounded the voice of a people that would not be silenced and a tradition that would not be erased. The physical limitations imposed on that voice, and the structural violence with which it continued to be countered by those in power were made vivid just a few minutes later: as the parade exited the plaza and pushed towards the I-10 overpass, a police drone descended from overhead, hovering eerily over the procession until we reached the bridge. The eyes of many participants were momentarily diverted towards this posthuman symbol of surveillance and containment, the instrument of a panoptic reality that so many second line participants reckon with on their home streets every day. Within about 10 minutes, however, the driving rhythms of the brass band and the dance steps – wide-legged movements that seemed to take the whole world in their embrace – won back the attention of the crowd. A decade of post-disaster urban renewal, much of it covertly aimed at making poor people of color in New Orleans invisible, could not make a proudly black and working-class tradition disappear. Today as on dozens of Sundays a year for over a century, the second line just kept rolling forward.

## Chapter 5: Second Line Culture Beyond the Parades

Though the parade itself remains the most important performative context where second line culture flourishes, there are a multitude of other spaces, social formations and institutions where second liners learn the tradition, hone their performance skills, and respond to the challenges of the present moment through the same sorts of performative exchanges that characterize the Sunday parades. Drawing primarily from my own ethnographic fieldwork, I look herein at four secondary contexts – the first two of which are spaces for public performance, and the next two of which might be best described as enculturative institutions - where second line culture unfolds.

### *Club Shows*

While the second line is fundamentally an outdoor phenomenon, the city's best young brass bands – TBC, Da Truth, and the Original Pinettes in particular – are able to reproduce some of the carnivalesque, participatory, free-flowing atmosphere of the street parades indoors at their regular club gigs. Having experienced second line dancers and fellow musicians in the crowd helps tremendously in bringing the second line atmosphere to life. And while actual indoor parades – complete with grand marshals, handkerchiefs and umbrellas – are more common in tourist-oriented venues than in the backatown bars at the heart of the black neighborhoods, it is in these latter spaces that the rhythms, chants, social interactions and bodily grammar of the Sunday parade are most faithfully recreated. Rachel Carrico writes in her 2015 dissertation that these venues provide dancers with an opportunity to test out new moves. Similarly, club gigs give bands a space to work on their repertoire, to introduce new music and



test out new members. Beyond that, these shows are an arena where community members can publicize and learn about upcoming events and local issues, commemorate birthdays and memorialize recent deaths, and celebrate the past and present of a homegrown expressive tradition. They are contemporary manifestations of what Mark Anthony Neal calls the “black public sphere,” or [include quote explaining]. As such, these performances are as much of a key to understanding the dynamics of second line culture as the parade itself.

The greatest concentration of the neighborhood venues where brass bands play regularly is in the downtown neighborhoods of Treme and the Seventh Ward.<sup>162</sup> Interestingly, these historically black neighborhoods are at the core of the most rapidly gentrifying area of the city. As young white professionals move into the area in droves and replace working-class blacks forced to resettle in less-accessible areas like New Orleans East due to skyrocketing rents, the demographics of the crowds at second line bars have already started to shift. Perhaps because of their central location in the city (their proximity to the French Quarter and the Central Business District), the Ooh Poo Pah Doo Bar and the Candlelight Lounge attract a racially and generationally mixed clientele, with a rotating contingent of tourists – with a lot of vacationing Baby Boomers at the former and young Europeans on road trips at the latter – alongside the local regulars. Situated in now-trendy neighborhoods where gentrification is already almost complete, the Hi-Ho Lounge in Marigny and Vaughan’s Lounge in the Bywater (a once-impoverished neighborhood that sits directly across the Industrial Canal from the Lower Ninth Ward) host a panoply of acts and draw a predominantly young crowd of second liners and hipsters both black

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<sup>162</sup> The black neighborhoods of Central City, Gert Town, and Gentilly all have their fair share of neighborhood bars and clubs, some of which regularly feature blues and jazz combos, but appearances by second line style brass bands at these venues are infrequent.

and white. Some of these venues, like the Candlelight Lounge and Bullet's Sports Bar, keep regular hours and serve simply as bars when bands aren't playing.

The hottest brass-band show in the city, for devoted second-liners anyway, happens every Wednesday night at Celebration Hall, a nondescript building half a block away from the Claiborne Avenue overpass.<sup>163</sup> It is here that the To Be Continued Brass Band has played weekly for over a decade, attracting a loyal crowd that has remained remarkably consistent over the three years I have attended shows. With most of the city's best second line dancers, assorted Social Aid and Pleasure Club Members and not a few musicians from brass bands like Rebirth, the Stooges and Da Truth regularly in attendance, TBC's show is something of an unofficial weekly social for the New Orleans second line community. In fact, DJ Action Jackson, who serves as the emcee and spins bounce and R&B records between TBC's sets, likens the band's performances to an indoor second line.

The second line atmosphere at Celebration Hall is buffeted not just by television sets in the corners that play video of recent parades but by the venue's unusual lighting and floor plan. The building is a trapezoid, with a bar occupying the long wall and the stage in the center of the opposite and second-longest wall. The hall is about twice as wide as it is long – making it easier to watch the band from the sides than the back – with wood flooring around the perimeter and railings enclosing a tiled dance floor area. The stage itself is not a raised platform, but a simple enclosure set off from the dance floor by more railings. Chairs and tables line the perimeter and the edges of the dancefloor. The areas to the left and right of the dancefloor are dimly lit, and bright lights illuminate the center of the floor, but the stage itself is not lit at all. The effect is to

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<sup>163</sup> Or at least it did until January of 2017, when a fire broke out at Celebration Hall that severely damaged the building. As of this May, TBC is still playing regularly on Wednesday nights, but their venue has shifted to the Autocrat Social Aid and Pleasure Club a few doors down.

draw the eyes of the audience towards the dancers, who provide the visual component of the performance while TBC provides the soundtrack.

Like a lot of brass bands, TBC operates on “New Orleans Time” – a tongue-in-cheek term for the almost ritually later-than-advertised start times of concerts and other cultural events throughout the city. While some of the more traditionalist performers I interviewed decried habitually late musicians as unprofessional, the time lapse between the advertised set time and the time that the band actually takes the stage is accepted and understood as part of the culture among the younger wave of bands. When there’s only one band on the bill, starting later also allows the venue to sell more drinks, builds anticipation for the performance, and ensures that the band hits the stage with a full house. The crowd at Celebration Hall generally begins to trickle in after 9 PM; a \$3 special on mixed drinks ends at 11 and pulls in a substantial contingent well before TBC takes the stage. Outside, vendors fire up gas grills and begin to cook up oysters, hamburgers and chicken, much like the mobile cooks who line the streets at the stops in a Sunday parade. In the venue, Action Jackson begins spinning a mix of R&B and rap hits past and present, alternating nationwide hits with songs that have a local following (even with nationally popular artists, New Orleans audiences will often seize upon a song that’s a relative obscurity in other parts of the country and make it a party standard) and local R&B and bounce tracks. Around 10:30 PM, a substantial crowd will have gathered both outside and inside; typically the band starts to show up at this time, milling about outside with friends. In the venue, Jackson starts to mix in popular brass band recordings, sometimes including a song or two by TBC itself. In between songs, Jackson pumps the crowd up with slogans promoting the band, the venue, and the event: “TBC, Celebration Hall, every Wednesday night.” One recurring favorite is the rhetorical question, “When’s the last time you got some booty on a Wednesday night?” Often,

Jackson will announce upcoming second lines, TBC performances and other community events that week. If there is a second line coming up, there will usually be a representative from the sponsoring organization passing out fliers with the location, time and parade route. At 10:45, one of the bartenders announces last call for the drink special, though the traffic at the bar likely won't let up for the rest of the night. Sometime between 11 and 11:30, Jackson announces the band and TBC hits the stage.

There is no such thing as a typical TBC setlist: the band draws from a large repertoire of contemporary brass band standards, originals and arrangements of popular songs. Where road veterans like Rebirth tend to designate a standard opening song and stick with it for months at a time, TBC has no set opener. Among the openers the band played in the three dozen or so times that I saw them at Celebration Hall over the course of 2013 were the following: "I Don't Fuck With You," a chant-based original; "Over in the Glory Land," which was dedicated to Trumpet Black in a performance two nights after his passing and was used to open the set again a month and a half later in tribute to a slain local police officer; a cover of the Staple Singers' "I'll Take You There"; a cover of the Jacksons' "Blame It On the Boogie"; "Get the Fuck Out the Way," an original; "Pop That Pussy," a cover of a song originally performed by Rebirth in collaboration with bounce artist Cheeky Blakk; and numerous songs I knew only by their riffs and vocal lines. TBC generally takes a few songs to build to the first of several climaxes in their set, igniting the fuse on the first drumbeat and then detonating the bomb once the remainder of the crowd lounging outside trickles in and hits the dance floor. Climaxes happen two or three times per set, the first typically occurring between 15 and 25 minutes through and the second shortly before the band takes a break. In between the two sets, Action Jackson spins an insistent mix of New Orleans bounce music, and while most of the audience trickles outside or towards the bar to

converse, a few dancers – usually women – stick around on the floor and execute some of the hip-thrusting moves associated with the city’s homegrown hip-hop variant. Just after the climax of their second set – usually the second to last number – the lights are flipped on, and the band essentially plays the audience back out to the street. While this is the only portion of the “indoor second line” that actually resembles a Sunday second line in shape and in movement, it is hardly a parade; generally the band will line the aisle that leads to the door, some members sitting in chairs and others standing, while audience members continue to dance in the aisle. Only now are both band and audience members fully illuminated, the barrier between them broken. This farewell portion sometimes lasts for one song, sometimes for two, depending upon how the band members are feeling on a given night. And with a last drumroll, sometime between 1 and 2 AM, the band calls it a night and the remaining audience members shuffle out of the bar.

Although TBC’s sets are more free-flowing and variable than any other brass band I regularly saw in New Orleans, there is an underlying and profound cohesion and discipline to their performances. There are no breaks between songs; each set typically functions as one long medley or groove, much like a DJ set at a dance club. Standard song form itself dissolves into an unspooling web of beats and chants and horn charts, all underlain by a polyrhythmic percussive backdrop centered on bass drummer Darren Towns’ variations of the three-beat tresillo rhythm. Introduced by the Rebirth Brass Band’s Keith Frazier, that booming tresillo bass-drum beat is the bedrock, the *roux* of the contemporary brass band sound in New Orleans. Towns’ personal wrinkle on the beat is an extra beat before the third beat of the tresillo (which falls on the fourth beat of the measure), which not only provides further accentuation to the “big four” but also gives the band’s signature groove an almost samba-like feel.

The Afro-Latin resonances of TBC's beat are further elaborated by ever-present cowbell patterns. Like many 21<sup>st</sup> century brass bands – and unlike most of their 1980s and 1990s forebears – TBC has a regular cowbell player. What sets them apart from their contemporaries is that TBC frequently employs a second cowbell in their club sets as well. Typically, one of the cowbells will lay out offset variations of a cinquillo pattern, with the other improvising a pattern of anywhere from five to nine beats around him. Often, audience members will improvise additional layers of counter-rhythm on bottles and cans. I will never forget one night when one regular near me in the crowd was beating out a loud, insistent rhythm on a beer bottle. On my opposite side was a sportscoat-wearing newcomer to the band's gigs, white like me and about my age, who yelled into my ear how annoying the ad-hoc stick-and-bottle percussion was. While I am sure I formed mistaken impressions of my own during my first TBC show, it struck me that the yuppie to my left had completely missed the spirit of the event. I had the benefit not only of forming a complete picture of TBC's performances over the course of several months but several years in an academic field that taught me to withhold snap judgments. I wasn't about to spoil the party further for a benighted observer, so I shrugged and murmured wordlessly in response. I never saw him again.

