"The Downfall of Their Daughters": E.J. Bellocq's Storyville Portraits and Representations of Sex Work in the Fin de Siècle

Volume I

Mollie Sarah LeVeque

A thesis submitted to the School of Art, Media, and American Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, University of East Anglia

March 2017

The copy of this thesis has been supplied on condition that anyone who consults it is understood to recognize that its copyright rests with the author and that use of any information derived therefrom must be in accordance with current UK copyright law. In addition, any quotation or extract must include full attribution.

Abstract

This thesis explores the "Storyville Portraits" as representations of sex work in the fin de siècle. Originally taken by New Orleanian commercial photographer E.J. Bellocq, the portraits' negatives were hidden away until they were rediscovered by contemporary photographers, most notably Lee Friedlander. Over the years, the portraits have most often been treated as tragic, ominous, or read with an assumption of New Orleans's exceptionalism. Despite renewed scholarly interest in Storyville, the city's infamous red-light district, the portraits' implications are still limited by these narratives, which have also generally emphasized Bellocq's "outsider" status or focused on his intentions.

However, I argue that the portraits resemble other transatlantic representations of urban sex work and are best read within those contexts. We can acknowledge their subversive qualities if we consider how, overall, they exist as part of the panorama these representations provide. At the same time, the portraits contradict many conventions of how "the prostitute" and even Storyville were portrayed in the 1900s. By using the mass and visual culture of four cities to pivot between my explorations, I explain how Bellocq provides us with another perspective on the sex worker: his work does not capitalize on his models' demonized social status or simulate voyeurism to gratify the viewer. Their portrayals of sex work (or indeed of "deviant" women) as mundane is their most significant quality, and still, it has been largely overlooked.

Access Condition and Agreement

Each deposit in UEA Digital Repository is protected by copyright and other intellectual property rights, and duplication or sale of all or part of any of the Data Collections is not permitted, except that material may be duplicated by you for your research use or for educational purposes in electronic or print form. You must obtain permission from the copyright holder, usually the author, for any other use. Exceptions only apply where a deposit may be explicitly provided under a stated licence, such as a Creative Commons licence or Open Government licence.

Electronic or print copies may not be offered, whether for sale or otherwise to anyone, unless explicitly stated under a Creative Commons or Open Government license. Unauthorised reproduction, editing or reformatting for resale purposes is explicitly prohibited (except where approved by the copyright holder themselves) and UEA reserves the right to take immediate ‘take down’ action on behalf of the copyright and/or rights holder if this Access condition of the UEA Digital Repository is breached. Any material in this database has been supplied on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the material may be published without proper acknowledgement.

Table of Contents

Abstract **2**

Table of Contents **3**

List of Illustrations **4**

Acknowledgements **6**

Introduction **7**

Thesis Structure *15*

Place in the literature *18*

Late nineteenth century New Orleans 19

Storyville 21

E.J. Bellocq 22

Histories of prostitution 24

Twentieth century art and visual culture 25

The razed brothel - stigma, race, and forgetful archives in histories of Storyville *27*

Chapter One: The "Parisification" of New Orleanian Vice **38**

Mysteries of Paris; Mysteries of New Orleans - promiscuity, sex work, and sex slavery *42*

"To see the tenderloin proper is to visit Trilby's": Echoes of Nana and Trilby in Storyville *50*

"Était dans le vice comme un poisson dans l'eau": Creole and Parisian influences on narratives of Storyville *54*

Conclusion: "An opulent city of sin, [...] a dangerous city of death" – New Orleans's Parisian "otherness" *63*

Chapter Two: A Heritage of Violence, Voyeurism, and Crime **71**

"Violently and downwards" – the Ripper postmortems and the curious case of Thomas McNeill Cream *73*

"But I am what [he] made me": The Storyville Portraits as "lust diary" *82*

"I am just aching to take my axe and go down Canal Street": Violence as a convention of reform *90*

Conclusion: "Bellocq never said anything and they always let him go" – Imposed Criminalities *97*

Chapter Three: The White Slave, the Sex Slave, and the Question of Ambiguity **107**

"Degrees to which a woman could be considered fallen": white slavery scares and Sloan's Three A.M. *109*

Intersectional taboos: interracial sex, interracial women *120*

"Think I want to get pinched under the white slave law?": Ambiguity in representations of sex and sex work *124*

Conclusion: "Infinite stories whose endings we will never know" in Bellocq's portraits *129*

Chapter Four: (Self)-Representing Storyville Women **137**

"The Terrible Fate of Kate Townsend": melodrama and morality in the media *139*

Blue Books and manufactured personas *148*

The "indelible marks" of "lewd and abandoned" women - pornography and print culture *160*

Conclusion: Depictions of Collateral Damage *165*

Conclusion **172**

Bibliography **194**

List of Illustrations

Figure 1 Plate 16, E.J. Bellocq

Figure 2 Bellocq's desk or bureau

Figure 3 "At the French Opera – After the French Opera"

Figure 4 Plate 5, E.J. Bellocq

Figure 5 Plate 19, E.J. Bellocq

Figure 6 Plate 3, E.J. Bellocq

Figure 7 Anonymous

Figure 8 Anonymous

Figure 9 Anonymous

Figure 10 Anonymous

Figure 11 Anonymous

Figure 12 *Akt mit Lyra*, Frankreich

Figure 13 Anonymous

Figure 14 Plate 33, E.J. Bellocq

Figure 15 Attributed to E.J. Bellocq

Figure 16 Attributed to E.J. Bellocq

Figure 17 Dan Leyrer, Mahogany Hall

Figure 18 Attributed to E. J. Bellocq, Mahogany Hall interior

Figure 19 Plate 17, E.J. Bellocq

Figure 20 Advertisement, *Blue Book*

Figure 21 Advertisement, *Blue Book*

Figure 22 Detail from the *Illustrated Police News*

Figure 23 Studio portrait of Annie Chapman and her husband, John Chapman

Figure 24 Annie Chapman's postmortem portrait

Figure 25 John Sloan, *Three A.M.*

Figure 26 George Bellows, "But If You've Never Cooked or Done Housework…"

Figure 27 Glenn O. Coleman, "Are you Going to See Me Home…"

Figure 28 Selection of Bertillon cards from the New Orleans Police Department

Figure 29 Plate 9, E.J. Bellocq

Figure 30 Detail from "The Townsend Tragedy"

Figure 31 Detail from *The Mascot*

Figure 32 Franz von Bayros, "Der Rivale"

Figure 33 Anonymous

Figure 34 Anonymous

Figure 35 Anonymous

Figure 36 Anonymous

Figure 37 Plate 14, E.J. Bellocq

Figure 38 Plate 13, E.J. Bellocq

Figure 39 Plate 22, E.J. Bellocq

Figure 40 Plate 2, E.J. Bellocq

Figure 41 Plate 24, E.J. Bellocq

Figure 42 Plate 20, E.J. Bellocq

Figure 43 René Rondeau, *Storyville – Tribute to E.J. Bellocq of New Orleans*

Figure 44 René Rondeau, *Portrait*

Figure 45 John Sloan, *Prone Nude*

Figure 46 John Sloan, *Prone Nude (Nude Lying Down)*

Figure 47 John Sloan, *Turning Out the Light*

Figure 48 John Sloan, *Bachelor Girl*

Acknowledgements

There's a small, diverse cavalcade of people I'm honored to thank.

Nat, who crossed a country – then an ocean – and has been listening to me rant about Bellocq for four years. My mother, stepfather, and grandparents, who are endlessly selfless and reassuring. Merlin, whose friendship and intellect have been truly indispensible. Joanne, who always has something sensible to say. Fi, who keeps things in perspective.

Louise Coleman and Pamela Arceneaux were both very gracious when I travelled to New Orleans for research. Louise showed me relevant sites, answering lots of questions and going out of her way to introduce me to people. Pamela, meanwhile, shared her thoughts (and a few notes) on Storyville's madams and the Blue Books. (I hope I've done her work some justice.)

The Abbey Guest House in Norwich also deserves earnest thanks for providing me with a safe place to live when I needed it: Mandy and David were an unexpected source of encouragement and warmth.

Last, but decidedly not least: Tom and David were insightful, very patient supervisors who helped me shape and hone this thesis. They were immensely supportive, kind, and tolerant of my interdisciplinary inclinations and lateral thinking. I was so fortunate to work with them.

Introduction

> "Well [photographs of prostitutes] were so commonplace; I mean, we knew all the people who he was taking pictures of. [...] There was this saloon on South Rampart, and above this saloon was a little room, and in this room were thousands of pictures; they looked like they were made in France, of fornication and anything related to that in all its possible [...] positions."[1]

In the initial decades of the twentieth century, John Ernest Joseph Bellocq (commonly known as "E.J. Bellocq"), a New Orleanian commercial photographer,[2] made a series of portraits of local women who worked in Storyville. Typical of many of the inscrutable, so-called "Storyville Portraits," Plate 16 [Figure 1] in *E.J. Bellocq: Storyville Portraits – Photographs from the New Orleans Red-Light District, c.1912*, reveals austere surroundings that belie no trace of their legendary locale: a brothel in a New Orleans red-light district that came to be known as Storyville.[3] The scene is simple and provides no orientating context. There is just a scuffed windowsill draped with a sheet that frames a smiling, naked young woman whose dark hair is arranged in careful ringlets – a luxurious hairstyle compared to her lack of either clothing or enticing lingerie. Beyond her, we can just make out a nondescript metal bedframe with rumpled linens that rests at a diagonal, seeming to connect with her legs and torso. Although she is bathed in daylight, the room is ominously dark and appears flat as a backdrop: in effect, she is a gatekeeper, an obstacle to approaching the room. It is both a disarming image, and an intriguing one.

While there are few overt confirmations about this woman, as Rebecca Zurier says in *Painting the City*, this portrait's "unnamed setting [can] tell a great deal about the story

---

[1] Johnny Wiggs, as quoted in *E.J. Bellocq: Storyville Portraits – Photographs from the New Orleans Red-Light District, circa 1912* (Meriden: The Museum of Modern Art, 1970), 12. As I will address in my conclusion, I have used "sex worker" and "sex work" (rather than "prostitute" and "prostitution," among other terms), but I do not substitute them in other sources.

[2] Laura Thomson notes, in "A Thoroughly Modern Man: EJ Bellocq and the creation of a Modernist myth. [Sic]" (MA essay, University of Sussex, 2005), "how startling" it was to discover one of Bellocq's professional commissions was to photograph "sixteen virgins:" "How startling that this tableau of sixteen virgins is attributed to a man whose entire legacy famously contains nothing but eighty nine photographic plates of Storyville whores [sic]," 10. Information about Bellocq's occupation is a matter of public record; as Thomson notes, the Archdiocesan Archives for New Orleans, Louisiana contain the photograph that "startled" her. See also Rex Rose, "The Last Days of Ernest J. Bellocq," *Exquisite Corpse: A Journal of Letters and Life* 10 (2002), as posted to "American Suburb X," URL: http://www.americansuburbx.com/2011/02/e-j-bellocq-the-last-days-of-ernest-j-bellocq.html.

[3] E. J. Bellocq, prints made by Lee Friedlander, *Storyville Portraits: Photographs from the New Orleans Red-Light District, circa 1912,* ed. John Szarkowski (Meriden: The Museum of Modern Art, 1970). Though there is a strong case to be made for referring to the images as Friedlander's rather than Bellocq's alone, I do reference them as Bellocq's. Where applicable, I also use plate numbers (as they have been given in the book) to refer to individual portraits.

unfolding in it" because it does present "enough specific detail."[4] The bed lurks in shadow and looms in the scene like a faint ghost. It suggests the woman's profession, providing a more subversive sign than her nudity alone, and cannot be missed or discounted as insignificant. This image with its bizarre setting – somewhere between indoors and outdoors – and what Brian Wallis calls "tawdry details"[5] like rumpled sheets and peeling paint, is not an advertisement or one of the decade's many cabinet cards of pretty, nude young women. It provides neither fantasy nor indulgence, even at a time when expensive brothels like the one where this unknown woman most likely worked, explains Gina Greene, "Deliberately sought to conjure up [an] erotic world of aristocratic privilege."[6] Instead, the portrait gives viewers a glimpse of an early twentieth century reality separated from that artifice. This woman is, in all likelihood, a sex worker lounging on a threshold that separates public from private.

Collectively, Bellocq's portraits remain some of the most enigmatic images of sex work from the time – and from Storyville, which was open, writes Al Rose, "Between January 1, 1898, to the fall of 1917."[7] They were probably not, however, produced for wide public consumption.[8] Indeed, they remained hidden until the 1950s. When a cache of fragile negatives was rediscovered with belongings that had belonged to Ernest's younger brother, it seemed that Leon Bellocq – and by then, Leon was an ordained Catholic priest – secreted them out of sight when Ernest died in 1949.[9] In total, there were over eighty negatives – a number that clearly indicates Ernest considered this project to be worthwhile

---

[4] Rebecca Zurier, *Picturing the City: Urban Vision and the Ashcan School* (University of California Press, 2006), 276.

[5] Brian Wallis writes, "Bellocq's intention is only one of many potential readings of his pictures, and the survival of his full-plate negatives reveals much about the reality that contradicts his own prints. For in the tawdry background details – the iron beds, the wall pennants, the bare washstands – these pictures offer a rare portrayal of the everyday lives of working-class American prostitutes." See *The Mysterious Monsieur Bellocq*, (International Center of Photography, 2004), 15. As I argue, however, Bellocq's portraits were not "a *rare* portrayal of the everyday lives of *working-class* American prostitutes" (emphasis mine). In reality, they were part of a complex, multimedia network of portrayals of "prostitutes" in popular and/or visual culture. They are – as far as we know – the only portrayal of this kind to have come from Storyville. But I believe that they should not be regarded as such isolated incidents, and that the women are not necessarily best read as "working-class" sex workers.

[6] Gina Greene, "Reflections of Desire: Masculinity and Fantasy in the Fin-De-Siècle Luxury Brothel," *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* 14 (2015): 7.

[7] Al Rose, preface to *Storyville, New Orleans, Being an Authentic, Illustrated Account of the Notorious Red-light District* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1974), ix.

[8] Christian Waguespack posits the idea that they were advertisements, but the portraits do not seem to make appearances in known Blue Books, the local directories of prostitution that featured many advertisements for liquor, "medicines," and even funerary services. See Waguespack, "Reframing E.J. Bellocq: A Vernacular Reading of the Storyville Portraits" (MA thesis, University of New Mexico, 2015). Pamela Arceneaux was an invaluable source of information on the Blue Books when I visited The Historic New Orleans Collection Archives in May 2016.

[9] Glenda D. Skinner, "The Storyville Portraits: A Collaborative History" (MA thesis, Virginia Commonwealth University, 1999), 9.

and compelling. It was not until the early 1960s, though, that the portraits started to be introduced to the larger world. Christian Waguespack explains:

> One of the Storyville Portraits was published in a book by [curator] John Szarkowski [...] "The Photographer's Eye", and was included in an exhibition of the same name at the Museum of Modern Art.[10]

Szarkowski's friend, the photographer Lee Friedlander, had been captivated by these images and set out to make more prints from Bellocq's negatives. After some study, he turned to methods photographers would have used in the 1900s.[11] Even if some of the resultant portraits may not indicate it, as a frequenter of one of the rowdiest, most formidable red-light districts ever to exist in the United States, Bellocq had to have been well-versed in the day's erotic tastes.[12] A photograph of his workspace reveals edited and framed versions of his Storyville photographs – each is of a woman or a small group of women – as well as art nouveau images and a miniature cabinet card of a woman in a kimono at the desk's far right corner [Figure 2].[13] Although we can see from this photograph that he perfected and changed images by manipulating his "raw" portraits, he only left behind a puzzling array of unadorned negatives. These negatives, which were made into photographs by several mid-twentieth century photographers, including Friedlander, constitute the collection of images now known as the "Storyville Portraits."[14] They have continued to intrigue twenty-first century viewers.

---

[10] Waguespack, 43.

[11] Friedlander explains in the preface to *Storyville Portraits:* "Some research led me to a printing technique popular at the turn of the century called P.O.P (printing out paper) which has an inherent self masking quality. In this method the plates were exposed to the P.O.P by indirect daylight for anywhere from three hours to seven days, depending on the plate's density and quality of daylight [...]," 5.

[12] These included bestiality, same-sex activity, sadomasochism, and interracial sex. Japanese shunga (broadly defined as a genre of sexual, or sexually humorous, drawings and photographs) also circulated in the United States by the late 1800s, which influenced domestic pornography production. See Hans-Michael Koetzle, *1,000 Nudes* (Taschen, 2005) and Gilles Néret, *Erotica Universalis* (Taschen, 2004) for many examples of these images, and see Emily Epstein Landau, *Spectacular Wickedness: Sex, Race, and Memory in Storyville, New Orleans* (Louisiana State University Press, 2013), 139-143, for a consideration of pornography in Storyville that is focused on pornographic portraits of local madam Lulu White. Primary textual sources that exemplify these popular tropes include *My Secret Life* (Auguste Brancart, 1888), a graphic "memoir" of sexual exploits written by an "anonymous" author, and – to a far less explicit extent – any fin de siècle New Orleans directories of brothels. According to Gina Greene, as well, "Print media made the [idea of] sexual libertinism, if not the actual practice of it, available to men of all classes," 7. None of Bellocq's images fully cater to these proclivities, even if some of the portraits could have been used to create cabinet cards, for example, which were more socially acceptable erotic images in the guise of art or decoration.

[13] Al Rose believed these were photographs of Bellocq's workspace. See Al Rose, *Storyville, New Orleans, Being an Authentic, Illustrated Account of the Notorious Red-light District* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1974), 59. There was apparently some debate as to whether they are of a domestic setting or his studio, but Janet Malcolm also maintains that they are from "his own apartment," *Diana & Nikon: Essays on Photography* (New York: Aperture Foundation, 1997), 200-201.

[14] These photographers include Lee Friedlander, John T. Mendes, and Dan Leyrer. See *E.J. Bellocq: Storyville Portraits – Photographs from the New Orleans Red-Light District, Circa 1912*, as well as The Historic New Orleans Collection archives.

Friedlander's work was eventually displayed at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City between 1970-1971, where it shared space with photographs by contemporary artists. This was to have an irrevocable effect on how Bellocq was interpreted. In fact, the portraits have been exhibited in galleries on several occasions, which has strengthened their association with art and artists. But as Waguespack notes, "*Storyville Portraits* (1970) was the first time [they] were shown together with any level of didactic or interpretative contextualization."[15] So far, these images have mainly garnered responses that address them as rediscovered *objets d'art* with an enigmatic maker and a serendipitous introduction to the public, rather than representations of sex work or early twentieth century womanhood. For example, the most attention has been given to Bellocq's (or Friedlander's) role as an artist (or to Bellocq's biography, which has been muddled with mythic additions) and to the women's role as models, although an aside in *Storyville Portraits* said that the portraits "wouldn't have changed the history of photography" if they had been discovered any earlier.[16]

There are only a few scholars who have written about the portraits directly, and all have situated them within the history of art or photography.[17] Further, and rightly so, there has also been an emphasis on the process of collaboration that has occurred in their rediscovery and Friedlander's position as a co-creator.[18] On the other hand, Louis Malle recalled that while he conducted research for his film "Pretty Baby" (1978), which was about a fictional Storyville brothel and featured Bellocq as a main character (eventually, he marries an underage sex worker), one curator claimed that the images were faked.[19] Clearly, then, they have encouraged a variety of conversations, but have been discussed and interpreted in specific, limiting ways, as I will address in more detail. Despite how they have been narrativized in cultural and art histories, I maintain that the Storyville Portraits are best regarded as part of a vast spectrum of "obscene" images and mass culture. Conversely, their creator has been implicitly elevated above (and problematically distanced from) the category of someone who took pornographic photographs. As Szarkowski writes, "Bellocq – whoever he was – interests us [...] as an artist: a man who saw more

---

[15] Waguespack, 43.
[16] Szarkowski, 10.
[17] See Skinner, and Waguespack especially.
[18] Waguespack, 43: "Friedlander was not simply copying Bellocq's photographs when he reprinted them; he created a brand new body of work, the artistic and aesthetic content for which is vastly different than the vernacular context for the original Storyville portraits [sic]."
[19] "Louis Malle," in *Film Voices: Interviews from Post Script,* ed. Gerald Duchovnay (State University of New York Press, 2012), 235.

clearly than we do, and who discovered secrets."[20] In reality, he was not exceptional in his choice of subject, and there is currently no way to determine whether he regarded himself as an artist. More to the point, it does not seem particularly likely: like many other commercial photographers of his time, he was experimenting with more risqué subject matter. There was no better place; Storyville was a ribald red-light district.

Meanwhile, nineteenth and early twentieth century America was saturated with a variety of "pornographic" images and literature created by a large number of people who had access to the right technologies. Scholars have studied the prolific interest in pornographic novels and novellas during the antebellum and post-Civil War periods, and they have established that a large variety of tastes and fantasies were catered to across media; this carried through into the fin de siècle and was met with reform efforts. Of course, both pornography and sex trades flourished in cities. Research conducted about these trades in non-American cities, especially London, indicated similar trends and underscore how pornography production, trade, and consumption occurred across boundaries of nationality, class, and gender.

What we can surmise from these studies, then, is that misconceptions about pornography and sex work industries in a transatlantic context owe much to the moralist rhetoric of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which has in turn impacted receptions of the Storyville Portraits. In fact, the boundaries and stereotypes associated with "obscene" images or reading during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – that, for instance, only men produced or consumed pornography – are not accurate. The visuality and the phenotypes in general of sex workers and pornographic models are, as well, less homogenized. This is perhaps why the Storyville Portraits have been categorized as niche and melancholic: they do not reinforce the stereotypes, and many of them appear instead to be almost documentary.

Further, as Jamie Stoops writes, successful nude models possessed a certain "theatricality" that enabled them to manipulate the viewer into having a sense of control, voyeurism, or dominance. This was due in no small part to the association of the theatre (and actors) with prostitution, which was no less true in New Orleans than it was in London, New York or Paris; the belief was evidenced in an 1888 illustration of the New Orleanian French Opera featured in local paper *The Mascot*, which provided glimpses at the

---

[19] Szarkowski, 10.

supposedly morally corrosive effect of the venue [Figure 3].[21] But what this "theatricality" amounted to, visually and stylistically, was a vast array of images featuring women who appeared seductive: subservient in some cases, but also smoldering and worldly. Humor, too, played its part in creating a visual code of eroticism, a shorthand that conveyed to the viewer that this image was for erotic stimulation. There were also examples of early photo-manipulation and collage: a photographer could have models pose, then use their bodies and gestures in conjunction with other photographs to create a new, more atmospheric scene [Figure 8].

Many of Bellocq's portraits are at home in the enormous milieu of nineteenth and early twentieth century pornography, particularly when we consider the photograph of his workspace and desk. We can see that he kept "naughty" postcards within his sight, and at least one of the portraits he took himself is featured in a small frame alongside these images [Figure 2]. That his work shares traits with pornography, yet is interspersed by mundane aspects of fin de siècle life, simply points to the fact that sex work was an occupation in the city. Importantly for the purposes of this thesis, it was starting to be represented as such. However, the notion persists that somehow, we are "privileged" to see scenes like this from a fin de siècle brothel because they were all actually horrific, and Bellocq was some kind of interlocutor for those less fortunate than himself. Chris Waddington writes:

> His pictures present glimpses of life lived outside of commerce, when one is surrounded by friends: the silliness, the daydreaming, the casual nudity and occasional settings among hanging laundry and rooms decorated with postcards and university pennants. In effect, today's viewers are ushered behind the doors of a 1912 New Orleans brothel, witness to privileged moments […].[22]

I want to move away from the notion that Bellocq provides us with "privileged moments," and consider the deceptively simple suggestion that these were just moments and women he wanted to photograph.

They are neither fully candid nor fully staged scenes, and Bellocq must have been aware of, consuming, or to some extent emulating examples of "obscene images" that

[21] "Bankoff and Girlie in Big Modern Dancing Act Headlining Orpheum Bill This Week," *Times-Picayune*, September 3, 1916, "'Amusements [Illegible] Rustieana' at the French Opera House," *Daily Picayune,* January 22, 1897, and "Wistful And Sweet Are These Dainty Female Feet of the Stage. Some of Them Are...," *Daily Picayune,* February 24, 1895, and see Karl Beckson, "Prostitutes on the Promenade," in *London in the 1890s: A Cultural History* (W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1992), 111-128.

[22] Chris Waddington, "Unlocking Bellocq's Secrets," *The Times-Picayune*, September 23, 1996.

involved an ostensibly "artistic" or "romantic" style. What remains unusual about his work, however, is the amount of respect it accords its subjects and the variety found in the body types (if not necessarily the races or ethnicities) of women he photographed. Even within his portraits of nude women, there is evident rapport – very little, even none, of what Stoops observes of the "theatricality" in other "lewd" photographs. Bellocq's models are not performing facial expressions or scenes. In the case of the other portraits, women are completely clothed [Figures 29, 37, 39, and 40]. We are left to wonder if these are more of a documentary effort. Bellocq sometimes seems just as confused; amongst his portraits we can find both what might be examples of the quintessential "naughty" postcard [Figures 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11], or the portraits needed to make them, and instances of what almost – but do not quite – amount to social or representational realism, or even modernism.

Meanwhile, some of the portraits have been defaced with no explanation [Figures 14, 15, and 16]. As ominous as this might seem, it only indicates Storyville's inherent tensions – especially as they might have been perceived by Bellocq, who was a white, relatively well-off Creole. He does not depict any dark-skinned women, for example. Speculation about why he might have defaced the images runs rampant. Still, his models are neither "victims" who need to be saved, nor "criminals" who should be corrected. They pose frankly, but not seductively – this is indicative of how accustomed they were to being naked. In fact, sometimes the clothed portraits feel more uncomfortable than the ones featuring nudity. Yet the paradigms through which these women were interpreted by their society insisted that they must be either tragic or cunning: they are still viewed today under similar cultural understandings of New Orleans and Storyville. This was, though, also the imaginary that madams and sex workers manipulated for survival and, in other cases, profit.

