Title

“Great Changes are Often Wrought through Humble Beginnings:” The Life Histories of Five Free Black Women in Antebellum New Orleans

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Abstract

This thesis explores the life and times of five free women of colour in antebellum New Orleans. It examines the difficulties that these women faced during this time period, and also reflects on how assumptions about race and gender affected their opportunities as well as their struggles. Comparison of their lives provides new insight into their challenges as free women of colour, and the methods they used to overcome these, and navigate their way through a complex society. Building on the recent research of various scholars, this thesis will provide new insights into the lived experiences of these women, arguing that they were showing self-direction through their creation of successful business ventures and organizations, in a repudiation of societal expectations of their race and gender. Utilization of their connections with White men and women, and the foundation of feminine networks in support of these institutions, also meant that these women were able to challenge and confront the White patriarchal establishment in various ways.

This thesis uses a variety of public documents such as wills and successions, notarial records, city directories and censuses in order to trace these five women's lives. It offers new readings of some of the previously studied documents, by looking at the problematic subjects of slaveholding and elitism within New Orleans' free Black society, while also exploring some previously unexamined papers. By looking at their lives from birth to death, and presenting them as wives, mothers, and daughters who struggled with discrimination from the White population, who had money troubles and serious illnesses, the thesis gives a unique insight into lives of free Black women in Antebellum New Orleans. Thus, ultimately, it gives a voice to these marginalized, and often overlooked inhabitants of the Crescent City.

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Introduction

Eulalie Mandeville, a free Black businesswoman, stood at the door of her house in New Orleans in 1832, watching as her "marchandes" (street vendors) walked down the road, baskets on their heads full of assorted dry goods from her armoire, including shawls, lingerie, cloth and various other feminine articles to sell in the street, or door-to-door. With the help of her friend, the widow Chavenet, she had also sorted out the choicest goods, recently brought back from Paris by her son, Pierre Villarceaux. She had already alerted her clients from the upper classes of New Orleans' White society that she had new stock straight from France and planned to personally call on them that morning to show them this latest finery, while also dispensing advice and guidance on how to style these newest fashions. This picture of a typical day in the working life of one of New Orleans' most successful free Black entrepreneurs comes from the various witness statements in the trial of *Macarty v Mandeville*.[1] That Mandeville was a productive and wealthy Black businesswoman throughout her adult life is a testament to her achievements in an Antebellum slave society. It also demonstrates her tenacity, and that of other free Black women, not only to make a place for themselves in New Orleans society, but in some cases, to also reshape the preconceptions of this community, where they were deemed subordinate by both their gender and race.

Figure 1: House from where Eulalie Mandeville may have dispensed her wares.925-929 Barracks Street in the 1940s/50s. Special Collections Division. Tulane University Library

[1] The heirs of Eulalie Mandeville's deceased White partner, Eugène Macarty sued Eulalie Mandeville for the money that she had in her bank account, which they alleged belonged to Macarty and should have been included as part of his succession. Nicolas Theodore Macarty v. Eulalie Mandeville (Supreme Court of Louisiana Historical Archives at the Earl K. Long Library University of New Orleans) 106 U.S. 61 (1846-1861). See more about Eulalie Mandeville's life in Chapter Four.

I first came across Eulalie's court case on a very rainy afternoon in the University of East Anglia's library, while deciding how to tackle my PhD thesis. My interest in New Orleans had been sparked during my time in America as an international undergraduate student from the College of St. Mark & St. John in Plymouth, UK. Therefore, in 1987, at the end of a semester at Frostburg State University in Maryland, I decided to make the long journey to New Orleans by Greyhound bus, and like many of the nineteenth century travellers was immediately fascinated by the City. As a historian, I was eager to avail myself of the various walking tours and trips around historic buildings, cemeteries, and streets, and it was during these excursions that I first heard the names of some notable Black women of the nineteenth century. It seemed remarkable to me that not only had they managed to make an impact on the city's consciousness during their lifetimes, but their stories had survived through the centuries. Therefore, many years later, when deciding to study for a PhD, I remembered them, and the city which had so fascinated me, and resolved to examine the lives of some of these women. I decided to research women whose stories were not only compelling and interesting, but also served to demonstrate the main premises of this thesis. All of them exemplified the way in which free Black women could challenge White authority, utilizing their skills and talents, while taking advantage of societal and economic changes. Hence, it provides an examination of Eulalie Mandeville, a free Black businesswoman who single-handedly ran her successful business empire. It also looks at Henriette Delille, another competent manager, and the leader of the first order of free Black nuns in New Orleans. Her sister, Cécille Bonille, saw how the City was changing, and decided to eschew old practices by conducting a domestic partnership with one of the newer inhabitants of New Orleans. Marie Dolores Laveaux, who was the half-sister of Voodoo priestess, Marie Laveaux, and also an enterprising businesswoman, showed her strength by refusing to submit to an abusive husband. Finally, it analyses the life history of Marie Couvent, who was probably the most disadvantaged of all the women. She overcame her enslaved background and refugee status to forge a life for herself, which ultimately benefitted the free Black community, by her philanthropic bequests.

The research project will also consider these women's lives against the backdrop of New Orleans' racial and sexual mores. Factors such as the French and Spanish cultural economic and political influences affected these women's lives. Their religious worship, mostly centering around the Roman Catholic Church, their relationships both familial, and with the free Black community, and their working life, also had a profound effect in shaping their experiences. The thesis will show how the issues of racial individuality and class subdivisions within the free Black society also played an important role in defining their identities beyond their immediate family, often causing them to come into conflict with a racially ordered patriarchal state. Furthermore, it will demonstrate how these women negotiated and networked within the free Black community and beyond. They used legal, social and economic channels to challenge the dominance of White male authority, creating a distinct position for themselves within society, which was very different from that expected for a free woman of colour.[2] Through their efforts, these free Black women provided a valuable contribution, not only to the City's general economy, but also by assisting the free Black community in its creation of charitable and educational organizations. Thus, my project not only adds to the recent scholarship on free Black women in the nineteenth century, but also provides new important insights into the life they created for themselves. My research confirms that all these women, in various walks of life showed self-determination in order to manage their affairs. It also clearly highlights how far they used various networks in order to enhance their safety in an often-hostile society, engendering links which went way beyond New Orleans to the Atlantic world. The final chapter focuses on the legacies of these women through the actions of their children. It opens up further questions about the ambitions of these women, both for themselves and for their children, which could usefully be examined through further research. This study is timely, as recent events in the U.S.A and elsewhere have shone the spotlight on the continuing problems faced by the Black community. As a result of this, there has been renewed interest in the history of African-Americans, and how previous events have contributed to the continuing

[2] See Marissa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives, Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (University of Pennsylvania Press), 2016; Lisa Ze Winters, " 'More Desultory and Unconnected than Any Other': Geography, Desire, and, Freedom in Eliza Potter's 'A Hairdresser's Experience in High Life'" *American Quarterly*, Vol. 61, No. 3, In the Wake of Katrina: New Paradigms and Social Visions (Sept., 2009); Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (University of Harvard Press, 2001)

difficulties of race relations up to the present day. This research will therefore provide an important contribution to those insights, and certainly demonstrates that these women's lives did indeed matter.

Although in-depth research of New Orleans' free people of colour became more established by the mid-twentieth century, there was little examination of its female cohort. Indeed, the first scholars to research the lives of the City's free Black community, such as H.E. Sterkx and John Blassingame, only barely made mention of free Black women, even though they were a large and important group in the City.[3] In 1985, however, Deborah Gray White's groundbreaking book, *Ar'n't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* made a giant leap forward in the study of Black women. White's book was the first to be completely devoted to the complex lives of enslaved women, and therefore had a significant impact in the field of African-American history. Her analysis exposed the sexual exploitation that was intertwined with Antebellum stereotypes of Black women, as either asexual Mammies or oversexed Jezebels. While the book focused on the enslaved populations of the plantation South, it provided further explanation of the overtly sexualized images of free mixed-race women, which directly emanated from these stereotypes.[4] Following the publication of White's study, other scholars began to build upon her example and examine both free and enslaved women of colour in more depth. The issue of racial tropes around free Black women's sexuality was also explored by Kimberly S. Hanger, who focused on the interracial sexual relationships which took place in New Orleans during the era of Spanish rule. Her research identified the possible advantages of these relationships for free Black women, enabling them to amass wealth and property because of these unions. Hangar also argued that their unmarried status allowed them a certain amount of freedom to pursue business activities, unlike married White women who were under the control of their spouse, and the restrictions they imposed.[5]

As a result of these unions, and their own entrepreneurial activities, free Black women were often able to hand down legacies to their children. This is evidenced in Virginia Gould's and Emily

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[3] H. E. Sterkx, *The Free Negro in Ante-Bellum Louisiana* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1972); John W. Blassingame, *Black New Orleans 1860-1880* (The University of Chicago Press, 1973)
[4] Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (W.W. Norton, New York, 1985)
[5] Kimberly S. Hanger, "Coping in a Complex World: Free Black Women in Colonial New Orleans," in *The Devil's Lane: Sex and Race in the Early South*, edited collection by Catherine Clinton and Michele Gillespie (Oxford University Press, 1997), 218-231.

Clark's innovative research into the importance of the Catholic Church for New Orleans' free women of colour. Their article entitled "The Feminine Face of Afro-Catholicism in New Orleans, 1727-1852" includes the family history of Henriette Delille, showing how wealth and property was passed down through the succeeding generations.[6] Although all of the women examined in this thesis have sometimes been mentioned in various books, articles and dissertations, often as part of an overview of New Orleans' Antebellum free people of colour, or occasionally as a stand-alone study, this will be the first in-depth research which directly juxtaposes their lives, thereby placing them within an interconnected community of both Black and White people. Indeed, one of the surprises of this thesis was how the lives of these women were themselves so interlinked. They would, at the very least, have been aware of each other's existence, through various commercial activities, apart from links through friends and family. This strong interconnection between the women studied in this project, also shows how class as well as race was an important factor in determining status, in both free Black, and White society.

Like Hangar, Amrita Chakrabarti Myers suggests that Antebellum free women of colour also often deliberately sought relationships with powerful and wealthy White men in order to further their financial ambitions.[7] This analysis still implies a sense of exploitation, suggesting as it does, an imbalance in these relationships, both in terms of wealth and power. However, in her compelling study of New Orleans' "quadroons," Emily Clark suggests that by the Antebellum period free Black women were choosing to marry free Black men rather than become a White man's partner.[8] It could be argued therefore that the resulting legal protection they obtained by doing so, conversely suggested a more equal union than that of a plaçée.[9] However, the reality was not so clear cut, because many of these women were still under the control of their husbands. It also appears that by the Antebellum period, the characteristics of some of these so-called plaçage relationships were changing, thereby also negating

[6] Emily Clark and Virginia Meacham Gould, "The Feminine Face of Afro-Catholicism in New Orleans, 1727-1852." *The William and Mary Quarterly, Third Series,* Vol. 59, No.2 (April 2002), 409-448
[7] Amrita Chakrabarti Myers, *Forging Freedom: Black Women in the Pursuit of Liberty in Antebellum Charleston* (University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 25
[8] Emily Clark, *The Strange History of the American Quadroon: Free Women of Color in the Revolutionary Atlantic World* (University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 86, 88
[9] The term plaçée traditionally referred to a free woman of colour who was conducting a domestic partnership with a French or Spanish Creole man.

some of the inequalities of the plaçée.[10] The case study of Henriette Delille's sister, Cécille Bonille, offered here in Chapter Three, showed how she did not ally herself to a Spanish or French Creole man, as had been the norm for her family for several generations, instead, having a domestic partnership with one of the Northern European immigrants, who were by this time flooding into New Orleans. This meant that the relationship acquired a different aspect. She moved in more diverse circles than that of the totally Creole world, fostering and maintaining contacts with men from the newly Americanized New Orleans, which would benefit her throughout her life. It also became clear that, by this era, and with the increasing affluence of some free Black women, the balance of power in these formerly unequal partnerships could shift slightly in their favour. Some of them became businesswomen and wealthy property owners, in some cases wealthier than their partners. This applied to various women whether they were in a domestic partnership or married. It may have been this increased confidence through the fruits of their own abilities that gave them the impetus to use their White male connections, and the legal system, in protection of their property.

Various other scholars such as Loren Schweninger have also studied the history of Antebellum free women of colour as property holders.[11] The legal right to own property, along with access to equal protection of that property under the law, was accorded to free people of colour in New Orleans in the Colonial period and maintained after the Louisiana Purchase. This right marked a boundary between free and enslaved people of African descent in New Orleans.[12] Free Black people, therefore, not only became landowners, but also the holders of enslaved people, when they had the means to do so. Free Black slaveholding has always presented a complex and challenging phenomenon for historians. People of African descent owning other people of African descent did not fit the common narrative of slavery in the United States as White subjugation of Black people. Scholars who have studied African-American slaveholders have therefore long debated the motivations for holding members of their own

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[10] Plaçage was a recognized extralegal system in French and Spanish slave colonies of North America (including the Caribbean) by which ethnic European men entered into non-legalized domestic unions with women of non-European or mixed-race descent. The term comes from the French *placer* meaning "to place with."

[11] Loren Schweninger, "Prosperous Blacks in the South 1790-1880." *The American Historical Review 95,* (February 1990), 31-56

[12] Kimberly S. Hanger, *Bounded Lives, Bounded Places: Free Black Society in Colonial New Orleans 1769-1803* (Durham Duke University Press, 1997), 56

race in bondage. In 1924, Carter G. Woodson studied Black slaveholding through the 1830 Census, finding that most individuals only owned a small number of slaves. Woodson concluded from his research that free people of colour therefore mainly held slaves through philanthropic motives. In subsequent studies, historians echoed this theory, citing examples of free people of colour who purchased their spouses, children, other family members and friends.[13] Larry Koger departed from this line of reasoning in his study of Black slaveholders in South Carolina. His research suggested that although some free people of colour certainly owned slaves for benign reasons, it was clear that a good many of them used slaves for commercial purposes. He also concluded that slaveholding amongst free Black people could be a mixture of the benevolent and the exploitative.[14] Since Koger's work, this dichotomy of motives for free Black slaveholding has remained the predominant way in which it is discussed. In her dissertation, Anne Ulentin undertook the first comprehensive study of slaveholding among free women of colour in nineteenth century New Orleans. Ulentin argues that scholarship needs to move beyond the simple divide between free Black slaveholders as either mostly benign or mostly exploitative.[15] Paul Lachance also argues that the mixture of reasons for the purchase of enslaved people showed in the documented treatment of individuals by their holders.[16] According to Marisa J. Fuentes, free Black women held slaves as a further way of protecting themselves from societal forces and the powerlessness of their sex. She argues that "with their vulnerability and lack of choice, free women of colour felt constrained to perpetuate a slave economy."[17] The overarching desire to protect their tenuous freedom was also an important factor in their slaveholding, as the more enslaved people who were held, the greater the household's perceived wealth and standing, and the further away it was from the spectre of slavery.[18] My research has found that relationships with enslaved people were often complicated,

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[13] Carter G. Woodson, " Free Negro Owners of Slaves in the U.S. in 1830." *The Journal of Negro History,* 9*,* (January 1924) 41-85

[14] Larry Koger, *Black Slaveowners*: *Free Black Slave Masters in South Carolina: 1790-1860 (*University of South Carolina Press, 1995), xiii

[15] Anne Ulentin, "Free Women of Color and Slaveholding in New Orleans, 1810-1830." (MA Dissertation, Louisiana State University, 2007), 71-73

[16] Paul Lachance, "The Limits of Privilege: Where Free Persons of Color Stood in the Hierarchy of Wealth in Antebellum New Orleans" in *Against the Odds: Free Blacks in the Slave Societies of the Americas*, edited collection by Jane Landers (Frank Cass Publishers: London, 1996), 65-84

[17] Marissa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives, Enslaved People, Violence, and the Archive* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 62

[18] Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 151

and could be determined by a person's circumstances and upbringing, both for the enslaver and the enslaved. Even within a household, enslaved people could be viewed and treated differently according to skills, status, and parentage. Thus, there is no one model which can be used to determine motivation for Black slaveholding and their treatment of the enslaved. This research about the enslaved also further emphasizes that although free women of colour have often been viewed as a homogenous cohort of women, in reality, diverse backgrounds and circumstances made their life experiences very different, thus also highlighting the value of comparing their lives through these case studies.

Finally, the thesis looks at the legacy of empowerment which these women engendered. Previously, scholars such as Marisa J. Fuentes have argued that free Black women were constrained by their race and gender in a system of exploitation. She suggests therefore that their "situations allowed them a mode of survival that kept structures of inequality and denigration in place."[19] Thus, although they may have seemingly gained some status through their activities of networking and management of organizations, it could never be deemed as such, because through these activities, they were supporting the values of the society which had oppressed them. However, Sabra Mahmood interprets the actions of her own research subjects to suggest increased empowerment in a repressive society towards women. She describes it as being behaviour that manifests "in ways that confound our expectations."[20] This definition could also apply to New Orleans' free women of colour. As Jessica Johnson's recent book about free Black women in New Orleans suggests, they may have confounded the beliefs of White supremacy towards women of colour. She describes how they used a mixture of " refusal and defence" in their practices, thereby negating the idea that "licentiousness and subservience was the sum total of their gender and race," by challenging the mores of the dominant authorities. [21] Through its case studies, this thesis builds on the work of Johnson by further revealing how women in various spheres of life showed their power and confidence. It also demonstrates how they were not deterred in their ambitions

[19] Marissa J., Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives, Enslaved People, Violence, and the Archive* (University of Pennsylvania, 2016), 67
[20] Sabra Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamist Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton University, 2005), 20
[21] Jessica Marie Johnson, *Wicked Flesh: Black Women, Intimacy and Freedom in the Atlantic World* (University of Pennsylvania), 146

by their perceived lowly status. The title of the research project *Great Changes are Often Wrought through Humble Beginnings* is therefore apt in encapsulating the central theme of this thesis, that through their actions these women brought about changes, not only for themselves but also for New Orleans society. Two of these five women originated from what would be considered as the humblest of beginnings, that of an enslaved person, while the others were born into a society where they were perceived as having little value. It could be argued therefore that by their actions, they all engendered different perceptions of what it meant to be a free Black woman in Antebellum New Orleans, thus laying down the foundations for change for the generations that followed.

Terms and Concepts

When describing and writing about these women, there are several terms commonly used which have sometimes caused disagreement. Therefore, this section of the introduction will discuss the use of them, and why I have chosen to include them in this study. For example, the utilization of the word plaçage by scholars as a blanket term for those unions between a free Black woman and a White man has caused some discord, suggesting as it does, the idea of the mistress, and thus, a lack of morality, further evoking those negative portrayals of Black women. Historians such as Shirley E. Thompson and Emily Clark have argued that these so-called plaçage relationships were far from being the fleeting, immoral unions associated with the term. They were often long-term domestic partnerships, closer to marriage than to concubinage. Thompson, therefore, while using the term, has made clear that she sees it as "a middle ground between legitimate marriage and mere concubinage."[22] Emily Clark's research about free Black women in New Orleans also demonstrates that, while some White men were unfaithful to their mixed-race partners, having serial relationships, and others left to marry White women, there were more examples of men who made lifelong exclusive commitments.[23] Thus, the notion of a relationship

[22]Shirley E. Thompson, *Exiles at Home: The Struggle to Become American in Creole New Orleans* (Harvard University Press, 2009), 12

[23] Emily Clark, *The Strange History of the American Quadroon: free Women of Color in the Revolutionary Atlantic World* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 127; Emily Clark also places the institution's origin in the Caribbean, where white bachelors often hired free women of colour to manage their households. These women worked by contract; they often – but not always – were sexual partners, and frequently became

between a free Black woman and a White man as a rite of passage, or a fleeting union has been somewhat debunked. Kenneth Aslakson attributes most of what he calls the "quadroon-plaçage myth" to the travellers who misunderstood French-Caribbean social traditions.[24] Therefore, while, in the interests of clarity and brevity, my thesis uses the term plaçage to describe these relationships, it also makes clear the variety of unions the word encompasses.

The thesis also makes use of the various terms utilized to describe the status of these women, such as "free woman of colour," "Afro-Creole" and "free Black woman," while noting that these labels can also be ambiguous. In Antebellum New Orleans, an individual named in legal documents as a "free woman of color" was presumed to be a person of mixed-race. However, some free Black women like Marie Couvent, were of wholly African origin, nonetheless they were also described as "free women of color." This conflation of mixed racial ancestry and free people of colour has been further complicated by the use of such terms as "Afro-Creoles" and "Creoles of color." Thompson charted the history of the word Creole, suggesting that it was very much bound up with the individuality of the free Black population, "channelling them into a singular identity with deep roots in a particular context."[25] According to Thompson, the word derived from the Portuguese Crioulo and the Wolof Kréyol, originally describing a person of European descent, who was born in the "New World," and denoting a separation from their country of heritage. In the nineteenth century, the word took on a variety of forms. For example, in the Antebellum period, when used in the lower case, it merely attributed birth. However, later in the century when the word took on an upper-case C, it became more openly political. Free Black activists of the Reconstruction period, like Rodolphe Desdunes, wished to rescue the word from White supremacists, who wanted the noun Creole to be solely reserved for Whites, while the adjective creole would be used to "describe lesser beings and inanimate objects such as creole horses, creole cotton and creole 'negroes.' " [26] I have used the words free women of colour, free Black women, and Afro-Creoles

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partners for life. This pattern was brought over by refugees from Saint-Domingue following the revolution. 59, 63–64

[24] Kenneth Aslakson, "'The 'Quadroon-Plaçage Myth' of Antebellum New Orleans: Anglo-American (Mis)interpretations of a French-Caribbean Phenomenon." Journal of Social History, Vol. 45, No. 3, (Spring 2012), 709–710, 727

[25] Shirley E. Thompson, *Exiles at Home: The Struggle to Become American in Creole New Orleans* (Harvard University Press, 2009) 30-31

[26] Ibid

interchangeably throughout the thesis when describing the women of my case studies. Arguably, even Marie Couvent could be described as Creole by culture, if not by birth. She certainly shared cultural traits of language and religion with those other women who were born in New Orleans to a free Black mother and a White father. As the lack of capitalization potentially further diminished the status of New Orleans' Afro-Creoles, so it has been argued that the non-capitalization of black does the same, by not recognizing the shared history, identity and community among people who identify as such. I have therefore capitalized Black, and White, when referring to individuals, thus emphasizing their status as distinct cultural entities in the United States.

Methodology

The methodology for this thesis is a combination of in-depth archival research juxtaposed against the historiography of time and place, and narrative research, to conceptualize expressions of identity, community, and empowerment. The primary material for my research comes almost exclusively from public archival documents including censuses, city directories, notarial records, wills, and successions. There is little in the way of more personal documents, written by hand, such as letters or diaries. Marisa J. Fuentes outlines the ways in which use of these public documents can be problematic. She argues that they show how the "material lives" of Afro-Creole women were created and sustained by White power, thereby making it difficult for historians to meet "the disciplinary demands of the subject which require them to construct unbiased accounts from these documents."[27] The historian must therefore be careful to include wide ranging research from secondary sources when considering these primary documents. This research has taken into consideration the restraints imposed by these archives and will also reflect on issues of veracity in examination of these public documents. However, despite the problems, these fragmentary glimpses can also offer crucial insight into the lives of these women, even while living under the domination of a White patriarchal, slave society. Wills, even when recorded by a notary, were generally dictated. Therefore, by using a mixture of the testator's own words and

[27]Marissa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives, Enslaved People, Violence, and the Archive* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 63

legalese, they become the closest thing to personal papers. Testaments also disclose networks of family members, friends, business associates, and other social relationships forged during the testator's lifetime. Among the most important contacts named in any will are the beneficiaries who receive bequeathed property, and executors who manage the testator's estate. Comparison of these documents also reveals noticeable variations in the personal information included. Therefore, when looking at these archives, this research will also consider the silences and what they might mean, as well as what these documents reveal. Although my thesis also uses some of the same records previously utilized by historians, it will provide different analyses by looking at these women's lives through the lens of identity, community and empowerment, and by providing a broader examination of the innovative ways in which they circumvented their problems and navigated their way through New Orleans' complex society.

I am aware that as all my five case studies left a public record of themselves, either personally through their own testimony or via public documents, they were all from the privileged strata of New Orleans' free Black society. Thus, they assumed a place as women of note in some way. It is arguable that by using these women as my case studies I am perpetuating the marginalization of free Black women who lived and died without leaving any traces of their existence. However, the life histories that this project does focus on, will turn the spotlight on the problems that all these women faced, while living in a racially ordered patriarchal society. They all experienced the common factors of urban condition, the powerlessness caused by their race and gender, as well as the struggle for increased economic stability for themselves and for their families. Therefore, this research will also highlight the intersections of race, class and gender for *all* free Black women in New Orleans during the Antebellum era, while reflecting on the ways in which some of these women were able to find a mode of life which allowed them a degree of autonomy.

Structure of the Thesis

Chapter One will therefore examine the background to the history of free women of colour. Through an exploration of New Orleans' historical evolution as a city, passing through the hands of the French, Spanish and finally the American administration, this chapter will lay out the foundations for the

Antebellum society, in which these women lived. The mixing of these various cultures shaped the lives of its inhabitants It will look at how the colonial policies of enslavement and manumission led to the formation of a distinctive free Black community. The chapter will also foreground themes to be discussed throughout the thesis by providing a background to various important aspects of these women's lives including religion, relationships, and employment. It was also in these areas where they often became successful in organizing their own affairs.

Following on from this, Chapter Two will provide the first case study in the form of free Black nun, Henriette Delille. This chapter will look at how some free Black women were successful in founding institutions for the free Black community, despite much opposition from various sources. This chapter primarily focuses on the means by which these women were able to direct their own lives, by ascertaining how far the creation of a religious community recognized by the Catholic Church, allowed Delille and her followers to achieve some form of empowerment in New Orleans. This chapter contrasts her life history with that of Elizabeth Lange, who founded an order of Black nuns, the Oblate Sisters of Providence, in Baltimore. It illustrates the many ways in which Delille was more successful in gaining the autonomy to organize her order than Lange. I argue that this was partly because of the force of Delille's personality, her position as a member of the free Black community's elite, and the difference in cultures between New Orleans and Baltimore. This chapter will also look at the other important themes running throughout this thesis which had a profound effect on these women's lives, including class, skin colour, self-identity, and, of course, slaveholding. Although the Sisters of the Holy Family were instrumental in helping enslaved people, paradoxically they also held slaves. This chapter looks at the reasons for this, contrasting them to the Oblate Sisters, who were never slaveholders. This chapter also begins the thesis' investigation of the diverse female networks formed by free women of colour, by looking at Delille's own feminine network of support, which also included White women, and which eventually evolved into an order of nuns. Besides their slaveholding, New Orleans' Black nuns have also been criticized for denying their own heritage by their conformity to White notions of behaviour, and by their elitism. Therefore, this chapter provides a possible explanation for their reasons for doing so. I argue that, although there is evidence of classism in the order, this was a deliberate ploy, as the nuns were building a narrative of the Sisters of the Holy Family as genteel free Black women of a

certain class, in order to gain approbation from a hostile White society, and to ensure their continued survival.

Although Henriette Delille and her nuns eschewed a life of domesticity, most free Black women did not. Chapter Three therefore looks at the case studies of two women: Cécille Bonille, who was the plaçée of a White man, and Marie Dolores Laveaux who was married to a free man of colour. It has often been argued that the life of a plaçée was always one of exploitation, little different from that of an enslaved woman, as they suffered from a lack of choice. However, it could also be suggested that plaçage could give advantages of wealth to women, who otherwise would have had none, one of the main reasons why they actively sought a White partner. Despite this, recent research has also shown that by the Antebellum period, marriage with a free Black man had become increasingly more popular for free Black women. This chapter therefore examines the two women's domestic unions, exploring the complexities posed in consideration of both relationships. My research suggests that initially, probably neither of them had much choice in their unions, as they were partnered, possibly through pressure from their parents, when they were both teenagers and their partners were both middle aged men. All women were subjugated in Antebellum New Orleans, and whether free Black or White, were often married young to men considered suitable by their families. This chapter also demonstrates, by its exploration of Marie Dolores Laveaux's situation with her husband, that exploitative relationships were also not only confined to those with White partners. However, the research also suggests that when both Bonille and Laveaux reached maturity, they proved that they were both capable of directing their own lives. This chapter therefore concentrates on the importance of free Black women's recourse to legal protection, because both women had to rely on the courts for their own economic and personal security. As Chakrabarti Myers argues, many free Black women, especially in New Orleans, became litigants in lawsuits to protect their property, thus suggesting a belief in their entitlement to certain rights.[28] Both Céçille Bonille and Marie Dolores Laveaux contested their rights to their property, and in Laveaux's case, she gained her freedom from an acrimonious marriage. Therefore, I argue that,

[28] Amrita Chakrabarti Myers, *Forging Freedom: Black Women in the Pursuit of Liberty in Antebellum Charleston* (University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 25

although they may have been constrained in their choice of relationship, ultimately Cécille gained some financial security from her union during her partner's lifetime, and Marie Dolores escaped from her marriage with her fortune intact. Therefore, these women ultimately demonstrated that they could gain empowerment by using legal, economic, and social systems to acquire a stronger position within the existing power structures.

Chapter Four looks at Eulalie Mandeville, who also used the power of the court to protect what was rightfully hers, and she had much to protect, because she was one of the richest free Black women in New Orleans, and the protagonist of the vignette at the beginning of this introduction. It also examines the life of another successful entrepreneur, Marie Couvent. In this chapter, I argue that it was relationships with other women which were evident and paramount in contributing to their entrepreneurial success, and by providing support, even in the courtroom. The other themes discussed are the business strategies which these women employed and how they were learnt, the personal characteristics of the two entrepreneurs, and the perceived effects of race and gender on their achievements. This chapter also further explores domestic relationships, as the union between Eulalie Mandeville and her White partner Eugéne Macarty was seemingly less unequal than has been traditionally assumed of the relationships between plaçées and their White partners. He was of a comparable age to her, from a similar background, and she had the advantage over him in terms of monetary wealth. This chapter will also continue to consider the issues surrounding slaveholding by free women of colour in New Orleans, as both women bought and sold numerous slaves, either for investment purposes, or to work in their commercial endeavours. Furthermore, this chapter focuses on the formation of kinship groups, looking at the complicated and tangled associations with enslaved and free Black people and White people in New Orleans during the lives of both women. Although this chapter also demonstrates how Eulalie's business practices gained her the respect of prominent White businessmen, it shows how Marie Couvent started a change among free Black society by leaving a lasting legacy, with her bequest of money to start a school for Black orphans. This was unlike Eulalie, who was more concerned about securing future economic stability for her children, rather than assisting the free Black community. Thus, Eulalie is all but forgotten in New Orleans, except by scholars, while Marie Couvent is one of the few free women of colour to be remembered even up to the present day.

To conclude this research, Chapter Five delves into the lives of two of the families, the Macartys and the Augustes, whose children were descended from Eulalie Mandeville and Marie Dolores Laveaux, looking at their lives after the Civil War. This chapter therefore examines the ways in which these two women carried their legacies forward, through their descendants, thus providing continuity during a period of great societal upheaval in New Orleans. It studies the difficult challenges their offspring faced, and the decisions they had to make after the war. It also analyses how the main themes of this thesis, which include class, kinship, community, and empowerment were carried on in the next generation, notwithstanding the very different circumstances after the Civil War. Although, of necessity, I have had to research males more than females in this chapter because more of them survived into older adulthood, I argue that the spirit of their feminine forbears did indeed filter down into the succeeding generation as an added legacy from these women. While one of the families ultimately disappeared into White society, some family members made their presence felt in the political arena, often to their own person detriment. Of the women that I researched, I discovered that although in many ways their lives had become more restricted than those of their forbears, mainly because of public opinion, and the differing ways in which Black women were viewed after the war, yet they still defied convention and supported each other, in the same way that free Black women had done before them. Like them, they made provision for, and championed the next generation of women, by leaving them legacies, and by their example as role models. They also relied upon each other for support in a hostile world, very much like their forbears. Thus, I conclude that the example set by these five women, unknown as they mostly were, until recently, has filtered down through the generations, and certainly permeated organizations such as the Sisters of the Holy Family, the Couvent School and various other institutions. There is no doubt that the history of New Orleans was also important in shaping the storied of these Antebellum free women of colour. Thus, Chapter One will take us back to the beginning of their stories by looking at how New Orleans' evolution intertwined with the lives of these free Black women.

Chapter One

Catholics, Tragic Mulattas and Entrepreneurs: The Rise of New Orleans' Free Women of Colour

> *On the levee five hundred white men and women, & of all hues of brown & all classes of faces, from round Yankees, to grisly and lean Spaniards, black negroes and negresses, filthy Indians half naked, mulattoes, curly and straight haired, quateroons of all shades, long haired & frizzled, the women dressed in the most flaring yellow and scarlet gowns.*[29]

This first chapter will set the background to the emergence of free Black women as a visible force in New Orleans, by looking at the history of the Crescent City, and in particular, how Black people took advantage of the policies and customs of the colonial city, in order to secure their manumission and to gain economic security. Colonial tradition also affected the composition of free Back society in New Orleans, as it favoured the manumission of light skinned women of colour. This created an imbalance in the ratio of free Black women to men and resulted in a disproportionate number of lighter skinned freed people.[30] It also had the effect of encouraging free women of colour to form relationships with White men, and created a hierarchy amongst free people of colour, which was partially based around lineage and skin colour. Evidence also indicates that the ways in which Black women escaped slavery, as well as in subsequently finding jobs and acquiring property, were tied to the nature of their enslavement. However, after manumission, free women of colour sought to distance themselves from their enslaved pasts, striving to gain increased control over their lives and protect their always fragile freedom. As this thesis will demonstrate, they also often had to overcome prejudices relating both to race and gender, which shaped, not only the terms of their labour, but also their modes of dress, worship, and recreation. That they were often successful in their endeavours is a testament to their ingenuity in

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[29] Architect Latrobe described his first view of New Orleans after sailing there from Baltimore in 1819. Benjamin Henry Latrobe, *Impressions Respecting New Orleans Diary and Sketches, 1818-1820* edited by Samuel Wilson Jnr.(New York, 1951), 219

[30] See Gwendolyn Midlo-Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The development of Afro Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge, 1992); Jean M. Spear, *Race, Sex and Social Order in Early New Orleans* (John Hopkins University, 2009); Kimberley S. Hangar, *Bounded Lives: Bounded Places, Free Black Society in Colonial New Orleans. 1769-1803* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997)

overcoming these challenges and their determination to secure a better life for themselves and their children.

This chapter will also provide a background to the societal, cultural, and economic influences which governed the lives of these women, namely: the Catholic religion, employment, and their relationships with both White, enslaved, and free Black people. These common factors of the urban condition, race, gender, and legal status worked together in critical ways to unify the life experience of these Afro-Creole women, shaping their identities and opportunities. All these topics will be analyzed in further detail in later chapters by looking at examples of how particular free women of colour used legal, economic, and social systems to try to acquire a stronger position within the existing race and gender power structures.

Enslaved and Free People of Colour in French New Orleans

In 1719, the first large group of enslaved Africans came to Louisiana, which was at this time under French rule. Two thirds of them were from the Senegambian region of West Africa, and the rest from the Bight of Benin and Angola.[31] The economy quickly became dependent on them, as they brought desperately needed knowledge of the cultivation of rice, corn, tobacco and cotton, as well as an assortment of skills related to the cultivation of these crops, and also in the production of tools and crafts.[32] By 1721, there were more Black enslaved men than White men in the City. Indeed, until the massive European immigration of the 1830s and 1840s, non-White residents formed the majority of the population of New Orleans.[33] Also, during this period, Black men generally outnumbered women, and by the end of the 1720s the ratio was 2:1.[34] The 1724 Louisiana Code Noir governed the treatment of these enslaved people. Parts of this were influenced by the codes produced for the French Caribbean and Indian Ocean colonies. However, the Louisiana Code differed from these others in several

[31] Gwendolyn Midlo-Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The development of Afro Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge, 1992), 43
[32] Ibid
[33] Ibid
[34] Emily Clark and Virginia Meacham Gould, "The Feminine Face of Afro-Catholicism in New Orleans." *The William and Mary Quarterly.* Third Series, Vol 59, No2 (April 2002), 415

important ways, especially with regard to the prevention of interracial unions. For example, the code in Saint-Domingue prohibited concubinage but did allow marriage between Black and White couples, who had been baptized in the Roman Catholic religion. The Louisiana Code banned marriage between enslaved and free Black people and Whites but allowed a free man of colour to marry a "slave concubine," if he was unmarried.[35] In practice, however, the Louisiana Code did very little to dissuade unsanctioned interracial relationships because of the imbalance in numbers of White women to White men in the colony. Thus, although the Code Noir prescribed a standard of behaviour by law, this was countered by a set of social traditions established by necessity.

In Saint-Domingue, manumission of the enslaved was initially encouraged by the Crown, in order to create a class of artisans and skilled workers, but, by the 1720s, there was concern about the size of the rapidly growing free Black population on the island.[36] Eager not to make the same mistake in Louisiana, the 1724 code made it more difficult for slaveholders to free their enslaved workers, by stipulating that they (the owners) had to be over twenty-five years old. They also had to gain the prior approval of the Superior Council.[37] Therefore, numbers of freed people remained relatively low during this period. Of those that were freed, more than half of them were women, either alone or with their children. The census figures suggest that certain enslaved people were more likely to be freed than others. According to these documents, being a woman, or a lighter skinned "mûlatre,*"* significantly increased the chances of manumission.[38] Although, as Jennifer M. Spear suggests, one must exercise caution as to the accuracy of these numbers, as free people of colour were often recorded by the census takers as having a lighter skin, as a result of their free status, it gives some indication of the composition of free Black society during the French period.[39]

Between 1733 and 1742, no new shipments of enslaved people came to New Orleans, and only one shipment in 1743. This moratorium on these shipments continued until after 1776 when the

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[35] 1724 Louisiana Code Noir, Article vi
[36] Jennifer M. Spear, *Race, Sex and Social Order in Early New Orleans* (John Hopkins University Press, 2009), 65
[37] 1724 Louisiana Code Noir, Article L
[38] Jennifer M. Spear, *Race, Sex and Social Order in Early New Orleans* (John Hopkins University Press, 2009), 85
[39] Ibid. 91

Spanish reinstated the trade.[40] Louisiana historian, Gwendolyn Midlo-Hall, suggests that this stasis produced a unique Afro-Creole society which synthesized aspects of European, African, and Native American culture. None of these cultures were entirely subsumed into a European melting pot.[41] The second generation of these enslaved people, therefore, began to take on the mores, culture and religion of their French owners, while simultaneously maintaining their links with African traditions. This produced a syncretic blend of cultures, which could be seen in many of the port cities with ties to Africa and the Caribbean, throughout the Atlantic world.

Spanish New Orleans

In 1763, the King of France ceded Louisiana to Spain. French laws gave way to Spanish ones, and the Cabildo or town council was created.[42] The Spanish introduced a new and distinctly more liberal Codigo Negro (Black Code). Significantly, Spanish law was similar to Roman law, in that enslavement was not seen as a permanent state. Therefore, Spanish law provided enslaved people with several ways in which they could obtain their "carta de libertad" or freedom. Firstly, slaveholders were no longer required to obtain the governing authorities' approval for their manumissions.[43] Also included in the Spanish Black Code was a practice known as coartaćion, which had been developed in Cuba, giving the enslaved the right to obtain their freedom for a price agreed upon by their holders. If they could not pay the money immediately, they could pay in instalments over time. If the slaveholder refused to grant them freedom or set the price unreasonably high, the enslaved person could petition the Governor´s Tribunal to reassess their monetary value. The same procedure could be applied to a third-party purchase by another interested person.[44] With this relaxation of the manumission laws, it only took four years of Spanish rule for the number of manumissions to surpass all of those freed during forty years of

[40]Gwendolyn Midlo-Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge, 1992), 60
[41] Gwendolyn Midlo-Hall, *Slavery and African Ethnicities in the Americas: Restoring the Links* (University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 166
[42] Joe Gray Taylor, *Louisiana: A Bicentennial History* (Louisiana State Museum, 1976), 27
[43] Jennifer M. Spear, *Race, Sex and Social Order in Early New Orleans (*John Hopkins University Press, 2009), 109-110
[44] Ibid

French rule. In total, almost 2,000 of the enslaved were freed during the four decades of the Spanish administration.[45] The increased prosperity of Louisiana during this period meant that New Orleans became a flourishing commercial centre, with many opportunities for the enslaved to hire themselves out, or to sell their crafts and produce. They could then use the money to buy their freedom. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, self-purchase or third-party purchase became more common than voluntary manumission.[46]

Like the French administration, certain enslaved people had more chance of gaining their freedom than others, and women were still more likely to be freed than men. An enslaved man was worth more than a woman, so it was rarer for slaveholders to free them voluntarily, and if they wanted to buy their own freedom, it cost them more. It was also customary for French and Spanish men to free enslaved women, especially if they had a previous sexual connection with them, and they also often freed any children resulting from these unions.[47] Although darker skinned Black people and "mulattoes" were freed in roughly equal numbers, darker skinned individuals were one and a half times more likely to buy their own freedom.[48] In her analysis of Spanish-era manumissions, Kimberley S. Hangar concluded that the lighter a woman's skin, the more likely she was to be freed when younger and through the actions of others, whereas those with darker complexions were more likely to be freed at an older age, and through their own endeavours.[49] This inequality of numbers may also have been occasioned by the preponderance of lighter skinned enslaved women who were used in the house. As a result of the more intimate nature of their employment, they often had a closer personal relationship with their enslavers, whether it was a sexual one or not.[50] The sacramental registers and notarial records from the Spanish period also reveal that there were more liaisons between White Creole men and free

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[45] Ibid
[46] Carolyn Morrow Long, *A New Orleans Voodou Princess: The Legend and Reality of Marie Laveau* (University Press of Florida, 2006), 51
[47]Laurence J. Kotlikoff and Anton J. Robert, "The Manumission of Slaves in New Orleans 1827-1846." *Southern Studies*, 19, No. 2, (1980), 178
[48] Jennifer M. Spear, *Race, Sex and Social Order in Early New Orleans* (John Hopkins University Press, 2009), 109
[49] Kimberley S. Hangar, *Bounded Lives: Bounded Places, Free Black Society in Colonial New Orleans. 1769-1803* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 21-34
[50] See Jane E. Dabel's analysis of the occupations of black women in "My Ma Went to Work Every Mornin': Color, Gender & Occupation in New Orleans 1840-1860."*The Journal of Louisiana Historical Association*, Vol 41, No 2 (Spring 2000)

women of colour than during the French period. These increasing interracial relationships and their resulting offspring meant that, by the end of the eighteenth century, New Orleans had a thriving free Black population.[51]

Under Spanish law, when a slaveholder wanted to free an enslaved person, they merely had to appear with two witnesses in front of a priest or notary. The code also made it legal to free the enslaved, not only during the lifetime of the owner, but also by last will and testament. By the end of the century, giving the enslaved their freedom through wills happened very frequently in New Orleans. Although there was no legal need to do so, slaveholders often listed their reasons for granting them their freedom. Ina Fandrich's research cites numerous cases for petitions where the enslaved person was being freed in "especial thankfulness for devoted care-taking during an illness," probably the slaveholder's final illness.[52] However, Jennifer M. Spear notes that these reasons given by slaveholders may not necessarily signify any deep relationships between the holder and the enslaved person. Phrases like "for good services," and even "for the love I have," appeared frequently in these documents, even for those who were buying their own freedom, and therefore may have been stock phrases provided by the notary, the holder choosing the phrase which seemed most appropriate.[53]

As Jessica Johnson observes, Black people learnt to interpret European slave codes to their own advantage, by pursuing formal manumission, and improving their economic status.[54] This is not to say however, that free Black people could enjoy the same freedom and privileges as Whites. Laura Foner notes that "although the government and the ruling whites protected the distinction between a free man of color and a slave, they took equal if not greater care to preserve the distinction between themselves and a free man of color."[55] Despite the fact that free people of colour were allowed to own real estate

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[51] Jennifer M. Spear, *Race, Sex and Social Order in Early New Orleans* (John Hopkins University Press, 2009), 142, 154

[52] Ina Johanna Fandrich, *The Mysterious Voodoo Queen: Marie Laveau: A Study of Powerful Female Leadership in Nineteenth Century New Orleans* (University of Louisiana Press, 2012), 125

[53] Jennifer M. Spear, Race, *Sex and Social Order in Early New Orleans* (John Hopkins University Press, 2009), 114

[54] Jessica Marie Johnson, *Wicked Flesh: Black Women. Intimacy and Freedom in the Atlantic World* (University of Pennsylvania, 2020), 17

[55] Laura Foner, "Free People of Color in Louisiana and St Domingue: A Comparative Portrait of Two Three-Caste Slave Societies." *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 3, No.4 (Oxford University Press, 1970), 415-416

and keep all of their earnings, they had no political rights, thus were always hostages to fortune in regard to any laws which were passed directly affecting their status.[56]

Although the authorities conspired to minimize any opportunities for equality between free people of colour and Whites, the development of New Orleans into one of the most important port cities in the United States gave free Black people the chance to strengthen their position economically. The growth of large plantations and the Mississippi River trade, which linked the South and the Midwest, brought cotton, sugar, pork, and hundreds of other commodities to the City.[57] This commercial metropolis, the third largest in the antebellum South, needed an urban middle class to work at the skilled trades, to run the hundreds of retail shops, and to perform commercial transactions.[58] Free people of colour filled this basic need. Therefore, they came to be increasingly regarded as an essential part of the social order and began to enjoy a social and economic status far superior to that of any other free people of colour in the South. As they became wealthier, free people of colour began to emulate the lifestyle and manners of high-class White society. The most prosperous had grand houses and carriages and sent their children to Europe to acquire education and manners.[59]

By purchasing properties all over the city, free people of colour also began to shape their environment and society. Prosperous free people of colour became slaveholders. Some of them inherited enslaved people from White or free Black family members, while others purchased them. Not all these slaveholders were from the higher echelons of free Black society. In South Carolina, free Black slaveholders who worked as draymen, stable keepers and even washerwomen, had enough money to buy slaves.[60] The Charleston Census of 1850 showed that 83.1% of free Black slaveholders were "mulattoes," while nearly 90% of the enslaved people were of dark skin.[61] Evidence from wills and other legal documents has shown that although free Black people sometimes viewed slaveholding as a

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[56]Judith Kelleher Schafer, *Becoming Free, Remaining Free: Manumission and Enslavement in New Orleans 1846-1862* (University of Louisiana Press, 2003), xv
[57] Joe Gray Taylor, *Louisiana: A Bicentennial History* (Louisiana State Museum, 1976), 27
[58] Laura Foner, "Free People of Color in Louisiana and St Domingue: A Comparative Portrait of Two Three-Caste Slave Societies." *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 3, No.4 (Oxford University Press, 1970), 415-416
[59] Philip S. Foner, *History of Black Americans from the Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom to the Eve of the Compromise of 1850* (Greenwood Press, Connecticut, 1983), 38
[60] Larry Koger, *Black Slaveowners: Free Black Slave Masters in South Carolina: 1790-1860* (University of South Carolina Press, 1995), 2-3
[61] Ibid. xiii

money-making enterprise, there was a difference in the way that they treated enslaved relatives or friends, allowing them special privileges, and often granting them manumission and a legacy in their wills. However, enslaved people who were purchased as investments and were not related to, or a friend of their owner, were more likely to be viewed as commodities to be exploited for profit.[62]

Larry Koger argues that the White establishment had no problem with free Black slaveholders, as contemporary beliefs held that slaveholding free Black people would be more interested in preserving the status quo, rather than encouraging rebellion. However, Michael P. Johnson and James L. Roark assert that despite this approbation on the part of White society, Black slaveholding in fact weakened the structure of Southern enslavement, which was based on the premise that this was a natural state for all people of African descent. Thus, they argue, this paradox of free Black people as slaveholders generally heightened the enslaved person's desire for freedom, precipitating discontent among the community.[63] For a free Black person, however, ownership of enslaved people was an important marker of their prestige in society. As Johnson and Roark observed: "Nothing was more likely to inspire white's admiration than owning slaves. No investment promised such handsome returns-both economically and socially. No act put as much difference between a free Afro-American and slave." [64]

It could also be suggested, that by the end of the Spanish period, those free Black people who could afford to do so, were increasingly taking on the mores of elite Whites, by amassing wealth to purchase real estate and enslaved people. However, Fuentes argues that these outward trappings of success amongst the free Black population denoted a "mode of survival" in the gendered and racial hierarchies of the Caribbean, and in New Orleans.[65] Free people of colour were often pushed to the fringes of society by a White elite who were determined not to grant them equality and full citizenship. Eager to preserve the White supremacist order of New Orleans, the authorities began to put in place economic and societal structures in order to maintain and defend their control. This denigration of the

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[62] Paul Lachance, "The Limits of Privilege: Where Free Persons of Color Stood in the Hierarchy of Wealth in Antebellum New Orleans" in *Against the Odds: Free Blacks in the Slave Societies of the Americas* edited collection by Jane Landers (Frank Cass Publishers: London, 1996), 65-84,
[63] Michael P. Johnson and James L. Roark (eds) *No Chariot Let Down, Charleston's Free People of Color on the Eve of the Civil War* (W.W. Norton & Co., New York & London, 1984), 91
[64] Ibid. 40
[65] Marisa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives, Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 68

position of free people of colour became even more pronounced with the increasing Americanization of New Orleans after the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. Therefore, for the community leaders of free Black society, the maintenance of a free Black community which was distinct from that of the enslaved became increasingly more important, as their cultural networks and religious institutions reinforced collaboration and kinship bonds within their own group.[66]

The Louisiana Purchase

Louisiana was retroceded from Spain back to France on 3 November 1803. Napoleon Bonaparte received back the colony in exchange for a small kingdom in Northern Italy. Thomas Jefferson then bought land from Bonaparte in 1803, which included the Louisiana Territory. The Louisiana Purchase therefore gave the United States control of the Mississippi River, and of New Orleans. It also ensured that France and other European countries would not try to re-take the land.[67] It was during this period that New Orleans rose to its greatest heights of prosperity. The New Orleans City Guide proudly boasted in 1938, that by 1840, New Orleans was second only to New York as a port.[68]

The incoming American administration was nervous about taking over a territory whose population had seen frequent changes of government, with loyalties torn between France, Spain, and the United States. The large numbers of Black people in New Orleans, both enslaved and free, were also perceived as a threat by authorities unused to dealing with cities where White people were in the minority. The first American Census of New Orleans in 1805, recorded 8,212 inhabitants, of whom only 3,551 were classified as White. They were therefore outnumbered by 3,105 enslaved and 1,556 free people of colour.[69] The situation was further exacerbated by the arrival of thousands of immigrants from the former Saint-Domingue. This mass exodus was as a result of the slave revolution fought between 1791-1804 in Saint-Domingue. In 1803, as a result of the decisive defeat of Napoleon's troops,

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[66] Jennifer M. Spear, *Race, Sex and Social Order in Early New Orleans* (John Hopkins University Press, 2010), 114

[67] Joe Gray Taylor, *Louisiana: A Bicentennial History* (Louisiana State Museum, 1976), 27

[68] *New Orleans City Guide*, Written and Compiled by the Federal Writers 'Project of the Works Progress Administration for the City of New Orleans (Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1938), 4

[69] Tulane University Library: Census of New Orleans, 1805, submitted by Matthew Flannery to the City Council of New Orleans May 11, 1805.

sent to restore order on the island, most remaining Whites and a large number of free Black people and their enslaved workers fled to Cuba. They were eventually expelled by the Spanish authorities in 1809 and forced to seek refuge elsewhere. New Orleans was a popular destination.[70] They more than doubled the French-speaking population and added to the growing numbers of free Black people. The authorities feared that many of these enslaved and free Black people may have absorbed revolutionary ideals from Saint-Domingue, which they would use to incite the local population.[71] Generally uncomfortable with the racial hierarchies of New Orleans, the authorities therefore set about undermining the legal and social position of free people of colour.[72] Initially, the free Black community had hoped that the Louisiana Purchase would offer them a chance to obtain increased equality, but these aspirations were firmly disabused by the actions of those in charge. For example, moves were made to restrict manumission and thus curtail any further expansion of the free Black population. Although the Civil Code, which constituted the civil law for the antebellum period, maintained the rights of the enslaved to sue directly for their freedom, after 1807, and with the imminent closure of the Transatlantic slave trade, tighter restrictions were placed on slaveholders wishing to manumit enslaved people, as there would no longer be fresh shipments of people from West Africa and the Caribbean. Slaveholders had to prove that they were over thirty years old and had exhibited "honest conduct" for four years. The only exception allowed was if an enslaved person had saved the life of a holder or any of his family. Despite this, Louisiana's population of free people of colour increased by fifty-three per cent between 1820-1830, from approximately 10,000 to 16,000.[73] Thus, by the 1830s, further legislation was put in place to expel those free people of colour who had recently entered the state, and also to enforce the removal of the newly freed from the state. All free people of colour who had come to Louisiana after 1825 were therefore required to leave within sixty days or face a prison sentence or hard labour for one year. The law also declared that those who wished to free an enslaved person had to post a $1,000 bond

[70] Jean M. Hebrard & Rebecca Scott, *Freedom Papers: An Atlantic Odyssey in the Age of Emancipation* (Harvard University Press,2012), 3,21
[71] Philip S. Foner, *History of Black Americans from the Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom to the Eve of the Compromise of 1850* (Greenwood Press, Connecticut, 1983), 188
[72] Jennifer M. Spear, Race, *Sex and Social Order in Early New Orleans* (John Hopkins University Press, 2009), 97,179
[73] Judith Kelleher Schafer, *Becoming Free, Remaining Free: Manumission and Enslavement in New Orleans 1846-1862* (University of Louisiana Press, 2003), 6

to guarantee their departure within one month of their manumission. The statute also ordered that all free people of colour who were legally allowed to remain in the state had to register with their parish judge. The 1830 law also discouraged White people from engendering any slave discontent or rebellion, by threatening a sentence of 6 months to 3 years for those who disobeyed. Free people of colour who flouted this law, faced a sentence of hard labour from 3-5 years, and afterwards permanent expulsion.[74] This demonstrates an increasing fear on the part of the administration, of an insurrection, which might be aided and abetted by the free Black population. However, the protests and demands for exceptions were such, that the following year, a further law was instituted, which toned it down somewhat. Parish police juries were now able to permit the newly freed to remain in the state, and anyone freed for "meritorious conduct" had no restrictions. "A study of Parish police records from 1831-1846 showed that no freed people were required to leave the state as a condition of their manumission."[75] Resident free people of colour who left the state were also allowed to return "if they owned property there, exercised a useful trade and conducted themselves with the utmost respect and good order."[76] This shows how the customs of manumission, and the reliance of the economy on the labour of free Black people in New Orleans were so engrained, that these increasing strictures were often vetoed by public opinion.

By the 1850s, slavery had moved to centre stage of the political arena, as the antislavery movement grew more vocal in the Northern states. Although the free Black population of New Orleans had severely declined from 19,226 in 1840 to 9,905 by 1850, the laws around manumission became even more strict. A new law of 1853 compelled slaveholders to send all of the newly freed to Liberia within one year of manumission. Those who returned to Louisiana or who did not go to Liberia lost their right to freedom. This resulted in slaveholders besieging the authorities for exceptions and the numbers of freed people with permission to remain in the state increased. Finally, in 1857, Louisiana fell in line with many other Southern states by banning manumission altogether.[77]

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[74] Ibid. 4
[75] Ibid.7
[76] Ibid. 130
[77] Ibid. 7, 12,

The legislature of the 1830s also meant that free people of colour had to be clearly identified in all legal documents, thus attempting to curb the efforts of those of ambiguous racial origin to pass for White.[78] The numbers of interracial unions also declined, partly due to increasing adverse public opinion. However, equally important, was the trend for free women of colour to reject interracial liaisons with White men, in preference for marriage with free Black men.[79] As will be shown later on in the thesis, these increasingly repressive laws also resulted in the further solidification of kinship and community ties of free Black women, in defence of their freedom.

The Role of the Roman Catholic Church

Catholicism played an important part in the lives of the enslaved and free people of colour from the beginning of the colonial period. In the 1700s, missionaries were sent from France to Louisiana to convert the indigenous population and the enslaved, and to administer to the spiritual needs of the colonists. Their mandate was to ensure that all those who inhabited the colony were Catholics, whether colonist, Native or enslaved.[80] Latin Catholicism in Louisiana differed from the racial rigidity of the Anglo-American Protestants and Catholics who colonized North America's seaboard. Although the Roman Catholic Church accommodated racism and the institution of slavery, the 1724 French Code Noir required slaveholders to teach the precepts of Catholicism to their enslaved people and have them baptized into the faith. They were also prohibited from encouraging the practice of any other religion.[81] This contrasted sharply with the predominantly Protestant English colonies to the North, whose clergy were uncertain as to whether churches or slaveholders held any religious obligations to the enslaved. That some Louisiana slaveholders took their religious instruction responsibilities seriously was evidenced by the frequency with which Whites stood as sponsors for Black baptisms.[82] French and

[78] They were identified by the initial f.m.c. (free man of color) or f.w.c. (free woman of color). See Jennifer M. Spear, *Race, Sex and Social Order in Early New Orleans* (John Hopkins University Press, 2009), 214
[79] See Emily Clark, *The Strange History of the American Quadroon: Free Women of Color in the Revolutionary Atlantic World* (University of North Carolina Press, 2013)
[80] James B. Bennett, *Religion and the Rise of Jim Crow in New Orleans* (Princeton University Press, 2005), 137
[81] 1724 Louisiana Code Noir, Articles II, III
[82] See Emily Clark & Virginia Meacham Gould, "The Feminine Face of Afro Catholicism in New Orleans 1727-1852." *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 59, No.2 (April 2002), 412

Spanish clergy also extended the sacraments to Catholics of colour as relative equals, nurturing a loyalty among the City's Black residents which outlived both French and Spanish colonialism.[83]

Clergy acknowledged the children of interracial relationships and sought to bring them into the faith. "They administered to their spiritual needs, conducting baptisms, confirmations, marriages, and burials, thus forming a life-time habit among the free Black community, in support of the Church."[84] The Roman Catholic Church of New Orleans also gave free people of colour privileges which were denied to the enslaved. For example, by allowing them to create their own religious charitable societies, they tacitly acknowledged their different status.