The band's horn riffs change on a dime, with the switches usually signaled by a roll of Glen Finnister Andrews' snare, alternating with spoken and sung chants in a bevy of different call and response formations; the tempo quickens and slackens in tandem with the fervor of the crowd and the limber movements of the dancers, and somehow none of the instruments ever falls out of step. Rounding each new curve in a tight-knit musical matrix, scaling successive peaks and valleys as the night wears on, the band moves as one voice. Yet all eyes are on the dancers: men and women, young and old, encompassing every size and shape, they keep on doing their

thing. Each shift in mood, tempo and movement depends upon the cooperation of everyone in the room; just as the entire band listens to Glen's snare cues in order to ratchet up or bring down the tempo, dancers keep an eye on one another for the moment when it's time to break out their best moves. An especially animated dancer will galvanize all of the second liners around him, unloosing their limbs as if by telekinesis.

Rachel Carrico has outlined a discursive strategy by which second line dancers deflect or downplay questions about the meaning of the dances, their specific and unifying formal characteristics, and the tremendous amount of practice and dedication required to execute these steps gracefully and with one's own unique personality. Carrico calls this discourse "Do Whatcha Wanna," and it effectively mystifies the second line dance style for observers and cultural outsiders. The gist is that second lining comes naturally to dancers, that it is in their blood, and – simultaneously, but with nobody I interviewed noting the apparent contradiction – that there is no right or wrong way to second line; anyone with two feet and two ears can do it. I heard variations of these sentiments from nearly all the dancers with whom I spoke, and yet for all the distinct styles of footwork on display at Celebration Hall, every dancer who took to the center of the floor clearly knew the "right" way to second line. While no two dancers moved exactly alike, every one of them had mastered the same underlying bodily attitude and the same basic vocabulary of movements: all the movement centered around the hips, knees and feet, with the upper half of the body employed only to accentuate the movements of the lower half; the feet stepped on the "one" and "three" of the beat, with the pelvis and knees accentuating the off-beats. Dancers typically adopt a wide-legged stance, bending the knees and directing most movements towards the ground. One middle-aged dancer's signature move was actually to drop to the ground and shake before lying completely motionless; it was almost a game to figure out

when he would leap back up again. At other times he would “hump” the floor, in effect miming an act of copulation with the earth. One can infer meaningful parallels between such gestures and the preoccupation with sexuality and the corporeal in the lyrics, and connect both to the sonic foregrounding of the bass frequencies introduced by Rebirth’s founding “bass brothers,” Keith and Philip Frazier. If anything, though, the youngest generation of second line dancers seem to orient their bodily movements away from the ground and towards the sky. A younger dancer, Roderick “YF Scubble” Davis, was known primarily for his virtuosic, fleet footwork; like most of the best young second liners, Davis displayed a lighter, faster style, centered around the feet rather than the hips and knees. In motion, Scubble looked like he was walking on air. The new style developed by Davis and others reflects not just the faster tempo of the contemporary second-line beat but the age of the participants, requiring an agility and flexibility that middle-aged participants simply don’t have. Maybe it is apropos, then, that TBC’s shows at Celebration Hall are a kind of proving ground for young second liners; even as they settle into their characteristic midtempo groove, the samba-like pulse of the cowbells and bass drums gives the rhythm a lift, an upward motion both against and in tandem with the rooted, earthward thrust of the downbeat. The rhythms of black New Orleans have always had this dynamic, pushing simultaneously at opposite ends of the vertical axis, ever since the “big four” gave a lift, a sense of suspension to the fourth beat of every other measure.

Once I had a month or two worth of experience second lining behind me, I was confident enough to dance at most brass band gigs after a couple of beers. But I wouldn’t have dared to take the center of the dance floor at a Wednesday night TBC show. From the first time I saw the band play at Celebration Hall in 2013, the immense skill of the dancers around me was apparent. There was nothing explicitly preventing me from dancing in the middle of the circle that opens



up on the floor once TBC hits the stage. It was an entirely tacit understanding that only the best dancers occupied that space. Not until a return trip to New Orleans in September 2016 did I dare to enter the circle, and then only at the urging of a few dancers around me. Notably, although it was a regular Wednesday night TBC show, it was not at the regular location, but at a rarely open venue a few blocks from Celebration Hall called the Hollywood Bar & Lounge. It's doubtful that anyone called me to the center of the circle because my footwork was exceptional; more likely, I was noticed because I'm a heavysset white man and I was dancing confidently. Even now, only a small handful of white people regularly attend TBC's Wednesday night shows, and fewer still bother to dance. What I've struggled with is that when I dance at such shows I am often accepted and even embraced by those who surround me, and I often feel like I haven't earned that acceptance. A young black man dancing at my skill level would barely elicit a glance from the crowd.

TBC's riffs and chants are a playground of intertextual reference, mixing and matching, quoting and transfiguring lines and hooks both original and borrowed from a vast library of past and present hits and standards the way an expert DJ sequences and cuts up records. Every professional brass band in New Orleans is well-versed in traditional repertoire, which for my purposes means the body of local brass band standards originating from before the era of rupture and revival in the 1970s. But except for spirituals, which the band usually played to commemorate the death of a beloved community member, TBC barely touches this older repertoire at Wednesday night shows. Instead, their sets are a mixture of originals (many of them yet to be commercially recorded and released), more recent brass band standards (originating from a variety of still-active local bands, but with Rebirth as the most common source), and covers of R&B, hip-hop and pop songs (mostly dating from the 1980s to the present, but with a

handful of throwbacks to 1960s and 1970s soul). The Original Pinettes, Da Truth, the New Breed and other young brass bands draw from essentially the same musical well and have similarly structured setlists. All draw from one another's songs and arrangements, interpreting and reconfiguring as a matter of course. Each band has its own stylistic trademarks, but all exemplify numerous shared features of the 21<sup>st</sup> century New Orleans brass band sound: a moderately fast tempo; an emphasis on riffs and beats over chord changes and the melodic development of conventional song form; multiple call-and-response exchanges between different instruments, between solo and group voices, and between band and audience; and vocal refrains and chants that draw heavily from hip-hop in their dialect, subject matter and musicological features. Where progenitors of the brass band/hip-hop fusion like Rebirth and the Soul Rebels melded the styles via collaboration with hip-hop artists (in the case of the former) or by incorporating drum machine beats (in the case of the latter), the current generation of brass bands come by the hybrid organically. Hip-hop is just one more element, one more source material integrated into the whole of the sound.

As an event frequented primarily by cultural insiders – not just the residents of the black, largely working-class neighborhoods that most of the city's major brass bands and benevolent societies call home, but active, committed participants in second line culture – TBC's Wednesday night gig at Celebration Hall is a contemporary manifestation of the Black public sphere. It is a space for the exchange of shared values, an arena in which to work out the immediate issues facing the community in the present. Not coincidentally, its physical location is about a mile outside of the main tourist areas of the French Quarter and Marigny – areas that the band was actually forced to abandon as victims in the continuing struggle over music performance in public space.

Like TBC at Celebration Hall, the all-female Original Pinettes Brass Band plays to a largely black local crowd during their Friday night gigs at Bullet's Sports Bar. The band sports a sound as distinct and dynamic as that of any of their rivals, and they have attracted nearly as much press attention – much of it from outside the city – as TBC. The Pinettes also have nearly a decade of experience on TBC – they were founded by band director Jeffrey Herbert at St. Mary's Academy, a Catholic high school for young women in New Orleans East, in 1991 – but despite their long history, the size of their local following doesn't approach that of TBC, never mind groups like the Hot 8 and Rebirth. In part this is because, for 15 years out of their quarter-century history, the Pinettes were only sporadically active; it was not until after Hurricane Katrina that the group began to play regular club shows and build a local reputation. But as women in a tradition that is almost exclusively male, they have long faced an uphill battle in winning respect from their fellow musicians and from the second line community. “It was all men, and I knew they wouldn't make room for us,” snare drummer and bandleader Christie Jourdain told me, “But we actually kicked that door down.” When I brought up the Pinettes in conversations with a couple of male brass band players, the reactions ranged from comments on their appearance to criticisms of their instrumental abilities; even in 2015, they didn't appear to take the Pinettes seriously as peers. The lack of women on the city's brass band scene is itself somewhat perplexing; almost every high school marching band I saw in New Orleans had at least a few female members, yet there wasn't one woman in any of the brass bands I saw in New Orleans aside from the Pinettes. It appears that most women who come up through scholastic marching band programs either abandon their instruments or decline to pursue professional musical careers. In the city's jazz scene, women are largely relegated to the roles of pianist or vocalist; the two or three female horn players I saw in traditional jazz bands, oddly enough, were all

Asian. Within the city's contemporary brass band scene, however, the Pinettes remain the only outlet for female marching band alumnae who want to go professional. And today the group includes members drawn from several local high schools, as Jourdain proudly noted to me.



*Figure 5-1: Original Pinettes Brass Band at Bullet's Sports Bar, August 14, 2015. Photo by author.*

Tucked away along a poorly-maintained stretch of A.P. Tureaud Avenue at the heart of the Seventh Ward, Bullet's is a community staple, an ordinary-looking dive bar that happens to host some of the best musical talent in the city. Outside the shows I attended, there would frequently be a vendor grilling hamburgers and steaks, or a food truck selling fried chicken and po-boys. New Orleans Saints memorabilia and photographs from the community line the walls; televisions in each corner play local and national sporting events; and the entire venue is lit a

distinctive crimson hue. As at Celebration Hall, the stage is not elevated above the audience; instead, it is a small area right next to the front door, so that if you come in after the band has started you are immediately treated to the blare of horns and drums. The bar is best known for regular Thursday night shows with trumpeter Kermit Ruffins and his Barbecue Swingers. By featuring a performance by Ruffins at Bullet's in its pilot episode, the HBO television series *Treme* brought both to national attention in 2010. And at some Friday night shows I attended, a small tourist contingent showed up alongside the locals. At a typical Bullet's show, though, the audience predominantly middle-aged and black, with a handful of young white fans among the crowd. The Pinettes start around 7:30 PM, and like TBC they generally play two sets with a break in between. During the break, the band goes outside to drink and converse, while inside a DJ plays local R&B favorites.

Most of the audience stays seated at Pinettes shows, at least for the band's first set. Usually at least a couple of audience members will be dancing by the end of the set, but given the median age of the crowd and the layout of the bar, where the only floor space is really between tables, there's never the full-on dance floor atmosphere one finds at TBC shows. Where TBC is all about the power of the collective, the Pinettes' instrumental work tends to highlight individual voices more, particularly the funky solos of saxophonist Natasha Harris. Snare drummer Christie Jourdain's easy rolling beats – the snares commonly switched off, with a low-pitched pair of swung eighth notes on the “two” of the bar answered by a higher, louder crack on the “four” – drive the whole enterprise forward, and Janine “Tuba Shorty” Waters' riffing bass lines anchor the numerous chanted exchanges between band and audience throughout each set. It is in these call-and-response chants and sung refrains – which are more numerous, more intricate and more tightly coordinated than those of any male brass band that I am aware of – that the

Pinettes both carve out their distinct identity and forge an expressive bond with their audience. Chants are generally led either by Harris or by trumpeter Veronique Dorsey and are distinctly community-directed: one regular refrain began with the call, “Who ready, who ready?” with the audience response, “We ready, Pinettes!” On another, “Ain’t No City Like the One I’m From,” Harris limns out the perks of life in the Crescent City, the crowd answering every line with a repetition of the titular refrain. The Pinettes’ contemporaries all utilize some form of call-and-response with the audience, but none make as overt a verbal, dialogical connection with the crowd. At a TBC show, the interaction between band and audience is primarily a matter of dance in dialogue with musical sound. The bodies and faces of the band itself are literally almost obscured by the dim lighting. But at a Pinettes performance, the verbal engagement is ongoing throughout the performance. Angela Y. Davis and Mark Anthony Neal have detailed how female blues singers in the early twentieth century would create an intimate community with their audience in performance, with the singers’ assumption of shared perspectives and experience in matters of race, class, and gender struggle transforming the authorial “I” in song lyrics into an implied “we.” While the lyrics of the Pinettes’ songs are by no means uniformly concerned with economic struggle and heartache, many songs allude to one of these two themes, and the group’s performative emphasis on vocal call-and-response with the audience transforms the implication of a shared perspective into an actual, in-the-moment shared experience.