A spectrum of images and popular culture, then, forms a panorama within which these portraits need to be, but have not yet been, fully considered. By looking across transatlantic mass, visual, and popular cultures that comprise popular imaginaries of "the obscene" and "the prostitute," Bellocq's addition to the archives of Storyville is re-orientated. He was not exceptional: he followed his interests and was surrounded by a thriving vice trade that included the creation and distribution of pornographic images. By Storyville's heyday in the early 1900s, an overwhelming number of these existed. They ranged from the graphic – depictions of penetrative acts were common [Figures 35 and 36] – to the scenes that had been made under the guise of "artistic" studies or nudes [Figure 13]. Models were understood to be immoral, if not outright sex workers. However, this

shame was the result of a popular culture that was fascinated with "deviant" women. It took a specific turn in New Orleans, which was itself perceived to be different from other American cities.

The portraits' ability to elucidate surprising changes in these representations of prostitution, obscenity, and sex work has not yet been explored. They relate to the prostitute as a western cultural icon, even though they have a regional context that is specific to the United States and the South. In part, the ways in which they contain few direct, visual ties to New Orleans – but remain emblematic of urban sex work during the 1900s – is what makes them so compelling. Susan Sontag, Friedlander's contemporary, addressed this potential when she observed how the Storyville Portraits could have been at home in any decade that spanned 1880-1912. To her, these women appeared representative not only of sex workers, but of other types of "fallen" women across decades of urban life – including Kate Chopin's Edna Pontellier, who was neither a sex worker nor an artists' model. Sontag noted:

> The year is 1912, but we would not be surprised to be told that the pictures were taken in 1901, when Theodore Dreiser began writing *Jennie Gerhardt*, or in 1899, when Kate Chopin published *The Awakening*, or in 1889, the year Dreiser set the start of his first novel, *Sister Carrie* – the ballooning clothes and plump bodies could be dated anywhere from 1880 to the beginning of World War I. The charges of indecency that greeted Chopin's only novel and Dreiser's first were so unrelenting that Chopin retreated from literature and Dreiser faltered. (Anticipating more such attacks, Dreiser, after beginning his great second novel in 1901, put it aside for a decade.) Bellocq's photographs belong to this same world of anti-formulaic, anti-salacious sympathy for "fallen" women, though in his case we can only speculate about the origin of that sympathy.[23]

So, the thought that the images were not actually segmented from popular culture is not new, but little work has been done to extend it any further. The majority of this project, then, rests in considering Bellocq's images as a manifestation of the figure that proliferated diverse media in the city, such as novels like Emile Zola's *Nana* (1880), realist paintings like John Sloan's *Three A.M.* (1910), Victorian and fin de siècle New Orleans newspapers (rather, virtually any newspapers), and even some of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's "Sherlock Holmes" stories. I posit that the portraits are "anti-formulaic" and "anti-salacious" *because* they are part of this metropolitan milieu of erotica (or erotic representations), and can indeed facilitate readings of the "prostitute" as a cultural icon.

---

[23] Susan Sontag, introduction to *E.J. Bellocq: Storyville Portraits, Photographs from the New Orleans Red-Light District, Circa 1912*, ed. John Szarkowski (New York: Random House, 1996), URL: http://www.masters-of-photography.com/B/bellocq/bellocq_articles2.html.

I first encountered Bellocq's work in a 2002 issue of *Archaeology Magazine* – whose use of a portrait [Figure 1] in an article about excavations on one of Storyville's old sites sparked irate letters to the editor.[24] Eventually, after years of research, I was to realize that they were not unlike letters to the editor written almost a century before – about the dangers of the district. The portrait was perceived as obscene, and inappropriate to include in such a publication.[25] But the portrait in question, which I underscored at the start of this introduction, was hardly as shocking as complaints made it out to be. Indeed, compared to late nineteenth and early twentieth century pornography, it is completely unremarkable. Yet, like the rest of Bellocq's oeuvre, it remains compelling and off-kilter. This thesis uses Bellocq's images as a starting point or a rationale because of those attributes. At the time of their creation, representations of prostitution were in wide circulation across a variety of media well across the globe. The prostitute as a cultural icon was one of the most significant figures of the fin de siècle, encompassing a range of anxieties, commentaries, fetishes, and aesthetics.

Additionally, the fact that the images surfaced out of New Orleans's lush cityscape only adds to their complexity and intrigue. They exist at a mythopoeic crossroads of powerful imaginaries: one of the "prostitute," and another of the "Crescent City." Each encompasses what Norman Klein calls "fictions [that] are built into facts" and has witnessed the shift of "facts into fictions."[26] This thesis, therefore, is both an exploration of the representation of prostitution across the last decades of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, and also an attempt to better understand the Storyville Portraits within the rich contexts of representations of prostitution, the city as a trope, and perceptions of their own city. Though the portraits were not circulated to the public at large, they are still part of a complex network of media. Without reflecting on their place in these immense, reciprocal discourses, we risk oversimplifying an unconventional, but potentially interventional, archive of images.

Thesis Structure

In effect, Bellocq's portraits are a coda within each chapter and at the end of the thesis, which triangulates the portraits with representations of prostitution and examines the prostitute's presence in cities. I reconnect those subversive influences with the portraits.

---

[24] Eric A. Powell, "Tales From Storyville – Digging the 'Sporting Life' in Old New Orleans," *Archeology Magazine* 55 (2002).
[25] "Letters From The People," *Times-Picayune*, August 6, 1914.
[26] Norman Klein, *The History of Forgetting: Los Angeles and the Erasure of Memory* (Verso, 1999), 16.

Four cities, namely Paris, London, New York, and New Orleans, function as ideological and geographical anchors because they shed considerable light on the "prostitute" as an urban archetype: therefore, they shape my reading of Bellocq's work. This structure also takes into account New Orleans's actual transatlantic connections – e.g. to Francophone and/or Creole cultures – and its imagined ones. As Christopher Benfey explores, the presence of Creoles, Cajuns, and expatriate Parisians fostered cultural hierarchies and practices reminiscent of those in France or French colonies, and New Orleans was an attractive – though risqué – destination for foreign travel writers and tourists. The Civil War's deep repercussions on the South effectively ended these social orders, but it could not obliterate them.[27] They, along with other influences, had differentiated New Orleans from the rest of the United States long before it was admitted to the Union.

Apart from providing pivotal points from which we may consider the Storyville Portraits, organizing the thesis through ideologically interconnected cities also allows for a consideration of the imagined qualities that were part of New Orleans's image as a destination, and especially its identity as a destination for interracial sexual tourism. References to how – or implications of how – "worldly" New Orleans was in comparison to other American cities were common. They abounded in Storyville's advertisements, which often took the form of the local "Blue Book," the district's guide to women available for hire, or booklets published by individual madams. Clara Miller's advertisement in a souvenir book promises:

> She has been in the principal cities of Europe and the Continent, and can certainly interest you as she has a host of many others. When we add that the famous octaroon was born near Baton Rouge we trust you will certainly call on her.[28]

Storyville's women consciously manipulated New Orleans's attraction to travellers from other cities, as well as the cultural capital granted by cosmopolitan travel – which implied a level of financial security and a reasonably good education – to turn a profit. Importantly, a focus on representations of urban prostitution allows for themes to be brought to bear on the portraits through discourses particularly exemplified in each city. These include coercion, violence, criminality, secrecy, self-determinism, and ambiguity. The portraits are, then, regarded with these archetypical traits in mind and put into conversation with them.

---

[27] Christopher Benfey, *Degas in New Orleans* (University of California Press, 1997), 240.
[28] Lulu White, *New Mahogany Hall* (New Orleans, La.: s.n., between 1898 and 1899), Call Number: HQ146.N6 W55.

This project discusses Bellocq's images as part of a network of representations rather than images that are disconnected from, or exceptional because of, what they portray.

Chapter One addresses the considerable influence of Parisian narratives on the nineteenth century prostitute archetype. Indeed, it is difficult to discuss any history of sex work at this time without reference to Paris. I posit that this influence needs to be taken into account, especially considering the popular American (and international) notion that New Orleans was more "Creole" and therefore more "French" than the rest of the country.[29] Beginning with Eugene Sue's *Les Mystéres de Paris* (1842-43) as an early, key incarnation of the nineteenth century relationship between sex workers and the city, the chapter sets up the notion of "prostitutes" and exploitative individuals as "characters." It addresses Baron Von Reizenstein's obscure city mystery novel *The Mysteries of New Orleans* (1854-55) and Zola's *Nana* (1880) to establish the rhetoric of tragedy and corruption that was prevalent in the representation of prostitution. It also discusses George du Maurier's *Trilby* (1894) and the massive popularity of Trilby herself – who was neither overtly a sex worker, nor a chaste woman – as a character, and the surprising repercussions this had on New Orleans sex workers' self-representation and the city's media.

In the second chapter, I look from Paris to London, which witnessed a brutal, eventually infamous, series of crimes toward sex workers in the late 1800s. Jack the Ripper not only terrorized the city and fascinated the world: he became as iconic as his victims. Through the interplay of the popular press and public hysteria, violence and crime were reaffirmed as part of the narratives of prostitution. They manifested in the *Illustrated Police News* and seeped into other newspapers and magazines. But the unsolved mystery of the Ripper's identity, along with other infamous cases of violence against women, also had a marked effect on the prostitute's portrayal in fiction, e.g. in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Illustrious Client," which was published in 1924, but conjured up a turn of the century London similarly to how *Storyville Portraits* evoked a fin de siècle New Orleans.

The last two chapters of the thesis deal with the representation of the prostitute in American cities, and are more interpretive in their approaches. Chapter Three is rooted in New York City,[30] where by the start of the twentieth century, the "prostitute" had morphed into either the "white slave" or "New Woman." New strains of skepticism

[29] Intriguingly, as Landau notes: "French tourist guides were 'Guides Bleus,'" 112.

[30] Landau also points out that one of the Blue Books' subtitles, "Tenderloin 400 […] highlight[ed] the boundedness of the demimonde's elite by referring to Ward McAllister's New York social register and 'The Four Hundred' guests from New York's elite circles who were invited to Mrs. William Astor's 1892 gala ball," 112. So although the connotations may be subtle to us today, at the time, Blue Books truly were evoking playful associations with other, more "metropolitan" cities like New York. New Orleans, then, was not at all closed-off from the rest of the world.

surfaced in art, illustration, and fiction that focused on sex workers as everyday women and hallmarks of life in the city. Sexual mores, too, were changing, and sex workers (or promiscuous women) were hardly shocking aspects of city life by the 1910s. While many studies of white slavery and sex work in New York's visual culture do exist, this chapter contextualizes them with representations of the "white slave" in New Orleans. I also account for the appearances, and to an extent, the content, of Bellocq's portraits by comparing them with paintings and illustrations of women by the "Ashcan School" and in particular, John Sloan.

With reference to the first three cities, the final chapter looks to New Orleans. In comparison to my previous case studies, much of the representation of prostitution within its sphere of influence was self-initiated by sex workers themselves. Though other cities also had red-light districts that indubitably created their own advertisements and pornography, Storyville was arguably the most infamous. It demonstrated the marked effort of madams and their "girls" to create and control both sexual and business personas. However, running under this remarkable amount of social power were insidious cycles of poverty, racism, and stigma.

Place in the literature

This thesis bridges the work of scholars who have specialized in the history of New Orleans and the history of Storyville, and prolific studies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century urban "prostitute." I am most interested in her representation in popular and visual culture. Overall, blending these areas of enquiry amends a lapse in scholarship about Bellocq and his portraits: as yet, no work has considered in depth how these images are, in many respects, actually exemplary of this time's representations of both women – particularly working and middle class women – and sex workers, not "prostitutes." The portraits are ambiguous, haphazard, amoral, and humane in the sense that the models are not treated as passive sexual objects. But they neither attempt to "humanize" the women by underscoring a real or imagined plight, nor can they always be called "erotic." This was not characteristic of mass culture that originated from Storyville, but artists and illustrators were creating similar images to Bellocq's at the same time he was working.

Since I draw from studies of the representations of prostitution as well as the history of vice in four cities, my methodologies and influences are purposefully interdisciplinary. They particularly include feminist history and visual studies, literary and journalism studies, race studies, and art history. My consideration of the portraits also

involves assessing ways in which the representation of women shifted during the 1900s, which dictates looking beyond the sources that have thus far provided most discussions of Bellocq or his work. Therefore, it is most useful to thematically arrange the literature that I have consulted. This approach most clearly shows pertinent trends and ideologies, and that there is actually no dearth of scholarly work that can connect the Storyville Portraits to the figure of the urban sex worker in art history, visual and print culture, and literature. Essentially, I rely on the assumption that, as cultural icons of the fin de siècle, cities, prostitutes, and women interact with each other on a foundational, ideological level.

However, in Storyville's case, there was a fervent effort to expunge New Orleans of certain aspects of its history, which poses a challenge to discussing the portraits as anything other than portrayals of tragedy or sin. This sort of erasure also occurred in the other cities I researched, and was related to controlling subcultures or curtailing undesirable demographics of the population, such as sex workers. Therefore, while they do not make numerous appearances, works on the process of forgetting (or excluding certain narratives of) urban history have shaped my research's perspectives. Norman Klein's work on "forgotten" aspects of Los Angeles's history,[31] along with Daniel Hurewitz's discussions of leftist bohemian subcultures centered on "deviant" sexualities in Los Angeles,[32] influenced the way I approach Bellocq's portraits. I am firstly concerned with real and imagined narratives of late nineteenth and early twentieth century cities, women, and vice, and how they were visualized and manifested. Secondly, I use these obscured or forgotten narratives as a "prism" through which the Storyville Portraits can be refracted and reimagined as loaded, complex representations of sex workers.

Late nineteenth century New Orleans

Within scholarly and non-fiction sources, there is currently a tendency to question or elucidate the lurid reputation New Orleans garnered via nineteenth century travel writing, advertisements, and histories written by mid-twentieth century authors. Herbert Asbury's *The French Quarter: An Informal History of the New Orleans Underworld* is perhaps the earliest forerunner to today's cultural histories about New Orleans and its undeniable entanglements with vice.[33] Originally written in 1936 and republished under different titles, including *The Gangs of New Orleans* (inspired by the success of his more famous book *The Gangs of New York*, it was retitled by publishers), his "informal history" ends with

[31] See Klein, *The History of Forgetting.*
[32] Daniel Hurewitz, *Bohemian Los Angeles and the Making of Modern Politics* (University of California Press, 2008).
[33] Herbert Asbury, *The French Quarter: An Informal History of the New Orleans Underworld* (London: Arrow, 2004).

Storyville's 1917 closure. Though his book is lush with details that can be corroborated by excavating a variety of official records, newspapers, and photographs, Asbury's citations are not at all rigorous and he provides only what he terms the "most useful" works he consulted. This abounds in New Orleans histories originating from the early-to-mid twentieth century, which generally do not use many footnotes or other citations. Likewise, Asbury weaves a tale that has been problematized – particularly by scholars who focus on race. In this case, New Orleans is nearly synonymous with the French Quarter, and the French Quarter is almost a shorthand for exoticism.

Al Rose's *Storyville, New Orleans, Being an Authentic, Illustrated Account of the Notorious Red-Light District* bears mentioning alongside Asbury's work. Even though Rose concentrates on Storyville, he tends to follow the same trend of using the imagined French Quarter as a metonym for New Orleans.[34] Interspersing his history with anecdotes, illustrations, and some of Bellocq's portraits (one of which might be misattributed) Rose creates a narrative that is at turns entertaining and offensive, but it is not especially well documented. Again the presumption – or the inability, given the stigma of the topic and how rapidly Storyville's prolific ephemera seemed to disappear after 1917 – surfaces that this history does not need, or cannot have, proper attribution. What essentially occurs, especially between these two pieces of literature, is the formation of a precedent: folklore and hearsay often become amorphously mixed with fact, leaving later researchers to investigate ambiguities and taboos. Though I do not believe that historians can be purely "objective" and New Orleanian history is often enriched by its closeness to folklore, this relationship has limited our reception and interpretations of the Storyville Portraits.

Gary Krist has recently explored crime in fin de siècle New Orleans; he echoes Rose and Asbury's earlier books in scope. However, in *Empire of Sin: A Story of Sex, Jazz, Murder and the Battle for New Orleans*,[35] he demonstrates that archival research on the New Orleans underworld characterized by Asbury and Rose is not at all impossible to conduct. In this manner, he amended some discrepancies between the earlier informal histories and contemporary literature on nineteenth century New Orleans. Jazz, of course, almost always accompanies these stories of violence and sex, and has appeared as a centerpiece in most of the work on New Orleans and Storyville. Among that of other scholars, Court Carney's work engages with the history of New Orleans jazz from a cultural perspective, while Thomas R. Smith's *Southern Queen: New Orleans in the Nineteenth Century* exposes complex

[34] Al Rose, *Storyville, New Orleans, Being an Authentic, Illustrated Account of the Notorious Red-Light District* (University of Alabama Press, 1974).
[35] Gary Krist, *Empire of Sin: A Story of Sex, Jazz, Murder and the Battle for New Orleans* (Stroud: Amberley, 2014).

interplays between literature, travel, jazz, and vice, again recognizing the influence of an imagined New Orleans while exploring the city's complexities during one of its most formative centuries.[36] What has emerged in recent literature is the idea that New Orleans cannot be seen as hermetically sealed from either the South or the rest of the United States, despite its sometimes extreme cultural differences from both imagined entities. Cultural histories and literary studies, in particular, have allowed me to analyze the ways in which New Orleans, and by extension Storyville, have always been conceptualized and imagined as an "other" that lingers on the fringes of American society, and how this tendency colors my own practice in the exploration of visual representations of marginalized women in an equally "othered," but still powerful, space.

Storyville

Current work about the city often discusses the impact of women on the history of New Orleans and its representations.[37] A focus on gender, race, and the history of prostitution, as well as thriving slave trades of women of color in the antebellum American South, is the unifying factor in the recent work that has been completed about Storyville. Alecia P. Long's *The Great Southern Babylon: Sex, Race, and Respectability in New Orleans, 1865-1920* provides the definitive social history of the vice district and its women.[38] Examining issues of race, gender, and class within a wider exploration of sexuality in the South, Louisiana, and New Orleans, *Southern Babylon* portrays Storyville as a unique locus of power and power struggles. Emily Epstein Landau expands on Long's work with her *Spectacular Wickedness: Sex, Race, and Memory in Storyville, New Orleans*, joining social history and biographical information on Storyville madams, notably Lulu White and Willie Piazza.[39] While both authors build on some foundations provided by Asbury and Rose, they leave behind conjecture and less well-cited oral histories in favor of blending archival fact with adept cultural and social, feminist analysis. They also establish the need to recall once notorious women and again place them within narratives of Storyville, New Orleans, and the South as a region – instead of regarding their tales as anomalous. Further, without

---

[36] Thomas Ruys Smith, *Southern Queen New Orleans in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Continuum, 2011).
[37] Emily Clark's *The Strange History of the American Quadroon: Free Women of Color in the Revolutionary Atlantic World* (University of North Carolina Press, 2013) was one of the most useful books I encountered that established these themes, although her time period is earlier than the one I discuss.
[38] Aecia P. Long, *The Great Southern Babylon: Sex, Race, and Respectability in New Orleans*, 1865-1920 (Louisiana State University Press, 2004).
[39] See Landau, *Spectacular Wickedness.*

Pamela D. Arceneaux's research on the Blue Books (and her efforts to put them on microfilm), understanding Storyville as we do today would be nearly impossible.[40]

Within this literature, there is an implicit question of forgetfulness – an awareness of what has been forgotten or omitted in the previous retellings of Storyville – and attempts are made to rectify it by focusing on biography and sociology. Landau and Long's respective research on Storyville does not examine Bellocq's portraits as part of Storyville's popular culture. Neither scholar has discussed his portraits in context with images in the press or those generated by photographers or artists, and situated Bellocq's corpus alongside narratives of either prostitution or women. However, neither of their works possessed that aim, and their contributions have kindled my own enquiries.

Since the late 1990s, Storyville has also inspired a handful of sociological essays, theses, and studies. Among these, Katy Coyle and Nadine Van Dyke examine the presence of same-sex (romantic, sexual, and homosocial) partnerships between Storyville women,[41] while Eric Platt and Lillian Hill's 2014 piece posited that many madams and "girls" were engaged in models of alternative education that built knowledge of topics as diverse as Shakespeare, sexually transmitted infections, and business practices.[42] What often emerged, these sources argue, was a stronger manifestation of agency and community than has been previously acknowledged. Despite the earlier sensationalist tales about Storyville – though I should emphasize that, justifiably, no researcher has argued that it was an unproblematic place – scholars have started to understand it in more nuanced terms.

E.J. Bellocq

The majority of literature about Bellocq has been driven by twentieth and twenty-first century exhibitions of his work. His life and portraits have also inspired works of literary fiction, a film, and photographic pastiches.[43] Compared to many other photographers of

[40] Her *Guidebooks to Sin: The Blue Books of Storyville, New Orleans* (The Historic New Orleans Collection, 2017) was forthcoming when I was finishing this thesis, but will be available in early February and shares the same title as her earlier article on the Blue Books, which is in *Louisiana History* 28 (Fall 1987): 397-405.
[41] Katy Coyle and Nadiene Van Dyke, "Sex, Smashing, and Storyville in Turn-of-the-Century New Orleans: Reexamining the Continuum of Lesbian Sexuality," in *Carryin' on in the Lesbian and Gay South*, ed. John Howard (London: New York University Press, 1997). See also, Katy Coyle, "The Intersection of Law and Desire: Sex, Storyville, and Prostitution in Turn-of-Century New Orleans," (Ph.D. diss., Tulane University).
[42] R. Eric Platt and Lillian Hill, "A Storyville Education: Spatial Practices and the Learned Sex Trade in the City That Care Forgot," *Adult Education Quarterly* 64:4 (2014): 285–305.
[43] René Rondeau's self-portrait, a tintype called *Storyville – Tribute to E.J. Bellocq of New Orleans* [Figure 43], is probably the most relevant pastiche to my discussions. It was inspired by the Storyville Portraits, and has often been misattributed to Bellocq online. For the original work, see her website: http://www.edisontinfoil.com, and author's page on the website "Wet Plate Day:" http://www.wetplateday.org/artist/rene-rondeau/. Rondeau draws on visual cues provided by Bellocq's portraits, and because she depicts herself with a black eye, she integrates the ideas of abuse and violence that have been associated with sex work. These associations may actually account for the misattribution; many

his day, the resources about him are sparse and arguably permeated with more folklore. I turn away from Bellocq's biography as an explanation for the Storyville Portraits, and instead consider how his background has been reconstructed and received: this necessitates taking into account the different tenors of response to Bellocq across genres. The cycles of reception inspired by Bellocq's factual and fictional biographies are exemplary of the overall mythmaking process that I underscore in this thesis, and they are responsible for framing our interpretations of the Storyville Portraits.

There has been concise, self-contained non-fiction produced about or around Bellocq. (This includes at least three American master's theses, including mine, as well as several research essays.) The first catalogue to give much unified information about him was *Storyville Portraits*, which I have already quoted at length, and it undeniably influenced subsequent interpretations of his life and work. However, when the Julie Saul Gallery held the exhibit "E.J. Bellocq – Storyville Portraits, c. 1912" between December 2001-January 2002, Al Rose's son Rex Rose wrote a biographical essay about Bellocq that cleared the photographer's story of ableist, outlandish claims that he was disturbed, odd, and crippled.[44] This idea had been put forth largely by contributors to *Storyville Portraits*, as well as Ondaatje, who used Bellocq as a minor character alongside the protagonist Buddy Bolden in *Coming Through Slaughter* (1976).[45] There is skepticism amongst current literature about older perceptions of Bellocq, to which my project adds another voice.

Following an exhibit at the International Center of Photography in New York City (from December 10, 2004 to February 27, 2005), another catalogue publication, *The Mysterious Monsieur Bellocq,* was put forth in 2004. It featured an explanatory essay by curator Brian Wallis.[46] These early twenty-first century exhibits prompted reviews in the press, which I also consider as part of the literature on E.J. Bellocq and his portraits along with commentary, articles, and essays by, amongst other authors, Susan Sontag and Janet Malcolm. Further, Steven Maklansky, former Director of Photography at the New Orleans Museum of Art, provided fascinating insights on Bellocq (as well as Lee Friedlander and the Storyville Portraits) in short emails to Laura Thomson in 2005. Thomson includes his responses in the Appendices of her essay, "A Thoroughly Modern Man: EJ Bellocq and

---

viewers seem to expect there to be more evidence of misogyny and physical violence in Bellocq's work. "Storyville – Tribute to E.J. Bellocq of New Orleans" is listed on her website beside another, similar self-portrait in which she does not have a black eye. But this second image is simply called *Portrait* [Figure 44], which suggests that any correlations made between Storyville and violence are purposeful.

[44] Rex Rose, "The Last Days of Ernest J. Bellocq," *Exquisite Corpse: A Journal of Letters and Life* 10 (2002), as posted to "American Suburb X," URL: http://www.americansuburbx.com/2011/02/e-j-bellocq-the-last-days-of-ernest-j-bellocq.html.

[45] Michael Ondaatje, *Coming Through Slaughter* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004).