By the Antebellum period, free people of colour had become an important factor in the strength of New Orleans' Catholicism, forming most of the congregation and providing financial support in several of the City's parishes. By 1810, Catholics of colour constituted nearly two thirds of the membership of Saint Louis Cathedral, their numbers having been swelled by the influx of refugees from Saint-Domingue and Cuba. Antebellum travellers to the City often commented on the integrated nature of the Roman Catholic congregation. The Cathedral was a popular destination for visitors as its impressive structure was clearly visible to those travellers who arrived by boat on the Mississippi river.[85] When architect Benjamin Latrobe went to services at the Cathedral, he was struck by the diversity of the congregation which "consisted of at least 4/5th women, of which number one half at least were colored."[86]This was unusual, as in the rest of the South, in accordance with public convention, the Black worshippers occupied a prescribed space and were not allowed to mix indiscriminately with Whites during services.[87]

The Catholic Church also played an important role in the lives of New Orleans' free Black women. Historians Emily Clark and Virginia Gould have researched the effects of this Africanization

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[83] James B. Bennett, *Religion and the Rise of Jim Crow in New Orleans* (Princeton University Press, 2005), 137
[84] Ibid
[85] Ibid. 143
[86] Benjamin Henry Latrobe, *Impressions Respecting New Orleans Diary and Sketches, 1818-1820* edited by Samuel Wilson Jnr. (New York, 1951)
[87] Diane Batts Morrow, *Persons of Color and Religious at the Same Time: The Oblate Sisters of Providence 1828-1860* (The University of Carolina Press, 2002), 20

and feminization of the Church.[88] The Order of Ursuline nuns arrived in New Orleans in 1727. They were teaching nuns who were committed to the propagation of the Catholic religion through the education of women. They believed that women played an important role in ensuring continuity of faith through their influence with the next generation. The nuns were therefore committed to extending the opportunity of education to all young women, regardless of race. This feminine responsibility of passing down religious practice was also a tradition of the Wolof tribe of West Africa, from where many of Louisiana's enslaved people originated.[89] Thus, by tradition, Black women were accustomed to being religious educators. By 1728, the Ursuline nuns had established a girls´ school in New Orleans whose pupils included free and enslaved Black and Native American girls.[90] They also encouraged free and enslaved women to attend services at the convent, thus forming a strong female connection between themselves and the Black women of New Orleans.[91] Clark and Gould argue that for African women, "the female sacred space and activity at the convent could represent fidelity to the central sustaining features of their traditional religion;" thus, they were drawn to Catholicism in ever increasing numbers during the colonial period.[92] Evidence from the numbers of baptisms suggests that the first generation of enslaved Black women were more enthusiastic converts to the Catholic religion than Black men. However, in succeeding generations, the numbers of Black boys and men being baptized increased, possibly showing the influence of Black women in promoting Roman Catholicism within their society. However, there is also evidence that some of these women combined their African traditions, such as the Voodoo religion, with Roman Catholicism, producing a synthesized version of religious practice. Alice Nelson Dunbar's short story, "The Goodness of Saint Rocque," tells of an Afro-Creole woman, who in an effort to win over her lover, wears a Voodoo charm around her waist, as well as making a novena in Saint Rocque's Chapel. She also visits a Voodoo priestess in her house, where the room combines Catholic sacred objects such as an altar, a portrait of Saint Joseph and a crucifix, along with tarot cards and other articles of Voodoo. This description of the woman's religious artifacts, by a Black

[88] See Emily Clark and Virginia Meacham Gould, "The Feminine Face of Afro Catholicism in New Orleans." *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol 59, No 2, (April 2002)
[89] Ibid. 416-417
[90] Ibid
[91] Ibid. 420-421
[92] Ibid

woman who was brought up in New Orleans, demonstrates how African and European religious traditions were often blended together, synthesizing them into a religion which combined both these beliefs.[93] While actively practicing the Voodoo religion, famous Voodoo priestess, Marie Laveaux, also observed Roman Catholic ceremony, as she married in Saint Louis Cathedral and had all her children baptized there.[94] However, this open duality of religious practice was not evident in the eventual institution of a religious sisterhood in New Orleans. Although the Sisters of the Holy Family emulated the Voodoo priestesses by taking on female religious leadership roles, they did so very much under the auspices of the Catholic Church, thus eschewing any African religious practices. However, by becoming recognized as religious women and thus avoiding some of the prejudices ascribed by their race and gender, they also began to provide a very different version of Afro-Creole womanhood to the one portrayed by New Orleans' travellers and the popular literature of the time.[95]

Figure 2: 721-727 Chartres (St. Louis Cathedral), Date: [1847-1849]; Image I.D. No. N-1541; The Historic New Orleans Collection

The Quadroons of New Orleans

For much of the eighteenth century, the term "quadroon" was merely descriptive, and was applied to light skinned biracial people. During French rule, sacramental registers often assigned a phenotype to mixed-race individuals. However, with the advent of the Spanish administration, this became more detailed, giving far more attention to colour terms and racial distinctions. Spanish civil and clerical

[93] Alice Nelson-Dunbar, *The Goodness of Saint Rocque and Other Stories* (Philadelphia, 1899)
[94] See Carolyn Morrow Long, *A New Orleans Voodou Princess: The Legend and Reality of Marie Laveau* (University Press of Florida, 2006)
[95] Emily Clark and Virginia Meacham Gould, "The Feminine Face of Afro Catholicism in New Orleans. "*The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol 59, No 2 (April 2002), 412

officials applied the term "moreno" to someone whose ancestry was less than half-White, and "pardo" for those who had more than half European ancestry. A "negro" was a person of pure African ancestry and a "mulatto" was a person who was of half European and African descent. "Grifo" referred to someone born from a "pardo" and a "moreno." A "cautarón" (quadroon) was the child of a White and a "pardo."[96] Also by the Spanish period, the lifestyle and appearance of the so-called lighter skinned "quadroon" women came under scrutiny by the administration. In his Bando de Bueno Gobierno (Proclamation of Good Government) of 1786, Governor Esteban Miró, criticized the "quadroon" and "mûlatresse" women who "subsist from the product of their licentious life." He admonished them to "drop all communication with intercourse and vice and go back to work," with the understanding that he would be "suspicious of their indecent conduct, as evidenced by the luxury in their dressing." The Sumptuary laws therefore made it illegal for any free woman of colour to "walk abroad in silks, jewels or plumes" and required that they had to cover their hair with a "kerchief."[97] These laws contributed to the creation of the image of free Black womanhood as idle and vain, and living off the proceeds of her immoral earnings, a reputation which would haunt them for centuries. The kerchief which they were obliged to wear, also known as a "tignon," was traditionally worn by enslaved women, thus reemphasizing their ties to an enslaved past.[98]

These women were considered to have been born from immorality, as they were often the illegitimate offspring of a White Creole man and a Black enslaved or free woman. Powerless enslaved women were clearly the victims of exploitation by their owners, however, the relationships between White men and free Black women were often more nuanced. Domestic unions between a free woman of colour and a White man eventually became known in New Orleans as plaçage. Interracial marriage was illegal, so the White man pledged to monetarily provide for his free Black domestic partner and any children who might result from the relationship. These informal contracts were allegedly often

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[96] Emily Clark, *The Strange History of the American Quadroon: Free Women of Color in the Revolutionary Atlantic World* (University of North Carolina, 2013), 82

[97] Don Esteban Miró, Bando de Buen Gobierno, Deliberations of the Cabildo, June 1, 1786, Vol. 3, No.1 (1784-1787) Records of the Cabildo Proceedings, English Translation, 106-107

[98] Joan M. Martin, "Plaçage and the Louisiana Gens de Couleur" in *Creole: The History and Legacy of Louisiana's Free People of Color* edited collection by Sybil Klein (Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 57-70

brokered by the mother or other guardian on behalf of their daughter, although no written records exist to support this claim.[99] Scholars have been divided on the issue of whether these relationships with White men, which often gave women the chance to obtain financial independence and economic security for themselves and their children, really gave them increased control of their lives. Some suggest that a lack of power precluded any circumstances of true consent by free women of colour to sexual relationships with White men, making them merely an extension of the exploitation of enslaved women.[100] Fuentes questions "the application of sexual agency to enslaved and free women's sexual relationships with white men in the context of a slave society where many enslaved and free women were subject to unequal power relations and violence, thus negating any form of autonomy for these women."[101] However, Amrita Chakrabarti Myers, in her study of the free Black women of Charleston, argues that despite their seemingly subordinate position by virtue of their sex and race, free women of colour were demonstrating their hegemony, by their willingness to go to court and fight for the "protection of their bodily freedom and the defense of their property."[102] Thus, she suggests that although free Black women struggled, they did have recourse to the courts and the judicial system to protect their fragile rights, whereas enslaved women did not.

Emily Clark contends that the myths surrounding plaçage, of the beautiful young "quadroon" kept in luxury by her White protector were probably no more than " the projection of male fantasy" rather than reality. Accounts written by New Orleans' male travellers deliberately titillated the reading public to sell more books.[103] However, the comments of some of these nineteenth century travellers

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[99] Emily Clark, *The Strange History of the American Quadroon: Free Women of Color in the Revolutionary Atlantic World* (University of North Carolina, 2013), 66

[100] See Amrita Chakrabarti Myers, *Forging Freedom: Black Women and the Pursuit of Liberty in Antebellum Charleston* (University of Charleston Press, 2011); Joan M. Martin, "Plaçage and the Louisiana Gens de Couleur" in *Creole: The History and Legacy of Louisiana's Free People of Color* edited collection by Sybil Klein (Louisiana State University Press, 2000); Emily Clark, *The Strange History of the American Quadroon: Free Women of Color in the Revolutionary Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Kenneth Aslakson, "The 'Quadroon-Plaçage' Myth of Antebellum New Orleans: Anglo American (Mis)interpretations of a French-Caribbean Phenomenon." Journal of Social History, Vol:45, no. 3(2012); Carol Wilson, "Plaçage and the Performance of Whiteness: The Trial of Eulalie Mandeville, Free Colored Woman, of Antebellum New Orleans." American Nineteenth Century History Vol. 15, No. 2, (2014) 187–209.

[101] Marisa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (University of Pennsylvania, 2016), 46

[102] Amrita Chakrabarti Myers, *Forging Freedom: Black Women in the Pursuit of Liberty in Antebellum Charleston* (University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 7

[103] Emily Clark, *The Strange History of the American Quadroon: Free Women of Color in the Revolutionary Atlantic World* (University of North Carolina, 2013), 170

often reduced these relationships to near prostitution. For instance, British aristocrat, Edward Sullivan, wrote, "a handsome quadroon could not be bought for less than $1,000 or $1,500." This emphasis on a woman's monetary worth also related back to their former enslaved status, in terms of putting a value on their bodies[104]

In contrast to these accounts, the records show that, especially during the French and Spanish periods, free Black women often had lifetime relationships with White male partners. Clark terms them "bachelor patriarchs" because they were unmarried White men who stayed with their Black partners and provided for them and their mixed-race children throughout their lives.[105] These relationships assumed more of an air of respectability to society at large and were sometimes seemingly accepted as legitimate by White relatives. White family members were often listed as godparents and guardians of the resulting children.[106] Eliza Potter, a free Black woman hairdresser from the North, observed how these domestic partnerships were formed:

> When they are marriageable, they are courted by gentlemen the same as any other ladies, till it comes to the ceremony, then there is a large party assembled and the young girl is given away by her father or mother, or both, this is called placayed, it is the same in their eyes as marriage but no licence is required.[107]

Other visitors also noticed how within certain families, free women of colour were apparently being groomed to become the long-term placeés of White men. Frederick Law Olmsted, a landscape architect who visited New Orleans in the 1850s, wrote of a "quadroon family" to whom he was introduced, and was subsequently treated as a prospective suitor for one of the daughters. He waxed lyrical about their accomplishments, which prepared them to become fitting consorts for high class Whites: "There were three pretty and accomplished young women in the family. They were intelligent, well informed, their musical taste was extremely well cultivated, they were interested in the literature of the day and their

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[104] Edward Sullivan, *Rambles and Scrambles in North and South America* (Richard Bentley, London, 1852), 233

[105] Jennifer M. Spear, *Race, Sex and Social Order in Early New Orleans* (John Hopkins University Press, 2009), 8

[106] Ibid

[107] Eliza Potter, *A Hairdresser's Experience in High Life* (Cincinnati, 1859), 190

conversation was characterized by good sense and refined discrimination."[108] Eliza Potter also noted the education of some free Black young women in genteel manners and accomplishments, in order to enhance their prospects of making a good match with a White man:

> These young girls are brought up as particularly as any children in the world, they have the best education that can be given them, they are taught music, dance and every branch necessary to the accomplishment of a lady. They are never permitted to walk out to church or school or any other place, without a servant after them.[109]

However, British traveller, Harriet Martineau, who was in New Orleans during the 1830s, eschewed the notion of these relationships as providing near-marriage status for these women, foreshadowing the antislavery writers in trying to engender public sympathy for the plight of the "quadroon." She wrote:

> The connexion now and then lasts for life, usually for several years. In the latter case, when the time comes for the gentlemen to take a white wife, the dreadful news reaches his quadroon partner, either by a letter or by the newspaper which announces his marriage. Many commit suicide, more die broken hearted.[110]

By describing the fate of the "quadroon" thus, she firmly defined the plaçeé as a dependent, defenceless woman, subject to the caprices of her White lover. Certainly, a lack of any legal contract meant that there was often no security for these women, many of whom were forced to take other partners either through the death or desertion of the White man. However, perhaps, as Spear suggests, instead of a blanket judgement about plaçage, these relationships should be examined through the particular circumstances of each case.[111] This thesis will therefore provide a case study of a placée in a later chapter, in order to further demonstrate that there was not one model of plaçage which appertained to all these unions.

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[108] Frederick Law Olmsted, *The Cotton Kingdom: A Traveller's Observations on Cotton and Slavery in the American Slaves States-1853-1861*: Vol. II. (Mason Brothers, New York), 597
[109] Eliza Potter, *A Hairdresser's Experience in High Life* (Cincinnati, 1859), 190
[110] Harriet Martineau, *Retrospect of Western Travel,* Vol.1 (Harper Bros, New York, 1838), 255
[111] Jennifer M. Spear Race, *Sex and Social Order in Early New Orleans* (John Hopkins University Press, 2009), 70

Quadroon Balls

Although some relationships may have been verbally contracted by families in the drawing rooms of New Orleans, it is also the case that some free Black young women attended New Orleans' famed quadroon balls in order to meet wealthy White men. As with plaçage, opinions of the function and purpose of these balls have also divided historians. Some have taken the more romantic view evinced by Harriet Martineau that it was, indeed, a sort of debutante's ball for free Black young women to meet eligible White bachelors, while historian Joseph Tregle saw the quadroon balls as nothing more than interracial orgies.[112] If that was so, it is hard to imagine the carefully brought up young women described by Law Olmsted or Potter attending that kind of entertainment.

The history of these balls began in the Spanish period. Before the formal institution of a ballroom in New Orleans, lower-class free Black and enslaved people and Whites danced together in public entertainment places, such as taverns. Wealthy Whites and free Black people also danced at private gatherings in their homes. Esteban Lelande, a prominent member of New Orleans' Free Black Militia, regularly hosted dances at his house to which he invited prosperous free people of colour, as well as wealthy Whites.[113] In 1799, Bernard Coquet successfully petitioned Spanish officials to open a ballroom for free people of colour. From the first, White men of different classes attended these balls, causing anxiety amongst the authorities about the open racial mixing. Thus, there were calls to shut it down. Although the Cabildo initially rejected these requests, once the year's lease was over, they refused to renew it. Some wealthy free men of colour from the Free Black Militia petitioned for its reopening, and it was finally granted, with the proviso that the enslaved were prohibited from attending. It was also tacitly accepted by the free Black community that White men would continue to attend. However, it was after the Louisiana Purchase that the first official quadroon ball was held.[114] Probably

[112] Joseph Tregle, *Louisiana in the Age of Jackson* (Baton Rouge, 1999), 35
[113] Kimberley S. Hangar, *Bounded Lives, Bounded Places: Free Black Society in Colonial New Orleans. 1769-1803* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 21-34
[114] Kenneth Randolph Aslakson, "Making Race: The Role of Free Blacks in the Development of New Orleans' Three Caste System 1791-1812." (PhD thesis, The University of Texas at Austin, 2007), 126, 131,133,143

noting the popularity of balls for White men wishing to meet free Black women, in 1804, August Tessier, an actor from Saint-Domingue, placed a notice in the press for a ball specifically for free Black women and White men, to which free men of colour would not be permitted to attend.[115] The establishment of the quadroon ball during the Antebellum era was probably no accident. In this period of increasing hostility by the authorities toward the free Black population, the inauguration of these quadroon balls emphasized the mastery of White men over free Black women and the emasculation of the free Black man.[116] But these balls were not the low-class entertainment described by Tregle. Tessier provided refinements which had not been seen at other balls such as consommés, wines, soups, chocolates, and a carriage service. It was also double the price of any other ballroom, thus discouraging the attendance of lower orders. There was a dress code and a doorman who kept out any undesirables.[117] Those travellers who attended the balls, described in detail the poise and elegance of the female attendees. Edward Sullivan wrote: "I made a point of going to some of the quadroon balls. I had heard a great deal about the splendid figures and graceful dancing of the New Orleans quadroons, and I was not disappointed. Their movements are the most easy and graceful that I have ever seen."[118] It was also partly through these balls that the term "quadroon" began to be more frequently used to describe all free Afro-Creole women. In the strictest sense of New Orleans' racial characterizations, many of the women who attended these balls would not have been classified as quadroons, but their presence defined them as such. Also, if free Black people tended to be categorized as lighter skinned by virtue of their freedom, then it is no wonder that these women of colour became known by the term used for the lightest skinned. However, the quadroon balls also served to accentuate the darker reputation of the quadroon, as a woman of easy virtue. The animosity of New Orleans' White women towards the quadroons, who appeared to be garnering the affections of White men through their lack of morals, was expressed by nineteenth century Louisiana historian, Grace King:

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[115] *Moniteur Louisiane Newspaper*, 20 November 1805
[116] Emily Clark, *The Strange History of the American Quadroon: Free Women of Color in the Revolutionary Atlantic World* (University of North Carolina, 2013), 70
[117] Herbert Asbury, *The French Quarter* (New York, 1936), 132-134
[118] Edward Sullivan, *Rambles and Scrambles in North and South America* (Richard Bentley, London, 1852), 233

> Hence an aversion on their part to marrying men of their own color, and hence the relaxation and deviation from, if not their complete denial of, the code of morality accepted by the white women and the consequent adoption of a separate standard of, morals for themselves… Unscrupulous and pitiless by nature or circumstances, as one chooses to view it, secretly still claiming the racial license of Africa, they were, in regard to family purity, domestic peace and household dignity, the most insidious and the deadliest foes a community ever possessed. [119]

The judge's pronouncement in the Sally Miller court case of 1845, supported her contention that she was a White woman, by contrasting her behaviour and appearance with that of a "Quateronne." By doing so he also emphasized how the word quadroon had become synonymous with certain negative traits of character, the very same characteristics which were expressed about New Orleans' "mulattas" in the Sumptuary Laws of the Spanish period. In his final summation, he stated:

> I contend that the moral traits of the Quateronne, the moral features of an African are far more difficult to be erased and are far more easily traced than are the distinctions and differences of physical conformation. The Quateronne is idle, reckless and extravagant, this woman is industrious, clever and prudent- the Quateronne is fond of dress, of finery and display- this woman is neat in her person, simple in her array, and with no ornament upon her, not even a ring on her finger.[120]

The "Tragic Mulatta"

By the 1840s, the term "quadroon" had also begun to serve another purpose. The antislavery novels published during this era assigned another role for her as a "tragic mulatta." Although termed as such, the heroines of these novels were more likely to be quadroons or octoroons rather than a darker skinned mulatta.[121] A pale skin and more European features allowed the White readers of these romances to

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[119] Grace King, *New Orleans the Place and the People* (Macmillan Company, New York, 1895), 349

[120] Sally Miller contended that she was born white and was therefore unlawfully enslaved: See Sally Miller v. Louis Belmonti and John Miller, Supreme Court of Louisiana, July 16, 1845**,** Docket #5623, Supreme Court of Louisiana Collection, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans

[121] Octoroons were only considered to be one eight African.

identify themselves more easily with the heroine. Antislavery writers such as William Wells Brown and Lydia Maria Child, used these women of colour to highlight the evils of enslavement by their sufferings at the hands of lustful White males. These books were written to a formula which was instantly recognizable. The most typical situation was that of a beautiful mixed-race girl, who had been brought up thinking that she was free, only to find that when her father died, she was a slave, and must be sold at auction to settle his debts. The story therefore illustrated the horrors of enslavement, as well as the difficult position of mixed-race people.[122] Literary critic, Sterling Brown, suggested that the conventions of these stories were so well-known, that readers would guess immediately ¨because of the single drop of midnight in her veins, the mixed-race figure must go down to a tragic end.¨[123] Descriptions of these women were also very similar. They were all described as beautiful, according to White ideals of beauty of the time, while gesturing toward the exotic. Thus, they often had flashing dark eyes and raven flowing hair. They were usually also graceful, well-educated, and innocent.[124]

It could be imagined that these portrayals of biracial women might therefore have also helped to rescue them from their notorious unchaste reputation. However, as Allegra Raiman argues, although most of these women were portrayed as pure and virtuous rather than licentious, ¨the sexually charged nature of these descriptions, which anti–slavery writers used to their advantage, derives from the invitation to readers to transgress boundaries of both race and class at once, since all the women are portrayed as exotic, sexually available and aristocratic all at once.¨[125] Thus, underneath the seeming innocence of the quadroon heroine, there was an underlying sexuality as a result of her tainted African blood, making her more vulnerable to White men's desires. Emily Clark also suggests that "abolitionists fed on the fictional fare of the tragic mulatto, expected New Orleans to be filled with 'white slaves'

[122] Emily Clark, *The Strange History of the American Quadroon: Free Women of Color in the Revolutionary Atlantic World* (University of North Carolina, 2013), 133-134
[123] Sterling Brown, *The Negro in American Fiction* (Arno Press, New York, Reprint, 1969), 38
[124] See Lydia Maria Child, *The Quadroon* (Liberty Bell, Philadelphia, 1842); Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *The Octoroon or, The Lily of Louisiana* (De Witt, New York, 1861)
[125] Allegra Eve Raimon, *The Tragic Mulatta Revisited in the Nineteenth Century Anti-Slavery Fiction,* (Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, 2004),74

catering to the sexual appetites of immoral men."[126] Therefore, in trying to arouse sympathy for their own purposes, these writers were helping to perpetuate the myths surrounding these biracial women.

Figure 3: Illustration from *The Quadroons*
by Lydia Maria Child, (Liberty Bell, Philadelphia, 1842)

Marriage and the Single Free Woman of Colour

Although the quadroon was alternately depicted in the public imagination as predatory exploiter of White men's sexual weakness, or the unwitting victim of white men's lust, it appears that by the Antebellum period, many free Black women were eschewing relationships with White men in favour of lawful marriage with other free men of colour. During the colonial period, the imbalance in the ratio between the numbers of free Black women and men, often meant that women were forced to conduct interracial relationships which were not recognized by law, rather than marrying. However, after the Louisiana Purchase, the imbalance of men to women became less marked, and evidence shows that free people of colour began to marry in ever increasing numbers. Between 1810 and 1819, marriages in New Orleans between free people of colour nearly doubled, and again between 1820-1829.[127]

There are various reasons why marriage may have become more popular during this period. Changes in Louisiana law which disadvantaged children born of non-marital unions may have had an

[126] Emily Clark, *The Strange History of the American Quadroon: Free Women of Color in the Revolutionary Atlantic World* (University of North Carolina, 2013), 133-134
[127] Ibid. 86, 88

influence. The 1808 Civil Code stated: "Those who have lived together in open concubinage are respectively incapable of making to each other…any donation of moveables (including slaves) and if they make a donation of moveables, it cannot exceed one tenth part of the whole value of their estate."[128] However, the code did allow that "children born out of marriage, except those who are born from incestuous or adulterous connection, may be legitimized by the subsequent marriage of their father or mother."[129] Marriage, therefore, became a more important institution when the inheritance rights of offspring were affected by legislation. The Black Militia also campaigned for free Black people to marry, possibly in order to impress the incoming American administration of their community's respectability, and thus their fitness to be citizens of the state. Clark also argues that the increase in marriages amongst New Orleans' indigenous free Black population during the Antebellum period also resulted from the influx of refugees from Saint-Domingue. She suggests that "as free Black Saint-Dominguan female refugees had a reputation for licentiousness, and free Black men for possible subversive revolutionary ideals, New Orleans' native free people of colour wished to distance themselves from the newcomers, both culturally and politically."[130] Embracing marriage was one of the ways in which they could differentiate themselves, especially from the free Black women refugees, who were more likely to favour interracial relationships over marriage.[131] Also, as a result of the increasing prejudice and harassment of the free Black society during this period, many of New Orleans' prominent free Black families began intermarrying in order to protect their wealth and property and to keep it within the free Black community. They realized that the ability to form intimate ties with each other through marriage was essential to their individual and group survival.[132] Finally, the leadership of free women of colour within the Catholic Church may have also had an influence in encouraging marriage. The Sisters of the Holy Family order of nuns, headed by Henriette Delille, abhorred plaçage on moral grounds, and through their school and other institutions may have influenced young free Black women

[128] Ibid
[129] Louisiana Civil Code, 1808
[130] Emily Clark, *The Strange History of the American Quadroon: Free Women of Color in the Revolutionary Atlantic World* (University of North Carolina, 2013), 86, 88
[131] Ibid
[132] Ibid. 87

to marry within their own community.[133] This will be discussed further in the next chapter which looks at the founding and organization of the Sisters of the Holy Family.

Figure 4: Sunday in New Orleans: 19th Century Vintage engraving: Gettyimages.com

The History of Black Entrepreneurship in New Orleans

In addition to societal influences in New Orleans, economic factors also played an important role in the lives of its Black community. Enslaved and free Black people were motivated to participate in the emerging capitalist order of New Orleans, transforming some of them into resourceful and innovative entrepreneurs. The rise of Black businesspeople in New Orleans began in the French colonial period. From its foundation in 1699, up to the beginning of the eighteenth century, France's Louisiana colony regularly suffered from the threat of starvation. It was especially severe in the 1720s, after the collapse and reorganization of the Company of the Indies cut off not only food imports but virtually all capital supplies. Many slaveholders could not afford to feed their slaves; thus, they began encouraging them to become more self-sufficient.[134] They assigned plots of land to their enslaved people so that they could grow their own food. The slaveholders also began to see the advantages of abiding to article 5 of the

[133] Henriette Delille may have persuaded her niece Antoinette Bonille to marry rather than become a placée. See Sister Audrey Marie Détiege, *Henriette Delille: Free Woman of Color: Foundress of the Sisters of the Holy Family* (Sisters of the Holy Family in New Orleans, 1976)

[134]Jerah Johnson, "New Orleans' Congo Square. An Urban Setting for Early Afro-American Culture Formation." *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Society,* Vol.32, No. 2, (Spring 1991), 121-122

Code Noir, which exempted the enslaved from working on Sundays and religious holidays, in order that they had more time to cultivate their crops, thus producing above and beyond what was needed for themselves and enabling them to set up a system of trade. Loren Schweninger suggests that initially this trade followed West African tradition as it was characterized by the bartering of goods rather than cash payment. However, later on, the domestic enslaved economy moved away from its African roots and became cash based.[135] Taking advantage of their free time, the enslaved also began hiring themselves out for wages or selling some of their surplus products.[136] Once the principle of wages for the enslaved had been established, some of the most highly skilled and talented Black artisans could seek to hire themselves out, negotiating contracts, making their own living arrangements, and paying their owners a specified amount.[137] Jean Françoi Dumont, a Parisian who arrived in New Orleans in 1719 observed:

> Most of the slaves clear grounds and cultivate them on their own account, raising cotton, & tobacco, which they sell. Some [masters] give their negroes Saturdays and Sundays to themselves and during that time the master does not give them food; they then work for other Frenchmen who have no slaves and pay them. Those who live in the capital generally turn their two hours at noon to account by making faggots to sell in the city; others sell ashes or fruits that are in season.[138]

Jerah Johnson, writing about the history of the French market, argues that there was nothing remarkable about Louisiana's enslaved people acting as merchants, or being free to pursue their own work at the weekend, as this was also common practice in other states, and the Sabbath was respected as a non-workday throughout the Southern slave states. However, Louisiana's enslaved people differed in that they used their free time as they saw fit, with little or no supervision from their slaveholders. This was

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[135] Loren Schweninger, "Black-Owned Businesses in the South, 1790-1880." *The Business History Review,* Vol. 63, No.1 (Spring 1989), 26

[136]Jerah Johnson, "New Orleans' Congo Square. An Urban Setting for Early Afro-American Culture Formation." *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Society,* Vol.32, No. 2, (Spring 1991), 121-122

[137] Loren Schweninger, "Black -Owned Businesses in the South, 1790-1880." *The Business History Review,* Vol. 63, No.1 (Spring 1989), 27

[138] Jean François-Benjamin Dumont de Montigny, *Memoires Historiques sur la Louisiane*, 2 vols, (Paris, 1753) translated as *History of Louisiana* by Benjamin F. French (ed), 5 vols (New York, 1846-1853), 120

a concept not accepted elsewhere in the South.[139] This increased licence could have been a result of the difficult conditions in the colony, which had enhanced the importance of the role of the enslaved as a part of the economic system.

However, these trade activities were still strictly illegal under the Code Noir, which expressly forbade enslaved people to work on Sundays and Holy Days. They were also forbidden from owning any property, conducting any kind of trade on their own account, or selling goods, without written permission. By this time, however, these enslaved entrepreneurs were providing a much-needed service to a city which was frequently short of food products; thus, the authorities chose to turn a blind eye, and assume that they were selling goods on behalf, and with the permission of the slaveholders. This laissez faire approach continued during the Spanish era, although the Real Cedula of the Spanish government in 1789 caused a problem for Louisiana's authorities. This new code prohibited the enslaved from working on Sundays, growing their own food, and purchasing their own clothes. The Governor, Estaban Miró, urged on by the Cabildo and plantation owners, immediately advised his superiors of the impracticality of enforcing this regulation in Louisiana; so, for the sixteen months of his remaining term, he delayed implementation. His successor, the Baron de Carondelet, fearful that the revolutionary ideals of the uprising in Saint-Domingue would spread to Louisiana, was also reluctant to enforce a law which would be seen as increasing the repression of the enslaved. Therefore, he simply ignored the Real Cedula.[140] Many of the enslaved took advantage of the Spanish system to buy their own freedom, thus helping to establish a distinct free Black business class. A city with a growing population like New Orleans needed to utilize the skills of its free Black population. Therefore, as Loren Schweninger suggests: "Free people of color took advantage of the continued demand for service businesses and the relatively small numbers of skilled whites and immigrants."[141]

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[139] Jerah Johnson, "New Orleans' Congo Square. An Urban Setting for Early Afro-American Culture Formation." *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Society,* Vol.32, No. 2, (Spring 1991), 121-122

[140] Shirley E. Thompson, *Exiles at Home: The Struggle to Become American in Creole New Orleans* (Harvard University Press, 2009) 30-31

[141] Loren Schweninger, "Prosperous Blacks in the South 1790-1880." *The American Historical Review*, Vol.95. No.1 (Feb 1990), 36

By 1802, the visibility of the free Black working population had become such that a free Black visitor to the city commented on the "great number of free mulattoes who had special skills as artisans."[142] He also noted that some of them had begun to accumulate property and a few had established small businesses.[143] These free Black artisans also bought enslaved people and trained them, thus creating a sought-after commodity. It was not unusual for free Black artisans to sell enslaved people at a profit, thereby making it worthwhile to invest their earnings. By the 1830s, their numbers had increased substantially. "An 1836 tax list for the City included the names of eight hundred and fifty-five free persons of color who had paid taxes on property worth $2,462,470. Among them were several highly successful brokers, grocers, tailors, storekeepers, real estate speculators and landlords."[144] During the mid to late Antebellum period, those business owners who had wealth and property were better able to insulate themselves from the tumultuous political events taking place around them. Therefore, although the rapid expansion of the entrepreneurial class began to slow by the 1820s and 30s, there was a continued growth in the 1840s and 50s.[145] So, despite increasing harassment and the emigration of some free Black people to Europe or the Caribbean, large scale free Black business activity continued until the Civil War.

Free Black Businesswomen

From the French era onwards, there were many enslaved women who used their knowledge, expertise and skills, firstly to improve their quality of life, and then to earn money to buy their freedom.[146] As Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers argues, enslaved women were always aware that buyers valued certain skills, qualities and abilities more highly, and cultivated them in the hope of becoming more valuable, thereby gaining better prospects in the slave market. They were also conscious of their own monetary worth;

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[142] William Hogan & Edwin Davis(eds) *Natchez: The Ante-Bellum Diary of a Free Negro* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana.1951), 23
[143] Ibid
[144] Loren Schweninger, "Prosperous Blacks in the South 1790-1880." *The American Historical Review*, Vol.95. No.1 (Feb 1990), 36
[145] Ibid
[146]Cheryl A. Smith, *Market Women: Black Women Entrepreneurs, Past, Present and Future* (Preager, Westport, Connecticut, 2005), 24

thus, they chose the most opportune ways of making money in order to expedite their manumission.[147] In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, free and enslaved Black women marchandes (street vendors) began to dominate in the streets of New Orleans. Robert Olwell, in his study of enslaved women in eighteenth century Charleston, attributes this predominance of female marketers, to their assumption of a role that was traditionally allocated to women in West Africa, the Caribbean and pre-industrial societies.[148] Thus, some enslaved women possessed commercial knowledge and skill, which they had obtained before enslavement, and which they could use to their advantage in New Orleans. Apart from becoming market vendors, enslaved and free Black women also used skills learnt in bondage, such as sewing or laundry to earn money.[149]

As with manumission, skin colour was an important factor in the types of employment performed by free Black women. Jane E. Dabel's analysis of the *Register of Free Persons of Color 1840-1857* and the 1860 census revealed that there were marked differences in occupations for certain groups, according to their caste. Dabel notes that by 1860, Parish Officials had designated free people of colour into four categories for the census: Blacks, mulattoes, mixed-race and quadroons, enabling her to match free Black women's colour designation to their employment. She found differences in employment that correlated to their skin colour. Lighter skinned "mulatto" women generally held the most prestigious and desirable jobs such as seamstress, schoolmistress, vegetable dealer and midwife, while Black African women were overrepresented in service positions such as cooks, domestic servants and washerwomen. The Register therefore revealed that "mulatto" women generally held three times as many skilled and professional jobs than their darker skinned counterparts.[150] Even given the difficulties with the census enumerators' subjective racial categorizations, Dabel's analysis indicates that although free Black women were dominant in roles demanding feminine skills learnt in slavery,

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[147]Stephanie E. Rogers-Jones, *They were her Property: White women as Slave Owners in the American South* (Yale University Press, 2019), 99

[148] Robert Olwell "Loose, Idle & Disorderly Slave Women in the Eighteenth-Century Charleston Market Place" in *Black Women and Slavery in the Americas: More than Chattel* edited collection by David Barry Gaspar and Darlene Hine Clark (Indiana University Press, Bloomington & Indianapolis, 1996), 97-110

[149] Virginia Meacham Gould, *Coastal Encounters: The Transformation of the Gulf South in the Eighteenth Century* (University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 158

[150]Jane E. Dabel, "My Ma Went to Work Every Mornin': Color, Gender & Occupation in New Orleans 1840-1860."*Louisiana History, The Journal of Louisiana Historical Association*, Vol 41, No 2 (Spring 2000), 217, 223

skin colour was also an important factor in determining occupation and earning power. This was, in part, as a result of the conceptions around skin colour. Those with lighter skins were deemed more intelligent and presentable because of their White blood and were therefore more often employed in White peoples' houses, while darker skinned women held more menial jobs, or worked as field hands. Lighter skinned women therefore learnt more transferable skills such as sewing, and in general, were taught the manners and refinement of White society in order to serve in the house. There were also major differences in the work of a seamstress and a washerwoman. The first position required training in specialized commercial sewing methods, therefore it was a step up from the skills of slavery and was also a job not exclusively performed by Black women. Working-class White women also became seamstresses and milliners. Washing, on the other hand, was a service position, requiring little skill and training.[151]

There were also other lucrative occupations which became the province of free Black women due to their perceived *wisdom* or *talent*, engendered by their African roots. Nursing was one such occupation that also came to be dominated by free Black women. In enslaved society, women sometimes practiced as herb doctors, and their medicine was often preferred and trusted more than White ministrations.[152] White New Orleanians also acknowledged Black women's skills in this area, as demonstrated by novelist George Washington Cable in his book *The Grandissimes*: "The blue turbaned black nurse was tucking the covering around his feet… Dr Keene told him, "Do as your nurse tells you and next week you may raise your head and shoulders a little; but if you don't mind her you'll have backset and the devil himself wouldn't engage to cure you."[153]

Hairdressing was another occupation associated with free Black women. Oral tradition suggests that New Orleans' most famous free woman of colour, Voodoo priestess, Marie Laveaux, may have also practiced this occupation, gaining much of her information and power over the wealthy White population through dressing women's hair and listening to their gossip. Unfortunately, as Carolyn

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[151] Ibid. 225

[152] See Sharla M. Fett, *Working Cures: Healing, Health, and Power on Southern Slave Plantations* (University of North Carolina Press, 2002); David Barry Gaspar and Darlene Hine Clark, (eds), *Black Women and Slavery in the Americas: More than Chattel (* Indiana University Press, Bloomington & Indianapolis, 1996)

[153]George Washington Cable, *The Grandissimes* (Hill & Wang, New York, 1879), 12-13

Morrow Long points out in her biographical account, this is not substantiated by any historical documents.[154] However, as Eliza Potter's experiences show in her memoir, *A Hairdresser's Experience in High Life*, free Black women could make a good living from hairdressing.[155]

Once a free Black woman had established a business and begun to amass wealth, she often consolidated her position further by buying real estate and by the purchase of the enslaved. The controversial nature of slaveholding by free people of colour has already been discussed in this chapter. However, Chakrabarti Myers argues that in the case of free Black women, this was often seen by them as being necessary. As they were frequently single heads of households, they had to prioritize the economic needs of their family over those of the enslaved. Thus, they could not afford to think about race, and the fact that they were doing to other people what had been done to them, or to their forbears. Also, the fragile nature of their free status was such that many of them participated in White Southern practices as a form of protection.[156] The purchasing of enslaved people was therefore seen by them as an economic necessity upon which their livelihood and thus their freedom depended.

In the Antebellum period, Afro-Creole women became an important part of the labour market. By pursuing certain occupations, they also began to make themselves indispensable to New Orleans' White society. In doing so, they achieved an opportunity for economic security which had been denied their enslaved forbears. Free women of colour deliberately amassed wealth, real estate, and enslaved people to shield themselves and their families from discrimination and racism. Thus, they moved further away from their enslaved heritage, clearly separating themselves from the enslaved people of the City. Although this could be seen as a capitulation to dominant White culture by these women, Michael P. Johnson and James L. Roark argue that it was a type of resistance, as according to White ideology, their African heritage should have precluded them from any of these privileges. Thus, they conducted their businesses and bought property as a challenge to White supremacist and patriarchal beliefs.[157] They

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[154] See Carolyn Morrow Long, *A New Orleans Voodou Princess: The Legend and Reality of Marie Laveau* (University Press of Florida, 2006)
[155] Eliza Potter, *A Hairdresser's Experience in the High Life* (Connecticut,1859)
[156] Amrita Myers Chakrabarti, *Forging Freedom: Black Women in Pursuit of Liberty in Antebellum Charleston* (University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 15-16
[157] Michael P. Johnson & James L. Roark, *Black Masters: A Free Family of Color in the Old South* (W.W. Norton & Co. New York & London. 1984*),* 101-102

also defied ideals of femininity which dictated that a woman's place was in the domestic sphere. These women's challenges to White society's dogmas and mores will become a thread of continuity throughout the succeeding chapters.

This introductory chapter has provided a broad overview of how the history of New Orleans' antebellum free women of colour intertwined with the evolution of the City; the next and succeeding chapters will look in more detail at the important facets of their lives, by examination of two contrasting case studies. Chapter Two will begin with further examination of the Roman Catholic religion, assessing its importance in the lives of free women of colour, by consideration of an enterprising group of religious free Black women who surmounted objections and difficulties to form Holy Orders in New Orleans and Baltimore.

Figure 5: Women selling their wares. In the Old French Market, New Orleans by James White Alexander, 1882

Chapter Two

No Cross, No Crown: The First Free Black Catholic Nuns

Religious association! It gives even to women the strength of a giant. There is in it consolidation, duration, infinite power and almost ubiquity of influence.[158]

Although Charles Gayarré's above quote was probably meant in a more metaphorical sense, some historians would argue that Roman Catholicism did indeed literally bestow strength, power, and influence for certain free Black religious women, giving them increased autonomy in a repressive slave society. This chapter will therefore study this premise further by examination of two orders of free Black religious women in New Orleans and Baltimore, looking at how far their alliance with the Catholic religion gave them increased status and influence within the free Black community. Emily Clark and Virginia Gould argue that, through the foundation of their order, New Orleans' nuns were able to transform themselves from "nearly powerless objects of coercion into powerful agents."[159] Gould further suggests that, with community recognition as religious women, and the foundation of various institutions, these women also resisted the negative portrayals of Black womanhood and became positive role models for young women of colour. Thus, she argues that it was this "recasting of their identity which enabled them to gain influence and power within the community." [160] However, Marissa J. Fuentes questions whether any free women of colour could be said to have true autonomy or self-direction in a slave society, because in their chosen methods of survival, free women of colour were, in effect, helping to keep these "structures of inequality and denigration in place."[161] Indeed there has also

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[158] Charles Gayarré, *History of Louisiana: The French Domination,* Vol 1 (William J. Widdleton, New York, 1866), 380

[159] Emily Clark & Virginia Meacham Gould, "The Feminine Face of Afro Catholicism in New Orleans 1727-1852." *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 59, No.2 (April 2002), 412

[160] Virginia Meacham Gould, "Henriette Delille, Free Women of Color, and Catholicism in Antebellum New Orleans, 1727-1852" in *Beyond Bondage: Free Women of Color in the Americas*, edited collection by David Barry Gaspar & Darleen Clark Hine (University of Illinois Press, Urbana & Chicago, 2004), 271- 285

[161] Marisa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives, Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 22

been debate, around whether New Orleans' free Black nuns' connections with White society, and their adherence to White mores, actually succeeded in the further repression of African tradition.[162]

Much of the evidence about New Orleans' Sisters of the Holy Family order, including their racial and societal dogmas, comes from the written accounts of their first historian, Sister Mary Bernard Deggs. Her journal written in the late nineteenth century has been painstakingly edited by Virginia Gould and Charles E. Nolan and recounts the early history of the order between 1842 and 1896. She was one of the few sisters still alive who remembered the founders, and one of a small group of Black women to author a literary document in the nineteenth century. In contrast to this, the early history of the Oblate Sisters of Providence was mainly recounted through the diary of Reverend James Joubert, their founder and director. Therefore, unlike the Sisters of the Holy Family, whose history was written solely from the viewpoint of one of their own nuns, the founding of the Oblate Sisters order was written from the perspective of a White male placed in authority over them. This documentary source aptly demonstrates the difficulties described by Marisa J. Fuentes in deconstructing historical documents written about free women of colour, as they were "often structured by the privileges of race, gender and class."[163] However, the Oblate Sisters' archives also include the memoirs of one of their nuns in the late nineteenth century, which provided an alternative history of the co-founders and the organization of the order.

The two accounts demonstrate how, after their foundation, each of the two orders were organized and run in a singular way, appearing different in several significant aspects, as evidenced by their rules and membership, which will be discussed later in this chapter. The chapter will also examine how these differences may have been engendered from the distinctive cultures of their respective cities, contributing to the variations in these religious communities. The problems of these women were similar, in that they both had to work within a patriarchal structured racial hierarchy. Both orders were

[162]At least one work of musical scholarship on New Orleans charged the Sisters of the Holy Family with stifling African-American musical innovation (of which the New Orleans ballroom, which the sisters subsequently took over, had been an early headquarters) by endorsing black conformity with majority white culture: See Stephen Longstreet, *Sportin' House: A History of New Orleans' Sinners and the Birth of Jazz* (Los Angeles Sherbourne Press, 1965)

[163]As described by Marisa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive (*University of Pennsylvania, 2016)

also founded against a backdrop of racial slavery; thus, the women occupied a subordinate position by virtue of both their race as well as their gender. This chapter will also analyze how free Black, and some White women formed support networks, which not only assisted them in overcoming some of the problems they experienced, but also helped them to achieve their goals of aiding the Black community, while also expanding their religious influence in New Orleans and Baltimore.

The chapter will firstly examine the life of Henriette Delille, founder of the Sisters of the Holy Family in New Orleans, and contrast it with that of Elizabeth Lange, who instituted the Oblate Sisters of Providence in Baltimore. They were the first leaders of the only two orders for free Black women in America. This comparative analysis, revealing the similarities and differences in their experiences, will further highlight the importance of place, as well as culture, in the lives of these women. With its eighteenth-century French and Spanish administrations, the city of New Orleans had evolved very differently from Baltimore. The French language and Roman Catholicism still predominated in the City, even in the mid-nineteenth century. Thus, Delille and her sisters did not have to face further discrimination, apart from that of their race and gender, for their lack of English language skills, or for being in a religious minority. In comparison, nuns in Baltimore were used to being pelted with missiles and were also subjected to verbal abuse on a regular basis, no matter the colour of their skin. Also, Elizabeth Lange and the other founders of Baltimore's order were refugees from Saint-Domingue and Cuba, thus inviting further prejudice stemming from their refugee status and place of origin, whereas most of the founders and early members of the Sisters of the Holy Family were born in New Orleans, only one of them originating from Cuba. Finally, the chapter will also look at the organization of the two orders and how they evolved, taking into consideration the issues surrounding race and self-identity, in relation to societal roles and community loyalty.

The "Venerable" Henriette Delille

Henriette Delille's life has been examined by ecclesiastical biographers and historians since her death in 1862. One of the most significant sources was the journal written by Sister Mary Deggs in the late nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, nuns from the order, Sister Mary Francis Borgia Hart, and

Sister Audrey Marie Detiège, have also written biographies of the founders, mostly based around the oral tradition, and some archival sources of the Sisters of the Holy Family. More recently, historians such as Father Cyprien Davis, a leader in historical studies of the African-American Church in the United States, and Virginia Gould, current historian for the Sisters of the Holy Family, have researched Delille's life, using resources from the archives to assist in an ongoing canonization process. Henriette was declared venerable by Pope Benedict XVI in 2010.[164] Yet, like many other free Black women, actual historical documentation is sparse, and much of the information about her life still comes from her community's oral tradition. She was born around 1812, the offspring of free Black woman, Maria Josefa Diaz, and probably fathered by Jean Baptiste Lille Sarpy, a White Frenchman of means, although evidence of her birth has never been found.[165] Through her family´s continued relationships with elite White males, she was related to some of New Orleans´ most prominent White families. Her family was also prosperous, thanks, in part, to her enslaved great, great-grandmother Nanette who after gaining her freedom, invested in land and property to leave to her heirs.[166] That Nanette´s daughters also continued to amass wealth from their White partners, is evidenced by the records of her daughter, Fanchonetta Decoudreaux, partner of White Frenchman, Charles Decoudreaux. In 1786, Decoudreaux sold some land to her brother, Etienne Debreuil, which was ¨acquired by the vendress by a clause in the last testament given by Charles Decoudreaux Captain of the Regiment of the Plaza."[167] Delille's two uncles, Narcisse Lebeau, and, Raphael Roig, also owned large plantations and were friendly with some of New Orleans' most notable White citizens, including John McDonough, founder of most of the pre -Civil War public schools of New Orleans.[168] Therefore, Delille was a member of New Orleans' elite free Black society.

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[164] Venerable Henriette Delille is the first U.S. native born African American woman whose cause for canonization has been opened by the Catholic Church. Her cause was opened in 1988 and endorsed by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in 1997. She was decreed "venerable" in 2010 by Pope Benedict XVI. The next step is validation of an alleged miracle, after which she would then be beatified and named "blessed." A second miracle is needed for sainthood. As of 2016 another alleged miracle was being tried in the Diocese of Little Rock, Arkansas, if successful Henriette Delille will be declared blessed the third step in canonization. See https://www.henriettedelille.com/canonization-process

[165] Historians have speculated that her birth may have been entered into the book for white baptism.

[166] See Emily Clark & Virginia Meacham Gould, "The Feminine Face of Afro Catholicism in New Orleans 1727-1852."*The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 59, No.2 (April 2002)

[167] Civil District Court, New Orleans Parish: Succession of Charles Decoudreaux, Vol: 598, , 631

[168] Jessie Carney Smith (ed) *Notable Black American Women* (Gale Research, 1992), 5

There is very little record of Delille's early life. She was brought up in a house on Burgundy Street with her half-sister Cécille, her mother's daughter from a relationship with another White man, and her brother Jean. Maria Josefa Diaz owned several properties, which she probably rented out. One on Barrack Street was described as a lot with two houses, "one of lumber and the other built of bricks between posts with a bakery, in a very bad state."[169] Certainly, Maria Josefa may have been running some sort of business as her name appeared in New Orleans' Business Directories of 1822 and 1823, under the Burgundy Street address. The 1830 Census recorded that by this time, Maria Josefa owned an enslaved male, under ten years old. Also, the family were all enumerated as being free White, rather than free Black people, as they had been in the 1820 Census.[170] This census therefore reports two important features which would affect the life of Henriette Delille: firstly, all the family were light skinned enough to be mistaken for White; also, she grew up in a household that had at least owned one enslaved person.

When she was of school age, Henriette may have been educated at Saint Claude's Street School run by French nun, Sister Saint Marthe Frontiere, a religious sister of the Dames Hospitalieres near Lyon in France. Although there are no official school records remaining, Sister Mary Bernard Deggs' journal records that some of the women who founded the order were pupils at the Saint- Claude Street School. Thus, Delille may have attended the school with her co-founders of the order, Juliette Gaudin and Josephine Charles.[171] The school also became a centre of Catholic missionary activities for Black people, both enslaved and free. When she was older, Delille may have become a teacher herself, as according to oral tradition, Sister Saint Marthe encouraged her students to teach religion to those enslaved females where it was allowed.[172] Delille, therefore, may have observed first-hand the kind of autonomy which religion offered a woman, as she saw Sister Saint Marthe single-handedly running the school. The Sister was also very successful in attracting and recruiting students, as evidenced by a letter from Bishop Duberg to Father Antoine Blanc, a priest from New Orleans who was in France to recruit

[169] Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family: Succession of Marie Joseph Dias, 1848
[170] The Historic New Orleans Collection: New Orleans' 1830 Census
[171] Sister Deggs was born in 1846 and joined the order in 1873, therefore she very likely knew the founders and their history. See Sister Mary Deggs' Journal in *No Cross, No Crown: Black Nuns in Nineteenth Century New Orleans*, edited by Virginia Meacham Gould and Charles E Nolan (Indiana University Press, 2001), vii
[172] Jessie Carney Smith (ed) *Notable Black American Women,* (Gale Research, 1992)

missionaries for Louisiana. Duberg wrote that Blanc should "try to bring back two good Sisters of Saint Charles to cooperate with good Sister Ste. Martha …her school is doing much good. She has some eighty pupils and the number would increase quickly if she had helpers."[173]

Not only did Henriette's education probably form part of Catholic missionary practice, but she also came from a family with a tradition of devout Catholic women, as demonstrated by the number of times her female forbears stood as godparents at baptisms. Her mother was named as a godparent to a free Black girl in November 1826 and for a boy in 1827. Later in the year she became the godmother to an enslaved man and in 1828 for an enslaved woman.[174] Thus, the importance of expanding the influence of the Catholic religion in the Black population would have been instilled in Delille from her birth. However, as well as this religious devoutness, the other feminine family tradition was to become the partner of a White man. Although Maria Josefa had inherited real estate from her forbears, it appears that she may have often been in financial difficulties during her life-time, and also had at least two White partners, possibly in order to try and ensure her standard of living. That she also made sure her two daughters received an education and were taught other social accomplishments may have been an investment in their future, as she possibly hoped that these social endowments would assist them in making an alliance with a wealthy White man. By the time Henriette was attending school, her elder half-sister Cécille had already followed the family custom by becoming the placèe of a wealthy merchant, possibly meeting him at a quadroon ball.[175] Previously, Catholic scholars had maintained that, unlike her sister, Delille defied her family by rejecting plaçage and would not attend quadroon balls. Detiège writes that she exclaimed, "one hour with God in church is sweeter than the vanities found in the ballroom."[176] However, baptismal documents discovered by the Archdiocesan archivist of New Orleans in 2004, suggested that in the 1820s, Delille gave birth to two sons, both of whom died very young.[177] In the entry of the Ursuline nun's record of deaths, they were both listed as being called

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[173] Archives, Oeuvres Pontifical Missionaire, Lyon, France: Duberg to Blanc, New Orleans, June 27, 1824.
[174] Archives of the Archdiocese of New Orleans: Saint Louis Cathedral Baptisms of Slaves and Free People of Color, Mar. 1825-Dec. 1826, and St. Louis Cathedral Baptisms of Slaves and Free People of Color, Sept. 1827-June 1829
[175] Sister Audrey Marie Détiege, *Henriette Delille, free woman of color: Foundress of the Sisters of the Holy Family* (Sisters of the Holy Family, New Orleans, 1976), 22
[176] Jessie Carney Smith (ed), *Notable Black American Women* (Gale Research, 1992), 5
[177] *Catholic News Service*, 29 March 2010

Henri Bocno, the surname providing a clue to the father's origin. Her sister Cécille's White partner, although called by the anglicized surname of Hart, was actually Jewish, originally from Galicia in Austria, which then became part of Poland.[178] Thus, Bocno was probably Bochno, a surname originating from Poland, suggesting that the two sisters were with men of similar ancestry, maybe even friends or colleagues. Indeed, Sister Détiege wrote: "Cecilia presided over [her husband's] dinner parties where she met outstanding members of New Orleans such as William Bell and John Slidell and it was through her sister that Henriette met so many wealthy whites."[179] However, currently no further archival evidence about Henriette Delille's partner and the outcome of the relationship has been discovered.[180] She was very young when she had these children, barely out of childhood herself, thus the grief that she felt at their death may have also contributed to her desire to enter religious life.

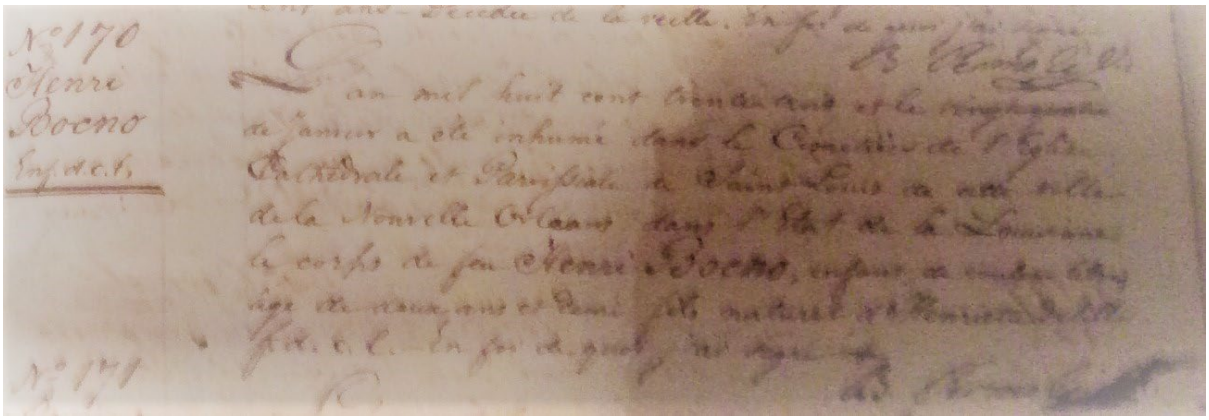


Figure 6: Entry in the ledgers of the Ursuline Convent 1827 of the Death of Henri Bocno. Collection of the Ursuline Convent, New Orleans

It was not unusual in Antebellum New Orleans for young free Black women to be married or have a partner, often much older than themselves. Indeed, Delille's sister's partner was in his fifties when he formed a relationship with the teenage Cécille. Henriette may also have had another reason for

[178] Samuel Hart was buried in the now demolished Gates of Mercy Cemetery, the first Jewish cemetery in New Orleans. https://www.jewishgen.org/databases/cemetery/jowbr.php?rec=J_LA_0002682

[179] May refer to William R. Bell (1814-1874), New Orleans Undertaker and Livery Owner. John Slidell (1793-1871) noted Louisiana lawyer, Politician and Businessman; Sister Audrey Marie Détiege, *Henriette Delille, free woman of color: Foundress of the Sisters of the Holy Family* (Sisters of the Holy Family, New Orleans, 1976), 22

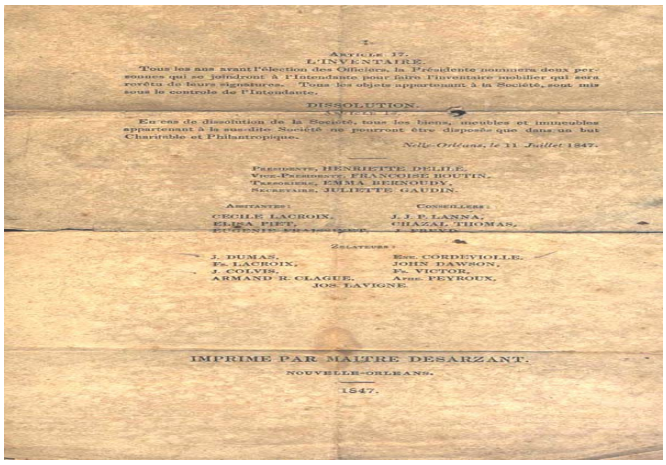
[180] Although I could not find any records for a Bochno in New Orleans, I did come across a newspaper article about Jules Gustave Bochno who was attacked by a man with a dagger in New Orleans. *The Daily Crescent,* 1849

wishing to leave her mother's household while still very young. In 1832, her sister Cécille petitioned the court for Maria Josefa Diaz to be provided with a "curator to take charge of her person and property," as she had been "certified insane." A family meeting was convened and held at the notary's office, which included Cécille's White partner, Samuel Hart, and a curator was duly appointed, Anthony Batistessa.[181] Perhaps her mother had been mentally unstable for some time, making her children's childhood a difficult one. Her mental illness may have also been due, in part, to her precarious life as a plaçée. During her lifetime, she obviously had different White partners and the instability of these relationships and the resulting financial difficulties may have provided extra stress for Maria Josefa, contributing to her eventual breakdown. Henriette may therefore have also reflected on the difference between her mother's existence compared to that of Sister Saint Marthe, who had the support and the stability of the Church. As Virginia Gould suggests, countless religious Frenchwomen had used their autonomy brought about by their association with the Catholic Church to assist with the sick and needy. They were also able to travel to New Orleans as teachers and nurses.[182]

Official records offer no further insight into Henriette's life until she was in her mid- twenties, when she became the leader of a lay religious sisterhood, the first one of its kind for free Black women in New Orleans. The aims of this religious and charitable organization were to care for the sick; assist the poor and instruct the "ignorant black population." [183] In 1836, Delille drew up the rules for the lay society, a document entitled *The Rules and Regulations for the Congregation of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary.* The rules included instructions for the group to assemble at least once a month; care for any member who became ill; assist at the funeral of a deceased member, and undertake to look after any of their children, funds permitting. Each member was also to make an annual offering of at least one dollar, as well as a monthly contribution of fifty cents.[184] The document

[181] Notarial Archives: Vol:10a, Acts No:16, Aug-Oct 1832; de Armas, Notary, No:406
[182] Virginia Meacham Gould "Henriette Delille, Free Woman of Color and Catholicism in the Antebellum New Orleans 1727- 1852" in *Beyond Bondage: Free Women of Color in the Americas* edited collection by David Barry Gaspar & Darlene Clark Hine (University of Illinois Press, 2004), 271-285
[183] Cyprien Davis, *Henriette Delille: Servant of Slaves: Witness to the Poor* (Archdiocese of New Orleans, 2004), 40
[184] Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family: "The Rules and Regulations for the Congregation of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary under the Invocation of Mary the Virgin of the Holy Presentation. Founded in New Orleans 21 November 1863."

makes clear that at this time the members did not live together as a community, and that women with children were permitted to join this lay religious society. However, the Church authorities initially refused to officially recognize the society because of its aims, which included the education of enslaved people, which by then violated state law. The 1830 law against incitement of any rebellion or discontent amongst the enslaved, also included prohibitions on education, which was seen by the authorities as posing a threat to the status quo.[185] Delille and her co-founders, Juliette Gaudin and Josephine Charles, acceded to the requirements of the 1830 law by undertaking only to teach religion to enslaved girls. From then on, Henriette Delille's personal life history became subsumed into that of her society. The evolution of the society into its final form as the Sisters of the Holy Family order was a slow process. In 1840, Bishop Blanc sought approbation from Rome for a group of religious women known as the Sisters of the Presentation. He received confirmation from the Vatican that the group was affiliated to the Congregation Prima Primariae of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Roman Catholic Church. As a result of this, the three women founders began a "more concentrated and focused ministry with the aid of [Père] Étienne Rousselon."[186] According to oral tradition, in 1842 the three co-founders moved into a house on Saint-Bernard Street, marking the beginning of the Sisters of the Holy Family as a religious community.[187]



ARTICLE 17.
L'INVENTAIRE.
Tous les ans avant l'élection des Officières, la Présidente nommera deux personnes qui se joindront à l'Intendante pour faire l'inventaire mobilier qui sera revêtu de leurs signatures. Tous les objets appartenant à la Société, sont mis sous le controle de l'Intendante.