Even on Christie Jourdain’s “Get A Life,” the band’s breakout song and the only openly combative song in the Pinettes’ regular repertoire, the object of the lyrics’ scorn is understood not to be the audience but a physically absent foe; the group invites the crowd to join in the defiant titular cry, a riposte to detractors. The song’s lyrics, like those of many of the cover tunes the Pinettes perform, are explicitly female-identified. Although ostensibly directed at jealous

women – actually a couple of Jourdain’s former bandmates, who had threatened to sue her for reforming the band without them after they had left in 2005 – the song can also be read as a challenge to any of the band’s rivals, male or female. Another staple of the band’s setlist is “Baby,” a jilted lover’s lament made famous by the late Amy Winehouse under its original name, “Valerie.” In performance, DeCosde notes, these songs are effectively off-limits to male brass bands, who cultivate an aggressively heterosexual masculine persona in the lyrics of their songs. Though they continue to be marginalized by the local brass band scene, the Pinettes are able to expand upon the standard repertoire through material that centers the experiences and concerns of women. And as DeCosde points out, through their collective assertion of a voice and an identity that is largely sidelined within the mainstream of the brass band tradition, the Pinettes have attracted audiences who would not necessarily be drawn to brass band music otherwise.

The Pinettes and TBC cultivate their own counter-public spheres through performance, forging an expressive community in tandem with their audiences through verbal, musical, and bodily forms of call-and-response. Often incorporating references to local events, places, and personalities into their songs, these bands turn the neighborhood bar into a space for airing out and negotiating the challenges of the present moment. Synthesizing and reinterpreting riffs, lyrics, beats and dance movements both original and borrowed, band and audience also utilize the performance space to test out new material, producing the future of the second line tradition through the creative transformation of its past and present.

### *Street Performances*

If TBC and the Pinettes are steadfastly and self-assuredly working their way through an ever-changing musical and sociopolitical present, many of the bands that play bars, theaters and

street corners around the city – particularly those in and around the French Quarter – are recreating a half-mythic musical past year in and year out. For these bands, adopting a traditional repertoire is simply good business; tourists, especially the older and wealthier ones, are by and large happiest with music that fits into the image the city projects of itself as a merry, half-debauched historical playground. Many who have a steady club gig are lifelong traditionalists who view themselves as keepers of a tradition that they feel has lost its way, or veterans of the contemporary brass band scene who have reembraced the older styles as a means of reconnecting with (what is imagined to be) a more dignified musical past. But for the younger bands out on street corners, the traditional repertoire serves an additional function – a core of all-purpose standards that are not only guaranteed to attract an audience but that allow musicians to ply their trade, developing their improvisational skills, their chemistry with other players and their stage presence in what is essentially a public rehearsal space.

As I noted in chapter 3, New Orleans police in the early 2010s began to crack down on street musical performances in the French Quarter, reviving long-unenforced noise ordinances to justify the assault on these frequently underemployed cultural workers' livelihoods. As a result, opportunities for public performance spaces in the city's busiest tourist district have been dramatically reduced. One of the few places in the Quarter where musicians are allowed to play regularly for tips is Jackson Square, which sits almost in the exact center of the neighborhood. Stretching between Decatur street and a complex of buildings that formerly comprised the seat of both the French and Spanish colonial governments in Louisiana, the space was developed into a public park after 1803, when it served as the site of colony's sale to the United States via the Louisiana Purchase. Jackson Square today comprises a green surrounding a statue of namesake Andrew Jackson, enclosed on all four sides by a cobblestone walkway. On three sides, artists



display their wares for sale and street performers dance or pose for tips. One side faces the two colonial government buildings and the massive St. Louis Cathedral, and it is in this space, on either side of the church, where brass bands frequently play for tips. While I lived in New Orleans over most of 2015, there were three brass bands that played regularly in the square: the the Jackson Square All Stars, the Young Fellaz, and the Free Spirit Brass Band. The Jackson Square All Stars was and remains an ad-hoc ensemble of older and younger players, with the forty- and fifty-something veterans generally setting a repertoire of crowd-pleasing standards. The veterans include trumpet player and leader Kenneth Terry along with Keith “Wolf” Anderson, both former members of Rebirth. Several of the younger members are also part of the Young Fellaz Brass Band.

On the other side of the entrance to St. Louis Cathedral, the Free Spirit Brass Band would play regularly. Like the Young Fellaz and TBC, the Free Spirit are part of the post-millennium generation of brass bands who grew up on Rebirth and the Soul Rebels’ fusions of brass band music and hip hop. Their kinship to this new generation of bands is most obvious in their dress style and the polyrhythmic layering of their arrangements, but also key is the presence of a full-time cowbell player in Alexis Pierce. I began frequenting the Free Spirit’s shows in Jackson Square in early 2015 and tried to catch their performances at least a couple of times a month throughout the year. I wish now that I’d devoted a few days to following the band as they trekked across town from one gig to another, but it wasn’t until late in my fieldwork stay that I fully grasped how important these street corner performances were both to brass band musicians’ creative and professional education and to their everyday livelihood.



*Figure 5-2: Free Spirits Brass Band at Jackson Square, March 7, 2015. Photo by author.*

As with many young brass bands, the Free Spirits' lineup is subject to frequent fluctuation, with many musicians coming and going, sitting in or temporarily AWOL, but the core of the group remained fairly consistent throughout my time in the field. Bass drummer Jerel Brown, snare drummer Tyrone Brown, tuba player Jay Foley, trumpeter Sean Roberts, trombonist Louis Landry, trombonist Robert Walker, and cowbell player Alexis Pierce were all more or less mainstays. While the Free Spirit's street performances effectively constitute a full-time job – the band plays in Jackson Square from around 10 AM to 5 PM every day before heading over heading over to the corner of Bourbon and Iberville Streets and playing for the more raucous bar crowds from 6 to 8 in the evening – they don't really pull in enough through this labor alone to make a living. Several members also perform regular club gigs with other

bands: Jerel Brown is an unofficial but more-or-less permanent member of the otherwise all-female Pinettes at Bullet's; Roberts plays with TBC at the Autocrat; and Walker plays with the Street Legends at the Blue Nile. But with around two dozen regularly performing brass bands in town, secure gigs like this are in short supply, and the Free Spirits themselves still haven't landed one. Pierce told me that the band probably makes more money playing on the street than some groups make from weekly club shows, and since they don't have to split their proceeds with a venue he may be right. But club gigs are highly sought-after not just because they provide a steady source of income but because they can boost a band's profile significantly, and later events suggested to me that the Free Spirit Brass Band wants to land one of these gigs as much as anybody.

With thousands of tourists passing through the French Quarter every day, it is conceivable that the sound of the Free Spirit reaches more ears than the few who make enough money touring the world to effectively retire from the street. But ears don't always translate into dollars, and the Free Spirit's ability to fill the tip jar depends on a combination of finely honed performance strategies, timing, and luck. Though the band plays about a half-dozen sets in Jackson Square each day, about half their time is spent waiting for foot traffic to pick up; it doesn't make a lot of sense to play if there's no audience. The acoustics of the surrounding area help to draw crowds, with the cobblestones underfoot and the 50-foot stucco façade opposite Jackson Square Park providing natural amplification for the band; at a block's remove, the group sounds about four times its actual size. Even when the square is busy, however, the Free Spirits have to work hard to get a crowd to stick around and listen and then to put money in the jar; there is of course no guarantee that anyone walking by will do either. Often, tourists stick around for a song or two and then depart without making any kind of donation. Many seem ignorant of

the fact that busking is hard work, and fall into the all-too-easy trap of treating musicians as ornaments of the cityscape rather than as fellow human beings. I don't exempt myself from this unfortunate behavior; I probably haven't tipped at every street performance I've witnessed, but I hope I have treated performers better than did some of the tourists I saw in Jackson Square. I witnessed a few occasions when passing tourists took photos of one another right in front of the band, sometimes in between two of the musicians, *as they were playing*, without bothering to ask the musicians for permission. There was no thank you to the band afterward and no tip. Usually these tourists didn't tip, of course.

The Free Spirit Brass Band uses a variety of techniques to engage the crowd of passersby and encourage spectators to tip. Since most working musicians in New Orleans have been living gig to gig and tip to tip for over a century, these techniques have been honed to a fine point over the years, and many of the strategies the Free Spirits use – including the quips they employ between songs – can be found among bands working both outdoors and indoors throughout the city. The band places a tip jar about three feet in front of the trumpet player, who occupies “center stage” in the band's physical formation. Trombonist Robert Walker generally acts as the emcee, introducing the group after the first song of each set and encouraging audience members to tip with a humorous flourish: “If you like the band, please tip the band. If you don't like the band, tip the band anyway.” As the band plays, Walker or trumpeter Sean Roberts will sometimes step out in front and circle the area in order to direct tourists' attention to the performance. On some numbers, the band uses crowd-participation gestures to engage the audience, clapping or initiating a call-and-response chant. If a sizable crowd forms, one of the members will walk around with the bucket and solicit tips. Occasionally one or more locals will show up and enliven the performance with some second line dance moves. But locals and

habitués of the Square can also be a nuisance, sometimes getting into interpersonal conflicts with band members or berating spectators. Many of the people who frequent the area are homeless, and the band has to watch the tip bucket carefully to make sure nobody steals from it.

In any fair economic system, a band as skilled as the Free Spirit would not have to fight with the homeless in order to make a living (and of course, a fair system wouldn't leave people homeless in the first place). Ultimately, the impediments and hassles the Free Spirit and other street bands face highlight how the city's tourist economy feeds upon and reinforces inequities of class and race; the absence of other types of industry drives thousands of artistically-inclined inner-city youth into performance and other forms of cultural labor, but the resulting overabundance of talent allows businesses to pay the few artists they employ less than what they're worth, while the many unemployed and underemployed performers are forced to feed on scraps. And yet the street-corner brass bands that feed on these figurative scraps are an indispensable component of the image that New Orleans projects to visitors. One day in October, I had an encounter with a transient in the Square that exposed this tension – and the systematic exploitation that produces it – in dramatic fashion. I and a couple of visiting friends were watching the Free Spirit perform one of their afternoon sets when a homeless man began what I thought was an entreaty for money. I cut him off and said “Sorry, dude,” before he could finish his appeal, and he turned accusatory. For the next couple of minutes, he vented about how “your people” (I and both of my friends were white, while he was black) were turning the world into a ghetto and cautioned that people were getting mad about it. His closing note was conciliatory – “treat everybody nice.” I had no immediate response, but after I began to dance to the band, he remarked to me, “Even though you're wrong, you're alright.” Sensing that my actions probably had been driven by unconscious prejudice – why did I so quickly assume he was asking for

money? – I apologized to the man for being short with him earlier. One of my friends was fairly shaken by the encounter, but I shrugged and pointed out that he was right to be angry about a system that marginalizes people of color even while it is fundamentally dependent upon their creative labor. Performing daily at the heart of the city’s tourist district, the Free Spirit occupies a central position within this system (even though they are not particularly prominent within the local brass band scene), and the group has to employ a variety of adaptive strategies to avoid its depredations and survive.

Like any decent working band in New Orleans, the Free Spirit tailors its sound and repertoire differently depending on the audience and the performance space. Both in Jackson Square during the day and on Bourbon Street at night, the band plays a mixture of old and contemporary brass band standards with covers of popular songs and a handful of originals. With much of the daytime crowd consisting of older folks and families, the band typically plays at a medium tempo and emphasizes the classic brass band repertoire, while on Bourbon in the evening they match the energy of the bar-hopping throng with a faster pulse and more contemporary tunes.

Bass drummer and bandleader Jerel Brown believes that the Free Spirit is helping to maintain the contemporary brass band scene’s connection to the streets. “I think we are the sound the streets are looking for right now,” he told me in 2015. And while Brown was quick to credit his forebears in the Hot 8 – who he named as his all-time favorite group – and the rest of “the elders” for paving the way for young brass bands playing in the French Quarter, he also proudly the Free Spirits as their rightful heirs. “Y’all understood the Rebirth and Hot 8,” he told me. “We want y’all to understand us.”