[46] Brian Wallis, *The Mysterious Monsieur Bellocq*, (International Center of Photography, 2004), 5.

the creation of a Modernist myth. [Sic]," which she wrote as a master's student at the University of Sussex.[47]

Alongside these sources are novels, poems, and one film. *Coming Through Slaughter* is the earliest published novel to portray Bellocq, but as I have mentioned, he is not a main character. In 2001, Peter Everett penned *Bellocq's Women*, which like Malle's film "Pretty Baby" (1978), presents a version of Bellocq with emotional ties to an underage girl working in a brothel.[48] He also has a bizarre relationship with his mother; in short, Everett relies upon and upholds a trope of the misunderstood, even infantilized, male artist. Natasha Trethewey's collection of poems entitled *Bellocq's Ophelia* (2001), conversely, speaks from the point of view of a light complexioned, black sex worker, rather than the photographer or another observer.[49]

This thesis provides a crucial, sustained study of Bellocq and his work by reframing the Storyville Portraits as images of sex work rather than "prostitution." By ceasing to use only the conventions of understanding established by earlier works – e.g. always casting Bellocq as an "artist" or his models as "victims" – I reflect on how these myths were made to remedy our lack of knowledge about (and uneasiness with) their subjects. This provides distance from clichéd assumptions about exploitation and tragedy that condition our reception of the portraits. Because of cultural discomfort with the topics of sex work and eroticism, our reactions to and interpretations of the Storyville Portraits have been limited by reductive paradigms that are rooted in nineteenth century attitudes toward prostitutes, vice, and art. However, I utilize the relationships between Bellocq, his portraits, and the fictions or mythologies that surround them to propel my project.

Histories of prostitution

Judith R. Walkowitz's *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* is a formative contemporary history of nineteenth century prostitution,[50] and she has influenced a variety of the literature that is critical to my own practice. Without her work, Long's *Southern Babylon* and Landau's *Spectacular Delight* would probably not exist as such comprehensive cultural, social histories. Further, *City of Dreadful Delight* also impacted Timothy Gilfoyle's *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex,*

---

[47] Emails between Laura Thomson and Steven Maklansky, "A Thoroughly Modern Man: EJ Bellocq and the creation of a Modernist myth." [Sic], (MA essay, University of Sussex, 2005).
[48] Peter Everett, *Bellocq's Women* (Penguin Vintage, 2001).
[49] Natasha Trethewey, *Bellocq's Ophelia* (Graywolf Press, 2001).
[50] Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

1790-1920, an extensive account of sex work and sex in New York City.[51] Each of these authors reinforce the relationships between the modern prostitute and the city that has been long established in art, journalism, and literature, with Gilfoyle, Landau, and Long bringing their focus to bear on American cities.

Overall, I explore the implicit transatlantic paradigms that underpin studies of prostitution in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: inevitably, enquiries into the subject are haunted by Jack the Ripper, as well as the industrial revolution and its manifestations on both sides of the Atlantic, which indubitably influenced the production and consumption of literature, popular magazines, and images. It would be difficult to address the Storyville Portraits without also addressing the extreme hold that prostitution as a theme had on nineteenth century culture, and how perceptions of it changed as the twentieth century loomed. While many sources acknowledge these relationships implicitly or explicitly, it has been less common to assess a popular, visual culture that includes prostitution in United States cities, although art historians such as Rebecca Zurier and Rachel Schreiber have examined representations of the prostitute in late nineteenth century American art and magazines.

Gilfoyle engages with nineteenth century American art history and visual culture at several points in *City of Eros*, but his work remains more textual and historical in its approach. As such, it has been useful to consult other scholars' research on visual culture and sex work in the same period, but within different countries or regions. Charles Bernheimer's *Figures of Ill Repute: Representing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century France*[52] conducts an interdisciplinary study of representations of French prostitutes; given its blend of social history, art history, the history of science, and mass media, it has been very helpful to my own work. In general, studies of late nineteenth century prostitution are less traditional blends of disciplines and primary sources: this reflects and is necessitated by their topic and its past (even present) stigma. The story of the Storyville Portraits, as well as any interpretations or interests attached to them, though, have been restricted because they have been discussed in regional or moralistic terms.

Twentieth century art and visual culture

Intriguingly, the ambiguity of the Storyville Portraits meant I needed to de-emphasize a regional, Southern approach to my research. This became most apparent in my assessment

[51] Timothy J. Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790-1920* (London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992).
[52] Charles Bernheimer, *Figures of Ill Repute: Representing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century France* (London: Harvard University Press, 1989).

of the literature on prostitutes in fin de siècle visual culture, including most of what is present within American art history. Unlike the fields of fin de siècle French or British art, there has been less literature about the "prostitute" or "fallen woman" in American art of the same time – further, most of it is focused on early twentieth century artists in New York City. For the purposes of my own discussions, literature on paintings and illustrations by George Bellows and John Sloan are most salient. Scholars, including David Peters Corbett, have pointed out that their work displays a "dialogue" between older, deterministic views of urban women and more sympathetic attitudes toward them; I underscore this tension repeatedly in the thesis.[53] Other authors, notably Schreiber and Zurier, focus primarily on fin de siècle representations of the prostitute and urban, single women, pointing out that there was little left to distinguish between the two categories symbolically or visually, and how disruptive this change was to perceptions of femininity and American womanhood.[54] Correspondingly, Gilfoyle makes this assertion in *City of Eros*. Landau, too, brings ideas of sexual agency and women's ensuing symbolic and presentational ambiguity into her discussion of pornography, although neither she nor Long situates her work fully in a nexus of visual culture or art history.

As such, warring factors of actions against, moral ambiguity toward, and the ubiquity of prostitutes – all present during the 1900s in life, laws, public discussions, art, literature, and journalism – have had an immense effect on how I discuss the Storyville Portraits. After they were exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art, for example, Friedlander and Sontag each wrote or spoke about them,[55] but they – Sontag more than Friedlander – tend to espouse a nearly saccharine view that was characteristic of the 1960s and 70s. Their focus is on the "found," serendipitous nature of the photographs and the supposedly tragic lives that they depict. However, in general, there have been few endeavors to consider or interpret the portraits in a wider context, e.g. within the fin de siècle generally, although token comparisons have continuously been made between Bellocq and Toulouse-Lautrec. More than anything else, this is a shorthand describing Bellocq's imagined relationship with the models, rather than an assignment of his work to a stylistic or aesthetic category.

---

[53] David Peters Corbett, "Camden Town and Ashcan: Difference, Similarity and the 'Anglo-American' in the Work of Walter Sickert and John Sloan," *Art History* 34 (September 2011): 774-795.
[54] Rachel Schreiber, "Before Their Makers and Their Judges: Prostitutes and White Slaves in the Political Cartoons of the 'Masses' (New York, 1911-1917)," URL: http://www.rachelschreiber.com/pdfs/schreiber_fs.pdf.
[55] Sontag, introduction to *Storyville Portraits*.

In the last decade or so, there have been several master's theses and essays about the Storyville Portraits specifically. Generally, these are grounded in discourses about art history, authorship, and curatorial practice.[56] My project, on the other hand, is more interested in the idea of the portraits "as relics of something that had been important" to the photographer and models.[57] They are intimate images that can be only partially read within the paradigms granted by art history or visual theory. The latest of these more art historical efforts is Christian Waguespack's master's thesis, submitted to the University of New Mexico in 2015, which endeavors to "rethink" the portraits "in a vernacular context."[58] Along with establishing the way modern art trends impacted understandings of both Bellocq and his images, he is most interested "in the re-introduction of these images as fine art by Szarkowski" and attempts to "trace the photographs [sic] history back to the original creation and use of the Storyville Portraits."[59] Despite his arguments, I still posit that there is not enough concrete evidence to "trace" their "original" use. Therefore, my thesis preserves the enigma of the portraits' intention and uses it as a force for other inquries. While it is possible that some (or most, or even all) might have been used for "marketing good times in New Orleans," as Waguespack writes,[60] I am uninterested in defining their purpose and believe this would have a limiting effect. My research focuses on exploring what they represent, because there is already abundant speculation about what purpose they served. This thesis looks to amend the way that, to echo Waguespack's observation:

> [The portraits] are rarely looked at alongside visual material from their own time and place, much of which is still only considered valuable as historical documentation […].[61]

However, I shift from a consideration of New Orleanian "visual material" and extend my approach to include transatlantic popular culture, which I believe best addresses the Storyville Portraits' powerful, mysterious qualities.

The razed brothel - stigma, race, and forgetful archives in histories of Storyville

---

56 See Skinner, Waguespack, and Thomson, as well as Chelsea Nichols, "Defacement: E.J. Bellocq and the Storyville Prostitutes," (Submission for *Edgar Wynd Journal*, on the theme of "destruction,") 2002.
57 Szarkowski, 12.
58 Waguespack, 1.
59 Ibid., 3.
60 Ibid., 6.
61 Ibid., 9.

As well as considerations of the prostitute as a cultural icon, my perspective and approach are shaped by "forgetting" in a literal and ideological sense. Most specifically, it has been impacted by the processes of remembering that occur in the absence of tangible historical records – including buildings. This process, especially when it involves cultural taboos such as prostitution or proactive female sexuality, often focuses on artifacts and ephemera when there are no more physical premises in which to recall the narratives. According to Eric Powell, three of Storyville's original structures remained in 2002.[62] Within the next ten years, three dwindled to one. Of course, there are still intact Storyville-era buildings in the French Quarter and other parts of the city, such as the Eagle Saloon, which was frequented by jazz legends such as Buddy Bolden when they were not playing in Storyville's dancehalls. Many of these are now empty.[63] When Storyville was legally closed in the autumn of 1917, city officials decided the next step was to get rid of its physical traces: their work to that end was ultimately effective. Brothels were an indisputable symbol of sexual excess and moral decay. By the early twentieth century, emphasis on the preservation of masculinity (rather than just protecting women from ill influences) meant that the brothel, like the dancehall, was a perverse domain that could "deplete" masculine integrity. As Greene explains:

> The decision to seek out the brothel [...] was in itself a choice fraught with contradictory consequences and meanings. In the logic of the period, trips to the brothel invited the possibility of excessive sexual depletion and thus even more masculine degeneration. Furthermore, the very desire for deviant or theatrical types of sexual entertainment reflected, according to psychologists, the already depleted state of many men.[64]

There was an avid fixation on ridding Storyville of both prostitutes and the spaces in which they did business because it was thought that this "depletion" – something New Orleans was already thought to encourage – could be curtailed.

Although many women who had worked in the district lingered because they could not go elsewhere, with still more disregarding police warnings by continuing to offer sexual services to paying clients,[65] the "mansion brothels" were sold to "respectable" owners or left to stand empty.[66] By the 1940s, however, the Iberville housing projects stood roughly where the main section of the red-light district had been.[67] Finally, 1949 witnessed the

---

[62] Powell, "Tales From Storyville – Digging the 'Sporting Life' in Old New Orleans."
[63] Louise Coleman, in discussion with the author, May 26, 2016.
[64] Greene, 6.
[65] Landau, 204.
[66] Ibid., 204-205.
[67] Ibid., 205.

demolishment of Mahogany Hall, one of the most popular and consistently advertised brothels [Figure 17]. It is arguably the only bordello whose memory strongly outlived the sanitizing effect of moralism, given its prevalence in jazz lore and songs like "Mahogany Hall Stomp" – one of Bellocq's portraits is even supposedly of Lulu White, the affluent madam of Mahogany Hall, though this is probably not the case: White had one of her “girls” pose as “her” in another photograph,[68] and most likely made it a habit as she grew older.

Regardless, Bellocq took photographs in and of the famous bordello. In fact, he provides some of the few pictures of its intact interior [Figure 18]. Compared to these, civic photographer Dan Leyrer's snapshot of the empty stairwell depicts a shell, a revenant from a bygone era [Figure 17]. Bellocq affirms descriptions of the opulent place at its height, while Leyrer documents its demise. These two images are characteristic of the extremes this thesis navigates: the portraits exist at the center of polarized (and polarizing) representations, not only of "fallen" women, but also of the spaces they "corrupted" with their presence. At least subliminally, Bellocq seems aware of this association. He does not reinforce typical connections between prostitutes and cities, or even brothels; his portraits are devoid of many characteristics that could suggest a definitive city. Some even place women in liminal spaces where they are neither indoors nor outdoors. Nonetheless, their ambiguity is the product of urban modernity, an indication of male uncertainty in the face of an age that shifted gender relations and sexual conduct: the city functions within them as an unseen but still determining force.

Seemingly unwanted scraps of the legendary saloons and bordellos, once known for their “opulence,”[69] held an almost mystical power. Speaking on the subject years later, Johnny Wiggs, a musician who had played in Storyville dancehalls, recounted how he was compelled to take away bits of Mahogany Hall during its demolition.[70] No one, it seemed, really wanted or knew what to do with them. However, after returning home from a trip, he found that his housekeeper had discovered and thrown away his hidden souvenirs (apparently no more salacious than a swathe of wallpaper and some pieces of wood paneling) as though she disapproved of, or even feared, their influence. Storyville, then,

---

[68] Pamela Arceneaux, in discussion with the author, May 24, 2016.
[69] Smith, 168: "As Morton remembered, '[t]hese houses were filled up with the most expensive furniture and paintings. Three of them had mirror parlors where you couldn't find the door for the mirrors, the one at Lula White's costing $30,000."
[70] Wiggs, as quoted in *Storyville Portraits,* 13-14.

became a literal manifestation of what Walter Benjamin calls the "trash of history"[71] because it was something the city wanted to forget. After all, according to Greene, these walls had enclosed:

> Fantasies [which] became increasingly eclectic and varied. The possibility of imaginative erotic journeys expanded to include even more possibilities beyond the conventional tropes of European Orientalist or aristocratic fantasy.[72]

Tellingly, the discarded remains carried an insidious persuasion all their own.

They inspired divisive reactions: disgust or devotion, recoil or reverence. Not coincidentally, Long explains, during the early 1900s, professionals and laypeople alike often believed that the sexuality of "African Americans or other women of color […] was beyond their conscious control – animal like and depraved."[73] I will argue that this perception was also applied to Creoles (both white Creoles and Creoles of color), who by the turn of the century were losing their cultural relevance. Eradicating Storyville in a very physical sense after it had been shut down meant cleansing an array of unwanted social forces. Leon Bellocq and Johnny Wiggs kept – and hid – its concrete traces much like sacred objects in a shrine. Whether Leon kept his brother's negatives out of sentiment or for another reason, he still decided not to destroy them.

Wiggs, who seemed to enjoy reminiscing about his younger days, exhibited a more obvious motive for keeping mementos. Conversely, dominant public opinion ran in the opposite direction. The red-light district was something to be forgotten and ignored, and it was felt that New Orleans would benefit from this process of forgetting. Carolyn Steedman writes, "You cannot be shocked at [the archive's] exclusions [...] at what is not catalogued [...] nor that it tells of the gentry and not of the poor stockinger."[74] Likewise, we cannot be shocked at the exclusion of sex workers – prostitutes – from any official archives. This exclusion, however, did not stop with the archive; it encompassed an entire neighborhood.

Meanwhile, as Benjamin writes, "To live means to leave traces. In the interior these are emphasized. [...] The traces of the occupant also leave their impression on the interior,"[75] which was exceptionally true in this case. Without physical interiors, the

---

[71] Walter Benjamin, "Paris: Capital of the Nineteenth Century," in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writing* (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), 155.
[72] Greene, 14.
[73] Long, 203-206.
[74] Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (Rutgers, 2002), 68.
[75] Benjamin, 155.

memories and events were fragmented, transmuted into music – jazz – and oral histories. Officials were hyperaware of the histories of Storyville's interiors and went to great lengths to literally dismantle them. Therefore, it was thought, they would be exorcised of their previous "demons" of interracial sex and prostitution. The brothel gripped fin de siècle imaginations because it was where sex was a transaction, and in Storyville, says Smith, "the patina of glamour cultivated by a select few houses and individuals often wore thin very quickly."[76] In tandem with the cultural icon of the prostitute, the idea of the brothel muddled issues of gender, sexuality, respectability and race, exposing how inflammatory and fragile these categories were. Greene writes:

> Far from being a marginal phenomenon, the fin-de-siècle luxury brothel was at the center of a number of issues critical to our understanding of gender, sexuality and commodity culture [...]. As representational spaces, brothels functioned as hermetically-sealed dream worlds in which the objects in the interior became vehicles for visual fantasies.[77]

Even the fundamentally useless remnants of these interiors were treated as threatening, which Wiggs's housekeeper demonstrated through her stubborn disposal of his keepsakes.

Further, many official archival records having to do with the red-light district were destroyed – seemingly under the guise of creating more jobs in the midst of the Great Depression. Louise Coleman pointed out to me that many landlords' wives obscured any traces of vice in their husbands' official records, as well.[78] Aggression toward the literal existence and even the memory of brothels and prostitution, then, was motivated by their symbolic, psychic influence. This aggression left tales of Storyville's women, despite their varied, sometimes violent and possibly luxurious lives, with a scattered and scarred physical setting that reinforces their exclusion from most narratives.

Today, no one can visit The Arlington or Mahogany Hall and there is little left to mark the red-light district's history. Through any examination of the remaining ephemera and Bellocq's images, it is inevitable that, as Benjamin writes, "The detective story that follows these traces comes into being."[79] Such a “detective story” has been the result of omission and disavowal, and the allure of the stereotypical prostitute is at its center. After all, she was the reason why Storyville was so provocative, and she became the reason for its eradication. Although the majority of Bellocq's models are individuals whose stories will

---

[76] Smith, 168.
[77] Greene, 16.
[78] Coleman, in discussion with the author.
[79] Benjamin, 155.

probably never be told, they also stand as an archetype with cumulative power. They represent the urban woman, and they do it compellingly. Like pieces of wallpaper snatched off a wall about to be knocked down, Bellocq's negatives had enough affective power to inspire their own preservation and rescue.

At first, Storyville was represented and marketed as a place where fantasies could be lived without question. Though the red-light district provided alarmingly cheap options as well, it was most often portrayed as somewhere wealthy, white clients could retreat from their usual roles in life. Greene notes that during the fin de siècle:

> The rooms of the brothel enabled the male client to unhinge himself from the pressures of modernity, from the restrictive bourgeois moral code, and from the limits of his own fixed persona, and to transform himself into something other. Divisions between reality and fantasy, normal and transgressive were seamlessly blurred.[80]

However, as the early 1900s approached, Storyville's brothels did not merely allow "the male client to unhinge himself from the pressures of modernity" by "seamlessly blurr[ing]" the "divisions between reality and fantasy." They went further and facilitated a reaffirmation of social roles that were under threat, and redirected "the pressures of modernity" by allowing select clients to exercise what they believed were their rights over women, and especially women of color and black women. This process was guised in fantasies, particularly fantasies of antebellum race and gender dynamics. But it was also strengthened by fears of contemporary, unregulated female sexuality and agency. Cities were now full of women who went to their own jobs, frequently had sex outside of marriage,[81] and otherwise lived life far differently than their mothers and grandmothers had before them.

Ubiquitous sex workers, the many women who had casual heterosexual relationships, and even a rising number of more overt romantic relationships between women were regarded as challenges to traditional, ostensibly heterosexual masculinity. In the city, these scenarios were all more possible and ultimately rendered more visible. Storyville, then, situated in "exotic" New Orleans – with warrens of cheap cribs and a handful of reputedly palatial brothels – functioned as a panacea to the anxieties inspired by these realities by playing with and subverting them. Unlike other American red-light districts, it had inherited New Orleans's considerable imaginaries. These granted it an

---

[80] Greene, 4.

[81] John X. Christ, "A Short Guide to the Art of Dining, Slumming, Touring, Wildlife, and Women for Hire in New York's Chinatown and Chinese Restaurants," *Oxford Art Journal* 26 (2003): 87.

enduring sense of old world nostalgia (especially for the days of "octoroon" or slave mistresses) and unfettered inhibitions. Long observes:

> Storyville was by no means a singular phenomenon, [but] during the twentieth century it gained a reputation as unique. This is partially due to the parochial nature of what has been written about it, and also to the widely held notion that New Orleans is sui generis, unique among American cities.[82]

Though Storyville was not at all unique in its standing as a decriminalized (or just civically tolerated) red-light district in America, this thesis posits that its position in New Orleans, with the associations that location already garnered, is in part what makes Bellocq's portraits so difficult to compartmentalize. They originate from a red-light district with a "raucous reputation"[83] that readily catered to those who sought out outrageous sex circuses and lax morality. Yet the Storyville Portraits do not affirm those expectations, or reinforce the theoretical male viewer's supremacy. Many are erotic, but none place the models in subservient positions.

While sex work was not always a fundamentally "empowering" option, and I try to be cautious of that narrative (as well as any of unconditional victimization or exploitation), it is imperative to note that the portraits demonstrate how it granted these specific women reasonable material means. In turn, this bolsters the sense that they chose to model and did not necessarily have to work with Bellocq. Intricate dresses, fur stoles, and the women's figures – none of which seem to indicate that procuring enough food was a problem – all attest to at least a modest level of financial security. (It is possible that some of the accessories, such as a locket that makes more than one appearance, belonged to Bellocq.) What would have been troubling to many anti-prostitution reformists, had these portraits been circulated, was the fact that this evident, moderate comfort was not the result of conventional relationships or professions. In contrast to popular novels and white slave narratives, the bodies shown in the Storyville Portraits do not bear signs of shame, illness, or extreme hardship.

Simply put, these women do not suffer any visible consequences of being part of their "immoral" trade. Of course, business arrangements between madams and their "girls" varied. The extent to which they were mutually beneficial is debatable. But to an outsider – to a moral reformer, especially – it would appear that the material benefits had been garnered consistently and independently through prostitution. They were gained without

---

[82] Long, 107.
[83] Ibid., 198.

the guiding influence of a father, husband, or other male guardian. Although women in various "respectable" professions were now earning their own way in the world, that reality combined with the iconoclastic prostitute was incendiary. Further, what Long calls the "long and varied history" of "sexual contact between white men and light skinned, mixed-race prostitutes and courtesans"[84] was another reason for Storyville to be stamped out from mainstream American consciousness. Its history provided yet more permutations of the fin de siècle prostitute, and New Orleans "octoroons" and "quadroons" became allied ideologically to women of orientalist harems, fulfilling a similar role within American culture. The fantasy, often centered on light skinned black and/or mixed-race women, Greene writes:

> Specifically focused on the seduction of exotic women and the imagined absence or impotence of exotic men. The ultimate symbol of this scenario was the harem, which Malek Alloula identifies as the undisputed locus of sensual pleasure and perversion in the European imagination.[85]

"The harem" had its own manifestations in New Orleans, and the term was used in at least one newspaper to refer to brothels full of mixed-race women.[86] But by 1917, writes Long, "The octoroon [had] disappeared from the officially sanctioned commercial sexual culture."[87] It was no accident that she had also been a powerful marketing tool for black and mixed-race sex workers – or those who claimed to be – and held a strong appeal over men who were interested in that eroticized (and by the twentieth century, extremely amorphous) category of women.

Willie Piazza, a madam who worked in Storyville for the nearly twenty years it was in business, was severely divested of her influence when the "erotic type" lost "its cultural viability."[88] Her story, one of a black woman in Storyville, is exceptionally well documented: many more remain unknown. It exemplifies the power that representations of sex work had; a loss of "cultural viability" of the octoroon myths – and myths similar to them – was closely followed by a loss of livelihood and, for Piazza, her social and political influence. In a larger context, this was characteristic of the struggles against female sexualities that particularly existed in urban cultures. Bellocq and his portraits, then, rest among these rich and uniquely disordered circumstances. They are images amid a vast

---

[84] Ibid., 222.
[85] Greene, 11.
[86] "Carved to Death; Terrible Fate of Kate Townsend, at the Hands of Troisville Sykes," *The Daily Picayune*, November 4, 1883.
[87] Long, 223.
[88] Ibid., 222.

number of media that depicted both prostitutes and women who were otherwise unconventional. Some of this media, at least by the early twentieth century, was starting to question narratives put forth by those in power or those with vociferous moral opinions.

Still, Bellocq did not see fit to release the portraits to the public as images meant to inspire sexual arousal, yet they are not examples of anti-vice propaganda, either. His younger brother, who because of his extensive religious training might have felt morally justified to dispose of the negatives, could not bring himself to do so. Their reticence to either publicize or eradicate photographs of these women is strange. After all, the women worked in a red-light district that posed many ideological and representational challenges. That alone should have spurred the sale of the portraits, or their destruction. Powell observes, "The physical legacy of the district has been swept away, but the past has a way of surfacing at unpredictable moments, no matter how hard you try to bury it."[89] Likewise, Storyville's madams and women were not known for their predictable, submissive behavior, as a cursory glance through any of the relevant police reports or newspapers reveals.[90] Lulu White was brought up on several charges of violence,[91] while her contemporary, Emma Johnson, madam of the nearby "House of All Nations" has been described by Gary Krist as a tall, "masculine, Cajun lesbian" who did not brook any insolence from her clients.[92] The tales of Storyville are, like the tales of other red-light districts, packed with violence, fervor, and memorable women. It stands to reason, then, that such an energetic and frenetic place cannot be "swept away" and remains "unpredictable" in its ability to affect us.

The meanings of its narratives of sex work are complex, yet have been strategically simplified and silenced. Bellocq's images exist, therefore, in a manner that makes them ideal for exploring and questioning representations of the fin de siècle prostitute. However, that exploration cannot happen productively by using a vision of New Orleans as, to borrow from Long, "sui generis." This thesis relates the Crescent City's sex workers to other cities' sex workers on a narrative level. It situates New Orleans's cycles of representation alongside theirs and, by looking for similarities while establishing the indubitable differences created by New Orleanian history, adds a different reading of the Storyville Portraits to those that already exist. It also places the city within formative,

---

89 Powell, "Tales From Storyville – Digging the 'Sporting Life' in Old New Orleans."
90 "Hidden From History: Unknown New Orleans," exhibition curated by Emily Epstein Landau, City Archives, New Orleans Public Library, URL:
http://nutrias.org/exhibits/hidden/hiddenfromhistory_intro.htm
91 Ibid.
92 Krist, 133.

transatlantic dialogues of urban prostitution, and examines the meanings of the narratives of prostitution that emerge in late twentieth century cities. As Rebecca Zurier writes of New York City: "The growing impersonality of modern society" meant that mass culture dictated these representations,[93] but Bellocq belies both his personal interest and his model's roles in "modern society."