DISSOLUTION.
ARTICLE 18.
En cas de dissolution de la Société, tous les biens, meubles et immeubles appartenant à la susdite Société ne pourront être disposés que dans un but Charitable et Philantropique.
Nelle-Orléans, le 11 *Juillet* 1847.

PRÉSIDENTE, HENRIETTE DELILE.
VICE-PRÉSIDENTE, FRANÇOISE BOUTIN.
TRÉSORIÈRE, EMMA BERNOUDY.
SECRÉTAIRE, JULIETTE GAUDIN.

ASSISTANTES:
CÉCILE LACROIX.
ELISA PIET.
EUGÉNIE BRASSEAUX.

CONSEILLERS:
J. J. F. LANNA.
CHAZAL THOMAS.
J. PRIEUR.

SOLLICITEURS:
J. DUMAS.
P. LACROIX.
J. COLVIS.
ARMAND R. CLAGUE.
JOS. TAVIGNE.
EDM. CORDEVIOLLE.
JOHN DAWSON.
PL. VICTOR.
Arms. PEYROUX.

IMPRIMÉ PAR MAITRE DESARZANT.
NOUVELLE-ORLEANS.
1847.

Figure 7: Articles of *La Société de la Sainte Famille.* New Orleans' Public Library Exhibition

[185] Judith Kelleher Schafer, *Becoming Free, Remaining Free. Manumission and Enslavement in New Orleans 1846-1862* (University of Louisiana Press, 2003), 6
[186] Cyprien Davis, *Henriette Delille: Servant of Slaves: Witness to the Poor* (Archdiocese of New Orleans, 2004), 46-47
[187] M. Shawn Copeland, *The Subversive Power of Love: The Vision of Henriette Delille (*Paulist Press, New York, 2007), 29-30

In 1848, Henriette's mother died. Her heirs were Jean Delille, Henriette Delille, and the four children of her by now deceased daughter Cécille: Antoinette, Amelia, Samuel, and John Hart. Maria Josefa left a small legacy consisting of her property in Burgundy Street, which was sold to her grandson-in-law, Joseph Emile Darsse, husband of Antoinette, for $2,325.[188] Once Maria Josefa's debts had been settled, Henriette received a very modest amount of money, which she used to partially finance the buying of a property for the Sisters of the Holy Family. Henriette Delille was appointed the Mother Superior and continued in that role until her early death in 1862.[189] By 1860, Henriette was obviously ailing. Her goddaughter Ella Bell wrote her a letter in that year, "rejoicing in her convalescence and wishing for her restoration to good health." In a further letter written in January 1861, she bemoans the fact that, "mother has let me know that your health is still delicate."[190] By November of 1862, Henriette Delille had passed away, cemetery records recording her burial in Saint Louis Cemetery No.2. She was fifty years old, and the cause of her death was attributed to phthisis (tuberculosis).[191] Sister Hart also ascribes Delille's death to the emotional toll and stress caused by the bombardment and capture of New Orleans by the Union army in April 1862, which according to her, "told heavily on the enfeebled health of Mother Henriette."[192] Obituary notices appeared in in *L'Abeille* (The Bee) Newspaper. Her funeral was a modest one: the cost for the coffin and hearse was $20, and the rental of three carriages for three dollars each.[193]

Elizabeth Lange (Mother Mary)

Elizabeth Lange was one of the main founders of Baltimore's Oblate Sisters of Providence in 1829. This was officially the first order of Black nuns in the United States, as the Sisters of the Holy Family were founded much later. Even less is known of her early background than of Henriette Delille's, and accounts of her later life story rely on the order's documents and the diary of Reverend James Joubert,

[188] Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family: Succession of Marie Joseph Dias, 1848,.
[189] Sister Mary Deggs' Journal in *No Cross, No Crown: Black Nuns in Nineteenth Century New Orleans*, edited by Virginia Meacham Gould and Charles E Nolan (Indiana University Press, 2001), 204
[190] Cyprian Davis, *Henriette Delille: Servant of Slaves: Witness to the Poor* (Archdiocese of New Orleans,2004)
[191]Archives of the Archdiocese of New Orleans, Register of Saint Louis Cemeteries, 1857-1863
[192] Sister Mary Francis Borgia Hart, *Violets in the King's Garden: A History of the Sisters of the Holy Family in New Orleans* (Sisters of the Holy Family, 1976), 76
[193] Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family: Receipt from Undertaker P. Casenave

the Oblate's priest patron. Like Delille, her life has also been researched by members of the order, including, Catherine Willigman, and more recently a comprehensive history of the order has been written by African-American historian, Diane Morrow. The latest research by Oblate archivist, Sharon Knecht, suggests that she was born in Santiago de Cuba, which at that time had a large Francophone population, in around 1794. It was also previously thought that, like Delille, she was born of mixed parentage, with a wealthy White planter father, but an exhumation of her body in 2013, showed her to be solely of African descent.[194] Her father was evidently therefore a wealthy free man of colour. Although he did not come with Lange and her mother to America, he supported them throughout his lifetime and left Lange a legacy after his death. Thus, she had probably lived a relatively privileged life in Cuba and was well educated. According to the Oblate's oral tradition, when Elizabeth and her mother came to America, they lived briefly in Charleston, South Carolina and Norfolk, Virginia, before coming to Baltimore. However, Lange resided in Baltimore from at least 1813, when she was in her late twenties.[195] Like New Orleans, Baltimore was also a haven for refugees from Saint-Domingue and Cuba. There were well-established trade relationships between Maryland planters and merchants with their counterparts in the Caribbean, which encouraged emigration to Baltimore after the insurrection. Therefore, by the time of Lange's arrival, there were already large numbers of White, enslaved and free Black Catholic refugees residing in Baltimore.[196] Thus, although the Creole culture was not as widespread in the city of Baltimore as in New Orleans, these refugees created an enclave of Creole customs and traditions within a separate community. Indeed, refugees were also attracted to the City by knowledge of the existence of a large French-speaking population. The Catholic Church in Baltimore therefore became key in fostering a sense of community amongst the displaced people, both Black and White. Continued financial support from Lange's father allowed her and her mother to live independently in the City. Thus, although there is no record of Lange or her mother owning slaves, the

[194] *Catholic Review*, 6 February 2015: The sisters had Vatican permission to transfer Mother Lange's relics to the Oblates' motherhouse in Arbutus, where they would be sealed in a new sarcophagus in their chapel's oratory. Like Henriette Delille, the order hope that she will be canonized, and believe that the move will make her remains more accessible for veneration and pilgrimage.
[195] *Baltimore Sun*, Feb 4 1882: Obituary of Mother Mary Lange,
[196] Diane Batts Morrow, *Persons of Color & Religious at the Same Time: The Oblate Sisters of Providence. 1828-1860* (University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 18

largesse of her planter father, and her eventual inheritance from him meant that Lange, like Delille, benefitted financially from the slave system. However, unlike Henriette Delille, who was a recognized member of an established free Black community in New Orleans, Elizabeth Lange had to navigate her way through a very different society. Free Black people of the Caribbean had a much high status than in the U.S.A. Even in New Orleans, wealthy mixed-race lighter skinned people like Henriette Delille were recognized as being at the topmost echelon of the free Black community. In contrast, Baltimore's largely unstratified free Black population, and the lack of acknowledgment of the position of free people of colour in the City, resulted in equal discrimination from Whites towards Black people, whether enslaved or free, light, or dark skinned. Thus, Morrow argues that the downgrading of her status and the increased uncertainty of her position may have been factors in Lange's inclination to take refuge in religious life.[197] As with Delille and her family, there was no doubt of Lange's allegiance to the Catholic religion, as her name appears in the registers of three religious confraternities from 1813 onwards.[198] Lange also established a small school, which she ran from her house, for free Black children in Baltimore, with two fellow refugees, Mary Rosine Boegue, and Mary Frances Balas.[199] It was not unusual for refugees from Cuba and Saint-Domingue to work as schoolteachers, as the White and free Black population were mainly literate and well educated. Indeed, Sally McKee writes that the refugees from Saint-Domingue and Cuba who came to New Orleans included many White and mixed-race teachers as, "the Caribbean newcomers, regardless of race, were better educated and had higher standards for refinement and gentility than did the town's longer settled residents."[200] Lange may have also been appalled at the lack of opportunity for free Black children to obtain an education, as Black children were not permitted to attend Baltimore's public schools.[201]

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[197] Ibid. 26

[198] Ibid. Membership of confraternities could be clergy or lay, male or female, black or white. Each of them selected a specific act such as wearing a certain medal or reciting a certain prayer as its distinguishing feature or bond of association.

[199] Grace H. Sherwood, *The Oblates' Hundred and One Years* (Macmillan, New York, 1931),7

[200] Sally McKee, *The Exiles Song. Edmond Dedé and the Unfinished Revolutions of the Atlantic World* (Yale University Press, 2017), 27

[201] See Bettye J. Gardner**, "**Ante-Bellum Black Education in Baltimore." *Maryland Historical Magazine* 71, no. 3 (1976)

The education of free Black children in Baltimore was also a preoccupation of James H. N. Joubert de la Mureille, a former French schoolteacher who moved from Saint Jean d'Angely to Saint-Domingue in 1800. He remained for three years, eventually taking refuge in Cuba, and then moving to Baltimore, where he taught at a girls' school. In 1805, he entered Saint Mary's seminary and was ordained in 1810.[202] Saint Mary was the centre of religious activity among Catholic Black and White refugees from Cuba and Saint-Domingue. According to his diary, Joubert aspired to establish a school for the education of free Black girls. He singled out Elizabeth Lange and Mary Rosine Boegue, as likely candidates to help him with this project. He wrote in his diary that he had in mind, "two excellent colored girls" to assist him in the running of a school. Elizabeth Lange's school had proved very popular with free Black families. Catherine Willigman recalled that parents "lost no time in placing their children in Miss Lange's school which was filled with the most intelligent families of Baltimore."[203] However, Lange did not only take pupils from high class families, as Willigman goes on to say, "no distinction whatever was made among the pupils and a very large number of the poorer class who had no means of paying for their education were admitted."[204] When Joubert approached her with his idea, Elizabeth Lange was about to close her school because of lack of funds. Obviously eager to continue educating Baltimore's free Black children, Lange and the two other free Black women teachers and co-founders of the order, decided to accept Joubert's offer.[205] Therefore, unlike the Sisters of the Holy Family, which evolved from Henriette Delille's leadership of a laywoman's religious association, it appears that the Oblate Sister's order was engendered from a desire on the part of a White male priest to provide an education for free Black children. Indeed, Joubert's diary suggests that all the impetus for forming a school and subsequently an order of nuns came solely from him. Although the Sisters of the Holy Family had a male priest sponsor in the form of Father Étienne Rousselon, who helped them to achieve Holy Orders, there was never a suggestion in the archives that the drive to establish an order

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[202] Grace H. Sherwood, *The Oblates' Hundred and One Years* (Macmillan, New York, 1931), 5

[203] Catherine Willigman translated the annals of the Oblate Sisters from French into English. Her knowledge of Elizabeth Lange was a personal one as she had lived in the Oblate community from the age of five. "Oblate Sisters of Providence: First Foundresses of the Oblates." Typescript Copy (Archives of the Oblate Sisters of Providence), 8

[204] Ibid

[205] W. N. Jones (ed), *100 years of the Oblate Sisters* (Tidewater Publishing, Maryland, 1977), 208, 210

came exclusively from him. If Lange did indeed take a more subordinate role than Delille in the foundation of the order, there are several reasons why this might have been the case. Henriette Delille was born in New Orleans, and therefore well practiced in negotiating the challenges created by her race and gender in that society. She also had wealthy planter relatives with connections to the White elite of New Orleans. She was a French-speaking Afro-Creole in a largely Francophone and Creole population, thus she also did not suffer from the communication and cultural problems experienced by Elizabeth Lange and the other refugees, in a predominantly Anglo-American society. Also, Henriette Delille was extremely light skinned with European features, as opposed to the darker complexioned Elizabeth Lange, which may have enhanced Delille's standing with the White Catholic authorities. (See Figures 8 & 9, page 74) for images of Henriette Delille and Elizabeth Lange). This seeming favouritism on the part of the Church toward lighter skinned Afro-Creole women will be further discussed later in the chapter.

However, despite these apparent disadvantages of birth and appearance, Morrow nonetheless argues that Lange probably did collaborate with, rather than being entirely directed by Joubert, in the foundation of the school and the order. She suggests that, as Lange and her co-founders had already run a successful school, without any interference from White male authorities, it was possible that they had more input into the decision-making than recorded by Joubert.[206] Joubert's diary does make clear, however, that for many years both Lange and Boegue were wishing to devote themselves to the religious life, thus also suggesting that the impetus in eventually forming an order may have been as much their desire as Joubert's. He wrote in his diary, "both of them told me that for more than ten years they had wished to consecrate themselves to God for this good work."[207] Nevertheless, the evidence from Joubert's diary and other documents in the Oblate Sisters' archives suggested, at least in the beginning of the order's foundation, the sisters relied on him to take an active leadership role. Initially, he was responsible for renting a house for the three founders: Elizabeth Lange, Mary Rosine Boegue and Mary Francis Balas, as they began their novitiate for religious life. He also wrote the rules for their religious

[206] Diane Batts Morrow, *Persons of Color & Religious at the Same Time: The Oblate Sisters of Providence. 1828-1860* (University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 14
[207] Quote taken from Joubert's diary in Grace H. Sherwood, *The Oblates' Hundred and One Years* (Macmillan, New York, 1931), 7

society, in contrast to Henriette Delille, who wrote her own rules. In 1829, it was Joubert who appointed Elizabeth Lange as superior of the order for the next three years, taking the name of Sister Mary.[208] Also, according to his diary, Joubert decided that the order would re-elect its superior every three years from then on. As a result of this, Lange was only actually superior general of the order from 1829-1832 and 1835-1841, unlike Delille who was the superior of her order from its foundation until her death.[209] There is also evidence from the archival material that Lange was indeed a strong personality and sometimes an autocratic one, who may have resented the rule of the Church's male hierarchy. Her style of leadership may have also caused her unpopularity, not least with the Church's authorities, as well as with her colleagues, thus precipitating her exclusion from office. After the first three-year term, Willigman recalled: "Sister Mary was good but a strict observer of the Rule and made no allowances for small omissions."[210] Lange's mother who joined the Oblates as a boarder in the year before her death, "was afraid of her and called her mistress."[211] In 1833, after Lange's first term as superior, Joubert and the Oblate community revised the original rules, ¨at the requests of the nuns wishing to put an end to the different abuses which had been introduced not long among them.¨[212] One of the articles revised by Joubert also included this pointed direction:

> Let the superior seek less to have herself feared by those in her charge than to be useful to them. Let her learn that she should be the mother not the mistress of her subjects and if there be a need to sometime use severity, let it be the severity of the mother and not that of the tyrant.[213]

This apparent admonishment from Joubert could suggest that Lange's relationship with him may have been a difficult one at times. In 1839, during Lange's third term as superior, Joubert again addressed

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[208] Ibid.15
[209] Catherine Willigman, "Oblate Sisters of Providence: First Foundresses of the Oblates." Typescript Copy. (Archives of the Oblate Sisters of Providence), 8-10
[210] Ibid
[211] Ibid
[212] Ibid
[213] Quote taken from the "Revision of 1833" in Thaddeus J. Posey, "An Unwanted Commitment: The Spirituality of the Early Oblate Sisters of Providence 1829-1890" (PhD thesis, Saint Louis University, 1993), 129-130

the community, also about severity, exhorting the superior to "be severe with herself and full of indulgence for others."[214]

Morrow argues that Elizabeth Lange may have clashed with Roman Catholic male authority when she exhibited traits such as forcefulness and decisiveness, which were not considered desirable qualities of character for a woman in the nineteenth century. As Joubert's admonishment reiterates, during this period, the most appropriate form of female leadership was motherhood, nineteenth century societal thought exalting the maternal role for women.[215] Indeed, the superiors were also always called *Mother*. However, Delille's twenty year term of office as superior of the Sisters of the Holy Family, and the subsequent breakdown of the order after her death suggests that, possibly, in contrast to Lange, her leadership skills went far beyond those expected of a nineteenth century woman. It could be argued, although this was probably partly due to Delille's charismatic presence, which was frequently commented on by Deggs in her journal, it may also have been as a result of her high status in New Orleans' free Black society, thus making her more respected by the general public, and therefore a natural leader.

Lange could have antagonized Joubert, causing him to fuel the dissatisfaction of her fellow nuns. However, Delille was able to challenge White male hierarchy and impose her authority if she thought that the situation demanded it, without causing a problem. This was evidenced by Deggs, who wrote, because of persecution from their neighbours, Delille wanted to rent out the sisters' house and rent another one. Rousselon would not give his consent, but Henriette went ahead anyway and did it "of her own accord."[216] Therefore, Delille's confidence in her position and the self-belief engendered by societal acknowledgement of her status, may have enabled her to challenge White male authority without any repercussions. On the other hand, Lange's problems with Joubert, and a sense of having an inferior position in society, may therefore have caused her to assume a more autocratic management style within her order, in defence of her position. These disagreements with Church authorities on the

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[214] Archives of the Oblate Sisters of Providence: Translation from "The Original Diary of the Oblate Sisters of Providence" Vols 1&2, Box 47, 1:61

[215] Diane Batts Morrow, *Persons of Color & Religious at the Same Time: The Oblate Sisters of Providence. 1828-1860* (University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 24-25

[216] Sister Mary Deggs' Journal in *No Cross, No Crown: Black Nuns in Nineteenth Century New Orleans*, edited by Virginia Meacham Gould and Charles E. Nolan (Indiana University Press, 2001), 11

part of Lange are further suggested by the appointment of one of the other co-founders, Sister Francis Balas, who took over from Lange in 1833 and served the next three-year term as superior. She was said by Joubert, rather significantly, to be ¨the favorite of all the community." Thus, he may have encouraged the appointment of Balas because he found her more malleable and easier to dominate than Lange.[217] Indeed, Balas' acquiescence to the Church authorities is evident in a letter written to the Oblates of St. Francis of Rome, in which she very much assumed a subordinate position, referring to the Oblates as "poor daughters of Baltimore," and closed the letter "with sentiments of respect and submission."[218] Thus, she perhaps displayed a more acceptable front for a free Black order in Baltimore by clearly demonstrating her belief in her inferior position to the White orders of nuns.

However, if Lange did have problems with the Church's authorities, they could not have faulted her work ethic. Whether Lange was the superior or a member of the order, she was always a devoted and hard-working member of the community. For instance, she was among the first of the sisters to volunteer to nurse cholera victims at the hospital in 1832.[219] Even when she was at an advanced age, she still took an active role in the work of the order, "especially sewing and when her strength permitted, manual labor."[220] Lange far outlived Henriette Delille, surviving to her nineties, and dying in 1882, therefore witnessing many changes, both to her own religious community and society at large.[221]

This comparison of the two women founders, Delille and Lange, shows the similarities in their background and culture, while highlighting the differences in the way in which they were perceived by general society, the church authorities, and their fellow nuns. Although they both originated from Francophone societies in which free people of colour held a recognized position, Delille was ethnically Afro-Creole in a still predominantly Creole society, whereas Lange was a Cuban refugee in a predominantly Anglo-American society. Lange had come from a culture where free Black people held certain privileges, to one where they did not. Therefore, her overbearing behaviour while acting as

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[217] Archives of the Oblate Sisters of Providence: Translation from "The Original Diary of the Oblate Sisters of Providence", Vols 1&2, Box 47, 27, 28
[218] Ibid. 8
[219] Ibid. 10, 12
[220] Catherine Willigman, "Oblate Sisters of Providence: First Foundresses of the Oblates. Typescript Copy. Archives of the Oblate Sisters of Providence, 9
[221] W. N. Jones (ed), *100 years of the Oblate Sisters* (Tidewater Publishing, Maryland, 1977), 211

superior may have been a way of negating her sense of increased powerlessness in society. The differences between the two women may also explain why Lange relied more on the intervention of the priest Joubert, in the foundation of the Oblate Sisters. Delille's status in New Orleans' society may have enabled her association with Rousselon to be a more collaborative one, than that of Lange with Joubert. Delille´s character and standing within the free Black and White religious community also enabled her to organize and preserve her order for the years of her leadership, whereas Lange's initial contribution to the foundation of her order appears to have been more limited because of her reliance on Joubert. Her style of leadership also seems to have been at times divisive, rather than helping to build a cohesive community. As a result of this, she only led the order for a few years, and thus, did not consolidate her position. However, apart from the leadership styles of the two women, the cultures of their respective cities also affected the way in which the two orders were created and managed. Therefore, the next part of the chapter will examine the differences in the way in which the orders were organized, how they served their communities, and how they were regarded by society and by each other in New Orleans and Baltimore.

Figure 8: Carte de Visité of Henriette Delille, Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family Convent

Figure 9: Elizabeth Lange, Archives of the Oblate Sisters of Providence

"Pious Colored Females:" The Sisters of the Holy Family

The sisters' connections with White New Orleans' society and their high position within the free Black community did not however entirely preclude them from experiencing the same prejudices and hardships as those suffered by the Oblate nuns. Sister Deggs' first entry in her journal of the history of the order emphasizes the expression "no cross, no crown" which she then repeated in her journal many times, because the sisters did indeed have many crosses to bear during the foundation of their religious community and throughout the years. Both orders faced persecution in certain quarters of White society and neither of them enjoyed the privileges given to the White religious orders of women. Like all nuns, both Black and White, the sisters also shared an ascribed social status within the patriarchal and hierarchical Catholic Church. Yet convent life could also give young women the opportunity to live a more autonomous lifestyle, free from some of the restrictions of the rest of male dominated society. Therefore, despite difficulties, it was clear in Deggs' journal that many of the women found convent life to be preferable to the usual life of a nineteenth century woman, centering around family and domesticity. Although they were overseen by a White male priest, it could be argued that the sisters enjoyed certain freedoms in the day-to-day management of their affairs, in a way which was denied most women. However, in the enactment of these liberties, the nuns also laid themselves open to hostility. Therefore, this part of the chapter will look at various ways in which free Black nuns overcame the problems engendered by societal prejudice, also examining how the association with these religious communities gave New Orleans' religious free women of colour the impetus and means to challenge the shared misconceptions surrounding their race and gender.

Sister Mary Deggs was born in 1846, but did not officially join the order until 1873, many years after the death of Henriette Delille in 1862. However, because of her familiarity with the order and its founders, Virginia Gould suggests that she had probably been associated with the community since childhood. She may have gone to their convent school, although there are no written records to support

this.[222] According to Deggs, the three co-founders of the Sisters of the Holy Family were women of a very similar background. Like Henriette Delille, Juliette Gaudin and Josephine Charles, were also products of the plaçage system. They were all fathered by White men and free Black women and were also particularly light skinned in complexion.[223] Deggs' journal reiterated their high social status within the free Black community: "All the sisters were of the first families of the city. They were all natives of this state, but their fathers were all foreigners – some French, Spanish or German."[224] Not too much is known about the background of Sister Deggs, but it appears that she had the same heritage as Delille and her co-founders. She was the child of a Spanish man and a free Black woman. Deggs may therefore have also been light skinned, which may explain why her journal was preoccupied with the appearance of the nuns, and why she seemed to take great pride in their light skins and European features. Thus, it appears that even by the time she wrote the journal, in the late nineteenth century, the somewhat classist attitude of the founders towards the recruitment of its members may have prevailed, to some extent.[225]

Her journal gave a description of the foundation and organization of the order, which has been supplemented by the research of various historians such as Father Cyprian Davis. The women who founded the Sisters of the Holy Family began their religious career by working together as friends and associates in order to evangelize the enslaved. They subsequently expanded their religious ambitions by forming a confraternity. This small group led by Henriette Delille, eventually culminated in the women moving out of their separate households around 1840, into a house leased for them by Father Étienne Rousselon. Deggs described him as "the spiritual adviser and co-founder of the community."[226] He arrived in New Orleans in 1837, where he became chaplain to the Ursuline Convent and school, and the Saint-Claude Street School, as well as vicar general of the diocese. In 1847, the women under the leadership of Henriette Delille became incorporated as the Society of the Holy Family. Then, in 1851, using her modest inheritance from her mother, and with financial help from a French supporter, Jeanne

[222] Sister Mary Deggs' Journal in *No Cross, No Crown: Black Nuns in Nineteenth Century New Orleans,* edited by Virginia Meacham Gould and Charles E. Nolan (Indiana University Press, 2001), XIV
[223] See Sister Mary Deggs' Journal for descriptions of Juliette Gaudin and Josephine Charles, highlighting their light skinned complexions and European features.
[224] Ibid. 29
[225] Ibid. XIV
[226] Ibid. 13

Marie Aliquot, Delille purchased a house on Bayou Street to provide a permanent home for a more communal life. There, the sisters "kept a school, catechized enslaved and free woman of colour, sheltered orphans, and nursed the sick, elderly and the destitute with food and clothing."[227] In order to also make clear their transition from devout women to sisters, the women exchanged their blue percale dresses for black ones.[228] By evolving from a religious association to an order of nuns, Gould suggests that Henriette, "prized open the door of feminine religious life previously available only to white women."[229]

Although this was an important development for free women of colour in New Orleans, Sister Mary Deggs' journal also makes clear, that during the Antebellum period, not all free women of colour were eligible to join the order, only those from the high status free Black families. She wrote: "The rule of the first motherhouse state that we accept only those of free and well-known families."[230] In their analysis of Deggs' journal, Virginia Gould, and Charles E. Nolan, suggest that it was not necessarily just racial and class discrimination which prompted the Sisters of the Holy Family to only enroll what they considered to be high status free Black women. They argue that the recruitment of well-educated and articulate free women of colour would have been necessary in order to raise the sisters' credibility with the White authorities.[231] The organization needed women who could negotiate with Church leaders and benefactors and have enough education to teach in their school. They further suggest that the founders and Rousselon were also aware that the inclusion of any women not acceptable to White society could have jeopardized the continuation of the community, and that it would be more tolerated, if the entrants were from higher class free Black families. The Sisters of the Holy Family also required that applicants bring a dowry with them to pay for their upkeep and clothing during their postulancy and novitiate; thus, also further limiting those who could afford to enter the community. Sister Mary

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[227] Sister Mary Deggs' Journal in *No Cross, No Crown: Black Nuns in Nineteenth Century New Orleans,* edited by Virginia Meacham Gould and Charles E. Nolan (Indiana University Press, 2001), 9
[228] Ibid
[229]Virginia Meacham Gould "Henriette Delille, Free Woman of Color and Catholicism in the Antebellum New Orleans 1727- 1852" in *Beyond Bondage: Free Women of Color in the Americas*, edited collection by David Barry Gaspar & Darlene Clark Hine (University of Illinois Press, 2004), 271-285
[230] Sister Mary Deggs' Journal in *No Cross, No Crown: Black Nuns in Nineteenth Century New Orleans,* edited by Virginia Meacham Gould and Charles E. Nolan (Indiana University Press, 2001), 8
[231] Ibid. 9

Francis Borgia Hart's history of the order also highlights this emphasis on class: "From the early Foundation in 1842 until the death of Père Rousselon, only the members of the privileged classes sought and obtained admission in the ranks of the sisters."[232] That it was significant enough to be made a rule of the association, supports Gould's and Nolan's suppositions by demonstrating how class as well as race and skin colour were held of almost equal importance in New Orleans, in defining the status of an individual. In Baltimore, these distinctions were not so recognized, thus societal status was not such a central issue for admittance to the Oblates' order. This importance of class within New Orleans' free Black society also extended to the sisters' school, where as Hart again notes: "The social distinction was recognized among the pupils for whom separate classes were conducted."[233] However, by this separation of their students, the sisters were also demonstrating their adherence to nineteenth century thought around keeping people in their station, by copying the practice of White orders. For example, the Sisters of Charity educated White orphans and poor girls for free at their academy, segregating these poorer pupils from the more elite boarding school students, "to prevent them from contracting the habits of idleness, pride and notions above the sphere of life in which they may have to live."[234]

Gould's and Nolan's argument appears to partially exonerate the class prejudice amongst the sisters by suggesting that they were forced by circumstances to adopt these practices, however, Sister Deggs' journal implies that there was also a desire on the part of the nuns to promote their exclusivity by only recruiting people like themselves. There is further evidence of this in their attitude towards the Oblate Sisters, which will be discussed later in the chapter, and the split that happened in the community after Delille's death. Deggs wrote about this split in her journal but did not directly mention the cause. However, Hart recorded, after the Civil War the sisters became divided over the admittance of a freedwoman into the community. The mother superior at that time, Juliette Gaudin, was not in favour, whereas the other co-founder, Josephine Charles, was open to a change in the community, by accepting the formerly enslaved. There was a vote amongst the nuns, who also held divided opinions. Charles

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[232] Sister Mary Francis Borgia Hart, "A History of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Family of New Orleans."(BA dissertation, Xavier College, New Orleans, 1931), 42
[233] Ibid
[234] Diane Batts Morrow, *Persons of Color and Religious at the Same Time* (University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 88

eventually moved with the sisters who were in favour of the admittance, to another house and was appointed superior by the director who took over from Rousselon, Father Gilbert Raymond. Deggs hints at the cause for the difference of opinion when she stated: "Mother Josephine had a complexion so tender and so beautiful. With all that she was not proud at all, for the first two sisters whom she received were as dark as the head of jet pine, but both were very holy and well-disposed."[235] This possible prejudice on the part of some of the nuns also reflects the discomfort faced by some Afro-Creoles in New Orleans, before and after the Civil War. Wealthy free people of colour had always sought to defend their position and distance themselves from their enslaved past. Thus, the sisters, by only recruiting people of their own class, reflected awareness of status in free Black society during the Antebellum period, which was then swept away by the Civil War. They, like others of their society, may have found it difficult to come to terms with the new order.

Their adherence to the prevalent societal norms within White and high class free Black society was also evidenced by the fact that, like many other prosperous free people of colour, and, indeed, White orders of nuns, the Sisters of the Holy Family were slaveholders. This is also supported by evidence from Deggs' journal. She recorded, in the beginning of the foundation of the order, their Frenchwoman supporter and benefactor, Jeanne Marie Aliqout, "also went to all of the richest planters to beg sugar and syrup for the sisters and she brought two or three slaves to work for us."[236] This seemingly casual statement makes clear that these enslaved people were not brought to the sisters to be educated or manumitted, but for the purposes of labour. Documents also suggest that the co-founders were affiliated to a religious association which purchased property and bought and sold enslaved people. Father Cyprien writes that in 1853, Madame Félice Joublanc, president of the "Asylum of the Holy Family," was directed to sell at auction a "young mulatto" called Louis-Joseph, alias Jim, who was about fourteen years old and a house slave. He had been willed to the association by Rose Alamnzor, a free woman of colour.[237] There is also evidence that Delille was a slaveholder. Cyprien Davis

[235] Sister Mary Deggs' Journal in *No Cross, No Crown: Black Nuns in Nineteenth Century New Orleans,* edited by Virginia Meacham Gould and Charles E. Nolan (Indiana University Press, 2001), 29
[236] Ibid. 10
[237] Father Cyprien Davis, *Henriette Delille: Servant of Slaves: Witness to the Poor* (Archdiocese of New Orleans, 2004), 156

discovered that in 1835, she gave an enslaved woman named Polly to her sister, Cècille Bonille.[238] In her first will of 1851, she also bequeathed to her brother Jean, "my black woman, Betsy."[239] Based on archival records, there was an enslaved woman named Betsy who had belonged to Cecille's partner, Samuel Hart, so Betsy may therefore have been a gift or an inheritance.[240] Gould and Nolan suggest that Delille was prevented from freeing her by the increasingly strict laws on manumission in Louisiana.[241] However, slaveholders who wanted to free their enslaved people found it easy to circumvent the laws, as they were not always strictly adhered to in New Orleans. It seems paradoxical that Henriette and the sisters would devote themselves to the welfare of the Black community, while at the same time being themselves, slaveholders. In her newspaper obituary Henriette was even called "servant to the slaves."[242] However, the Catholic Church, while emphasizing the religious duty of the slaveholder towards the enslaved, not only tolerated, but actually supported the institution of slavery, utilizing the labour of enslaved people in its religious institutions.[243] Also, Henriette and the other sisters came from families who had probably held enslaved people in their households for several generations, as it was a mark of wealth and standing amongst the free Black and White community. Therefore, as with their rules about the women who could join the order, their adherence to southern White societal norms with regard to slaveholding, could have also been deliberate in reassuring White society that despite their radical move in the foundation of an order of Black nuns, the sisters supported the status quo and did not constitute any threat to the system.

However, despite trying to overcome the problems of prejudice, as free women of colour, they never had equality or parity with their White religious counterparts. They were still discriminated against by the Church, and not accorded the respect given to White orders. White nuns always received more assistance and money from the Church and other organizations. In contrast, the Sisters of the Holy Family often had to rely on their own resources and the generosity of the lay community for financial

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[238] Ibid. 64-68
[239] Notarial Archives: Octave de Armas.No.161 5-12-1851: Testament de Henriette Delille
[240]New Orleans Public Library, City Archives: Louisiana Parish Files 1804-1836: Will of Samuel Hart 1832
[241] Sister Mary Deggs Journal in *No Cross, No Crown: Black Nuns in Nineteenth Century New Orleans,* edited by Virginia Meacham Gould and Charles E. Nolan (Indiana University Press, 2001), 5
[242] *Bee (L'Abeille*), 18 November 1862
[243] Maura Jane Farrelly, "American Slavery, American Freedom, American Catholicism." *Early American Studies,*Vol.10, No.1 (Winter 2002), 29

support. As it was, they were often short of food and fuel. They also had to endure insults and racial slurs from some in the White community. Sister Deggs wrote of the "malice of persecutors" which forced the sisters to rent out their first property and rent one somewhere else where "they might live in peace." Neighbours also constantly complained that their school children made too much noise. [244] The Sisters of the Holy Family were never recorded in the documents of the Catholic Church as a Holy Order until the late nineteenth century. Even after having taken their vows, they were still generally referred to as "a group of pious, colored females" in the Catholic press.[245] The sisters were also listed as a Catholic Benevolent Association in New Orleans' Diocesan directories until the 1870s. When they were finally listed with the other nuns of the Diocese, they were last in rank and categorized by their race.[246] There was also much resistance amongst Catholic male clergy and some White orders against Black women wearing habits. Deggs wrote that they were ¨persecuted by a white order of nuns who tried to make them take off their habits when they saw them wearing them."[247]

Therefore, religious vocation was not an easy life for these free women of colour. Deggs wrote that "many joined them, but the work was too hard and the sacrifice so great that they did not stay more than a few months, some only stayed a few weeks."[248] Some of these women who left may have decided to pass for White, thereby making them eligible to enjoy the privileges of being in a White order. Sister Detiège writes "that some of them yielded to the entreaties of their parents and went to France to be nuns, while others joined various white orders in New Orleans."[249] This also reflects the choices being made by other free people of colour, when faced with increasing problems of prejudice during the antebellum period. Some light skinned individuals decided to emigrate to other parts of America, or to other countries, passing for White. Indeed, Delille's own brother, Jean, opted to pass, and left New Orleans in the early 1850s, eventually emigrating to Mexico, where Delille's only descendants now

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[244] Sister Mary Deggs' Journal in *No Cross, No Crown: Black Nuns in Nineteenth Century New Orleans*, edited by Virginia Meacham Gould and Charles E. Nolan (Indiana University, 2001), 11
[245] Jessie Carney Smith (ed) *Notable Black American Women* (Gale Research, 1992), 63
[246] Tracy Fessenden, "The Sisters of the Holy Family and the Veil of Race, Religious and American Culture." *A Journal of Interpretation,* Vol. 10, No. 2 (Summer 2000), 190
[247] Sister Mary Deggs' Journal in *No Cross, No Crown: Black Nuns in Nineteenth Century New Orleans* edited by Virginia Meacham Gould and Charles E Nolan (Indiana University, 2001), 11
[248] Ibid. 42
[249] Sister Audrey Mary Dètiege, *Henriette Delille, Free Woman of Color* (Sisters of the Holy Family, 1976), 27

reside.[250] That the three co-founders did not choose to pursue an easier life in a White convent, when they clearly had the opportunity to do so, showed their commitment and loyalty to the free Black community, and their determination to found a Holy Order for free women of colour.

Thus, despite their difficulties, the founders continued with their efforts to establish the Sisters of the Holy Family as a recognized order during the Antebellum period. Sister Dètiege suggests that Henriette was the driving force, organizing fund-raising events, dealing with the wealthy sponsors, as well as her endeavours with the sick and the needy. A hospice was built, as well as a home for orphans and a school for free Black girls.[251] Delille's good reputation in the free Black community was also reiterated by Deggs, who wrote that after her death, "several parents came to take their children from the school and another group of the sisters left the order to go to France."[252] By 1865, seven of the twelve sisters had gone, leaving only five to carry on the work.[253] That the death of their White male co-founder, Father Rousselon, a few years before Henriette, had little impact on the community also demonstrates how it was Delille's leadership, not Rousselon's, which contributed to the success of the community during the Antebellum period. It was not until the late nineteenth century that the order began to flourish again under new leadership.

"Good Colored Women:" The Oblate Sisters of Providence

There are many parallels in the experiences of the Oblate Sisters to those of the Sisters of the Holy Family, especially regarding racial discrimination. Joubert admits in his diary to hearing from White parishioners who "could not think of the idea of seeing those poor girls wearing the religious habit and constituting a religious community." Some went as far as to tell him that "black people have neither souls to be saved nor minds to be instructed."[254] Like the Sisters of the Holy Family, they were often persecuted, especially while trying to obtain suitable accommodation. Evicted from their first rental

[250] Ibid. 22
[251] Sister Mary Deggs' Journal, *No Cross, No Crown: Black Nuns in Nineteenth Century New Orleans,* edited by Virginia Meacham Gould and Charles E Nolan (Indiana University, 2001), 48
[252] Ibid. 12-13
[253] Ibid
[254] Archives of the Oblate Sisters of Providence: Translation from "The Original Diary of the Oblate Sisters of Providence." Vols 1&2, Box 47

property in 1829, the sisters were refused accommodation by some, or offered it at exorbitant rates by others. Eventually a wealthy White man of Saint-Dominguan descent offered them a residence at a reduced rent. Like the Sisters of the Holy Family, they also often failed to gain recognition by the Church and public authorities, even for their good works. In 1832, there was a cholera epidemic in Baltimore and the sisters were asked to help the poor and sick at the hospital. Afterwards a vote of thanks was given by the City Council to the White order of nuns who had also volunteered, the Sisters of the Holy Charity, but the Oblate Sisters were never mentioned.[255]

However, unlike the Sisters of the Holy Family, the Oblate Sisters also suffered persecution because of their Catholic faith and their refugee status. Convents were targets of the "Nativists" during the Jacksonian period. These descendants of earlier waves of immigrants resented a new surge of mostly Roman Catholic Europeans to America, who competed with them for jobs in port cities. Convents also appeared as antithical to nineteenth century American values of marriage and motherhood for women. Convent schools therefore were accused of influencing impressionable young women to join Holy Orders in repudiation of these values.[256] Joubert noted in his diary of 1834, "some alarming rumours had been current for some days of the ill will born to all religious houses of the city and the desire they had to renew in Baltimore, the horrible scenes enacted in the Convent of the Ursulines in Charleston near Boston."[257] Ethnicity also provided other grounds for prejudice against the sisters. There was a difference in the way in which Baltimoreans had viewed the influx of White and Black refugees from Saint-Domingue and Cuba. The former had been received far more hospitably than the latter.[258] Therefore, the Oblate Sisters had the disadvantages of living in a largely Protestant Anglo-American community, where their culture marked them out as different, as well as their race. As Willigman observed: "They were French in language, in sympathy and in habit of life."[259] She also noted Elizabeth

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[255] Grace H. Sherwood, *The Oblates' Hundred and One Years* (Macmillan, New York, 1931),58-59
[256] Diane Batts Morrow, *Persons of Color and Religious at the Same Time* (University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 149
[257]Archives of the Oblate Sisters of Providence: Translation from "The Original Diary of the Oblate Sisters of Providence." Vols 1&2, Box 47. In Boston nativist mobs had burnt down the convent school of the Ursuline nuns in 1834.
[258] Diane Batts Morrow, *Persons of Color and Religious at the Same Time* (University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 152
[259] Catherine Willigman, "Oblate Sisters of Providence: First Foundresses of the Oblates." Typescript Copy. (Archives of the Oblate Sisters of Providence), 19

Lange's aversion to the English language, stating, "although Sister Mary was a very accomplished scholar in French and Spanish, she never tried to acquire English."[260]

After the foundation of the order, Mother Willigman provided many details about its organization. Like Sister Deggs, Willigman's knowledge of the Oblate Sisters came from personal experience, as she had lived in the Oblate community from the age of five. She recorded that the first task of the new order was to establish a school for free Black girls.[261] Although there were no laws against the education of enslaved or free Black people in Baltimore, the climate of public opinion was against educating them, no doubt because of the close association in the mind of White society, between education and insurrection.[262] Thus, the opening of a school for free Black children by Joubert and the Oblates under the auspices of the Church, was a bold move in the City. The co-founders also concentrated on building a religious community to run the school. Like the Sisters of the Holy Family, the Oblates required their entrants to provide a dowry. However, depending on the circumstances and qualifications of the candidate, the community could waive this requirement.[263] The attributes sought in members of the community were often around their employability in the order. For example, they had to be "well fitted for teaching…useful for sewing…of talents and ability suitable for any employment."[264]

Although it seems that the co-founders were probably from the higher echelons of free Black society in Cuba and Saint-Domingue, and that the applicants to the order, at least had to be literate, it does not appear that they were as elitist as the Sisters of the Holy Family. However, they did not explicitly address the issue of slavery in the rules, only requiring that candidates be "free from debts and detained in the world by no hindrance whatsoever." Some of the Oblate Sisters who were subsequently recruited were newly freed. Of the forty women who entered the Oblate novitiate in the antebellum period, eight had previously been enslaved. Therefore, the Oblates did not disqualify

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[260] Ibid
[261] Diane Batts Morrow, *Persons of Color and Religious at the Same Time* (University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 24
[262] Ibid
[263] Grace H. Sherwood, *The Oblates' Hundred and One Years* (Macmillan, New York, 1931), 38
[264] Catherine Willigman, "Oblate Sisters of Providence: First Foundresses of the Oblates. "Typescript Copy. (Archives of the Oblate Sisters of Providence), 19

candidates for a previous life of servitude.[265] The order was also different in its recruitment practices by allowing non-Creoles, and women from different areas of the United States to join its ranks. The first one was Marie Anne Barclay in 1830. Others followed, including Baptista Roberts from Kansas, and Cassandra Butler. This idea seems to have come from Joubert, who was apparently so keen to have out of town recruits that he waived the dowry requirements for them.[266] In a more largely Protestant city than New Orleans, Joubert may have been concerned that there might not be enough Catholic free Black women to join the order. All the orders in Baltimore relied on the recruitment of non-Catholics to increase the numbers of children in their convent schools.[267] Thus, Joubert's control over the sisters' recruitment practices may have also resulted in their rather more inclusive entrance requirements. The importance of light skin colour also did not seem to feature in the documents of the Oblate Sisters. Unlike Deggs' journal, very little detail of the sisters' appearances is mentioned in these records, apart from a description of Sister Marie Therese Duchemain (See Figure 10, page 88) who was blonde haired and blue eyed, suggesting that she may have been the exception rather than the rule.[268]

In the 1830s, the order began to thrive. Wealthy members of Baltimore's free Black society, many of them of Saint-Dominguan descent, contributed funding to the Oblates. They also supported them by sending their children to the school. Willigman described the first pupils as "some of the most refined children, whose parents were if not wealthy, very respectable, honest and hardworking, thinking no sacrifice too great for the welfare of their children."[269] Willigman's pride in the refinements of the sisters' students echoes that of Deggs in New Orleans, however, Deggs dwelt very much on the pedigree of the students, suggesting that they were all from upper class families. In contrast to this, Willigman acknowledged that some of the Oblate school's students came from poorer circumstances. Whatever their background, the Oblate pupils studied the curriculum which was set by the Church for poor White

[265] Diane Batts Morrow, *Persons of Color and Religious at the Same Time* (University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 68
[266] Grace H. Sherwood, *The Oblates' Hundred and One Years* (Macmillan, New York, 1931), 43
[267] Diane Batts Morrow, *Persons of Color and Religious at the Same Time* (University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 68
[268] Catherine Willigman, "Oblate Sisters of Providence: First Foundresses of the Oblates." Typescript Copy. (Archives of the Oblate Sisters of Providence), 63
[269] Ibid. 33

girls in convent schools, except for the inclusion of French and embroidery.[270] In addition to this, the Oblates' school prospectus wrote that the nuns would "instil in their pupils, certain principles of virtue becoming their situation."[271] Indeed, the philosophy of the school, as outlined in its prospectus, echoed the expectations of gender and class in nineteenth century education, when it stated that the girl's schooling would enable them to become "mothers of families or be introduced as servants into decent houses."[272] Morrow argues that this prospectus was probably written by Joubert, and thus reflects his caution and conservatism. Training students to become servants to White families may therefore have been an effort by him to justify the school's usefulness to White society, thus validating its existence.[273] However, it could be argued that this prospectus also reflected the more subordinate position of free Black people in Baltimore's society, as opposed to New Orleans. Although the Sisters of the Holy Family appeared elitist by their segregation of the different classes of students by day, they did also operate night classes for girls who could not afford the day school, which included a music and Latin class. This inclusion of Latin also suggested that the Sisters of the Holy family provided a classical education for their students, rather like that of their male counterparts. This is further reiterated by the recorded scholastic achievements of one of the principals of the school, Sister Elizabeth, who was acknowledged by Deggs to be "a brilliant scholar…. She spoke three different languages and taught them with perfect ease. What is more, she had been a bookkeeper for some of the first stores in her own city."[274] The school was very popular when she was the principle, suggesting that the parents were eager to send their daughters to a school with such a role model.

However, after the death of Joubert, and the ensuing troubles within their community, the Oblate Sisters amended their school prospectus in 1854, showing a change in their educational philosophy, which became more like that of the Sisters of the Holy Family, by deleting the original

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[270] Diane Batts Morrow, *Persons of Color and Religious at the Same Time* (University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 88
[271] Archives of the Oblate Sisters of Providence: The Original Rule of the Oblate Sisters of Providence, Revision of 1833, as amended by Fr. Jacques Joubert, translated from French text by Fr. Cyprian Davis
[272] Ibid
[273] Diane Batts Morrow, *Persons of Color and Religious at the Same Time* (University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 142
[274] Sister Mary Deggs' Journal in *No Cross, No Crown: Black Nuns in Nineteenth Century New Orleans,* edited by Virginia Meacham Gould and Charles E. Nolan (Indiana University Press, 2001), 33

expectation that the girls would become mothers or household servants. The curriculum was also revised and expanded, adding geography and music lessons, and eliminating washing and ironing, thus also implying that the order may have become more scholastically ambitious for its students. By this time, they had removed French from the standard curriculum and offered it as an optional paid extra, suggesting that the original Francophone domination of the school had changed.[275] This is also evidenced by a letter from Jesuit Director, Peter Miller, in 1866, when the Oblate Sisters established a mission in New Orleans. Miller assured the Bishop of New Orleans that the superior they were sending, "speaks French very well and will only require some practice to speak it fluently."[276] Thus, also showing that even after the Civil War, it was still important in New Orleans to be able to speak good French, both for working within the Church and probably for daily life. Joubert had died in 1843, and as with the death of Henriette Delille, this prompted a crisis in the order. Many of the supporters ceased helping the order financially. Some of the sisters left, and their school dwindled to a handful of students. The sisters were forced to take in washing, mending, and sewing in order to survive.[277] Diocesan indifference towards the order between 1843 and 1847 also affected the stability of the community as they had no White male director. Morrow argues that this clerical abandonment was as a result of the worsening status of free Black people in Maryland. In 1841, a convention of slaveholders put forward a series of legislative proposals for the Maryland State Assembly, which included control of the burgeoning free Black community. When Joubert's superior at the seminary asked for support for the Oblate's work from the new Archbishop, Samuel Eccleston, the latter reportedly replied: "What good is it?" He thought that the education of Black children was unimportant and suggested that the community be dissolved.[278] Like the Sisters of the Holy Family in the aftermath of Delille's passing, some of the Oblate nuns also left the order after Joubert's death. In 1845, the previously mentioned light

[275] Diane Batts Morrow, *Persons of Color and Religious at the Same Time* (University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 218-219
[276]Archives of the Oblate Sisters of Providence: Translation of "The Original Diary of the Oblate Sisters of Providence," typescript and manuscript copies, Vols 1 &2, Box 47..
[277] Grace H. Sherwood, *The Oblates' Hundred and One Years* (Macmillan, New York, 1931), 108
[278] Joanne Turpin, *Women in Church History: 20 Stories for 20 Centuries* (Saint Anthony Messenger Press, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1990), 161

skinned nun, Sister Marie Therese Duchemain, went to Michigan with another sister. They had decided to found a White order called the Servants of the Immaculate Heart.

Figure 10: Sister Marie Therese Duchemain: Archives of the Servants of the Immaculate Heart

That Duchemain was a loss to the Oblates was evidenced by Willigman who stated: "Sister Therese was a very useful member as she had a good English education, she was a kind of amanuensis, also secretary and she was appointed Teacher of the school in their English Branches."[279]Another Oblate nun, Sister Stanilaus, also wished to join them, but was sent word by Sister Therese not to come because her skin was too dark. Therefore, although the Oblate Sisters were initially more inclusive, like the Sisters of the Holy family, the defection of Duchemain and her decision to pass, in order to gain the benefits of being in a White order, showed that issues of skin colour and class also existed within the Oblates.[280] Interestingly, Duchemain also received the approbation of the Church as she was "armed with the permission, the blessings and the letters of introduction from her confessor, the Redemptorist Superior, Peter Czaclert and the Sulpician Superior Louis Deluol," suggesting that they were complicit in her passing for White.[281]

This apparent approval by the Church towards those wishing to enter White convents also serves to demonstrate how there may have been a different attitude among the Church hierarchy to lighter skinned free women of colour. That members of the Sisters of the Holy Family were also accepted by White orders in New Orleans, after Delille's death, is another example of the Church

[279] Catherine Willigman, "Oblate Sisters of Providence: First Foundresses of the Oblates." Typescript Copy. (Archives of the Oblate Sisters of Providence), 63
[280] Diane Batts Morrow, *Persons of Color and Religious at the Same Time* (University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 119
[281] Ibid. 188

showing its tolerance of free people of colour passing for White. However, in Baltimore, the Church hierarchy may have also been trying to deliberately split the order, by encouraging this defection of the nuns, thus hastening its demise. If this was the case, the strategy didn't succeed, because despite the confusion and the indifference of the Church, the order managed to survive until a new director, Father Thomas Anwander, was appointed, and after him, James Poirier, in 1856. Enrolment of students to the school gradually increased, new sisters were recruited, and the order thrived again. Like the Sisters of the Holy Family, the Oblate Sisters' order has survived up to the present day.

The Influence and Legacy of these Free Black Religious Women

It could be argued, by the very fact of their existence, these religious women negated the prevailing adverse contemporary views of Black women. The members of these orders clearly demonstrated that even so-called "quadroon" women, whose racial categorization was often associated with lack of morals, could live chaste lives of religious devotion. Later, historians suggested that the existence of Henriette Delille's pious life constituted a means of rescuing Black women from their licentious reputation.[282] Even by the early twentieth century, Afro-Creole author, Rodolphe Desdunes, was foregrounding the life of Delille in his book about Black community leaders, in order to suggest that "most Creole women were exemplars of piety and charity," also emphasizing their contribution to education and services to the poor.[283] The Sisters of the Holy Family also received the approbation of White historian Grace King, as she acknowledged that the order was founded, "during the heyday of the brilliant, unwholesome notoriety of the quadroon women," and suggested that in their renunciation of their "earthly temptations, the sisters, alone, had found the road to social equality." She finished her paragraph about them with her highest praise possible, "no white woman could have done more."[284] However, there was still the sense that King saw them as exceptional, not as a general example of Black

[282] M. Shawn Copeland, *The Subversive Power of Love. The Vision of Henriette Delille* (Paulist Press, New York, 2007), 5
[283] Rodolphe Lucien Desdunes, *Our People: Our History: Fifty Creole Portraits*, translated and edited by Sister Dorothea Olga McCants (Louisiana State University Press, 1973), 97
[284] Grace King, *New Orleans; the Place and the People* (Macmillan, New York, 1895), 10-11

womanhood. This may have been as a result of the order only recruiting women from a certain class, and building a narrative about the order, which emphasized the piety, lady-like manners and appearance of these light skinned sisters. By doing so, they may have also distanced them in the eyes of White society, from other women in their community. Henriette Delille's status can be clearly seen in the carte de visité image (see Figure 8, page 74). She is modestly dressed, but in the latest fashion as befits a woman from the higher echelons of free Black society. This elitism may have meant that paradoxically, although it was often the lighter skinned women who were vilified for their lack of morals, in some circumstances, their white blood may have also qualified them, in the eyes of certain White authorities, to be capable of eschewing such a life for one of piety. The favouritism shown to them, by allowing them to join White orders, therefore also supports the notion that there was sometimes prejudice in the Church hierarchy about darker skinned Black women taking Holy Orders. It appears that this was not the case for Joubert, who encouraged inclusivity. However, after his death, the Church authorities may have encouraged lighter skinned nuns to found a white order, further suggesting a bias towards the religious capabilities of these women, and an admission of their ambiguous racial identity. Newspaper articles in New Orleans often referred to the Sisters of the Holy Family by their racial categorization as "quadroon nuns," thus also emphasizing their lightness of skin and their exclusivity. Their appearance was also remarked upon by King, who appeared to be perpetuating the myth of the beautiful Afro-Creole woman, even those who were nuns, as she wrote: "Of their history and personality little is known, beyond their having possessed in marked degree, the beauty of their class."[285] The *Picayunne's* obituary of Josephine Charles in 1885 made this preoccupation surrounding the Afro-Creole nuns' beauty and sexual attraction even clearer: "Thirty-years ago a modest, beautiful quadroon woman took up the cross and set about performing the noble task of the improvement of her people…She grew up a beautiful girl, bright in complexion, tall and stately in figure and was much courted."[286] This description of Charles would not have been out of place in a slave market. And it is debatable whether the obituary

[285] Ibid. 11

[286] *The Times Picayune*, 21 May 1885: Obituary of Mother Josephine Charles; See also slave dealer, James Blakeney's description of the enslaved Mildred Ann Jackson which ran along the same lines: "Her color was that of a quadroon, very good figure, she is rather tall and slim." In Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside an Antebellum Slave Market* (Harvard University Press, 1999), 155

of a White mother superior would have made such references to her beauty and openly hint at her attractiveness to the opposite sex. The first part of the obituary also suggested that rather than helping the Black community, the nuns were bettering them, thus again covertly suggesting the nuns' superiority over the general Black population. It therefore seems that if the nuns were attempting to rehabilitate the reputations of free Black women in New Orleans through their religious association, they may have been only partially successful, as by doing so, their exclusivity and thus their exceptionality were also highlighted. Although, over the years, there were many eulogies written in praise of the nuns, yet they still referenced an enslaved past, and even evoked memories of the "tragic mulatta" trope. It also appears that New Orleans' free Black nuns extended their exclusivity in their rivalry with the Oblate Sisters. That the two orders were aware of each other and had some sort of opposition was evidenced by Deggs, who continued, after her proud statement of the sisters teaching children from all the high class free Black families in the South, to say: "Much has been said of Baltimore but only on the part of the Oblate Sisters of Providence."[287] The Oblate Sisters also further antagonized the Sisters of the Holy Family by invading their patch. In 1866, the Oblate Sisters were invited by the Catholic hierarchy to open a branch of their order in New Orleans. They also took charge of a new orphanage. It seems however that they were not generally very welcome in New Orleans, as the orphanage ran out of funds, and the sisters were apparently "too scared of violence" to beg for their charges. However, Deggs does not make clear where this violence might have come from, or whether it was from the White population. Perhaps having two orders of Black nuns in New Orleans was too much for the White inhabitants, so they targeted the newcomers. The sisters were therefore forced to leave and go back to Baltimore. The orphanage was then taken over by the Sisters of the Holy Family.[288] Sister Deggs claimed:

> The Oblate Sisters accused our sisters of having influenced the people against them and also said that we wanted their places. But that was a falsehood…Our people have more confidence in us than the Oblates, who were strangers. We regretted taking their old house which was full of insects…Poor Sister Anne, who had been placed as directress of the

[287] Sister Mary Deggs' Journal in *No Cross, No Crown: Black Nuns in Nineteenth Century New Orleans,* edited by Virginia Meacham Gould and Charles E. Nolan (Indiana University Press, 2001), 33
[288] William L. Montgomery, "The Oblate Sisters of Providence." *US Catholic Historian*, Vol.24, No.2 (Spring 2002), 194

> orphanage had a very sad time. They did not take to her as they had been in the habit of going all about the house when the Oblate Sisters were there. But with her, they could not do that.[289]

Deggs' scarcely veiled diatribe against the Oblates suggested that despite her vehement denial, New Orleans' sisters may have also been guilty of turning the local free Black population against them. The assumed inferiority of the Oblates was also made clear by Deggs, insinuating that they were slanderous, bad housekeepers who also did not discipline their charges. The free Black population of New Orleans obviously did not support them, thus echoing the nuns' prejudices. It may have been pure jealousy on the part of the sisters, simply wanting to be the only Black order in the city, or they may have viewed the more diverse nature of the Oblate Sisters as not being commensurate with the image of nuns which they wished to portray.