Not just a drummer but an accomplished dancer and a Mardi Gras Indian who masks with the Uptown Warriors tribe, Brown is completely immersed in second line culture, and by 2015 he had spent dedicated half a decade to establishing his band's rightful place at the heart of the local cultural economy. So when another young band won a coveted weekly gig at the Hi-Ho Lounge in June, Brown and some of his bandmates staged a musical revolt. The members of Da Truth, the rival band in question, were well on their way to being crowned as the new "street kings" of the brass band scene at the time. While the band was first put together by tuba player Travis Carter in 2004, most of the founding members were displaced after Hurricane Katrina hit the city a year later. It was not until 2013 that Carter put the group back together, and in short order they rose up the ranks of the local scene. By landing the gig at Hi-Ho, Da Truth had effectively been appointed as heirs to the Stooges Brass Band, whose onetime weekly gig at the same venue had been a springboard to an internationally successful touring career. The Hi-Ho Lounge itself was significant as a focal point of the St. Roch neighborhood, a rapidly-gentrifying area that developers were touting as a new entertainment district. Given the high hopes and potentially high stakes revolving around the gig, perhaps it shouldn't have been a surprise that the selection of Da Truth would be contested.

I learned about Da Truth's new gig from my friend Mike at a second line on June 21<sup>st</sup>. I knew little about the band at that point, but I was eager to expand my fieldwork in local clubs, and so I showed up to the Hi-Ho Lounge around 8 PM on Tuesday night. The show drew a similar crowd to TBC's Wednesday night gig at Celebration Hall, with many of the best dancers and regulars from the Sunday parades turning up to show off their best moves, although overall the audience was younger and more racially mixed. About a half hour into Da Truth's first set, I began to hear what sounded like another brass band on the street outside. The sound quickly

grew in volume until I and most of the crowd had turned our heads to the entrance. Out on the sidewalk was the Free Spirit Brass Band, blowing away in a performative challenge to Da Truth's recent ascendancy. For a moment or two the audience's attentions were divided, but soon people began to stream outside to see the challengers. One by one, the members of Da Truth put down their instruments and stopped playing, at first confused and then stunned by the unexpected affront. "Rude motherfuckers," one musician mumbled, and as the Free Spirit continued to play several of his bandmates raised their middle fingers and took to the street outside. As soon as the Free Spirits finished the song, Da Truth reassembled, raised their instruments and began to blow back at their challengers. For the next 20 minutes the two bands traded riffs and taunts, with members of the crowd goading on both sides. When it became apparent that the Free Spirit had no intention of backing down, the members of Da Truth began to motion to each other to step back inside. After the DJ at the bar started spinning some bounce tunes, the Free Spirit finally began to beat a retreat. Jerel Brown still wasn't ready to back down, however. "Y'all [playing] Hot 8, TBC, Rebirth – y'all ain't got no originals!" he yelled as his bandmates dragged him away, contesting the right of a band with few songs of their own to assume to inherit such a prestigious gig.

It's tempting, especially given Brown's outburst at the end, to read this impromptu battle of the bands solely in the context of the inter-band rivalries and struggles for creative and commercial dominance that are inevitable in a city with too many musicians and too few good gigs. But if there was any lingering animosity after the showdown, both groups kept it to themselves. A week later, Brown and a couple of his bandmates were back at the Hi Ho Lounge, not as musical challengers but as dancers in the audience. And when I interviewed Brown in July, he was quick to downplay any conflicts between musicians and dancers within the culture.



Though I had seen him initiate what looked to me like creative battles with other bands and with fellow dancers, Brown objected to my use of the word “competition” (which I had employed almost as a euphemism) in describing such encounters. “When the music hits, it’s gonna bring whatever out [of] you that you feel,” he explained. “It’s not about the competition, ’cause there’s no wrong way or right way to second line.” On one level, I suspect that the vagueness of Brown’s response is deliberate; it fits squarely within what Rachel Carrico calls the “‘do-watcha-wanna’ discourse” – or the idea proffered by many dancers and musicians that second lining is an individual form of expression and that anyone can do it – and exemplifies how that discourse “performs a right to what postcolonial theorist Edward Glissant has called ‘opacity,’ or the right of the Other to remain unknowable” to the (white) ethnographer.<sup>164</sup> On another level, Brown might be expressing solidarity with his fellow second liners; working out rivalries on the dance floor and on the bandstand is a different matter than sharing disagreements with a cultural outsider, since the latter might have unforeseen personal and professional consequences. But above all, the indeterminacy of Brown’s response leaves the performance to speak for itself. And in the performance, individual and interpersonal struggle is transformed into the creative play of call-and-response.

The real struggles most working brass band musicians face are not creative and professional rivalries with their peers, of course, but the challenges of navigating and surviving within a system that exploits their creative labor. Even the street kings can be vulnerable to its ravages, as demonstrated by what happened between Da Truth and Hi Ho later in 2015. Since I hadn’t been able to establish a rapport with the band (none of the members of Da Truth had responded to my requests for interviews), I never learned the inside story, but the trouble seemed

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<sup>164</sup> Carrico 2015:22-23.

to start on the last Tuesday of September. On that night, the start time for the group's first set was delayed from 10 PM to 11:45, apparently because one of the band members had just been robbed and was talking to the police. A week later, however, the band also hit the stage unusually late. The week after that, they started an hour earlier than usual and left after one set rather than their regular two. By November, it was anybody's guess as to when the band would show up to the gig – or whether they would turn up at all. And soon thereafter, I heard that the group would no longer be playing at the Hi-Ho Lounge. I also heard rumors that there had been a dispute between the band and the venue over money, but I can't confirm that story. Da Truth may well have been justified in failing to appear, but since the reasons for the band's erratic appearances were never made public, the band's reputation had suffered at least a temporary blow.

In order to avoid such pitfalls, musicians have to be immensely knowledgeable about the realities of the business and resourceful in putting that knowledge to use to build a performance career. School marching bands are one of the few formal settings where young musicians in New Orleans can begin to develop that knowledge. It is in these ensembles where most of those who end up in successful groups learn to master the creative and professional dimensions of life as a performing brass band musician, and it is to that primary context that I now turn.

### ***School Marching Bands***

The scholastic marching band in America has a history about as long as that of the second line; it was right around the same turn-of-the-century period when the second line was coalescing into a regular Sunday parade in New Orleans that the marching band became a common feature of secondary and higher education across the country. Due to the parallel development of these two cultural institutions, along with the city's overstuffed festival and parade calendar, school

marching bands have always been especially popular and esteemed in New Orleans. As I mentioned in chapter 5, the scholastic brass band tradition in New Orleans was dealt a devastating blow by Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath. With the forced exodus of many residents of color and the subsequent dismantling and reorganization of the city's public school system, band programs were forced to rebuild from the ground up and with a severely limited pool of resources and personnel. But in the 10 years after the storm, nonprofits and private foundations seized on the increasingly popular notion of music and culture as productive resources and began to fund music programs in the city's schools once again. While this turn of events reflects the troubling neoliberal policy of shifting social welfare and education programs into private hands, the net result was that, by the time I entered the field in 2015, the school marching band tradition was alive and thriving in New Orleans once again.

One of the primary benefactors for school band programs in the city today is the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Foundation, which has sponsored the "Class Got Brass" competition since 2012. The event takes place publicly in March and features middle- and high-school bands competing in several categories before a panel of judges. Each of the winning bands and runners-up receives a prize that the school's band program can use to pay for musical instruments, repairs and other essential supplies. The bands that compete in the event are limited to a traditional 12-person lineup, which means that the schools with large band programs are able to put forward their best musicians. The bands are judged according to five criteria, which are described as follows on the Jazz and Heritage Foundation website:

- "Adherence to tradition (How much does it sound like a New Orleans second-line band?)
- Originality (How much of their own personality is in the performance?)
- Improvisation (Do the band members interact with one another?)
- Tightness (Do they sound rehearsed and together?)

- Overall presentation (Do they sound good? Do they look good? Are they having fun?)”<sup>165</sup>

I first heard about the competition from a friend at WWOZ, the non-commercial, Jazz and Heritage Foundation-linked radio station where I volunteered occasionally. The event culminated the annual Congo Square New World Rhythms and Heritage Festival, held in the historic marketplace for which the festival is named and which is now the centerpiece of Louis Armstrong Park. The competition was open to middle and high school bands across Louisiana, though the vast majority came from right here in New Orleans. Some of the bands were excellent, some were good, and some were obviously inexperienced. Given the vast disparities in resources and arts funding that have plagued the charter school system instituted after the storm, this should not have been surprising; at least a handful of the participating schools had just established their band programs over the past year.

Amidst the good and the not-so-good, though, the band from Landry-Walker High School clearly stood out. On a mixture of traditional and contemporary brass numbers, the group’s taut arrangements and musicianship rivaled and sometimes even surpassed that of many professional brass bands I’ve seen. Dressed impeccably in the traditional brass band uniform of peaked caps, white shirts, black slacks and black ties, the young band parted the dense festival crowd with a brief yet faithful rendition of the jazz funeral standard “Just A Closer Walk With Thee.” A lone trumpet’s bluesy cries pealed forth over the ensemble dirge, and then, little more than thirty seconds into the performance, the band shifted gears seamlessly into Paul Barbarin’s uptempo standard “The Second Line.” Out in front of the band was the grand marshal, attired in black fedora, black bowtie, black slacks and black coat with a white shirt, white gloves and a white

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<sup>165</sup> “Class Got Brass? A ‘Battle of the Brass Bands’ for Schools,” *The New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Foundation, inc.* (website), <http://www.jazzandheritage.org/what-we-do/high-school-brass-band-competition> (accessed April 20, 2018).

sash draped over his shoulder.<sup>166</sup> Exhibiting the hip-swiveling, low-stepping style of midcentury second liners rather than the fleet footwork of present day paraders, he led the band up to the stage, where they left the past of the second line behind and shifted gears into the present. Ramping up the tempo for a near-flawless medley of two contemporary standards by Rebirth Brass Band – “A.P. Touro” and “Let’s Go Get ’Em” – the band now had the audience in the palm of its hand, clapping along and shouting in delight. And the whole virtuosic performance was over in less than four minutes. Although it was only the third group out of about ten to perform in the senior division, I was certain then that Landry-Walker would cinch first prize. As the band collected its trophy and headed for the parking lot an hour later, I raced up to their director and introduced myself. His name was Wilbert Rawlins, and he told me he would be happy to talk about his work sometime over the next week or two.

The following Monday, Mr. Rawlins and I spoke over lunch at one of his favorite local seafood restaurants for almost three hours. A multi-instrumentalist who first picked up the fundamentals of music from his R&B drummer father and from an “old white lady” who played the organ at his church, Rawlins predicates his teaching philosophy on an almost-mystical belief in the power of the mind-body connection between the musician and their instrument. “I am putting together a direct correlation between the instruments and the vibrations that they give off, and endorphins,” he told me. “So when you play an instrument, the vibrations flow through your body [and] the brain gives off these endorphins [that] feel like sex, chocolate, food, and even

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<sup>166</sup> The Landry-Walker Band was one of only two or three groups to actually employ a grand marshal for the competition. As I would later learn, the grand marshal’s presence betokened not just the goodwill and community-wide support that the city’s best high school bands inspire; it was also an indication of the band director’s commitment to honoring the rich history of the New Orleans brass band tradition.

drugs.”<sup>167</sup> He sees building this connection and inculcating a passion for music as a means to steer youths in difficult straits onto a healthier and more productive path.

“In my line of work here in New Orleans we’re talking about [children growing up in] environments which you couldn’t begin to imagine,” he said, later relating to me a heart-rending story of a young musician in one of his past bands who had to effectively assume the role of parent for his drug-addicted, sometime-prostitute mother. Seizing intently on the notion of culture as a fertile and renewable resource for rebuilding community and combatting social ills, Rawlins draws on the cultural capital of the brass band tradition, the economic and symbolic capital of the successful performing musician, and the mutually reinforcing structure of the band itself to build an alternative and (hopefully) more positive and productive environment than the other social and physical spaces that his least advantaged students inhabit – spaces that he, like many other musical educators, suggests are morally and spiritually broken.