In her analysis of John Sloan's paintings of women, which were contemporaneous with Bellocq's portraits (and similar in their content and appearances, which I will discuss later), Zurier describes how by the time Sloan was working, women were:

> Not only the object of the gaze and a frequent subject in the city on paper [...]. They also played an active role in urban life: as consumers, and participants in public culture, they were called on to work as well.[94]

The women of Storyville, like their counterparts in New York City, were just as "active" in public life – they had to be because of their trade, and many had the means to be. While Bellocq does not depict women out and about, he does depict women who were presumably "consumers" and "participants in public culture." This is clear from the trappings of modern life around them or on their bodies. One memorable portrait, for example, depicts a woman sitting at a table gazing amusedly at a bottle of Raleigh Rye whiskey [Figure 19]. It is one of the better-known Bellocq images: the woman poses wryly, almost as though she is making light of an advertisement. Indeed, Waguespack maintains that this must have been a photograph to be used as an advertisement's reference.[95] Regardless of whether it was, this, as well as Bellocq's other images, suggests that unorthodox, early twentieth century women – sex workers or not – were not passive icons. They were agents: consumers who drank, smoked, bought clothes, and attended various entertainment venues. If they were not, they would not have roused such opposition.

Their ability to consume freely was part of what made them so troublesome. Zurier reminds us, "As Stuart Hall advises in his study of the tabloid press, the language of the popular newspaper is a "complex species of linguistic ventriloquism.""[96] This "ventriloquism" is an attempt to control, and "should not be misinterpreted as a direct transcription of 'authentic' working-class speech."[97] Similarly, although he was an "insider" of both New Orleans and Storyville, Bellocq's images should not be regarded as a "direct transcription" of his models' experiences or self-perceptions. They reveal far more about

[93] Zurier, *Picturing the City: Urban Vision and the Ashcan School*, 134.
[94] Ibid., 266.
[95] Waguespack, 12.
[96] Zurier, 229.
[97] Ibid.

him, and the place of the “prostitute” in early twentieth century culture, than they do individual experiences. They are marked by distance and restraint despite the women's apparent familiarity with Bellocq, which indicates trepidation. However, many readings of the portraits have resulted in a visual "ventriloquism" that wants to make these women “speak,” but does not want to listen to what they could have to say if it is not outright condemnation. After all, writes Smith, "the people" of Storyville "ran the gamut, too. The thousands of working women and men who made up the District left little record of their lives."[98] Imagination plays a crucial role, here, because there are so few of these records.

This thesis aims to conjecture, through interrogating representations of fin de siècle prostitution, sex workers, and women, what new meanings and questions can be derived from these images. "Though marginalized from polite society," writes Smith, "Storyville's residents left indelible marks on the city's culture."[99] Doubtless, they also left "indelible marks" on how the prostitute was represented and abstracted. One mark – or a group of these marks – is the Storyville Portraits. Klein points out that "uncertainty allows the historian to find a narrative hook, like the opening page of a novel,"[100] and I have used Bellocq's images as this thesis’s "narrative hook." It uses their "uncertainty" to engage with them as representations of modern women and sex workers. Unlike previous readings of the portraits, which have insisted on their rarity as images of the quotidian, city prostitute, I treat them as depictions of sex workers in the city. Sex work did cultural work on ideological, political, and aesthetic levels. It was an integral aspect of commerce and popular culture. Representations of the prostitute herself evoked what Klein calls both "presence and absence"[101] – of the city, of the viewer, of sex – while being scattered across a myriad of media. Bellocq's images, then, are powerfully read within the interconnected cities whose imaginaries influence our assumptions about his models.

---

[98] Smith, 168.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Klein, 11.
[101] Ibid.

Chapter One: The "Parisification" of New Orleanian Vice

Paris loomed large in the nineteenth century's imaginary of sex work – especially in New Orleans. Storyville's Blue Book advertisements like the ones for "French Balls"[1] [Figure 20] and indeed, all of New Orleans's imagined, romanticized identity within the fabric of American popular culture reaffirmed it. Ideas of Paris, however, also merged with more national (and international) notions of the thrilling, the erotic, and the risqué.[2] This prevalence owed itself to a popular culture that had long depicted cities as milieus of courtesans and mavericks while it effectively interchanged "Paris" with "France." Visual and textual media kindled a fascination with Paris, prostitutes, and Parisian avant-garde women, even if, like George Du Maurier's tragic heroine Trilby, they were not – strictly speaking – sex workers or ethnically French. This chapter examines Paris's influence upon the prostitute as a nineteenth century cultural icon, and more specifically, upon Storyville sex workers' representation and self-representation. Existing scholarship does not address the ways in which the Storyville Portraits are, paradoxically, simultaneously singular and ordinary within these contexts. It has also tended to take a regional look at the district rather than interpreting it as an American manifestation of nineteenth century cultural trends regarding vice, sexuality, race, and women – especially in New Orleans, these would have been marked by associations with Paris.

This is, in truth, a truly transatlantic story. I explore the impetus of these connections – their effects on American and British representations of sex work and vice – as well as the implications of the notion that New Orleans was often more "Parisian" than "American." This chapter, therefore, establishes how "Parisian" tropes and icons can be used to frame the Storyville Portraits within a panorama of representations. This was an era when, as Paul Woolf notes in his analysis of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Murders of the Rue Morgue" (1841), all "American cities were quickly becoming, or perceived to be

---

[1] *Blue Book*, (New Orleans: s.n., 1909), HQ146.N6 B58 1909.

[2] Emily Epstein Landau points out how intrinsic this was to New Orleans's sex tourism: Emma Johnson "claimed to be the 'Parisian Queen' and […] later called her Storyville bordello the 'French Studio,'" while Lulu White, who would also become a Storyville madam, made use of the fact that "sex shows involving Great Danes were popular in Paris" when she posed for a series of pornographic photographs "with a large dog" sometime in the late nineteenth century. See *Spectacular Wickedness: Sex, Race, and Memory in Storyville, New Orleans* (Louisiana State University Press, 2013), 139.

becoming, just like Paris, that is, 'hotbeds of sin and merchandise.'"[3] So, although New Orleans was indeed an "other" and had been since it became part of the United States, there existed the perception that cities in general harbored the same obscenities and the same classes of the underworld. Paris was simply the prime example. Woolf explains how "after 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue,' Poe's friend Nathaniel Willis referred to the 'imminent Paris-ification' [sic] of New York […]."[4] Willis writes in *The Rag-Bag* (1855):

> But, generally, as to the imminent Paris-ification of New York: - There is a floating population of seekers of the world's pleasantest place, who, as it will appear to every connoisseur of European capitals, are very sure to follow the sweetest voices, most bewildering legs, best players, boldest riders, etc. These independent idlers, in turn, are sure to be followed by the best cooks, the prettiest glove-fitters, the most inspired milliners, the best portrait painters […].[5]

Meanwhile, Poe, a lifelong "Francophile" who had never actually been to France,[6] exploits the beguiling trend of perceived "imminent Paris-ification" by setting his tale in the center of Paris. As events begin, Poe's unnamed narrator says he and Auguste Dupin, the extraordinary detective whom I will reference again in Chapter Two:

> Were strolling one night down a long dirty street in the vicinity of the Palais Royal. Being both, apparently, occupied with thought, neither of us had spoken a syllable for fifteen minutes at least.[7]

The image of two young men taking a late night stroll along "long dirty street," especially one near the Palais Royal, would have immediately summoned a suggestion of illicit and risky activities. Though Willis envisioned a New York that benefitted from "Parisification" attracting droves of fashionable, if avant-garde "independent idlers" and "the best" tradespeople who followed them, Poe depicts a darker, more vice-riddled vision.

To be sure, Woolf asserts, "In the American cultural imagination, Paris was [...] the world capital of sexual immorality, with the Palais at its heart," and it is this imagined Paris that I evoke in this chapter.[8] New Orleans, meanwhile, was the American "capital of sexual immorality" with Storyville "at its heart." By extension, then, the thought of Parisian women – sex workers, of course, but all of Paris's women, as well – being more sexually

---

[3] Paul Woolf, "Prostitutes, Paris, and Poe: The Sexual Economy of Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue,'" *Clues: A Journal of Detection* 25 (Issue 1): 15.
[4] Woolf, 15.
[5] Nathaniel Parker Willis, *The Rag-Bag: A Collection of Ephemera* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1855), 47.
[6] Woolf, 18.
[7] Edgar Allan Poe, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," *Graham's Magazine* (April 1841).
[8] Woolf, 10.

available than others was already part of "the American cultural imagination." Strains of this belief were found in "sporting newspapers"[9] or guides like the New Orleans and Storyville Blue Books, as well as its less illustrious newspapers like *The Mascot*.[10] But suggestions of immorality were also found in media that was not meant to sell vice, such as family magazines. Woolf concludes:

> "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" was first published in *Graham's Magazine*, a middle-to-highbrow periodical with an educated audience, I would suggest that, given the widespread notoriety of the Palais [...] Poe could depend on readers of the story also making an immediate mental association. Poe's reference to the Palais would, if only subliminally, have inserted into his readers' minds the idea of prostitution.[11]

Storyville, then, manipulated these "subliminal" triggers. Unsurprisingly, given ideological links between prostitution, Paris, and the visual, some have likened E.J. Bellocq to Henri Toulouse-Lautrec, a comparison that is indicative of how inseparable the idea of Paris was from the early twentieth century sex worker in Storyville.[12] In other words, this does not accurately describe Bellocq's aesthetic so much as it demonstrates how connected these ideas collectively were, and are. Scholars, however, have posited that this comparison had most to do with making connections between Toulouse-Lautrec's biography and Bellocq's highly mythologized one during the mid-twentieth century.[13] It has indeed been used as a discursive strategy to attempt to explore Bellocq's intentions, but here I wish to draw more attention to the role of Parisian and Parisian-influenced archetypes in representations of "fast" women and sex workers.

By considering specific aspects of popular culture tinged by its references to Paris or its Parisian-ness, we can then excavate how New Orleans – thought of as the home of Creoles, supposedly those with French ancestry and values[14] – and Paris were similarly

---

[9] See Jamie Stoops, "Class and Gender of the Pornography Trade in Late Nineteenth Century Britain" *The Historical Journal* 58 (2015): 137-156, and Michael Millner "The Senses of Reading Badly: The Examples of Antebellum 'Obscene Reading'" *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 57 (2011): 274-313.

[10] *The Mascot*, 21 May 1892.

[11] Woolf, "Prostitutes, Paris, and Poe," 10.

[12] See Steven Maklansky to Laura Thomson, "Appendices," "A Thoroughly Modern Man: EJ Bellocq and the creation of a Modernist myth." [Sic], (MA essay, University of Sussex, 2005), 35, where he describes what he believes to be the genesis of this comparison.

[13] See Rex Rose, "The Last Days of Ernest J. Bellocq," *Exquisite Corpse: A Journal of Letters and Life* 10 (2002), as posted to "American Suburb X," URL: http://www.americansuburbx.com/2011/02/e-j-bellocq-the-last-days-of-ernest-j-bellocq.html, and Christian Waguespack, "Reframing E.J. Bellocq: A Vernacular Reading of the Storyville Portraits" (MA thesis, University of New Mexico, 2015).

[14] Reizenstein's notes on Creoles throughout the novel make it clear that the term's colloquial use in New Orleans was related to its etymology, which originates from the Spanish verb "criar" ("to raise"). Therefore he applies the term to those whom the larger American public would not necessarily think of as "Creole," such as New Orleans born German-Americans who were raised in New Orleans. My focus, though, is on the

imagined in the nineteenth century, and what bearings this had on the ways in which sex workers advertised and were represented themselves. I bring New Orleans, too, into a discourse that considers the ways in which it was influenced by its associations with Paris – the more lurid aspects of actual and imagined Parisian life – and what this meant for representations of nineteenth century sex work. What emerges in this first chapter, then, is an excavated map of imaginaries that brought Paris, New Orleans, Creoles, sensuality, and sexuality – specifically sex work and obscenity – into contact with one another. As yet, these links have not been overtly acknowledged. Through them, I begin my consideration of representational influences that can be used to triangulate the Storyville Portraits in a nexus of mass, popular, and visual culture.

I begin in the first section with Eugene Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris* (serialized in 1842-23), then consider its impact on Baron Ludwig von Reizenstein's *Mysteries of New Orleans* (serialized in 1854-55), a German-American urban mystery novel that was rediscovered and translated into English by Steven Rowan. The few scholarly discussions it has inspired are, in general, about Reizenstein's radical politics and his detailed depiction of nineteenth century New Orleans, as well as his use of prophesy as a structural, narrative motif.[15] But I look to his representations of women: the lovers Claudine and Orleana, and the domineering black madam Parasina Brulard. The second section considers two texts that use not New Orleans, but Paris, as a setting: George Du Maurier's *Trilby* (1894) and Emile Zola's *Nana* (1880). These tales of two immoral women, who were both transgressive in their own ways, were popular in New Orleans – especially *Trilby*, which had a direct effect on both Storyville's self-advertising and the city's popular culture. Further, they owe much of their style and eventual popularity to the fact that authors like Du Maurier and Zola used styles and tropes that had been directly impacted by urban mysteries like – if not *Mysteries of New Orleans* itself – Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris* and Baudelaire's more risqué poetry. My third, final section explores how the figure of the Creole woman as imagined in New Orleans was refracted by the city's fascination with Paris and its fictional prostitutes, or in *Trilby's* case, its transgressive women. Through all of this, I address the concurrent issue of New Orleans being imagined as more Parisian than other American cities.

---

stereotypical Creole woman of color as she was imagined in popular culture. See Ludwig Von Reizenstein, *The Mysteries of New Orleans* trans. and ed. Steven Rowan (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).

[15] Timothy Walker, "Prophetic Chronotope and the Sexual Revolution in Baron Ludwig von Reizenstein's *Mysteries of New Orleans*" (MA thesis, Georgia State University, 2015).

As I have stated, Americans seemed ready to believe that all of their cities were becoming more "Parisian" due to the more assertive, visible presences of vice. But New Orleans had already been othered by its history and cultures. Because of these factors, New Orleans madams and sex workers – before and during Storyville's time – utilized terms such as "Creole" and "octoroon" while boasting of their "Continental" travels or possessions. The conclusion of this chapter posits that by looking at how New Orleans reacted so readily to aspects of Parisian print culture – which actually also inspired plays, more novels and novellas, and pornography[16] – we can begin to consider the Storyville Portraits as examples among many images that have been conditioned by a vast imaginary of prostitution. This imaginary was, overall, framed by urban centers and their interconnected networks of communication and mass culture, and Paris had a lasting and pronounced presence as a cultural arbitrator in New Orleans. In Storyville particularly, the figure of the prostitute was refracted by the sensual and sexual connotations of Paris.

Mysteries of Paris; Mysteries of New Orleans - promiscuity, sex work, and sex slavery

Published in *Le Journal des débats* between 1842 and 1843, Eugene Sue's novel *Les Mystères de Paris* follows the adventures of a disguised German nobleman, Rodolphe, the Grand Duke of Gérolstein, as he wanders the demimonde. Rodolphe is both a voyeur and a philanthropist, interested in observing the lower classes while acting, when it suits him, as a dashing savior. Elizabeth Erbeznik calls him a "social chameleon" and notes that as the story's linchpin, the "numerous characters and plots of the novel are tenuously connected through" him.[17] In the course of the massive, convoluted text, Sue's minute descriptions and supposed realism jostle with unlikely, romantic occurrences – e.g., the young grisette Rodolphe saves from certain violence at the very start of the novel turns out to be his elusive, long-lost daughter. Sue absolutely captivated nineteenth century Parisian and international readers; *Les Mystères de Paris* drew on, as Erbeznik states, "familiar characterizations propagated by popular panoramic literature" and it greatly appealed to a readership that was both interested in "social legibility" and "avid" for titillating, urban stories.[18] The novel's effect on American popular culture was almost immediate: it instigated a translation and publishing race for who would be first to present it to an

---

[16] Leslie Choquette, "Degenerate or Degendered? Images of Prostitution and Homosexuality in the French Third Republic," *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques* 23 (1997): 207-219.
[17] Elizabeth Erbeznik, "Workers and Wives as Legible Types in Eugene Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris*," *Nineteenth Century French Studies* 41(2012-2013): 67.
[18] Ibid.

English-speaking American audience (it had already been translated in Britain), and it inspired numerous imitation novels.[19] Undeniably, this meant that Paris had become the prime symbolic intermediary for representations of urban vice in America, while the novel itself impacted the styles and tropes at hand for subsequent authors who wrote about intrigue, demimondes, and crime in English (including Edgar Allan Poe, Arthur Conan Doyle, and Stephen Crane).

As it was imagined in *Les Mystères de Paris*, Paris operated on paradoxes that seemed uniquely Parisian, but ran in representations of all cities: it was theoretically navigable yet claustrophobically secretive, opulent yet criminal, and redemptive yet seductive. Sue, despite his novel's specificity to one place, offered up a formula of archetypes that were mapped onto other locations so that they too could be re-presented and re-imagined. Louis James explains that *Les Mystères de Paris* "greatly boosted" the readership of *Le Journal des débats*, "and prompted *Le Courier Français* to serialize a rival, and also highly popular, *Les Mystères de Londres* […]."[20] Slightly later, there was a flurry of "Yankee" city mysteries published entirely because of the popularity of Sue's work in America. Though the process of the Parisification of American cities was well underway in 1841, and was hastened by a similar mania in London – whose press, Ryan Cordell notes, shared trends and stories with its American counterparts[21] – the publication of Sue's novel in English in the United States in 1844 clinched the process.

Apart from all his characters, all of whom owed something to "argot" (Parisian street slang that fascinated both Victor Hugo[22] and Charles Baudelaire) and, as Erbeznik stresses, the multitude of panoramic literature popular during the mid-nineteenth century,[23] of most importance to this thesis is the beautiful prostitute nicknamed La Goualeuse. Revealed to be Rodolphe's daughter Fleur-de-Marie,[24] she ultimately refuses a respectable marriage – to a Prince, no less – because she "has been polluted by the bandits of the Cité"

---

[19] Ronald J. Zboray and Mary Saracino Zboray*,* "The Mysteries of New England; Eugène Sue's American 'Imitators,' 1844," *NCC* 22 (2000): 457-458.
[20] Louis James, "From Egan to Reynolds: The shaping of urban 'Mysteries' in England and France, 1821–48," *European Journal of English Studies* 14 (2010): 100.
[21] Ryan Cordell, seminar at the University of East Anglia, 11 May 2016.
[22] For a good account of argot's place in popular culture, including in Hugo's *Les Misérables*, see Pascale Gaitet, "From the Criminal's to the People's: The Evolution of Argot and Popular Language in the Nineteenth Century," *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 19 (1991): 231-46. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23532151.
[23] Erbeznik, 67-68.
[24] Even "Fleur-de-Marie" is argot for "virgin." Likewise, La Goualeuse is slang for "la chanteuse," a female – generally cabaret or nightclub – singer, and refers to Fleur-de-Marie's beautiful, beguiling voice and her love of singing.

and fully redeems herself by dying.[25] Though this narrative of a "fallen" woman (or just a somehow deviant woman) dying because of her perceived sins was not new, and would indeed repeat itself in different characters (Emile Zola's Nana, Stephen Crane's Maggie, George Du Maurier's Trilby, and Kate Chopin's Edna Pontellier), it was encapsulated and tied to Paris for an enormous audience by Sue. Like the city of Paris, Fleur-de-Marie could be transferred and reconfigured elsewhere. One of her most extraordinary manifestations occurred in New Orleans, where she was not transposed onto one character, but instead inspired facets of flawed, ocassionally more self-actualized female characters. Between 1854-55, both Paris and Fleur-de-Marie were transformed in New Orleans by Baron Ludwig von Reizenstein, a German who had immigrated to the United States and settled in New Orleans. Apart from penning an expansive, gothic urban mystery, he also integrated occult and queer elements into his novel that amounted to criticisms of slavery, sexual violence, misogyny, and misogynoir.[26]

Overall, Reizenstein's *Mysteries of New Orleans* is an ambitious and subversive descendant of Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris*, one that maps an imagined Paris onto an imagined New Orleans. It is also a representation of nineteenth century New Orleans that has, until recently, garnered very little notice or scholarship. Part of a genre of German-American literature inspired by Sue's work and other "mystery" novels, *Mysteries of New Orleans* provides seditious perspectives on women's sexuality, sex workers, and sex slaves. Steven Rowan explains that "German writers [of the antebellum period] showed much more sensitivity than their English-speaking contemporaries to the ethnic diversity of the United States,"[27] and as well as demonstrating this inclination, Reizenstein's "only sympathetic lovers – really the only 'straight' people – in his entire story are the tender lesbians, Claudine and Orleana."[28] While their relationship is described in flowery, poetic terms characteristic of gothic and sensational novels, it is not tinged with any undertones of judgment or perversion.

The "tender" character of their relationship is marked and surprising, given New Orleans's reputation. There is, though, sensuality – a sexuality – to their love; Reizenstein gives no illusions that they have a chaste or platonic relationship, and their relationship flourishes because of where they live. As Rowan notes, "[Claudine and Orleana] represent

---

[25] Eugene Sue, *The Mysteries of Paris*, in Part IV of Chapter VI, URL: https://archive.org/details/mysteriesparis00suegoog

[26] Moya Bailey coined this term, which refers to the intersection of racism and misogyny that impacts specifically black women.

[27] Steven Rowan, introduction to *The Mysteries of New Orleans,* by Ludwig Von Reizenstein, xxvii.

[28] Ibid., xxx.

an alternative lesbian society flourishing in New Orleans as nowhere else in America;" he elucidates:

> This particular vision of lesbian communal utopias derives from a masculine pornographic-voyeuristic tradition that ritualizes the sexuality of 'others' in society, whether they are repressed monks or women ensconced in harems.[29]

Interestingly, while "this particular vision" may derive "from a masculine pornographic-voyeuristic tradition" and we can conjecture that it made appearances in New Orleanian pornography at the time – it infused Storyville's own mythos, at any rate, where both same-sex acts for an audience and personal, private relationships were evidently common – it does not, at least not entirely, function pornographically in the text. Similarly, Reizenstein's visions of either sex work or women who have casual sex are straightforward and varied, perhaps derived from pornographic traditions but not motivated by objectification for its own sake.

On the other hand, they are also influenced by Reizenstein's concerns over slavery and unwilling prostitution – merely another kind of slavery. Although he does depict willing participants in sex work and extramarital sexual affairs (Lucy, the free woman of color[30] and Parasina, the "Negresse"[31] to name just two), there are also young girls who have been forced into sexual slavery: Parasina's harem of underage girls. These are all recognizable archetypes that can be traced decades later in Storyville's Blue Books, reminiscences of the district, and its prevalent mythohistory. Uniquely, however, Reizenstein provides a sense of where New Orleans fell within the panorama of vice in the United States, and what made it different: slavery. Like Sue's Paris, his New Orleans is a character rather than a setting. It is an entity that, in some respects, encourages and thrives off the presence of slavery and violence.

As Sara James observes, "[T]he character of Paris in *Les Mystères de Paris* is frequently associated only with the underworld, a Gothicized image of poverty and crime,"[32] and by consciously evoking this in his novel, Reizenstein too resurrects New Orleans as America's "Paris," if to different effects. "Now we lead the reader into the

---

[29] Ibid. Rowan also asserts that Reizenstein looked to the Marquis de Sade as an aesthetic inspiration, so insinuations of sadomasochism in the text are not at all accidental. Though it does not figure into Orleana and Claudine's representation, it makes an appearance in other characters, some of whom are rapists or otherwise violent, as well as in the dynamics between Parasina and her "sex slaves."
[30] Reizenstein, 11.
[31] Ibid., 47.
[32] Sara James, "Detecting Paris: the character of the city in Eugène Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris* (1842–1843)," *Modern & Contemporary France* 8 (2000): 305.

Third Municipality," says the narrator at the beginning of Chapter Seven, "where he will see crimes committed that, although they are rather common in and around New Orleans, are still horrifying and debasing."[33] New Orleans, then, is demarcated as a place accustomed to "horrifying and debasing" acts – even a place that relishes them – because "Robbers' Roost and similar hiding places in St. Louis are temples of the fairies [...]" in comparison.[34] However, here Reizenstein chooses to mention not two brothels or houses of prostitution specifically, but locations that were known more for their overtly violent activities. This suggests that his portrayals of promiscuity, sex work, and sex slavery in nineteenth century New Orleans were more nuanced, or at least socially provocative, than others.

He does not automatically correlate the idea of "New Orleans" with sexual transgressions, although the connection is made. Likewise, he does not necessarily interchange the idea of sex work (or promiscuity in general) with immorality. Rather, he dwells on slavery, physical violence, and emotional manipulation as the worst evils. He fully differentiates between Parasina's abused, enslaved girls – especially Pharis and Elma, her most prized commodities – and women who have sex for gain, money, or outside of marriage. He is, in fact, sympathetic toward them while remaining noncommittal about the moral implications of consensual promiscuity and sex work. The first description of Parasina's harem of slaves, though, is meant to rouse readers' emotions:

> They were all young girls of eleven to fourteen years of age: Negresses, mulattos, mestizas, quadroons – in short, all the shadings of colored blood. Whoever might appear at this hour without knowing the reason for these girls' gathering would have doubted his own sanity, believing instead that his senses had been clouded by some sort of trickery from the wand of an evil magician. [But] he had entered a shameful den of vice and [...] the bodies of these pretty maids were being sold and rented. He might have throttled the woman who owned these girls in his rage, little suspecting that he would never leave this pit alive.[35]

Immediately, readers are told that these are sex slaves, not sex workers, and they are "owned" by another woman.