By the organization of their order, the Sisters of the Holy Family therefore appeared to conform to White societal notions of how a religious woman should behave, while also providing an acceptable face of Blackness to White hierarchy, Through doing so, Catholic historian, Tracy Fessenden argues that they may have stifled their African roots, with their acceptance of Black conformity within a majority White culture.[290] However, by acting in a manner acceptable to the Church authorities and White society, the Sisters of the Holy Family were able to create a successful organization. As a result, the wealthiest members of the free Black community could provide funding for their charitable establishments and entrust the nuns with the education of their children. The nuns were also visible on the streets of New Orleans, carrying out various duties, which challenged the notion that women should only remain in the domestic sphere. They created and ran various institutions, using administrative and management skills which were generally only attributed to men. They were also able to devote their lives solely to public service in way which was denied to most women. Therefore, although they were bound by the constraints of a White male Church hierarchy, it could be argued that they had more self-direction than many White women and, indeed, other women of their own community. They also

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[289] Sister Mary Deggs' Journal, *No Cross, No Crown: Black Nuns in Nineteenth Century New Orleans* edited by Virginia Meacham Gould & Charles E. Nolan (Indiana University, 2001), 38-39

[290] Tracy Fessenden ¨The Sisters of the Holy Family and the Veil of Race, Religious and American Culture.¨ *A Journal of Interpretation,* Vol. 10, No. 2 (Summer 2000), 190

conformed to what African-American feminist historian, Roslyn Terborg-Penn, described as, "perhaps the two most dominant values in the African feminist theory…developing survival strategies and encouraging self-reliance through female networks."[291]

The first value has already been amply demonstrated in this chapter, although the orders operated in different ways to ensure their survival. When considering the second, there also appears to have been a difference between the two orders. While both formed strong alliances with free Black women, both lay and religious, in order to increase their number, and to provide support, the Sisters of the Holy Family also formed alliances with religious White women. Sister Detiège writes that in the 1830s, Henriette attempted to found a community of religious women with a Miss Jeanne Marie Aliquot, a Frenchwoman who was described by Detiège, as one of Delille's "dearest and closest friends." However, the act of 1830 made it illegal for anyone to destroy "the line of distinction which the law established between the several classes in this community." [292] Thus, Aliquot could not join the sisters. However, she still showed her support and friendship towards Henriette and the sisters by campaigning for donations on behalf of the order, and by loaning Delille some money to buy a house for the order. Despite the racial restrictions, she was often with the sisters in their house, showing her support for the sisters.[293] She was even at the convent when she died. Deggs' comments showed the depth of feeling towards her by the community: "We regretted her death very much for we have not found a friend as dear as she was nor as holy a religious."[294] This sense of connection with the White community is also further reiterated by Sister Deggs, who wrote, "we have always been like one and the same family, going to the same church, sitting in the same pews, and many of them sleeping in the

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[291] Roslyn Terborg-Penn "Through an African feminist theoretical lens: Viewing Caribbean women's history cross-culturally" in *Engendering History: Caribbean Women in Historical Perspective* edited collection by Verene Shepherd, Bridget Brereton & Barbera Bailey (St. Martin's Press 1995), 25

[292] Sister Audrey Mary Dètiege, *Henriette Delille, Free Woman of Color* (Sisters of the Holy Family, 1976), 26-27

[293] Although she was closely associated with the sisters, she was not included in any official lists. She was also not buried in the Holy Family tomb probably due to the racial strictures of the time: See Sister Mary Deggs' Journal in *No Cross, No Crown: Black Nuns in Nineteenth Century New Orleans,* edited by Virginia Meacham Gould and Charles E. Nolan (Indiana University Press, 2001), 206

[294] Borgia Hart writes that the sisters were perturbed when White friends took the body away. A fire broke out in the house where she was laid out and the body had to be retrieved. It was then taken back to the convent. See Sister Borgia Hart, *Violet's in the King's Garden*, *A History of the Sisters of the Holy Family in New Orleans* (Sisters of the Holy Family, 1976), 17

same bed. If we had any entertainment, the whites would come by."[295] These bonds between women, which sometimes crossed racial lines, will also be evidenced in a later chapter looking at the female entrepreneurs of New Orleans. Like Henriette Delille, businesswoman, Eulalie Mandeville had a close friendship with a White woman, who also supported her in her entrepreneurial endeavours. It shows the often-intertwined relationships between Black and White people in the City, both familial, and through other institutions. These close relationships between the races may have been more prevalent in upper class free people of colour, as they were the ones with the strongest kinship links to White society.

However, conversely, because of these strong ties to the White community, and the way in which the order operated, there has been doubt about the extent to which the sisters of New Orleans challenged the racial inequalities of Antebellum society, and thus, whether they really achieved any empowerment. Marisa J. Fuentes has questioned the notion of any economic or social power being attributed to those Black women who did not resist the system of slavery. She also argues that it was not possible for them to have any real influence because they were trapped in the power of others to gain any privileges.[296] Although Henriette Delille and her sisters were subject to domination by the Catholic Church, and they seemingly deferred to White societal norms, yet Delille showed strong leadership and resistance by refusing to be deterred by White detractors who wanted to extinguish the order. She also continued to provide services for the Black community, often in the face of opposition from those same critics. Thus, while Henriette Delille and her sisters may have also reflected the classist nature of New Orleans' free Black society at that time, they left a legacy of determination in the face of racial discrimination, and a male dominated patriarchal church, which is only now being fully appreciated by their descendants.

While the free Black nuns of New Orleans eschewed domestic partnerships, they were an important part of most free Black women's lives. Although interracial marriage was strictly illegal, some chose to have enduring unions with White men, while others preferred lawful marriage to a free

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[295] Sister Mary Deggs' Journal in *No Cross, No Crown: Black Nuns in Nineteenth Century New Orleans,* edited by Virginia Meacham Gould and Charles E. Nolan (Indiana University Press, 2001), 92

[296] As described by Marisa J. Fuentes in *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive (*University of Pennsylvania, 2016), 62

man of colour. The next chapter will look at two such relationships in detail, assessing their impact on the life histories of the two case studies.

Chapter Three

Quadroons, Plaçées and Lawfully Wedded Wives

The desire of distinction to rise from a lower level to social equality with a superior race was implanted in the heart of the quadroon, as in all women.[297]

This chapter will continue the exploration of the themes of place, identity, and empowerment for the free Black women of New Orleans, by looking at two case studies which focus on personal and domestic connections. Analysis of the different life experiences of Cécille Bonille, half-sister to the leader of the Sisters of the Holy Family, Henriette Delille, and Marie Dolores Laveaux, half-sister of New Orleans' arguably most well-known free woman of colour and Voodoo priestess, Marie Laveaux, will provide an analysis of the factors, both economic and cultural, which may have encouraged, or indeed, perhaps forced these women to conduct their respective relationships with a White man and a free man of colour. Amrita Chakrabati Myers has suggested that by actively seeking a plaçage relationship, free Black women like Cècille Bonille, could gain more control of their life, obtaining a higher standard of living for themselves and their families; while Marissa J. Fuentes, has maintained that a plaçage relationship, however economically advantageous, still sustained "a vulnerability to whites' legal and social regulation and control of black bodies."[298] Therefore, it could be argued, as with the free Black nuns, that these plaçées were perpetuating a system of enslavement, and enabling inequalities to remain in place.[299] They could also be viewed as perpetuating the notion of Black women as sexually licentious, because these relationships challenged the mores of nineteenth century middle-class morality. Conversely, free women of colour who married free Black men demonstrated that Black women were indeed capable of assuming the role of wife, a position which was expected of most White women. Thus, by marrying, they perhaps helped to rehabilitate the reputation of Afro-Creole women, by

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[297] Grace King, *New Orleans: The Place and the People* (The MacMillan Co., New York, 1895), 343
[298] See Amrita Chakrabati Myers, *Forging Freedom: Black Women in the Pursuit of Liberty in Antebellum Charleston* (University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 25; Marissa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives, Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 62
[299] Ibid. 68

demonstrating respectability, and adherence to White middle-class standards. Also, the increasing popularity of marriage over plaçage in the Antebellum period reflected the shift towards cultural insularity in the free Black community, signalling a change in racial intimacy, and an increased desire to protect the community's investments from White ownership.[300]

This chapter will therefore examine and compare the lives of Cécille Bonille, the plaçée, and of Marie Dolores Laveaux, the wife. It will assess how far the changing cultural and economic circumstances of New Orleans, including its increasing Americanization, which engendered more prejudice and hostility towards free Black people, impacted the experiences of these two women. It will also continue to look at those influences of background, class, and identity within free Black society, which determined the world view of Afro-Creole women. Finally, it will examine the ways in which their respective relationships may have helped or hindered them in achieving more empowerment, in a society which repressed both people of colour and women.

The many tropes surrounding New Orleans' Afro-Creole women and their sexuality had led to much negative stereotyping, encouraged by the popular media of the time. According to many contemporary fictional and non-fictional accounts, the free Black woman's main aim in life was to find a wealthy White partner who would keep her in luxury. Contemporary sources also suggested that free women of colour generally encountered these men through their attendance at quadroon balls. According to some of these authors, mothers brokered beneficial financial arrangements for their daughters with a prospective suitor.[301] However, there are no historical records of these informal contracts, nor mention of them anywhere in the primary sources of the time, such as letters, memoirs or diaries. Kenneth Aslakson therefore argues that these accounts of mothers bargaining away their daughter's virtue were another way for antislavery authors to garner support for the movement, in a

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[300] Shirley E. Thompson, *Exiles at Home: The Struggle to Become American in Creole New Orleans* (Harvard University Press, 2009), 142

[301] See Edward Sullivan, *Rambles & Scrambles in North & South America* (Richard Bentley, London, 1852); Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States* (Dix & Edwards Sampson Law New York & London, 1856);Carl Bernhard, Duke of Saxe-Weimar Eisnach, *Travels through North America During the Years 1825 & 1826* (Lea & Cary, Philadelphia, 1828); Major Amos Stoddard, *Sketches, Historical & Descriptive of Louisiana* (Cary, Philadelphia, 1812)

message which denounced both the commodification of people, and the destruction of families.[302] The high status and wealth of the White male partner was also another frequently mentioned aspect of plaçage, further suggesting an inequality between the woman and the man, both in standing, and financial prosperity. Contemporary writers usually portrayed the male half of the partnership as a wealthy planter or gentleman of means.[303] Only nineteenth century author, Louis Fitzgerald Tasistro, disagreed with these accounts, claiming that "every clerk and scrivener" attended the quadroon balls.[304] Aslakson also researched 333 mixed-race couples from censuses between 1780 and 1860, revealing that many of the men were from the middle ranks of society, as only ten of them were classified as planters or gentlemen.[305] Although not all free Black women lived with their partners, especially those who held plantations out of the City, meaning that these men would not have been enumerated by the census at the same address, Aslakson's research gives an insight into the class diversity within this group of men. It also demonstrates that many of these biracial couples lived together as a family unit with their children, the female partners sometimes making significant economic contributions to the family coffers. Thus, these so-called plaçage relationships could often be more akin to common-law marriage.[306] Also, although it is clear that quadroon balls formed part of the cultural scene in antebellum New Orleans, according to Aslakson, they did not play such an important part in these interracial relationships as the contemporary travellers' accounts suggest. He argues that there were many places of entertainment in New Orleans, and quadroon balls formed only a small part of the diversions on offer.[307] Thus, he suggests that many of these women conducted mutually dependent relationships, with far more equality than had been previously thought.

However, there has also been debate amongst other scholars surrounding the way in which these women made their relationship choices, and, indeed, whether they had any choice at all, but were

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[302] Kenneth Aslakson, "The Quadroon-Plaçage Myth of Antebellum New Orleans: Anglo American (Mis) Interpretations of a French-Caribbean Phenomenon." *Journal of Social History,* Vol. 45, No.3, The Hidden History of Crime, Corruption and States, (Spring 2012), 717-718
[303] Ibid
[304] Louis Fitzgerald Tasistro, *Random Shots and Southern Breezes* (New York, 1842), 24
[305] Kenneth Aslakson, "The Quadroon-Plaçage Myth of Antebellum New Orleans: Anglo American (Mis) Interpretations of a French-Caribbean Phenomenon." *Journal of Social History,* Vol. 45, No.3, The Hidden History of Crime, Corruption and States, (Spring 2012), 717-718
[306] Ibid
[307] Ibid. 719, 724

forced into these connections by their parents, or by economic necessity. They were often portrayed as powerless objects of coercion by nineteenth century authors, thus, suggesting that, despite their free status, they were still in effect often viewed as property by White society. Lisa Ze Winters, through her examination of Eliza Potter's memoir, *A Hairdresser's Experience in High Life,* also suggests that these relationships with white partners denoted "an economy and culture still rooted in slavery, the quadroon mistress evolving from the fancy woman who was sold at the auction house in New Orleans."[308] Ze Winters argues that "New Orleans, therefore, cannot be that site of remarkable agency for women of color."[309] However, Aslakson suggests that, by using their most valuable asset, their sexuality, to gain financial benefits, free women of colour were changing their status from passive to active, even if their choices were limited in a repressive society.[310] Through her case studies of free Black women in Charleston, Amrita Chakrabati Myers also demonstrates how some financially ambitious free Black women deliberately allied themselves with wealthy White men, in order to maximize their financial and social mobility. She argues therefore that they were demonstrating a power of choice, and a way of increasing their influence on society through their purchase of land, and the foundation of their businesses.[311]

By the Antebellum period, and certainly towards the mid-century, some historians such as Emily Clark and Jennifer M. Spear suggest that these plaçage relationships were on the wane, as lawful marriage became popular for free Black women, thus also negating the previously held notion by contemporary writers, that most Afro-Creole women preferred to have White male partners.[312] Nevertheless, according to Ashley Baggett, a researcher into partner violence in the nineteenth century, once these women married, they were then often subjected to White society's moral values, and also to

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[308] Eliza Potter, *A Hairdresser's Experience in the High Life* (Cincinnati,1859)
[309] Lisa Ze Winters, "More Desultory and Unconnected than Any Other": Geography, Desire, and Freedom in Eliza Potter's "A Hairdresser's Experience in High Life" *American Quarterly*, Vol. 61, No. 3, In the Wake of Katrina: New Paradigms and Social Visions (Sept., 2009), 456
[310] Kenneth Aslakson, "The Quadroon-Plaçage Myth of Antebellum New Orleans: Anglo American (Mis) Interpretations of a French-Caribbean Phenomenon." *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 45, No.3, The Hidden History of Crime, Corruption and States, (Spring 2012), 717-718
[311] Amrita Chakrabati Myers, *Forging Freedom: Black Women in the Pursuit of Liberty in Antebellum Charleston* (University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 25
[312] See Jennifer M. Spear, *Race, Sex and Social Order in Early New Orleans* (John Hopkins University Press, 2009)

White expectations of womanhood, which empowered men and left women open to abuse.[313] Indeed, Kimberly S. Hanger's research about free Black women of New Orleans' Spanish period, suggests that those unmarried women with children, who were classified as the heads of households by the census-takers, were not impeded by male domination in the domestic setting. Therefore, they enjoyed a freedom, above and beyond that of those women who were bound to marriage and subsequent patriarchal domination by their husbands.[314] These arguments suggest that by choosing to marry, free women of colour may have sacrificed some of their autonomy, even while they had more legal security as a lawfully wedded wife.

The first part of the chapter will therefore look at the story of Cécille Bonille's partnership with Samuel Hart, in order to analyze how far this relationship was influenced by outside forces, including cultural and economic factors. It will also reflect on how her partnership with Hart affected the course of her life, and that of her family. It will then compare her life experience with that of Marie Dolores Laveaux who married François Auguste. Laveaux's experience of married life will be considered through the lens of the societal values and mores which governed the life of the family in Antebellum New Orleans. The analysis will also assess how far Laveaux's legally more secure position through marriage, may have ultimately given her increased status, stability and thus, more control over her life.

Cécille Bonille: The Plaçée

Cécille Bonille was born to Maria Josefa Diaz and Juan Bonille or Bonilla, a White man of unknown origin, who resided in Havana, Cuba, but who may have been originally from New Orleans.[315] Her baptism was registered in the Archdiocesan records in 1807, in a volume designated for slaves and free coloured people. Cécille's death certificate described her as Bonille's "natural daughter*,"* showing that

[313] See Ashley Baggett, *Intimate Partner Violence in New Orleans: Gender, Race and Reform 1840-1900* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi,2017)
[314] Kimberly S. Hanger, *Bounded Lives, Bounded Places: Free Black Society in Colonial New Orleans 1769-180* (Durham Duke University Press, 1997), 218-231
[315] She wrote in her will that he was living in Cuba. New Orleans Public Library, City Archive: Louisiana Orleans Parish Estate Files 1804-1866. Will Books 1837-1842

he recognized her as his child, but it is doubtful whether she had much contact with him.[316] As with Henriette Delille's father, there is no mention of his playing any role in Cécille's life. Her maternal background was one of interracial relationships, as her enslaved and free Black ancestors all had children with White men, going back to her enslaved great-great grandmother, Nanette, who had five children with her owner, Claude Joseph Dubreuil. The relationship between Claude Dubreuil and Nanette was at best likely to have been an exploitative one, and at worst violent, because rape was certainly an all-too-common and horrific reality for many enslaved women.[317] Although not manumitted by Dubreuil, Nanette was eventually freed in 1763 by his son.[318] After this, she disappeared from legal records until 1770, when she bought, and subsequently freed, her daughter Cécile, the youngest of her four daughters, and Cécile's two children. She paid a total of 2,800 livres for their release.[319] Thus, in seven years, she had amassed a considerable sum of money to free her daughter and grandchildren, indicating that she was a resourceful hard worker with a talent for making money. However, she may also have benefitted financially because of her kinship with the Dubreuils. Her daughter Cécile had two children while she was enslaved, one of whom was Henriette Laveau, Cécille Bonille's grandmother. After Henriette was freed by her mother, she conducted a relationship with a White man named Miguel Roig (or Roche) and had two more children with him.[320] Cécile had also obviously inherited her mother's business acumen and began to invest in property. Very soon she was "counted among the most well-to-do property-holders in New Orleans."[321] Presumably Cécile inherited properties from her mother, but she may have also profited financially by her association with her White

[316]White men typically referred to their white children by marriage as legitimate and their duly acknowledged children of colour as their natural children. By the time of her death, it seems that Juan Bonille had predeceased her as he was called the late Bonille in her death certificate. New Orleans Public Library, City Archive: Louisiana Orleans Parish Estate Files 1804-1846; Death Certificate of Cecille Bonille, 1841

[317] See Thavolia Glymph for examples of sexual violence, *Out of the House of Bondage. The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (Cambridge University Press, 2008)

[318] Virginia Meacham Gould, "Henriette Delille, Free Women of Color, and Catholicism in Antebellum New Orleans, 1727-1852" in *Beyond Bondage: Free Women of Color in the Americas*, edited collection by David Barry Gaspar & Darleen Clark Hine (University of Illinois Press, Urbana & Chicago, 2004), 271-285

[319] Ibid

[320] Father Cyprien Davis, *Henriette Delille: Servant to the Slaves, Witness to the Poor* (New Orleans, Sisters of the Holy Family, 2004), 98

[321] Virginia Meacham Gould, "Henriette Delille, Free Women of Color, and Catholicism in Antebellum New Orleans, 1727-1852,"in *Beyond Bondage: Free Women of Color in the Americas*, edited collection by David Barry Gaspar & Darleen Clark Hine (University of Illinois Press, Urbana & Chicago, 2004), 271-285

partners. Her daughter, Henriette, had relationships with three other White men apart from Roche, Chevalier (Charles) Morant, Pedro Foucher, and Antonio Diaz. This last relationship produced Maria Josefa Diaz, Cécille's mother.[322] Therefore, by the time of her birth, Cécille Bonille's family were considered relatively wealthy. As well as their economic advantages, the family's light skin and kinship with elite Spanish and French families put them into the higher echelons of New Orleans' free Black community.

Although Maria Josefa had at least two relationships with White partners and produced children with them, it is probable that they never lived with her. The Censuses of 1820 and 1830 marked her as the head of the household.[323] The records from the Vieux Carrė survey at New Orleans' Historical Collection, and Acts from the Notarial Archives showed that when she was young, Maria Josefa also bought and sold property for financial gain.[324] Like many other free women of colour who owned multiple properties, she probably rented them out to give herself a further income. Thus, she carried on the family tradition of putting her wealth into property in order to continue improving her economic position. It is difficult to ascertain whether Maria Josefa was also financially or emotionally dependent on her White partners. The fact that she had more than one seems to suggest that she needed to have a domestic partner, possibly for financial reasons, as her economic situation began to worsen during her lifetime. Her mental instability also suggests that she may have endured hardship, despite or possibly because of her relationships.

There are no descriptions of Cécille, and no known portraits of her, either as a girl or in adulthood, but it is likely that she was also fair skinned with European features, like her half-sister Henriette Delille (see figure 8, page 74). As previously mentioned in Chapter Two, the 1830 Census, recorded the family as being White rather than free people of colour, showing the racial ambiguity of their skin colour and features. Their lightness of skin went as far back as her grandmother, Henriette

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[322] Ibid
[323] The Historic New Orleans Collection: See New Orleans' Census Records 1820, 1830
[324] The Historic New Orleans Collection: See The Collins C. Diboll Vieux Carré Survey; Notarial Records: Vol 4, 577, Pierre Pedesclaux, sale of 532-534 Burgundy Street from Antione Argot to Marie Joseph Diaz fwc, Vol 4, Michel de Armas, Aug 3rd, 1810, sale of property from Marie Joseph Dias fwc to Angel Benito de Ariza,

Laveau, who was described as a light skinned "quateroon" in a legal document of 1822.[325] Nöel Mellick Voltz argues, as it was accepted that a lighter skin gave a free Black person higher status within New Orleans' free black community, and indeed within general society, some Afro-Creole women chose plaçage over marriage, to benefit their children, as well as themselves.[326] Grace King goes further, by suggesting that the benefits of this lightening of skin tone throughout the generations could be even more advantageous, in giving them the option to pass as White. She asserts therefore, "the great ambition of the unmarried quadroon mothers was to have their children pass for White and so get access to the privileged class."[327] It could be argued that by exclusively choosing high status White partners, Cécille's female relatives had indeed actively pursued these benefits throughout the generations, in an effort to achieve increased financial security and status within society, and even perhaps, giving the opportunity for their descendants to move into White society.

As with Henriette Delille, there are no records of Cécille's early life in her mother's house on Burgundy Street (see Figure 11, below) but she, like Delille, was also educated.[328] She may have gone to the same Saint-Claude Street school allegedly attended by Henriette Delille, as she also sent her two daughters to study there. It was described as a Maison D'Education (House of Education) pour les jeunes personnes de couleur (for young people of colour) run by the Carmelite nuns at St Augustin's chapel.[329]

Figure 11: In the French Quarter, New Orleans, La. (500 Block Burgundy) where Cécille Bonille and Henriette Delille lived as children. Date: 1904 The Historic New Orleans Collection

[325] The Historic New Orleans Collection: See the Collins C Dibill Vieux Carré Survey; Notarial Records 1822, Notary Michel de Armas, Registration of an Act in which Henriette Laveau is described as "a free quateroon"
[326] Nöel Mellick Voltz, "Black Female Agency and Sexual Exploitation: Quadroon Balls and Plaçage Relationships." (PhD thesis, Ohio State University, 2008), 31
[327] Grace King, *New Orleans: The Place and the People* (Macmillan Co., New York, 1895), 347
[328] All the family were literate as shown by their signatures on various legal documents.
[329] New Orleans Public Library, City Archive: Louisiana Orleans Parish Estate Files 1804-146, Succession of Cécille Bonille, 1842: Bill from the Maison D'Education.

However, by the time she was around seventeen, she met Samuel Hart, who was to be her only partner and father of her children. Sister Détiege writes: "In 1824…Cécile had the thrill of attending the ball where she met and gave her love to Samuel [Hart], a wealthy commissioned merchant of New Orleans, originally from Austria."[330] This date is also evidenced by the birth of her first child, Antoinette, in 1825.[331] It is feasible that Cécille attended quadroon balls, but it may have also been assumed by Sister Détiege that she met Hart at a ball, in keeping with the stories of these plaçage relationships. Even if this was the case, Samuel Hart was certainly not the typical suitor portrayed in the accounts of these liaisons. Indeed, the myths surrounding plaçage are still so strong, that a movie filmed in 2000 about Henriette Delille's life, portrayed Cécille's partner as a handsome, wealthy Creole planter in his early twenties.[332] In reality, Samuel Hart was an immigrant, a Jewish man from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, who was already fifty-three when he met Cécille. [333] This alliance between Bonille and Hart also broke with the tradition of Cécille's forbears, who had always conducted associations with Catholic French or Spanish Creoles, with whom they shared a common language and culture. However, the influx of immigrants to New Orleans during the early part of the century may have brought about more diversity in these interracial relationships. As Emily Clark observes, "many of them were newcomers, outsiders and economically challenged in some way, making them unpromising competitors for …. European women."[334] However, Hart was wealthy and well established, as he was a prosperous merchant, who came to New Orleans sometime before 1805.[335] He was often referred to as "Captain Hart" in documents, so may have originally been captain of a merchant ship. Therefore, it is likely that it was his Jewish religion which alienated New Orleans' eligible White women. In legal documents he was also variously described as being Polish, from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, or Austrian, the

[330] Sister Audrey Marie Détiege, *Henriette Delille, Free Woman of Color: Foundress of the Sisters of the Holy Family* (New Orleans: Sisters of the Holy Family, 1976), 15
[331] Although Sam and Cecille had four children, her birth was the only one found in the Archdiocese records. Her father's name was recorded as Sem, Polish and her mother's as Cecile Bonny. Archives of the Archdiocese of New Orleans: Saint Louis Cathedral, Births of Free Colored People Vol 16 p. 190
[332] See *The Courage to Love,* Television History Film, Ontario, Canada, 2000
[333] At the time of his death in 1832, Hart was described as being around 60 years old. New Orleans Public Library, City Archives: Louisiana Parish Files 1804-1836, Samuel Hart Record of Death 1832
[334] Emily Clark, *The Strange History of the American Quadroon: Free Women of Color in the Revolutionary Atlantic World* (University of North Carolina, 2013), 69
[335] Sister Audrey Marie Détiege, *Henriette Delille, Free Woman of Color: Foundress of the Sisters of the Holy Family* (New Orleans: Sisters of the Holy Family, 1976), 15

confusion not unsurprising, as during the nineteenth century, the borders of these countries were often changing.[336] However, his Jewish ethnicity was also evident in the names of his relatives. Although he was called Hart, his brother was named Saul Kalman Robinsohn, and his sister was Hendel Rosenberg, suggesting that he may have wished to hide his identity by the adoption of the anglicized surname.[337] It was, therefore, on the face of it, an unusual choice of partner for a French-speaking Catholic Afro-Creole. One wonders how her piously Catholic family viewed the Jewish Hart, or if they eagerly welcomed him into the family fold because of his wealth. Also, the big age difference meant that this was probably not a romantic connection, and could have also been a potentially exploitative one, as Cécille was still very young. Indeed, Sister Détiege wrote that, before meeting Cécille, Hart had conducted a relationship with his enslaved woman, Betsy, who was subsequently gifted to Henriette Delille. Betsy had a son, John, who may have been fathered by Hart. Betsy was no doubt defenceless in her relationship with Hart, showing how Hart's previous unions with Black women had been based on the abuse of power.[338] Sister Détiege did not comment on, or even condemn, this inappropriate connection in her written account of the order's history, published in the 1970s, showing how unremarkable this was in Antebellum New Orleans. Indeed, there was often an acceptance amongst women in the South that they might have to come to terms with the visibility of their husbands' enslaved children. Some of them even had to submit to their future husbands' exhortation to "behave kindly" towards them.[339]

Betsy had no choice in her relationship with Hart, but Cécille, as a free woman of colour, at least had the option of rejecting his advances. However, she did not, and that she seemingly chose to be with a man old enough to be her grandfather, showed that other factors, apart from physical attraction, favoured an alliance with Hart. Despite his past relationship indiscretion and advancing age, for Cécille, a partnership with Hart had obvious benefits. He had wealth, which would be of value to Cécille and

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[336] See Samuel Hart's death certificate, will and succession as detailed in footnote below and in subsequent pages.
[337] New Orleans Public Library, City Archives: Louisiana Parish Files 1804-1836; Will of Samuel Hart 1832
[338] Sister Audrey Marie Détiege, *Henriette Delille, Free Woman of Color: Foundress of the Sisters of the Holy Family* (New Orleans: Sisters of the Holy Family, 1976), 15
[339] Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (New York, 2008), 29

her family, and despite being an outsider, as a prosperous White man, he also had some status and influence in the general community. She may have seen how these new immigrants were making their mark on the economic life of the City. Thus, an alliance with someone who was contributing to a changing New Orleans, was possibly seen by her as a means of further protecting herself, her family, and any children she might have in the future, against the increasing prejudice toward free people of colour. Also, despite the differences of age and culture, her relationship with Hart proved to be a more stable one than the previous partnerships of her mother, lasting until his untimely death in 1832. By that time, he and Cécille had four children: Antoinette, Amelia, John, and Samuel.

The year of 1832 was generally a very difficult one for Cécille, as it was the year when her mother was also certified insane.[340] Cécille's desperation about the state of her mother's mental health was such that she applied to the courts in order to try and sort out her mother's affairs. A family meeting, which included Samuel Hart, was called at the office of notary, Felix De Armas. Hart's inclusion showed that by this time he was an accepted and trusted family member. Of course, it was also always an advantage for free people of colour to have a White man present at meetings involving the public authorities. However, his attendance also made clear that, unlike the absentee Creole partners of her mother, Hart was by now supportive of Cécille and involved in her family's affairs. Hart also filed a will in 1832, making clear his obligations to his children with Cécille, by providing for them in the event of his death. Although he did not openly acknowledge the relationship with Cécille in his will, declaring that he was "unmarried and had no children," he clearly stated that he wanted to bequeath one fifth of his estate, in line with Louisiana inheritance law for natural children, "to the four children of Cecilia Boni, female of color."[341] He left the rest of his estate to be divided up amongst his heirs in Europe. His will stated, somewhat poignantly, that he was, at that time "in good health but aware of the uncertainty of human life." The fatefulness of this phrase became clear because although Hart was obviously feeling well on 8th September when he wrote his will, by November of that same year he had died of cholera.[342] Between October and November of that year, a terrible cholera epidemic raged in

[340] Notarial Archives: Acts. No.16, Aug-Oct 1832 de Armas notary. No.406
[341] New Orleans Public Library, City Archives: Louisiana Parish Files 1804-1836; Will of Samuel Hart 1832
[342] Ibid

the City, claiming the lives of an estimated 5,000 people.[343] He was not the only one in the household to get the disease. His nurse recalled that she also had to tend to other members of his family (probably referring to Bonille and the children) but they all survived.[344] He died in his house in the suburb St Mary, his death certificate recording, "Samuel Hart aged about 60 years, native of Poland died on the 9th November at 8 o'clock and that he was unmarried."[345] He had an expensive funeral, befitting a man of his status, at a cost of $175 for "one full mounted mahogoney[sic] coffin, two horse herse [sic] and 10 carriages at 8 dollars each."[346] If he had been a Catholic of high standing, he would probably have had his funeral service at Saint Louis Cathedral and been interred in Saint Louis Cemetery No.1. He was however, buried in the now demolished Gates of Mercy Cemetery, the first Jewish cemetery in New Orleans.[347]

After Hart's death, and with the loss of his protection, life became more difficult for Cécille. His will had given powers to the executors, William Brocke, James Ramsey, and James Hopkins, to take possession, and make an inventory of his estate. Thus, after Hart's death, a notary went to his house where Cécille and the children were residing, and asked her to "exhibit to me all the property and effects, rights and credits of every description appertaining to the said estate, which were in her possession or of which she lacks any knowledge."[348] It must have been traumatic for Cécille after the loss of her partner, having people going through the family's personal possessions, and knowing that she would have to leave the house that she had shared with Hart. Although he had left the children provided for, like many other White men with long-term free Black partners, and in the knowledge that he was about to die, he also tried to make provision for Cécille, by giving her money while he was still alive. Cécille therefore declared to the notary that she had been given several notes by Hart, as a donation to her, five or six days before his death, in the presence of witnesses. There were seventeen "billets" amounting to

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[343] Charles Rosenburg, *The Cholera Years: The United States in 1832, 1849 and 1866* (The University of Chicago Press, 1962), 1,13,25,37

[344] New Orleans Public Library, City Archive: Louisiana Wills and Probate Records 1756-1964; Succession of Samuel Hart 1832; Petition of Antoinette Knoll 2

[345] New Orleans Public Library, City Archive: Louisiana Statewide Death Index 1819-1964: Record of Death 1832

[346]New Orleans Public Library, City Archive: Louisiana Wills and Probate Records 1756-1964; Succession of Samuel Hart 1832. Bill from the undertakers

[347]See https://www.jewishgen.org/databases/cemetery/jowbr.php?rec=J_LA_0002682 for Hart's burial place

[348] New Orleans Public Library, City Archive: Louisiana US Wills and Probate Records 1756-1964; Succession of Samuel Hart 1832

the very large sum of $123,451. The notary immediately took possession of these notes and deposited them in a bank subject to "the joint orders of the said executors of the one part and of the said Cécille Bonilla and John Slidell Esq., her attorney of the other part…"[349] Hart had a large number of siblings residing in Europe, and although some of these had already predeceased him, they also had large families of children and grandchildren, who were no doubt all hoping to benefit from the estate of the "unmarried" Hart. The executors therefore decided that these notes given to Bonille should be included in the estate and took her to court to reclaim the money.

Cécille, possibly in the anticipation of trouble, had already hired a noted lawyer and friend of Samuel Hart, John Slidell.[350] Sister Détiege suggests that Cécille was well acquainted with Slidell, as she and Hart had thrown dinner parties for him.[351] As a result of his friendship with Hart, Slidell may have felt obligated to help Cécille. However, it was not altogether unusual for eminent White lawyers to take on the cases of free Black women being sued for inheritance monies by White relatives. Another free woman of colour featured in this thesis, Eulalie Mandeville, also hired lead defence attorney, Pierre Soulé, to protect her money from her deceased White partner's heirs. [352] Chakrabati Myers observes that free Black women often "spent their lives in negotiations and alliances with both free Black and White men and much of what they obtained in their lives resulted from their tireless and astute negotiations with men."[353] Those free women of colour, like Mandeville and Bonille, who had kinship or friendship ties with prominent White families, could also utilize these connections to their advantage. The law played a critical role in a free Black woman's ability to defend her rights, thus they used the legal system in order to protect these entitlements. "Whether they won or lost their individual battles,

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[349] Ibid

[350] John Slidell was a lawyer turned businessman who moved to New Orleans in 1819 to practice law after his business failed. He rose to prominence as a Louisiana Politician in the decades before the Civil War. www.knowsouthernhistory.net

[351] Sister Audrey Marie Détiege, *Henriette Delille, Free Woman of Color: Foundress of the Sisters of the Holy Family* (New Orleans: Sisters of the Holy Family, 1976), 22

[352] He was a rising star of the Democratic Party, noted for his oratory. See Nicolas Theodore Macarty v. Eulalie Mandeville (Supreme Court of Louisiana Historical Archives at the Earl K. Long Library University of New Orleans) 106 U.S. 61 (1846-1861)

[353] Amrita Chakrabati Myers, *Forging Freedom: Black Women and the Pursuit of liberty in Antebellum Charleston* (University of Caroline Press, 2011), 202,5-6

what is important is that free black women in the antebellum South clearly believed that they were entitled to certain things, including …defence of their property."354

Cécille's case went to the Parish court and was dismissed by the judge. The executors then appealed, and the case went to the Louisiana Supreme Court in 1833. By this time, the main executor, William Brocke, had also died. Cécille's defence therefore made the case that a petition to set aside a donation made by a testator could only be brought by the heirs and legatees, not by executors, and that, as Brocke had died, and his co-executors had been appointed merely to aid him, it was not valid for them to bring this action. The plaintiffs' counterargument was, as the executors were authorized to recover the possession of any property at Hart's death, article 1669 of the Louisiana Code recognized their right to bring actions on behalf of the succession. The Supreme Court judge overturned the decision of the Parish Court in favour of the plaintiffs, stating, "although executors cannot alone maintain an action in relation to the rights of heirs, they may, if those who are interested are made party to the suit."[355] He therefore ordered that the case "be remanded to be proceeded in according to the law."[356] As it seemed that the court case would drag on, with the aid of Slidell, Cécille negotiated a monetary settlement with Hart's heirs out of court.[357] The amount she received was not recorded anywhere, and her later financial difficulties suggested that it was probably nowhere near the money initially given to her by Hart. However, she was fortunate that, as Hart's heirs lived in Europe, they were perhaps less willing to come to New Orleans for another court case, so she at least retained some of the money. After this was settled, Cécille also asked John Mcdonough, another very influential White New Orleanian and friend of her two uncles, to purchase four lots of land belonging to Hart for the sum of $32,000, on behalf of her children.[358] This seemingly headstrong act on the part of Bonille caused a problem, because she did not seek any authorization of the purchase from the executors or from the

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[354] Ibid

[355]December 1833, The Executors v Boni F.W.C, edited by Merrit Robinson in, *Reports of Cases Argued and Determined in the Supreme Court State of Louisiana, Eastern District New Orleans*, Vol.VI (New Orleans, Gaston Brusle, 1834)

[356] Ibid

[357] Notarial Archives: Acts of Felix Grima, 1834

[358] John Mcdonogh who was born in Baltimore made his fortune in real estate and was at one time director of the Louisiana State Bank. At his death he left his fortune to be used for the education of boys and girls in Baltimore and New Orleans. Thirty-six schools were built in total.

Court of Probates, nor, indeed, from her own family. Although it was unauthorized, the purchase was finally approved by all those concerned. However, it would turn out to be a contentious issue after her death. [359]

Although still only in her twenties at the time of Hart's death, Cécille Bonille had the confidence of her convictions to try and protect her position and her inheritance, by defending her case in court; thus, also demonstrating that she was willing to take an active role in the protection of her welfare, and that of her children. She may also have been influenced in her actions by the plight of her own mother, who did not have much financial security in later life. This pragmatism on the part of Bonille suggests that the choice of Hart as partner was also a deliberate one. However, in making her choice, Cécille was no doubt influenced by economic and cultural factors. Firstly, Hart's origins and more advanced age, meant that he was less likely to marry another woman, leaving her without any financial support. Also, Hart's isolation, as he had no other close family members nearby, and was far from home, meant that he was more likely to want to live with Cécille, giving her increased status as Hart's recognized "near-wife," a status which seemed to be important for Cécille. The uncertainty surrounding her mother's domestic life may have made her crave increased security. Her choice of relationship may have also reflected the evolution of these biracial partnerships. A more Americanized New Orleans, resulted in more diversity of unions between free Black women and White men. These relationships may have also contributed to the change from temporary unions, like those of her mother, to those which were considered by both parties as a near marriage. Cécille was always keen to validate her relationship with Hart. Despite her relative youth, after Hart's death, she did not have any other partners, and referred to herself as the Veuve (widow) Hart, until the end of her life. [360]

Cécille lived quietly until the summer of 1841, when she was taken ill. There was no record of the cause of the illness, but it was sufficiently serious for Cécille to be afraid that she might die. She therefore called the notary, Louis T. Caire, to her apartment on Saint-Claude Street. He found Cécille lying on a daybed with Mr. and Mrs. Jean Louis Dolliole and Paynal Auguste in attendance. She had

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[359] Antoinette Darsse v Henry Leaumont & another Executors of Cecilia Bonilla, in *Louisiana Reports Cases argued and determined in the Supreme Court*, Vol.44, edited by Merrit Robinson,(New Orleans, Gaston Brusle, 1843)

[360] The Historic New Orleans Collection: See City Directories of New Orleans, 1835-1836

also called them to be witnesses to her last will and testament. The severity of Cecille's illness was evidenced by statement to the notary that she wanted to dictate her last wishes to him, "while she had use of her mental faculties, to put her affairs in order."[361] She told him her name and described herself as a "Creole." It is significant that Cécille identified herself thus. Virginia R. Dominguez suggests that, for free Black people, the term Creole denoted a traditional association with "old White families," and by extension, to a higher social status.[362] By classifying herself as a Creole, Cécille was therefore proclaiming her allegiance to a specific cultural group, and also distinguishing herself from cultural outsiders, including her previous partner. Therefore, although Cécille had broken family tradition by her association with Hart, thereby also seemingly eschewing her association with the old families of New Orleans, in favour of the new Americanized City, yet she still evinced a pride in her culture and origins, which were as important as her race. Shirley E. Thompson also argues, "for those of African blood, a Creole identity signalled a struggle against the limits imposed on individuals and groups who had not become White."[363] Therefore, Bonille's insistence at being named a Creole, long before political activists like Rodolphe Desdune appropriated this cultural title, was perhaps also a further conscious effort on her part to emphasize both her origins and her status in her will.

Her succession also exposed more details of her character and mode of living. She should have been a wealthy woman, her succession stating that she had two properties in Saint-Claude Street and Villére Street, as well as two enslaved women. However, in reality, her financial situation was in disarray, as she also had many debts. She owed in excess of $3,000 in outstanding accounts, which her executors, Henry Leaumont and William Bell, had to agree to settle immediately. Indeed, the inventory of her possessions showed that Cécille was a woman who liked to spend money, and who was sometimes slow to settle her accounts. Her death expenses were also eye-wateringly costly, suggesting that she had a grand funeral and interment. Indeed, the cost of the funeral, which was held in Saint Louis Cathedral, amounted to a staggering $299.75. This was much more expensive than the funeral of her

[361]New Orleans Public Library, City Archive: Louisiana Will Books 1837-1842; Last Will and Testament, Bonille, femme de couleur libre, 27 August 1841 (translated from French by author)
[362] Virginia R. Dominguez, *White by Definition. Social Classification in Creole Louisiana* (Rutgers, USA, 1986), 123, 125
[363] Shirley E. Thompson, *Exiles at Home: The Struggle to Become American in Creole New Orleans* (Harvard University Press, 2009), 13

partner, Samuel Hart, and certainly much more than her sister, Henriette's, modest affair. Her coffin cost $127.13, signifying that it was probably at the top of the range, and her tombstone was also $60. This suggests that even in death, Cécille wanted to put on a good show to impress friends and family. The cost of her last illness was also inordinately expensive. She was attended by no less than three doctors, their fees ranging from $20 through to $50. Her medicines also cost $76.24, although it all proved to be ineffective in curing whatever was wrong with her.[364] She had obviously not expected to die at the young age of thirty-four, leaving her children vulnerable from her debts, and she evidently made every attempt to avert her fate, but it was all to no avail.

Her succession also revealed a love of clothes and finery. She owed money to several lady's clothing and millinery shops, including $27 to the Bellone Magasin where she purchased, among other things, stockings, collars, and muslin. Her account from this shop ran from 1836, and although she had paid some of it off in 1839 and 1840, there was still an amount owing.[365] She used this shop to buy her more mundane garments, whereas her outer garments, such as hats, came from an altogether grander establishment. Madame Delouvre's store was situated on Royal Street where, according to Eliza Ripley, who wrote a book about her recollections of New Orleans before the Civil War, there were many high-class clothing establishments. Ripley described one such shop called Barrièr's: "Where could be found all the French nouveatés of the day, beautiful barège's, marcelines and chiné organdies stamped in gorgeous designs, to be made up with wreathed and bouquet flounces."[366] She also described the popularity of bright colours, as well as luxurious materials for the women of New Orleans, "bottle green gloves were considered very comme il faut. They harmonized with the green barége."[367] Delouvre's, which was described as a "fancy store" in New Orleans' City Directory of 1842, advertised itself as a "new and fashionable store, selling a variety of ladys' clothing, including "articles of fantasy."

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[364] New Orleans Public Library, City Archive: Louisiana Orleans Parish Estate Files, 1804-1846; Cecilia Bonille, 1841, Court of Probates

[365] New Orleans Public Library, City Archive: Louisiana Parish Estate Files 1804-1846: Succession of Cecilia Bonille, Folder 3, Mademoiselle Cecilia Bonille, Bellone Magasin, Savoir 1836-1840

[366] Eliza Ripley, *Social Life in Old New Orleans: Being Recollections of my Girlhood* (D. Appletons & Company, New York & London, 1912), 58

[367] Ibid. 61

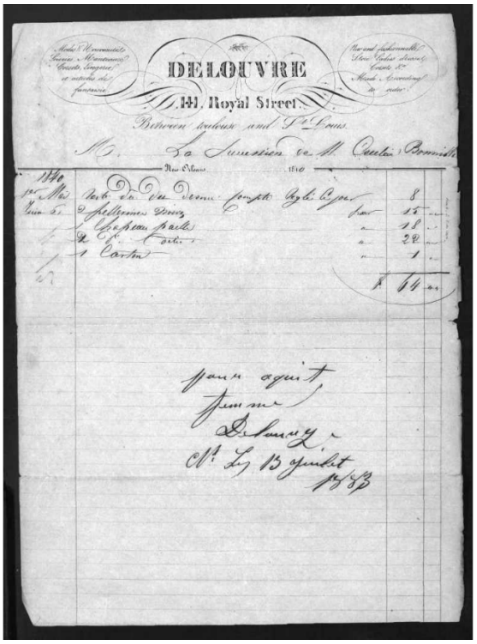

Figure 12: Bill from Madame Delouvre's shop taken from the 1841 succession papers of Cécille Bonille: Louisiana parish Estate Files 1804-1846

By dressing in fine French clothing, Cécille was also making a visual statement about her identity and status. Whitney Nell Stewart suggests that elite people of colour deployed material expressions of their Frenchness in order to uphold their social position in the face of increasing prejudice, and also as a means of showing their European origins. Thus, she argues, "those who had the resources would therefore fill their armoires with the latest French inspired fashion."[368] Cécille Bonille, therefore, also proclaimed her Creole origins during her lifetime, by means of her material possessions. Chakrabarti Myers also ascribes free Black women's attention to their appearance as showing "an outward expression of their freedom, and as a testimony to their belief that they were the equals of White women."[369] Thus, Cécille may have preferred to shop at an exclusive French store, which was also patronized by White women. Unfortunately, this attention to her appearance also resulted in more debt.

[368] Whitney Nell Stewart, "Fashioning Frenchness: Gens de Couleur Libres and the Cultural Struggle for Power in Antebellum New Orleans." *Journal of Social History* (Oct 7, 2016), 32
[369]Amrita Chakrabati Myers, *Forging Freedom: Black Women and the Pursuit of liberty in Antebellum Charleston* (University of Caroline Press, 2011), 67

Cécille's property was auctioned in an attempt to cover her debts and included her two houses and the two enslaved women, Fanny, a "negress" aged 26 years, and Pauline, a "griffa" aged about 35 years..[370] As with her mother's real estate, which was later bought by the Darsse family to clear her debts, the house and land in Saint-Claude Street was bought by Cécille's married daughter, Antoinette Darsse, for $2,610, thus clearing her debts. There was, however, little money left over from Cecille's estate for the children. At her death, three of her children, Amelia, Samuel, and John were still classed as minors. She also owed $110 for their school fees and $71 to a private tutor.[371] Antoinette was married to a free man of colour, Joseph Emile Darsse, thereby being the first of the generations, apart from Henriette Delille, to break with the plaçage tradition of the family. Sister Détiege maintains that it was her aunt, Henriette, who persuaded Antoinette to eschew the family custom.[372] However, perhaps Cécille also encouraged her daughter to marry. She had already broken with tradition in her choice of partner, as a reflection of changing times and shifting power structures in New Orleans, therefore, like other free Black families at that time, she may have encouraged Antoinette's marriage as a further move away from the old practices. She perhaps also did not want her daughter to experience the difficulties that she and her mother had endured as placées. Indeed, Antoinette married into a prosperous family, thus she combined the benefits of having a wealthy partner, with the increased security of a legal marriage.

Although Cécille's arrears were all resolved, there were still legal problems associated with the houses that she had bought for her children with their inheritance from Hart. These houses proved not to have been a wise investment, as they had not been well maintained. Cécille's brother, Jean, was concerned about the state of the two properties, "one of which had fallen down, owing to the giving away of the foundation by which accident the other brick house, which is said to be considerably damaged, has been rendered uninhabitable." Therefore "the revenue of the said minors is much reduced,

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[370]New Orleans Public Library, City Archive: Louisiana Parish Estate Files 1804-1846; Succession of Cecilia Bonille; Petition of Henry Leaumont and William Bell

[371] New Orleans Public Library, City Archive: Louisiana Parish Estate Files 1804-1846; Succession of Cecilia Bonille. Amelia must have subsequently died in about 1843 because her name does not appear in the later succession records.

[372] Sister Audrey Marie Détiege, *Henriette Delille, Free Woman of Color: Foundress of the Sisters of the Holy Family* (New Orleans: Sisters of the Holy Family, 1976), 15

what remains is insufficient for their support." Jean advised that a portion of their property should be sold, or money borrowed to rebuild the house.[373] There were also further difficulties with these houses in the settling of the estate, because Cécille, who had bought them for $32,000, maintained that she had only received $15,196.95 from Hart's estate on behalf of the children, and therefore they owed her $17,639.41. Although Cécille had credited the children's account with the rents of the properties, she had also debited it for expenses such as education and clothing, thus the amount was never paid off, and the interest accrued. At her death, her accounts showed that the children owed her, and therefore the estate, $25,020.89, an amount which the executors wished to recover from the children. Antoinette Darsse therefore brought a suit against the executors, claiming that as Cécille took matters into her own hands by buying these properties without consulting the family, and did not disclose that the children would be in her debt by doing so, the purchase of the property in the children's name should be annulled, reverting to Cécille's estate. However, during the investigations, it was also revealed that as Hart's estate totalled $171,960.22, the fifth part of that was $35,435, which was presumed to have been received by Bonille. Therefore, she had in fact obtained more than enough money to pay for the properties, and the children could not be indebted to her.[374] The judge ruled that the executors could not therefore recover the claim set up against the children of the deceased, by reason of the purchase. The houses were finally sold in 1844 to John Mcdonogh at a huge loss for $18,900, which was then divided between the children.[375]

On the face of it, the succession and subsequent court case did not give a very favourable impression of Cécille. It seems to portray her as an extravagant woman, who was concerned with outward appearances, and possibly not very good at managing her finances. This was perhaps behaviour learnt from her mother who had financial difficulties of her own. Cécille also made an unwise investment without notifying or consulting with the concerned parties. However, her haste could have

[373] New Orleans Public Library, City Archive: Louisiana Parish Estate Files 1804-1846; Succession of Cecilia Bonille; Petition of Jean Delille, tutor (guardian) of the minors
[374]Antoinette Darsse v Henry Leaumont & another in *Reports of Cases Argued and Determined in the Supreme Court of Louisiana*, Vol 5 from 29 May to 30 Sept 1843, New Orleans 1845 edited by Merrit M. Robinson (Frank Shepard, Chicago, 1895)
[375]New Orleans Public Library, City Archive: Louisiana Parish Estate Files 1804-1846; Succession of Cecilia Bonille; Petition of Jean Delille.

perhaps been because of her difficulties with Hart's other heirs, causing her to feel that she needed to get the children's legacy safely invested as quickly as possible. Subsequently, the court case revealed that she may have, in effect, tried to cheat her children out of some of their inheritance from Hart, as part of their legacy obviously went missing. However, some of this extravagance may have been due to her desire to uphold her position as Hart's widow. She must have felt cheated out of the large amount of money which Hart obviously wished to bestow on her, thus she might have seen it as her due to take some of her children's inheritance. Upholding her status meant that Cécille probably relied upon the inheritance money of her children, in order to try to make ends meet. Despite this, Cécille's admittedly extravagant lifestyle meant she still ended up spiralling into debt. She also may not have realized the implications of her financial dealings for her children, in the event of her death. She was a strong-minded woman, who thought she had made a good decision in her choice of partner, but her hazardous legal position became all too clear, as it did for many other free women of colour, after Hart's demise. Although he tried to ensure her financial security before his death, the lack of any legal marriage contract made it impossible for him to protect his partner from the claims of his European heirs. However, after Bonille died, her daughter was able to sort out her financial affairs and ensure that the other children were not left penniless. Therefore, although Cécille made financial mistakes, yet she still gave her children a good start, which benefitted them in later life. Education, even for her daughters, was obviously important to Cécille, as it had been for her mother, and she made sure that they were all well-educated. It may have been this education, and the maintenance of the family's position in free Black society, which ultimately allowed Antoinette to make a financially advantageous marriage into a prosperous free Black family, and thus in the long run ensured the economic survival of the dynasty.

The next part of the chapter will look at the life of Marie Dolores Laveaux, who married within the free Black community. Arguably she should have had more protection as a lawfully wedded wife than Cécille. However, just as Cècille Bonille's life history has shown that the status and position in a relationship depended upon many factors, the same was true for women who chose marriage with a free Black man. Although partnerships with White men could be viewed as unequal and exploitative, marriages with free Black men could also be problematic within such a patriarchal society. Spanish and Napoleonic legal codes gave women the right to own and manage any property they inherited prior to

their marriage, but under Louisiana law, the husband was head and master of any property they both owned, which was called "community" property.[376] In choosing to marry, free Black women could face the same social strictures as White Creole women, who were discouraged from being seen in the public sphere, and whose husbands expected obedience from them.[377] Therefore, this part of the chapter will also compare Cécille's relationship with Hart, to that of Marie Dolores Laveaux with her husband, looking at the different ways in which societal and cultural pressures affected the personal lives of both women.

Marie Dolores Laveaux Auguste: The Wife

Marie Dolores Laveaux came from a similar background to Cécille Bonille, as she was brought up in a family from the wealthier echelons of New Orleans' free Black society. However, her parents were married, although her father, Charles Laveaux, was the son of a White man and a free Black woman. His father was possibly Charles Laveaux Trudeau, who at one time was the Surveyor General of New Orleans. Charles Laveaux married Marie Dolores' mother, Marie Françoise Dupart, in Saint Louis Cathedral in 1802.[378] The marriage certificate described Laveaux as "the natural son of Marie Labeau, free woman of colour and an unknown father."[379] Although Laveaux's father may have possibly assisted him financially, the Laveaux family appears not to have had the close kinship and connections with New Orleans's elite White society, that Cécille Bonille's family displayed through the generations. His wife also came from a prosperous free Black family, bringing a substantial dowry of $4000 to the marriage.[380] Both husband and wife came from business backgrounds. Laveaux was in the alcohol trade, and his name appeared in the City Directory of 1830, described as a victualler. Then in 1832, he was listed as owning a tavern on New Leveé, a notorious place for riotous drinking establishments. John

[376] Mary Gehman*, Women and New Orleans* (Margaret Media Inc, New Orleans, 2000), 25
[377] Ibid.10-11
[378] Carolyn Morrow Long, *A New Orleans Voudou Princess; The Legend and Reality of Marie Laveau* (University Press of Florida, 2006), 25
[379] Archives of the Archdiocese of New Orleans: See Saint Louis Cathedral Marriages, Free People of Color (1801-1804), Part 1
[380] New Orleans Public Library, City Archive: Louisiana Parish Estate Files 1804-1846: Laveau Mde Charles neé Marie Françoise Dupart Fwc, Estate of 1824

Williamson Carey, brick-making machine inventor, who visited New Orleans in 1835 was amazed at how much commerce and activity there was, even on "the Lords day." He wrote: "As I proceeded down old Leveé Street, the gambling and the liquor stores were all open and in full blast." He thought the scene was "unique, grotesque and profane."[381] At the time of his marriage, Laveaux had already fathered Marie Dolores' more well-known half-sibling, Marie Laveaux, the Voodoo priestess, after a brief relationship with her mother, Marguerite D'Arcantel.[382] Although it was a short-lived affair, Charles took an interest in his daughter by Marguerite. After the death or disappearance of Laveaux's husband, he helped to establish her in the alcohol business, as shown by his signature on a bond for a license to sell liquor. Marie was referred to in this document as Veuve (Widow) Paris. It also revealed that unlike her educated half-sister, who signed her documents, Laveaux was illiterate, as she signed it with a cross. As Charles put up the security for the bond, Marie Laveaux may have been working in one of his buildings.