Rawlins’ program begins with immersing students in brass band music and fostering their aspirations to become successful musicians, and then moves on to both impress upon and build in students the dedication, diverse skill set, professional responsibility, and self-respect required to achieve that success. In short, he wants his pupils to “be addicted to the music”; if he can create a powerful enough bond between the young musicians, their instruments, and the environment of the band room, he argues, they will do whatever they need to do to maintain that bond. For the Landry-Walker band, that means maintaining a 2.8 GPA and showing up regularly to rehearsal. If a student isn’t showing up to class or to band practice, he told me, “We’ll take the instrument from [them]. I mean, I won’t even allow [them] to touch it.”

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<sup>167</sup> Interview with author, March 30, 2015.

While Rawlins is firm in enforcing standards of conduct, he learned after a tragic incident in his early years as a band director to become more forgiving of students who slip up. Hired straight out of college as the band director at Sarah T. Reed High School, Rawlins began to have trouble with a student named Kunta. Though Rawlins says that Kunta was “going through life [as] an arrogant, thuggish little kid,” he had obvious musical talent, and had already demonstrated enough skill on the trombone to be named section leader. The problem was that Kunta was skipping all of his classes except band. When another teacher informed him about Kunta’s repeated absences, Rawlins took his pupil aside and spoke with him firmly, but a couple of weeks later, on the eve of the band’s performance at a football game, the same teacher approached Rawlins again and demanded that Kunta be barred from marching. Rawlins assented and kicked Kunta out of the band. Over the next week or so the trombonist showed up to Rawlins’ office every day, begging the band director to give him another chance, but Rawlins was unyielding; after a couple of months, he thought, Kunta would learn his lesson, and Rawlins would let him back into the band for Mardi Gras season.

Where might a kid like Kunta go if he weren’t at band practice? Rawlins hadn’t really considered that question – as a rookie teacher his mind was on “keeping face,” so he held his ground. The consequences of that decision would be disastrous, as Rawlins explained:

The day before the next game, the police started swarming all around everywhere you go on Bourbon. This kid had gotten shot at about 5 o’clock at a damn dice game. He wasn’t even playing dice – the guy who lost, everybody was laughing at him, and he just pulled a gun and shot Kunta in the chest, and he died right there on the scene at 5 o’clock...Shit, band practice was from 3 to 6:30. The kid was going to class, he got the teacher to send a note down. The teacher came down, the principal talked to me. He was a totally different person. He had done everything he was supposed to do to get back into the band, because the band is a serice of the school to keep the kid occupied. But my own ego, me wanting to show I’m in charge, kept him out of the one thing that he needed, and he got killed at 5 o’clock.

What the tragedy taught Mr. Rawlins was that the band, and the band's success, was not ultimately about him. It was about the students, and about providing a safe haven for them to learn and thrive. To that end, Rawlins's pedagogical strategies are oriented not just towards building instrumental competency and knowledge of the repertoire but towards inculcating self-sufficiency and a strong sense self-respect in all of his students. His approach seems to have paid off: graduating members of the Landry-Walker marching band win college band scholarships every year, and some go on to become school bandleaders or form successful ensembles of their own. In the meantime, the Landry-Walker band continues to dominate the "Class Got Brass" competition and remains in high demand throughout Mardi Gras season.

I got a glimpse of how Rawlins was able to realize these ends when I sat in on several rehearsals by an interscholastic ensemble comprised of musicians from across the city's high schools in November 2015. The ensemble was organized by a group of local band directors for the funeral of Carver High School bandleader John Summers, who had just lost his battle with cancer at age 51. The first rehearsal was held at Landry Walker. On the walls of the band room were school banners and several posters with inspirational slogans. "You Have to Give Respect to Get It," read one. "It's All About...Respect – Trust-worthiness – Caring – Leadership – Citizenship – Attitude – Fairness – Tolerance – Honesty." read another.

Though the participating bandleaders took turns running through different segments of the program, Rawlins predominated. After an assistant band director warmed the musicians up, Rawlins took to the center of the room. Drilling several songs, he repeatedly emphasized the importance of mutual respect between bandleader and musicians and employed strategies of positive reinforcement throughout. "If you allow us to treat you [respectfully]," he said to the ensemble near the beginning of the rehearsal, "that's the way you will be treated." And so, for



most of the practice, Rawlins treated the students like the responsible, professional adults he expected them to become. Individual students he addressed not by their first names but as “Mr.” and “Mrs.” “You know your rhythms because you learned your chromatics, right?” he asked the snare section at one point. “Yes sir!” they responded in unison. The question assumes that the musicians are competent and prepared, and so it went with each of Mr. Rawlins’ instructions, always underlain by the implicit message that he knew what students were capable of accomplishing, and that he knew *they* knew what they could accomplish. While the students’ responses were given in a regimented, military-style fashion – a remnant, perhaps, of the military discipline that legendary St. Augustine High School bandleader Edwin Hampton introduced in the 1950s and that was quickly adopted by school marching bands across the city – they were not simply conditioned responses to orders from an authority, but collective self-affirmations. Instilling confidence and self-respect in his students doesn’t just set his students up for success as adults; it also makes them better performers. “‘This is my town! I own this town! I run this town! I’m the best man out here!’ That’s the way you act,” he tells his students in *The Whole Gritty City*, a documentary film that traces the struggles and triumphs of three local marching bands in the years after Katrina. “You act that way, they treat you that way.” In the streets and on the concert stage, his band takes the message to heart.

First and foremost, Rawlins wants his students to believe in themselves, their abilities, and their potential, but what ultimately makes him such an effective bandleader is that he teaches his students how to *feel* the music in both mind and body. At the rehearsal, one could clearly distinguish the best and most-prepared students in the band just by looking at them; far more than their peers, they put their whole bodies into the music, moving with the rhythm, rising and falling with the dynamics of each piece. “You got to *sing* this,” he told the musicians during a

rehearsal of the gospel ballad “Let the Church Say Amen.” “You got to take the music off the page.” Once Rawlins got the opening of the song to sound the way he wanted it, he walked off the stand to listen. Gradually he began to sing some of the words, his voice increasing in volume as he strove to get the musicians to feel the words and “sing” them through the bells of their instruments. As the song reached a climax, Rawlins went full voice, belting while the horns surged forth in unison. The effect was tremendously powerful.

It took a lot of dedication and no small amount of sacrifice for Rawlins to reach this point with the Landry-Walker band. Nine years earlier, he was in Beaumont, Texas and the city’s high school band tradition was in ruins. Rawlins had fled New Orleans after Katrina and moved in with relatives in Beaumont, and in short order he had gotten a new job at a local high school and grown the marching band from 120 to 180 members. With a salary more than twice what he had earned in New Orleans and a new band that had already begun to dominate local competitions, Rawlins returned home for Mardi Gras in 2006 but informed several locals who asked that he had no intention to move back permanently. But watching the parades, he was taken aback; there was just one marching band, made up of the remaining students from three local schools, to play at the biggest and most important celebration of the year. “I know you,” said one older lady watching beside him. She recognized him as the band director at the Ninth Ward’s George Washington Carver High School. “I come under this bridge every year to hear your band. But you’re not home, so who’s gonna teach your band?” Rawlins didn’t have an answer. The drive back to Beaumont was one of the most difficult days of his life. But sure enough, a few days later, one of the remaining high schools in New Orleans called Mr. Rawlins with a job offer. It was O. Perry Walker, a high school in the West Bank neighborhood of Algiers. Rawlins agreed to return if the school could guarantee him a salary that came close to what he was earning in

Beaumont. Although he would have to take a pay cut, the school's offer was reasonable, and in a few months he was back in the Crescent City.

Rawlins was already something of a local legend, and as word spread that he was back and students continued to return to the city with their families he had little trouble rebuilding the Walker band: beginning the year with just 12 students, he quickly grew their ranks to around 80. But there would be further challenges. In October 2012, when both the band and the school were thriving, the Recovery School District announced plans to merge Walker with L.B. Landry High School, another school in Algiers. Unlike Walker, Landry had sat dormant for four years after the storm, and upon reopening in 2010 its students performed well below Walker's in standardized tests. Rawlins was not happy with the merger. "I'm like, 'Damn it,'" he told me. "I'd just gotten settled. I just got everything that I [wanted]...I'm having a great damn time here, I'm setting up deals all over, and now I have to attach a failing school's name to my name." If Rawlins was upset, parents at both schools were furious. The two schools had a long-standing and bitter rivalry, and while Walker parents were upset about being yoked to an underperforming school, parents and teachers at Landry felt that the merger – which, though the new school would be established on Landry's grounds, privileged Walker's resources and faculty – would erase a pillar of the community's identity.

What Rawlins found was that the enmity between Landry and Walker was mostly confined to the adults; it did not extend to the students in the newly-merged school and marching band. The Landry students were initially intimidated by the discipline and precision of the Walker band, but once they donned the uniforms and started marching their spirits were lifted – along with those of everyone watching. "When we put the two bands together and marched a parade, shit – they saw almost 200 kids playing," Rawlins told me. "The sound was thunderous.

Now everybody's saying, 'Ooh, look at what we got.'" The band had succeeded in bridging old community divides. The former rivals were stronger together.

Like other music educators I spoke with, Rawlins is committed to the idea that training young people in local musical traditions can turn their lives around, alleviate social ills and rebuild the bonds of community. And most of the brass band players I interviewed shared with their marching band mentors a belief in the rejuvenating power of music. But though forward-thinking bandleaders like Rawlins proudly incorporate contemporary brass band standards into their repertoire, the high school marching band and the contemporary brass band are two very different institutions. With matching uniforms and tightly coordinated steps, the marching bands emphasize orderliness, fealty to tradition, and a consciously dignified and respectable self-presentation. In contrast, contemporary brass bands from Rebirth to the Pinettes, TBC and beyond eschew uniforms for street clothes, maintain a much looser formation in parades, and frequently incorporate the kind of ribald, profanity-laced lyrics from popular hip hop songs that traditionalists (and band directors like Rawlins) disdain. Given that the vast majority of brass band musicians in New Orleans have at least some formative experience in scholastic marching bands, how might that environment shape their musical practices and their values today? Beyond providing a formal introduction – one might even say an initiation of sorts – to an expressive culture that most young musicians begin to absorb through informal routes from birth (every band director I interviewed includes at least a few second line standards in their band's repertoire), school bands in New Orleans offer both an eclectic musical training regimen and a solid professional education in the basics of how to survive as a performing musician. The formal and practical dimensions of marching band training are inextricable from one another; to train on multiple instruments and in multiple styles, as many students do over the course of their

elementary and secondary school education, is to increase one's value and ability to land gigs at parades, at social occasions and on the club circuit. Mr. Rawlins noted to me that even the college band directors expect versatile musicians out of high school; when I asked him why he puts the percussion section through such rigorous training, he reminded me that "high school is a preparatory place for college," and said that the many college band directors he's spoken to are looking for "someone that can come in [and] read the music, someone that can come in and just simply understand the basic rhythmic patterns, just [be competent in] different styles, genres."

Soul Rebels snare drummer and leader Lumar LeBlanc recalled to me in a 2014 telephone interview just how strikingly broad his own musical training in school bands had been. He started off on the bongos at nursery school. At Corpus Christi Secondary School, he learned symphonic percussion and the basics of the European tradition from two Catholic nuns who directed the concert band. Later in his time at Corpus Christi, the two nuns responded to the students' desire to play like St. Augustine High School's legendary Marching 100 band – by then the most popular and esteemed high school band in New Orleans for decades running – by bringing in music educator Joe Torregano. Torregano gave LeBlanc and his bandmates a deep historical and theoretical background on New Orleans jazz, and introduced to the paramilitary drum corps style of the Marching 100 through tightly coordinated "precision drills." LeBlanc also noted to me that several other musicians I interviewed had similarly wide-ranging training in school; Original Tuxedo Jazz Band drummer Gerald French studied timpani at Eleanor McMain High School in the Seventh Ward; TBC bass drummer Darren Towns trained on French horn at John F. Kennedy High School before switching to trumpet, and only took up his current instrument after graduation; snare drummer Floyd Gray of the Free Agents studied swing and bebop-era jazz as a member of the New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts (NOCCA) Jazz

Ensemble before graduating to the marching band at Kennedy; Christopher Herrero, a flautist and the current band director at Edna Karr High School, learned every brass instrument when he played in the same band under the tutelage of director Guy Wood from grades 7 through 12.