To add to the scene, they are all underage and are on a spectrum of "shadings of colored blood." Although Reizenstein does use the word “prostitution” in a derogatory way, he is more attuned to and concerned with the subjugation of slavery than “deviant” sexual activity. The narrator says "the round, swelling contours of [Pharis and Elma's

[33] Reizenstein, 47.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Reizenstein, 50.

bodies], all welled up with the warmth of life [...] had not been stilted by the poisonous pall of habitual prostitution," but later makes it clear that Parasina has "exploited" their youth and beauty most of all through her ownership.[36] In a rushed conversation before Parasina comes on her morning rounds – to collect all of the money that was procured the night before – they reveal that they are completely accustomed to having sex with clients, but are worried about Parasina's legal rights over them. Elma says:

> But just consider what torments we will endure if we are brought back! Madame will not rest until she has us in her clutches, and her connections with rich gentlemen will make it easier for her. I do not know the laws, but Celia, who came to us from a plantation a few weeks ago, tells me that her brother fled to Boston due to his massa's brutality, and that he was brought back and had to endure the most dreadful tortures.[37]

Describing Parasina herself, Reizenstein declares, "Whoever has an imagination that can fly high enough to conjure up the Whore of Babylon and fix it in memory would have found Parasina her double."[38]

Her magnetism comes from her intimidating features and nature, and her blackness is described as burnished and beautiful. "[She] was a powerful figure, a full six feet in height" whose skin "could easily be compared with dark pitch gilded by the shining rays of a tropic sun."[39] Her power over others as an owner, rather than because of her exceptional beauty, however, is all that really distinguishes her from her favorites Elma and Pharis. Reizenstein draws from sadomasochism and pornographic tradition here in his descriptions of Parasina and her "dormitory," but he also draws from archetypes of the "Creole" or “colored” concubine. Parasina, Pharis, and Elma are part of an already sexualized and romanticized idea that was popular in the antebellum American South.

Further, the tone Reizenstein uses to describe Parasina's girls is similar to Charles Baudelaire's poems inspired by his Haitian-born lover Jeanne Duval, who was also called Creole and was said to be promiscuous and imperious (or, because so much of our understanding of Duval comes from Baudelaire’s portrayal of her, this is the primary option we have).[40] Because of the gothic inspirations of *Mysteries of New Orleans* and

---

[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid., 52.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Her surname and exact origin have been disputed. But because of what is known about Jeanne, several of Baudelaire's poems in *Les Fleurs du mal* are considered to be about her, including: "Sed non satiata," "Le balcon," "Parfum exotique," "Un charogne," and "Le serpent qui danse." These range in their sentiments from frustrated to loving, but are unified by their erotic and sensual language. She was said to have both Haitian and French ancestry, and relocated to Paris from Haiti in 1842. See Beatrice Louise Stith, "The

Baudelaire's romantic and symbolist influences, this is significant. The two authors share a cultural moment when both the Creole and the prostitute scintillated, and it shows in their characterization of women of color and black women. Reizenstein began publishing his novel in a serialized form between 1854-55, while Baudelaire did not publish the first edition of his infamous *Les Fleurs du mal* until 1857. Reizenstein could not have been using the book as an inspiration (although Baudelaire had already published poems that would be included in *Les Fleurs du mal*), but this does attest that women of Parasina's ilk circulated in mid-nineteenth century fiction – in a very specific manner that was layered with discourses of sexuality, witchcraft (or voodoo, in New Orleans), and intoxicating beauty. Baudelaire's poem "Sed non satiata" casts its female subject as a demonic presence: "Singular deity, brown as the nights [...] O pitiless demon! pour upon me less flame,"[41] which is reminiscent of Reizenstein's "Whore of Babylon" description of Parasina. Additionally, "Sed non satiata" depicts this enticing, demonic woman as black, and it focuses on her tyranny and physicality. "Witch with ebony flanks, child of the black midnight" declares unquestionably the fact this woman has dark skin, too:[42] it could have been written about Parasina, the nefarious, vulgar madam who attracts both fear and devotion.

If Reizenstein wanted to make a lasting social commentary, however, it was overshadowed by his own reliance on the familiar tropes condensed by Sue, and their uncontrollable interactions with the forces of New Orleanian sex tourism. His *Mysteries of New Orleans,* though recognized today for its subversive elements such as the primacy given to a loving, monogamous queer relationship, and scathing portrayals of spousal violence and American slavery, was also a sensational, serialized tour de force. It imagined New Orleans as a quasi-Paris, depicting inequities and giving voluminous, transfixing accounts of New Orleanian "characters" and "life." For all that Claudine and Orleana were in love (only death parts them), the monstrous aspects of the city – the crime, the violence, and the sex – were what appealed.

In particular, the scheming, entrepreneurial, and vulgar black madam – exemplified by Parasina and Baudelaire's fictionalized Jeanne Duval – was to make her appearance in Storyville later. In *Storyville, New Orleans*, Al Rose shares a supposedly genuine interview with an anonymous man called simply "A Man About Town" – in which

---

Influence of Jeanne Duval on the poetry of Baudelaire" (1943), ETD Collection for AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library, Paper 1558, and Rebecca Munford, "Re-Presenting Charles Baudelaire/Re-Presencing Jeanne Duval: Transformations of the Muse in Angela Carter's 'Black Venus'" *Forum Modern Language Studies* 40 (2004): 1-13.

[41] Charles Baudelaire, "Sed non Satiata/Unslakable Lust," Charles Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil* trans. William Aggeler (Fresno: Academy Library Guild, 1954), URL: http://fleursdumal.org/poem/123

[42] Ibid.

the "Man About Town" recounted visiting Storyville for the first time at the age of sixteen with his father, whom he says was on friendly terms with Lulu White.[43] He gives a detailed description of White, madam and proprietor of Mahogany Hall, what he says was known then as the "Hall of Mirrors:"

> [She] greeted us after we'd been announced by a Negro doorman. I don't know what you may have heard about Lulu, but take my word for it, she was a monstrosity... laden with diamonds worn not selectively but just put on any place there seemed to be an inch to accommodate them. [...] She smelled overpoweringly of perfume. [She] was obviously Negro. She, in her way, acted the grande dame to the hilt [...] Her quick smile was as faked as the color of her [red] wig.[44]

Beyond her "monstrous" appearance, he was stricken by her beautiful "girls" and says that he was paired with "Rita [...] a very beautiful girl whom I knew to be an octoroon only from the fact that she was one of Lulu's girls."[45] Again, here is an assertion of "the shadings of colored blood" that Reizenstein told his readers could be found in New Orleans. Additionally, there is another young woman of color paired with a monstrous black madam – the "Man About Town" says the beautiful Rita could not have been more than nineteen, which was only three years older than him. A "Rita" is present in a Blue Book, so the name itself could reference an actual woman.

However, the "Man About Town" has given Rose his stories far later in his life, and claims that he has "been in whorehouses all over this globe," including Montmartre.[46] He goes on to complain that "the young lady, apart from a certain studied theatricality, was just as ill-informed and gauche as could be."[47] If there is any reason in particular to suspect that this interview was at least elaborated upon or amalgamated from several sources – or perhaps that the "Man About Town" just exaggerated his experiences with the benefit of hindsight – it is the narrator's own inconsistency and his tale's similarity to pornographic novels from France, America, and Great Britain.[48] Though he says that he had had his first

---

[43] Al Rose, *Storyville, New Orleans, Being an Authentic, Illustrated Account of the Notorious Red-light District* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1974), 154.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Here I also want to highlight how black, mixed-race, and women of color were represented with specific terms (e.g. "monstrosity" or "witch") that evoked simultaneous awe and terror – and how their physical appearance (their color) never went unaddressed. Also, the chain of command of a dark woman in power over a lighter-skinned woman is repeated in both fiction and fact – with the darker woman possibly being beautiful (Parasina is described as a beauty; Lulu White is not), but always being domineering. I remain skeptical of some of the information Rose presents as genuine. In the case of the "Man About Town" and his remembrances, I have found many similarities between his account and novels like *My Secret Life, Nana,* and the "whore biographies" that Michael Millner mentions in his research on the nineteenth century

"sex experience" before Rita, he had never been with "a prostitute" and "expected something sensationally evil" because he was "a guest in a world-renowned den of iniquity."[49] This expectation would not have existed without the popular cultures that had built blackness and "shadings of colored blood" into erotic fantasies.

"To see the tenderloin proper is to visit Trilby's": Echoes of *Nana* and *Trilby* in Storyville

Alongside its most obvious imitations and homages, Sue's novel created more unexpected ripples in popular culture. Out of its traditions also came George du Maurier's *Trilby* and Emile Zola's *Nana*, two novels that represented new, evocative moments in Parisian histories and mythologies. They were unified by their evocations of an imagined Paris and fixations on what were, in the end, immoral women given over to the fate ensured by their respective vices. They each trickled into fin de siècle New Orleanian consciousness. *Trilby* was an especially transatlantic novel in all senses: Du Maurier was Parisian-born, settled in Hampstead with his wife, where he died, and his novel – first published in installments in *Harper's* – was incredibly popular in the United States. Trilby, meanwhile, is half-Irish, half-French. Her milieu is populated by men who moved to Paris in pursuit of a "bohemian" lifestyle, and of the many fin de siècle representations of the city, her Paris is the most passive and ambiguous. Du Maurier, reluctant to describe in the same detail as Sue (or Zola, for that matter), ghastly Parisian immoralities, employs Paris as a setting that is implicitly given over to vice. By 1894, the year *Trilby* was published, readers already imagined – without a doubt, to their minds – that Paris was bohemian and romantic, and it was equally intoxicating and corrupting.

Emile Zola's vain, tragic courtesan predated Du Maurier's bohemian, undraped model by almost fifteen years, first appearing in Zola's lengthy *Les Rougon-Macquart* series. Nana was a more traditional "fallen woman" than Trilby, too – an opportunistic, beautiful prostitute doomed to die of smallpox after she destroyed the lives of her male lovers. Her background shares more in common with Sue's Fleur-de-Marie than Du Maurier's Trilby: like Fleur-de-Marie, she grew up poor (in Paris slums). By the time we meet her in *Nana*, however, she is affluent – albeit awful at managing her money – and unrepentantly a sex

---

pornography trade. These similarities include the "Man About Town's" clinical description of sexual acts, his insistence that he is a connoisseur of international "whorehouses," the way that he contradicts himself several times, and his relish for explicit language. However, my suspicion only underscores the point that Storyville was not somehow sealed off from mass culture: it was part of it. Our perceptions of the Storyville Portraits have been shaped by our ideas of the nineteenth century brothel, as well as fin de siècle "men about town."

[49] Rose, 154.

worker. What she lacks in financial acumen, she makes up for in astutely managing many clients. Despite their differences in character (Nana is never bothered by her professions, whether prostitution or stage acting; Fleur-de-Marie, conversely, longs for redemption), they inhabit similarly imagined cities – a dank, dark, dangerous Paris punctuated by elusive glamour – and are punished for their transgressions. Trilby dies, as well, but Nana and Fleur-de-Marie are more straightforwardly tainted and embedded in their urban demimondes. Trilby, conversely, drifts between a variety of identities: she is not a prostitute (therefore not categorically "bad") and she is certainly not fully Parisian. Without the same intentional iconoclasm as Reizenstein, Du Maurier subverts Sue again: his heroine, though doomed, disturbed the moral order that was set out in *Les Mystéres de Paris* and reiterated in *Nana*. She took on blended sexual, cultural, and gendered traits. Even if the implications of bending these boundaries are never fully realized by Trilby herself, her influence permeated out of fiction and into daily life. She was to become a style icon and inspiration to young women almost overnight.

Zola's novel merited more restrained mentions in the press. Indeed, it was accorded a brand of distance that *Trilby* never seemed to receive because of the perception that it was – though scintillating and shocking – somehow more continental and literary, excused for its sensuality because it was written by a French author. Ironically, observes Choquette, this restraint was only enhanced by the pornography that *Nana* inspired.[50] Nana's connections to the "erotic" were also more obvious than Trilby's: her status did not challenge conventional ideas of "good" and "bad" women. She had sex for money, she was an actress, and she was beautiful (which was why, despite her terrible acting, she remained a fixture of the theatre): thus, her "type" was clear, like Fleur-de-Marie's.[51] Her fate, as well, was an appropriate end for such a woman, and while Zola's narrator extended sympathy to Nana, the novel's most subversive aspect was its language – as a naturalist, Zola insisted on detailing everything, and created a lurid world that did not shy away from depictions of disease, hedonism, and promiscuous sex (prostitution, specifically) – as things that spread ruin. Nana's life begins and ends in unfortunate tragedy. But she is, unquestionably, what Steven Wilson calls a "contagion" who leads the men in the novel to various states of ruin.[52]

---

[49] Choquette, 210, 220, 222.
[51] As Woolf and others observe, the theatre was understood to be a venue where one could solicit sex workers by this time. See Woolf, Choquette, and Millner.
[52] See Steven Wilson, "Nana, Prostitution and the Textual Foundations of Zola's *Au Bonheur des Dames*," *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 41 (2012-2013): 91-104, and Choquette's article.

Nana never inspired the same level of popular mania that developed around *Trilby*. It seemed to be more segmented from the same wide audience that consumed *Trilby*, even though it did inspire novels, pornography, and plays. On the other hand, *Trilby* galvanized a prolific response, inspiring a language of idioms that would not have succeeded without a huge readership's shared knowledge. The level of its success was borne out in Du Maurier's continued bewilderment that his novel had done so well. Together, though, the heroines – or anti-heroines – of each novel represent a rupture that helps contextualize the Storyville Portraits. Trilby gained a following of women who wanted to emulate her, which is reiterated in articles and advertisements;[53] despite her moral shortcomings, she was desirable to men (who could, perhaps, potentially "reform" her) and not repugnant to "good" women. Although Nana was an incendiary figure, she was ultimately outmoded by Trilby *because* she was so clearly "bad." Trilby's identities were fluid, intermixed, and interchangeable: unremarkable and emblematic of "modern" women, to a degree. Her popularity in New Orleans occurred alongside the development of the amorphous, liminal identities imagined to be represented in the Storyville Portraits, and it signifies that her kind of womanhood was not limited to fiction.

New Orleanian newspapers ran routine reports on the Parisian and local theatres,[54] Paris-themed columns,[55] and featured an array of literary reviews;[56] these are collectively where Zola and Du Maurier (as well as their fiction) received most of their press in the city. Zola was known then more as an intellectual figure and as time went on, his novels were mentioned less frequently than his personal and political matters. *Trilby*, however, became Du Maurier's calling card, and it was repeatedly featured because of the new wave of themed parties and fashion trends. *The Times-Picayune's* pages and columns targeted at

---

[53] *Daily Advocate*, September 14, 1897, as well as the *Times-Picayune*, March 19, 1902 and December 13, 1910.

[54] "Green Room Gossip of Plays and the Players," a column, ran in the *Daily* and *Times-Picayune* and reported on plays in New Orleans and abroad – many of the companies from Paris and London came to New Orleans.

[55] "Gossip Of Europe" was an example of another running *Times-Picayune* column that was devoted to news from Europe (very often Paris) and it often mentioned Zola; it also reported on theatre plays.

[56] Collectively, they included many mentions of novels – often borrowed from other newspapers – as well as reviews and pieces on authors. While I worked in The Historic New Orleans Collection's Williams Research Center in the French Quarter, they were able to provide some copies of primary sources and full access to online databases. Though I cite limited examples to do with New Orleans newspapers, there are many more casual mentions, reviews, and advertisements. (They are also sometimes recycled or only slightly modified from other newspapers or magazines.) These indicate how much of a transatlantic, popular culture phenomenon these two characters – especially Trilby – were: but as Avis Berman notes, our awareness of how much of an impact *Trilby* in particular had is oddly limited. See Avis Berman, "George du Maurier's *Trilby* whipped up a worldwide storm," URL: http://www.trilbyfl.com/Trilby/book/smithsonian.htm. My overall understanding of how nineteenth and early twentieth century newspapers shared information and articles (sometimes modifying them according to regional tastes) via a vast, complex network was immeasurably improved by Ryan Cordell's research on this subject and a talk he gave for the department of American Studies at the University of East Anglia on May 11, 2016.

women readers, such as "Women's Work and World," often reported on what the press called the "*Trilby* fad" – which encompassed shoes, coats, and of course, hats, as much as the alluring story itself.[57] The rest of America experienced similar *Trilby* fads propelled, in particular, by themed apparel and memorabilia: New Orleans was no exception.[58] It had at least one *Trilby* glee club, and *Trilby*-inspired clothes were also advertised.[59]

Apart from inspiring innocuous trends, *Trilby* inspired erotic fantasies, too, though these were only hinted at in polite society. But Trilby's transformation into La Svengali evoked already established links between the theatre, mesmerism, and female submission or availability.[60] Her promiscuity, status as an artists' model, and the narrator's disclaimer that he would not go into detail about her past[61] were less subtle indications that Du Maurier's heroine was not a proper – and *was* a sexually available – young woman. Her manner of dressing, meanwhile, was tantalizingly neither fully masculine nor feminine, and hinted at her inner provocative inclinations. In gothic or sentimental novels, women who cross-dressed, as exemplified by Lucy in *Mysteries of New Orleans*, signified their lax approach to social and moral convention via wearing clothes designated for the "wrong" gender. Lucy, known for her physical beauty, dresses in her lover Emil's clothes to try to trick him. There is a sense that the extreme contrast between the clothing and her body only enhances her sexual appeal; likewise, Emil dresses in "women's" clothing, which "suits" him.[62]

Trilby, who regularly wore some menswear items – her coat, for example, which Du Maurier showed in his illustrations for the novel – is implied to have somehow imbibed more stereotypically "masculine" qualities by doing so, including promiscuity. This was part of her charm, and in reality did not discourage anyone from reading and enjoying *Trilby* even though it was, for the time, scintillating. But overall, it was her feet that became the most charged focal point of her appearance; New Orleans papers were keen to mention them. This was due, according to the papers, to "Du Maurier's description" of her feet.[63] The Picayune's "SHE" page devoted itself to reporting a letter sent to another newspaper, the St. Louis Republic, supposedly from a woman so moved

---

57 "Woman's Work and World," *Times-Picayune,* running column.
58 Berman, "George du Maurier's *Trilby* whipped up a worldwide storm."
58 "Trilby Glee," *The Daily Picayune*, July 2, 1895.
60 See Millner and McColl, in particular.
61 "Even Du Maurier shrinks from revealing too much about her," writes Hilary Grimes, and the narrator "suggest[s] instead that 'I have found it impossible so to tell her history as to make it quite fit and proper reading' […]" See Grimes, "Power in Flux: Mesmerism, Mesmeric Manuals and Du Maurier's *Trilby*," *Gothic Studies* 10 (2008): 70.
62 Reizenstein, 13-18.
63 "Wistful And Sweet Are These Dainty Female Feet of the Stage," *Times-Picayune*, February 24, 1895.

both by Trilby's plight and her beautiful feet that she claimed "nothing else [... had] more subtle power to suggest [...] the lordship of woman over all."[64] Women, then, had taken notice of Trilby's physical charm, which appealed as much as the novel's sensational twists and stimulating topics, in a very homosocial way.

This interest in Trilby's feet or having Trilby-like feet reached a pinnacle by the time a beloved French actress took the stage in New Orleans, where she was touted to be "posing" as Trilby.[65] Audiences were assured that she would have nearly bare feet – this was an enormous selling point. Though Nana had posed almost nude on a stage (draped in thin cloth that left nothing to the imagination), something about Trilby – even clothed, barring her feet – was more powerful. It was, it seemed, her vulnerability and realness: her likeness to "real" women, or the fact that she was not prohibitively corrupted as Nana had been. Never named as "a prostitute" and in possession of a sweet disposition, Trilby was free to recover her virtue and was ostensibly in more peril. Thus she was more marketable, as well as more likeable, than Nana.

The two fictions collided in an early Storyville Blue Book, which provides a scrap of compelling evidence that *Trilby* did inspire more carnal interests just as *Nana* had, at least in New Orleans [Figure 21]. At 986 Customhouse Street, there resided a landlady who called herself Trilby O'Farrell, and her advertisement's most prominent feature is the word "Trilby's" in a bold font. "To see the tenderloin proper is to visit Trilby's. Unless this has been done, the district has not been thoroughly covered," warns the advertisement [Figure 21]. The landlady's birth name remains unknown. But taken in context with the "Trilby fad" that had swept New Orleans, her professional name, doubtless, was chosen due to the success of Du Maurier's novel. While we can only conjecture what aspects of the story "Miss Trilby O'Farrell" re-enacted or embodied for clients, its representations of promiscuity and bohemianism must have been a strong lure. Trilby's submission to Svengali had to have appealed, as well (and what has Bellocq been cast as, if not a Svengali of sorts): submissive women were ubiquitous in both contemporaneous pornography and Storyville's brothels, while mesmerism fascinated Gilded Age audiences because of its implications of absent social decorum.

"Était dans le vice comme un poisson dans l'eau": Creole and Parisian influences on narratives of Storyville

[64] Ibid.
[65] "Green Room Players," *Times-Picayune*, c. 1907 (n.d.) and "Wistful And Sweet Are These Dainty Female Feet of the Stage."

As evidenced by the advertisement for 986 Customhouse Street, Storyville tried to summon decadent associations with "the Continent" in its advertisements, which boasted that women had toured the supposedly more cultured, cosmopolitan cities outside the United States. Furthermore, Louisiana natives who had supposedly cultivated their talents in Europe were presented as especially genteel, educated, and desirable. But this was accomplished with a new display of old exoticism that often relied on phrases once associated with house slaves, free people of color, or those who had European – generally black or white Creole, French, and Spanish – ancestry. Even as the city attempted to modernize and federalize around them, madams were happy to benefit from the sensual otherness that their locale conveyed.

On balance, a shift in attitudes during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries caused New Orleans's intricate cultural and racial gradients to be collapsed into more finite, and fewer, categories. Creole identities were slowly made into a mystique used to characterize and codify the city, while Louisiana was pushed to be more federalist and "American" in the nineteenth century. Being Creole was then repurposed and again coded as exotic, sexual. Gary Krist notes how "Creoles of Color" were impacted by these changes:

> Any difference between Creoles – often educated, urban and middle-class – and African Americans – the children of slaves more recently arrived from the countryside – was gone now, at least in the eyes of whites.[66]

"Whites" in New Orleans encompassed a range of ancestries, but after the Civil War had concluded in 1865, they increasingly unified and defined themselves against those whom they perceived to be "black." Krist explains, "'Negro' and 'disreputable' had become functionally synonymous."[67] But he does not address the ways in which this – along with fictionalized accounts of Creole life and culture – might have changed what the word "Creole," which had already been used in French literature to connote lust and sexual prowess.

In a post-Civil War, stubbornly "American" New Orleans, Creoles, regardless of their appearance or ancestry, had become "disreputable" to varying degrees because it was erroneously believed that all of their cultures were, somehow, tied to France. This intensified already existing rifts between white Creoles and Creoles of color. To further complicate matters, Creoles had been collectively immortalized in popular culture by

---

[66] Gary Krist, *Empire of Sin: A story of Sex, Jazz, Murder and the Battle for New Orleans* (Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2014), 133.
[67] Ibid.

George Washington Cable, the author of *Les Grandissimes* and *Old Creole Days*. Thomas Ruys Smith writes:

> Cable and New Orleans might have parted company in the middle of the 1880s, but his influence on popular conceptions of the city had a long shadow, stretching well into the twentieth century. For some New Orleanians, this was problematic.[68]

So this "long shadow" strongly influenced tourism, with many tourists brought in search of people like the Grandissimes and beautiful women of color: "Cable's works clearly drove the nascent tourist industry,"[69] drawing a range of people from all around the world to the city. A dramatized yet extremely fluid idea of "Creole," which connoted many of the same sensual and ethical excesses as "Parisian," allured the federalist American public after the Civil War.

This explains why references to French and Creole blood came to be increasingly interchanged during the 1900s, especially in literature. "Creole," much in the same way as "Parisian" had, connoted an emotional nature, an openness, that was never far in American imaginations from a lack of decorum and, potentially, sexual inhibition. As a shocked, but intrigued, Edna Pontellier observes even of upper-class Creole women in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, "A characteristic which distinguished [them] and which impressed [her] most forcibly was their entire absence of prudery."[70] Christopher Benfey elaborates, explaining how Edna, a "Kentucky-bred woman of Anglo-Saxon background [who...] entered an ethnically 'mixed' marriage with a somewhat older Creole from New Orleans called Léonce Pontellier,"[71] finds these women are utterly different from her own understanding and experience of womanhood, motherhood, and marriage.

But their interactions actually call to mind contemporaneous Parisian women and the social dynamics that Storyville madams like Lulu White wanted to cultivate, or have clients believe existed, between them and high society. If we are to believe Rose's "Man About Town," Storyville brothels were more vulgar than the competition in Europe, and this had to do with the fact that they could only imitate the cultures of Paris and Montmartre, which pivoted on far stronger perceptions of *all* women possessing sexual desires. Michele Plott writes:

---

[68] Thomas Ruys Smith, *Southern Queen: New Orleans in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Continuum, 2011), 159.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Kate Chopin, *The Awakening* (Chicago & New York: Herbert S. Stone & Company, 1899) 23.
[71] Christopher Benfey, *Degas in New Orleans* (University of California Press, 1997), 240.