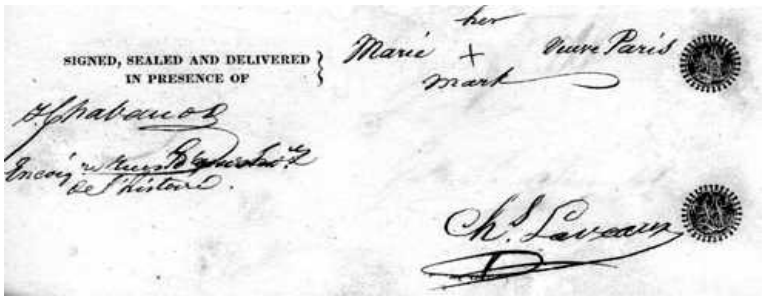

Figure 13: Office of the Mayor, Security Bonds for having a liquor store selling by the pint and above, 1832, New Orleans Public Library Exhibition

Marie Dolores' mother was also a businesswoman. In her succession she was described as owning a delicatessen.[383] For most of their life, Charles and Marie appeared to prosper, as an inventory of their community property after the death of Marie François Dupart evidenced. The estate was valued at $10,631, and the number of enslaved people they owned, put them into the highest economic bracket

[381] John Williamson Crary, Reminiscences of the Old South from 1834-1866 (Pensacola, Perdido Bay Press, 1984), 11

[382] She was at the time in a plaçage relationship with white Frenchman Henri D'Arcantel. After her short relationship with Charles Laveaux, she went back to him. See Carolyn Morrow Long, A New Orleans Voudou Princess; The Legend and Reality of Marie Laveau (University Press of Florida, 2006), 65

[383] New Orleans Public Library, City Archive: Louisiana Parish Estate Files 1804-1846: Laveau, Mde. Charles, neé Marie Françoise Dupart, Fwc, Estate of 1824

for free Black people. At Dupart's death, their community property comprised, "ebony, cherry and mahogany furniture, silverware, china, household linens and utensils, wearing apparel, a horse, three milk cows and their calves, two houses on Dauphine Street between St Philip and Dumaine, a house at the corner of Grand Hommes (Dauphine) and Mysterious Columbus, in the Faubourg Marigny, a tract of land with buildings on Chantilly Road, and eleven adult slaves with three slave children."[384]

Charles and Marie Françoise only had two children, Laurent and Marie Dolores, who was born in 1804.[385] This was an unusually small family, as most married women of the time spent their fertile years in a continuous state of pregnancy, and large families were the norm. Marie Dolores was the younger of the two, her baptismal record describing her as a "griffe*,"* like her mother.[386] She may have been brought up in the house on Dauphine Street (see Figure 14, below) away from Charles' rowdy taverns.[387] However, the details of her early life remain as much a mystery as the other free women of colour in this study. There are no more records of her life until 1818, when, at the tender age of fourteen, she married François Auguste.[388] Fourteen may seem young to be a bride by today's standards, but in nineteenth century New Orleans, Creole girls were considered ready for marriage by their early teens.[389] They also often died young, taken by childbirth, or by New Orleans' many epidemics of disease. Indeed, both Cécille Bonille and Marie Dolores died while only in their thirties.

Like her father, Marie Dolores' husband, François Auguste, was also described a victualler; so, Marie Dolores may have known him through her father's business**.**[390] Carolyn Morrow Long's research discovered a marriage contract which revealed much about their union. In this written document, Marie

[384] Inventory of the Estate of Marie Françoise Fanchon Dupart, Wife of Charles Laveaux Fmc., July 27, 1824, typed translation LWP folder 495. Information courtesy of Carolyn Morrow Long
[385]Archives of the Archdiocese of New Orleans: Baptisms of Free Colored People Vol 13, p 132.
[386] Ibid
[387] Charles Laveau owned two properties on Dauphin Street, 923-929 and 914-918 from 1804-1827. See The Historic New Orleans Collection, Vieux Carré Digital Survey
[388]Archives of the Archdiocese of New Orleans: Marriage of Francisco Augusto and Maria Labeau, Slaves and Free People of Color Marriages, vol. 1, p. 58, act 244
[389] Gehman Mary, *Women and New Orleans*, (Margaret Media Inc, New Orleans, 2000), 11
[390]The Historic New Orleans Collection: In the City Directories of 1822 to 1838 his occupation is listed as victualler and a butcher.

Figure 14: Marie Dolores Laveaux may have lived in this house owned by Charles Laveaux on Dauphine Street. Title: A Curious Building (923-929 Dauphine) Date: [19th century], *Harper's Weekly*

Dolores and Auguste agreed to "hold in common all goods, moveable or immoveable, that they may acquire during marriage." This was in line with Louisiana's property laws, as they appertained to married couples. It was also stipulated that "any debts that either parties may have are to be paid and acquitted by them before the celebration of the marriage and those [debts] that are unknown are to be considered null from the date thereof." This was more likely to have applied to Auguste than Marie Dolores, as it was unlikely that she would have acquired much debt living with her parents. The document also gave details of any goods which would be brought to the marriage. François Auguste declared, "the furniture in his household belonged to the three children of the late Marie Magdalen," presumably a previous wife or partner. Thus, it appears Marie Magdalen had bequeathed her goods to her children after her death, rather than to Auguste. As they were all still living in Auguste's house, she may have died shortly before Auguste and Marie Dolores married. Also, there is no mention as to whether Auguste was the father of any of these children. However, many years later, one of his daughters with Marie Dolores, Lizida, wrote in her will, that she had a close friendship with a woman called Estelle Auguste. Although called "sister" by Lizida, she was born in 1809, only two years after Marie Dolores, making it possible that she was one of these children from Auguste's previous

relationship.[391] Marie Dolores contributed, "a bed, an armoire and a piano, in addition to other moveables for household use," valued at $500, which she had acquired "from the wages gained by her labor and savings and which the said François Auguste acknowledges as the dot (dowry) given to his account."[392] This demonstrated that Marie Dolores was a hard-working young woman, having acquired all these goods through her own employment at such an early age. It also clearly highlighted that François Auguste did not bring much to the marriage. He did not have any goods, and it was unclear whether the house he lived in was owned by him. This further demonstrated the very unequal partnership between Marie Dolores and François Auguste. She was a young woman marrying a much older man, possibly a widower with other children, and who seemed to have little or no money or goods. It did not seem, on the face of it, a very advantageous move for Marie Dolores.

From the records, it was unclear exactly how much older François Auguste was when he married her. According to the Louisiana death records and *The Bee* newspaper, he died in 1873 aged ninety–six, which would have made him already forty-seven when he married Marie Dolores.[393] However, a census entry for 1850 recorded that he was born in 1790, putting him at twenty-eight when he married her, a more reasonable age gap, but still many years older than her.[394] Although this was probably not any kind of love match, convenient strategic alliances were not unusual in New Orleans. As historian Lilian Creté suggests, the expectations surrounding marriage in the City were such that "for the young Creole woman, it was the pursuit of a husband not the pursuit of love, that became her chief preoccupation."[395] Kathryn Venturatos also concurs that marriages were often based on financial considerations rather than romantic ideals, but adds, "with nineteenth century expectations of men and

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[391] New Orleans Public Library, City Archive: Louisiana Orleans Parish Will Books: Louisiana Will Book, Vol 11, 1857-1860, Lizida Auguste, Probate Date: 6 Apr 1858 (Translated from French by author). Carolyn Morrow Long has also ascertained that François Auguste had at least one natural son, François, with a woman named Fatina Detrén, a native of Saint-Domingue. This child was born the year before he married Marie Dolores on June 1, 1817. In the baptismal record the father is identified as Francisco Augusto, *natural de Irlanda*. (Baptism of Francisco Detrén, SLC Baptisms, October 22, 1817, vol. 15, act 911, p. 180 verso, Archdiocesan Archives.)

[392] Notarial Archives: On October 5, 1818, Marie Dolores Laveaux, accompanied by her father, signed a marriage contract with François Auguste before the notary Narcisse Broutin. Courtesy of Carolyn Morrow Long

[393] *The Bee*, 1 December 1873: Obituary of François Auguste

[394] "United States Census, 1850," database *FamilySearch*(https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MCJC-CL1 : 12 April 2016), Francois Auguste, New Orleans, ward 4 (1st municipality), Orleans, Louisiana, United States; citing family 896, NARA microfilm publication M432 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.).

[395] Lilian Creté, *Daily Life in Louisiana 1815-1830* (University of Louisiana Press, 1978), 106

women, and the valorization of wifehood and motherhood, they were expected to last until the death of one of the partners."[396]

It is unclear in this case, if Auguste was Marie Dolores' choice, or her father's. However, there was no record of Charles Laveaux contributing towards his legitimate daughter's dowry, as he did for his natural daughter, Marie Laveau, when she married.[397] This lack of any financial contribution from Charles could suggest a disapproval of the marriage to Auguste, although he had to put his signature to the marriage contract. As a minor, Marie Dolores could not have married without his permission. However, Carolyn Morrow Long's research suggests that the reason Laveaux may have decided to marry his daughter to Auguste, was because it appears Marie Dolores had already given birth to an illegitimate child named Laurent. This may have seriously damaged her marriage prospects in New Orleans' high class free Black society, who were becoming more concerned with emphasizing the moral virtuousness of their community, and especially of their women, during the Antebellum period. Although the child Laurent, was baptized in 1824 as the legitimate son of Marie Dolores and Auguste, two years later in 1826, Auguste and Marie Dolores filed a suit against the godparents, Laurent Charles Laveaux and Madeleine Marie Herveau, stating that the ceremony had been performed by them, without the parents' consent. The Auguste's then filed a petition declaring the child non-legitimate, and that the child's birth had been put forward one year to 1819, so that he appeared to have been born during the marriage of the petitioners. Thus, Charles may have only been too pleased to instigate the marriage of Marie Dolores and François Auguste as a means of solving the problem of the illegitimate child, while signalling his disapproval of her behaviour by not providing a dowry.[398] This may also explain why Marie Dolores married a much older man, of questionable finances and origins, rather than a man from an established New Orleanian free Black family. Auguste's background was also as obscure as his age. The marriage record described him as being from Saint-Domingue, however this was crossed out at a

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[396] Kathryn Venturatos, "New Orleans: The Changing Concept of the Family and its Effect on Louisiana Succession Law" Vol 63, *Louisiana Law Review,* Summer (2003), 1

[397] He gave her a plot of land on Love Street. See Carolyn Morrow Long, *A New Orleans Voudou Princess; The Legend and Reality of Marie Laveau (* University Press of Florida, 2006), 65

[398] Archives of the Archdiocese of New Orleans: Baptism of Lorenzo Auguste (born June 19, 1819), Saint Louis Cathedral Baptisms, November 18, 1824, vol. 18, act 861, p. 170 verso; godparents Laurent Charles Laveaux and Marie Madelaine Herveau, wife of Joseph Cabaret. Courtesy of Carolyn Morrow Long

later date, and replaced by Ireland.[399] Later census records also recorded his birthplace as Ireland. It is possible that he was of Irish birth, as there were small numbers of Black people living in Ireland in the eighteenth century. Many worked as servants of wealthy families, others were tradesmen, soldiers, travelling artists or musicians.[400] However, despite his claim to Irish birth, there was no suggestion that he ever passed for White. He was always described as a free man of colour in various legal documents. If he had passed for White, the Naturalization Act of the 1790s, which declared that "any alien being a free white person, may be admitted to become a citizen of the United States," would have given him the full citizenship denied to free people of colour.[401] In 1825, Auguste travelled from Santiago de Cuba to New Orleans, suggesting that he may have had links there, but his country of origin was still named as being Ireland.[402] This confusion around his identity is similar to that surrounding Hart, and shows the difference between these new immigrants and the established Creole population of New Orleans. These new people could deliberately change their names and obscure their origins, in contrast to the old Creole families who proudly proclaimed their heritage. No doubt Charles Laveaux would have preferred an alliance with another Afro-Creole family of standing in New Orleans, rather than an unknown free man of colour with ambiguous roots. For François Auguste, however, the chance to ally himself with a wealthy and established New Orleanian free Black family, probably outweighed the disadvantages of taking on a wife with another man's child. It certainly appears that he may have benefitted financially from the marriage, whether by association with Charles Laveaux, or through the business efforts of Marie Dolores, as it was only after his marriage that he began to acquire multiple properties.[403] It was only later, and probably with the increasing problems in the marriage, that he decided to legally declare Laurent's illegitimacy.

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[399]Archives of the Archdiocese of New Orleans: See Marriage of Francisco Augusto and Maria Labeau, Slaves and Free People of Color Marriages, vol. 1, p. 58, act 244.

[400] James Walvin, *An African's Life: The Life and Times of Olaudah Equiano, 1745-1797 (*Continuum International Publishing Group, 1998), 165

[401] Clan T. McMahon, *The Global Dimensions of Irish Identity: Race, Nation and the Popular Press* (University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 81

[402] New Orleans, Passenger List Quarterly Abstracts, 1820-1875 [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2011

[403] See The Historic New Orleans Collection, Vieux Carré Survey: Citation of Owners: François Auguste

That it was very much a *marriage de convenance* between Marie Dolores Laveaux and François Auguste, was also evidenced by the way in which it did not take very long for trouble to occur between the ill-matched pair. The marriage began to break down after only a year. In 1819, Auguste went to the extreme measure of placing a notice in the *Louisiana Courier*, announcing, "his wife, Marie Laveaux, having left his bed and board since the sixth day of this month, he is determined to pay no debts of her contracting."[404] This was unusual, because such notices were not generally published in the local newspapers until after a legal separation was sanctioned by the courts. In that case, such announcements were important, alerting creditors to the wife's changed legal status.[405] Thus, it might have been a ploy by Auguste to shame his wife in the eyes of free Black society. However, there must have been some sort of reconciliation, because Marie Dolores and François then went on to have four children between 1819 and 1824.[406] Also, in 1824, Marie Dolores' mother died aged around forty, after what was described as a "lingering illness."[407] The two siblings**,** Laurent and Marie Dolores, then filed a suit against their father to claim their inheritances. Marie Françoise Dupart had died intestate, but under Louisiana Civil Law, one half of the estate, and their mother's separate property, should have been divided between Laurent and Marie Dolores. The children took their father to court, accusing him of withholding sums of money, in particular the dowry brought to the marriage by their mother, amounting to $4,500, and thereby attempting to defraud them. In retaliation, Laveaux claimed that, despite the impressive inventory included in Marie Françoise's estate, after the debts had been settled, there was only $422 remaining, plus the $550 owed to Marie Françoise from the community property, making a grand total of $761.16½. Obviously the dowry and other assets were missing, so Laurent and Marie Dolores eventually had to agree to their father taking charge of the sale of the properties, and

[404]*Louisiana Courier*, 24 November 1819; also cited in Dillon, "Voodoo/Marie the Great," p. 4a, LWP folder 319. Courtesy of Carolyn Morrow Long
[405] Judith Schafer, *Becoming Free, Remaining Free: Manumission and Enslavement in New Orleans: 1846-1862* (Louisiana State University Press, 2003), 35
[406] Marie Henriette Auguste 1820; Eveline Auguste. 1821; Francisca Auguste, 1823; Joseph Jean Auguste, 1824
[407] "Louisiana, Orleans Parish Estate Files, 1804-1846," database with images, *FamilySearch* (https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:JJC1-N38 : 4 December 2014), Marie Françoise Dupart, 1824; citing probate place Orleans Parish, Louisiana, Probate Court, New Orleans City Archives.

discharging all of his debts.[408] Therefore, it appears that, although the Laveaux family had been prosperous, by the time of Dupart's death, their fortunes had reversed. Thus, if François Auguste had also hoped for his wife to receive a large legacy from his seemingly wealthy mother-in-law, he would have been disappointed, possibly creating further tensions.

The marriage between Auguste and Laveaux limped on for another four years, but in 1828 Marie Dolores decided to file for a separation of bed and board.[409] On the day that Marie Dolores filed her separation suit, Auguste placed another notice in the *Louisiana Courier* stating that he, "wishing to put the public on their guard, now declares that he will pay no debts contracted by his wife, Marie Laveaux." Thus, it seems that, as before, Auguste did not mind about letting the public know of his marital and financial problems and was also happy to broadcast the imminent breakdown of his marriage. Separation and divorce were difficult and complicated processes in Antebellum New Orleans. Although the Louisiana Digest of 1808 allowed "separation by bed and board, " a full divorce was not even permitted until 1827.[410] Suits brought against husbands in the eighteenth century were virtually always based on the charge of cruelty, suggesting that this was the most legally acceptable ground for a separation. In the 1820s, Louisiana divorce courts still restricted the grounds on which women could apply for separation or divorce, and courts could easily strip women of the financial support they had as wives.[411]

When suing for separation or divorce, women also often faced opposition from the judicial system because of the "separate spheres" ideology which prevailed in the nineteenth century. Deemed by scholars to have been as a result of the growing middle class, and anxiety about the maintenance of

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[408]New Orleans Public Library, City Archive: Marie Laveau wife of François Auguste vs Charles Laveau, Suit no.387; Laurent Laveau vs Charles Laveau, Suit 392, Court of Probates, microfilm, Courtesy of Carolyn Morrow Long

[409]New Orleans Public Library, City Archive: Marie Laveaux Fwc, wife of François Auguste vs François Auguste, Parish Court, August-October 1828, docket number: 5041, Microfilm, Courtesy of Carolyn Morrow Long

[410] Sara Brooks, "Women and the Law of Property under Louisiana Civil Law 1782-1835." (PhD thesis, University of Wisconsin, 2001), 4

[411] Glenda Riley, *Divorce: An American Tradition* (Oxford University Press, 1991), 28, 50, 53. Also a full divorce was only allowed by the courts for adultery, gross ill treatment and conviction for a serious crime. Separation could be granted "in the case of public defamation, chronic drunkenness, cruel treatment and outrages…that rendered living together insupportable," in addition to the other reasons already cited for a full divorce. See also Ashley Baggett, *Intimate Partner Violence in New Orleans: Gender, Race and Reform* (University Press of Mississippi 2017)

class identity and hegemony, women were expected to remain in the domestic sphere, looking after the home and children; while men were in the public sphere, conducting business away from the home, and providing for the family. Nineteenth century ideology therefore considered that the ideal woman was someone who used all her time in looking after her children, and making the home run smoothly.[412] Glenda Riley suggests that this concept of separate spheres could have been instrumental in increasing pressures on marriage, as these delineated roles amplified the differences between men and women, affecting their world view, and their values.[413] This ideology also promoted the view that, as the provider, the man had ultimate control over his wife and family.[414] However, the sentimentalization of women and motherhood had also created an expectation of benevolent patriarchy, whereby traditional male misbehaviours towards their wives such as authoritarian control, physical abuse, drinking and unfaithfulness were increasingly frowned upon. Husbands who continued to indulge in these vices were therefore at added risk of finding themselves in court, mostly on charges of cruelty.[415] According to Ashley Baggett, in the case of a divorce suit, counsel often garnered increased sympathy for women by "the use of high emotive words such as 'most violent' or 'barbarously beaten." Lawyers then sought to prove that these vicious and uncivilized attacks served to demonstrate how these men violated societal expectations of manhood, proving that they were therefore barbaric and undeserving of any support from the public and the courts.[416] Thus, the divorce courts were playing a role in helping to define the new cultural boundaries of behaviour toward women.[417] Although these petitions resulting from marital abuse were a way for women to escape from a troubled marriage, yet they also highlighted the perspective that wives needed added protection from their husbands, thus further negating any notion

[412]Kay Broadman, "The Ideology of Domesticity: The Regulation of the Household Economy in Victorian Women's Magazines." *Victorian Periodicals Review,* Vol.33, No. 2 (Summer, 2000), 150
[413] Glenda Riley, *Divorce: An American Tradition* (Oxford University Press, 1991), 48
[414]Ashley Baggett, *Intimate Partner Violence in New Orleans: Gender, Race and Reform* (University Press of Mississippi 2017), 5
[415] Robert L. Griswold, "Divorce and the Legal Redefinition of Victorian Manhood "in *Meanings of Manhood: Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian America* edited collection by Mark C. Carnes & Clyde Griffen (University of Chicago Press, 1990); 96-111
[416] Ashley Baggett, *Intimate Partner Violence in New Orleans: Gender, Race and Reform* (University Press of Mississippi 2017), 5
[417] Robert L. Griswold, "Divorce and the Legal Redefinition of Victorian Manhood "in *Meanings of Manhood: Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian America* edited collection by Mark C. Carnes & Clyde Griffen (University of Chicago Press, 1990); 96-111

of gender equality.[418] As Robert L. Griswold argues, the courts were influenced by Victorian conceptions of manhood and womanhood; thus," judges and jurists expected that men temper their excesses and strive for middle-class respectabilities, and expected wives to be ladylike and to minister to the moral needs of their families."[419]

Although by 1828, Marie Dolores could have filed for a full divorce, there are a number of possible reasons why she decided to petition for a separation of bed and board. Firstly, it required less grounds to file for separation than divorce in Louisiana, so she stood more chance of succeeding in her petition. Also, separation of bed and board carried with it a virtual guarantee of receiving alimony. However, the disadvantages were that generally the husband retained management of the joint property, nor could she remarry during her husband's lifetime.[420] Subsequent events also suggest that Marie Dolores may not have wished to completely erase François Auguste from her domestic and business life. However, she cited physical abuse as the reason for wanting to separate from him, testifying**:**

> **[**She had] always lived with him and behaved like…a dutiful, tender and affectionate wife, and not withstanding all her efforts to preserve peace and harmony at home and to win the affections of her said husband, she has been intentionally ill-treated by him and of late been severely beaten without any provocation on her part whatever; that the excesses, cruel treatment and outrages of the said François Auguste …are of a dark nature to render their living together unsupportable; that he has not only ordered but actually turned her out of the matrimonial domicile and threatened to ill-use her if she should return thereto, and that in consequence thereof, your Petitioner [she] is reduced to the necessity of receiving from an acquaintance, Madame Montplaisir Thomas, that hospitality which is denied to her by the father of her children.[421]

Thus, Marie Dolores' description of her demeanour and behaviour very much reflected the standards expected of a Victorian wife and mother. She also placed much emphasis on her affectionate behaviour

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[418] Ibid
[419] Ibid
[420] Glenda Riley, *Divorce: An American Tradition* (Oxford University Press, 1991), 53
[421] New Orleans Public Library, City Archive: Marie Laveaux Fwc wife of François Auguste v François Auguste, Parish Court Aug-Oct 1828, docket no: 5041, Courtesy of Carolyn Morrow Long

towards her husband, and her attempts to win his regard. Therefore, she and her defence counsel were also playing on the Victorian cultural redefinition of manhood, which required that a husband should have a close emotional and physical tie with his wife and children.[422] Witness testimony also demonstrated that Auguste was not willing to try and resolve the situation between him and his wife. A. Maurises recalled how he "went to see the husband in order to perform reconciliation between them [and] far from listening to such an offer told him that if she dared show herself he would break her bones with a big stick which he showed to him."[423] According to Ashley Baggett, use of weaponry against a female was not unusual in Antebellum New Orleans. In fourteen of the pre-war cases she examined, the defendant used an object to attack his wife. "The weapons and knives, trowels, slingshots, shoes, hand irons gives insight into the incidents. In these cases, men grabbed whatever lay nearby and attacked their wives in the home."[424] She suggests that the use of physical objects to abuse women formed an even more valuable tool for the counsel to argue in their favour, as it further emphasized the man's violent temper, lack of control and respectability. [425] Marie Dolores could have petitioned for a separation due to Auguste's adultery, as it came out during the trial that he was unfaithful to her with one of the enslaved women living in the family house. A witness stated, "that he heard him say that he had one of his house as a wife and would continue to keep her as such." [426] However, the unremitting use of wife abuse in Louisiana as a reason for separations and divorces, suggested that during the Antebellum period, this was still the best way of obtaining a favourable outcome.[427]

Auguste's defence tried to tear down the petition of Marie Dolores by attacking her claims of wifely virtue, stating," the testimonies contained manifold errors," and that what happened between him and Marie Dolores "was normal for a marriage." It was also alleged that Marie Dolores was a bad mother, "owing to her improvidence, carelessness, and habit of being constantly out of doors." She was

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[422] Robert L. Griswold, "Divorce and the Legal Redefinition of Victorian Manhood, "in *Meanings of Manhood: Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian America*, edited collection by Mark C. Carnes & Clyde Griffen (University of Chicago Press, 1990), 96-111

[423] New Orleans Public Library, City Archive: Marie Laveaux Fwc, wife of François Auguste v François Auguste, Parish Court Aug-Oct 1828, docket no: 5041, Courtesy of Carolyn Morrow Long

[424] Ashley Baggett, *Intimate Partner Violence in New Orleans: Gender, Race and Reform* (University Press of Mississippi 2017), 39

[425] Ibid

[426] New Orleans Public Library, City Archive: Marie Laveaux Fwc, wife of François Auguste v François Auguste, Parish Court Aug-Oct 1828, docket no: 5041, Courtesy of Carolyn Morrow Long

[427] Glenda Riley, *Divorce: An American Tradition* (Oxford University Press, 1991), 28

also, "unworthy by her habitual dissipation after the birth of her young children."[428] Thus, the defence countered the emotive language of prosecutors by suggesting that Marie Dolores was an inadequate mother, a role which was considered her most important position in life, and by also claiming that she was hardly ever at home in the domestic sphere, where she belonged. However, this testimony also revealed much about Marie Dolores' marriage with Auguste. As Riley suggests, these cases cannot always be taken at face value, because there were often other underlying factors which contributed to the breakdown of the marriage.[429] This marriage was one of inequality from the start, with the difference in status and wealth between Marie Dolores and her husband. Auguste may have resented the fact that his wife could bring so much in material goods to the marriage. Also, Marie Dolores worked before her marriage, and her mother was a businesswoman, so it is highly likely she was running a business which required her to be in the public sphere like her husband. She may indeed have been more successful in her business life than him. Therefore, Marie Dolores' bid for separation was probably as a result of marital abuse, but this was also most likely to have been combined with a struggle over gender roles, and distribution of power and property.

Many of the witnesses testified in favour of Marie Dolores' motherhood and domestic skills. One of them, while allowing that Auguste was "an honest man," defended the accusations against her, noting that "his children and slaves are well kept and dutiful…," the second statement seemingly contradicting the first.[430] Another also saw "the wife at home, taking care of her children and contributing to the cleaning of the house."[431] The judge therefore awarded Marie Dolores her separation of bed and board from Auguste. Importantly, he also gave her custody of the children, thereby further negating Auguste's charges of her unfitness as a mother. It was still unusual at this time to grant full custody to the mother. As late as 1836, parental rights still conferred family authority primarily to the father. The mother, "was entitled to no power, but only to reverence and respect. Consequently, a

[428]New Orleans Public Library, City Archives: Marie Laveaux Fwc, wife of François Auguste v François Auguste, Parish Court Aug-Oct 1828, docket no: 5041,: Courtesy of Carolyn Morrow Long
[429] Glenda Riley, *Divorce: An American Tradition* (Oxford University Press, 1991), 28
[430] New Orleans Public Library, City Archives: Marie Laveaux Fwc, wife of François Auguste v François Auguste, Parish Court Aug-Oct 1828, docket no: 5041,: Courtesy of Carolyn Morrow Long
[431] Ibid

husband had a paramount right to custody."[432] Many women therefore stayed married to avoid losing their children. English-born actress Frances Kemble stayed with her husband, Georgia planter, Pierre Butler for many years because of this fear. Eventually, she left Butler who divorced her for desertion in 1849. The decree gave her a yearly allowance, but she could only visit her children for two months in a year. Thus, although she gained her personal, social, and economic independence, she essentially lost her children.[433] However, the idealization of motherhood also encouraged some judges to reject the traditional notion that children belonged to their fathers. By the 1820s, some judges had begun to come round to the view that children were better off with their mothers. They also considered the matter of guilt in making child custody decisions. If a female petitioner could prove her husband's guilt to a judge's satisfaction, he was more likely to award her custody of the children.[434] It appears therefore that this may have been the case in Marie Dolores' petition, as the judge also validated Auguste's guilt by granting her a generous separation settlement. In addition to the $500 she brought to the marriage, Marie Dolores was awarded half the couple's community property, and Auguste was ordered to pay court costs, alimony, and child support. The couple's assets at the time were "mahogany and cherry furniture, china, silver ware, a looking-glass, kitchen furniture and washing tubs." The community assets totalled $7,117.50, half of which were awarded to Marie Dolores.[435] By this time, the couple were prosperous, as both dealt in the buying and selling of property.

The relationship between Marie Dolores and François Auguste was certainly a complicated one, as they did not entirely separate after the court case. It was no doubt difficult living as a separated woman in New Orleans. Laveaux's daughter wrote of the scandal and judgements of other people in the free Black community, following the estrangement.[436] This may have been because of the community's increasing desire to be seen as respectable responsible citizens of New Orleans. Many in general society also feared that these increased divorce petitions would threaten the separate spheres' ideology by blurring the lines of sexual differences. Opponents of divorce also used lifelong monogamy

[432] Michael Grossberg , *Governing the Hearth* (The University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 235
[433] See J.C. Furness, *Fanny Kemble: Leading Lady of the Nineteenth Century Stage* (New York, 1982)
[434] Glenda Riley, *Divorce: An American Tradition* (Oxford University Press, 1991), 52
[435] New Orleans Public Library, City Archive, Marie Laveaux Fwc, wife of François Auguste v François Auguste, Parish Court Aug-Oct 1828, docket no: 5041, Courtesy of Carolyn Morrow Long
[436] See the part of Chapter Five about Lizida Auguste's life for further details

as a trope for law and order, making divorce socially subversive.[437] Therefore, despite still describing herself as being "separated from the body and goods of Auguste" in her will of 1829, Marie Dolores was still living at 159 Philip Street, which was also the address of her husband, indicating that they still shared a house together.[438] Marie Dolores and Auguste also had other children after their legal separation.[439] Perhaps Auguste's defeat at the hands of the judicial system had chastened his ego, making him a better husband. However, it appears that societal pressures, and indeed possibly even financial ones, may have affected her decision to stay with him. Although the judge's ruling gave her half control of the couple's assets, it was perhaps difficult for them to separate their business interests, and possibly more advantageous for her financially to remain with Auguste. There was also the difficult problem of alimony. Even when a judge ordered a man to pay alimony, it was often difficult to enforce, and the default rate was high.[440] Thus, it may have been social and financial expediency which caused her to remain living with Auguste after the separation was granted. She still had some control over half the assets, and therefore a measure of increased independence in the marriage.

After her will was written in 1829, there were no more records of her life until 1839, when Marie Dolores went to France. Probably her relationship with Auguste had deteriorated again, as she made a second will before her departure. She had also moved out of the family home by this time, and was residing on Dauphine Street, in a house which had belonged to her mother. In this new will, she still described herself as being separated from Auguste. By this time, she also had "seven children, all minor, issue of my marriage with François Auguste: Laurent Auguste, Henriette Auguste, Lizida Auguste, Hermogene Auguste, Mirtile Auguste, Telesfort Auguste, and Hermina Auguste."[441] However, despite being seemingly further estranged from François Auguste by this time, she still named him as her executor and "defender of her property," thus showing that she still thought he was the best person to look after her financial affairs, and those of her children after her death. She then departed for

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[437] Norma Basch, *Framing American Divorce From the Revolutionary Generation to the Victorian* (University of California Press, 1999), 61, 63
[438] Notarial Archives: First Will of Marie (Dolores) Charles Laveau, January 19, 1829, Acts of Louis T Caire, vol 6, p.55, act 66
[439] Louise Augustine, 1833; Marie Hermina, 1835
[440] Glenda Riley, *Divorce: An American Tradition* (Oxford University Press, 1991),52-53
[441] New Orleans Public Library, City Archive: Louisiana Parish Will Books 1837-1842: Marie Laveaux, March 25, 1839

France, dying shortly after, on June 22, 1839. Her succession confirmed that she "died in the city of Paris in the Kingdom of France."[442] Her body was returned to be interred at Saint Louis cemetery No.1 on October 29, 1839.[443] It seems likely that two of her children, Henriette and Lizida, accompanied their mother to France, while the others presumably remained with their father. New Orleans' passenger ship records of 1840 showed that an H. Auguste, an eighteen year old female, accompanied by a Françoise (no surname) who was two years younger, travelled from Le Havre to New Orleans, shortly after Marie Dolores' death in 1839, suggesting that they returned from France after their mother's passing. [444] A "negress" belonging to Monsieur Auguste also arrived on the same ship at a different time in 1840.[445] There is no way of knowing how long Marie Dolores intended to remain in France, or whether, like some other wealthy free people of colour at this time, she had decided to live there permanently. She may have also wished to escape the scandal and gossip surrounding the end of her marriage in New Orleans. However, her untimely death meant that she lived there for only a short time.

Like Cécille Bonille, Marie Dolores' property had to be sold immediately to cover her debts, which amounted to the large sum of $7236. However, unlike Bonille, Marie Dolores was a wealthy woman until her death. According to her succession, her properties consisted of:

> A lot of land, 344 Burgundy Street with buildings, a lot of land in Faubourg Marigny, with one brick house, 157 Champs Elysees, a lot of land in Faubourg Franklin with a brick building, two lots of ground adjoining each other in Faubourg Franklin, two other lots of land in the same Faubourg, two lots of ground in Faubourg Bouligny, parish of Jefferson, Delphine, a creole negress, aged about 30 years, a cook washer, Marchande, with her child Merantine, aged 10 years, Marie, a negresse, aged about 34 years, cook,

[442] New Orleans Public Library, City Archive, Louisiana Parish Files 1804-1836: Succession of Marie Laveaux,1841; Petition of François Auguste
[443] Archives of the Archdiocese of New Orleans: Saint Louis Cemetery Records: Interment Book, St. Louis Cemetery No.1. 1839
[444] Ancestry.com. *New Orleans, Passenger List Quarterly Abstracts, 1820-1875* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2011. Lizida may have been a pet name from her second name, Elizabeth – see also *Orleans Death Indices 1804-1876*; Volume: *14*; Page: *265*
[445] The ships were both called Lafayette coming from Havre.

> washer and ironer, Louis, an American negro, aged about 18 years, a labourer and George, a negro aged 14 years, house servant.[446]

She also left instructions for one of her slaves, called Sans Souci, to be manumitted after her death, and left him the quite considerable sum of 1200 piastres.[447]

Marie Dolores Laveaux obviously endured a miserable marriage, which was probably arranged by her parents, as a result of her having had an illegitimate child. However, it did not stop her from working to become wealthier and ensure the future of her family. Indeed, according to the witnesses in the court case, she successfully combined motherhood with business interests, thus showing herself to be a resourceful and hard-working woman. The abuse from Auguste may have been because of her independence and business acumen, giving him less control over her life, than that expected of a nineteenth century husband. Although she still lived with Auguste for several years after the separation, the generous award from the court case meant that she could have her independence, if she so wished. By the time of her death, it appears that she may have finally broken away from Auguste and was on the verge of starting a new independent life in Paris with her two daughters, when her life was tragically cut short.

Conclusion

The life histories of these two women in many ways represented the changing cultural scene of New Orleans, and changes in attitude towards men's and women's societal roles. The similarities in their experiences were in part as a result of their gender. Both women struggled because of the increasing rigidities of societal expectations for women, one by her strict maintenance of her position, even after the death of a partner; and the other, by staying with a potentially violent husband, even after legal separation.

Although Cécille's life appeared to reflect the relationship choices expected of a free Black woman, by following in the family's tradition, and choosing to be with a White man; yet her life also

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[446] New Orleans Public Library, City Archive: Louisiana Wills and Probate Records 1756-1984: Marie Laveau, New Orleans, 1841
[447] Ibid

demonstrated how even plaçage relationships were changing. Unlike her mother, and indeed many of her forbears, who often experienced several transitory relationships, Cécille and Hart were both committed to a long-lasting partnership, as demonstrated by his responsible attitude towards her and their children. Even though Cécille also deviated somewhat from the family tradition, by conducting a relationship with an immigrant to New Orleans; yet she was still proud of her status as a light skinned Afro-Creole, with connections to elite White society. Her standing in the community was obviously very important to her, as she proclaimed her background and affluence by the clothes she wore, and even by her funeral, after her life was over. She also utilized her connections with high status White society, by gaining the assistance of elite White males in helping her to buy property and to advise her on legal matters. In her attitude towards her identity, she also very much echoed the sentiments of the free Black nuns in the previous chapter, who, led by her half-sister, also liked to portray themselves as aristocratic free women of colour. She struggled to maintain her position after the death of Hart but did not wish to relinquish the title of widow or follow in her mother's footsteps by taking another partner, even though she was only in her twenties when Hart died. Thus, she also showed how important it was to her that this relationship was legitimized as a near-marriage, even many years after Hart's death.

The two women's lives also reflect the ongoing theme of the importance of class within free Black society, as discussed in the previous chapter, with the difference in culture and values of the women and their families. If Cécille and her family saw themselves as "gentlewomen," the culture and identity of Marie Dolores and her family was that of pragmatic businesspeople, working in the free Black community, with little connection to elite White society. These people were interested in creating dynasties by allying themselves with other free Black families of equal wealth and standing. Respectability, especially on the part of women, was also as important for them as for the higher-class free people of colour, as they also sought to further distance themselves from an enslaved past. Although Marie Dolores may have been relegated to marrying an immigrant because of her previous indiscretions, François Auguste turned out to be a good businessman, even if he was a terrible husband, and the family prospered economically.

While both women were subject to patriarchal and social control, it appears that, as a married woman, Marie Dolores ultimately may have had an advantage over Cécille, with more protection under

the legal system. While Marie Dolores suffered because of a problematic marriage, and the domestic abuse of her husband, eventually through her separation, she had access to her own money, and thus increased independence, and the ability to start a new life for herself. In contrast, while Cécille appeared to have made an economically advantageous match, after Hart's death, she lost most of the money he had given her, to his legal heirs. After this, she seems to have struggled financially until her demise.

This chapter has mainly looked at the domestic partnerships of the two women case studies, however, it has also touched on their business activities. Like many free women of colour, both made money by the buying and selling of real estate, and by renting out houses. Marie Dolores may have also owned businesses inherited from her mother. The next chapter will take this research further, by examining more closely the business activities of two other free Black women. It will look at how they contributed to New Orleans' economy, and to the cultural life of the free Black community, through the creation of their businesses and institutions.

Chapter Four

The Free Black Businesswomen of New Orleans

> *After 1815 she always knew Mandeville as a 'grosse marchande' (big businesswoman). She always had 5 or more negresses selling for her, besides these, 8 or 10 other persons sold for her on commission*.[448]

This chapter will provide a study of free Black businesswomen in the Antebellum period by looking in detail at the lives of two of them, Eulalie Mandeville, and Marie Couvent, who both came from very different backgrounds. Eulalie Mandeville was an Afro-Creole woman with impressive connections to New Orleans' high-class White families, whereas Marie Couvent was a formerly enslaved woman of purely African descent, and a refugee from Saint-Domingue. Despite their different origins, they both were successful property-owning businesswomen. Eulalie Mandeville became one of the richest women in New Orleans and as detailed in the quote above, even becoming known as a "big businesswoman" because of the uncommonly large number of women working for her. However, given that there was often little equality of opportunity in employment for those women considered to be at the bottom of free Black society, it could be counted as possibly even more remarkable that Marie Couvent also became a successful businesswoman. Most free Black women did not become as wealthy as Eulalie or Marie, although the challenges faced by them, and the strategies they used to attain their prosperity, were very much applicable to all free Black women wishing to earn a living in New Orleans. While the vast majority of these women lived their lives in obscurity, both Mandeville and Couvent left their mark in the archives, thereby helping to shed light on the life experiences of these free Black female entrepreneurs. The chapter will therefore compare the two women's life experiences, by focusing on the important issues of economic security, kinship, and community. Study of their lives will also highlight how, despite many adversities, some free women of colour could successfully enter the world of business and become respected by New Orleans' society for their skills and talents.

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[448] *Nicolas Theodore Macarty v. Eulalie Mandeville* (Supreme Court of Louisiana Historical Archives at the Earl K. Long Library University of New Orleans) 106 U.S. 61 (1846-1861), Testimony of the Widow Chavenet, 626

Through their participation in New Orleans' thriving economy, Mandeville and Couvent were continuing the example of their forbears from the colonial era, who were the first to achieve increased economic stability through their entrepreneurial efforts. The chapter will therefore begin with an examination of the history of employment for free Black women, looking at what motivated them in their desire for wealth and property, and how and why some of them became such successful businesswomen, despite the disadvantages of their race and sex. It will also further explore the nuances of the caste and class system of the free Black community in New Orleans, by consideration of how these societal factors shaped free Black women's employment prospects, often obstructing those considered to be at the bottom layer of free Black society from achieving the same economic prosperity as those at the top. It will also look further at the controversial issue of slaveholding amongst the free Black community, as both women bought and sold enslaved people, and used them in their businesses. Indeed, the quotation at the beginning of the chapter illustrates how Mandeville used enslaved women to sell her wares. The chapter will also continue its examination of the beneficial effects of the various networks instituted by these women, which often provided a support system, as well as enhancing their prospects for economic stability.

Jessica Johnson in her groundbreaking work suggests that these Afro-Creole businesswomen in New Orleans were continuing the resistance shown by their African ancestors in Senegambia who "refused to be bound by their rights to their bodies, or their property."[449] In Senegambia, the acquisition of real estate and enslaved people gave women of African descent status and position in society.[450] This was also the case in New Orleans where the "possession of material goods allowed women of color to represent themselves as belonging to a certain class."[451] Distancing themselves from the spectre of poverty was also a way of preserving their free status and shielding themselves from discrimination. Therefore, the accumulation of capital also gave these women other beneficial advantages beyond the purely economic, because "wealth and the connections that accompanied it, also allowed a number of

[449] Jessica Marie Johnson, *Wicked Flesh: Black Women, Intimacy and Freedom in the Atlantic World* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020), 17
[450] Ibid, 61
[451] Amrita Chakrabati Myers, *Forging Freedom: Black Women in the Pursuit of Liberty in Antebellum Charleston* (University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 114

free black women to file (and win) lawsuits in various courts."[452] Thus, it could be argued that the employment of these women, and their visibility in a sphere that was seen mainly as the prerogative of men, may have also given free Black women the confidence and connections to challenge the White dominant hierarchy in court. During the Antebellum period, judicial records have shown that many did indeed test the system in this way, including two of the women in this study, Cècille Bonille and Eulalie Mandeville. The next part of the chapter will therefore consider the evolution of these Black women entrepreneurs, and their transformation into successful free Black businesswomen like Mandeville and Couvent.

The Rise of the Free Black Female Entrepreneur

The history of free Black female entrepreneurs is a twofold one, evolving as it did from their African and enslaved pasts. During French and Spanish rule, some enterprising enslaved people, who were living on plantations, began to sell the surplus vegetables and fruit which they had cultivated in their allotted plots, in the streets or markets of New Orleans.[453] As a result of their business acumen, some enslaved people began to have money, and therefore buying power in New Orleans. This is further evidenced by a recommendation from the local procurador to the Cabildo in 1769, that merchants should be allowed to open their shops on Sundays in order to sell goods to enslaved people. Sundays were designated as their day of leisure as also laid down in the Spanish Code Noir.[454] Enslaved women vendors began to dominate in the streets of New Orleans. These numerous marchandes, not only added to the economics of New Orleans, but also enhanced the local colour and diversity of its life, as an added attraction to the curious traveller. This is evidenced by the nineteenth century *Historical Sketchbook and Guide to New Orleans* which stated: "There are many colored marchandes selling callas and cakes, milk and coffee women, carrying their immense cans well balanced on their turbaned heads."[455] Benjamin Henry Latrobe also noted that some of these women provided a door-to-door

[452] Ibid
[453] Louisiana Code Noir 1724, Articles XX11 and XX11
[454] Jerah Johnson, *Congo Square in New Orleans* (Louisiana Landmark Society, New Orleans, 2011), 12-13
[455] *Historical Sketchbook and Guide to New Orleans*, edited and compiled by leading writers of New Orleans Press (New York, Will H Coleman, New York, 1885), 13

service: “In every street, during the whole day, women, chiefly black women, are met carrying baskets upon their heads and calling at the doors of houses. These baskets contain assortments of dry goods, sometimes, to appearance, to a considerable amount.”[456] He went on to say, “it was not then, nor is it now, the fashion for ladies to go shopping. The Creole families stick still to the peddlers.”[457] Thus, while White middle-class Creole women were often confined to their houses by adherence to public convention, the marchandes moved freely in the public sphere.

Figure 15: A marchande selling her wares in New Orleans, Century Magazine 1886

That some free women of colour became successful saleswomen from the colonial era onwards, is evident from the actions of Don Fernando Alzar & Company, who in 1797, together with fifty other mercadores (merchants) petitioned the Cabildo (City Hall) to restrict the numbers of enslaved and free Black women selling merchandise in the French market and on the streets of New Orleans.[458] They obviously saw them as a threat to their livelihoods and also as an affront to White patriarchal supremacy. In eighteenth-century Charleston, these Black female market vendors were also not always looked upon with approval by White society. In 1786, jurymen complained of the “many idle negro wenches, selling dry goods, cakes, rice etc. in the markets.” Four years later, market women were similarly described as “loose, idle, and disorderly.” Some complainants characterized these women as “insolent, abusive,

Calas are dumplings composed primarily of cooked rice, yeast, sugar, eggs, and flour; the resulting batter is deep-fried. It is traditionally a breakfast dish, served with coffee or cafe au lait, and has a mention in most Creole cuisine cookbooks.

[456] Benjamin Henry Latrobe, *The Journal of Latrobe. Being the Notes and Sketches of an Architect, Naturalist and Traveler in the US from 1796-1820* (D Appleton, New York, 1905),202..

[457] Ibid. 203

[458] Kimberley S. Hangar, “Desiring Total Tranquility and Not Getting It: Conflict Involving Free Black Women in Spanish New Orleans *“The Americas*, Vol. 54, No. 4 (April 1998), 549

notorious, and impudent.*"*[459]These comments suggest that even in the colonial period, Black female street vendors were already showing their increased confidence by interacting with their customers in a more equal manner. By not being submissive, which was considered appropriate for their race and sex, this behaviour was labelled as being disruptive. Kimberley S. Hangar also suggests that this conduct, which was deemed antisocial by some, was also the way in which free Black women fought back against White authority. She says: "Frustrated with a patriarchal, racist society that discriminated against them as non-white and women, libres occasionally lashed back at their oppressors with venomous tongues."[460] However, despite the unpopularity of these women vendors in some quarters of society, these African-American women still came to dominate the trades of marketing.[461] Olwell suggests that by showing their superior business skills in the domination of a service which was used by both Black and White people, Black women began to challenge the notions of White supremacy and patriarchal authority in a slave society. [462] Thus, these women paved the way for their empowerment by virtue of their employment.

Apart from becoming market vendors, enslaved women also used skills learnt in bondage, such as sewing or laundry, to earn extra money for themselves, and eventually to purchase their freedom.[463] Some of these women then went on to become property owners, sometimes owning multiple properties, and adding to their wealth by renting rooms or even entire houses.[464] It was also not unusual for free Black entrepreneurs to purchase enslaved people to work in their businesses. In Charleston, so many free Black businesswomen held enslaved people, that they eventually dominated slaveholding within

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[459] Robert Olwell, "Loose, Idle & Disorderly Slave Women in the Eighteenth Century Charleston Market Place" in *Black Women and Slavery in the Americas: More than Chattel*, edited collection by David Barry Gaspar and Darlene Clark Hine (Indiana University Press, Bloomington & Indianapolis, 1996), 97-110

[460] Kimberley S. Hangar, "Desiring Total Tranquility and not Getting it: Conflict Involving Free Black Women in Spanish New Orleans." *The Americas*, Vol.54, No.4 (Apr 1998), 551

[461] Ibid. 549

[462] Robert Olwell, "Loose, Idle & Disorderly Slave Women in the Eighteenth-Century Charleston Market Place" in *Black Women and Slavery in the Americas: More than Chattel,* edited collection by David Barry Gaspar and Darlene Hine Clark (Indiana University Press, Bloomington & Indianapolis, 1996), 97-110

[463] Virginia Meacham Gould, *Coastal Encounters: The Transformation of the Gulf South in the Eighteenth Century* (University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 158

[464] Kimberley S. Hangar, "Avenues to Freedom Open to New Orleans' Black Population 1769-1779." *Louisiana History, The Journal of Louisiana Historical Association,* Vol 31, No 3 (Summer 1990), 140-141

the free Black community there.[465] Both of the two women studied in this chapter were slaveholders, and each case shows their differing attitudes towards enslaved people. Mandeville's stance may be explained by the research of Michael P. Johnson and James L. Roark, which suggests that Black offspring of White men, who received a privileged upbringing, like Eulalie Mandeville, often completely divorced themselves from their enslaved forbears, thus also making it more likely that they would become exploitative slaveholders. However, Marie Couvent was also a slaveholder, even though she was born in Africa, and was enslaved until adulthood. Although some of her relationships with enslaved people were benevolent, she also bought and sold many of these people for economic reasons, and possibly for enhanced standing within her adopted society. Entitlement to freedom passed through the maternal line, so the children of free women of colour were automatically considered free as well. Free Black women also bequeathed their property to their offspring, thus helping to ensure their own dynasty's continued economic stability. The next part of the chapter will study in more detail how these women amassed their wealth and property, by looking at the main avenues of employment available to free Black women.

Free Black Women's Employment Opportunities

Chakrabati Myers argues that free Black women were often severely limited in their choice of occupation, as public opinion influenced the kind of employment that was considered suitable for women of colour. She writes:

> The types of jobs that black women were permitted to practice were thought to require slave-like skills and were thus believed to be particularly suited to black people;… most of these jobs were also seen as being inherently female; and the majority of these positions, being both raced and sexed, paid poorly.[466]

[465] Michael P. Johnson and James L. Roark (eds) No *Chariot Let Down: Charleston's Free People of Color on the Eve of the Civil War* (New York & London, W Norton & Co. 1984), 25
[466] Amarita Chakrabati Myers, *Forging Freedom: Black Women in the Pursuit of Liberty in Antebellum Charleston* (University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 43

Jane E. Dabel's analysis also showed how lighter skinned "mulatto" women often held jobs requiring specific skills such as seamstress, while Black African women were disproportionally represented in the jobs requiring lesser skills, such as washerwomen.[467] This indicates that although Chakrabati was correct in arguing that free Black women were dominant in roles demanding feminine skills learnt in slavery, skin colour was also an important factor in determining occupation and earning power. In Southern society, popular opinion held that mixed ancestry conferred intelligence and attractiveness, therefore Afro-Creoles were more likely to be employed in the household, whereas their darker counterparts were more often seen in the fields. Lighter skinned women therefore learnt more transferable skills such as sewing, and in general, were taught manners and refinement to serve in the house. After having gained their freedom, these skills allowed them many advantages, including the benefits of better pay, having a cleaner work environment, and less physical exertion. For example, free women classified as being "mulatto" worked almost exclusively in the position of seamstress.[468] The more highly skilled sometimes became dressmakers who could design and create outfits. The most famous of these was Elizabeth Keckley, a free Black woman who established a successful dressmaking business in Washington DC, serving as dressmaker to both Varina Davis, first lady of the Confederacy and Mary Todd Lincoln, first lady of the USA.[469] However, Dabel's research would not have included the business activities of certain Afro-Creole women from the higher echelons of free Black society, like Eulalie Mandeville, who often participated in, or were the product of a plaçage liaison with a high status White man. Their businesses were not generally advertised in the business directory, and their occupations not listed in the census.[470]

Although Dabel's research shows that skin colour played a significant part in employment, it was not the only predictor of economic success. There were other factors, including experience in a particular area, or astute business skills, which also allowed some free Black women, considered as

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[467] See Jane E. Dabel, "My Ma Went to Work Every Mornin': Color, Gender & Occupation in New Orleans 1840-1860."*Louisiana History, The Journal of Louisiana Historical Association*, Vol 41, No 2 (Spring 2000)
[468] Ibid. 225
[469] Virginia Reynolds, "Slaves to Fashion Not Society: Elizabeth Keckley & Washington D.C's African American Dressmakers 1860-1870." *Washington History*, Vol. 26, No.2 (Fall 2014), 92
[470] Virginia Meacham Gould, *Coastal Encounters: The Transformation of the Gulf South in the Eighteenth Century* (University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 162

from the lower ranks of free Black society, to defy the odds and become wealthy. For example, having an especially recognized or valued skill such as nursing or hairdressing was another way in which these women accumulated wealth. They became lucrative occupations for free Black women. Enslaved women had often used herbal remedies on the plantations, their skills handed down from mother to daughter, eventually translating into profitable paid employment.[471] In a city as unhealthy as New Orleans, nursing was especially prized, as prominent New Orleans' citizen, Henry Castellanos noted:

> Whenever a neighbour got sick, or during the season of epidemics, it was a noble site [sic] to see these people engaged in their holy ministry and vying for one another in preparing medicinal antidotes, of many of which they possessed the secret. They were adept in the knowledge of the curative properties of certain herbs and roots...In periods of public calamity they were always to be seen in the front ranks cheerfully performing every service assigned to them. During epidemics, the females braved every danger and were considered by our physicians as the most competent and attentive nurses in the world.[472]

Nursing could be a well-paid profession, as evidenced by the research of Frank Joseph Lovato, who asserts that free black nurses were seen as invaluable by the White population, and therefore could charge as much as $10 a day.[473] That nurses could command high prices for their ministrations was also demonstrated by the testimony of Antoinette Knoll, a free Black nurse who petitioned the estate of Cécille Bonille's partner Samuel Hart, for the sum of $500. As discussed in the previous chapter, she had been employed by the unfortunate Hart who had succumbed to a cholera epidemic which was raging in New Orleans at that time. Knoll claimed that she was owed this large amount because she undertook to nurse him and other members of his family "at the imminent danger of her own life." She further

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[471] See Sharla M. Fett, *Working Cures: Healing, Health and Power on Southern Slave Plantations* (University of North Carolina Press, 2002); David Barry Caspar and Darlene Hine Clark (eds) *Black Women and Slavery in the Americas: More than Chattel* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington & Indianapolis, 1996)

[472] Henry Castellanos was an attorney and judge, a teacher, and a journalist, serving for many years on the editorial staff of the *Louisiana Courier*. *New Orleans City Guide Written and Compiled by the Federal Writers Project of the Works Progress Administration for the City of New Orleans* (Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1938), 17

[473] Frank Joseph Lovato, "Households and Neighborhoods among Free People of Color in New Orleans, View from the Census 1850-1860." (MA dissertation, University of New Orleans, 2010), 21

asserted, "in consequence of her extreme exertion during the sickness of said Samuel Hart she fell dangerously sick and was only partially restored to health after incurring considerable expense and undergoing much bodily pain and affliction and also suffering much inconvenience and loss in her endeavors."[474]

Knoll's testimony also highlighted that, although the job could be a profitable one, the risks to the nurse's own health were many, especially during these dangerous epidemics of cholera, smallpox, tuberculosis, malaria, dysentery, typhus, and the most dreaded one of all, yellow fever. It was always considered that Black people were less vulnerable to these diseases than Whites, but according to Southern historian, Kathryn Olivarious, the most prevalent myth, and possibly the most insidious, was that Black people could not be infected by yellow fever. Prominent doctors in the South spread the notion that Black people had a natural immunity to the disease, using this to justify slavery. "Advocates argued that God had made Black people immune to expand the cotton industry and the national economy, and to save white people from death."[475] It may have also been as a result of these beliefs that nursing became a profession dominated by free Black women, even though Knoll's experience showed that they were as vulnerable to disease as their employers. Many free Black women who did not generally practice professionally as nurses, such as the free Black nuns of New Orleans and Baltimore and voodoo priestess, Marie Laveaux, often volunteered to nurse patients during the periods of epidemics.[476]

Another profession which could be viewed as emanating from an African heritage was hairdressing. The skills of the free Black hairdressers were valued among the fashion-conscious ladies of New Orleans. Early travellers to the African continent, such as Cado Masto in 1456, had noted the elaborate hairstyles of African women. This desire to express their femininity through their hairstyles also extended into enslaved society. Jane Mickens Tombs, a former enslaved woman from Georgia

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[474] Louisiana, Orleans Parish Estate Files, 1804-1846," database with images, FamilySearch (https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:JJZJ-24W : 4 December 2014), Samuel Hart, 1832; citing probate place Orleans Parish, Louisiana, Probate Court, New Orleans City Archives

[475] See Kathryn Olivarious, "Immunity, Capital, and Power in Antebellum New Orleans" *American Historical Association,* Vol.124, Issue 2 (April 2019), 425-455

[476] It was mentioned in Laveaux's obituary of the *New York Times*, 23 January 1881: "During yellow fever and cholera epidemics she proved herself a noble, disinterested woman, going from patient to patient, administering to the wants of each and saving many from death."

described how the enslaved women on her plantation still straightened their hair by combing it with the cards used for processing sheep's wool, and how they curled it by wrapping it overnight with rags.[477] Dominic Cocuzza, in her study of the dress of free women of colour, suggests that these women's skills for dressing hair into elaborate styles was noted, and then utilized by White women.[478] Eliza Ripley reminisced about one such hairdresser who was obviously talented in recreating the elaborate hairstyles, which were fashionable during this period:

> Ladies had their hair done up with bondoline and pomatums made of beef's marrow and scented with patchouli; hair was done into marvellous plaits and puffs. A very much admired style which Henriette Blondeau, the fashionable hairdresser achieved was a wide plait surrounding a nest of stiff puffs. It was called 'the basket of fruit.'[479]

A traveller to New Orleans, Sir Charles Lyell, referred to the "quadroon" hairdresser as *"*a refinement in which the richest ladies in Boston would not think of indulging*."*[480] Eliza Ripley also illustrated how the ministrations of both seamstresses and hairdressers were a normal part of everyday life for the wealthy of New Orleans:

> Monday morning Mme Casimir or Mamzelle Victorine comes to sew all day like wild for 75 cents… Later dusky Henriette Blondeau comes with her tignon stuck full of pins and the deep pockets of her apron bulging with sticks of bandoline, pots of pomade, hairpins and a bandeau comb to dress the hair of mademoiselle.[481]

The titles of Madame and Mademoiselle which Eliza Ripley gives to the seamstresses, but not to the hairdresser, were also a significant indicator of race in New Orleans. In public documents, Whiteness was always denoted using such titles. Sometimes, married women from wealthy free Black families, or Afro-Creoles with connections to high status White families were also given titles. However, most free

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[477] Dominic Cocuzza, "The Dress of the Free Colored Women in New Orleans." (MA dissertation, SUNY, Fashion Institute of Technology, New York, 2001), 17, 37
[478] Ibid
[479] Eliza Ripley, *Social Life in New Orleans. Being Recollections of my Girlhood* (D. Appleton & Co, New York, 1912), 110
[480] Dominic Cocuzza, "The Dress of the Free Colored Women in New Orleans." (MA dissertation, SUNY, Fashion Institute of Technology, New York, 2001), 17, 37
[481] Eliza Ripley, *Social Life in New Orleans. Being Recollections of my Girlhood* (D. Appleton & Co, New York, 1912), 68

Black men and women were referred to by their first name and surname, if they had one.[482] Henriette was also described by Ripley as "dusky" and wearing a "tignon," immediately identifying her status as a free Black woman. Ripley's observations also illustrated the meagreness of the wages for the seamstresses, seventy-five cents, as opposed to the alleged ten dollars which might be charged by nurses. Therefore, those free Black women who offered a personal service, showing expertise that was above and beyond that which could be offered by the client's own enslaved women, could make a good living. Some also went to great lengths to perfect these skills. For example, Eliza Potter, a free Black hairdresser from the North, who frequently worked in New Orleans, went to Paris to study hairdressing.[483] However, the expense of her training was offset by the fact that she then had the skill and expertise to become indispensable to her clients and command higher wages. Although fictional, Grace King's novel *Monsieur Motte,* suggests that a free Black hairdresser could earn enough money to support a child at an expensive private school.[484] Also, free women of colour in New Orleans had an advantage over their peers in the North, because the Southern White elite were accustomed from childhood to intimate ministrations from enslaved people. Therefore, White women from the South more readily accepted services from Black workers. Their peers in the North suffered more from the racial taboos of bodily intimacy, which meant that they mostly served a Black clientele, ultimately making their trade less competitive and less profitable.[485] Eliza Potter wrote that she was always well paid by the ladies of Louisiana, indicating that she may have earned more money in the South than in the North. [486]

Self-employed service occupations also gave free Black women more autonomy than those who worked as house servants or domestics. They could pick and choose their clients, and hours of work, and they could also negotiate prices and terms, thus constructing a different type of relationship between

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[482] In France in the eighteenth-century Monsieur. Sieur, Mademoiselle or Madame were titles given only to respectable members of society in documents. In colonial and antebellum Louisiana, they were mainly given to white people and, even then, only to those of some social standing. See Anne Ulentin, "Shades of Grey: Slaveholding Free Women of Color in the Antebellum South 1800-1804*," (*PhD thesis, Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College, 2012), 57

[483] Eliza Potter, *A Hairdresser's Experience in High Life* (Cincinnati,1859), 54

[484] See Grace King, *Monsieur Motte* (Landor Press New York, 1888)

[485] Virginia Reynolds, "Slaves to Fashion Not Society: Elizabeth Keckley & Washington D.C's African American Dressmakers 1860-1870." *Washington History*, Vol. 26, No.2 (Fall 2014), 10

[486] Eliza Potter, *A Hairdresser's Experience in High Life* (Cincinnati 1859), 60

themselves and their White clients, than merely that of the subordinate. The more familiar contact between free Black women and their White clients in these occupations could also give a different type of leverage. As Dale Patrick Brown points out, in Eliza Potter's book, there is a veiled threat to her clients that she knows a great deal more about them which she could divulge if she chose.[487] It could be argued therefore that it was this increased control over their working life, and not just their acquisition of material goods, which also gave them the confidence to defend their rights against their peers and the White elite. Their business relationships with the dominant White hierarchy also enhanced the uniqueness of their position within New Orleans' society. Thus, although evidence suggests that many free women of colour were inhibited in their choice of employment by race and gender, some of them managed to turn this to their advantage. By pursuing occupations which were considered *suitable* such as hairdresser, nurse, or vendor of women's apparel, they also began to make themselves indispensable to New Orleans' White society, and therefore could begin to command decent remuneration for their skills. In doing so, they could achieve a measure of autonomy in their working lives, and an opportunity for economic security, which had been denied their enslaved forbears. This is exemplified in the lives of the two women studied in this chapter. The first of them to be examined is Eulalie Mandeville, who utilized her skills, and the resources around her, in the foundation of a highly successful business.