Training in such a diverse repertoire and on numerous different instruments from a young age allows students to become remarkably accomplished and versatile musicians before they even reach adulthood, which is probably one of the reason the base level of instrumental skill in the city's brass bands remains so high. It also means that the bands these students form can tackle an equally broad repertoire in their own performances, and most do: drawing from gospel, traditional New Orleans jazz, contemporary brass band standards, local hip hop and bounce favorites, and soul, pop, R&B and rock hits of the past 60 years, the best working brass bands in New Orleans are able to secure numerous different types of gigs because they can tailor their repertoire to different audiences and different occasions. TBC Brass Band, for instance, might emphasize spirituals for a funeral; a mixture of traditional and contemporary brass band tunes at a Sunday second line; R&B favorites from the past 30 years and their own hip hop-inflected originals for the hometown crowd at their Wednesday night show at Celebration Hall; and covers of pop and rock songs at a Frenchman Street club like 30/90, which draws a largely white crowd of tourists and young professionals. Sometimes they might even play all of these kinds of gigs in a single day. And just like the marching bands from which they emerged, the group members have collectively developed the skill to put their own unique twist on a century's worth of American music, filtering different styles through their distinctly midtempo, samba-like groove. A solid grounding in the panoply of African American musical traditions, then, gives TBC and other contemporary brass bands not just a large repertoire to draw from in their performances but

the means to reinterpret that repertoire and assert their own performative identity through the creative transformation of that repertoire.

School marching bands don't just help shape both the form and content of brass band musicians' performances; they also provide a grounding in professional ethics and, in some cases, the basics of navigating the city's entertainment industry and earning a living wage for their work. Wilbert Rawlins strives to impress upon students the importance of showing up to gigs on time: "To be on time is to be late," he tells his musicians. "To be early is to be on time." All other things being equal, a band that turns up on time, organized and prepared will of course have a leg up on a band that's chronically late to gigs. While many popular brass bands I saw in New Orleans would routinely hit the stage an hour or more later than the advertised start time for their regular club gigs, this was more a matter of social convention (and, perhaps, of getting the audience to spend money at the bar) than anything else; it's worth noting that these same bands were rarely late for Sunday second lines or funerals.

Band directors like Rawlins also provide mentorship and professional guidance for students who form bands of their own. As I detailed in chapter 4, Rawlins advised the formative lineup of TBC Brass Band on how to make a legitimate "hustle" out of live performance; he later provided similar guidance to the Young Fellaz – who established their reputation through sidewalk performances on Frenchmen Street – and, most recently, to the up-and-coming Chosen Ones Brass Band. For the most part, however, aspiring musicians receive schooling on the ins and outs of the music business not in the marching bands but at summer music and culture camps like Jerome Smith's Tambourine and Fan, through nonprofit educational programs like Derrick Tabb's Roots of Music, and through cultural organizations like Ed Buckner's Original Big 7 Social Aid and Pleasure Club offshoot the Red Flame Hunters Youth Tribe.

Perhaps just as important as the musical and professional training that school marching bands provide is the way they furnish what Murray Forman calls an “extreme local” conception of identity. Though Forman writes about the “extreme local” – a notion of place-based identity that centers around small geographic areas like the neighborhood, or the block, as opposed to the wider city – specifically as it applies to hip-hop, high school bands in New Orleans have articulated such hyperlocal identities since before hip-hop began. For local musicians, what high school you went to is almost as important a marker of identity as what neighborhood you grew up in. Public schools are among the most cherished social institutions in the city’s black neighborhoods, each one a repository of local memory, a symbol of achievement and a source of community pride. Marching bands play a major role in defining each school’s identity and cultural footprint, from their uniforms to their marching style to their repertoire.

One means by which marching bands distinguish themselves from one another is through their drum cadences. These are extended pieces played by the drum section of a marching band, incorporating basic strokes, rudiments, and more complex patterns into a collective display of technical prowess and precision. During one of the rehearsals for John Summers’ funeral service that I sat through in 2015, I watched an interscholastic drumline run through a series of cadences in rapid-fire succession. The drummers had no sheet music in front of them, but their execution of these challenging pieces was almost flawless. With what must have been at least 30 drummers in perfect sync, it was one of the most astonishing musical moments of my time in New Orleans. I later learned from Christopher Herrero that there are several traditional cadences that all marching band percussionists in New Orleans learn, and it was likely this core repertoire that the drummers were running through that day. Standard New Orleans drum cadences that Herrero named included “9<sup>th</sup> Ward” and the “Jungle Beat.” But different schools also have their own



cadences, and marching band percussion sections become known both for these signature cadences and for the distinct style with which they execute these cadences. Herrero named “New Year’s” and “Darth Vader” as two of the drum cadences that are exclusive to his band at Edna Karr; both were written by recent Karr alums. Lumar LeBlanc noted that his high school band – St. Augustine’s Marching 100 – was also known for specific cadences, but since the band was so popular and admired across the city, other schools would often adopt St. Augustine’s signature cadences into their own repertoire. What then distinguished St. Augustine from its rivals, LeBlanc explained, was its particular drumming style. “St. Aug plays real closed rolls, real [strong] dynamics,” he said, and vocally mimicked the distinctively buzzing snare sound that the band’s drummers are known for. Some other schools, he said were known for more of an “open roll” snare style. School drumlines get the opportunity to showcase their cadences and their sound not just at parades but in showdowns with rival bands, which often occur at halftime shows for sporting events. Drumline battles are also a popular feature of the many interscholastic band competitions that take place in New Orleans and throughout the region, events that sometimes see local bands traveling to different states. These battles typically take the form of a call-and-response: the two bands face one another; one band plays a cadence, the opposing band answers with a cadence of their own, and so forth. Many band battles do not have declared winners; the point is to showcase musical excellence, and the award is an enthusiastic audience reception. I only had the opportunity to observe a couple of these competitions while in New Orleans, neither of which featured drumline battles. There are dozens of videos of local drumline battles on YouTube, however, and they remind me of nothing so much as the impromptu showdown I observed between members of the Stooges and the Hot 8 Brass Bands at the Katrina 10 second line parade in August of 2015. These exchanges are nothing like the bitter turf wars

that still wrack some of the most impoverished communities in New Orleans; they are spirited competitions that celebrate neighborhood pride and spur participants to find their best selves in the act of performance. In a sense, transcending everyday oppressions and tapping into the full measure of one's power and potential for excellence, both individually and as part of a broader collective, is what both the second line and the scholastic marching band tradition that feeds it are really about.

Contemporary approaches to music education in New Orleans embody two interrelated responses to race- and class-based systems of oppression: first, the black mutual-aid tradition that underlies the second line itself and that proved so vital to the survival of black communities and black culture in New Orleans through the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries; second, the notion of culture as reconstructive resource and solution to socioeconomic problems that has taken hold of public policy efforts in the wake of Hurricane Katrina and the neoliberal state's divestment from social services and welfare programs. The efficacy of the culture-as-resource approach is still an open question; music education and mentorship has undoubtedly helped many underprivileged youths triumph over adverse conditions and lead long, successful careers. Yet by and large, the conditions that immiserate and marginalize the predominantly black communities served by youth music programs have not improved in the post-Katrina period; by some researchers' measures, they have actually gotten worse.

Part of the problem is that, in the post-Katrina era, black youths' access to music education is severely limited. The charter school system that took over the city's public schools in 2006 did not prioritize arts education, and severely limited funds along with the additional challenges posed by school reorganization meant that band programs were slow to rebuild. Even with the expansion of extracurricular programs like the Roots of Music and the increasing

involvement of nonprofits in supplying funding and instruments for school marching bands, many programs still struggle with money and resources. Many of the brass band musicians I interviewed began their musical education in elementary school or even earlier, but primary school music programs in the city are now scarce.<sup>168</sup> “As a whole,” Christopher Herrero told me, “New Orleans music programs are extremely underfunded.” Even at Edna Karr, where Herrero’s Marching Cougars have become popular enough to win appearances in music videos and television commercials, the money for instruments comes almost entirely from parade gigs and fundraisers. “We don’t get money from the state or anything like that,” he told me. “And I’ve actually come out of my pocket a lot every year just to pay for not only instruments, but also instrument repair.” Schools without such esteemed bands often don’t have the funds to establish programs in the first place. And concern about the state of music education was a fairly common refrain among my interviewees: Lumar LeBlanc, Kerry Hunter (of the New Birth Brass Band), and Derrick Tabb (of Rebirth and the Roots of Music program) all lamented the scarcity of school music programs since the storm. It will likely take more than the efforts of local nonprofits and the generosity of private foundations to make music education available to every young person in New Orleans; major, radical structural changes are needed. What is at stake for many musicians and educators is not simply their own personal livelihoods or their students’ futures, but the heritage and future of a vital local culture.

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<sup>168</sup> Rajul Punjabi, “The Struggle to Save New Orleans’s Musical Identity,” *The Atlantic* online (August 2, 2016), <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/08/salvaging-new-orleans-music/494120/>.

## *Marching Clubs*

Where the brass band musicians who provide the soundtrack to second lines learn the musical repertoire, the stylistic fundamentals, the improvisational strategies and the call-and-response musical exchanges of the parade largely through scholastic marching bands, many dancers learn the bodily repertoire of the parade through the marching clubs that sponsor the parades. Most, but not all, of these marching clubs also function as traditional Social Aid and Pleasure clubs or black benevolent societies; a few clubs exist almost entirely for the purpose of

Since the vast majority of my field research centered around second line musicians, my analysis of contemporary Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs and their role in enculturating second line dancers is not nearly as complete as I would like it to be. Fortunately, dance scholar Rachel Carrico provides a detailed ethnography on marching clubs in her 2015 dissertation, “Footwork! Improvised Dancing as Dissenting Mobility in the New Orleans Second Line.” I draw extensively on Carrico’s scholarship herein, along with the few interviews I conducted with dancers and marching club members, to detail the function of marching clubs within second line culture and the ways they shape the distinct “footwork” styles of the parade.

The oldest and probably the largest organization that sponsors second line parades is the Young Men Olympian (YMO) Benevolent Association. First chartered in 1884, YMO is also the oldest continually active black benevolent society in the city. The terminology here is important, especially for the group’s leadership; when I spoke to YMO president Norman Dixon, Jr. in 2015, he was emphatic in reminding me that YMO is a benevolent society and *not* a Social Aid and Pleasure Club. He lamented that many outsiders mislabel them because of the second lines and parties that they throw each year, but know little or nothing of the medical care and funeral services the organization provides to members, or the financial support that YMO offers to

deceased members' families. Benevolence and community service – “taking care of the sick and burying the dead” – are and have always been the organization's first priorities. Based in Central City, which is both one of the poorest areas of New Orleans and arguably the epicenter of Uptown second line culture, YMO's community service efforts include providing meals to the hungry on Thanksgiving and Christmas; hosting the Central City Night Out Against Crime; funding an annual Back To School giveaway; and running a computer education summer camp, which Dixon said was funded the previous summer by IBM. Despite these efforts, Dixon and many other senior members of YMO were increasingly concerned in 2015 that the organization was beginning to stray from its founding mission and becoming too consumed with parades and parties, and was considering cancelling the 2016 parade in order to get its priorities in order.