> In [late nineteenth century] Paris, relations between men and women were often flirtatious and were never based on an assumption of women's asexuality. The increasing acceptance of respectable women's sexual desires found its least controversial expression in the idea that men and women should feel a passionate connection within marriage.[72]

What Storyville dared to do, and what all New Orleans vice industries dared to do before it, was capitalize on the assumption that women were not asexual. This was not an acceptable idea to American culture. In general, fin de siècle brothels subverted instances of "increasing acceptance of respectable women's sexual desires." The effectiveness with which the most popular madams and sex workers did this was largely made possible by the contentious, yet fascinating – to Americans, anyway – presence of "French" influences in the city. It was particularly striking because it happened in the midst of a veritable ideological and political warfare over vice, white superiority, and women's sexuality. Extending into many spheres of life, the question of the latter was fraught with intersectional, international issues. Plott observes:

> In the 1890s, [believing French women were more sexual] was at the core of a wave of misogynist literature. However, this view may have provided an advantage as well: by the late nineteenth century, upper-middle-class French women may have been more at ease with their sexuality than their British or American counterparts or an earlier generation of French women, even if they were less secure in their respectability.[73]

This is not dissimilar to the depictions of Creole women that abounded in the nineteenth century.

The imagined cultural links between New Orleans Creoles and Paris, then, had very real ramifications upon the representation and advertisement of sex work in New Orleans. Understanding Paris's role as a setting, a trope, and its undeniable tendency to come up in ideologies and archetypes of sex work is crucial to understanding how New Orleans sex workers were represented and represented themselves for survival and profit's sake. Even as the city attempted to modernize around them, madams were happy to benefit from the sensual otherness that their locale conveyed while implying their own similarities to women in "the Continent." As I have mentioned previously, the advertisement for a woman called Clara Miller assures its readers:

---

[72] Michèle Plott, "The Rules of the Game: Respectability, Sexuality, and the Femme Mondaine in Late-Nineteenth-Century Paris," *French Historical Studies* 25 (3): 532.
[73] Ibid., 536.

> She has been in the principal cities of Europe and the Continent, and can certainly interest you as she has a host of many others. When we add that the famous octoroon was born near Baton Rouge we trust you will certainly call on her.[74]

Specifying Miller's "octoroon" heritage (real or imagined), her travels (again, actual or fabricated), and her native status was a powerful combination. It implied worldliness, sensuality, and an education. Expensive sex workers, then, were still giving the appearance that they could be – if the occasion called for it – classically accomplished and conventionally womanly. This was reminiscent of Creole women, or at least Creole women as they were imagined in popular culture.

In *The Awakening* (1899), Chopin takes care to mention that although Edna Pontellier thinks "[Creoles'] freedom of expression was at first incomprehensible [...] she had no difficulty in reconciling it with a lofty chastity which in the Creole woman seems to be inborn."[75] Although the supposed "freedom of expression" of all Creole women was apparently innate (at least from the point of view of a non-Creole woman, either Chopin or her fictitious Edna), the ones fit for society retained a "lofty chastity." This safely contained their expressiveness and did not allow it to contaminate surrounding individuals. After the Civil War, "Creole" influences and identities were, according to Nicole Willson, "anathema" to American "republican" values. They, in fact,

> Became increasingly anathema to the ideology of an exceptional republican identity. This was undoubtedly fuelled by the pervasive presence of 'other' Creoles (and particularly Saint-Domingan Creoles) in the turbulent decades following independence. This sense of creolistic coherence was thus supplanted by a republican exceptionalism that secreted its Creole history (and its echoes within Creole 'others'). [...] This 'America' was envisaged as exceptional and redemptive [...].[76]

Because of its plurality of connotations and usages, "Creole's" inherent incompatibility with what Willson calls "an exceptional republican identity" also allowed it to be associated with, and tacitly used by, a subculture of New Orleanian sex workers alongside terms like "octoroon."

Despite its linguistic and historic origins, the word came to be understood by many curious Americans as something uniquely New Orleanian - and French, but French by way of Paris - as well. It attracted tourists and clients who had been used to conceptualizing it

---

[74] Lulu White, *New Mahogany Hall*, (New Orleans, La. : s.n., between 1898 and 1899), Call Number: HQ146.N6 W55.
[75] Chopin, 23.
[76] Nicole Willson, (unpublished PhD thesis, University of East Anglia, 2015), 140.

as "other" while adding to late nineteenth century perceptions of New Orleans as somewhere "other" than America. Paris had such a lasting influence on representations of prostitution in New Orleans because en masse, respectable Parisian women behaved differently from their Anglo-American counterparts. They behaved more like Trilby, or more like sex workers. It would have been strange for Storyville not to capitalize on this ingrained assumption, or the perception that all cities were being subjected to "Paris-ification." All Parisian women – not just sex workers – were comparatively improper, or had the capacity to behave improperly, in the eyes of their British and American peers. As Plott notes, Parisian women had significantly different social expectations and standards, even in comparison to other French women.[77] These distanced them from more conservative moralities and ideologies in France, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Plott explains:

> The French experience differed in many ways from that of upper-middle-class women in Great Britain or the United States. As in France, British and American women of this class led lives of relative leisure, in which the rituals of "society" played an important part. However, even well-to-do English and American women appear to have placed less emphasis on their role as fashionable women than was common in France. British and American mores also allowed women a different experience of social life; stricter rules of social and sexual propriety ensured that the atmosphere between men and women remained far less overtly sexual in British and American society.[78]

What was so unthinkable to Americans and the British was precisely this sexual frankness amongst middle and upper-middle class women and men, which manifested in overt flirting and covert (but still condoned) sexual liaisons. In general, this dynamic, which did not privilege women's chastity above all else, became acceptable earlier in Paris than it did in either the United States or the United Kingdom. Parisian women were still concerned with maintaining appearances and social standing, but Plott notes:

> Within a larger context, in which the French always assumed that women were sexual beings, there is some evidence of a change between 1860 and 1900: to a far greater extent, upper-middle-class women could construct a sexual sense of self while remaining respectable.[79]

---

[77] Plott, 354.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid., 531-32. Plott's footnote elaborates: "The individual women discussed in this article were, for the most part, members of the Parisian elite. While their politics ranged from Bonapartist to avowedly Republican, all were upper middle class or even aristocratic, at least nominally Roman Catholic, and well connected within their own particular circle of high society. However, there is evidence that some of the

It is little wonder, then, that Edna was so stunned by her Creole acquaintances' "entire absence of prudery,"[80] a trait they evidently shared in common with the Parisian women Plott discusses. Edna, being neither Parisian nor Creole, was not raised either to "construct a sexual sense of self" or embrace her emotions. Many Creoles, conversely - at least to the American mindset - were more connected to this Parisian culture and were also part of New Orleans, which was "outside" the American mainstream in its own way.

"Remaining respectable" while cultivating "a sexual sense of self," however, was not a viable option for American women of any class until well after the 1900s. Even then, a sexual woman was not generally regarded as "respectable." During the fin de siècle and early 1900s, it was more likely that the thought of an American woman engaging in extramarital sexual activity (sex work or not) would provoke morbid curiosity or outright censure – no matter what her class. The qualities of "sexual" and "respectable" could not co-exist within any one woman. Literary fiction about unconventional women and prostitutes affirms the dichotomy. Stephen Crane's working-class Maggie, for example, is met with continuous violence and ridicule.[81] Beyond that, and troublingly – because it insinuates that an "immoral" woman is better off a dead woman, or that women who do not conform to narrow standards of morality are compelled to hurt themselves – both she and Edna commit suicide at the end of their stories. Their differences in social standing do not excuse either woman for what mainstream society deems to be their transgressions. Later in the thesis, I will be discussing images that are far more ambivalent toward, for example, young single women who were possibly also sex workers, but these were still surrounded by a culture of Progressive reforms and traditional moralism that had very fixed views on the American woman's place in society.

When Frederic Law Olmstead wrote of New Orleans:

> I have rarely, if ever, met more beautiful women than one or two I saw by chance, in the streets. They are better formed, and have a more graceful and elegant carriage than Americans in general [...] Of course, men are attracted to them […],[82]

---

trends described here did filter down to the more middling levels of the bourgeoisie by 1900. For example, many early-twentieth-century readers of the newspaper *Le matin* shared with these elite women the expectation of romance and sexual pleasure in marriage and the sense that this expectation was a modern one. See Gustave Téry, ed., *Les divorcés peint par eux-mêmes: Mille et une confessions recueillies* (Paris, n.d., c. 1908)."

[80] Chopin, 23.

[81] David Fitelson, "Stephen Crane's Maggie and Darwinsim," in *Stephen Crane, Maggie: A Girl of the Streets (A Story of New York) (1893)*, ed. Thomas A. Gullason (W.W. Norton and Company, New York: 1979), 109. Fitelson writes, "In reading the novel, one discovers that Crane is presenting characters whose lives are rigidly circumscribed by what appear to be inexorable laws. These are unenchanted lives. Their fundamental condition is violence...".

[82] Olmstead, as quoted by Smith, 93-94.

he encapsulated what nearly every visitor would think about "quadroons" and "octoroons" for years. This trope of the "beautiful women" of color who possessed "a more graceful and elegant carriage than Americans in general" was readily utilized by sex workers, thus it was blurred together with the Creole woman, too. In addition, the respectable "femme mondaine" that Plott says was found in Paris from the 1860s onward became a readily inverted archetype during the late nineteenth century and persisted well into the early 1900s. Many of the women who worked in "mansion brothels," combined signifiers of respectability and upper middle-class affluence like pianos and lavish furnishings with their sex for sale. They found their socially acceptable inverse, then, in the fin de siècle "femme mondaine" of Parisian society. Plott writes:

> A Parisian woman was expected to develop a worldly persona after marriage--to become a femme mondaine. This phrase implied a high degree of sophistication and "finish" [...] as well as participation in high society's rituals. In Paris, it suggested a worldly tolerance of sexual intrigue among one's acquaintance.[83]

This subversion was particularly effective in the city because of the ambiguity of the word "Creole" and its ideological intersections with ideas of French women, which – irrespective of actual, regional differences in social customs and representations – were conflated with a distinctly Parisian version of womanhood. In New Orleans, already "a crucible"[84] of identities whose uniqueness was being challenged and changed after the Civil War, there was a convergence of taboos that sex workers could draw upon. Race, female sensuality, and vice all came together to echo Parisian strains of the same types.

As opposed to the "neighborhoods of colored and white where we all got along just like one race of people" that jazz musician Johnny St. Cyr fondly remembered,[85] a keen fear of racial mixing – whether of actual miscegenation or a perceived dilution of ideological or moral purity – meant that there were invigorated assertions of white, American superiority. These had complex ramifications for representations of women, as well as tangible effects such as the push for legalized segregation. There was an "American" way of being a respectable woman (which was far more similar to being a respectable British woman than it was to being a respectable woman in France, or Paris specifically) that shaped how all women were evaluated and conceptualized. Creole

---

[83] Plott, 534.

[84] Bruce Boyd Raeburn, "Stars of David and Sons of Sicily: Constellations Beyond the Canon in Early New Orleans Jazz," *Jazz Perspectives*, 3 (2): 125.

[85] Alan Lomax, *Mister Jelly Roll: The Fortunes of Jelly Roll Morton, New Orleans Creole and "Inventor of Jazz"* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1950), 102.

women, with their supposed similarities to Parisian women, fell outside of these ideas even if they were white.

Like their Creole counterparts, "French women simply could not rely on more general ideas about women's asexuality to support their reputations as respectable women. Nineteenth-century French authors, both sympathetic and hostile to women, tended to describe them as inherently sexual beings," Plott writes.[86] However, in the United States, women did not have this framework to impact their presentations and experiences of sexuality. Not even "middle-class" women were represented in such a way that might allow a more feasible connection between "respectable" and "sexual." This is why sex work in New Orleans – the city already known to be what Bruce Boyd Raeburn calls "a boiling cauldron of violent antagonisms"[87] despite its "surface gayety"[88] – was represented by tongue in cheek references to France and "the Continent."[89] Even in France, however, as William A. Peniston explains, prostitution and "same-sex sexual activity [were] not illegal, [but] the police assumed that [they] led to crimes against both property, such as theft, blackmail, and extortion, and persons, such as assault and murder."[90]

It was not only the French connections New Orleanians had, but also their responses to them, that made the representations so effective and prevalent in popular culture. Benfey explains that the presence of Creoles, Cajuns, and expatriate Parisians had long fostered cultural hierarchies and practices reminiscent of those in France or Francophone colonies: the Civil War effectively ended these social ecologies. However, they, along with other influences, differentiated New Orleans from the rest of the United States long before it was admitted to the union. Even after, it had a tense relationship with the rest of the nation. Creoles in particular were often "scornful" of Americans as the century waned because their own "social status" had been diffused by the time the war ended.[91]

Further, as blackness became even more deeply associated with traits like promiscuity, and being "Creole" was heavily romanticized – even cast in antiquated terms, as though it was becoming obsolete – by the likes of Cable, it became more difficult for

---

[86] Plott, 535. Plott's very thorough footnotes demonstrate the massive, transatlantic extent of this phenomenon. There were many French-language "scientific," nominally sociological works on adultery and criminality, as well as an abundance of marriage and sex manuals, which confirms the power these themes had over the middle-class and elite fin de siècle public.
[87] Smith, 127.
[88] Ralph Keeler, as quoted by Smith, 127.
[89] Lulu White, *New Mahogany Hall*, (New Orleans, La. : s.n., between 1898 and 1899), Call Number: HQ146.N6 W55.
[90] William Peniston, "Pederasts, Prostitutes, and Pickpockets in Paris of the 1870s," *Journal of Homosexuality* 41 (2002): 169.
[91] Benfey, 105.

white Creoles to maintain relevant or dominant statuses in an Americanized New Orleans. Ideologically, "Creole," "French," and "Paris" summoned the same links in popular American consciousness: to promiscuous women, "a lack of prudery," and decadence. Maggie and Nana demonstrate this duality in fiction, which was borne out through transatlantic exchanges of literary, artistic, and popular culture to the point where pornographic postcards were called "French." Trilby, too, despite not being a true sex worker, underscores the divide between French decadence and Anglo-American morality. Zola's narrator declares unequivocally that Nana "était dans le vice comme un poisson dans l'eau" ("she took to vice like a fish in water").[92] She loves her work, and is not troubled by its implications. Representations of sex work in New Orleans would have us believe its prostitutes also took to vice like fish in water, as well. Stephen Crane's Maggie, on the other hand, was an American girl predestined by her urban, New York environment and lower social class – not anything intrinsic to her personal, racial, ethnic, or national identity – to enter a world of vice. Her brother Jimmie's scruples indicate that, though she does not seem to be acting upon it, she is still inherently "good" and only lacks the sense or opportunity to act upon that quality. Crane writes:

> [He] publically damned his sister that he might appear on a higher social plane. But, arguing with himself, stumbling about in ways that he knew not, he, once, almost came to a conclusion that his sister would have been more firmly good had she better known why.[93]

A binary is presented, again – American girls or women who enter vice trades were not "meant" to be part of them, whereas French or Creole girls, with their supposed heritage of sensuality, were preconfigured to coquetry. This heritage was, in effect, extended to New Orleanian sex workers.

Conclusion: "An opulent city of sin, [...] a dangerous city of death" – New Orleans's Parisian "otherness"

This chapter has examined the symbolic relationships between New Orleans, Paris, Creole "otherness," Storyville, and the Storyville Portraits. It demonstrates how these longstanding connections frame our reception of the portraits and fundamentally influenced their mythologies. Many scholars have explored the associations between New Orleans and France, but I have addressed how fictions about, particularly, Paris and New

---

[92] Emile Zola, *L'Assommoir: Nouvelle édition augmentée (*Arvensa editions: 2014), 299. This literally translates to "she was in vice like a fish in water."
[93] Crane, 42.

Orleans shape current readings of the Storyville Portraits and Bellocq himself. These inform the rest of the work in this thesis because, as I argue, the portraits' reception and our understanding of Bellocq is contingent on ideas about prostitution that have their roots in urban mystery novels and a fear (or the anticipation) that American cities were being subjected to "Parisification."

New Orleans and Paris were imagined, especially within what Charles Bernheimer terms the "male imaginary,"[94] so similarly during the nineteenth century that their most troublesome characteristics fell into almost twinned categories. These were, namely, disease, excess, violence, and sex for hire. Smith notes, however, that New Orleans's "other foibles – drunkenness, gambling, violence, sexual impropriety – were felt to be more offshoots of the original sins of slavery and slave trading"[95] and this is true for Reizenstein, who focuses on slavery as an ultimate evil. But I add "otherness" – whether it is Creoleness, interracialness, or cultural mixing – to the list of "other foibles," as well. En masse, these factors collectively made a difference to representations of its sex work industry and sex workers, even while New Orleanians mimicked and borrowed from their Parisian counterparts, and New Orleans itself was imagined through ghosts of Sue's immense serialized novel. It is little wonder that, with such representational paradigms in place, the New Orleans media remained fascinated with Paris and gave it a repeated spotlight.

Sex and death underpinned rhetoric about both cities in the 1800s: Bernheimer cites hygienists Alexandre Jean-Baptiste Parent-Duchâtelet[96] and Maxime Du Camp's assessments of Paris, saying, "Du Camp [also] speaks of a cesspool in need of cleaning, of a gangrene so deep it threatens to disintegrate the social organism."[97] Even years after it was written, Du Camp's work impacted how prostitution was understood: promiscuous sexual activity, specifically prostitution, was deeply associated with disease and both New Orleans and Paris. This was even more obviously the case when it involved women of "foreign origin." In nineteenth century Paris, "the great courtesans of the time were frequently of foreign origin"[98] – a trend which New Orleans sex workers wasted no time in emulating with their own twists (they did not always promote their foreignness, but many

---

[94] Bernheimer, 95.
[95] Smith, 93.
[96] Parent-Duchâtelet, a medical doctor, was a prominent hygienist who advocated for the legal registration of prostitutes in Paris. See *De la prostitution dans la ville de Paris: considérée sous le rapport de l'hygiène publique, de la morale et de l'administration... ; suivi d'un Précis hygiénique, statistique et administratif sur la prostitution dans les principales villes de l'Europe* (Paris: J.-B. Baillière et fils, 1857), URL: http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k86377g.
[97] Bernheimer, 94.
[98] Ibid., 93.

played up their New Orleanian status, again implying that to be from New Orleans was to be exotic or novel) or simply followed obliquely for the sake of business. Meanwhile, writes Bernheimer, the Goncourt brothers – well-known Parisian art critics and writers – sneered in 1863:

> Paris [was] a bordello for foreigners. [...] There is no longer a single woman kept by a Frenchman. They all belong to Hanoverians, Brazilians, Prussians, Dutch. It's an 1815 of the phallus.[99]

This revealed their belief that if Paris was to be a "bordello" (as they apparently felt it was), it should at least be "kept by Frenchmen."

New Orleans was, likewise, envisioned as an exotic destination that drew visitors and residents from all over the world for sexual tourism. But by the time the twentieth century drew nearer, reformists – alongside the United States Navy – considered the presence of the infamous red-light districts to be a direct threat to American public health and national interests. The issue was not just loose women; it was loose women catering to the kinds of men who were most crucial to protecting national autonomy and power. Well before then, though, Smith affirms, "Disease [had] certainly entered into the popular imagination, and the relationship between New Orleans and illness became proverbial."[100] There is, as Bernheimer elucidates about Paris's reputation during the nineteenth century, a stubborn correlation between illnesses, "prostitutional traffic, the circulation of liquid currency, and biological, even national degeneration"[101] at the core of how Paris and New Orleans were both imagined.

Both were considered to be, as Smith writes about New Orleans, "An opulent city of sin, [...] a dangerous city of death."[102] One was in the new world – tugged along into an America that had been fractured by war – while it echoed the other in the old world. Indeed, popular culture wanted to entomb New Orleans in an antebellum twilight and keep it in a state of arrested decay. But it was struggling to reshape its own identity. Innumerable contentions were occurring behind the attractive, if thrilling, façade created by travel writers and novelists.[103] Even if New Orleans was corrupted, like Paris, it was still

---

[99] As quoted by Bernheimer, 93.
[100] Smith, 92.
[101] Bernheimer, 94.
[102] Smith, 93.
[103] Reconstruction-era popular culture is not the only place we can see evidence of this tendency to romanticize New Orleans as somewhere "other" or "old world;" it appears in *The Mascot*, the Storyville Blue Books, and even novels such as Chopin's *The Awakening*. Still, even years after the Civil War ended there was a spate of literature and illustrations that, as Smith says of Grace King's writing, "Amplif[ied] the city's exotic otherness," 128.

alluring. Stephen Wilson writes that Zola's *Nana* memorably ends with "the rotting, putrefying, decomposing body of Nana – the most notorious insoumise in a distinguished tradition of nineteenth-century romans de la prostitution."[104] Like her city, Nana had supposedly been perverse from the inside out. Most importantly, this image, however, was to have a lasting effect on the representation of prostitutes. Like the grisly postmortem photographs of Jack the Ripper's victims, Zola's verbal portrait of a dead sex worker was evidence of moral order taking its rightful course. But it also titillated and drew in voyeurs eager for gore, and gore entwined with – as it could only be, given the entire course of the novel – sex. Zola's narrator relishes every detail: Nana is not only dead, she is a disgusting corpse, and her face in particular is described. Tellingly, her eyes are incapable of looking and do not even resemble eyes at this point:

> Un oeil, celui de gauche, avait complètement sombré dans le bouillonnement de la purulence; l'autre, à demi ouvert, s'enfonçait, comme un trou noir et gâté.
>
> (An eye, the left eye, was completely lost to purulence; the other, which remained half-open, looked like a deep, black hole.)[105]

That Zola took the time to minutely describe her now incapacitated, unrecognizable eyes is suggestive, especially given the commentary that had surrounded Edouard Manet's *Olympia*, his infamous painting of a courtesan, when it was exhibited in 1865.[106] Manet's model, Victorine Meurent, could look and would continue to stare coolly out at viewers, but Nana not only could not – her eyes had also rotted away beyond much recognition.

Unsurprisingly, then, one of the Storyville Portraits' most engaging qualities is their models' eye contact with the viewer.[107] Far from being suggestive, sultry, or docile, these women simply have, to choose one word, comfortable expressions. Conversely, some of the portraits have been literally defaced [Figures 14, 15, and 16], which has prompted speculation about why Bellocq – he most likely scratched out the women's faces during the wet stage of processing his work[108] – might have done it. Given the dramatic importance of the gaze – of looking – in depictions of not only sex workers or immoral women, but of all women, these speculations have often been dramatic. However, because

---

104 Wilson, 91.
105 Émile Zola, *Nana* (Hayrapetyan Brothers, 1933), 420.
106 Felix Jahyer, as quoted in "Various Authors on Manet's Olympia," *Art in Theory* (Malden: Blackwell, 2011), called Manet "the apostle of the ugly and repulsive" after Manet debuted *Olympia*, but this was not far from common public sentiment about the painting.
107 Vicki Goldberg, "So at Ease with Life on the Edge," *The New York Times*, January 6, 2002.
108 See Chelsea Nichols, "Defacement: E.J. Bellocq and the Storyville Prostitutes," (Submission for Edgar Wynd Journal, on the theme of "destruction," 2002).

the portraits bear no consistent marks of violence otherwise, assuming some level of misogynistic drama or tragedy does not make much sense, though it is strongly tied to the themes of domination and control that are present in *Nana*, *Trilby*, and *Les Fleurs du mal.* (I will return to these ideas in Chapter Two.)

"Most obviously," Susan Sontag writes about Bellocq's portraits, "it could not be detected from at least a third of the pictures that the women are inmates of a brothel."[109] This is a curious but crucial claim to consider: Bellocq's portraits do not foreground sex work as a topic. Nothing within them is specifically reminiscent of the city or red-light district, either. The portraits deny us that instant association with Storyville or hypothetical subjugation, but so many look like other instances of racy, "saucy scenes" that it is difficult not to consider them as part of that spectrum. Yet New Orleans, as ever, capitalized and complicated paradigms by blending them with its own long histories – and myths – of octoroons, quadroons, and Creole mistresses. There was slippage between terms and symbols of sexuality and sex work in the city. They were all linked by a Parisian influence, as well as racism strengthened by centuries of slavery.

Herbert Asbury tells how "In other days visitors to the city were escorted to Congo Square to see the dancing of the slaves, and to the old Orleans Ballroom to watch the beautiful quadroons trail their silks and satins across the dance-floor [sic]." But by Storyville's day, he says, "they were taken 'down the line' to see the plush and velvet parlors of the palatial mansions of sin, to shiver at the bawdy shows and dancing in the cabarets [...]."[110] Asbury does not take this any further, but in these "palatial mansions of sin," there were provocative and often false displays of foreignness that were enmeshed with assertions of racial otherness that had been built, over the last two centuries and beyond, into sexual and attractive fetishes.

According to Smith, "Antebellum travellers to the city, like others before them, rarely failed to comment on the nature of black life in the Crescent City, and in so doing, were clearly conditioned by popular culture."[111] He notes that an almost tactile pleasure was taken in describing women of color, too. Men alone were not limited to engaging in this pleasure, he describes: "Mrs Houstoun noted 'the rich dark cheek of the Quadroon.

---

[109] Susan Sontag, introduction to *E.J. Bellocq: Storyville Portraits, Photographs from the New Orleans Red-Light District, Circa 1912*, ed. John Szarkowski (New York: Random House, 1996), URL: http://www.masters-of-photography.com/B/bellocq/bellocq_articles2.html.
[110] Herbert Asbury, *The Gangs of New Orleans: An Informal History of the French Quarter Underworld* (London: Arrow, 2004), 433.
[111] Smith, 93.

The eloquent blood in her soft cheek speaks but too plainly of her despised descent.'"[112] The old Victorian impulse of classification blended with the entitlement that tourists (in particular, though not by any means exclusively) felt in regards to non-white women: blood is "eloquent," it "speaks," and it marks individuals as property or objects to be appraised and enjoyed.