Eulalie Mandeville - the "Big Businesswoman" of New Orleans

In 1845, Eulalie Mandeville, an Afro-Creole woman in her late sixties, was one of the richest women in Antebellum New Orleans. She owned close to $250,000 in assets, including eight properties in New Orleans, six slaves and over $150,000 in disposable cash.[488] Much of her wealth came from her successful commercial enterprises. She owned and ran what was described as a "dry goods" business, selling an assortment of wares, including cloth, accessories, lingerie, and other garments for women. In short, Eulalie was a businesswoman who built a very successful commercial empire. That she was not alone in her endeavours, or in her financial achievements, will be evidenced in this part of the

[487] Dale Patrick Brown, *Literary Cincinnati: The Missing Chapter* (Ohio University Press, 2011), 100
[488] Nicolas Theodore Macarty v. Eulalie Mandeville, 106 U.S. 61 (1846-1861) 626, Supreme Court of Louisiana Historical Archives, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans. Hereafter cited as *Macarty v. Mandeville*.

chapter, which shows that there was a cohesive community of these businesswomen in New Orleans. It will provide a detailed examination of Eulalie Mandeville's career as a free Black entrepreneur, thereby shedding more light on the business practices of women in Antebellum New Orleans. It will also look at the highly effective commercial activities, engendered by her and other female free Black entrepreneurs. Mandeville utilized the services of Black women, both enslaved and free, whom she employed as vendors for her goods. She also cultivated commercial alliances with women across racial lines. Through this network, unique to free Black women in New Orleans, Eulalie was able to market her goods on the internal market, and to also dabble in a transatlantic market in Europe. She and other businesswomen therefore built a business community which not only enabled them to prosper, but also contributed to the economy of New Orleans.

Much of the information about her business life, and indeed, many other facets of her life and background comes from the 1846 court case, *Nicolas Theodore Macarty v. Eulalie de Mandeville* which documents the lawsuit brought by the family of her White newly deceased partner, Eugène Macarty, over his succession. Although the case is well-known and has been previously examined by historians, many scholars have heavily concentrated on Eulalie's associations with her White father Marquis Pierre Philippe de Marigny de Mandeville; her White half-brother, Bernard Marigny; and her White partner Eugène Macarty; and testimony given during the court case by other elite White males.[489] Thus, the life story of Eulalie has often seemingly been defined through her connections with these White men. In contrast, this part of the chapter examines the networks Mandeville formed with other women, in order to maximize her business success and ensure the future of her family. Previously, there has been little or no examination of the female witnesses in this court case, which included three other free women of colour and one White woman. Their statements provide important new evidence of the relationships and bonds between these women. Therefore, by looking in detail at their testimonies, this chapter will

[489] See Penny Ward Johnson, "Eulalie de Mandeville: An Ethnohistorical Investigation Challenging Notions of Placage in New Orleans as revealed through the Lived Experiences of a Free Woman of Color." (MS dissertation, University of New Orleans, 2010); Carol Wilson, "Plaçage and the Performance of Whiteness: The Trial of Eulalie Mandeville, Free Colored Woman, of Antebellum New Orleans." *American Nineteenth Century History* (2014); Carolyn Morrow Long, *Madame Lalaurie Mistress of the Haunted House* (University Press of Florida, 2012); Shirley E. Thompson, *Exiles at Home: The Struggle to Become American in Creole New Orleans* (Harvard University Press, 2009)

provide an analysis of various free Black female business networks in New Orleans, while also adding further new perspectives on interactions between free Black women and White women.

Despite public belief to the contrary, Eulalie's White partner, Eugène Macarty, was very much the junior associate when it came to the family finances. On his death, his assets amounted to little more than $6,000, from which he bequeathed $2000 to his brother Theodore and to a nephew, and $500 to a niece. He also left $300 each to his natural children by Eulalie Mandeville.[490] It was little wonder therefore that his collateral heirs cast greedy eyes on Eulalie's fortune. She was taken to court by her White partner's brother in an effort to acquire the money and property held by her, which Macarty believed should have been included as part of his brother's succession.[491] The plaintiff's argument was that Eulalie never made much money from her business and that the real fortune was accumulated by Macarty, as a result of his investments. The plaintiff's petition also claimed that shortly before his death, Eugène had circumvented the legal requirements of the Civil Code by transferring a large amount of money to Eulalie's bank account.[492] The bulk of the defence was therefore taken up with establishing Mandeville's right to her fortune.

In *Nicolas Theodore Macarty v. Eulalie de Mandeville* the case for the defence began by emphasizing Eulalie's illustrious background, at least on her father's side. Although her mother had been an enslaved woman, her father was Marquis Pierre Philippe de Marigny de Mandeville, an extremely wealthy elite Creole of French extraction.[493] Although the Marquis was married with a family of his own, he acknowledged Eulalie as his "natural daughter" and seems to have been interested in her welfare throughout his lifetime.[494] In 1779, the five-year-old was freed by her paternal grandmother, in whose household she was brought up. Little is known of Eulalie's mother but in the manumission

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[490] New Orleans Public Library, City Archives: Louisiana, Wills and Probate Records, 1756-1984: Free black women were unable to legally wed their white partners, thus by law, their children could inherit no more than one-tenth of the father 's estate, and that even that tenth was subject to loss if legitimate heirs sued to acquire it; See also Penny Ward Johnson, "Eulalie de Mandeville: An Ethnohistorical Investigation Challenging Notions of Placage in New Orleans as revealed through the Lived Experiences of a Free Woman of Color" (MS dissertation, University of New Orleans, 2010)
[491] *Macarty v Mandeville*
[492] Ibid
[493] See Grace King**,** *Creole Families of New Orleans***,** (The Macmillan Company, New York, 1921)
[494] *Macarty v Mandeville*: White fathers typically referred to their white children by marriage as legitimate and their duly acknowledged children of color as their natural children. See also Shirley E. Thompson, *Exiles at Home: The Struggle to Become American in Creole New Orleans* (Harvard University Press, 2009), 197

papers, Madame de Mandeville described her as having provided "good service," thus suggesting that she was a house slave.[495] What happened to her after her emancipation is not recorded, but she seemingly did not feature in Mandeville's life. Eulalie's manumission document also declared that she was given her freedom by Madame de Mandeville because of "the love and affection I have for one born in my household."[496] Although these were standardized platitudes often included in such documents, Madame de Mandeville's subsequent treatment of Eulalie does suggest some depth of emotion. These fond feelings towards the enslaved by their White holders, particularly towards those who served them directly, was not unusual. As Thavolia Glymph observes:

> We should not be surprised to find ambivalence about owning other human beings or to find its expression in acts of kindness or expressions of concern. The psychological and political needs of masters and mistresses to see themselves as honorable and just and loved by their slaves no doubt created a kind of blindness to the inconsistencies.[497]

Michael P. Johnson's and James L. Roark's research on South Carolina's free Black population suggests that these mixed-race offspring were often allowed more freedom and given special privileges far above and beyond those of the other less paternally fortunate slaves.[498] As J. Enould Livaudais attested, Mandeville was "well-educated" by her grandmother.[499] Thus, unlike some of her peers she was literate.[500] Her status as their father's "natural daughter" was also recognized by her White half-siblings, demonstrated by the court testimony of Bernard Marigny: "She passes in the family of the witness as being his natural sister."[501] As Shirley E. Thompson notes: "Bernard Marigny's language at the trial contributes to, and participates in, a legacy of an informal but powerfully felt recognition of racial

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[495] Notarial Archives: *Acts of Andres Almonester y Roxas*, November 9, 1779
[496] Ibid.
[497] Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 29
[498] Michael P Johnson and James L Roark (eds) No *Chariot Let Down: Charleston's Free People of Color on the Eve of the Civil War* (New York & London, W Norton & Co. 1984) 140
[499] *Macarty v. Mandeville*: Testimony of J. Enould Livaudais, 164
[500] Other well -known free black businesswoman such as voodooeinne, Marie Laveaux and founder of the Couvent school, Marie Couvent, were illiterate. Marie Louise Panis, free colored businesswoman who testified on Mandeville's behalf was also illiterate as stated in the court records. See Carolyn Morrow Long, *A New Orleans Voudou Priestess: The Legend and Reality of Marie Laveau,* (University Press of Florida, 2007); Marie Couvent Will (1832) *Parish Will Books 1833-1837*
[501] *Macarty v Mandeville*: Testimony of Bernard Marigny, 137

mixing which exemplifies the complicated interracial and familial links common in antebellum New Orleans.“[502]

In her teens, Eulalie formed a relationship with Eugène Macarty, a young man from another prominent White Creole family.[503] After her grandmother’s death in 1799, they set up house together in a large cottage on the corner of Dauphine and Barracks Streets in the French Quarter.[504] The two families were very interconnected, as indeed were many of the families of New Orleans’ elite White society. Eugène's sister, Madame Miró was the godmother of Eulalie's half-sister Celeste Marigny.[505] Mandeville may have chosen her partner with an eye to the advantages of being allied to the powerful Macarty family. However, Mandeville’s lack of any legal marriage contract meant that she was always more vulnerable to White legal and social regulation, as evidenced by this court case.[506] Indeed, the judge emphasized the non-legal nature of her union with Macarty, calling it an “illicit connexion.”[507] Yet, Bernard Marigny, gave a different interpretation of the nature of the union, stating, “this was a serious connexion, entered into with the consent of her family, the nearest approach to marriage, the law would permit and looked on as morally binding.”[508] Indeed, the union was a very stable and long-lasting one as the couple were together for fifty years, producing seven children born between 1794-1815.[509]

According to Marigny’s testimony, his father’s continuing high regard for Eulalie eventually manifested in gifts of land and cattle. Marigny himself was also generous to her, giving her two lots of land in suburb Marigny and supplying her with the lumber to build on them.[510] Her other half-brother, Jean Baptiste Marigny, was equally open-handed. In the year 1803 or 1804, “he gave defendant $350

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[502] Shirley E. Thompson, *Exiles at Home: The Struggle to Become American in Creole New Orleans* (Harvard University Press, 2009), 195
[503] The Civil Code forbad marriage between black and white people. See Louisiana Civil Code (1825)
[504] See Carolyn Morrow Long, *Madame Lalaurie Mistress of the Haunted House* (University Press of Florida, 2012)
[505] Carol Wilson, “Plaçage and the Performance of Whiteness: The Trial of Eulalie Mandeville, Free Colored Woman, of Antebellum New Orleans. *“American Nineteenth Century History*, (2014), 193
[506]Marissa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives, Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 62
[507] *Macarty v Mandeville:* Judge’s Statement, 110
[508] *Macarty v. Mandeville*: Testimony of Bernard Marigny, 136
[509] The court case only refers to five children, but the notarial archives record seven indicating that two may have died. By the time of Eulalie Mandeville’s death, her only surviving daughter had also died.
[510] *Mandeville v Macarty*: Testimony of Bernard Marigny. 136,137

with which she bought a lot of ground in Hospital Street." Dying in 1806, he left Eulalie a slave in his will. [511]According to Livaudais, Madame de Mandeville also gave her granddaughter a large section of land, before her death in 1779.[512] Although these bequests could signify a deep familial regard for Mandeville, Thompson suggests that gifts to a mixed-race member of the family were less a sign of affection, and more part of a deep-rooted tradition from colonial times, whereby the White family accepted, "the codes of obligation accompanying interracial kinship."[513] Thompson's argument may also be inferred in Marigny's statement, "it was generally done by fathers who had natural children to give money in hand, *de main a main*."[514] Although Eulalie received this substantial financial assistance from her White male relatives, as a free woman of colour, she understood that manumission and even acceptance on the part of White families did not equate to equality. Thus, her desire to accumulate more wealth was always motivated by attempts to consolidate her always fragile freedom, and that of her children, as well as further increasing her social standing in society.[515]

While Eulalie began running a dry goods business when she was living on her grandmother's plantation, it was not until one of her sons entered adulthood that she reportedly began her expansion of the business. Her son, Pierre Villarceaux, who obviously spent a good deal of his time in France, began bringing her an assortment of goods from Paris.[516] Pierre was either educated in France or perhaps went over there after completing his education, as was the custom in these elite Creole families. Indeed, a passion for all things French, suffused the Francophone population of New Orleans. François Lacroix, a free Black tailor, and merchant was renowned for supplying the latest French fashion for men. An advertisement for his store claimed that he had "the best and most extensive assortment of clothing of every description, made in Paris."[517] It appears that Mandeville was doing the same for her female clients. In her promotion of French styles, Mandeville, like Lacroix, "participated in a transnational

[511] Ibid. 137
[512] *Macarty v. Mandeville*: Testimony of J. Enould Livaudais, 164
[513] Shirley E. Thompson, *Exiles at Home: The Struggle to Become American in Creole New Orleans* (Harvard University Press, 2009) 195
[514] *Mandeville v Macarty*: Testimony of Bernard Marigny, 137
[515]Amrita Chakrabati Myers, *Forging Freedom. Black Women and the Pursuit of Liberty in Antebellum Charleston* (University of Charleston Press, 2011), 114
[516]*Macarty v Mandeville*: Testimony of Bernard Marigny. 137; Testimony of Joseph Blache, 163
[517] Cohen's New Orleans and Southern Directory, (1853)

expression of what it meant to be French and urban."[518] Thus, the endeavours of these free Black businessmen and women gave an important service for the Creole community. By bringing the styles of Paris to New Orleans, they assisted in demonstrating the Creoles' traditional affiliation to France, and separateness from the increasing Americanization of the city, after the Louisiana Purchase of 1803.

By this time, Mandeville also had many "marchandes" working for her. The court's witnesses stressed the number of these women, suggesting that it was quite unusual for a female free Black vendor to have so many of them selling in the streets. It was the Widow Chavenet, her neighbour and friend for several years, who described Eulalie as a "gross marchande" (big businesswoman) because of the number of people she employed. The 1830 Census revealed that, at this time, Eulalie owned thirteen enslaved people, seven of them women, all of them probably adult, the youngest being aged between ten to twenty-three and the oldest fifty-five to ninety-nine.[519] It is very likely that these were the enslaved women she used in her business.

It is very clear that Eulalie took advantage of her enslaved women's earning powers in order to grow her business. One of the witnesses for the plaintiff, J. Bermudez, explained how Eulalie's exploitation of her enslaved women was an important part of her commercial success. His testimony avowed that she only made some money as "she didn't have much outlay because she owned her property and the slaves."[520] Eulalie had a small store at her house, and her marchandes sold goods on the street.[521] Although these enslaved women may not have enjoyed any financial recompense for their services, evidence from other witnesses showed that Eulalie was also providing paid employment for other free Black women. Chavenet described how, aside from her enslaved women, she had eight to ten other persons who sold for her on commission. These free women of colour took her goods, sold them and "every 15 or 20 days would call and settle their accounts with Mandeville."[522] Thus, Eulalie was also providing work for, and encouraging other free Black women to become businesswomen in their

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[518] Shirley E. Thompson, *Exiles at Home: The Struggle to Become American in Creole New Orleans* (Harvard University Press, 2009), 112
[519]The Historic New Orleans Collection: New Orleans' Census 1830
[520]Macarty v. Mandeville: Testimony of J Bermudez. 100, J. Bermudez was a Probate Court Judge and therefore a witness of some standing for the plaintiffs.
[521] Ibid: Testimony of Bernard Marigny, 137
[522] Ibid: Testimony of Widow Chavenet, 243

own right. Hence, she was by this time, the owner of a reasonably large business which was managed solely by her and which catered to and was fully staffed by a large cohort of women, a remarkable feat in antebellum New Orleans.

Eulalie bought goods from other stores and wholesalers in the City but continued sending her son to France to purchase goods, which she then sold to favoured customers. Casimir Lacoste, owner of a sugar plantation, and to whom Eulalie had lent $3,000, stated, "when she received goods from France, she sent word to his family," probably to his wife and daughters.[523] Lending money to the husbands of these elite White women may have also been another expedient way of ensuring that these men would then recommend her wares to their wives, thus creating informal contractual relationships. Terence Le Blanc also affirmed: "On receiving fresh goods, she would call on the ladies of the city and show them her wares, being in high favour with them."[524] Eulalie may have personally called on her high-class clients, merely in order to offer them the chance to view her choicest products from Paris. However, like some of her contemporaries, who were skilled in the art of fashioning elegant and tasteful clothing, and coiffures, she could have also been providing a personal styling service.[525]

Eulalie's importation of goods from Europe also demonstrated the thriving link between Afro-Creoles from New Orleans and other countries, especially those which were French or Spanish-speaking. Eulalie had links with France through her son, Pierre, and also with Cuba, as she and Eugène had sent two of their children to live there in the 1830s, managing a coffee plantation owned by Macarty.[526] These links with other countries, both in Europe and the Caribbean, had become more important to free people of colour as the nineteenth century progressed, and they found their privileges becoming increasingly more limited. Many began to aspire to leave New Orleans in pursuit of increased political and racial freedom.[527] It is therefore possible that Eulalie and Eugène decided to send three of their children abroad, in order to remove them from the increasing prejudice of New Orleans' White society towards free people of colour. Although the Spanish authorities had launched a general crack-

[523] Ibid: Testimony of Casimir Lacoste, 152
[524] Ibid: Testimony of Terence Latrobe,100
[525] Dominic Cocuzza, "The Dress of the Free Colored Women in New Orleans." (MA Thesis, SUNY, Fashion Institute of Technology, New York, 2001),17,37
[526] Macarty v Mandeville: Brief for the Defendant 1848, 103
[527] Mary Niall Mitchell, *Raising Freedom's Children* (New York University Press, 2008), 121

down in Cuba in 1809, expelling free Black refugees from Saint-Domingue, from 1814, the Spanish began inviting free people of colour to return to Cuba. Santiago de Cuba where Eulalie's children lived, was a popular choice because it already had a large Francophone population of African descent.[528] Some of the other free Black businesswomen mentioned in the court case emigrated to France after they had made money through their businesses. According to L. Lejour, these were Lise Perrault who was worth $30,000 when she stopped trading and left the country and Aurore Matou who was also worth $30,000 when she left the country in 1826 or 27 to live in France.[529] In her work on conceptions of freedom through the eyes of Black children during the 1850s through to the end of Reconstruction, Mary Niall Mitchell employs letters written by the boys in the mid-nineteenth century, from a free Black school which was founded by the other female entrepreneur to be studied in this Chapter, Marie Couvent. They were asked by their teachers to use their imagination, and to write these letters, as if they were businessmen venturing into the world of the commercial markets of both the United States and the transatlantic economies of Europe.[530] Their letters clearly showed that they were aware of the benefits from the movement of goods to and from other countries, both in producing wealth, as well as providing valuable links.[531] Thus, many of the boys imagined themselves using these trade links and the wealth they engendered in order to start afresh in another country. This imagining of transatlantic markets and trade by the boys of the Couvent School in the mid-nineteenth century had already been played out by the free Black women of New Orleans, such as Lise Perrault, Aurore Matou and, of course, Eulalie Mandeville.

Eulalie was also aware of the benefits of expanding her trade and business links within Louisiana. She therefore spread her business empire outside the city of New Orleans. According to witnesses, "her operations extended into the country as far as Donaldson and even Attakapas. She had a large depot in the Parish of Plaquemines and some of her marchandes visited St. John the Baptist."[532]

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[528] Shirley E. Thompson, *Exiles at Home. The Struggle to Become American in Creole New Orleans* (Harvard University Press, 2009), 79
[529] *Macarty v Mandeville*: Testimony of L. Lejour, 161
[530] The Couvent School for free colored children refers to the school which opened in 1848. It was founded by Marie Couvent an ex-slave who emigrated from Haiti to New Orleans around 1806. See Mary Niall Mitchell, *Raising Freedom's Children* (New York University Press, 2008)
[531] Mary Niall Mitchell, *Raising Freedom's Children* (New York University Press, 2008),15
[532] *Macarty v Mandeville*: Testimony of Victor Romerage, 159

This also suggests that she must have had agents working for her in these areas, as she would have been unable to monitor them all herself. The scale of her business was also remarked upon by Victor Romerage, a wholesaler, who said that "he knew people who merely made a living by selling at retail but they were not on so large a scale as defendant was."[533] From early on in her business career, Eulalie also knew how to capitalize on events happening in the world around her. The wholesalers who testified on her behalf stated that it was during the war of 1812 when the dry goods business became very lucrative because of the lack of merchandise. This was brought about by the blockades which drove up prices. Therefore, as Victor Romerage explained, those who managed to get hold of these products, "sold their goods very high and realized a large profit."[534] That Eulalie was one of those who used the opportunities presented by the war to expand profits, was evidenced by one of the other witnesses who stated that she "bought goods down the river during the war and realised a good profit."[535] Further witnesses also attested to her business acumen. L. Lejour described Eulalie as "a person who knew how to purchase.[536] And Michel V. Durel, Eugène's will executor, stated, "the business was profitable then, and is so still when the persons know how to purchase and sell at retail."[537] It was therefore made clear by these business professionals that Eulalie Mandeville was a skillful and talented businesswoman who had earned their respect.

Several of the witnesses also highlighted the number of other free women of colour who had successful dry goods businesses in New Orleans. L. Lejour referred to two other free Black women in his testimony, as well as the previously mentioned, Lise Perault and Aurore Matou. They were Agate Fauchon and Marie Louise Panis or Picou. The most well-known of these women was Agathe Fauchon or Fanchon. She was one of the first proprietors of what is now known as Preservation Hall.[538] Like Eulalie Mandeville, she owned multiple properties which she bought and sold from 1804 until her death

[533] Ibid
[534] Ibid
[535] Ibid: Testimony of Duncan Kennedy, 104
[536] Ibid: Testimony of L. Lejour, 161
[537] Ibid: Testimony of Michael V. Durel, 240
[538] Preservation Hall was established in 1961 to preserve, perpetuate, and protect traditional New Orleans Jazz. Operating as a music venue, a touring band (the Preservation Hall Jazz Band), a record label, and a non-profit organization, Preservation Hall continues their mission today as a cornerstone of New Orleans music and culture.

in about 1864.[539] She also branched out into other businesses. One of her properties had "several old buildings used as a charcoal and wood establishment," denoting that she either ran another business from there or rented it out. [540] Therefore, although Eulalie was much richer than any of these women, the testimony showed that there was a thriving community of prosperous free Black businesswomen in New Orleans.

The court case also revealed that some of these women had established a cooperative business community for those in the same line of commerce. Male merchants had long formed associations and business groups in New Orleans, but this was the first hint that these businesswomen did the same.[541] Michel V. Durel's testimony demonstrated how both free Black and White businesswomen cooperated in their commercial endeavours, in order to maximize their profits. Durel declared that, while working at a dry goods' wholesalers, he was aware that Eulalie, "purchased largely from that house in partnership with Mrs. Durel [presumably his wife] and others, which goods they divided amongst themselves and sold at retail."[542] Therefore, these women had recognized that they could get a better price if they bought together and formed a cooperative. The witness continued, "at that time Aurore Matou, Agate Fauchon, Mrs. Peuch, Mrs. Durel and some others sold as extensively as the defendant," suggesting that it was this group of women who bought their goods together. [543] Their cooperative evidently crossed racial lines, as Mrs. Durel was White, and Mrs. Peuch was probably also White.[544] Although this collaboration between free Black and White women could be deemed unusual, there is other evidence of female cooperation between the races in the achievement of a specific goal. A good example of this is provided in Chapter Two, about the attempts of Frenchwoman Marie Jean d'Aliqout to found a religious

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[539] The Historic New Orleans Collection: See the Collins C. Diboll Vieux Carré Survey: Eulalie Mandeville: Citation of owners

[540] See the Collins Diboll Vieux Carré Digital Survey online for information about Agathe Fauchon's properties http://www.hnoc.org/vcs/property_info.php?lot=18808

[541] See Scott P. Marler., *The Merchant's Capital: New Orleans & the Political Economy of the Nineteenth Century South* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2013)

[542] *Macarty v Mandeville*: Testimony of Michel V. Durel, 240

[543] Ibid

[544] That they were given formal titles suggests that they were white. Those free black women that were given that respect, like Eulalie, were often the daughters of prominent white men. Even if they had a partner, they were still usually called Mademoiselle or Miss denoting their unmarried status. See Rebecca J. Scott, *Degrees of Freedom: Louisiana and Cuba After Slavery* (Harvard University Press, 2005)

charitable organization with Henriette Delille.[545] These associations were probably as much about providing support as maximizing profitability. The cult of domesticity created expectations of how women should behave and presumed that a "lady's" proper place was within the home.[546] Therefore, by allying themselves with free Black businesswomen, these White women had increased support against the possible prejudices from the predominantly White male wholesalers, and those who disapproved of their visibility in the public sphere.

For free Black women, the foundation of any association reflected the way in which cultural networks, religious institutions and neighbourhood affiliations became more important for an increasingly beleaguered free Black population, as a means of protecting their own interests. Their sense of female community was also engendered by an enslaved past. As Deborah Grey White noted, "the terrible realities of slavery meant that women formed close-knit cooperatives in which female interdependencies were a fact of life."[547] This was therefore a thread which continued into social capital networks. Thus, like the White businesswomen, this alliance not only gave free Black women an edge over their White male rivals but also increased support in a hostile world. Free women of colour had to deal with discrimination because of their race as well as gender. Thus, as a consequence of their economic success, these women could have faced more criticism than their White counterparts. Therefore, a female business cooperative would have also given them an added feeling of support. This community feeling was evidenced in the testimony of free Black businesswoman, Marie Louise Panis, who came to court to testify on Eulalie's behalf.[548] She was also one of the successful businesswomen mentioned by the witness L. Lejour. This, coupled with the fact that she came to court in defence of Eulalie, suggests that she too may have been part of the business cooperative. She stated that she was

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[545] Sister Mary Deggs' Journal in *No Cross: No Crown: Black Nuns in Nineteenth Century New* Orleans, edited by Virginia Meacham Gould and Charles E. Nolan (Indiana University Press, 2001), 12

[546] Courtney Leigh Ahlstrom, " A space in between: Material enclosures for the women of New Orleans, 1850-1870." (PhD Thesis, Corcoran College of Art & Design, Department of History of Decorative Arts, 2012), 7-8

[547] Deborah Gray White, *Aren't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (W. W. Norton, New York, 1985), 199-200

[548] *Mandeville v Macarty*: Testimony of Marie Louise Panis. Panis bought and sold several properties in the French Quarter of New Orleans, beginning in 1795, when she was 26 years old. At age 62, she exchanged her properties on Royal Street and in St. Bernard Parish, on the site of the Battle of New Orleans, with Bernard Marigny, for a plantation he owned in St. John the Baptist Parish valued at about $75,000. By the time she died in 1852 at the age of eighty-four, the value of her plantation, the slaves, and the buildings on the property, would have been worth over a million dollars in 2020. See note of New Orleans Genealogical Research Society talk given by Emory Vebre, April 16, 2001.

not a personal friend and had only known Eulalie in business. Despite this, Panis felt some obligation to come and support her as a fellow businesswoman. She also helped Eulalie's case by emphasizing the size of her business and the number of people she had working for her, thus making clear that her business was a very lucrative one.[549]

Besides Marie Louise, there were two other free women of colour who testified. The first was Sophie Macarty, alias Sophie Mousante. [550] She had known Eulalie for forty years and also had a long term relationship with Eugène's brother, Louis Macarty, which lasted until his death.[551] The other was Modeste Foucher, probably the same Modeste Foucher, who had been the partner of Casimir Lacoste, one of the other witnesses for the defence.[552] Both Macarty and Foucher stated that they had regularly visited the house that Eulalie shared with Eugène.[553] These social calls with free Black women who were in a relationship with men of a similar high social status, signify another female network. These testimonies also suggest that there was an active alternative social life, apart from White society, taking place in these high-class drawing rooms between free women of colour and their White elite partners. Despite this, like Panis, Sophie claimed that "she had always been on good terms with the defendant without being an intimate friend."[554] Nonetheless, like Panis, she and Modeste also decided to testify on Eulalie's behalf, further demonstrating another instance of community and support. It is very likely that Sophie and Modeste were interested in and wanted to influence, the outcome of the court case. After all, their inheritances were also uncertain if their partners were to die before them. That Sophie was in a relationship with Eugène's brother also sent a message to the Macarty family, that she and others, who were bound together by the kinship or friendship of their White male partners, would stand together, and defend themselves if any of their number were taken to court over an inheritance.

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[549] Ibid.

[550] *Macarty v Mandeville*: Testimony of Sophie Macarty, 235

[551] Her will of 1855 describes her as Sophie Mousante alias Sophie Macarty. Ancestry.com. *Louisiana, U.S., Wills and Probate Records, 1756-1984* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2015.

[552] She had two children by him Augustine Modeste Casimir Lacoste 1793 and Josephine Lacoste Foucher 1800. She also had children by Barthelemy Lafon, an architect, engineer and town planner and Pierre Lafon. She was the mother of Thomy Lafon, renowned free colored philanthropist, Pierre Laralde. See La. Hist. Association's online dictionary of biography: http://www.lahistory.org/site29.ph

[553] *Macarty v Mandeville*: Testimony of Sophie Macarty, 235; Testimony of Modeste Foucher, 235

[554] Ibid

Like Mousante and Modeste, many of the free Black businesswomen mentioned in the court case also had relationships with White men. Indeed, Marie Louise Panis had a White partner.[555] "Aurore Matou lived with a White man named Pierre, since dead. Agate Fauchon also lived with Mr. Heno."[556] As these were said to be some of the wealthiest free Black businesswomen, it could be argued that they had an advantage because of the financial support of their partners. Certainly, Chakrabati Myers suggests that some free Black women sought unions with wealthy White men in order to increase their finances.[557] However, although some free Black women obviously benefitted economically through their associations with White partners, two of the most affluent free Black women in New Orleans did not. In Mandeville's case, testimony from the witnesses made clear that she did not have financial assistance from Eugène, who had no money when he became her partner. Eugène quite openly told people that he had returned penniless from France.[558] He also made it very plain to his friends and colleagues that it was Eulalie's money which he used to set up his money-lending business. A friend of Macarty's, Martin Duralde, stated, "the defendant had received funds from her father, Pierre de Marigny. He (Eugène) told witnesses at all times that he was doing business with Eulalie Mandeville's money."[559] Agate Fauchon's partner, Pierre Heno, was a butcher who had such severe financial difficulties that he had to surrender his house to his creditors, and he lived with Fauchon in one of her houses.[560] This directly contradicted the image of the predatory penniless free woman of colour who sought a wealthy White man in order to gain from the relationship. This was the picture which the plaintiffs tried to evoke in their depiction of Eulalie Mandeville, but Eugène's openness to his friends and family about the state of his finances rendered that argument useless. As Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers found, in Southern society, there were indeed men who entered marriage (or in this case, a domestic partnership), "with little or no wealth and their unions with propertied women became their primary

[555] *Macarty v Mandeville*: Testimony of L. Lejour, 161
[556] Ibid. 162
[557] Amrita Chakrabati Myers, *Forging Freedom: Black Women in the Pursuit of Liberty in Antebellum Charleston* (University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 25
[558] *Macarty v Mandeville*: Testimony of E. Forrest, 112
[559] *Macarty v Mandeville*: Testimony of Martin Duralde, 78
[560] New Orleans Public Library, City Archive: Louisiana Parish Files 1804-1846: Heno, District Court 1821

avenue to financial independence."[561] Her research therefore suggests that the actuality could be very different from the accepted tradition of White male dominance within the domestic sphere, especially when it was the woman who held the purse strings. In Eulalie's case, it was she who was the higher earner of the partnership and the owner of more property, even in a relationship where she would be considered the subordinate by virtue of both her sex and race. The acceptance of her financial supremacy by the judge would be a significant factor in the outcome of the court case.

Eulalie's superior financial situation was also emphasized by the testimony of Mrs. Chavenet. It is probable that the Widow Chavenet was Eulalie's closest friend. She described herself as "a good friend of Eulalie Mandeville's" and that "she had a good deal of regard for her."[562] She was the only one of the women to portray herself thus. Indeed, the others emphasized the distance of their personal relationships with Mandeville. However, Chavenet showed her intimacy with Eulalie by often helping her in her business, measuring out the goods, and she was also frequently present when the marchandes came to Eulalie for their payment. Chavenet was also regularly in attendance when Eulalie and Eugène were settling their finances.[563] Thus, her statement to the court was important in establishing that Mandeville and Macarty kept their finances separate and that Eulalie made her own financial decisions. The Widow reported: "Macarty would say to Eulalie Mandeville that such and such a transaction was offered to him and asked if she wished to make an investment. She would then say yes, and either give him a check or money which she had in her armoire."[564] This close friendship with Chavenet also appears to contradict the reported enmity between White women and free Black women, especially those with White partners. Contemporary and later literary sources sometimes emphasized the animosity and contempt felt towards free women of colour by White women, who viewed them as sexual competitors.[565] Despite Eulalie's appropriation of a marriageable bachelor, according to the court witnesses, she seems to have maintained good relationships with her White clients, her business

[561] Stephanie E. Jones- Rogers, They Were her Property; White women as Slave Owners in the American South (Yale University Press, 2019), xiii
[562] Macarty v. Mandeville: Testimony of Widow Chavenet, 243
[563] Ibid
[564] Ibid. 244
[565] See Grace King, New Orleans: *The Place and the People* (The MacMillan Co., New York, 1895; Valerie Martin, Property (Doubleday, 2003)

colleagues, and had an intimate friendship with her White neighbour. Her connections emphasized the racial intermingling and intimacy between female White Creoles and the free women of colour. They shopped at the same stores and went to the same restaurants. They lived in close proximity, did business together, and patronized each other's businesses.[566]

The testimonies of these women were certainly important in further emphasizing that Eulalie was an independent, successful businesswoman in her own right, and helped her to win her case. They also delivered a further challenge to White patriarchy by taking the stand and testifying against the politically powerful Macarty family. Their declarations on Mandeville's behalf also ultimately contributed to her winning the case and keeping her fortune. Even so, historians have speculated on the reasons why Mandeville was so successful in defeating the claims of such an influential White family. Carol Wilson suggests that it was her "performance of whiteness" which swayed the judgement in her favour.[567] The witnesses often referred to her character and behaviour, emphasizing traits which were considered inherently White. Eulalie was described by her half-brother as being "very steady, enterprising, industrious and economical."[568] However, this argument suggests that in some ways, it was the magnanimity of the White establishment, rewarding Eulalie for her acceptable behaviour, which resulted in her winning her case. In contrast to this, Shirley E. Thompson's analysis puts Eulalie firmly back in control by suggesting it was simply the fact that she had been so careful in separating her finances from those of Macarty, which meant that the judge could not "penetrate Mandeville's careful decades-long preparation of her claim to her property."[569] In addition, she always signed her own cheques and had her son, Eugène Macarty Jnr., deposit them in the bank for her.[570] Thus, it was her intelligence, canniness and business acumen that made it impossible for the judge to award the disputed money and property to the Macarty family.

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[566] Shirley E. Thompson, *Exiles at Home. The Struggle to Become American in Creole New Orleans* (Harvard University Press,2009), 139
[567] Carol Wilson, "Plaçage and the Performance of Whiteness: The Trial of Eulalie Mandeville, Free Colored Woman, of Antebellum New Orleans. *"American Nineteenth Century History*,(2014)
[568] *Macarty v Mandeville*: Testimony of Bernard Marigny,137
[569] Shirley E. Thompson, Exiles at Home: The Struggle to Become American in Creole New Orleans (Harvard University Press, 2009), 196-197
[570]Macarty v Mandeville: Testimony of Victor Visinier, 20

When she won the court case, Eulalie Mandeville was, by the standards of the nineteenth century, an old lady, who had by then retired from the business world. She therefore did not live long to enjoy her fortune, dying in 1848 in her early seventies. However, during her long lifetime, Eulalie's acute understanding of how to operate within a racist and paternalistic antebellum New Orleans, enabled her to achieve the maximum economic success. She used local events or trends to her advantage, obtaining goods during the war, and accommodating the increasing desire on the part of Creole women, to dress in the French style, by extending her business to France. Eulalie and her female business partners recognized the benefits of working cooperatively, not only in terms of increased buying power, but also by giving each other increased protection and support. In this society, which could be hostile towards women who did not conform to the accepted norms, and which was especially prejudiced against free women of colour, this assistance from other free Black businesswomen and, indeed, other White women was invaluable, and extended even into the courtroom. Historians have concentrated on the testimony of illustrious figures such as Bernard Marigny in Eulalie's court case, forgetting the equally important testimony from Eulalie's female friends and business acquaintances, who probably risked more in coming into the court room, giving her and themselves a voice alongside these eminent White men. Ultimately, all these women won, as they contributed to her success in protecting her fortune from the grasping hands of the Macarty family, allowing her to hand it over intact to her children.

The next part of the chapter will look at the life history of another successful Black female entrepreneur, living in New Orleans. Like Eulalie Mandeville, she was enslaved as a young child, but unlike Mandeville, it seems that she only obtained her freedom in adulthood. Also, her origins and life experiences were very different from those of the far more socially privileged Mandeville.

Marie Couvent –Refugee, Entrepreneur and Philanthropist

Marie Couvent, or Marie Justine Cirmaire, as she was also often called, was, like Mandeville, a successful free Black businesswoman in New Orleans, although having none of the advantages of birth

which Eulalie enjoyed.[571] The main sources of her life history are from two wills, one from 1812, the other in 1832, and her succession of 1837. They afford some insight into her life, although like all the other women in this study, much of it is still shrouded in mystery. The next part of this chapter will compare her life with that of Eulalie Mandeville's, looking at how her background and ethnic origin affected the way in which she lived, worked, and was perceived by both free Black and White society. It will also examine how, despite her many disadvantages, including a lack of education, she still became an economically successful free Black woman. By looking at her connections in Saint-Domingue and New Orleans, this part of the chapter will examine the networks which Couvent, like Mandeville, created in an effort for increased assistance, which she needed as a free Black woman and a refugee outsider. It will also look at her relationships with her slaves, which in the absence of any familial bonds, became an important source of emotional support.

Marie Couvent's story aptly illustrates the many abuses endured by enslaved women throughout their lives. She was born in Africa, where according to her will, at about the age of seven, although she was never really sure of her age, she was taken to Saint-Domingue by traders to be sold into enslavement. She also could not recall her father or her mother.[572] She was eventually held by a man called François Moreau, and had a son called Celestin Moreau. Described as a "mulâitre" (mulatto), he was very possibly Moreau's son. Tragically she had lost contact with this child when he was only ten, well before her arrival in New Orleans.[573] It is not clear exactly when she arrived in the City however, it is probable that she was one of the refugees, who came to New Orleans from Saint-Domingue in the early nineteenth century. She may have travelled with Jean Moreau, François Moreau's brother. His family left Cap Français in Saint-Domingue around 1804, and Couvent's first will made clear her close connections with him and his family.[574] If this was the case, then she was

[571] Although she used a number of different names, with different spellings throughout her lifetime, to avoid confusion I will refer to her as Marie Couvent throughout this Chapter.
[572] New Orleans Public Library, City Archive: New Orleans Will Parish Books 1833-1837, Vol 1 1805 – 1820 Marie Couvent 1832
[573] Elizabeth C. Neidenbach, "Mes Dernieres Volantés. Testaments to the Life of Marie Couvent, a Former Slave in New Orleans." *Transatlantica*, Cartographies de Amerique/Histoires d'esclaves (2012), 4
[574] Ibid

already middle-aged by the time of her arrival, suggesting that she had previously gained her freedom in Saint-Domingue. [575]

Marie Couvent owned property in New Orleans from 1806 onwards, thus, it is probable that she also brought some wealth with her from Saint-Domingue. Paul Lachance's research into marriage contracts in New Orleans between 1804 and 1820, suggests that Saint-Dominguan refugees added to the wealth of the free Black population. In contrast to some of the refugee White population of Saint-Domingue, who entered at the foot of the economic ladder, free women refugees of colour often arrived with more property than local free Black women.[576] Despite this, Rebecca Scott's and Jean Hébrard's research has shown that many free Black refugees faced challenges to their free status, after they relocated to New Orleans.[577] That those of mixed blood were treated in a different way from those of pure African origin was made clear in 1810, when "the territorial courts of Louisiana decided there was a significant difference between quadroons and other *sang-mélé*, (half-blood) on the one hand, and blacks, on the other, as the former should be presumed free. Negroes who claimed to be free would be required to establish their right to freedom by such evidence as would destroy the force of presumption arising from color."[578] Free Black refugees therefore often sought increased protection by creating a trail of documentation attesting to their free status, and also by the testimony of fellow refugees, especially that of wealthy White families like the Moreaus.[579] Also, like Elizabeth Lange of Baltimore, a refugee network in New Orleans was integral to Couvent's ability to settle in this new society. As also in the case of Lange, the Catholic Church played an important role in providing stability. Although Marie's free status may have initially been confirmed by the Moreau family when she arrived, her

[575] When she died in 1837, her age was recorded as being at around eighty. See *Black Women in America. An Historical Encyclopedia.* First edition. Two volumes. Edited by Darlene Clark Hine (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing, 1993)
[576] Paul Lachance, "Were Saint-Domingue Refugees a Distinctive Cultural Group in Antebellum New Orleans? Evidence from Patterns and Strategies of Property Holding." *Revista/Review Interamericana*, Vol. 29 (1999), No. 1-4, 191
[577] Rebecca Scott & Jean Hébrard, *Freedom Papers: An Atlantic Odyssey in the Age of Emancipation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 151
[578] Jennifer M. Spear, *Race, Sex & Social Order in Early New Orleans* (John Hopkins University Press, 2009), 190-191.
[579] Elizabeth C. Neidenbach, "Refugee from Saint-Domingue Living in this City." *Journal of Urban History,* Vol. 42, Issue. 5 (2016), 841

purchase of two lots of land in 1806 further strengthened her claim, as only free people of colour were allowed this legal right.[580]

That free Black refugees from Saint-Domingue were often looked upon with disfavour by White native New Orleanians was evidenced by the remarks of George Washington Cable who wrote, "they were an unaspiring, corrupted, and feeble class, of which little was feared, and nothing hoped."[581] Free Black women from Saint-Domingue were also vilified for their lack of morals. Historian Joseph Tregle claimed that they "monopolized the task of accommodating the licentiousness of the male part of New Orleans."[582] However, as this thesis has already made clear, some Saint-Dominguan Black women refugees, including Marie Couvent, made significant contributions to the cultural and economic life of the cities where they settled.

Marie dictated her first will in 1812 when she was about fifty-five years old to notary Narcisse Broutin. As was the custom, she called him to her house because she was very ill and feared that death was close. This will made clear her continuing relationship with the Moreau family, as she appointed Jean Moreau as her heir. It seems paradoxical that Marie would bequeath all her worldly goods to someone from a family who had perhaps physically abused her, and possibly parted her from her still enslaved child. However, Marie may have believed that the only way to ensure her son's freedom, at least after her death, was by the appointment of Jean Moreau as her heir. His inheritance was on condition that he "locate the heirs of Francis Moreau, and free her son."[583] In addition to naming Jean Moreau as her universal legatee, Couvent also chose him as her executor.[584] Therefore, she, like many of the other free women of colour in this study, pragmatically appointed a White man to carry out her legal transactions. She perhaps hoped, that by doing so, it was more likely her wishes would be carried out. According to Elizabeth C. Neidenbach, free women of colour from Saint-Domingue often chose

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[580] Ibid
[581] George Washington Cable, *Historical Sketchbook and Guide to New Orleans and Environs* (William H. Coleman, New York,1885), 30
[582] See Joseph Tregle, "Early New Orleans Society: A Reappraisal" *Journal of Southern History,* xviii (1) (February 1952), 20-36
[583] Notarial Archives: Acts of Broutin, 1812, 27, 199
[584] As a universal legatee he would receive any property or assets that remained after her debts were paid.

White male refugees as their executors, also suggesting the maintenance of old ties from the island.[585] Couvent's will also appeared to demonstrate a personal regard for the female members of the Moreau household, as she left one of her two houses to "Demoiselle Leonice natural daughter of Emilite Moreau, the widow Monet." Leonice was the granddaughter of François Moreau.[586] Again, although this also seems generous on the part of Couvent, as already observed in the life history of Eulalie Mandeville, relationships between the enslaved and their White holders were often complicated. Thavolia Glymph's reflections suggest a two way process where paradoxically, despite their often cruel treatment, some of the enslaved also came to have affection towards these White families, especially those who worked in closer proximity.[587] Psychologically, the connection with the Moreau family, may have also fulfilled a need for kinship and a sense of belonging for the rootless, now childless, Couvent.

The other bequests in Marie's will also further demonstrated these often-complex relationships between holder and slave, as she also left her other house to one of her enslaved women, Séraphine. Although the house would only be Séraphine's during her lifetime, reverting to Jean Moreau after her death, this bequest clearly showed a hierarchy in the Couvent household, by demonstrating the different ways in which she viewed her various slaves. She appeared to have emotional attachments to some, while others were merely investments. At the time she wrote her 1812 will, she had five enslaved people in her household: Séraphine and her ten-month-old son, Nöel; Sophie and her young daughter Simonette; and a fifty-six-year-old man named Bernard. She also wanted Séraphine, Nöel, and Bernard to be freed after her death, for their "good and loyal service."[588] However, she made no mention of Sophie and Simonette, who would have presumably therefore been sold to cover her debts or were part of Jean Moreau's legacy. On the day after she made her will, and probably while still feeling that she

[585] Elizabeth C. Neidenbach, "Refugee from Saint-Domingue Living in this City." *Journal of Urban History,* Vol. 42, Issue. 5 (2016), 843
[586] Julienne dite Lyonais was born in Santiago de Cuba in 1806. Antoine Besset and Marie Moreau's marriage in 1823 legitimized her birth. See *Sacramental Records of the Roman Catholic Church of the Diocese of New Orleans,* Vol:16, edited by Charles E. Nolan 1823-1825
[587] Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 29
[588] Notarial Archives: Acts of Broutin, 1812, 27, 199

was going to die, as she also received the last rites, she married a free man of colour called Bernard Couvent.[589]

Previous life histories of Marie Couvent have implied that Bernard Couvent may have freed her, and that she gained wealth through her marriage with him, in a more patriarchal reading of her life history.[590] However, Neidenbach's research suggests that it was Marie's enslaved man, Bernard, whom she married on that day.[591] Thus, it was unlikely that he was the source of the couple's wealth. The marriage was recorded in Saint Louis Cathedral by Antonio de Sedella stating, "Bernado, legitimate son of Simon and Maria a negro libro married Ester negra libre who had bought his freedom." The named witnesses of the marriage also suggest that it was Marie Couvent who married Bernard, as they all came from the Moreau family. One of them was Maria Antonia Moreau, Jean Moreau's daughter, and the other was his niece, the widow Moné (mother of one of Marie's estate beneficiaries). [592] Although the woman's first name was Ester, in the 1812 will, Marie called herself Marie Justine Sirnir, "dite Esther," suggesting that this was also another name she used and making it even more likely that this was her marriage record. Marie had bought Bernard from Mrs. Mary Wheaton in 1811," with all the diseases by which he can be attacked and his good and bad qualities, as has known him for a long time."[593] This description suggested that Bernard may not have been the best investment, thus the mention of some sort of prior relationship between Marie and Bernard may have been her motive in purchasing him. There is no record that her enslaved man, Bernard, was ever officially manumitted, and as the day before the marriage, he was still listed in her will as being enslaved, it is unlikely that she ever officially freed him. However, it was well known that the affirmation of free status through religious ceremonies was often a good way of claiming freedom, if the official documents were lacking. Enslaved mothers gained free status for their children by having them baptized as such by the Catholic

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[589] Elizabeth C. Neidenbach, "Refugee from Saint-Domingue Living in this City." *Journal of Urban History,* Vol. 42, Issue. 5 (2016), 843

[590] Kwami Anthony Appiah & Henry Louis Gates (eds) *Africana: The Encyclopaedia of the African American Experience* (Oxford University Press, 2006), 251

[591] Elizabeth C. Neidenbach, "Mes Dernieres Volantés. Testaments to the Life of Marie Couvent, a Former Slave in New Orleans." *Transatlantica*, Cartographies de Amerique/Histoires d'esclaves (2012), 5

[592]Archives of the Archdiocese of New Orleans: Saint Louis Cathedral Marriages, Free People of Color, Part 1 1812-1819

[593] Notarial Archives: Vente d 'Esclave par Mde Wheaton a Marie Jn Sirnir, Acts of N. Broutin, February 14,1811, Volume 25, page 46

Church. Sympathetic Roman Catholic officials such as Père Sedella, who married the couple, were also often complicit in these deceptions.[594] After they were married, the Couvents also created a document trail which validated Bernard's status, both as a husband and thus, a free man. After 1818, all notary records in which Couvent bought and sold enslaved people acknowledged that she was authorized to do so by her husband. Bernard Couvent was also listed as the head of the household in numerous City Directories from 1822 onwards.[595] Although Marie may have married Bernard as an altruistic gesture to ensure his freedom, and in the belief that she was about to die, she actually lived on for another twenty-five years. The marriage proved to be a long lasting and advantageous one for her, in terms of building stronger familial bonds, and the forging of local networks in the Crescent City.

None of Couvent's public documents make clear how she managed to amass all her wealth. However, by her death in 1837, she was worth $19,145.87.[596] Although she could not be counted as one of the wealthiest free Black women in New Orleans, this was a respectable fortune for a refugee from Saint-Domingue who could neither read nor write. The notarial records suggest that she made much of her wealth through the purchase and subsequent sale of enslaved people. She bought and sold at least twenty-five slaves while living in New Orleans. Like many other free women of colour, she therefore benefitted financially through their unpaid domestic work, and she could also rent out their services. The inventory taken from her estate recorded the occupations of two of her enslaved young men, Pierre and Silvain, who were described as "day laborers." Thus, their services were very marketable. She also often sold enslaved people for more than she paid for them, and some of the women had children while in her service; thus, considerably adding to her investment. Evidence also suggests that, like Mandeville, she sold dry goods. Her estate inventory contained large quantities of items commonly sold as dry goods, such as "185 handkerchiefs" and "25 schawls."[597] Jean Moreau's occupation was described as

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[594] See Jennifer M. Spear, *Race, Sex & Social Order in Early New Orleans* (John Hopkins University Press, 2009), 113,194,189, 196. Spear found that while only one-fourth of manumissions of slaves under thirty years old were granted through baptism before 1807, the proportion rose to one-half after the law went into effect in September 1807. Even baptisms recorded as late as 1832 declared that the enslaved child was baptized as free.
[595] Elizabeth C. Neidenbach, " The Life and Legacy of Marie Couvent: Social Networks, Property Ownership and the Making of a Free People of Color." (MA dissertation, College of William & Mary, Arts & Sciences, 2015), 306
[596]New Orleans Public Library, City Archive: Louisiana U.S., Wills and Probate Records, 1756-1984 for Madame Bernard Couvent, Inventories of Estates, 1837
[597] Ibid

"marchand," both in Saint-Domingue and New Orleans, and his entry in the 1805 New Orleans' City Directory, described him as a storekeeper. Marie might therefore have worked for the family in Saint-Domingue, gaining first-hand experience of the skills needed to run a dry goods business.[598] She also speculated with real estate, taking advantage of the credit offered by Eulalie Mandeville's half-brother, Bernard Marigny. She bought her first property from him in 1806 for 500 piastres, promising to pay the total amount in eighteen months.[599] Therefore, by this time she obviously felt financially secure enough in her business ventures to take on the debt. When she first bought the lot in 1806, it consisted of one house. However, by the time of her first will there were two houses on the lot, suggesting that she may have had the second one built, in order to rent it out. She lived in the original property at the rear of the courtyard for thirty-two years.[600]

Somewhat strangely, given the change in her circumstances and fortunes, Marie did not alter her will until 1832. This suggests that she had a continuing connection with the Moreau family, and therefore still also had hope of her son being located. Indeed, Jean Moreau continued to vouch for her financially, endorsing the notes Couvent used to pay for the purchase of enslaved people in 1810, and again in 1823.[601] She only changed her will, when again, she felt close to death. However, this will would be radically different from the one she wrote in 1812 and denoted the changed circumstances of her life. By this time, Marie Couvent had also petitioned for, and was granted, the emancipation of two of her enslaved women, Séraphine and Fillette in 1831, for "assisting in long and grievous spells of sickness," suggesting that she and her husband had not been in the best of health.[602] Indeed, Bernard had begun the process of freeing these two enslaved women but died before completing the

[598] Elizabeth C. Neidenbach, " The Life and Legacy of Marie Couvent: Social Networks, Property Ownership and the Making of a Free People of Color." (MA dissertation, College of William & Mary, Arts & Sciences, 2015), 306
[599] Notarial Archives: Acts of Broutin, 1806, 13:59
[600] Notarial Archives: Vente de terrain par Dame Marie de los Santos Dias a Marie Justine Simir, Testament, 1812; 1822 City Directory listed a woman named Leonora Remy at "28 Barrack bel. Conde," which is the same address provided for Bernard Couvent.
[601] Notarial Archives: Vente d'esclaves par Mouro & C. e à Marie Justine, Esther, March 20, 1810; M. Ant. e. Duverney, Vente d'esclaves à Marie Justine Sirnir, femme Bernard Couvent, Oct. 20, 1823
[602] Notarial Archives: Séraphine Negress Esclave, November 4, 1832; [Emancipation of Séraphine by Justine Sirnar](widow of Bernard Couvent), October 5, 1831, Acts of C. Pollock, Vol. 36, p.394

manumission in 1829.[603] The household was badly affected by the cholera epidemic of 1832. It took the lives of two people, Séraphine and an enslaved male named Joshué.[604] As Couvent wrote her new will eight days after the death of Séraphine, and with cholera already in her household, she could have been suffering from the disease, or thought that she had it. In this will, Marie stated that she had no children, thus it appears that she either had given up hope of locating her son, or that he had already died. Marie Couvent changed, not only her heirs, but also her executor, by appointing a free man of colour, Henry Fletcher, to take over the task. Henry also called the notary to the house after Marie was feeling so ill. In this new testament, she also left the house in which she lived, and its land, to Nöel, Sanon and Ezaline, "natural children of Séraphine, already deceased."[605] The 1832 will also made clear that at least one of Séraphine's children were also Bernard's, because she left "two hundred piastres to Sanon Bernard Couvent, natural son of my husband."[606] However, another son of Séraphine, Jules, who was still enslaved, did not receive anything, and was in fact bequeathed to his half-brother, Nöel. This further suggests that Nöel and Ezaline may also have been Bernard's children. By 1832, Marie had four other very young slaves in her household, namely "Pierre, around fourteen years: Radisse, around thirteen years, Sylvain, around thirteen years, and Silvana, eight years."[607] She bequeathed Sylvain to Henry Fletcher, on the condition that he was to be freed after Fletcher's death. The other slaves, however, were to be sold to pay off any debts.[608] In fact, Pierre absconded after Marie's death and a large reward of $100 was offered for his return. The notice in the newspaper, which was placed by Henry Fletcher, also specifically cautioned English captains of steamboats and others against harbouring him under the penalty of the law, as this was a very popular method for runaway slaves to flee New Orleans. [609]

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[603] Elizabeth C. Neidenbach, " The Life and Legacy of Marie Couvent: Social Networks, Property Ownership and the Making of a Free People of Color."(MA dissertation, College of William & Mary, Arts & Sciences, 2015), 306

[604] New Orleans Public Library, City Archive: Probate Court Suit, No. 1322, December 15, 1839; Archives of the Archdiocese of New Orleans: Saint Louis Cathedral, Funerals of Slaves and Free People of Color, Vol.9, Part 2: 1831-1832, No.2055

[605] New Orleans Public Library, City Archive: New Orleans Parish Will Books: Will Book 1833-1837: Marie Couvent, 11 November 1832 (translated from French by author)

[606] Ibid

[607] Ibid

[608] Ibid

[609] *The Bee*, 21 September 1837

Couvent's second will therefore demonstrates the continuing levels of demarcation in her household. She even differentiated between the children of her favoured formerly enslaved woman Séraphine, preferring those who were probably also the offspring of her husband. She also left legacies to two free people of colour: Phrosine Ballon and Louis Chesneau, and also acknowledged Bernard Couvent's granddaughter, who was married to Chesneau, by leaving one hundred piastres to her infant son, also called Louis. These bequests further show how far Couvent had moved away from her ties with the White Saint-Dominguan family, and how she had assimilated into New Orleans' free Black community. [610] This may have also been due in part to the influence of her marriage, as her husband was part of a large network of enslaved and formerly enslaved people, who had been held by the Ursuline nuns.[611] Bernard also had a large extended family, of which Marie became a part. She stood as godparent to Bernard Couvent's grandchild, also called Bernard after his father and grandfather. Bernard's son also had another child, who was named for her adopted grandmother, Marie.[612] Finally, Bernard and Marie's extensive business connections with the free Black community may have also caused her to distance herself from her old refugee ties. For example, Henry Fletcher was a carpenter like her husband, and a possible business colleague.[613]

Although Marie Couvent thought she was near death in 1832, she lived for another five years, dying in 1837. Her succession also showed how her circle of family, friends and acquaintances were now mainly from the native free Black community. For example, family meetings to appoint a guardian for Séraphine's minor child, Ezaline, included names from some of New Orleans' most well-known free Black families, such as Joseph Dolliole.[614] By the time Marie had passed, Séraphine's eldest child

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[610] New Orleans Public Library, City Archive: New Orleans Parish Will Books 1805-1920: Volume 1833-1837.