Due to its long history and the size of its membership (according to Dixon, there were 106 members as of 2015), YMO has more money in its coffers than most marching clubs, which both facilitates its extensive community outreach and charity work and helps fund its parades; YMO is also the only parading organization in the city that hosts two different Sunday second lines each year. The first of these is a two-hour “mini-parade” that kicks off the parade season in early September, a consciously old-fashioned affair that features the senior members of the club and a brass band playing favorites drawn exclusively from the traditional repertoire. The second is the biggest event of the second line season: a massive parade in late September that features six marching divisions and six brass bands. YMO's annual parade features six separate marching divisions, each of which designs its own suits and hires its own band. At the 2015 parade, these divisions were organized as follows, from front to back:

- The Body, outfitted in simple black and white suits and fez caps, and supported by the Sons of Jazz Brass Band

- The First Division, outfitted in dark and light blue, with commemorative patches sewn on the back of their jackets that depict recently deceased member Alfred “Bucket” Carter; supported by the New Birth Brass Band
- The New Look Kids, a mixed division of children and adults, with outfits of multiple different colors; supported by the Hot 8 Brass Band
- The Big Steppers, in blue and light brown suits, supported by the New Breed Brass Band
- The Untouchables, in pink and yellow suits, supported by the Stooges Brass Band
- The Furious Five, in blue and white, supported by Da Truth Brass Band

Each parading division comprises a subgroup within the larger YMO organization and is responsible for paying for its accompanying band and its own uniforms. Each group raises these funds by hosting a supper and a party at the YMO clubhouse, which all of the other groups must support. With each division boasting a sizable membership, and members regularly inviting friends and family members for these events, the necessary funds tend to roll in fairly quickly. “We’re making money off of ourselves to pay for each band,” Dixon explained.

YMO’s multiple divisions also provide a panoramic view of second line dancing styles old and new. The parade’s first two divisions are made up primarily of the club’s senior members, who tend to dance in a slower, more sensual style centered on lateral steps and circular hip movements. The younger divisions, which include the New Look Kids and the Furious Five, exhibit the kind of fast footwork of fleet, vertically-directed footwork that has been a hallmark of the contemporary second line style since the 1990s. Rachel Carrico in fact credits the Furious Five, along with the nascent Lady Buckjumpers and now-defunct YMO division the Mellow Fellows, with pioneering this style after they formed in the 1980s. The dance style these marching clubs developed, she states, replaced “upright, lateral step-touches with lightning-fast

footwork and acrobatic buck jumping.”<sup>169</sup> Their dance innovations were accompanied by the musical innovations of Rebirth and the Soul Rebels; as Carrico notes, these clubs were among the first to hire the new generation of brass bands whose hip-hop-inflected sound and swift tempo would shape the new dance steps.<sup>170</sup>

Like the high school marching bands where so many brass band players learn their trade, marching clubs new and old develop their skills and their style through rigorous practice. A key element of second lining, as with virtually all black vernacular dance, is the appearance of effortlessness, but inquiring into dancers’ and clubs’ actual histories reveals long, hard years of dedicated training that give the lie to the “Do watcha wanna” trope of “anyone can do it.” All of the clubs Carrico spoke to held regular rehearsals, not just to develop their routines and synchronize their steps but to refine their abilities for the designated portions of the parade where they would break off and improvise. Their performances in the parade demonstrate the same remarkable balance of precise group coordination and free expression that characterizes New Orleans brass band music and jazz. And young dancers develop their individual virtuosity through the intensive practice and exposure afforded by entry into these clubs.

Norman Dixon, Jr. became a member of YMO at age 7, his entry almost certainly facilitated by the fact that his father was the organization’s president. YF Scubble, one of the most outstanding and innovative dancers in the contemporary second line, joined his first marching club at a similarly early age, as so many of the parade’s leading stylists do. Best known

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<sup>169</sup> Carrico 2015:93.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*:92.

for his facility at what Rachel Carrico calls “summiting,” or climbing atop tall objects or buildings and dancing, Scubble joined the Dumaine Street Gang, of which his mother was one of the first female members, at age four. By the time we spoke in 2015 he had twenty years of marching club experience behind him. Scubble, whose real name is Roderick Davis, had lost his father to murder just a year before joining, and his trailblazing mother passed in 2008. His mother was memorialized by a second line, as he recounted to me:

We had a real nice homegoing for her, like a second line. When somebody passes around here, we celebrate. We don’t really pause too much – we really celebrate. Like, you’re liable to see a second line coming down the street right now around here. But when she passed, I kind of took what she said – I was rolling for her, as an everyday mindset. That’s why Sunday I took as not just dancing that one day for her. Every Sunday, or whenever I’m second lining, I do it for her. And I do it for my pops, ’cause I just know they’re watching me.<sup>171</sup>

After each of his parents’ deaths, the Dumaine Street Gang rallied around Scubble and helped him dance through his loss. Though he left the club and joined the Sudan Social Aid and Pleasure Club when continuing to parade with Dumaine proved too emotionally difficult, Scubble now dances for the memory of his parents, awakening their spirits with every footfall.

Just as the city’s marching clubs offer support to the families of their members through times of adversity, the more established clubs provide assistance to clubs that are recently established or financially distressed. Norman Dixon, Sr., the president of YMO from around the 1960s until his death in 2003, started a fund with the Jazz and Heritage Foundation that contributes \$1000 dollars towards the cost of each marching club’s parade permit, which is now \$2395 annually. The elder Dixon also helped raise the base price paid by the Foundation to each club that marches at Jazz Fest to \$2500. Through such efforts, and through mentoring local

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<sup>171</sup> Interview with author, October 14, 2015.



youths, organizations like YMO, the Dumaine Street Gang, and the Original Big 7 embody the spirit of mutual aid and help ensure that the second line tradition will survive, even in the face of continued adversity and struggle.

What I hope to have demonstrated in this chapter is that second-line culture is not confined to the primary context of the parades themselves; it unfolds within and is shaped by a multitude of other educational, professional, formal and informal contexts, from the club to the street corner and from the church to the high school band room.<sup>172</sup> What unites all of these contexts, beyond their shared inhabitants and expressive forms, is a condition of precarity. In bars and nightclubs, musicians are subject to economic exploitation and often forced to play for less than a living wage; on the street corner, they are subject to police crackdowns, confrontations with belligerent passersby, and noise complaints from area residents; the high school music programs in which they begin to hone their craft are often so cash-poor that they have to wait for months to get instruments; and marching clubs still struggle to pay exorbitant parading fees. This condition of precarity is of course in large part a result of the structural racism that continues to severely constrain the political agency and economic mobility of poor and working-class African Americans in New Orleans who sustain the second line tradition. How second liners respond to that precarity, both through the parade itself and through forms of political organization and activism that are enabled by the social formations that define second

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<sup>172</sup> I mention the church here, though I have not discussed its role within second line culture in any depth herein; other important contexts and institutions that shape second liners' lives and inform the history of the parade itself include the home (particularly the households of prominent musical families like the Lasties or the Andrewses) and the Mardi Gras Indian gangs. I omit these contexts not because they are any less vital but due to the temporal and logistical constraints of my field and archival research, which did not permit me to devote the attention to these spaces and organizations that they deserve. I intend to explore these sites where in greater detail through future research, and I hope that by highlighting the primacy of these contexts in the continued life of the second line as an expressive tradition, future scholars might also seek to document second line culture as it unfolds across myriad different sites and social formations.

line culture, has been the primary focus of my analysis herein. Why such an analysis is vital – and why the second line itself matters – is the critical question I address in my concluding chapter.

## Conclusion: Dancing Through That Water

I have argued herein that the second line functions as a dynamic expressive form through which participants negotiate trauma and sociopolitical upheaval, reenact and consecrate neighborhood histories, and forge an expressive counter-narrative of resistance and pride against socioeconomic marginalization, forced displacement and the threat of cultural erasure. Understanding such a deep-rooted, history-conscious and community-centric tradition in the present requires some explication of its past, so the first three chapters of this dissertation focus on the history and development of the second line tradition over almost 300 years. Drawing on Lawrence Levine and Sterling Stuckey's conception of African diasporic cultures as fundamentally adaptive and responsive to the challenges of the present moment, along with Samuel A. Floyd's conception of how African diasporic cultures use "dance, drum, and song" to reanimate and sacralize collective memories of struggle and triumph, I detail in Chapter 1 how the second line developed as a performative response to race and class-based systems of oppression through the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, germinating in the era of racial slavery and coalescing into a self-contained expressive tradition as white racial terror and the imposition of Jim Crow dashed the radical liberatory promise of the Reconstruction. I explain therein and in Chapter 2 how the expressive responses embodied in the second line (and later in jazz) developed in tandem with the political responses to white supremacy, with both germinating in the sacred and secular spaces – the church, the "jook," and the Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs – that constituted the city's black public sphere. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, for instance, when the *Plessy vs. Ferguson* ruling definitively disenfranchised all New Orleanians of color by collapsing the three-tiered (black/Creole of color/white) racial order of the French and Spanish

colonial periods into the two-tiered (black/white) color line that pervaded throughout the rest of the country, black and Creole residents came together in the relatively safe spaces of the black public sphere to create both an expressive form of resistance – jazz – and new strategies for political resistance and organization that would culminate, half a century later, in the rise of the mainstream Civil Rights movement.

A more recent example of expressive forms and political action coinciding closes Chapter 2. As new and more effectively concealed forms of state, economic and structural violence were exerted against New Orleanians of color through the period of deindustrialization and the collapse of the Civil Rights coalition in the 1960s and 1970s, musicians and community leaders responded not just by embracing the second line and the brass band tradition anew, but by investing these traditions with political efficacy. Conceived by veteran Creole jazz banjoist Danny Barker on the premise that gifted young musicians schooled in the economic self-reliance, dignified self-presentation, performance ethics, and sophisticated musical approach of the traditional New Orleans brass band could lead and help rebuild broken communities, the Fairview Baptist Christian Church Band was one of the first major local efforts to use culture as a reconstructive resource. Like many musical educators who succeeded him, Barker saw the brass band tradition as a potential solution to social ills plaguing the community and as a means to uplift black New Orleans through a display of respectability. While Fairview succeeded in popularizing the brass band tradition and second line parades again, it also precipitated a split in the culture between second line traditionalists (who follow from the lead of Barker and his acolytes among Fairview’s alumni) and modernists (who build upon the funk-inspired innovations of the Fairview alums who formed the groundbreaking Dirty Dozen Brass Band) that persists to this day, with debates over black respectability and the proper representation of the

second line tradition still raging. What unites both traditionalists and modernists, however, is that both camps largely prescribe to the notion that culture can be a vital resource for the reconstruction of community.

I expand upon the notion of culture-as-resource in Chapter 3, which is centered on the period leading up to, during, and after Hurricane Katrina. Synthesizing existing historical scholarship and social theory with my own ethnographic interviews, the chapter details the second line community's response to what Henry Giroux calls the "biopolitics of disposability," or the neoliberal state's systematic effort to mark disadvantaged populations as dangerous and therefore unworthy of state protection or support. While the effort to render poor New Orleans communities of color in New Orleans disposable and civically invisible began well before Katrina – with policies of containment, mass incarceration, government divestment from social services, and civic neglect that escalated throughout the 1980s and 1990s – the storm provided a rationale for civic and business leaders to displace large swathes of the black poor permanently. The chapter focalizes the second line culture's responses to these policies through the experiences of TBC, one of the city's leading young brass bands, before and after the storm. It details how the members of TBC came together under the mentorship of marching band director Wilbert Rawlins, a leading proponent of the culture-as-constructive-resource discourse; how their music was influenced by the brass band/hip hop fusions of Rebirth and the Soul Rebels, who drew upon the most politically potent form of popular music to emerge in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century as a way to narrativize and respond to mass incarceration. After detailing the group members' own experiences of enforced displacement and violence and their responses in song, I widen the lens to consider how, over the decade that followed the storm, the second line culture as a whole responded to state and internecine violence through the parade, through community

organization and through political action, often using the parade itself as a vehicle of organized protest.

An ethnographic account drawn from my own experiences at second line parades in 2015 and 2016, Chapter 4 details how second liners respond to continued socioeconomic marginalization, displacement, and other forms of structural violence in the present through the “dance, drum and song” of the parade itself. More specifically, it details specific examples of the ways second liners make themselves visible, audible, and mobile – both individually and as a community – in defiant response to state forces that seek to erase, silence, and contain them, and how they inscribe their presence and consecrate shared histories of struggle and triumph through ubiquitous references to people, groups, events and places past and present. The chapter also serves as a narrative of how I entered and began to navigate the second line culture, finding time and again that I was only able to fully apprehend the parade through active participation. These narratives – of the expressive responses of the community to the challenges of the present and of my own entrance into that community – come together through my extended accounts of two different types of second line memorials: first, the two weeks of memorial parades and musical tributes that followed the death of rising young brass band musician Trumpet Black, and second, the day of second lines memorializing the Hurricane Katrina disaster and its victims on its 10-year anniversary. On these occasions, second liners responded to loss, death and displacement with celebrations of life and defiant assertions of the will to survive.