If we begin to look at the Storyville Portraits with the expectation not that they are anomalous for their moment, but rather with an expectation that Bellocq gives us versions of a figure who was already prolific in mass culture, we can look at them differently. While they have been hailed as exceptional, and in some ways they are – their survival past the loss of many of Storyville's records and ephemera, as well as New Orleans's weather, was serendipitous – in reality, Bellocq was only depicting a common, very popular subject as she was configured by New Orleans. He does so in a surprisingly mundane manner, but without overtly depicting black women like Parasina. When regarded as a refraction of the topic of sex work rather than a deviation from it, we realize that his work is not as strange as it first appears and in fact can point to an arc of inquiry that tests our presumptions about New Orleans sex workers. This, in turn, shifts our perceptions of both Bellocq and the portraits. In order to assert that his portraits are not as iconoclastic as they have been made to seem – they were part of the vast panorama of fin de siècle visual and print culture that was about both women and sex workers – this idea of Paris arbitrating New Orleans's immorality in American popular culture is instrumental.

What then results through this acknowledgement is a re-orientation so that they can be part of a more inclusive imaginary that accounts for their ordinariness – and also the level of intimacy that makes his photographs stand apart from the spectrum that encompasses them. The portraits suggest that models and photographer were comfortable with each other, even if Bellocq's intentions are impossible to know. It is helpful to remember that New Orleans itself seems to inspire this inscrutability: for example, Steven Rowan observes that Baron von Reizenstein's reasons for devoting an entire chapter to Claudine and Oleana's relationship in *Mysteries of New Orleans* are unclear; it served no pragmatic purpose in the overall narrative. He believes that it must have had some personal significance to Reizenstein – it is, after all, included and their relationship is the only loving, healthy one in the novel. But Rowan does not speculate further on intentionality:[113] we should apply this logic to Bellocq, too. Rather than concentrate on

---

[112] Ibid.
[113] Rowan, xxx.

speculations about whether he "meant" to create pornography (or art, or advertisements, or documentary images), it is enough to say that specific portraits do resemble these things.

We remain unaware if Bellocq's models were his lovers or friends. But because there are almost ninety negatives, we should assume that he did have a personal interest in these women. Bellocq's portraits do not often match the visions conjured in Baudelaire's poetry, or city mysteries and fin de siècle novels. Plate 5 [Figure 4] in *Storyville Portraits* is among the most antithetical to this mythology: despite the young woman wearing undergarments, dark stockings, and patent leather shoes – all traditional for women in risqué postcards or photographs – the way she lounges on what looks like a makeshift table (strewn with a small rug) with a little dog makes this image relaxed, perhaps even relatively candid. All of her attention is on the dog, and she smiles happily at it. Viewers still might be drawn to the curves of her back, bottom, and legs, especially because they are offset by the horizontal lines provided by wooden panelling and shutters behind her. However, Bellocq did not choose this setting particularly to highlight her body or create a fantasy scene, even if he considered it for the lighting, as seems likely.

The door to the right of the model's feet does not indicate exactly where her photograph was taken, but if Bellocq worked out of brothels, this would be a secluded outdoor area behind, or near, one of them. There is no backdrop placed behind the model and she does not wear a costume, either. Her improper attire is not fully unexpected; this is a private moment. More precisely, it is a moment where her guard is down, and she is neither in public nor under pressure to entertain a client. It is not difficult to imagine that she is between clients and relaxing. Conversely, if we were to ignore the formidable mythologies that accompany the Storyville Portraits, this photograph could be of any urban, turn of the century single "bachelor girl" enjoying her spare time, rather than a Storyville "working girl" waiting for her next customer.[114]

I am not arguing that this portrait's connections with Storyville should be cast aside permanently. I do, however, wish to draw attention to the lack of nearly anything, but assertions made by people long after Bellocq took his photographs, that connects them to the red-light district – therefore New Orleans, too, and by association, Paris and Montmartre. Plate 5 demonstrates that, despite the ubiquitous reasons Bellocq had to turn his models into "Trilbys" and "Nanas" (or "Parasinas" and "Jeannes"), he does not cast them in those roles. Nevertheless, he does not have to: viewers, with all their preconceptions about New Orleans, are eager to supply far more lurid stories than the

[114] In Chapter Three, I will be discussing some of John Sloan's depictions of urban women, including his illustration for the socialist magazine *The Masses* entitled "Bachelor Girl."

ones implied by the portraits, and Plate 5 is only one example of how they do not conform to the mainstream, Parisian-influenced stereotypes about prostitution, in spite of retaining some influences from them.

Instead of trying to understand intentions, this chapter has explored how tropes related to the prostitute and prostitution in Paris were refracted in New Orleans, and change how we look at the portraits. Subsequently, we can regard Bellocq's work with new, less regionalized but vital perspectives. By beginning with an exploration of how New Orleans reacted to, and was connected to, the figure of the "loose" woman in Parisian popular culture, we can account for some of the most foundational influences on our reception of the Storyville Portraits. Sara James writes that Sue's Paris is "a world that is linked by material objects and by pieces of paper, whether transmitted through theft, gift or exchange; where appearances read as signs"[115] and irresistibly, the portraits themselves have been regarded as "material objects" within these same paradigms.

[115] James, 306.

Chapter Two: A Heritage of Violence, Voyeurism, and Crime

Using case studies that pivot between London and New Orleans, this chapter examines how criminality and victimization permeated discourses around prostitution and influenced the languages of reform. In order to consider the Storyville Portraits as images of sex workers, these dynamics have to be acknowledged, especially because the mythologies surrounding Bellocq owe much to the problematic assumption that he must have had either an overly malevolent or sympathetic interest in his models. He is imagined either as perverted, or alternatively a fellow social outcast: like that of the women he photographed, his role is predetermined by the overbearing duality between criminal and victim that saturated the idea of the prostitute. When the final years of the nineteenth century witnessed a quintessential case of violence against women, the sensational press and photography conjoined dual themes and made violence into a vernacular used to discuss women and prostitution.

In 1888, Jack the Ripper stalked London's dank alleys and slaughtered at least five sex workers; by the 1890s and certainly after, an international public was well aware of the Ripper murders, which were recounted in a variety of media and evoked for a range of purposes. They reached the level of a transatlantic, mass cultural phenomenon and hailed a renewed fascination with crime. Further, they confirmed that prostitutes – even when, or especially if, dead – were objects ripe for purportedly rational enquiry and repeated media spectacle. The role of photography and imagery in fuelling both the murderer's infamy and the objectification of the victims was an enormous lure to the public. It played a crucial part in capturing their imaginations: for the first time to such a large degree, graphic, so-called impartial photographs were used to make sense of a high-profile case that influenced not only reportage and police procedures, but also fiction and mass culture. Crime scene photographs – as well as verbal descriptions of the crime scenes – gave a sense of objectivity and documentation to the proceedings. In actuality, they encouraged a heightened focus on the female body. But this was acceptable within a social context – alongside, for example, academic nude portraiture.

My analysis draws upon scholarship that discusses the representation of prostitutes in Victorian London, such as Judith R. Walkowitz's *City of Dreadful Delight* and Megha Anwer's research on the Ripper postmortem photographs. However, since I focus on how

the sensational press and popular culture of, and influenced by, London should be used to triangulate the Storyville Portraits, I am equally in conversation with the narratives about Bellocq put forth by *Storyville Portraits* and the ideas of Storyville suggested in Al Rose's *Storyville, New Orleans: Being an Authentic, Illustrated Account of the Red-Light District*. Despite their parallels, any relationships between representations of violence and prostitution in Storyville and Whitechapel have not been discussed.

The New Orleans press had an avid interest in the Ripper, and its practice of rehashing local and international grisly crimes was shared by its London-based counterparts. I also consult a range of primary sources to demonstrate how the Storyville Portraits' reception, and indeed their appearance, was impacted by an atmosphere infused with sensational crime and the tenor of reforms spurred on by cycles of voyeurism and viciousness. Among others, I consider New Orleans newspapers, London newspapers, the Ripper postmortems, and Arthur Conan Doyle's short story "The Illustrious Client." These diverse materials situate the Portraits within a transatlantic, Anglo-American milieu – one that they share elements with, but do not conform to, fully – that has impacted their interpretation, yet has gone remarkably unacknowledged.

The chapter is comprised of three sections that each provide a different perspective on themes of the criminal and victim. Far from being separate notions, these often converge. First I discuss sensational crime's prevalence in the news, using reports of the Ripper murders and the later American (but equally transatlantic) case of Doctor Thomas McNeill Cream to demonstrate how the villainous predator set on murdering prostitutes was both a real threat and a constructed archetype. Reportage echoed his voyeurism as a much more quotidian social practice: via newspapers, the public was entitled to look at women's bodies or invade their privacy under the guise of staying informed about malicious events. Then, I establish how this manifested in fictional representations of photographs of immoral women.

Voyeurism as both an exercise in control and sexual perversion appeared in Doyle's "The Illustrious Client" (1924) and appeared again in Michael Ondaatje's *Coming Through Slaughter* (1976), where, because of his habit of photographing Storyville's sex workers, Bellocq is suspected of being a murderer. Without any tangible evidence to prompt the association – but because of a longstanding alliance between themes of violence, voyeurism, and sex work that was established in late Victorian mass culture (then reiterated in popular culture that conjured the Victorian era) – Bellocq is represented as ominous, a potential villain. Lastly, I end with a discussion of how perceptions of reformers and

reform efforts were influenced by such violent crimes against sex workers. Because they existed within such normalized practices of voyeurism, shame, and force, the same vocabulary of the sensational press was used both to convey, and criticize, their agenda.

"Violently and downwards" – the Ripper postmortems and the curious case of Thomas McNeill Cream

The Ripper postmortems and press coverage are perhaps the most recognizable images and representations of sex workers in the late nineteenth century. At the least, they undeniably comprise some of the most familiar images and discussions of vice in the Victorian period. This needs to be foregrounded as a preconfiguring influence on our reception of the Storyville Portraits. Although Storyville opened roughly ten years after the Ripper's murder spree, Storyville's antecedents in New Orleans – such as Smoky Row, notorious because of women who allegedly robbed and murdered their unwitting clients[1] – were also not without their ideological ties to sex, brutality, and death. Isolated incidents, too, were discussed with the same awe that would come to dominate discussions of the Ripper. New Orleans madam Kate Townsend's 1883 murder, for example, was almost lovingly detailed in the local press[2] and referenced in other American newspapers – which had all been primed by earlier stories like the 1836 murder of New York City sex worker Helen Jewett.[3] Writing about prostitution in New Orleans, fittingly, Barbara Eckstein agrees with Walter Benjamin that "prostitutes were modern figures of thanatos rather than eros."[4] This is evidenced in the torrid affairs that nineteenth (and twentieth) century culture had with crimes that were directed toward, or perpetrated by, sex workers.

In August of 1888, prostitution's conceptual alliance with death – not disease, as had been fairly usual in most discourses, but murder – took an irrevocable turn when an unknown killer began a cruel, soon to become iconic, spree of murders. Although fatal attacks against women in London's East End were regarded as common by the police and public, this instance was marked by its sheer viciousness. Mary Ann Nichols, a reputed

---

[1] Herbert Asbury and Al Rose relay the most salacious stories about Smoky Row. See *The French Quarter: An Informal History of the New Orleans Underworld* (London: Arrow, 2004), and *Storyville, New Orleans, Being an Authentic, Illustrated Account of the Notorious Red-Light District* (University of Alabama Press, 1974), respectively.
[2] To name only some of these: "Sykes In Prison. Committed by Judge Houston Until he Produces Kate Townsend's Jewelry," *Times-Picayune*, February 19, 1886, "Sykes Dismissed From the Executership of the Estate of Kate Townsend, by Judge Houston," *Times-Picayune*, February 19, 1884, "Carved To Death. Terrible Fate of Kate Townsend, At the Hands of Treville Sykes With...," *Times-Picayune*, November 4, 1883, "Sykes And Townsend," *Times-Picayune*, October 8, 1879, and "Killing Of Kate Townsend. The Testimony Taken Before coroner LeMonnier, *Times-Picayune*, November 3, 1883.
[3] Patricia Cline Cohen, *The Murder of Helen Jewett: The Life and Death of a Prostitute in Nineteenth Century New York* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998).
[4] Barbara Eckstein, *Sustaining New Orleans: Literature, Local Memory, and the Fate of a City* (Routledge, 2005), 66.

alcoholic, had gone out late to earn her night's rent, supposedly having spent it on booze rather than her doss house lodging. Nichols, however, was slaughtered before she could return home with any money. An inquest by coroner Wynne Edwin Baxter, who would be responsible for three of the recognized Ripper postmortems, reported:

> On the left side of the neck, about 1in. [sic] below the jaw, there was an incision about 4in. in length, and ran from a point immediately below the ear. On the same side, but an inch below, and commencing about 1in. in front of it, was a circular incision, which terminated at a point about 3in. below the right jaw. [...] The cuts must have been caused by a long-bladed knife, moderately sharp, and used with great violence. [...] There were no injuries about the body until just about the lower part of the abdomen. Two or three inches from the left side was a wound running in a jagged manner. The wound was a very deep one, and the tissues were cut through. There were several incisions running across the abdomen. There were three or four similar cuts running downwards, on the right side, all of which had been caused by a knife which had been used violently and downwards.[5]

Baxter gave copious details, edging as was expected of a medical report into technicalities of the death rather than emotional assertions. However, he reveals that the dead woman was conceptually the site of a murder rather than the victim of it; Baxter does not refer to the body as female, continuously using 'the' rather than more possessive or gendered terms.

This was the result of a clinician's usual approach, yet also it had the effect of dehumanizing and almost legitimizing the attack as something to be witnessed and judged. But he left no doubt that the circumstances were unusually violent. This was the first of five murders that were definitively attributed to the killer, or killers, known as "Jack the Ripper." Some later contested that there were more than five killings in different parts of the world, yet official statements placed the Ripper's main timeframe from August to November 1888, and only in London. There was continued speculation that more murders were committed by the same killer until at least 1891 in London, then in later years abroad.[6] Despite all of the unknown actualities, the Ripper became a demonic figure who reached sensational heights due in no small measure to minutely detailed, grisly newspaper reports. Public interest in how savagely he had mutilated his victims soared, while armchair detectives eagerly submitted theories to the police and newspaper editors. Of course, reports to the public included illustrations and photographs, always erring toward the visual.

---

[5] *The Times*, September 3, 1888.
[6] Stephen P. Ryder, introduction to *Casebook: Jack the Ripper (1996–2015),* URL: http://casebook.org/.

Evocative media nicknames such as "The Whitechapel Murderer," and among the earliest, "Leather Apron," were pervasive. Because of letters sent to police and other parties by either the killer or clever pranksters, "Jack the Ripper" became the calling card of the murderer who stalked Whitechapel, Aldgate, Spitalfields, and the City of London in search of his next quarry.[7] Always women who had engaged in prostitution, the victims were immortalized in investigations documented by the media. Their murderer remained safe under twin covers of anonymity and infamy, invading discourses and capturing imaginations while evading his own arrest. The Ripper has been well vetted by historians and remains a figure that imposes a long shadow on studies of late nineteenth century urbanity.[8] The dank London streets were at the heart of the case, but the Ripper influenced the treatment and discussion of urban serial killings for years to come in many countries.

This was true particularly in the United States, even if the murders were not exclusively of sex workers. H.H. Holmes was rumored to have been the Ripper after his deathly hotel, which he operated in Chicago during the 1893 World's Fair, came to light.[9] The still anonymous Axeman of New Orleans made a direct gesture to the chilling "From Hell" letter – received in 1888 by George Lusk, who was head of the Whitechapel Vigilance Committee[10] – in 1919 when he (or someone else posing as the Axeman) wrote to the Times-Picayune.[11] The Ripper left a bloody mark on the annals of criminal activity – even in New Orleans, which had its own impressive history of crime that was infamous the world over. Doctor Cream, a murderer who was finally executed in 1892 after claiming victims in Canada, the United States, and England, was also briefly believed to be the Ripper. (Admittedly, this was only because of a rumor fuelled by his executioner, but it gained traction, demonstrating just how keen the need for definitive answers – no matter how farfetched they were – could be.) Curiously, though it forms an engrossing body of material that could be studied in its own right, the media generated by the Ripper case and

---

[7] Ibid.

[8] Many serial murderers were then called "Rippers" for either their brutal methods or their focus on women, including Joseph Vacher, dubbed The French Ripper or The Ripper of the South East. Vacher was finally guillotined in 1898 for murdering up to thirty women and children in rural locations around France. Alongside "The Ripper" being used as a kind of shorthand for killers of women, there were also many conspiracy theories, e.g. of Cream's secret identity as Jack the Ripper and the American serial killer H.H. Holmes actually being "Jack" in 1893. Even as late as 1919, when New Orleans was subjected to its own "Ripper" known as The Axeman, there was talk of the two entities being one and the same. See Gary Krist, *Empire of Sin: A Story of Sex, Jazz, Murder and the Battle for New Orleans* (Stroud: Amberley, 2014).

[9] Erik Larson, *The Devil in the White City: Murder, Magic, and Madness at the Fair That Changed America* (Bantam, 2004).

[10] The infamous "Dear Boss" letter was not sent to Lusk. It was displayed in the British Library's "Terror and Wonder" exhibition (October 2014-January 2015) with an explanation that the two famous missives were sent to different recipients.

[11] Letter published by the *Times-Picayune*, dated March 13, 1919.

the cases after it, has garnered less continued interest than the question of the Ripper's identity.

Anwer writes:

> The paucity of criticism on the photographic evidence of Jack the Ripper's murders is striking and surprising, particularly given that these images amount to one of the first visual documentations of what are now called sex crimes. Even Robert McLaughlin's pioneering study *The First Jack the Ripper Victim Photographs* falls short of adequately decoding what's really going on in the pictures themselves [sic], in part because he seems less interested in the content of the photographs than in the biographical details of the photographers who created them.[12]

In contrast, there was and still is an enormous variety of speculation about who the Ripper was and what might have motivated the murders. Morality was often discussed as a motivation. Further, a pronounced "cult of feminine invalidism"[13] fed desires for illustrations, descriptions, and other depictions of the victims. This existed in conjunction with what Walkowitz terms the "New Journalism of the 1880s [...] which encouraged anonymous male villains like the Ripper [...] to communicate with a mass public through the newspaper,"[14] and both of these factors created a crucible in which misogynist, classist, and in New Orleans, particularly racist, conditions prevailed. If prostitutes had to exist and could not be contained, the logic seemed to go, there was a certain relish to be had in seeing them dead. In death, they were finally neutralized: looking at them was no longer unsafe, tempting, or questionably moral. This fixation on dead prostitutes, however, was part of a larger aesthetic that influenced paintings, literature, and theatre.

At the time, this aesthetic "cult," described by Bram Dijkstra as idealizing women's weakness and vulnerability,[15] had a vast effect on standards of femininity and female attractiveness: hardy women – literally healthy, but more troublingly, this implicated women who survived without proper male help in their lives, e.g. from a husband or father – were not feminine. Physical health and assertive personal qualities were twined together to create an atmosphere in which prostitutes were easily reconceptualized as more marketable and more intriguing if they were corpses. And, as Anwer states, so-called good "women were encouraged to appear starving and consumptive as proof of their superior

---

[12] Megha Anwer, "Murder in Black and White: Victorian Crime Scenes and the Ripper Photographs," *Victorian Studies* 56 (2014): 433.
[13] Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin De Siècle Culture* (Oxford University Press, 1986), 28.
[14] Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London*, (University of Chicago Press, 1992), 132.
[15] Dijkstra, 28.

breeding, feminine refinement, and spiritual purity" which was apparent in contemporaneous art that she says "consolidated and celebrated a sadistic culture push[ing] women into self-sacrifice to the point of death."[16] Prostitutes were transformed, even purified, in death, and this is made clear by the depictions of dead bodies in the Ripper case.

A pointed contrast did exist between the culturally attractive "starving and consumptive" aesthetic and the well-circulated illustrations of Annie Chapman in the *Illustrated Police News* [Figure 22], even though the later post-mortems did enshrine qualities of feminine invalidism to an extreme degree by aestheticizing the women's corpses – providing a voyeur's look at the nude, butchered bodies.[17] Meanwhile, Chapman, the second Ripper victim after Nichols, was depicted before her death as a stout woman with a dull, round face and wide set eyes. Her appearance was suggestive of the beliefs in phrenology and eugenics which asserted that deviance – as well as other qualities of personality or temperament – could be ascertained by the study and assessment of physical features.[18] Her double chin is soft and weak; her neck is thick above her collar. The illustration uses her postmortem photograph as a reference [Figure 24], but there is an extravagant, theatrical effect to her facial injuries and deep bruises. Compared to a photograph of Chapman around 1869 [Figure 23], the illustrations were barely recognizable as the same woman in the portrait.

Just as Nichols was rendered inhuman by Baxter's inquest, the *Police News* transformed Chapman into a grotesque figure that reaffirmed the negative perception of prostitution. Her photograph as a young wife, however, could have been of any lower-middle class female and her husband: Chapman is a small brunette, unremarkable with her severe features and grim expression. The portrait was also clearly taken in a studio [Figure 23]. Yet the 1888 illustrations show her disfigured and slaughtered. Even further, they show that she had been altered before her murder by a life of continued immorality. Their emphasis was not on catching the killer, but on the excitement he inspired, and the effect of vice upon the female body and mind. Prostitution was just an added note of intrigue to the entire affair; it was a familiar, sultry strain that enriched the proceeding.

When the New Orleans press reported on the Ripper, it did so with gusto. Papers speculated on his identity and whether he might even be in the United States well after the

---

[16] Anwer, 435.
[17] Ibid., 434.
[18] *Illustrated Police News*, Saturday, September 22, 1888.

London murders had seemingly concluded.[19] At times, the theory that he was actually a woman came into conversation; many were apt to blame prostitutes for murdering other prostitutes.[20] The city even had its own mutation of "Jack:" the Axeman evoked the same frenzied terror in 1919.[21] Whoever they were, they built upon the cloak-and-dagger mythology already laid by their London forerunner, and certainly incited a level of interest that was indebted to the Ripper as well as pragmatic concerns about citizens' safety. However, the Axeman, unlike the Ripper, targeted "ordinary" citizens, not exclusively sex workers. He (or she, or they) reveled in vice, as well. So far as we know, the Axeman did not murder any sexually deviant women and enjoyed jazz – often condemned as "sinful" music – enough to command that it be played to forestall more murders.

But killed prostitutes were neutralized; they could not tempt and they certainly were not romantic paragons who withered for the sake of their femininity. The Ripper's victims were never, as Johnny Wiggs mused about Bellocq's models, "Pretty whores [...] Some of them were very pretty."[22] Instead, their images affirmed what many Victorians believed, and indeed, what those who frequented prostitutes often discovered in spite of explicit erotica or racy advertisements: "that's something I never ran across in my life, was a pretty whore. [...] I mean in any of those places, I've never seen anything that resembled beauty."[23] There was nothing "beautiful" about Nichols or Chapman in life or death, but the representations of their bodies encouraged open stares and incessant conversation. By the late 1890s, the alliance between death and prostitutes firmly encompassed disease and murder, and had a strong influence on discussions of prostitution and attempts to represent it.

The Ripper case's influence on portrayals of sex workers, as well as to the iconography and symbolism of the prostitute and her milieu overall, haunted "respectable" women and sex workers for decades to come. Undeniably, it confirmed the separation between the two and marked a change in the discourses: the Ripper's victims were not ultimately characterized as tragic victims. They were a collective display of brutal sexuality and gore, and they were fascinating. In a story called "The Optimist Goes Slumming" as reported in a New Orleans paper, Charles Batell Loomis recounted how he went on a trip to Whitechapel, remarking:

---

[19] See "The Optimist Goes Slumming. Search for Horror in Whitechapel, London--None Found—," *Times-Picayune*, October 21, 1906, and "Another Jack the Ripper," *Times-Picayune*, December 9, 1893.
[20] Ibid.
[21] See Krist.
[22] Johnny Wiggs, as quoted in *E.J. Bellocq: Storyville Portraits – Photographs from the New Orleans Red-Light District, circa 1912* (Meriden: The Museum of Modern Art, 1970), 15.
[23] Ibid.

> I couldn't help feeling disappointed (the sensational part of me) that I had witnessed no murders, not even a wife-beating or eye-blacking, and if I had not afterward substantiated the fact that I had really been in Whitechapel I would have had a suspicion that my friends, being humorists, had been stringing me.[24]

This demonstrates not only how prolific the Ripper stories were in the American press – Loomis travelled to Whitechapel specifically because of "one Jack the Ripper" – but equally how entwined the concepts of urban poverty, murder, and sex work had become.

Like parts of New Orleans, areas in London were irrevocably tied with sensational crime. Loomis says Whitechapel was, to his mind, "one of the saddest, most vice-haunted, sodden, foul, pestilential dark, dismal, dreadful" places.[25] But he was disappointed that it did not live up to that expectation, which is ironic considering New Orleans's international reputation. He also, however, directly mentions "wife-beating," which reinforces the assumption that street crime was always misogynist. Given the popular cases in the newspapers, it is not difficult to imagine why one might assume he would see a "wife-beating," if the dead bodies often reported in the press belonged to women.

Not long after the Ripper, London would again be the site of dramatic killings of women, and this time they would have a transatlantic culprit. Within several years of the Ripper's mayhem, a gruesome set of poisonings in London shocked – and thrilled – the Anglo-American public. This time, the killer was eventually identified through his bragging and suspicious inside knowledge. By late October, 1892, Doctor Thomas Neill Cream, a Canadian medical doctor who had been educated at McGill University, was finally being tried for the latest in tandem strings of international murders and opportunistic blackmails.[26] The case was unique mostly for its transparency rather than its cast of characters. Prostitutes, mad doctors, serial killers, and police inspectors were all elements of daily life – at least in newspapers, magazines, and novels. The Cream trial is illustrative of common dynamics that were at play regarding the treatment of vice in late Victorian culture, but it was singular for its thorough documentation of the suspect and the evidence against him. It was also distinct for its conclusion, which was found with the culprit's true identity.