[611] Elizabeth C. Neidenbach, " The Life and Legacy of Marie Couvent: Social Networks, Property Ownership and the Making of a Free People of Color." (MA dissertation, College of William & Mary, Arts & Sciences, 2015), 306

[612] Bernard Couvent had a son with an enslaved woman named Helena in 1792. The couple also named the child Bernard and had him baptized as free in 1797. Bernard Couvent fils was also a carpenter and had several children with his long-time partner, Archives of the Archdiocese of New Orleans: Rosette Jacques, April 9,1797, page 354, no. 452, St. Louis Cathedral, New Orleans, Baptism, 1792-1798

[613] Archives of the Archdiocese of New Orleans: Bernard, negre lib de cette ville, May 17,1814, No. 184, page 25 in St. Louis Cathedral Baptisms of Slaves and Free People of Color, Volume 14, part 1,1814-1815.

[614] The Dolliole family in New Orleans were well known builders and architects, responsible for building many of the houses and cottages of the French Quarter. See Elizabeth C. Neidenbach, " The Life and Legacy of Marie Couvent: Social Networks, Property Ownership and the Making of a Free People of Color." (MA dissertation, College of William & Mary, Arts & Sciences, 2015)

Nöel, had already predeceased her, dying earlier in the year. His expensive funeral, which took place in Saint Louis Cathedral, showed the depth of Couvent's affection for him, and provided further evidence of her, by now, large circle of contacts within the free Black community. Fifty-one people were invited to his funeral at a cost of $34.[615] On the undertaker's receipt, he was referred to as her "petit-fils" (grandson), showing the bond of kinship that Marie now felt with her adopted New Orleans' family. Neidenbach suggests that the family which Couvent created, resembled the social organization of many West African societies. Although enslaved people were defined as outsiders in these West African communities, they could however change their status by forging bonds with their holder's family, eventually being incorporated into the family group.[616] While Marie was perhaps too young when she was taken to have absorbed her society's culture, Stewart King also found that this more African ethos of enslavement existed in Saint-Domingue among free Black society, whose attitude towards the enslaved differed from that of Whites.[617] Thus, Marie may have been continuing Saint-Dominguan practice in her creation of kinship bonds with certain members of her household. Her by now, extensive networks in New Orleans, and reputation within the free Black community, were also evidenced by her large and expensive funeral. One hundred invitations were sent out to mourners at a cost of $81.62.

Marie's will of 1832, also showed the extent of her connection to New Orleans' free Black society, through her wish to bequeath something meaningful to her adopted community. She therefore directed in her will, "my land at the corner of Grands Hommes and Union Street will be forever dedicated and employed for the establishment of a free school for the orphans of color of the Faubourg Marigny."[618] In her previous will, all her accumulated wealth would have gone to members of the White community, now it would directly benefit the free Black population. According to Desdunes, the notion of bequeathing land or money for charitable purposes was not common amongst the free Black population at this time, and he wrote, "she was the first amongst us to give the example of enlightened

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[615] New Orleans Public Library, City Archive: New Orleans Parish Will Books 1805-1920: Volume 1833-1837.
[616] Elizabeth C. Neidenbach, " The Life and Legacy of Marie Couvent: Social Networks, Property Ownership and the Making of a Free People of Color" (MA dissertation, College of William & Mary, Arts & Sciences, 2015), 213, 282
[617] Stewart King, *Blue Coat or Powdered Wig: Free People of Color in Pre-Revolutionary Saint-Domingue* (University of Georgia Press, 2007), 39
[618] New Orleans Public Library, City Archive: New Orleans Parish Will Books 1805-1920: Will Book 1833-1837

charity, and for a long time she was the only one who held this distinction."[619] Certainly it would seem that her contemporaries, such as Eulalie Mandeville, were more preoccupied with the accumulation of property, in order to benefit their heirs, rather than thinking about the future of their community. It was not until the mid-nineteenth century, that charitable bequests in wills became popular, as will be evidenced in the final chapter of this study. Therefore, Marie Couvent's bequest may have encouraged prominent and wealthy free Black citizens, such as Thomy Lafon and François Lacroix, in their support of the foundation of charitable institutions.[620]

There has also been speculation amongst scholars, of the reasons why Couvent chose the foundation of a school as her philanthropic bequest. Neidenbach suggests that the location of Marie's house may have influenced her choice. The front part of the property faced the Ursuline Convent, which offered education for both Black and White girls.[621] Perhaps seeing the daily attendance of these students planted the idea in Couvent's mind. Her preoccupation with schooling may have also been as a result of her Saint-Dominguan background. This study has already noted the importance of education in Saint-Domingue, and how many of the refugees were better educated than the free Black population of New Orleans. Also, like fellow refugee, Elizabeth Lange of Baltimore, Couvent may have noticed that there were little or no educational opportunities for free Black children in New Orleans, whose parents could not afford to pay for private education. As early as 1813, there had been private schools in New Orleans for free children of colour. However, there was no provision amongst the poorer members of the free Black community, except what was offered by the Catholic Church. Therefore, Neidenbach further suggests that Couvent's bequest could also be counted as a political one, because the restriction of Black people's education was a way of ensuring White hegemony. Couvent may have

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[619] Rudolphe Desdunes, *Our People and Our History: Fifty Creole Portraits,* translated and edited by Sister Dorothea Olga McCants (Louisiana University Press, 1973), 102

[620] They were also involved in the foundation of the Couvent school. See Rudolphe Desdunes, *Our People and Our History: Fifty Creole Portraits,* translated and edited by Sister Dorothea Olga McCants *(*Louisiana University Press, 1973), 102

[621] Elizabeth C. Neidenbach, " The Life and Legacy of Marie Couvent: Social Networks, Property Ownership and the Making of a Free People of Color."(MA dissertation, College of William & Mary, Arts & Sciences, 2015), 357

been aware of the potential liberating effects of knowledge for Black children, as a means of freeing themselves from their subordinate position.[622]

Marie directed that the school, which was to be called *L'Institution Catholique des Orphelins Indigents*, be set up under the auspices of Father Constantine Maenhaut or his successors, for the education of free Black orphans.[623] Her appointment of a Roman Catholic official to oversee the building of the school also demonstrated her loyalty to and support for the Roman Catholic Church. Many of the important events of her life were conducted in Saint Louis Cathedral, including her marriage, baptisms, and various funerals, even her own. She may have also been acknowledging the power of the Church, recognizing like Lange and Delille, that the patronage of a Catholic priest for her project meant that it was more likely to succeed. Marie also specifically designated the school for orphans, probably because they were the least likely to receive any care, as there were no institutions for free Black orphans at this time. In addition to Father Maenhaut, she also placed much confidence in Henry Fletcher, trusting that, as executor of the will, he would see that her wishes were carried out. According to Rodolphe Desdunes, this trust was misplaced because Fletcher kept her legacy secret and misappropriated some of the funds. Instead of ensuring that the work to establish the school was carried out, he apparently disposed of some of the property and used the money for himself.[624] However, other sources such as Marcus B. Christian claim, that it was New Orleans' public officials who deliberately delayed the opening of the school, which wasn't built until eleven years after Couvent's death.[625] Roger Baudier, a historian of Louisiana's Catholic Church, refutes this argument by suggesting that it was Maenhaut who delayed the establishment of the school, in order to protect it from the lay wardens who controlled the finances of the Catholic Church in New Orleans. By 1844, the Supreme Court had ruled to diminish the power of these wardens, making it safe for Maenhaut to proceed.[626] Neidenbach also proposes that the difficult economic situation of the late 1830s and early 1840s may have contributed

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[622] Ibid. 329
[623] New Orleans Public Library, City Archive: New Orleans Parish Will Books 1805-1920: Will Book 1833-1837
[624] Rudolphe Desdunes, *Our People and Our History: Fifty Creole Portraits,* translated and edited by Sister Dorothea Olga McCants (Louisiana University Press, 1973), 102
[625] Marcus B. Christian, "The Negro in Louisiana" (unpublished document, 1938, University of New Orleans, Marcus Christian Collection)
[626] Roger Baudier, *The Catholic Church in Louisiana* (A W Hyatt Stationery, mfg., co., ltd., 1939), 48

to the delay in implementing Couvent's wishes. When Couvent died in 1837, there was a nation-wide depression caused by a series of transatlantic financial crises. The situation did not resolve until 1843.[627] According to Desdunes, however, Father Maenhaut became concerned at the delay and decided to intervene. He sought the help of François Lacroix, and a society was created to oversee the project, which, "called for an account from the executor of the will concerning the misuse of the properties involved. Restitution was duly made, and a settlement provided for the establishment of a primary school for free Black orphans of the Third District."[628] Through donations and fairs, the society was also able to buy other land to extend the acreage available for the school.[629]

Elite members of the free Black community may have also been galvanized into further action, not just because of Maenhaut's intercedence. In 1841, the City's three municipalities each created their own public-school systems, after receiving authorization from the state legislature. Although free Black people were obliged to pay the taxes that supported these schools, their children were not allowed to go to them. Therefore, Neidenbach argues that the establishment of Couvent's school was, to a degree, a response on the part of an aggrieved free Black population, when it was made clear that their children would be denied access to public schooling.[630] The school opened in 1848 and enrolled forty-three orphans in the first year. The school also began to admit non-orphans, and by 1853 had a total of 240 students. The orphans were taught free of charge, but children with parents could pay what they could afford. Some came from poor families, while others were the sons and daughters of skilled artisans, entrepreneurs, and property owners.[631] Although Maenhaut was supposedly in charge of the school, probably as a sop to White authorities, who wanted, at least ostensibly, to have a White man in control, in fact, the society oversaw the running of the school. Free Black men and women taught at the school,

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[627] Elizabeth C. Neidenbach, "The Life and Legacy of Marie Couvent: Social Networks, Property Ownership and the Making of a Free People of Color."(MA dissertation, College of William & Mary, Arts & Sciences, 2015), 408
[628] Rudolphe Desdunes, *Our People and Our History: Fifty Creole Portraits,* translated and edited by Sister Dorothea Olga McCants (Louisiana University Press, 1973), 102
[629] Ibid. 104
[630] Elizabeth C. Neidenbach, " The Life and Legacy of Marie Couvent: Social Networks, Property Ownership and the Making of a Free People of Color." (MA dissertation, College of William & Mary, Arts & Sciences, 2015), 408
[631] Mary Niall Mitchell, *Raising Freedom's Children* (New York University Press, 2008), 17-18

and some of these were the most eminent French-speaking intellectuals and writers in New Orleans' free Black society.[632]

The history of the foundation of the *L'Institute Orphelins* as told by Desdunes, also revealed much about the class divisions within the free Black community. While admittedly praising Marie Couvent, Desdunes speculated why little was known about her. He attributed it to a lack of a network of descendants and relatives, even though she had an adopted family, and a vast network of her husband's relatives. However, these were humble, uneducated, often enslaved or formerly enslaved people from the lower echelons of free Black society. As a Black African woman, she was not connected by kinship to any of the White families residing in the City, and thus was probably not known to any high-class Afro-Creoles. However, the large number of people at her funeral attested to her being well-known in certain quarters of free Black society. In his more patriarchal reading of the history of the school, Desdunes suggests that Couvent was guided in her choices by Father Maenhaut, thus intimating that she would not have made such a decision of her own accord. His denigration of Fletcher for not carrying out Couvent's wishes also hints at elitism, as Fletcher was also an artisan and although he was literate, was still probably not a very educated man. Although the school was the first building in Louisiana constructed exclusively for the education of African-Americans and was also one of the few institutions to have its finances, building works and teaching controlled completely by them, it may have never become the sanctuary for poorer children which Couvent may have envisaged. Scholars have been divided whether the school really catered for the poorer free children of colour or whether it became an academic refuge for wealthier Afro-Creoles in the Marigny neighbourhood. John Blassingame was of the opinion that the school served the elite class of free Black people; whereas Mary Niall Mitchell argues that evidence about charitable donations and testimony from some of the students suggests that it was considered a public school by the community.[633] However, that the school's board was also not completely free of class prejudice was illustrated by an exchange between several of the board members concerning the building of a branch of the school in Faubourg Tremé, to serve

[632] Rudolphe Desdunes, *Our People and Our History: Fifty Creole Portraits,* translated and edited by Sister Dorothea Olga McCants (Louisiana University Press, 1973), 103
[633] See John W.Blassingame, *Black New Orleans 1860-1880,* (University of Chicago Press, 1973), 60; Mary Niall Mitchell, *Raising Freedom's Children* (New York University Press, 2008), 18

the poorest members of the free Black society. One of the members responded with disfavour, suggesting that poor children should walk if they wanted a free education. Although the members finally decided in favour of sourcing a suitable property in Tremé, this never happened. Thus, it could be argued that Couvent's wish of providing a school which exclusively catered for the poorer members of her community also never happened.[634]

Figure 16: Marie Couvent School: c1924: Archives and Records of the Archdiocese of New Orleans

The story of Marie Couvent illustrates how a formerly enslaved "outsider" could transcend all expectations to become a successful property-owning businesswoman. When she first arrived in New Orleans, she still felt an allegiance to her enslavers, but then gained the confidence to start her own business, speculating with her money and property to achieve her wealth. In the process she became an active member of New Orleans' free Black society, and eventually wished to contribute in some way to help people like herself, the poorest and least well-educated of her community. Her life also demonstrated the complicated interrelated relationships between Black and White, enslaved, and free, and how these lines could become blurred over time. Finally, it also shows the class as well as caste prejudices which pervaded White and New Orleans' free Black society. Although Marie Couvent would have been pleased at the success of her school, she might have ultimately been disappointed that it did not always appear to cater for the children whose lives she had hoped to improve by education.

[634] Donald E. Devore, "Race Relations & Community Development: The Education of Blacks in New Orleans 1862-1960." (PhD thesis, Louisiana State University and Mechanical & Agricultural College, 1989), 237

Conclusion

Although both Mandeville and Couvent became wealthy during their lifetimes, Couvent's attainments could perhaps be counted as the more notable because of her African enslaved background, as opposed to the privileged Afro-Creole origins of Mandeville. Her transition during her lifetime from enslaved to wealthy propertied woman is therefore even more remarkable. The two case studies also show the diversity of these businesswomen who managed to attain wealth in antebellum New Orleans. While some of them were from the higher echelons of New Orleans' free Black society, others, like Marie Louise Panis and Marie Couvent, were from a background of enslavement.

Despite this, there were still some commonalities of experience for both Mandeville and Couvent. Both were formerly enslaved by wealthy White families, with whom they had a close connection. Although Eulalie's former holders were bound by the bonds of kinship, nonetheless Couvent was also sometimes helped by her former enslavers when she arrived in New Orleans. However, Eulalie maintained close ties with her White relatives until late in her life, whereas Marie's connections grew less as she assimilated into New Orleans' free Black community. Both women also subsequently formed female networks for support, Couvent with some of her enslaved women, and Mandeville with other businesswomen, and with the plaçées of elite White males. They were also slaveholders, having power over the lives of their enslaved people. Mandeville's upbringing may have accustomed her to utilizing the services of enslaved people without much thought, so she had a distant relationship with her slaves, putting them to work in her business. There is no record of her ever having manumitted any of her slaves, or of making provision for them after her death. Although Marie Couvent formed relationships with certain of her enslaved people, she differentiated between them. While she manumitted some of the favoured ones, and even formed familial bonds with them, others were treated by her as solely economic investments.

The two women certainly differed in the way that they envisaged the disposal of their wealth, especially after their death. Eulalie, like many other free Black women, wanted to ensure that her children would benefit from her hard work, and that the next generation could also maintain economic stability. She may have induced Macarty to purchase plantations in Cuba, and sent two of her children

to live there, to avoid the increasing prejudice being shown to free people of colour in New Orleans. She also made sure that another of her sons had close ties with France. It would seem therefore that rather than encouraging her mixed-race children to become active members of the free Black community, she thought that their futures would be better if they left New Orleans. She did not use any of her influence or money to try and assist her own community of free Black people. It would be her children who took an interest in the welfare of the free Black community with their testamentary bequests. On the other hand, Marie Couvent was also forward thinking, but she wanted to try and ensure the future of the free Black community in her will, rather than hastening its demise. Previously her efforts had been focused on the manumission of her son after her death, even if she had to forfeit giving him an inheritance to do so. However, later in her life she saw that by investing in the future of the free Black community, she could make a difference for many future generations, not just that of her own family. In that respect, her own enslavement and hardships as a refugee may have played a part in her desire to assist others. As she could not read and write, and therefore understood the limitations this placed on her, she wanted disadvantaged children to receive the education that she never had. Thus, although Eulalie Mandeville was the wealthier of the two women, Couvent left more of a lasting legacy to the City and is now more remembered. Although in the 1990s, Couvent's name was removed from a school in New Orleans because of her slaveholding, like the Sisters of the Holy Family, her gravestone has been restored and a new plaque put on it, whereas Eulalie Mandeville's tomb now lies in ruins in the free Black section of Saint Louis Cemetery No. 2.

Up until now, this thesis has concentrated on the life histories of free Black women in the antebellum period. However, as much of their endeavours were about providing stability and constancy of experience for their children, the final chapter will take a brief look at the fate of two of the families during the Civil War and Reconstruction, in an analysis of continuity and change.

Chapter Five

Legacies: The Macarty and Auguste Families during the Late Antebellum Period, Civil War, and the Reconstruction

"It is important that Creoles of color be assessed and judged separately because they have a will of their own."[635]

Previous chapters have looked at the lived experiences of a cohort of free women of colour during the Antebellum period, focusing on those aspects which had an influence, not only on their own lives, but also those of their community. By establishing businesses and various other institutions, and by buying land and real estate, these women also helped shape the environment around them. Part of this drive to accumulate wealth and property was also an effort to provide a better future for the next generation. However, none of them could have foreseen the societal consequences of the Civil War, which would completely transform the world of their descendants. This conclusion, therefore, continues the reflections upon these women's lives, by comparison of their life experiences with those of their successors during the late antebellum period through to the Civil War and the Reconstruction.

No-one in New Orleans was exempt from the sweeping changes brought about by the war, and perhaps none more so than the wealthier members of its free Black population. During the post-war era there was a decline in the value of property holdings among the former free Black people in skilled occupations. "Between 1860 and 1870, the mean value of real-estate owning black bricklayers dropped from $2,888 to $1,022; among carpenters from $1,406 to $948; among merchants from $10,925 to $6,925; among grocers from $10,480 to $3,067; among shoemakers from $1,972 to $804; among cigar makers from $1,780 to $1,403; and among boarding house keepers from $2,794 to $2,243."[636] There was also a drop in the proportion of former free women of colour who owned real estate, from 28.4

[635] Rodolphe Desdunes, *Our People and Our History: Fifty Creole Portraits,* translated and edited by Sister Dorothea Olga McCants (Louisiana University Press, 1973), 95

[636] Loren Schweninger, "Antebellum Free Persons of Color in Postbellum Louisiana" *Louisiana History* 30 (Fall 1989), 354

percent in 1860 to 13.5 a decade later.[637] Many of New Orleans' White residents also suffered from the same problems of increased poverty, but as the quote from Rodolph Desdunes, which heads this chapter, intimates, some free Black people, especially those from the upper section of free Black society, were also concerned about the potential loss of their unique position, below White people but above the enslaved. In a new order which increasingly classified people as purely Black or White, they were afraid of losing further status. Historians such as Justin Nystrom have begun looking at the effects of the cultural and social changes on these Afro-Creole families, and the ways in which they sought to make a place for themselves in this new society.[638] He suggests that the collapse of the City's middle racial tier led to an identity crisis. Some of them believed that, because of the changes in attitudes toward their status, there were only two main options available to them: becoming part of the political leadership or crossing the colour line.[639] There was also the third option of leaving the South in the hope of obtaining increased equality and political rights elsewhere. Some feared that those who did nothing would inevitably lose their unique position as Afro-Creoles, becoming part of a generic Black community. Nystrom argues that many of the decisions taken by wealthy former free Black people after the war, were therefore, sometimes more to do with their individual needs, rather than wishing to change political or racial ideology. [640] Loren Schweninger asserts that, despite a professed avowal of a "common cause" towards all of the Black community, there were those of its society who viewed the aftermath of the war as a disaster for property-owning free people of colour.[641] Therefore, some who entered into the political arena may have been more concerned with maintaining and obtaining further privileges for the former free Black community, rather than representing all of New Orleans' Black citizens.

However, there were also those who genuinely saw the Reconstruction period as an opportunity to gain more equality for the Black inhabitants of New Orleans. Some of these were elite members of

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[637] Ibid

[638]See Justin Nystrom, *New Orleans after the Civil War: Race, Politics, and a New Birth of Freedom* (University of Georgia Press, 2010); Justin Nystrom, "In my Father's House: Relationships and Identity in an Interracial New Orleans Creole Family 1845-1875" *The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* Vol. 49. No.3 (Summer. 2008)

[639]Justin Nystrom, "In my Father's House: Relationships and Identity in an Interracial New Orleans Creole Family 1845-1875" *The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* Vol. 49. No.3 (Summer. 2008), 298

[640] Ibid. 288

[641] Loren Schweninger, "Antebellum Free Persons of Color in Postbellum Louisiana" *Louisiana History* 30 (Fall 1989), 352

the free Black community and were, therefore, not only well-educated, and wealthy, but also often closely linked to the City's leading White families through business or kinship. These political activists may have thought that through their connections, they could form a diplomatic bridge between the White population and the newly freed, for the benefit of all. Thus, enterprising men such as Louis Charles Roudanez and Paul Trèvigne advocated that, apart from emancipation, African-Americans should have rights to hold office, operate their own school system, and determine their collective and economic future.[642] Many scholars have focused on the political and ideological activities of these elite free Black men, mainly by examination of the two short-lived Black Creole newspapers, *L'Union* and *Le Tribune*, which were published from 1862-1869.[643] This chapter will also include study of one of the children of Marie Dolores Laveaux, who was a political activist, often featuring in these newspapers' articles. However, it will also examine the other issues facing this community through further case studies of people from two of the free Black families featured in this thesis: the Auguste family in Chapter Three and the Macarty family in Chapter Four, whose members were descended from Marie Dolores Laveaux and Eulalie Mandeville respectively. Thus, it will provide further research on the social, cultural, and economic consequences of the war and the Reconstruction on the elite free Black community, as well as assessing the impact of the legacy of these two free Black women. As with the previous chapters, it will examine the ways in which their children's backgrounds and position in free Black society affected their life decisions during the late Antebellum and Reconstruction periods. Thus, it will not only provide further insight into the problems faced by their community but will also offer an assessment of how far their mother's life choices also influenced their own experiences.

There were, of course, fewer options available for Afro-Creole women to be politically active after the Civil War, as they were prohibited from entering the political arena by virtue of their sex. However, as this thesis has already shown, by the antebellum period, some free Black women supported their community by effective organization of and participation in its institutions such as the Couvent

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[642]Gilles Vandal, "Black Utopia in Early Reconstruction New Orleans: The People's Bakery as a Case Study." *The Journal of Louisiana History Association,* Vol.9, No.3 (Summer 1968), 438

[643] See David Rankin, "The Origins of Black Leadership in New Orleans during the Reconstruction." *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol.40, No.3 (Aug 1974); Mark Charles Roudané, Matthew Charles Roudané, "The Color of Freedom: Louis Charles Roudanez, New Orleans, and the Transnational Origins of the African American Freedom Movement." *South Atlantic Review*, Vol. 73, No. 2 (Spring 2008)

School and the charitable enterprises of the Sisters of the Holy Family. A comparison of the lives of Mandeville and Laveaux, as opposed to those of their children, will therefore also serve to demonstrate the changes, not only to free Black society as a whole, but also to individuals, highlighting the profound effects of the run-up to the war and its aftermath on their lives. The chapter will begin by looking at the Civil War and its general impact on free Black society. It will then continue by concentrating on the Macarty and Auguste families, with an examination of their lives before, during and after the Civil War, assessing the possible reasons for the choices that they made, which would determine the future for them, and the succeeding generations.

The Impact of the Civil War on Free Black Society

The Civil War could be counted as a catalyst for societal and cultural change because it forced free people of colour to consider their allegiances. Were they loyal to the free Black population, divided itself by class and status? Or to a wider Black community, including the formerly enslaved? Or did their commitments remain with their Confederate, Francophone White connections fighting to retain racial slavery and ensuring state rights? Or indeed, was their devotion to their home city of New Orleans and the state of Louisiana? Certainly, when Louisiana first seceded in 1861, it appeared that many free people of colour rallied around the Confederacy. About 1,500 free Black men formed a militia called the Native Guard, in order to assist the White Confederate militias in its defence of the City and the State against the expected invasion from the North.[644] *The Gazette & Sentinel Newspaper* recorded the meeting which voted for this support:

> The free colored population made resolutions to offer their services to the Municipial authorities in case of invasion by the enemy; and if they are allowed to form themselves into military companies, they take the engagement to take arms at a moment's notice

[644] Sally McKee, *The Exiles Story; Edmond Dedé and the Unfinished Revolutions of the Atlantic World* (Yale University Press, 2017),163

> for the defense of their native soil and fight shoulder to shoulder as their fathers did in 1814.[645]

Armand Lanusse, a leading free Black citizen, and teacher at the Marie Couvent School, had addressed the meeting in favour of joining the Confederate cause. The resolution to form a militia was adopted by the committee, which included one Villarceaux Macarty, Eulalie Mandeville's son. By this time Pierre Villarceaux would have been in his mid-fifties, the large fortune left to him by his mother further consolidating his status as a member of the highest elite in the free Black community. Free Black women also supported the war effort. Shortly after it began, the City established a Free Market to help feed the wives and children of White soldiers whose companies fought far away from Louisiana. Free Black women organized *Colored Ladies' Fairs* at the Free Market which opened each night, as well as elaborate dances to raise money for the cause. In November 1861, the free Black community also organized a "fancy colored ball" to benefit the Free Market. It provided another propaganda opportunity for *The Daily Picayune* to report about the support for the war by the free Black population. An article entitled "Darkies Dancing for the Benefit of the Free Market" went on to say, "it is quite refreshing to see colored people dancing for the benefit of the sisters, mothers, daughters and wives left at home by our heroes. What would Lincoln say to this?" These balls were also successful in raising money for the cause, this one raising the sum of $600 for the Free Market.[646]

Historians have debated why many of New Orleans' free Black people reacted to the call to arms by joining the Confederacy. Indeed, after the war was over, many of them expediently defended their position by claiming that they had felt pressured to do so. They insisted that they would have been vulnerable, especially if they had refused. This was a good point in a City where free Black people felt increasingly beleaguered.[647] The violence towards them after the war, which will be discussed later in the Chapter, is also an indication of what might have happened if they had refused to support the Confederacy. Civil War historian James G. Hollandsworth suggests that it was mostly the wealthy high-status free people of colour who joined the Confederates, because they often had close family ties with

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[645] *Gazette & Sentinel*, 27 April 1861
[646] *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 29 November 1861; 3 January 1862
[647] Loren Schweninger, "Antebellum Free People of Color in Postbellum Louisiana." *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (Autumn, 1989), 346

White society. As prosperous slave and real estate holders, they also had more to lose in the event of a Union victory. He further suggests that, as a result of their background and upbringing, these Afro-Creoles identified more closely with White Creoles than with the enslaved, thus they had little compunction to side with them.[648] Indeed, previous Chapters have shown that there could be a strong sense of kinship between these Black and White families, despite the lesser standing of free Black relatives. For example, although Pierre Villarceaux Macarty had seen first-hand the way in which his mother's name was dragged through the courts by his Macarty relatives in an effort to relieve him of his inheritance, he supported the Confederacy, and at his death remembered some of his White relatives in his will.[649] However, Sally McKee points out the problem with Hollandworth's suppositions. She argues that the awareness of their subordinate status would have precluded free Black people from having such a strong identification with their oppressors. She suggests that free Black people aspired to the lifestyle of the dominant group, without perhaps necessarily associating themselves with it.[650] These debates between scholars demonstrate that the reasons for free Black people's support for the Confederacy may have been as complicated as the tangled relationships between these interracial families. Also, the free Black elite comprised only a small percentage of the community, not enough to have accounted for the numbers of recruits. Those poorer free people of colour who did not own enslaved people or land had, on the face of it, much less reason to support the Confederacy. However, the numbers of free Black conscripts imply that many of them also supported the cause, at least in the early days of the war. Judith Kelleher Schafer suggests another reason why they may have volunteered. She argues that by fighting side-by-side with White troops, free people of colour may have hoped at least to maintain their position during the war, and possibly also to achieve a measure of increased equality with their participation. If this was their aim however, they were soon to be disappointed. They found out that equality with White troops was not forthcoming, as the Confederate officials did not

[648] James G. Hollandsworth, *The Louisiana Native Guards: The Black Military Experience during the Civil War* (Baton Rouge, University of Louisiana Press, 1995), 105
[649]New Orleans Public Library, City Archive: Louisiana Wills and Probate Records 1756-1984: Pierre Villarceaux Macarty 30 August 1878
[650] Sally McKee, *The Exiles Story; Edmond Dedé and the Unfinished Revolutions of the Atlantic World* (Yale University Press, 2017), 63

supply them with arms or uniforms, or indeed, assign them to any duties of importance.[651] However, the aforementioned article in *The Gazette and Sentinel* newspaper could also suggest another reason for their support. With its reference to a shared history of a battle in which Black and White men fought together, it may have appealed to their sense of loyalty to their home city, by evoking a shared experience of a war in which free Black troops fought to protect New Orleans from the British alongside Whites.[652]

After the vote to join the Confederate army, two battalions were formed which were modelled after the French Chasseurs d'Afrique. The line officers were all Afro-Creole, although Governor Thomas O. Moore appointed a White officer in overall command. However, this militia was very short lived and did not see any action in battle. It was disbanded after the occupation of New Orleans by Union forces in 1862.[653] Loren Schweninger suggests that it was after the occupation of New Orleans that some free Black people may have pragmatically switched sides, with the dawning realization that the Confederates were not likely to win the war.[654] One of those who famously changed his loyalties was André Cailloux, one of the first Black officers to be killed in combat for the Union side. Cailloux was born a slave but was manumitted by his owner when he was twenty-one. By the time of the war in 1861, he was part of the prosperous free Black elite of New Orleans. He was also active in the free Black community as a philanthropist, providing funds to the Marie Couvent School. At the outbreak of war, Cailloux was commissioned as a lieutenant in the Confederate Native Guard, but subsequently changed his allegiance to join the Union side.[655] Telesphore Auguste, the son of Marie Dolores Laveaux, was also one of those soldiers who switched sides. He and his brother Mirtile initially volunteered for the Confederate Native Guard as private soldiers.[656] However, after 1861, Telesphore changed sides and served with the Union army in the 74th Regiment, United States Colored Infantry and then in the

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[651] Judith Kelleher Schafer, *Becoming Free, Remaining Free: Manumission and Enslavement in New Orleans 1846-1862* (University of Louisiana Press, 2003), 156

[652] Many free men of colour, including immigrants from the Saint-Domingue revolution, formed an African-American battalion. Also, for the first time, African-American soldiers earned the same wages as their White counterparts. From Exhibition: Louisiana State Exhibit Museum

[653] Terry L. Jones "The Free Men of Color Go to War", New York Times 19 October 2012

[654] Loren Schweninger, "Antebellum Free People of Color in Postbellum Louisiana," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (Autumn, 1989), 351

[655] See Randall G. Holden, *Futile Valor* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: MCG Publishing, 1998)

[656] Louisiana Confederate Soldiers Index 1861-1865

91st Regiment, United States Colored Infantry.[657] These defections of Cailloux and Auguste may have also been influenced by the stance of those two influential Afro-Creole newspapers, *L'Union* and *Le Tribune.* Realizing that a Union victory was inevitable, they began suggesting to their readers that the in-between position of free people of colour, rather than being a disadvantage, would enable them to have an active role after the war. According to the newspapers, by providing cultural mediation between White and Black, they could influence the founding of a future environment of social and political equality.[658] With the defeat of the Confederates on the horizon, the free Black community therefore was perhaps striving to do what it had always done, which was to protect its future. Some of its number may have concluded therefore that the best way to do this was to join the winning side, subsequently working on the inside towards a favourable outcome for their community. However, the reality of the aftermath of the war and the Reconstruction would provide many challenges for the free Black community, and for the Macarty and Auguste families. The next part of the chapter will therefore examine the experiences of the Macarty Family after the Civil War.

The Lives of "Eugène Macarty's Mulatto Sons"

At Eulalie Mandeville's death in 1848, the petition for her succession stated that she had four surviving children: Barthélemy, Eugène, Pierre Villarceaux and Theodule.[659] At this time, Barthélemy was still living in Cuba. His sister, Emerité, Eulalie's only daughter to have survived to adulthood, had died in Cuba before Eulalie. However, Emerité's children, Eulalie's grandchildren, Isabel Rigaud and Eugène Rigaud, received their mother's portion from the succession.[660] During her lifetime, Eulalie's considerable fortune had given her children prosperity and financial security. Her succession now established them as one of the wealthiest free Black families of New Orleans.

The title of this part of the chapter was recorded in Mandeville's court case as the way in which many people in the City referred to Eugène, Pierre Villarceaux and Theodule Macarty. This open public

[657] U.S Civil War Soldier Records and Profiles 1861-1865
[658] See Shirley E. Thompson, *Exiles at Home: The Struggle to Become American in Creole New Orleans* (Harvard University Press, 2009)
[659] New Orleans Public Library, City Archive: Succession of Eulalie Mandeville, 1848
[660] Ibid

acknowledgement of their paternal origins during Eulalie's lifetime demonstrated the acceptance of these mixed-race natural children of prominent White Creole citizens in New Orleans' society. This was to change after the Civil War. With the advent of increasingly binary attitudes towards race after the emancipation of the previously enslaved people, New Orleans' White Creole families started to distance themselves from their Afro-Creole relatives.[661] Justin Nystrom suggests that, in addition to increasing nervousness on the part of White Creoles about compromising their own racial identity, the diminished status of the free Black community was also in part to blame for making White relatives more nervous about admitting family ties.[662] Grace King's written work about the White Creole families of New Orleans exemplifies this mounting desire on the part of the White population to deny any suggestion of procreation across the colour line in their families. In the chapter dedicated entirely to the Macarty family, King wrote, "the good old Creole name of Macarty has become only a memory in New Orleans. The male members of the family are extinct."[663] At the time she was writing, at the end of the nineteenth century, she would have known that there were still those direct descendants from the family, who bore the Macarty name in New Orleans. However, due to the male Macartys' predilections for setting-up house and having children with free Black women, they were mixed-race, and as such, by then, would not have been acknowledged by King. Thompson also suggests that King's comment was an implied criticism of the Macarty men for having "reneged on their social responsibility to pass off their genes and perpetuate a white Creole aristocracy."[664]

Of Mandeville's three sons, only Eugène Jnr. carried on their father's business of money-lending. Pierre Villarceaux speculated on the property market and Theodule lived off his mother's endowments.[665] This was not uncommon amongst second or third generation free Black people with relatives from the highest White echelons of New Orleans' society. They were often educated like their

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[661] See Shirley E. Thompson, *Exiles at Home: The Struggle to Become American in Creole New Orleans* (Harvard University Press, 2009), 192
[662] Justin Nystrom, "In my Father's House: Relationships and Identity in an Interracial New Orleans Creole Family." *The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association*, Vol.49, No.3 (Summer 2008), 298
[663] Grace King, *Creole Families of New Orleans* (The Macmillan Company,1895), 363
[664] Shirley E. Thompson, *Exiles at Home: The Struggle to Become American in Creole New Orleans* (Harvard University Press, 2009), 192
[665] Notarial Archives: Phillipe Lacoste Notary Public, Acts 115-218 for mention of mortgage lending by Eugène Macarty Junior.

White kin in France, and lavished with money, thus they assumed the leisured life of a person of means. One portrait of a free man of colour, Honoré Grandissemé, in George Washington Cable's novel *The Grandissemes* depicts such a person, living off his assets, provided by his White father.[666] Honoré, like the Macarty brothers, has close White relatives, in his case a White half-brother, has been well-educated in France and is a wealthy man, with a fortune left to him by his White father. Literary historian Christopher Bollini argues that Honoré can be characterized as an "economically successful person yet emotionally and spiritually neutered." For Bollini, Honoré exemplifies "a still born, dead end life for those characters of color who subscribe to white models of achievement."[667] On the other hand, Michael L. Campbell suggests that Honoré is an "effete introvert" as a result of the "stifling contempt and hatred directed to him all his life."[668] Thus, Cable was effectively highlighting the difficulties of mixed-race people in New Orleans. In the novel, Honoré comes to a tragic end by killing a White man and fleeing to France with a quadroon woman, Palmyre. He eventually commits suicide by diving into the harbour in Bordeaux. Perhaps Cable was also foreshadowing the demise of the free Black population in New Orleans with this allegory. Ironically, like Honoré, some members of the Macarty family escaped the problems of New Orleans by settling in France and, indeed, in Bordeaux. We cannot know of Theodule Macarty's disposition, or indeed how his existence may have been stifled by increasing oppression from a dominant White society. However, the legacy left by his mother had made him a rich man.. Blassingame's analysis of the richest free Black families from the 1850 census showed that, at this time, Macarty had a considerable personal fortune of $28,000, thus he probably felt no need to enter the world of work.[669] Apart from this census entry, there is little or no record of Theodule's life in New Orleans. He was the first of the brothers to die in 1854 aged forty-nine. [670] The notary records showed that his property was passed to his brother, Pierre Villarceaux.[671]

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[666] George Washington Cable, *The Grandissemes* (Hill & Wang, New York, 1879), 268
[667] Christopher Bollini, "The Grandissimes and Political Transition: The Threat of Genealogical Violence as the Bringer of Change." *The Mississippi Quarterly,* Vol:69, No.2 (Spring 2016), 171
[668] Michael L. Campbell, "The Negro in Cable's the Grandissimes" *The Mississippi Quarterly,* Vol:27, No.2 (Spring 1974), 167
[669] Tulane University, Amistad Centre: "List of Negroes in New Orleans possessing $2000 or more in property", compiled from the 1850 census by John W Blassingame. John W. Blassingame papers.
[670] *The Bee* obituaries, 13 December 1854
[671] See Collins C. Diboll Vieux Carré Digital Survey: see online for information about Theodule Macarty's properties https://www.hnoc.org/vcs/property_info.php?lot=23057

Barthélemy died shortly after his brother Theodule in 1855 in Santiago de Cuba.[672] The coffee plantation purchased by Eugène Macarty had initially not proved to be a financial success for the two Cuban-based Macarty children. At one point, the financial situation was so bad that Emerité's husband, Chére Rigaud, had to abandon the plantation and open a school in the town. However, by the time of Eugène senior's death, Barthélemy and Emerité were well established in Cuba and owned three plantations.[673] Eugène may have deliberately purchased the plantation with a view of helping at least two of his children to have a fresh start in Cuba. By the 1830s, emigration had become a popular option for free people of colour wishing to escape increasing discrimination in New Orleans. The Caribbean, France and Mexico were fashionable destinations because of the similar culture and language. For wealthy free Black people there was also an added incentive to emigrate to the Caribbean Islands, as free people of colour enjoyed a higher status there than in the Southern States of America. Martha Hodes suggests, "in the U.S. a person designated as mulatto stood closer to blackness, but in the West Indies a person designated as colored stood closer to whiteness."[674] There is an intimation in Barthélemy's will that he may well have benefitted from higher status in Cuba, or he could have even been passing for White. The will described him as the "legitimate" son, rather than the "natural" son of "Don" Eugenia and "Doña" Eulalia Mandeville.[675] Also, in the will, Barthélemy was given the title of "Don" like his parents, and the usual appellation for a free Black man in Cuba (moreno libre*)* was not given after his name. Don and Doña were titles generally given only to White Creoles.[676]In any event, by remaining in Cuba throughout his lifetime, Barthélemy and his family avoided the problems which beset the free Black community in their native land. It is also interesting to note that he and Emerité were the only members of Eulalie's family who felt settled enough to marry and have children. Eulalie's sons in New Orleans remained life-long bachelors.

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[672] New Orleans Public Library, City Archive: Louisiana Wills and Probate Records 1756-1984, Will Book, Vol.10, 1855-1857, 24-12-1855

[673] See Supreme Court of Louisiana Historical Archives at the Earl K. Long Library University of New Orleans) 106 U.S. 61 (1846-1861), 626

[674] Martha Hodes, *The Sea Captain's Wife: A True Story of Love, Race and War in the Nineteenth Century* (W.W. Norton & Co., New York, 2006), 221

[675] New Orleans Public Library, City Archive: Louisiana Wills and Probate Records 1756-1984, Will Book, Vol.10, 1855-1857, 24-12-1855

[676] Rebecca J. Scott, *Degrees of Freedom, Louisiana and Cuba After Slavery* (Harvard University Press, 2005), 96

Eugène Macarty Jnr. was the next brother to die in 1866. He left a very brief will.[677] Although he left the bulk of his fortune to his only surviving brother, Pierre Villarceaux, he did make a significant bequest of 600 piastres to the Marie Couvent School.[678] This bequest to one of the foremost institutions of the free Black community in New Orleans, exemplifies how some free Black people were drawing together in defence against an increasingly repressive environment before and after the Civil War. They began to create and then to support their own community organizations. Although Eugène was spared sight of the further societal upheavals which would happen during the reconstruction, it would have become clear to him that, after the Union victory, and with the emancipation of the formerly enslaved people, free people of colour were likely to lose their privileges and position as the middle tier of society. For example, even by 1864, the Union administration under General Nathanial Banks decreed that passes had to be carried by all Black people regardless of their pre-war status. Before this, the Afro-Creoles of New Orleans had generally been exempted from any of the constraints placed on the mobility of Black people.[679] David Rankin suggests that these increasing strictures caused tension and anxiety, leading the Afro-Creole community to become more insular, and retreat into their institutions and enclaves. Organizations such as the Catholic Church, schools and charitable institutions therefore became increasingly important to the community, because they were social markers that distinguished Afro-Creoles from other non-Creole or newly freed Black people.[680] It is significant therefore that Eugène became the first of the family to leave a bequest to one of these key symbols of free Black identity. His endowment also showed a change in attitude from that of the previous generation. His mother had been more concerned with leaving her heirs a substantial inheritance to ensure the future of her family. After the war, her offspring became more interested in preserving their community's future through financial support of their organizations. Thus, although childless himself, Eugène still felt an

[677] New Orleans Public Library, City Archive: Louisiana Wills and Probate Records 1756-1984, Will Book, Vol.14, 1865-1867, 21-06-1866. Piastres were the same value as dollars
[678] Ibid
[679] Shirley E. Thompson, *Exiles at Home: The Struggle to Become American in Creole New Orleans* (Harvard University Press, 2009), 232
[680]David C. Rankin, "The Origins of Black Leadership in New Orleans during the Reconstruction." *The Journal of Southern History,* Vol.40, No.3 (Aug 1974), 299

obligation to try and maintain the future of Afro-Creole society through the education of its children. This desire was also reiterated by his brother Pierre Villarceaux Macarty in his bequests after his death.

Pierre Villarceaux Macarty – the Reluctant Exile

Pierre Villarceaux was the longest lived of all the brothers, dying in Paris in 1878. Therefore, he lived through the Civil War and the Reconstruction-era. His will was also the most comprehensive of all the brothers, its contents shedding further light on the uncertainties and divided loyalties of elite Afro-Creole society. During his lifetime, he was financially more fortunate than many of his peers and he did not face any economic deprivations because of the war. He had inherited wealth from his mother and was also the main heir in two of his brothers' successions. He had also increased his own fortune by buying and selling land. As Loren Schweninger suggests, those who invested heavily in real estate rather than slaves, largely escaped the privations endured by plantation owners after the war. Some of these land speculators made huge increases in their personal wealth, like Thomy Lafon who expanded his fortune from $10,000 to $55,000 by speculating in the swamplands during the Union occupation.[681] At the time of his death, Pierre Villarceaux had around $86,000 in the bank and owned numerous houses throughout the City.[682]

Although Pierre maintained a household in New Orleans, his death certificate and succession suggested that in his later years he may have lived more in France than in Louisiana. It was not unusual for free Black people to retire in France after having amassed enough money to live comfortably there. It was a popular destination for free people of colour from New Orleans and the Caribbean. In the first two decades of the nineteenth century there were already 5,000 free people of colour from various colonies who were living in France.[683] Many felt that racial discrimination was less pronounced in Europe. Frederick Douglass, the famed African-American abolitionist who went to Europe to build an international transatlantic antislavery network believed, "in Europe, the black man had a right to be a

[681] Loren Schweninger, "Antebellum Free People of Color in Postbellum Louisiana." *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (Autumn, 1989), 356
[682] New Orleans Public Library, City Archive: Louisiana Wills and Probate Records 1756-1984: Pierre Villarceaux Macarty 30 August 1878
[683] Shirley E. Thompson, *Exiles at Home: The Struggle to Become American in Creole New Orleans* (Harvard University Press, 2009), 221

man, even a gentleman."[684] Douglass found himself temporarily relocated from a world of discrimination into upper-class internationalism in cosmopolitan centres such as Paris and London.[685]

Pierre Villarceaux may also have felt increasingly constrained to leave his native city because of the changes happening there. Between 1860 and 1870, the numbers of Black people in New Orleans more than doubled from 24,074 to 50,475, while the numbers of Whites declined.[686] To the remaining White community, this influx appeared to pose a threat, and it also further undermined the position of the Afro-Creole community by continuing to blur the lines between the formerly free and freed people.[687] The realization that they were increasingly being categorized by the White population as the same as non-native Black or newly freed people was brought home to Afro-Creoles in the riot of July 1866 at the Mechanic's Institute, where it was reported that "119 black people" were wounded and "34 colored citizens" had been shot, stabbed or bludgeoned to death. Thus, this riot forcibly demonstrated that Afro-Creoles were no longer protected by their former status.[688]

The war and the Reconstruction era, therefore, engendered an exodus of wealthy Afro-Creoles, including Les Cenelles poet, Camille Thierry, who spent the rest of his life in Bordeaux, living off his income from his New Orleans' real estate.[689] However, he, like many others, evinced a reluctance to completely sever ties with his native city; thus, managing the properties and investments of these exiles became big business for their agents.[690] Tellingly, Pierre's death notice in Paris also stated that he was "temporarily residing in France," suggesting that he had planned a return to New Orleans. His last wishes also specified that he wanted to be buried in his native city. Thompson argues that these real estate connections, as well as the nostalgic poetry of the Les Cenelles poet exiles, were a way of

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[684] Serpa Salenius, "Troubling the White Supremacy Black Inferiority Paradigm: Frederick Douglas & William Wells Brown in Europe." *Transatlantic Studies* (June 2016), 14, 153
[685] Ibid
[686] John W. Blassingame, *Black New Orleans: 1860-1880* (The University of Chicago Press, 1973), Table 1
[687] Shirley E. Thompson, *Exiles at Home: The Struggle to Become American in Creole New Orleans* (Harvard University Press, 2009), 221
[688]The Library of Congress: *House Reports*, 19th Congress, 2nd session, No.15. p.12
[689]In 1845, a volume of 85 poems was published by a group of seventeen New Orleanians, all were free men of color – *Les Cenelles: Choix de Poesies Indigines*. The poets of *Les Cenelles* were men of culture and learning (a number of them educated in France); See Sally McKee, *A Family Long Free*, (Yale University Press, 2017), 37
[690] Shirley E. Thompson, *Exiles at Home: The Struggle to Become American in Creole New Orleans* (Harvard University Press, 2009), 221

presaging a return to New Orleans, perhaps in better times.[691] If this was Pierre's ambition, it was unfortunately only realized after his demise. His nephew, Albert Albin Macarty, accompanied the body of his uncle back to New Orleans, at a huge cost of $785.50. His large funeral took place in Saint Louis Cathedral, with one hundred mourners in attendance.[692]

The bulk of Pierre's fortune was left to his widowed niece, Isabel, who had lived in Paris for some time.[693] This generous bequest intimates that she had frequently provided companionship and care for her elderly uncle in France. Indeed, by the time of Pierre's death, Isabel was also very much on her own. She was a widow with no children and her only other close family member, her brother, Eugène, had died in New Orleans in 1849 at the early age of thirty-one. Pierre Villarceaux also made several other significant bequests in his will. Firstly, he left 400 piastres to Madame Ambrosine Chevalier, widow of Clement Lanusse. Clement was the son of Marie Celeste Macarty Lanusse, daughter of Jean Baptiste Macarty, Eugène Macarty's brother.[694] He also left 100 piastres to Monsieur Mandeville Marigny, Bernard Marigny's son. By this time the Marigny family was struggling financially, Bernard Marigny having gambled away his inheritance. Pierre's gifts suggest that he may have been continuing the French Romantic tradition of noblesse oblige that had also precipitated the gifts of money and property to his mother from her White male relatives. His bequests also signified that he still felt some connection and responsibility to his White kin. However, he also made settlements which were an indication of his identification with, and support for, the Afro-Creole community. To Aglae Robin, widow of prominent free Black citizen, Armand Lanusse, who was described by Rodolphe Desdunes as, "a poet, teacher, politician and patriot of the highest order," he left 400 piastres.[695] He also made a bequest of 100 piastres to "Madame Juliette Godin, presidente of the Institution of the Holy Family." Therefore, like many other prominent Afro-Creoles of this time he supported the charitable and educational institutions of the Sisters of the Holy Family. He also made quite a large mysterious legacy

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[691] Ibid. 152
[692] New Orleans Public Library, City Archive: Louisiana Wills and Probate Records 1756-1984: Pierre Villarceaux Macarty 30 August 1878
[693] Ibid
[694] Ibid
[695] Rodolphe Desdunes, *Our People and Our History: Fifty Creole Portraits,* translated and edited by Sister Dorothea Olga McCants (Louisiana University Press, 1973), 50

of property and the sum of 200 piastres to a person called Omer Augustin who was described as a "mulatto."[696] There appears to be no direct connection to the family, but he might have been a former slave or perhaps a natural son of Pierre Villarceaux, or one of the other brothers. The 1880 New Orleans' Census lists Omer as a carpenter and he named one of his sons Villarceaux, after his benefactor. Pierre Villarceaux also made a series of bequests of money and land to four people who were almost certainly former slaves. He described them variously as his "old domestics" or "old servants." Marie Antoinette Macarty and Marie Claire Macarty both received houses and Marie Antoinette also received an extra 200 piastres "because she had children." Eduard Macarty and Pierre Macarty also received 100 piastres and houses. These people, who were described in the will "as being born on the property" and who had the Macarty surname were perhaps house slaves who had very likely remained in his household after emancipation.[697] These bequests to them were generous and would almost certainly have set them up financially for the rest of their lives. Pierre's substantial settlements were like those of Marie Couvent, thus intimating that, like her, he may also have had a close relationship with these enslaved people. Indeed, they may have even been blood relatives. Also, before the war, favoured slaves were often freed by their holders on their deathbeds as a reward for loyal service. Although there was now no need for Pierre to grant them their actual freedom, his bequests granted them freedom from financial concerns. Pierre's settlements therefore showed his support for his community, his adherence to the traditions of free people of colour, and to the customs of noblesse oblige engendered by White Creole society.

After Isabel, his nieces and nephew were the main beneficiaries of Pierre's will. By the time of his passing, all of Eulalie Mandeville's grandchildren and great grandchildren were living in France. Thus, if Eugène and Eulalie had sent some of their children away in order to see them removed from the racial hierarchies of New Orleans' society and settled in places where people of colour were not so discriminated against, their wishes had been fulfilled. Pierre Villarceaux's other niece, Julia Josepha Hermina Macarty, lived with her husband in Bordeaux. The daughters and husband of his deceased

[696] New Orleans Public Library, City Archive: Louisiana Wills and Probate Records 1756-1984: Pierre Villarceaux Macarty 30 August 1878
[697] Ibid

niece, Isabella Dolorita Macarty, were also living in Bordeaux, as was his nephew, Albert Albin Macarty. Bordeaux was a popular destination for New Orleans' Afro-Creoles, especially for the artistic and musical members of New Orleans' free Black community. Renowned musician and composer Edmond Dedé went there and worked as a conductor of the orchestra at the old Grand Theatre. He eventually married a French woman and assimilated into French society.[698] In *The Grandissimes*, Palmyre, a light skinned free woman of colour who practices voodoo, flees New Orleans with Honoré Grandissimé to eventually become the racially ambiguous Mme. Inconnue in Bordeaux. [699] Therefore, although there is no evidence to support the notion that the Macarty family passed for White when they first moved to France, they may have begun to "experience the color line dividing people of African descent from those of European descent as permeable."[700] Eventually, the two great granddaughters of Eulalie Mandeville, Marceline and Marie Vedey, both married Parisians in the 1880s and disappeared into White society.[701]

Although Pierre Villarceaux's nephew, Albin Albert Macarty, may have also crossed the colour line in Europe, yet like his uncle, he still retained his links with New Orleans, where his ancestry was probably well-known. He would have been one of the Macartys in the City whom Grace King didn't recognize. He kept the real estate in New Orleans which he had inherited from his late uncle and from his cousin Isabel Rigaud (who had also inherited her property in New Orleans from Pierre) after she passed away in 1890.[702] There is also an intimation that he returned to live in New Orleans in 1889 when he was listed as a passenger on a ship from Bordeaux. France was cited as the country to which he belonged, and the USA was the country of which he intended to become an inhabitant. He was described as a merchant and was the only passenger to be travelling first class, thus it appears that he also had kept the Mandeville legacy intact.[703] Albert Albin certainly owned property in the City until

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[698] Sally McKee, *The Exile's Song: Edmund Dedé and the Unfinished Revolution of the Atlantic World* (Yale University Press, 2017), 158
[699] George Washington Cable, *The Grandissimes: A Story of Creole Life* (Hill & Wang, New York, 1879)
[700] Sally McKee, *The Exile's Song: Edmund Dedé and the Unfinished Revolution of the Atlantic World* (Yale University Press, 2017), 158
[701] See Ancestry.com. *Paris, France & Vicinity Marriage Banns, 1860-1902* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2008
[702] Notarial Archives: June 18th, 1879, 1227 Dauphine Street, Succession: From Pierre Villarceaux Macarty to Isadore Albin Albert Macarty. Notary: A Villeré, COB. Vol:109, p.872, May 19, 1890. Succession: From Isabel Rigaud to Isadore Albin Albert Macarty, Notary: A Villeré, COB, Vol:132,p.529
[703] Passenger Lists of Vessels Arriving at New Orleans, Louisiana, 1820-1902

1899 when he would have been sixty. Although Isabel kept her property in New Orleans until she died, there is no record of her ever going there. She died in Paris and was buried there, leaving most of her legacy to Albert Albin.[704] Thus, the family gradually ceased to have ties with New Orleans.