Chapter 5 explores the institutions and spaces where second line culture unfolds outside of the parade itself. The chapter begins with the secondary performance environments of the stage and the street corner, where brass bands and their audiences practice their craft and produce a performative community through call-and-response exchanges of intertextual reference to

songs, events, personalities, and places past and present. I argue that these spaces also function as contemporary manifestations of the black public sphere, where performers and audiences circulate news about current events in the community and articulate verbal and musical responses to those events. I then move on to discuss the enculturative spheres of the high school marching bands and the marching clubs, where musicians and dancers learn the performative conventions of the tradition and the systems of value that underlie them. These spheres represent two interrelated responses to the persistent racial and socioeconomic inequities that still circumscribe black life and mobility in New Orleans: one, the tradition of black mutual aid that has underwritten the second line for its entire history; and two, the more recent efforts to utilize culture as a reconstructive resource in rebuilding the bonds of community and combatting social ills. Both strategies have undoubtedly helped the second line tradition survive and thrive; the efficacy of the latter as a solution to the complex problems that face the communities where the second line lives is still uncertain. But I want to leave open the possibility here that the most demonstrably effective means of healing and strengthening communities still battling social dysfunction and economic precarity lie within the expressive conventions of the second line itself.

### ***Concluding Thoughts, Caveats and Future Possibilities***

I conceive the second line herein as a performative encounter between past and present. The parade is a sort of living archive: the rhythms, the songs, the dance moves, and the spaces the parade moves through all connote and contain shared histories, shared struggles, and second lines past. It is through the interaction between these elements that such histories come alive and signify in the present. Second liners refigure, reinterpret, revise, and add their own wrinkles to

the dance, the rhythms, the songs and the physical space – and the histories each element contains – as a means to assert their own identities and comment upon the challenges of the current moment. This is a process that Henry Louis Gates refers to in *The Signifying Monkey* as “repetition with revision, or repetition with a signal difference.”<sup>173</sup> Joseph Roach, in *Cities of the Dead*, emphasizes the importance of history and memory in this process of repetition and revision, which he calls “surrogation” – a process found across the Black Atlantic world whereby African diasporic peoples “have invented themselves by performing their pasts in the presence of others.”<sup>174</sup>

The fact that so much of this performative rendering of history has taken place “in the presence of others” goes some way towards explaining second liners’ anxieties about respectability and the “proper” representation of tradition. In a very real sense, black New Orleanians have had to *make* their own histories through performance, acting in defiance of a racial state that seeks to rob a people of their agency and identity by suppressing and erasing that history. But it is the making and remaking of that history, in the encounter between past and present, that the second line makes meaning. And it is for this reason that place equal emphasis on the past and present dimensions of the parade herein. Existing second line ethnographies have typically contained capsule histories of the parade, but I don’t know of any prior ethnographic study that explores in detail the questions of how and why the second line tradition emerged, and how it has changed in response to the circumstances and challenges of each new era. Haitian *rara*, the Cuban *comparsas*, Brazilian *samba* and the Mardi Gras Indians of New Orleans are just a few of the expressive traditions from around the Black Atlantic that share with the second line

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<sup>173</sup> Gates 1988:xxiv.

<sup>174</sup> Roach 1996:2; 5.



a genealogy, several formal features, and a performative engagement with memory and history. I hope my synthesis of history and ethnography in this dissertation can serve as a model for future studies of these and related performance traditions.

As I assert above, the second line makes meaning not just through the encounter between past and present, but through the performative interaction between four distinct elements: dance, rhythm, song, and physical space. There has been a tendency to privilege one or two of these elements at the expense of others in previous second line ethnographies; for my own part, I think I have done some justice to the rhythm, dance, and physical spaces of the second line herein, but I regret that I did not devote more attention to the songs of the parade. But the point I want to make here is that there are entire disciplinary fields devoted to each of these elements. The success of future scholarship on the second line, and on related performance traditions throughout the Black Atlantic world, is going to depend on real and sustained collaboration between scholars in musicology, history, dance studies, urban studies, African American studies, and related fields.

It cannot be stressed enough that the second line is a form of *collective* creation; it signifies not through individual performance but through the interactions of a large gathering of people. Native second liners understand this better than most outside scholars do, of course; many of the musicians and dancers I interviewed were far more comfortable talking about the multiplicity of people who influenced their performance style than in taking individual credit for innovations and stylistic breakthroughs. Scholarly protocol dictates that I take the opposite take herein by explicitly distinguishing my work from that of my scholarly predecessors. But the truth is that many of the second liners I interviewed have more profound things to say about the past and present of their tradition than I do. Some, like Dr. Brice Miller, are now producing vital

ethnographic studies themselves. But many second liners who have not had the opportunity to obtain a higher degree are community historians, ethnographers, and musicologists in their own right. Future studies of the second line must include collaborative scholarship not just between academics in different fields, but between academics and practitioners in the community.

This dissertation is not intended as an argument that second lining is always an *intentional* act of resistance to oppression and domination. For many lifelong participants, the second line is so ingrained in the fabric of everyday life that, on a conscious level, Sunday parades are first and foremost an excuse to drink and be merry – to party. I worry that in ascribing too much explicit political value to the parade I risk rewriting or misinterpreting the histories, values, and experiences that have been related to me by participants to make them fit my own narrative. But if one is to take to heart the axiom that “the personal is political” – that for marginalized and oppressed groups of people, the struggles of everyday life and the mechanisms for pushing through, responding to and surviving those struggles are inherently political – then second lining is always a political act. It is a means of transcending oppressive conditions and socioeconomic divisions, even if only temporarily, and of literally rising above and moving across physical barriers to mobility. While dancers leaping across cracks in the pavement and climbing atop buildings and bridges make themselves visible over and against a geography of containment and neglect, the musicians (and the crowds who answer their rhythms and riffs) make themselves audible through instrumental voices that are amplified, multiplied, and projected far and wide when they reverberate off of concrete walls and bridges – ironically the very architecture of containment. At the same time, the parade is a means of continually reinscribing the collective memory of a community – its struggles and triumphs, its joys and sorrows – upon the neighborhood spaces in which it unfolds.

Since the second line is open to everyone, not every participant is dancing against (and over) the same constraints. As a grad school-educated white man from an economically privileged background, I enjoy far greater socioeconomic and geographical mobility than many if not most second liners. At any time, I can leave the often-blighted spaces that the second line winds through and transforms; I can drink in the ecstasy of the occasion, jot down my observations, and go home. I can move through the city unencumbered by the threat of police brutality or the perception that I am a criminal in potentia. And while glaring racial disparities in access to education and a shortage of well-paying jobs for cultural workers mean that many of the most skilled second line musicians and dancers struggle to make a living wage, I, a novice second liner, can use my observations of the parade to advance a potentially lucrative academic career. In short, I am a part of the “third line,” or the ever-expanding mass of photographers, journalists, ethnographers and other outsiders who document and interpret the parade. Second liners, a number of whom have experience with unscrupulous photographers, writers and music producers who profit off of the culture and don’t share any of the proceeds with those who create it, have reason to be wary of outsiders. And while most cultural insiders welcomed me, at moments during my fieldwork, some of which I have detailed herein, I sensed resentment of my presence. While I would ultimately like to avoid reproducing historically exploitative relationships between cultural producers and outside observers through collaborative ethnography and projects that directly benefit and support the musicians and dancers who have shared their stories with me, the truth is that I haven’t done any of these things yet. Foregrounding these musicians’ histories and perspectives and celebrating their contributions through my writing is a (very) small step in the right direction, but it isn’t enough.

When I began this project, I was primarily interested in drummers and the rhythms of black New Orleans in and of themselves. I wanted to know where these rhythms came from, what they meant for performers and their audience, and how musicians constructed both local and broader diasporic histories through the interpretation, juxtaposition and transformation of these rhythms. But I soon began to realize that it made no sense to try and unpack the meanings of those rhythms – both for the musicians who play them and the audiences who absorb and respond to them – separately from other elements of the performance. The first hint that I needed to widen my lens came when I attended a performance by TBC Brass Band at Celebration Hall late in the summer of 2013. The layout and lighting of the venue put the visual focus of the performance not on the band but on the audience members who were dancing to the music, many of whom proved to be virtuosic bodily interpreters of TBC’s rolling street beats. At the time I had not yet attended a proper second line parade, but while I began to sense that the parade itself would emerge as my primary subject as early as my first Sunday second line in the fall of 2014, it was not until almost a year later, well over halfway into my primarily that I formally decided my dissertation would be about the second line as a total phenomenon. The meaning of the performance, I ultimately found, inhered in the interaction between band, dancers, and performance space. This held true both in the parade itself and in the stationary “indoor second line” environment of community bars and nightclubs. But the meaning was also dependent upon a multiplicity of shared references, histories, and the established conventions of performative exchanges between band and audience. For any outside observer, it takes long and intensive effort to learn those references, conventions, and histories through which the second line signifies. I began to unpack how the second line makes meaning first through the standard ethnographic method of participant-observation, and then through broad – sometimes too broad –

historical research. I also employed musicological analysis to examine how second line rhythms have developed and adapted to broader musical and cultural shifts over time. I believe anyone trying to determine how particular expressive traditions signify – especially the expressive traditions of oppressed peoples, which often have complex and even contradictory political meanings – ought to make use of at least as many methodologies and angles of inquiry as I have done herein.

In the field I was consistently humbled by the depth and breadth of musicians' knowledge about the second line tradition, its history and its significance. This is part of the reason why I hope to conduct more collaborative scholarship with members of the community, many of whom are organic intellectuals and neighborhood historians who lack only the prestige of a degree, in the future. But for now it may be best to conclude with the words of musicians themselves:

*It was so bad how they had us on that bridge  
So let's get it how we live, that's why we did what we did  
When I lost my city, I almost lost my mind  
I'm in and out of hotels, feel like I'm doing time  
Please Mr. Officer, don't shoot  
'Cause I ain't ate in days, I was stuck up on that roof  
Ain't trying to make an excuse but they running from the truth  
We know they blew them levees man but we ain't got no proof*

*Whatever they do I can't turn my back  
I was born right chea so right chea is where I'm at  
Send them troops home, look daddy this ain't Iraq  
And tell FEMA we gone need more than ten stacks  
Wherever you at, St. Bernard to the Calliope  
One time do it big for Dinerral  
H-town all the way to the A  
We appreciate the love but my people can't stay  
We done made it some way*

So goes the rap section of the Free Agents Brass Band's "We Made It Through That Water," the song that provides the title for this dissertation and serves as an unofficial anthem for the post-Katrina diaspora. While the rap may refer specifically to the formative experiences of the Free Agents themselves – whose founding members first came together only after they were dispersed by the storm – it encapsulates the collective experiences of countless displaced second liners in the aftermath of the storm. The Free Agents respond to disaster and state violence with a passing shot at what many believe was a pre-planned demolition ("We know they blew the levees but we ain't got no proof"); a unifying callout to the former inhabitants of local public housing projects ("St. Bernard to the Calliope"), both of which were demolished by the city government after the storm; a tribute to late, beloved Hot 8 Brass Band drummer Dinerral Shavers, slain in 2006; and above all, a defiant assertion of their right to the city. Later in the song, the band incorporates a refrain from the spiritual "Wade in the Water," tying the contemporary experience of forced exodus and return to the both the Biblical Exodus story and to the travails that once awaited black slaves fleeing bondage. The song provides an example of how the second line enacts the dance of black life in New Orleans, serving as an expressive means to make it through the waters of the flood and the tide of oppression. Ultimately, both the song and the tradition it belongs to bear out funk musician George Clinton's maxim on black expressive culture as both dance and dynamic survival mechanism: "With the rhythm it takes to dance through what we have to live through/You can dance underwater and not get wet."

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