Eulalie Mandeville's legacy and foresight were important in allowing her children and grandchildren to eventually make their home in a place where they were not categorized by their race. She encouraged her children to explore beyond the narrow borders of antebellum New Orleans through her own example, by setting up trade links abroad and by encouraging her children to live in other countries. Her descendants also maintained businesses, thus capitalizing on the legacy she had bequeathed to them, enabling them to maintain their wealth and status. However, as a native of New Orleans, she would perhaps have been disappointed that her children and grandchildren made choices which eventually meant that they lost all ties to the City, and, of course, to its population of Afro-Creoles.

Victor Eugène Macarty – Actor, Composer, Musician and Political Activist

There was, however, another Macarty child, Victor Eugène, who also was well-known in the City, firstly for his musical talents and then during the Reconstruction period, for his political activities. Victor Eugène Macarty was Eugène Macarty's son with another free Black woman, Hèloise Croy, from Saint-Domingue.[705] Although Eugène Macarty lived with Mandeville until his death, he was unfaithful to her and fathered several other children with different free Black women.[706] Victor Eugène's mother was one of the many refugees who came to New Orleans after the slave insurrection in Saint-Domingue.[707] There is no record of Héloise's entry to New Orleans or whether she was enslaved or free when she arrived. The first documented proof of her residence in the City was an address in the Directory of 1822, probably around the time that her son was born. She was also listed at different

[704] New Orleans Public Library, City Archive: Louisiana Wills 1889-1890, Isabelle Chery Rigaud, case no: 29064

[705]The Historic New Orleans Collection: See New Orleans Census of 1850, Heloise Croy is listed as being born in Santo Domingo

[706] Carolyn Morrow Long, *Madame Lalaurie: Mistress of the Haunted House* (University Press of Florida, 2012), 11

[707] 1850 Census gives his age as 28

addresses in the 1832 and 1843 directories. She was, however, by this time clearly a woman of some means, as the notarial records showed that she bought and sold slaves.[708] Victor Eugène's Saint-Dominguan heritage on his mother's side may have contributed to his initial choice of occupation as a musician. Free Black actors and musicians were one of the typical features of the Saint-Dominguan world and the refugees brought this tradition to New Orleans.[709] Other notable musicians with Saint-Dominguan ancestry included Edmond Dedé. Like Dedé, Victor Eugène obviously had some talent as a pianist, performing at the "fashionable soirées of New Orleans." He also composed music, as evidenced by his only surviving manuscript *Fleurs de Salon: Two Favorite Polkas,* which was sold at "principal music stores."[710]

After the occupation of New Orleans by Union forces in 1862, he organized concerts for free people of colour, raising money to assist the community. *Le Tribune* wrote admiringly of him, describing him as "one of the talented men who are an honor to our population."[711] By the end of the Civil War he had completely eschewed his former artistic ambitions by concentrating wholly on politics. He was elected as a member of the Central Committee of the Republican Party in 1866 and he served on the Orleans Parish Board of Police Commissioners in 1867.[712] In 1869 he was involved in an infamous incident at the French Opera House, being ordered out of his seat in an area traditionally for Whites only, while attending a performance of Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*. According to the press report, Macarty protested vehemently to the manager and "threatened him with corrections with slaps on the face and kicks posteriori."[713] After being forced out, Victor Eugène brought a suit against the French Opera House. There is no record as to whether he won his case, but other such suits followed against the Opera House several years later. He may have deliberately entered an area designated for

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[708] Notarial Archives: Sale of a Slave, John Woolfork to Heloise Croy, William Boswell, Notary, New Orleans, 12 June 1827, vol. 3, 389, NARC; Release, Payment of Heloise Croy to Estate of Antoine Abat, Carlile Pollock, Notary, New Orleans, 1 May 1832, vol. 38A, 273, NARC; Vente d'esclave, Heloise Croy to Madame Honorine Saint Clair, Carlile Pollock, Notary, New Orleans, 27April 1832, vol. 40, 291, NARC; Vente d'esclave, Héloïse Croix to Charles Becquet, Louis T. Caire, Notary, New Orleans, 15 January 1839, act 25, vol. 69, 56,
[709] Nathalie Dessens, From Saint-Domingue to New Orleans. Migration and Influences (University Press of Florida, 2007), 147
[710]Tulane University, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library: Victor Eugène Macarty, " Fleur's des Salons: Two Favourite Polkas," New Orleans, Wehrman, 1854, box 34, folder 2, William Ransome Hogan Jazz Archive
[711] *The Tribune*, 20 June 1865
[712] William Horne, "From Art to Activism in Reconstruction-Era New Orleans." *Atlantic Review*, Vol.73, No.2 (Spring 2008), 507
[713] The Tribune, July 8, 1869

White people as a way of testing legal privileges under the Louisiana Constitution of 1868, which granted Black people equal treatment in public accommodation. By this time, many others were also doing the same by attempting to enter White saloons, coffeehouses, theatres and other public facilities.[714] It may have been this very public act of defiance which brought him to the attention of the White supremacist faction, to the detriment of his later political career and, indeed, his life.

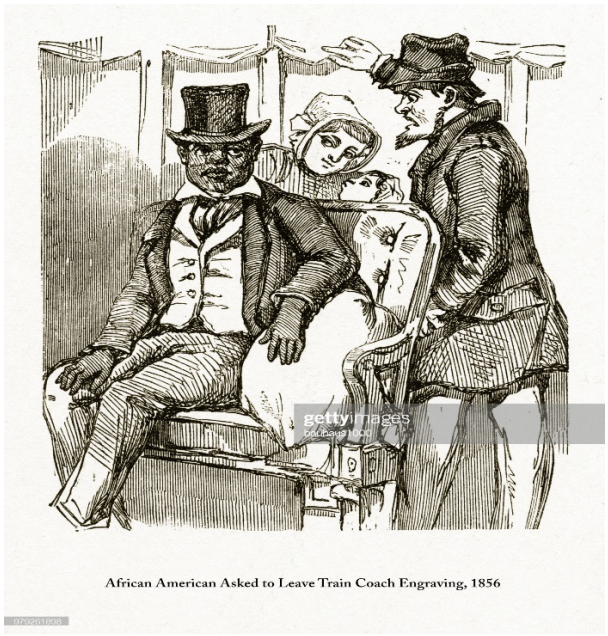

Figure 17: African-American Asked to Leave a Train Coach Engraving, 1856: Gettyimages.com

It may have been Victor Eugène's Saint-Dominguan ancestry which also inclined him to campaign for the rights of the Black community after the Civil War. There was a tradition of participation in politics on the part of the Saint-Dominguan refugees. During the antebellum period many White refugees from Saint-Domingue entered politics, occupying ranking positions of authority in the City and State. This political consciousness was also a characteristic of free Black former refugees after the Civil War. Therefore, Creoles of colour from Saint-Domingue played a prominent part in the political scene until the late nineteenth century.[715] Thompson suggests that the refugees' memories of the "more fluid, less repressive racial system in Saint-Domingue" may have been a contributing factor

[714] Dale A. Summers, "Black and White in New Orleans: A Study in Urban Race Relations 1865-1900." *The Journal of Southern History,* Vol.40, No.1 (Feb,1974), 25
[715] Ibid. 29

in their political activism.[716] Like the White children of former refugees, Afro-Creoles of refugee descent were also uncommonly active politically.[717] Indeed, the political leaders of America's first civil rights movement, Louis Charles Roudanez and his brother Jean-Baptist were descended from Saint-Dominguan plantation owners.[718]

Although the politics of the early Postbellum period allowed biracial New Orleanians like Victor Eugène to reach positions that would have been unthinkable in the antebellum period, it was clear by the 1870s that the public mood was changing. The political prominence of these Afro-Creoles alarmed those who saw them as undermining the precepts of White supremacy and the practical codification of social and political segregation. Thus, as Justin Nystrom argues, free people of colour became far more dangerous individually to a White supremacist version of social order than the far more numerous freedmen. Consequently, they became the focus of White anger, often attacked, and vilified by the press.[719] Victor Eugène Macarty was also targeted by newspapers. In 1875 *The New Orleans Bulletin* wrote that Macarty's role as a member of the city's school board represented "an affront to decency." In an article entitled "A Model School Board(?)" *The Bulletin* stated that all nine members of the school board were unqualified to hold office and singled out Macarty as a particularly "immoral rascal" with "vile propensities." The article went on to state that Macarty was a "lecherous, ignorant and brutal Negro*"* as he was also accused of having insulted a White female schoolteacher.[720] *The Bulletin* then ran a front-page article entitled "V.E. Macarty," declaring that "he had made himself offensive to the white people of the city."[721] These verbal attacks eventually manifested into physical violence. In 1875 it was reported that he was viciously attacked by two men. *The Weekly Louisianan* described him as "miserable, beaten senseless with clubs."[722] The two White men who had assaulted

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[716] Shirley E. Thompson, *Exiles at Home: The Struggle to Become American in Creole New Orleans* (Harvard University Press, 2009), 77
[717] Ibid. 29, 31
[718] Mark Charles Roudanez & Matthew Charles Roudanez, "The Color of Freedom: Louis Charles Roudanez, New Orleans and the Transnational Origins of the African American Freedom Movement." *South Atlantic Review*, 2
[719] Justin Nystrom, *New Orleans After the Civil War: Race, Politics, and a New Birth of Freedom* (John Hopkins University Press, 2010), 159
[720] *New Orleans Bulletin*, 15 September 1875
[721] Ibid. 20 November 1875
[722] *The Weekly Louisianan*, September 17, 1875

him were only sentenced to "a fine of ten cents or one minute in the Parish Prison."[723] Macarty's fortunes declined further when the Republican Party's increasingly shaky rule collapsed in 1877 and Macarty lost his job at City Hall.

Not only were his political ambitions finished, he was, by this time, also heavily in debt. After the death of his wife in 1877, he had to sell their house in order to cover his financial arrears.[724] Victor Eugène was also living a double life as he had a mistress, Rosalie Hugon, with whom he had three other children. He was thus supporting two households and six children.[725] By 1880, he was living in a boarding house in Baton Rouge and working as a schoolteacher.[726] Boarding with strangers was not uncommon for elderly poor people during the nineteenth century. However, boarding houses generally provided accommodation for those who lived outside kinship groups and who had no children or other relatives to care for them. This suggests that at the end of his life, Macarty was estranged from both of his families.[727] This estrangement is further implied by the actions of his legitimate daughter, Corilla, who in 1877 at the age of seventeen, successfully filed for emancipation from the legal supervision of her father, giving her power "to do and perform all acts as fully as if she had attained the age of twenty-one years."[728] This was a bold move for a young woman, and indeed she went on to have an impressive career, continuing the educational and artistic legacy of her father by teaching at the Southern University and directing the Ladies Symphony Orchestra in Houston.[729]

In 1881 Victor Eugène died. His obituary in the *Weekly Louisianan* praised him for his dedication in "educating our youth at Baton Rouge."[730] Thus, Victor Eugène went from being a popular and feted musician, then a respected politician, to eventually, an impoverished schoolteacher in Baton

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[723] *New Orleans Republican*, September 17, 1875
[724] New Orleans Public Library. City Archive: Inventory September 21, 1877, Succession of Elizabeth Lucie Lee, Case 39759, Orleans Second District Court,
[725] The Historic New Orleans Collection: See Eugène Macarty's household with Elizabeth, 1870 Census, Ward 6, Orleans Parish and Eugène *Macarthy*'s household with Rosalie, 1870 Census, Ward 6, Orleans Parish
[726] The Historic New Orleans Collection: 1880 Census, Baton Rouge, Louisiana
[727] Shirley E. Thompson, *Exiles at Home: The Struggle to Become American in Creole New Orleans* (Harvard University Press, 2009), 67
[728] New Orleans Public Library, City Archive: Corilla Marie Macarty, emancipation, 7 September 1877, case number: 39756, Second District Court,. The 1880 Census of New Orleans records Corilla's age as twenty, putting her birthdate as sometime in 1860.
[729] William Horne, "From Art to Activism in Reconstruction-Era New Orleans," *Atlantic Review*, Vol.73, No.2 (Spring 2008), 524
[730] *Weekly Louisianan* Obituaries, July 2, 1881

Rouge. In contrast, his peer, Edmond Dedé, who chose to leave New Orleans for Bordeaux, maintained a successful musical career throughout his life in France. Therefore, Macarty's choice of sacrificing his musical career for one in politics came at a huge cost to him, both economically, emotionally, and physically.

Macarty represented the optimistic view in certain quarters of Afro-Creole society, believing that the Reconstruction era was a real opportunity for change. Also, unlike some in his community he was dedicated to the welfare of all Black society, not just that of the former free Black people. He was therefore looking to the future rather than the past, as opposed to his half-brother Pierre Villarceaux, whose nostalgia for the old times may have led him to become exiled in France. For a brief time, it looked as though Victor Eugène and the Black community could achieve their ambitions. However, eventually the status quo prevailed and all their hopes for more equality were dashed. Interestingly, although it does not seem that Pierre Villarceaux or any other of Eulalie Mandeville's children ever acknowledged the existence of Victor Eugène, the incident at the Opera House was first reported to have been perpetrated by Pierre Villarceaux, suggesting that they were alike, at least, in appearance.[731] The next part of the Chapter will look at the Auguste family, examining the ways in which they navigated pre and post-Civil War society.

Figure 18: Victor Eugene Macarty, Amistad Research Centre, Louisiana Music Collection

[731] *The Tribune*, July 8, 1869

Figure 19: Tintype of Rosalie Hugon – Victor Eugene's mistress: From William Horne's article, "From Art to Activism in Reconstruction-Era New Orleans," *Atlantic Review*, Vol.73, No.2 (Spring 2008)

Figure 20: Henry Macarty – around 1875 – son of Victor-Eugene Macarty and Rosalie Hugon: From William Horne's article

The Auguste Family – A Free Black Dynasty

Like Eulalie Mandeville, Marie Dolores Laveaux also left her children very well provided for, with both money and real estate. She made specific bequests in a thorough and detailed will, as opposed to Eulalie who died intestate. Marie Dolores may have left a water-tight will as a precaution against her estranged husband, François Auguste. It appears that he had been an unsatisfactory and possibly violent partner. Although the Auguste family did not come from the same exalted heights as the Macartys, they

were also successful businesspeople. Unlike the Macarty family, they had legitimately married into their own class for several generations, creating a free Black dynasty. Marie Dolores died in 1839, leaving seven surviving children: Laurent, Lizida, Telesphore, Mirtile, Hermogene, Henriette and Hermina. They were all left very generous legacies by their wealthy mother.[732] Of the four brothers, Hermogéne must have died young because his name doesn't appear as part of the household in the 1850 Census. Telesphore married Harriet Derchike in 1858, and he was very likely killed during the Civil War, as from the 1860s onwards, his widow, Harriet, received a pension from the army.[733] Telesphore also fathered a child whose existence was not known about by the rest of the family. She was legitimized by her father before his death and eventually petitioned the succession of her grandfather, François Auguste, for her inheritance, after his death in 1873, much to the surprise of the only surviving children, Laurent and Hermina Auguste.[734]

After serving in the Civil War, Mirtile Auguste became a money broker, as evidenced by the 1868 Freedman's Bank Records.[735] In this document he stated that he had one brother Laurent and one sister Hermina living, as well as his father, thus also confirming that by this time Telesphore had died. However, by the time of Mirtile's death in 1871 at the age of forty-six, he had little to show for his inheritance. He died intestate, and his only collateral was his real estate which had to be sold to cover his debts and administrative expenses. Neither his brother nor his sister dealt with his affairs which were handled by the parish, suggesting that they were not close by this time.[736]

[732] New Orleans Public Library, City Archive: See Louisiana, Orleans Parish Estate Files, Louisiana. Probate Court (Orleans Parish); *Probate Place:* Orleans, Louisiana, Louisiana, Wills and Probate Records, 1756-1984, Succession of Marie Laveau, 1841

[733] New Orleans Public Library, City Archive: See Louisiana Parish Marriages 1837-1957; United States Freedman's Bureau, roll 47, Register of Claimants, Oct 1872-May 1878

[734] New Orleans Public Library, City Archive: Louisiana Orleans Parish, Second District Court Case files, 1873. Docket No: 3601, Succession of François Auguste

[735] New Orleans Public Library, City Archive: Freedman's Bank Records 1865-1874 1 July 1868

[736] New Orleans Public Library, City Archive: Louisiana Successions 1846-1880. Mrytile Auguste, 1872

Laurent Auguste – From Cigar-Maker to Chief Legal Adviser and Treasurer of the State of Louisiana

The eldest brother, Laurent, born around 1818, was the only member of the Auguste family to become involved in politics. As written in Chapter Three, he was probably not the son of François Auguste, but was an illegitimate child whom Marie Dolores had borne before her marriage. However, despite this, he appears to have been close with, and supportive to his stepfather throughout his lifetime. Like Victor Eugène Macarty, his background was also typical for a politically active Afro-Creole. David Rankin has compiled profile analyses of these Creoles of colour who entered politics. Firstly, they were generally more financially secure or wealthy than many of their peers. At the beginning of the Civil War, Auguste like Victor Eugène Macarty, was reasonably well-off, having $2,300 in 1860-61.[737] He was also in his forties at this time, thus, like three quarters of those who pursued a political career, in the prime of life. Nearly all these political activists held jobs that demanded skill or schooling. Auguste was a cigar-maker and then became a money broker. Therefore, prior to the war, he channelled his energy into learning trades and making money.[738] Like Victor Eugène, he left his former business life and became treasurer to the Comité des Citoyens, a group which was founded by Rodolphe Desdunes and Louis Martinet. It advocated equality for all Black New Orleanians, and its members were also known for being "militant, recalcitrant, and defiant."[739] The Comité's philosophy and values were also spelled out in their newspaper, *The Crusader,* which stated: "No theory of white supremacy, no method of lynching, no class legislation, no undue disqualification of citizenship, no system of enforced ignorance, no privileged classes at the expense of others can be tolerated, and, much less, openly encouraged by any citizen who loves justice."[740] They eventually also became renowned for organizing Homer Plessy's violation of the railroad segregation laws in 1892.[741]

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[737] David C. Rankin, "The Origins of Black Leadership in New Orleans during the Reconstruction." *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol.40, No.3 (Aug 1974), 428

[738]The Historic New Orleans Collection: See City Directories of 1861,1864,1866,1867 for Auguste's occupation

[739] Justin Nystrom, *New Orleans After the Civil War: Race, Politics, and a New Birth of Freedom* (John Hopkins University Press, 2010), 172

[740] *The Crusader Newspaper*, March 3, 1867

[741] Hoping to strike down segregation laws, the Citizens' Committee of New Orleans (Comité des Citoyens) recruited Plessy to deliberately violate Louisiana's 1890 separate-car law. To pose a clear test, the Citizens' Committee gave notice of Plessy's intent to the railroad, which opposed the law because it required adding more cars to its trains.

Auguste eventually became the Legal Advisor to the State Treasurer of Louisiana in 1874. However, he entered this higher office at a difficult time for the Republican Party. The White League, which had been formed by ex-Confederates, had just staged an insurrection against the Republicans and the Reconstruction government, who were by this stage, clearly living on borrowed time.[742] After the collapse of the Republican Party in 1877, Auguste and his colleagues were taken before a Legislative Committee of Inquiry "into the abuses in the Treasury Office."[743] Like Macarty, Laurent was castigated by the press. Singled out far more by the newspapers than any of the other accused White officials, it was evident that it was his race which caused him to be more vilified than the others. One of the articles began by describing him as a "large griffe," a racial classification from the slave markets, and one associated with those of darker skin.[744] Like Victor Eugène, newspaper articles also ridiculed Auguste's qualifications for his job of Legal Adviser. They reported, when asked why he was chosen for this position and "preferred to the attorneys employed by the State and to the whole bar of the State and City when he was not a practicing lawyer," Auguste replied, "he was not a lawyer, did not meddle with books, but simply gave out advice according to common sense."[745] The article finished on a tone of irony suggesting that "struggling young attorneys should stop reading all those law books and instead study common sense, which bore Mr. Auguste from his humble position of street broker to that of Chief Legal Adviser to the Treasurer of the State of Louisiana."[746]

Auguste was also accused of having abused his position by acting as an agent to people paying money into the Treasury, and by giving out information about money in the Treasury.[747] He denied the accusations, saying that while he was employed by the Treasury, he had lived on his salary as a solicitor, never had any commissions on warrants, nor received compensation from any other sources than the Treasurer's Office. The newspaper article again mocked his statement, while also questioning its truthfulness by writing, "so lives and thrives 'solicitor' Auguste evolving an honest livelihood out of

[742] Justin Nystrom, *New Orleans After the Civil War: Race, Politics, and a New Birth of Freedom* (John Hopkins University Press, 2010) 172
[743] *The New Orleans Daily Democrat*, September 6, 1877
[744] Ibid
[745] Ibid
[746] Ibid
[747] Ibid. September 18, 1877

his 'common sense' and narrating cheerful anecdotes to the Legislative Committee."[748] It is significant that both he and Macarty, who were well-known Black political figures, had their reputations ruined by the newspapers in this way. These articles also showed the depth of feeling by this time against these Afro-Creole politicians and civic leaders and suggested that the Democratic newspapers were specifically targeting them, bringing them into disrepute.

After the collapse of his political life, Laurent Auguste went back to his former profession as a money broker.[749] Like Macarty, he may have also had financial problems because of his political career. Since 1858, Laurent, his wife Lucie, and his sister Hermina had lived in François Auguste's house. Lucie and Laurent married later in life, so did not have any children.[750] Upon his father's demise in 1873, Laurent rapidly sold the house which had been bequeathed to him by Auguste, suggesting an urgent need to realize some capital.[751] In 1873, he also sold the house left to him by his mother, to his sister Hermina, and by 1900 was living with her in this property.[752] By then he was a widower, as his wife had died in 1895.[753] Jane Turner Censer's research suggests that as a result of increasing financial difficulties during the Reconstruction era, there was generally an increase in the amount of sibling and parental co-residences in White Southern families.[754] Therefore, this may have also been the case for the formerly free people of colour. Furthermore, Auguste appeared to have been working right up until his death, as his profession in the 1900 Census, when he would have been eighty-two years old, was still described as money broker. This is unlike his father, whom the census recorded as being "retired"in 1870, just before he died. However, like his father, Laurent lived a long life, especially by the standards of the nineteenth century, passing at the age of eighty-five in 1903.[755]

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[748] Ibid. Oct 2, 1877
[749] The Historic New Orleans Collection: See New Orleans Census 1900
[750] Louisiana Parish Marriages, 1837-1957," database with images, *FamilySearch* (https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:QKJ8-2T2D : 4 April 2020), Laurent Auguste and Lucie Masters, 20 Apr 1858; citing Orleans, Louisiana, United States, various parish courthouses, Louisiana; FHL microfilm 1,734,768.
[751] New Orleans Historical Collection: The Collins C. Diboll Vieux Carré Survey: Laurent Auguste; Citation of Owners
[752] Ibid: See also the Census 1900
[753] Ancestry.com. *Louisiana, U.S., Statewide Death Index, 1819-1964* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Lucie Masters 2 Feb 1895
[754] Jane Turner Censer, *The Reconstruction of White Womanhood* (Louisiana State University, 2003), 54
[755] Ancestry.com. *Louisiana, U.S., Statewide Death Index, 1819-1964* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2002. 4 March 1903

It appears, therefore, that despite the differences in their backgrounds, the lives of Victor Eugène Macarty and Laurent Auguste overlapped in various ways, as did the fortunes of some of the other male family members. Eugène and Laurent were both very active in politics and, indeed, would have known one another, as their signatures often appeared side-by-side in various committee meeting documents. Unfortunately, because of these activities, they suffered attacks on their reputation, and in Victor Eugène's case, physical abuse. They also both faced economic difficulties, possibly because of their decision to enter the world of politics. The two families also had other male members who never married, and lived off their inheritances, seemingly not making much of their lives. Thus, although their mothers had attempted to bring economic stability to their children by passing on wealth and real estate; they could not have foreseen the changes occurring as a result of the war and the Reconstruction era. Increased discrimination against people of colour, lead some of their offspring to live quietly and without ambition; while other family members also risked their livelihoods, and indeed ultimately their lives, by putting their heads above the parapet. At the beginning of the Reconstruction period, Victor Eugène Macarty and Laurent Auguste initially attained heights of political influence their mothers could have only dreamed of for their children. However, as the Reconstruction era continued and the old order began to re-establish itself, these politically ambitious Afro-Creoles lost both their reputations and their positions. As the political landscape changed in the 1870s, so did the economic landscape. Macarty and Auguste, along with many other Afro-Creoles suffered from a combination of adverse economic conditions. The deepening national recession, and a return to power of the ex-Confederate White male elite, meant that their world was now in disarray. Those who were once of the free Black community were realizing their worst fears of becoming politically and economically disadvantaged citizens. Increasing discrimination towards free people of colour from the late antebellum period onwards also had severe consequences for the next generation of Afro-Creole women, including the three daughters of Marie Dolores. This next part of the chapter will examine the lives of these women, comparing their experiences to those of their forbears, and assessing how the legacies of their mothers affected them throughout their lifetimes.

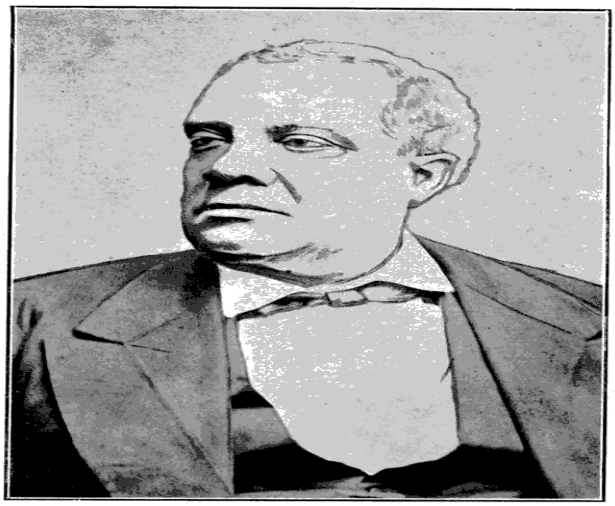

Figure 21: Laurent Auguste – Illustration from Rodolphe Desdune's book, Our People and Our History: Fifty Creole Portraits, published in 1911

Lizida Auguste – Loyal Daughter, Sister and Aunt

Marie Dolores had three daughters who survived to adulthood, Henriette, Lizida and Hermina. Like their brothers, the lives of these daughters were also affected by the events surrounding them, causing changes to their status and position. Hermina was the youngest and longest-lived of the sisters. Like all of them, she never married, mostly living with her father or her half-brother, Laurent, during their lifetimes. Eventually however she sold her house in New Orleans in 1901, before her brother's death in 1903.[756] She also possibly moved to California at this time, as her death was recorded in Los Angeles in 1921 at the age of eighty-six.[757] Beyond this, there is not much record of her life. Like her sisters, she did not appear to have engaged in the sort of business activities which characterized the lives of her mother and grandmother. However, her inheritance from her mother made her financially secure throughout her life.

The unhappy dynamic of the Auguste household, for at least some of its female members, was only revealed by her elder sister, Lizida, in her self-written will of 1854, shortly after the death of her

[756] The Historic New Orleans Collection: The Collins Diboll Vieux Carré Survey: Hermina Auguste: Citation of Owners

[757] It appears that by the twentieth century, there was a thriving community of Louisiana Afro-Creoles in Los Angeles, as recorded by the Socialites Social and Charity Club which was founded in 1965 to preserve the cultural heritage of individuals living in California who could trace their heritage to Louisiana Creole communities; *California, U.S., Death Index, 1905-1939* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2013. March 30, 1921

"beloved sister Henriette."[758] Lizida was also only to live for another four years after writing the will, dying in 1858.[759] This will is the only testamentary document of this study which was handwritten rather than being dictated to a notary; therefore, it is invaluable in giving information about her existence and thoughts, rather than echoing the usual stilted legalese from the notary's pen. It also gave an indication of her life as a middle-class free woman of colour in late antebellum New Orleans, an existence which appeared much more restricted than the life of her mother and Eulalie Mandeville. Lizida's will painted a bleak picture of family life in the Auguste household, referring to her mother as her "poor mother" and Henriette as her "poor sister." She also described her own life as a "sad existence."[760] Her will made clear her animosity and distrust for the male members of her family. For example, she did not appoint her father or any of her brothers as executors of her will, something which would have been very unorthodox during this period. She also flouted convention further by choosing a female relative, Estelle Auguste, as her executor. This person was someone whom she variously referred to as her "dear sister" or "second mother." Lizida knew that this will would cause problems in the family and scandalize her community, stating," her enemies would be happy that there was something else they could malign her for."[761] The wording of the will also suggested a rift in the family, which may have been caused by the marital separation, and subsequent relocation to Paris, of Marie Dolores. It seems likely that Henriette and Lizida accompanied their mother to France, thus causing this split. Lizida wrote in her will: "Two hearts and two martyrs were broken for Henriette and me after our return from France. We had a lot of pain and slanders in our family."[762] This suggests that the two young women were vilified, not only by their own family, but also by free Black society, for having supported their mother. Lizida went on to say that "we found consolation in our sister Estelle and Mr. Lacroix. They were brothers for us." This also suggests that she did not get much support from her biological brothers. Mr. Lacroix, whom she described as her "friend and second father" was probably White, as he was the only male in

[758] Henriette died in 1853. She may have been a victim of the worst yellow fever epidemic ever to hit the city in the summer of that year. *Orleans Death Indices 1804-1876*; Volume: *14*; Page: *236*
[759] *Orleans Death Indices 1804-1876*
[760] New Orleans Public Library, City Archives: Louisiana Orleans Parish Will Books; Will Book, Vol 11, 1857-1860, Lizida Auguste, Probate Date: Apr 6, 1858 (Translated from French by author)
[761] Ibid
[762] Ibid

her will afforded a title and no first name. His inclusion in her will as a friend and advisor therefore showed a continuity with the previous free women of colour studied in this research, who often had White male advisors or partners to assist them with their business and legal affairs. However, Lizida did not instruct Mr. Lacroix to oversee her will, thus deviating from this pattern. That she chose another free woman of colour to perform this task suggested an independence, female solidarity, and a recognition by her that a woman could deal with legal matters as well as a man. This feminine esprit de corps was a feature of Lizida's will.

Lizida may have chosen Estelle Auguste as executor because she had already shown her strong character and loyalty by supporting Lizida and her sister after their return from France, in the face of adverse public opinion. She wrote that she wanted Estelle to administer her will because "she would not listen to anything her father would say." Thus, she intimated that any other male member of her family, or indeed even Mr. Lacroix, might defer to François Auguste's wishes, as the male head of the household. She referred to Estelle as her "sister," but she was not Marie Dolores' daughter. It is likely therefore that she was the daughter of François Auguste from an earlier marriage or liaison. As mentioned in Chapter Three, before his marriage, Auguste had been living with a woman called Marie Magdalen who had died, leaving her goods to her children. Probably one of those children was Estelle. There is also further evidence of this, as Estelle's son, Arnold Bertonneau, who worked at the State Treasury with Laurent Auguste was described by him, during the investigation, as his nephew.[763]

Although Lizida's will defied the conventions of her time, it also clearly showed the Romantic view of death which had taken hold of the public imagination during the mid-nineteenth century, transforming it from the fearful to the beautiful, to be almost eagerly awaited. Many Victorians also glorified the act of dying and the deathbed scene.[764] Historian Karen Halttunen suggests that this culture of sentimentality gave middle-class men and women an opportunity to demonstrate continued gentility even in death. She also argues that the funeral itself became a powerful form of theatre.[765] Lizida's will supports Halttunen's arguments with its precise instructions for her laying-out and funeral, a detail

[763] See "The Treasury Inquiry, Examination of the Witnesses." *The New Orleans Daily Democrat*, 18 Sept 1877
[764] Pat Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1996), 8
[765] Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America 1830-1870* (Yale University Press, 1983), 124, 169

which was not seen in earlier wills of her mother or, indeed, any of the other free Black women featured in this research. By the mid-nineteenth century, the corpse itself had also returned to centre stage in the drama of death, thus Lizida left clear instructions for her body's preparation and viewing arrangements and set the scene for maximum dramatic effect.[766] She asked her friends, Les Demoiselles Mavioux, to prepare and dress her as they had done for her sister Henriette. White curtains were to be hung in the salon and the room where she would be laid out. Her coffin, which would be free of any ornamentation, the inside lined with white cotton, would "be placed on two chairs in the room with four chandeliers and candles around my body."[767] Thus, she deliberately staged her laying-out and viewing arrangements, creating a scene very like that depicted in Victorian paintings of the deathbeds of young women. However, these careful preparations were not to be seen by many people, as she only wanted to be viewed by a small number of family and friends, including Estelle and her children, Mr. Lacroix, Loulan, Les Demoiselles Mavioux and their mother. As for her father and siblings, her final wishes stated baldly: "If the rest of my family ask, let them. I know their intention for me. I have already suffered during my lifetime, also Henriette."[768] Her funeral arrangements also specified that her hearse would be the simplest one that could be found in New Orleans. She also did not nominate her father or brothers to be pallbearers for her coffin. She asked that Mr. Lacroix perform that service, along with her brother-in-law, Estelle's husband, Louis Bertonneau, and her nephew Arnold. She wished to be buried with her mother and her sister and left money for the opening of the tomb and the inscription.[769]

She also showed her favour for her half-sister and her family by leaving most of her money and possessions to them. She did, however, make a bequest to her sister, Hermina, who received a gold bracelet, along with a bag of money from Lizida's armoire. She left Estelle an evening gown and a collar which had belonged to her sister Henriette. She also bequeathed her a gold bracelet "for the difficulties she will have with my brothers," thus again emphasizing that Estelle would have to stand against the wishes of the males of her family. She also left her niece, Eugenie Bertonneau, a gold

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[766] Ibid
[767] New Orleans Public Library, City Archive. Louisiana Orleans Parish Will Books*;* Louisiana Will Book, Vol 11, 1857-1860, Lizida Auguste, Probate Date: 6 Apr 1858
[768] Ibid
[769] Ibid

bracelet. However, she left the money from her mother's succession, which was probably the bulk of her fortune, to her other niece, Alice Bertonneau, thus demonstrating how she wished to pass on her legacy from her mother to a favoured person from the next generation of women. As for her father and brothers, she left two diamond pins, one each to her father and brother Mirtile. She did not mention either of her two other brothers, Telesphore and Laurent in the will, thus also suggesting that they were estranged. Mirtile was younger and therefore perhaps less likely to have been a controlling force in her life, like the two elder brothers.[770] Her will generally supported the idea that there was a rift in the family, with Laurent, Telesphore and possibly Hermina allying themselves with their father. The three brothers may have become further estranged during the Civil War for political reasons. Both Mirtile and Telesphore originally signed up with the Confederacy. However, Telesphore switched sides whereas Mirtile did not. Mirtile could therefore have held different political views from his brothers, leading to his further estrangement from the family, even after his death.

By not being afraid to exclude male family members from her funeral and from any inheritance, Lizida's last wishes demonstrated that she was a woman who was not afraid to challenge society's' conventions. Therefore, it is somewhat perplexing why the two sisters did not feel able to defy their father and leave him while they were still alive. At the time of their mother's death, they were probably too young to stay alone in a foreign country. However, eventually they had money from their mother's succession, so could have set up house together in New Orleans. Thus, it seems strange that they stayed in their father's house, where they were so miserable, and remained with him until their deaths. That they were both desperate to leave the house, if not in life then certainly after their demise, is recorded in the will, as Lizida admitted that her sister had also wanted to leave the house, at least after she died, but that she (Lizida) was afraid to carry out this wish because of the scandal.[771] For her own part, Lizida asked her friend, Mr. Lacroix, to take her body out of the house after she was dead, no doubt assuming that her father and brothers were less likely to challenge a White man.[772]

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[770] Ibid
[771] New Orleans Public Library, City Archive: Louisiana Orleans Parish Will Books; Louisiana Wil/ Book, Vol 11, 1857-1860, Lizida Auguste, Probate Date: 6 Apr 1858
[772] Ibid

Halttunen's descriptions of death and mourning demonstrated how gentility amongst the mid-nineteenth century middle classes had to be preserved, even after death. The strict rules of mourning etiquette showed how important societal pressure became in enforcing these boundaries and strictures, especially for women. These increasingly restrictive societal expectations for the behaviour of women may have also been one of the reasons why Lizida and Henriette found it difficult to challenge the status quo during their lifetimes, and even after their death. Although Hulttunen's research referred to mores of the White American middle-classes, wealthy free Black people had often traditionally reflected White culture in their desire to protect their free status. This became even more important during the antebellum period and beyond, as their position in society became eroded. Free Black women were also increasingly vilified, even to the point of being described as "vessels of disorder and filth" to bolster Southern pro-slavery ideology and evolving notions of female domesticity. [773] Therefore, high status free Black women may have wished to emphasize their gentility and high moral standards by displaying even more strict adherence to the behaviours expected of White women. Lizida's will suggested that not doing so risked condemnation from elite free Black society and social exile. Also, in a patriarchal society, free Black men could pressure, or indeed force, female family members to display the behaviours expected for higher-class women in the nineteenth century.

This importance of appearances as a means of maintaining the traditional extra privileges of their community was demonstrated by a judge's assessment of Afro-Creole woman, Josephine Decuir, in an 1872 court case. Decuir won the approbation of Judge Cullom for being, "genteel in her manners, modest in her deportment, neat in her appearance and quite fair for one of mixed blood…He concluded that she was never a slave, nor a descendent of a slave."[774] This description of Decuir emphasized her gentility and therefore repudiation of any enslaved past. Thus, as Thompson suggests, by displaying the behaviours expected of high-class White women, these women of colour were demonstrating to the

[773] Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 65

[774] Josephine Decuir vs. Joseph Benson of the Gov Allen Steamship, 1872, Superior District Court. She was denied access to the "lady's cabin" reserved for whites but by which by custom had always been available for "ladies of color", probably only of Decuir's class. She had paid the extra money for the ticket, therefore the judge allowed that by law she should have been allowed access.

White community, "a solidarity based on class, public demeanour and appreciation for correct social etiquette."[775] Lizida's mother had already broken these rules by separating from her husband and living in France, therefore, in these increasingly repressive times for middle-class Black women, Lizida and Henriette were obviously in fear of creating further scandal by any other unorthodox behaviour. Thus, they may have been forced by the importance of appearances to live quietly and unhappily in their father's home until their deaths. Lizida's will made clear how powerful public opinion had become by this time in enforcing the behaviour of women. In the mid-Victorian era public facades were everything. Therefore, as Loren Schweninger argues, "race most clearly affected the depth of a woman's oppression but class, background and the willingness to behave in the prescribed female manner also greatly affected a woman's status among those who wielded power in her community."[776]

Although Lizida felt unable to challenge the status quo during her lifetime, her will showed her independent spirit and her readiness to defy it after her death. By her bequests, especially to her eldest niece, who was the daughter of Estelle Auguste, a woman who had already shown her strong and unconstrained character, Lizida gave out the promise of hope for an increased rebellion against convention by the next generation of females in the family. She also echoed the philosophies of her forbears by providing economic security to her heirs, but also importantly for her main female beneficiary, she provided financial independence from male relatives.

Conclusion

One factor that immediately stands out when considering the story of the Macarty and Auguste children, was their seeming unwillingness to marry and produce the next generation. Their mothers, in adherence to the societal norms of the time, both had large families. However, despite this, Eulalie Mandeville only had six grandchildren, as just two of her children married. The only branch of the Macarty family to proliferate was the one created by Eugène Macarty with two other free Black women. Although Marie Dolores had seven children living at the time she died, yet she only had one granddaughter. None

[775] Shirley E. Thompson, *Exiles at Home: The Struggle to Become American in Creole New Orleans* (Harvard University Press), 264
[776] Loren Schweninger, "Prosperous Blacks in the South,1790-1880" *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 95, No. 1 (Feb 1990), 57

of Marie Dolores' three daughters ever married, although this would have been one way of escaping from a seemingly unhappy household, even if their father discouraged any suitors. However, Jane Turner Censer's work on the effects of the Reconstruction-era on White Southern women, suggests various reasons for their reluctance to wed. She argues that feminine views about marriage and family had been shifting for some time. Therefore, even in the years leading up to the Civil War, privileged Southern White women began to question the benefits of marriage because of the power a husband held over them. She also argues that the closeness of the Victorian family was a factor in women choosing not to marry. Some daughters became devoted to other family members in an intense way, making it difficult for them to break free from these emotional bonds. Others felt that male behaviour was a problem, including excessive drinking and violence within the marriage.[777] Although they were Creoles of colour, Lizida and her sisters came from a middle-class family, and thus, these general trends against matrimony amongst privileged White women may have also influenced their decisions in this regard. There is evidence in the hand-written will that Lizida was very close to her mother and her sister Henriette. Also, the sisters probably saw first-hand the abuses of their father towards their mother, thus further disinclining them to marry. Therefore, if Eulalie Mandeville and Marie Dolores Laveaux had expected to create a dynasty, they would have been disappointed at the lack of marriage partners and children in their respective families.

The life histories of the Macarty and the Auguste families also demonstrate the different ways in which they as wealthy Afro-Creoles, faced changes in society at the end of the Antebellum period through to the Reconstruction era. They showed how their backgrounds and position in New Orleans' society also influenced their decisions in life. Eulalie Mandeville's children, with their illustrious French pedigrees on both sides, eventually gravitated towards France and entry into White society. Their choices may have also been influenced by the actions of their parents. By educating at least one of their children in France and sending two others to Cuba, Eulalie and Eugène gave their offspring a broader perspective on the opportunities outside of New Orleans. Mandeville's Atlantic business links may have also encouraged them to settle elsewhere.

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[777] Jane Turner Censer, *The Reconstruction of Southern Womanhood* (Louisiana State University, 2003), 31, 33-34, 36

Historians have also argued about how far these wealthy, aristocratic Afro-Creoles with close kinship ties to elite White society identified with free Black society, or indeed, if they even considered themselves as part of the free Black community.[778] The eventual ambiguous racial designation of Barthelémy Macarty, as demonstrated by his Cuban will, could suggest that he had a very tenuous link to his interracial background. However, the successions of the Macarty brothers who remained in New Orleans gave a different picture, demonstrating that while they may have maintained their links with their White kin, they had by this time also formed an allegiance to the free Black community. Eulalie Mandeville engendered links with the free Black population through her business networks, and her sons extended this with their support of free Black institutions and charities. Despite this, eventually Pierre Villarceaux, perhaps dismayed by the new order in New Orleans and the loss of his community's status, eventually also retreated to France. It was Eulalie Mandeville's great grandchildren who finally severed their ties to New Orleans and the Afro-Creole community.

However, the Macarty brothers' half-sibling, Victor Eugène Macarty, chose to stay in New Orleans and try to affect the future of his community for the better. His decision may have also been influenced by his background. Unlike Eulalie Mandeville's sons he appeared to have had little or nothing to do with his White father or relatives. Thus, he did not have the divided loyalties of the other Macartys, and was more under the influence of his mother, a refugee from Saint-Domingue. Nonetheless, like his Macarty half-brothers, Victor Eugène represented himself as a high-class free person of colour, through the refinement of his dress and manner. [779] If he had continued to pursue a career in music throughout his life, he may have emigrated to France, as did some of his musical colleagues. However, his Saint- Dominguan roots also predisposed him towards his eventual career in politics. He pursued his ambition for the advancement of the rights of the Black population, whether Afro-Creole or newly freed. He was the only Macarty son to do so. His half-brother Pierre Villarceaux appears to have been more politically conservative, showing his support for the Confederacy at the beginning of the war. An article from *The New Orleans Crescent* in 1869, suggested that some high-

[778] See Justin Nystrom, *New Orleans After the Civil War: Race, Politics, and a New Birth of Freedom,* (John Hopkins University Press, 2010)
[779] His refined appearance was noted by the newspaper when reporting on the incident at the French Opera House: *The Tribune*, 8 July 1869

class Afro-Creoles would be as appalled as those in White society, at the thought of equality for the newly freed people, naming those it thought would concur. It stated, "we would wager our last dollar that a Macarty, a Joubert, a Rillieux or a Mary would no sooner admit the equality of a Murrell, a François or a Pollard than Wade Hampton or Peyton Randolph would."[780] It is probable that this article was referring to Pierre Villarceaux Macarty rather than Victor Eugène. Although there is no evidence to suggest that Pierre Villarceaux actually agreed with these sentiments, the fact that the writer of the article thought he would, also showed how class and hierarchy as well as race still retained some influence in New Orleans in the first decade after the war.

Like Victor Eugène Macarty, the Auguste family also did not have any strong kinship links with White society, and Marie Dolores' eldest son, Laurent Auguste, also entered politics after the Civil War. Unlike Victor Eugène, however, he was from an entirely New Orleanian background, and as such, might have been considered more likely to support the advancement of the former free Black community. Despite this, like Macarty, Auguste became allied with a political group who were promoting equality for all New Orleans' Black citizens. The Auguste family may have had links with France, as their mother ended her days there, so they could have also considered the option to leave New Orleans. Perhaps Marie Dolores' daughters might have chosen this route for their own personal freedom if they had been allowed. However, it seems that because of societal and familial pressures, the women of the Auguste family increasingly led more restricted lives than that of their mother, who was free to conduct business, separate from her husband and move to another country. Her daughter's rebellion was limited to acts of defiance after she died.

Yet, it appears that the spirit of Eulalie and Marie Dolores could not be entirely subsumed by the more regulated lives of their women descendants. After years of living with her father and brother, it seems that Hermina Auguste went to live in California as an independent woman for the remainder of her life. Lizida Auguste gave her niece a chance to become liberated by passing on her inheritance from Marie Dolores. Coralie Auguste came forward and petitioned Laurent and Hermina Auguste for the inheritance from her grandfather, even though she was unknown to the two surviving Auguste

[780] *The New Orleans Crescent*, 14 January 1869

family members. Probably the most enterprising was Corilla Macarty, who although not a direct descendant of Eulalie Mandeville, had a successful career as a musician and university lecturer.

Finale

The thesis has looked at the lives of five free Black women in New Orleans, in order to determine how far they overcame the challenges posed by their race and gender, to achieve a measure of empowerment and economic security, in a hostile environment. It also demonstrated how the societal and economic changes in New Orleans during the Antebellum period, and the influx of immigrants from Saint-Domingue and Cuba, and other parts of America and Europe, impacted the lives of these women, presenting them with new challenges, but also providing them with opportunities. This project has uncovered how their tenacity and determination helped them to achieve successful careers, and to keep the rewards of their labours for themselves and their families, in the face of severe opposition. They were successful businesswomen, founders of organizations and philanthropists, in a way which would be lauded as a remarkable achievement for a woman, even by today's standards. Even more importantly, they provided positive role models for other free women of colour, by recruiting them into their businesses, by educating them, and with their challenges to the patriarchal mores of New Orleans. They also influenced others of the free Black society to support and found charitable institutions, which would benefit the community. They established support networks in both business and domestic life, and cooperated with other women of African and European descent to enhance their economic success, and in defence against a society which condemned them for being Black and a woman. These feminine associations could cross racial and class lines, in a negation of the view that all free Black women and White women were adversaries. The women understood how these alliances strengthened their position, therefore casting racial and class prejudice aside, in return for increased protection.

Free Black women not only spread their influence in Louisiana, but also in the Atlantic World through their business activities, and by sending their children abroad to Europe and the Caribbean. This more transatlantic outlook may have been engendered by the changes happening in New Orleans. By the Antebellum era, it was becoming a prosperous port city, giving various opportunities for increased trade, with other parts of U.S.A, the Caribbean and Europe. The Louisiana Purchase brought about an influx of new immigrants, with their different cultures and values, possibly also engendering

a more global mindset amongst these free Black businesswomen of New Orleans. Increased connections with other parts of America also brought about other influences which changed New Orleans' society. In the mid- nineteenth century, different mores and accepted standards of conduct for both married men and women had begun to affect domestic life in the North, and these attitudes now began to spread to the South. These societal changes affected the life histories of both Cècille Bonille and Marie Dolores Laveaux. In particular, Bonille's domestic partnership demonstrated how immigration was affecting the traditional customs of Creole society, whereas Laveaux's court case in support of a separation from her husband, indicated the change in views about marriage and family.

Although all but one of these women were Afro-Creoles, they came from diverse backgrounds. By comparing women who were deemed from a different class, or heritage, this thesis has explored how far status within the free Black community, and also within White society, affected these women's chances of economic success. For example, Mandeville's and Bonille's connections with White society, and their rank within free Black society was certainly an advantage when they had to take their conniving White relatives to court. Mandeville's White family also helped her to start her business, with gifts of money and land. Their high status within society also provided them with further opportunities to network within the free Black and White communities and across national borders in countries like France and Cuba. However, the thesis also demonstrates how free Black women, like Marie Couvent, who by all accounts would have been at the lower end of Black society, could also achieve economic success in New Orleans. Unlike all the other women of this study, Couvent was illiterate, yet she became a reasonably wealthy woman. This may also have been due, in part, to her networking abilities. Like Mandeville, she formed networks, firstly with White Saint-Dominguans who accompanied her to New Orleans, and then with the free Black and enslaved community of the City. In addition, the project showed how high status and connections with White society were also not a guarantee of continued economic security, especially for those who were the domestic partners of White men. Maria Josefa Diaz and her daughter Cècille Bonille, were examples of those higher class free Black women who suffered from lack of funds and had large debts at the end of their lives.

The thesis also examined how class and origins affected the world view of these women. For many years, New Orleans' free Black nuns only wished to recruit wealthy Afro-Creole women into its

ranks and its school, producing an image of gentility. They may have believed that this would engender ongoing approbation among the White community, and thus an increased chance of the convent's continued existence. Eulalie Mandeville's illustrious White heritage on her father's side may have also influenced her ambitions for her family. She ensured that two of her sons had close ties with France and Cuba, rather than with the free Black population of New Orleans. Thus, perhaps she ultimately encouraged them to leave New Orleans, rather than staying and supporting the free Black community during the Reconstruction. Her background also impacted the way in which she viewed slaveholding, meaning that she saw enslaved people only in terms of an investment. Indeed, the thesis has examined the reasons for slaveholding among free people of colour, taking into consideration the opinions of various scholars. While Mandeville's view of enslaved people may have been engendered by her upbringing and custom; for many free Black women of a lower class, choosing to become a slaveholder generally meant increased income and better conditions for the family. It could therefore be viewed as a form of defence, distancing these women from the enslaved community, and thereby protecting their sometimes-precarious free status. The thesis also examined the complicated relationships between enslaved and free Black people, and the way in which some of the enslaved were favoured by their holders over others. This was often the case for those who purchased friends and family. However, the research project also demonstrated how associations between free Black women and the enslaved could result in them forming new kinship networks. This is exemplified by Marie Couvent, who, when she arrived in New Orleans appeared to have a close relationship with her enslavers. By her purchase of enslaved people, she entered the Black community of New Orleans, resulting in marriage to one of her enslaved men, and the engendering of close, almost familial friendships with some of the others. This may have ultimately led to her desire to provide a charitable organization for the community. Indeed, this research has shown how some of these women began to change the way in which they distributed their wealth, especially after their demise. In the beginning it was all about providing for the next generation, but by the end of the Antebellum period, they became more concerned with the future of the free Black community. Some of them, or their children, left legacies or established charitable organizations which benefitted and empowered the free Black population.

These women also began to influence others within the free Black, and even White communities of New Orleans, not only by their bequests, but also by their example. There is a suggestion that the Sisters of the Holy Family were guiding young women against entering into plaçage relationships in favour of marriage. Although there is no supporting evidence for this, except what has been reported by oral tradition, it seems plausible, because the nuns influenced their students. They also made sure that they received a good education, thus maximizing their choices and opportunities. Eulalie Mandeville's court case showed that free Black businesswomen could gain the respect and approbation of White businessmen for their skills and professionalism, after having been universally derided by them in the Colonial period. Her case also made clear that free Black women could win in court, even against powerful White families. The appearance of other free Black women in defence of Eulalie also showed the authorities that they would stand together and assist each other, both in and out of court. Henriette Delille demonstrated to the Catholic Church that a free Black woman could run a successful religious organization, and women like Marie Dolores Laveaux made it clear that they would no longer put up with an abusive marriage in silence. According to Desdunes, Marie Couvent's bequest paved the way for philanthropic gestures from other wealthy members of the free Black population, leading to an upsurge in the building of charitable institutions. Thus, in some cases these women did not only influence their own society, but also helped in the facilitation of change for the generations to come.

Indeed, the legacies of these women is a key theme of the project, explored through an examination of two of the families during the end of the Antebellum period through to the Reconstruction. Marie Dolores Laveaux's children with their links to the free Black community through successive marriages and through business links, may have been influenced to ally themselves more strongly with New Orleans' Black community, On the other hand, members of Eulalie Mandeville's family were possibly encouraged by her to seek their fortunes elsewhere. Historians have concentrated on the economic aspects of the legacy these women wished to leave their children, but further investigation beyond the scope of this project may show how gaining increased status for their children, either through immigration to Caribbean or European countries, or by *passing*, may have been an equally important legacy that these mothers gifted their subsequent descendants. However, this research has also noted that the offspring of Mandeville and Laveaux did not produce many children. This is

perhaps a telling testimony on the condition for those of African descent in the period of the Reconstruction. They were perhaps unwilling to bring children into a world still structured by a distinct racial and gendered order. It is therefore significant that the only children of Eulalie Mandeville to marry and produce offspring were those who left New Orleans to settle abroad. This is suggestive of the idea that only once they were away from the racial hierarchies that still pervaded the United States, even after the Reconstruction Amendments granting citizenship and male suffrage to those of African descent, did the children of these women feel free to produce the next generation. The free Black population of New Orleans went down drastically at the end of the Antebellum period and the Reconstruction. This was undoubtedly due to people leaving the City, however it would be interesting to research further as to whether this reluctance to marry was a general trend amongst New Orleans' young Black people.

It is difficult to determine what hopes and fears these mothers and educators had for future generations. However, through their actions they instituted organizations which survived and provided positive reinforcement for young Black women throughout the years. This is especially true of the Sisters of the Holy Family, whose order still exists up until the present day. They operated a school for free Black girls from their inception onwards. This continued until the inauguration of Saint Mary's Academy in 1867, which ironically was built on the site of one of the ballrooms where the quadroon balls were held. From the beginning, under the guidance of Henriette Delille, they provided a good education for young Black girls. During the civil rights era, they also taught leadership skills, and fostered increased self-esteem in young Black women, which continues up to the present day. Student Maci Broaden, 17, who was present at the 150-year anniversary of the school in 2017, summed up the positive influence of the Sisters: "I'm not the same person who came in, she said. Being at St. Mary's has made me realize that I do matter in the world. And I feel comfortable in my own skin, being myself."[781] Thus, these free women of colour not only contributed to the economic, social and political life of New Orleans in the antebellum period, but their influence continues right up until the present

[781]https://www.nola.com/news/education/article_353ab64c-6565-5428-8872-aeaca7542b89.html

day. In these uncertain times, it is even more important that their achievements should be known and recognized by succeeding generations of young women, both Black and White.

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APPENDIX 1

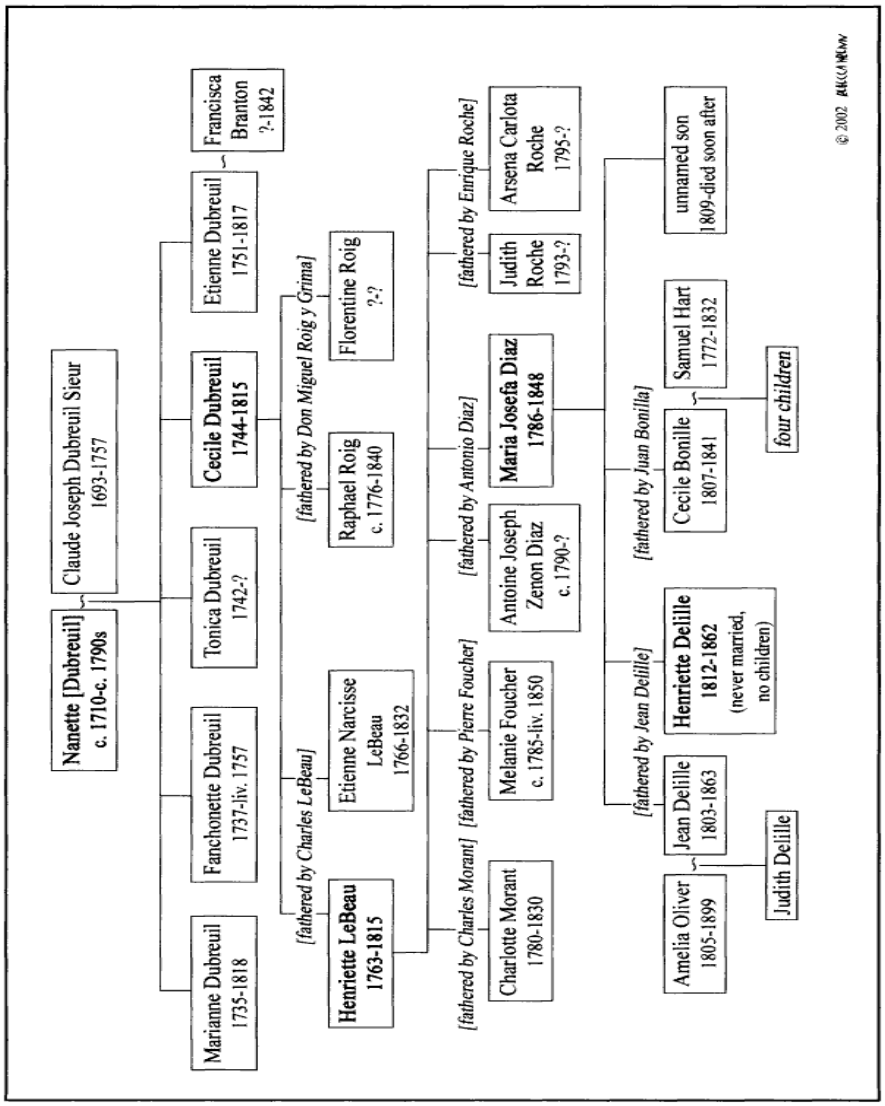

FIGURE II: Genealogy of Henriette Delille. Based on information gathered by Virginia Meacham Gould and the Henriette Delille Historical Commission, New Orleans.