However, the case exposed plenty of subverted apprehensions despite its tidy closure. Paula J. Reiter writes, perceptively:

---

[24] "The Optimist Goes Slumming. Search for Horror in Whitechapel, London--None Found—".
[25] Ibid.
[26] Paula J. Reiter, "Doctors, Detectives, and the Professional Ideal: The Trial of Thomas Neill Cream and the Mastery of Sherlock Holmes," *College Literature 35.3 (2008):* 59.

> The Cream trial provides a remarkably complete record of a Victorian serial killer and blackmailer. What is more remarkable, however, is the nexus joining this deviant Victorian with his society at large. The Cream trial remains important not as a picture of a singular maniac – 'a doctor gone wrong' –but for traces of the anxieties felt by others that his crimes made visible.[27]

Cream, a "deviant" doctor who purportedly inspired Sir Arthur Conan Doyle to write his Sherlock Holmes short story "The Adventure of the Speckled Band,"[28] had already committed murder in Canada and the United States by the time he resided – and was being tried for murder again – in London.[29] However, the most remarkable quality of his trial was the extreme and specific disquiet it captured. At stake in the proceedings were questions of professionalism, gender roles, and the presence of vice in modern culture. Cream was a doctor who went after another kind of professional: sex workers.

Prostitution was discussed (however begrudgingly) as an occupation by the late nineteenth century, particularly in metropolises, or vice districts as established and efficient as Storyville. Louis Armstrong, who worked there before moving on to his more prestigious venues, noted that many of the women who worked in Storyville lived in other parts of the city – like other workers did – and commuted to the district.[30] These remarks suggest that beyond what were, by then, routine arguments about respectability and morality, sex workers provoked thought about the role of women in all workplaces. “Professionalized” vice called into question the definition of “legitimate” work or occupations, however accidentally. This accentuated its potential to undermine traditional social orders. Moreover, these new misgivings helped allow Cream, a doctor, to be treated with more respect because of his profession and its perceived superiority to sex work.

Unluckily for his prosecutors and victims, Cream was prone to relocating fairly often and freely, even though, as Reiter recounts, he had an alarming habit:

> [He] left a trail of dead women in his wake, [but] his victims' sudden and excruciating deaths repeatedly failed to trigger official investigation. [...] Primarily [Cream] targeted women seeking abortions and women working

---

[27] Reiter, 58.

[28] Reiter begins her article with a quote from "The Speckled Band," which was first published in *The Strand.* As she rightly says, scholars have noted similarities between Grimesby Roylott, the ex-military doctor in Doyle's story, and Cream. Doyle, however, omits any suggestion of sexual intrigue in “The Speckled Band.” Roylott's paranoid brutality was motivated by avarice and debt, not anything sexual. See "The Speckled Band" in *Favourite Sherlock Holmes Stories: Selected by the Author* (Atlantic Books Crime Classics, 2009), 1-29.

[29] See Angus Mclaren, *A Prescription for Murder: The Victorian Serial Killings of Dr. Thomas Neill Cream* (University of Chicago Press, 1995) and Reiter.

[30] See Randall Sandke, *Where the Dark and the Light Folks Meet: Race and the Mythology, Politics, and Business of Jazz* (Scarecrow Press, 2010).

> as prostitutes – women regularly vilified by society. He counted on the silence and shame associated with abortion and was protected by public indifference to the fate of prostitutes.[31]

Though at first sentenced to life imprisonment in the United States, he was eventually granted clemency – probably due to a bribe – and freed.[32] He continued indulging in his penchant for murdering the "vilified" women against whom he carried a marked grudge. Cream's story was not stranger than fiction. It was commonplace, particularly after the Ripper had paved the way for him in headlines. He was being charged with his third official murder by the time he was forty-two, but the overall number of people he killed is unknown. It could be more substantial than the mere handful he was assigned in court. "By employing poison (primarily strychnine) under the guise of 'medicine,' his violence could be misattributed or misinterpreted," writes Reiter, "unless an autopsy was performed."[33]

Authorities were reluctant to question Cream until later in his criminal career, just as they were originally reticent to treat prostitutes' deaths as suspicious. Other supposed corruptions, like alcoholism, further incriminated the women, and were convenient explanations that could also explicate their deaths. Despite claims to the contrary made by detective inspectors, the blackmail threats that Cream sent to fellow medical men Joseph Harper and William Henry seemed to be more offensive to the court than murder. There was a pattern in how Cream was convicted, and it had been set during his residence in Illinois. Reiter writes:

> Not until Cream poisoned Daniel Stott, age 61 and Cream's only known male victim, was enough evidence gathered to finally convict him. One suspects that a male, middle class, 'respectable' victim [...] may also have tipped the scales in this case, an early indication that the gender and class of Cream's victims would be crucial in determining the response of law enforcement agencies.[34]

Boundaries between decent and indecent behavior, categories of respectability, and the illusion that crime was specific to certain classes and genders of people (namely the lower classes, and often, poor women), were all issues during the 1892 Cream trial. Having already been confronted with a serial murderer of prostitutes who went unknown and

---

[31] Reiter, 59.
[32] It was not until Scotland Yard began to suspect Cream was the "Lambeth Poisoner" that anyone contacted American authorities for information. They then learned that he had a criminal record dating back to August 1880. See Mclaren and Reiter.
[33] Reiter, 59.
[34] Ibid., 60.

unnamed – except for a newspaper moniker that stuck – the American public was enthralled by a pernicious doctor who also targeted these women. It was, though, more indignant about the other individuals he compromised or killed.

Further, assessing and asserting the right kind of victimization became of paramount importance within the media. A "unified front" was created "against Cream and the prostitutes"[35] so that police, detectives, and doctors would not be discredited by the actions of a select person of their ranks that had gained infamy. In other words, even though Lou Harvey, a sex worker who escaped Cream by pretending to swallow a poisoned pill he gave to her, testified in court, this was not meant to generate sympathy for her ilk or suggest that the murdered women were more victimized than anyone else had been. They, instead, were more like living photographs or taxonomies to be used for restoring proper order and bringing justice.

As women, they were already at a social disadvantage, but as prostitutes, they were just as, if not more, unlawful and immoral than Cream. After all, they were the perpetrators of criminal acts that put gender and family identities at risk. They compromised physical safety, too. Therefore, they could not possibly be victims to the same degree of severity as anyone else. Although the press cast Cream as a renegade (not to be thought of alongside other physicians), the prostitutes who testified against – or were murdered by – him were still, in many ways, less trustworthy. These social dynamics were echoed in popular fiction. In my penultimate section, I highlight a fictional artist's model and mistress who, with the help of the famous Mister Sherlock Holmes and Doctor John Watson, brought an abusive, murdering ex-lover to justice. While scholars like Reiter have acknowledged the influence of Cream's trial on Doyle's fiction, specifically citing the vitriolic Doctor Grimesby Roylott of "The Speckled Band" as a caricature of Cream, "The Illustrious Client" retains a high and more directly recognizable number of the same figures and tropes. What is more, parallels between the story and E.J. Bellocq's rediscovered portraits have molded the preconceived notions about maker and models that they still carry.

"But I am what [he] made me": The Storyville Portraits as "lust diary"

Descended from Edgar Allan Poe's genius, eccentric French detective C. Auguste Dupin,[36] who was active in the 1840s, popular sleuths were still a foil to the disorder of city life (with all its crime and violence) in the 1890s. Most would curb their more bohemian and

---

[35] Ibid., 87.
[36] Edgar Allan Poe, "The Murders of the Rue Morgue," (1841), URL: http://poestories.com/text.php?file=murders.

flamboyant qualities – such as drug use or intimated libertinism – by the turn of the century. This signified both growing unease and a continued fascination with surveillance, sexual intrigue, and associations with criminal folk. Sherlock Holmes, debatably the most popular detective to emerge from the latter half of the century, embodied these issues by taking on cases of sexually charged blackmail in "A Scandal in Bohemia" (1891),[37] "The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton" (1904),[38] and "The Illustrious Client" (1924). Intriguingly, these tales all involve the use of photographs or documents to demonstrate the danger of inappropriate social and sexual associations. I want to draw attention to the same archetypes that permeate our readings of the Storyville Portraits: they are often seen as tragic, while Bellocq has been – depending on the decade – described as a cripple, an outcast, simply strange,[39] or even an "invert"[40] who was not sexually attracted to women.

I evoke Holmes here because Bellocq's clandestine portraits can be powerfully compared to the hidden "lust diary" of "The Illustrious Client," in which Holmes's antagonist is the womanizing murderer Baron Adelbert Gruner.[41] Gruner's "lust diary" illustrates the full implications of the discourses scholars have used to make sense of Bellocq and his portraits. Fictional Victorian detectives, however – unlike photographers – rarely fully immersed themselves in places that were reminiscent of Storyville. This is equally true of Holmes, who often voices his disgust with Gruner's immorality. As the tale unravels, readers learn from Miss Kitty Winter, the friend of Holmes's criminal informant Shinwell Johnson, that Gruner keeps a book of his past mistresses. According to Kitty, who is all but said to be a sex worker or courtesan, it includes "snapshot photographs, names, details, everything about [us]."[42] Kitty's role in the story is like Lou Harvey's in Cream's trial: without her, the villain could not have been exposed, and uncovering this

---

[37] The King of Bohemia seeks Holmes's help in retrieving an incriminating photograph of himself with his ex-mistress, the American "adventuress" (a word often used to refer to a promiscuous or opportunistic woman) Irene Adler. See "A Scandal in Bohemia," originally published in *The Strand* (July 1891) or alternatively available in contemporary editions of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*. When the King gives a false title to Holmes in the hopes that Holmes will not recognize who he truly is, it is almost certainly a nod to Rodolphe's true title (the Grand Duke of Gérolstein) in *Les Mystéres de Paris*.

[38] See "The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton," first published in 1904 as part of *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*. Further, the titular antagonist was based off accused blackmailer Charles Augustus Howell, who in 1890 was found in Chelsea with his throat slit. Crimes like these were an enormous inspiration for fiction during the turn of the century. See Nicholas Freeman, *Drama, Disaster and Disgrace in Late Victorian Britain* (Edinburgh University Press, 2011).

[39] David Bowman, "Strange and vanished flesh," Salon.com, URL: http://www.salon.com/2002/01/25/bellocq/.

[40] In Louis Malle's "Pretty Baby," a madam calls him an "invert:" see Polly Platt, "Pretty Baby" screenplay, transcription PDF via Scriptfly.com. "Invert" was a term for homosexuals taken from sexologist Havelock Ellis's late nineteenth century work. His full *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* are online, URL: http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/author/2654.

[41] Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993), 1042.

[42] Ibid., 1048.

hidden item becomes the key to preventing Gruner's marriage to a society woman. While the book serves as something for Holmes to find and isolate as evidence, the implication of what it contains is immensely troubling.

Ultimately, it does lead to the Baron's downfall: it is the material center of his unpalatable activities. Although Gruner murdered his last wife, his invasive records of women represent the pinnacle of his deviousness, and together comprised "a beastly book – a book no man, even if he had come from the gutter, could have put together."[43] By implication of her inclusion in the book, Kitty is portrayed as a woman of ill repute. Watson describes her as possessing a "fierce energy,"[44] which reinforces the assumption that Kitty is neither prim nor especially feminine. Doyle also provides an unconscious commentary by shifting focus from Kitty to Gruner's scandalous proclivity: she is incidental on her own, one of many women of her kind, yet she becomes instrumental to the hero's genius. Without her, Holmes would not have discovered this devious book, but if there were no women like her, Doyle seems to imply, the book could not exist. Though a more enlightened portrayal of a woman who, if she was not directly in "the trade" was still from a 1902 circle of what she calls "Hell, London,"[45] Kitty's role in "The Illustrious Client" is – despite her language of revenge and her own misfortune at Gruner's hands – one of the savior or penitent. She is a lower class woman who works to preserve the life and honor of her distinguished double, Miss Violet de Merville, Gruner's new fiancée.

By aiding Holmes in this endeavor, Kitty absolves herself of whatever past she had. Conversely, he solves the case, upholds social order, and prevents Violet from coming to harm. However, there is no such purpose to the Storyville Portraits, no matter how much we would like to imagine they are indications of something sordid: these were all satisfying points for Doyle's readers, but the portraits will probably never be able to claim the satisfying closure of a Holmesian tale. They do not possess the shock of a Ripper postmortem, either. They linger at the periphery of Storyville's stories, perhaps going without sustained comment because they remind us of what has been purposefully forgotten. Unlike Gruner's book, they do not appear to serve as a trophy and are ambiguous in their intent. They are also not shameful in the sense that they are lewd.

Gruner, conversely, counts "on the silence and shame"[46] of his past mistresses, as well as the implicit trust of his new fiancée, to protect him. Further, his status means that

---

[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid., 1059.

others are deeply reticent to challenge his assertions of innocence – even when he is suspected of dealing in bribery, blackmail, and murder. As Sir James Damery tells Watson and Holmes when he asks if they will accept the case, Gruner is not above all suspicion. He is merely too clever and affluent to be convicted without explicit evidence. "He has been fortunate in some rather shady speculations and is a rich man," says Damery of the Baron, "which, naturally, makes him a more dangerous antagonist."[47]

Further, Gruner is a "brilliant, forceful rascal" who has convinced his fiancée that he is innocent of all accusations, and Holmes concedes that he must indeed be "a complex mind."[48] When pressed to reveal more details of the engagement between Violet, the daughter of a distinguished, retired British general, and Gruner, Damery replies exasperatedly:

> The cunning devil has told her every unsavory public scandal of his past life, but always in such a way as to make himself out to be an innocent martyr. She absolutely accepts his version and will listen to no other.[49]

Gruner has adeptly manipulated Violet's feelings to ensure her loyalty to him. This is in spite of his history with women: "he is said to have the whole sex at his mercy and to have made ample use of the fact."[50] The polite allusion to his many affairs foreshadows macabre knowledge to come, while reminding readers that Violet knows about that aspect of his reputation. It hints at the idea, too, that apart from setting his sights on women of her standing, he was previously involved with prostitutes or mistresses. After all, Damery uses the words "shady" and "rascal," which were hardly qualities associated with moral men. However, Winter discloses Gruner's most disturbing secret: the "lust diary."
With no qualms, Kitty introduces herself to Watson and Holmes as an "old mate" of the reformed convict "Porky" Shinwell Johnson,[51] which means that like Shinwell, she is affiliated with London's criminal subcultures. Watson describes Johnson's history in an aside; Doyle seems uninterested in creating an origin story for Kitty outside of the connection she has to Gruner.

In effect, she is a plot device who also serves to establish and offset Violet's identity properly. One could argue the same of Violet: the two women, different as they are, provide the game for two brilliant men. Most discussions of the Storyville Portraits until very recently have, despite showing compassion for the models, always remark most

[47] Ibid., 1044.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.

upon Bellocq's mysterious intentions. While this may be because we know little about the individual women, this focus on Bellocq is comfortable and convenient within a popular culture tradition of men who are connected with "fallen" women monopolizing the women's stories. As Kitty assures Holmes:

> You needn't go into my past, Mr. Holmes. That's neither here nor there. But I am what Adelbert Gruner made me. If I could pull him down! [...] Oh, if only I could pull him into the pit where he has pushed so many![52]

In effect, most perceptions of the models in the Storyville Portraits echo her words.

In general, viewers assume that Bellocq "made" these women, regardless of his intentions. And however obliquely, Kitty blames Gruner for her present state. Readers are left to wonder what exactly he has made of her, and why she remains vengeful, when the conversation swiftly moves toward a discussion of the Baron's current life. Kitty and Holmes address Violet's awareness of the Baron's past, and Kitty offers to reason with Violet in person, which would be a breech of social conduct between women of different ranks. However, such different women often passed one another in public spaces, especially by the turn of the century. The conversation goes as follows:

> 'Couldn't you lay proofs before her silly eyes?'
> 'Well, can you help us do so?'
> 'Ain't I a proof myself? If I stood before her and told her [...]'
> 'Would you do this?'
> 'Would I? Would I not?'
> 'Well, it might be worth trying. But he has told her most of his sins.'
> 'I'll lay he didn't tell her all,' said Miss Winter.[53]

The two ladies are part of vastly different circumstances. Just as Kitty was, Violet is in physical and emotional danger as long as she remains with Gruner. But unlike Kitty, Violet is not anonymous enough to hope that any scandal that might involve her could remain private. She is also not expendable: being part of a respectable, well-connected family, she is not the subject of "public indifference" (or scorn) like an artist's model or a sex worker.[54]

By making her offer, Kitty presents herself as an insider and tells Watson and Holmes about the "brown leather book with a lock" that Gruner secreted away in his study.[55] This locked book is a collection of trophies, an arrangement of conquests – not, as Watson later assumes, purely for old lovers' mementos. It is not even as pragmatic as a

[52] Ibid, 1048.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Reiter, 59.
[55] Doyle, 1048.

madam's black book of information about clients. As Kitty says, it houses a large assemblage of women's portraits and Gruner's notes. It is incriminating against the Baron, but most of all toward his past mistresses. Although some New Orleanian souvenir books contained at least as many photographs as this mysterious book would have – and readers are never told explicitly what it contains – they are overt. Blue Books, for example, were meant to be read by many men, and did not, according to Pamela Arceneaux, contain lewd images or text.[56]

Conversely, the "brown volume" that Holmes eventually takes back to 221B Baker Street menaces the women it contains. It even inspires unease among the men, who might otherwise be interested; it silently menaces instead of intriguing them to look at it. Watson asks – perhaps endeavoring to find something relatable about the case – "Is it his love diary?" and Holmes replies, flatly, "Or his lust diary. Call it what you will. The moment the woman told us of it I realized what a tremendous weapon was there, if we could but lay our hands on it."[57] While this "tremendous weapon" could be used for extortion or blackmail, and something like it might have been used for that purpose in Storyville – almost to the point of rousing little interest amongst other instances of foul play – Holmes means to use the book to persuade Violet to end her engagement. His role is to uphold the law, and further than it, morality. Unambiguously, he states, "It is [Gruner's] moral side, not his physical, which we have to destroy."[58]

On the other hand, Kitty only has the power to mar Gruner's persuasive physicality: she sneaks into his house, attacks him with vitriol, and leaves him permanently disfigured. Watson, who was present during the abrupt assault, recounts its effect on Gruner's face, ears, and neck in almost mournful, homosocial terms. "The features I had admired a few minutes before were now like some beautiful painting over which the artist had passed over a wet and foul sponge," he says. "They were blurred, discolored, inhuman, terrible."[59] In the end, Gruner's physical appearance mirrors his internal corruption, but his assortment of women remains fully intact.

The Storyville Portraits are not particularly manipulative, and definitely not in the same fashion as the "lust diary" of "The Illustrious Client." Bellocq's only known similarity to Gruner would have been his good looks when he was a young man; as Rex Rose says, he was probably "a Storyville Dandy," which leaves one to imagine that the district

---

[55] Pamela Arceneaux, in discussion with the author, 24 May 2016.
[57] Doyle, 1058.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid., 1057.

possessed its own fashionable set (or regulars, at least, whether or not they were fashionable) like other demimondes.[60] This said, the figure of the prostitute (as well as the heinous blackmailer or murderer) as presented – even obliquely, since Kitty is only overtly named as a mistress and artist's model, but those two roles were closely allied with prostitution in the nineteenth century – by Doyle refracts our viewings of the Storyville Portraits. These tropes are embedded in our conceptualizations of Storyville, of New Orleans, and of the models in the portraits.

Regardless of why Bellocq made his photographs, they do still amount to a collection of women. In itself, this can be regarded as strange – if not downright sinister to some. As a fictitious creature, the Baron had his beginnings in vivid newspaper reports and the villainous men of sensational literature. Like Doctor Cream, he was an attractive murderer, and like the Ripper, he was good at not being caught committing his crimes. Doyle's increasingly outlandish writing shows how his imagination had tired of Sherlock Holmes by 1924, which was when he wrote "The Illustrious Client." As a result, his stories became more supportive of a nostalgic, fantastical Victorian age that relied on popular culture. Similarly, what we know of Bellocq is disjointed, questionable, and melodramatic: it often reads as sensationally as one of Doyle's short stories and has been just as fabricated in many respects.[61]

The singular "lust diary" within the Holmes canon – itself steeped in criminality, popular culture, and pathology, like histories of vice districts and Storyville specifically – pairs well with the Storyville Portraits and their serendipitous origin. John Szarkowski writes:

> A plausible guess might be that [Bellocq's] working life reached from about 1895 through the first four decades [of the twentieth century]. The thirty-four pictures reproduced here are selected from a group of eighty-nine plates – portraits of Storyville prostitutes – which were discovered in Bellocq's desk after his death. These negatives were made about 1912. As far as it is known, they constitute the only fragment of his work to have survived.[62]

---

[60] Rex Rose, "The Last Days of Ernest J. Bellocq," *Exquisite Corpse: A Journal of Letters and Life* 10 (2002), as posted to "American Suburb X," URL: http://www.americansuburbx.com/2011/02/e-j-bellocq-the-last-days-of-ernest-j-bellocq.html.

[61] Al Rose's influential *Storyville, New Orleans, Being an Authentic, Illustrated Account of the Notorious Red-Light District* (University of Alabama Press, 1974), has few citations (though it does have a bibliography) – and as Pamela Arceneaux pointed out to me, some of what he believed to be genuine primary source material (namely a Blue Book) was a hoax. His son, Rex Rose, has tried to rectify the discrepancies about Bellocq in his own biographical essay on the photographer, which uses archival sources mostly from the state of Louisiana and the city of New Orleans. See "The Last Days of Ernest J. Bellocq."

[62] John Szarkowski, "Bellocq," in *E.J. Bellocq: Storyville Portraits – Photographs from the New Orleans Red-Light District, circa 1912,* ed. John Szarkowski (Meriden: The Museum of Modern Art, 1970), 6.

While this "fragment" of his work does not humiliate the women who were involved, and further, there are no notes attached to the images that have been included in any monographs, the fact that it seemed to be relatively private – a personal exercise for the photographer – is the source of many questions and few answers. At the very least, the secretive nature of Bellocq's portraits must be considered if we are to fully engage with them. Perhaps this secrecy can be interpreted as a reaction against the frenetic responses to the District, though: they complicate the prostitute's archetypical presence in discourses about vice and crime by not affirming her deviant nature. The models they contain are more reminiscent of Kitty Winter or Lou Harvey than the caricatured illustration of Annie Chapman. They can radiate melancholia: the women are enigmatic, but instead of theatricality, they possess quietude. They are what Bellocq "made them," as Kitty says of herself and her relationship with Gruner, yet they remain individuals with a variety of figures and expressions.

A salient question to ask about his work, then, is whether or not it was intended to be sold alongside the massive amounts of pornography that Storyville generated. When asked about the popularity of pornography in Storyville, "Adele" – a woman who, apparently, was the "subject of several of Bellocq portraits" (though no one tells readers which portraits are Adele's)[63] – said, "There were so many taken, I don't know why they're so scarce [today]. Lots of, you know, dirty pictures."[64] Even if there "were so many taken," they were ephemeral items that originated from what was commonly regarded as a den of vice, so "dirty pictures" would hold little value in any sense after Storyville's demise. Logically, many would have been destroyed and they would thus become "scarce," akin to bits of fallout or refuse rather than treated as objects and images with historical or aesthetic importance.

Still, the Storyville Portraits are not at all the most explicit examples of fin de siècle pornography, whether from the United States or Great Britain, an idea I will return to in Chapter Four. Emily Epstein Landau asserts that Lulu White commissioned a series of explicit photographs of herself having sex with a dog, as well.[65] So, we can surmise that if she or anyone else wanted Bellocq to take more risqué photographs, they would have had no trouble broaching the subject. Szarkowski's belief that "it [was] more likely that Bellocq

---

[63] Szarkowski, 7-18.

[64] Adele, as quoted in *E.J. Bellocq: Storyville Portraits – Photographs from the New Orleans Red-Light District, circa 1912*, 15.

[65] Landau, *Spectacular Wickedness*, 139. Today, the photographs are in the Kinsey Institute Archives in Bloomington, Indiana. Along with this series, she notes there are several of White posing with a (white) man dressed as a sailor.

photographed the women of Storyville because he found them irresistibly compelling" is probably the most accurate assumption we can make, despite the somewhat maudlin suggestion that Bellocq somehow had access to their personal confidences.[66] Of course, that is what we might like to imagine as viewers: it is compelling to think about the conversations that indubitably occurred between the women and the man behind his camera, and this is easily part of what makes the portraits so haunting and affective. They suggest, but never affirm. Many of the portraits are of naked women, for example, but nudity does not automatically create eroticism. And if later testimonies were any indication, pornographers were rife, but Bellocq was not one; prostitutes were used to their presence and would have no motive to lie if he was making "dirty pictures."

We have no reason to doubt this was the case, regardless of whether Adele was truly one of Bellocq's models – or just a creation based off an amalgamation of several, now nameless, women and jumbled hearsay. Perhaps disappointingly in comparison to tales of intrigue and crime from their home city, the portraits' survival is one of the most remarkable things about them. They have origins which have been even more confused by numerous retellings, research complicated by the presence of both urban legends and verifiable events, and large amounts of editorial – not to mention artistic[67] – license. If anything, the portraits are an ideal case study of how nonlinear history can be in theory and practice, especially when vice is involved. More significance is attributed to the city they came from and their creator, but not particularly to what they portray within their own confines.

"I am just aching to take my axe and go down Canal Street": Violence as a convention of reform

In 1894, Laura Ormiston Chant, a British "suffragist, novelist, poet, and nurse"[68] said "the Love that overcame Negro slavery in the United States shall overcome the white slavery of London, of England."[69] Contrary to what Chant claimed, "Love" had very little to do with how "white slaves" (a theme I will return to in the next chapter, though in New York and New Orleans rather than London) were understood, spoken about, or treated. Misogynistic

---

[66] Szarkowski, 13.
[67] Natasha Trethewey uses the portraits as the inspiration for her poetic narrator in *Bellocq's Ophelia* (Graywolf Press, 2002), and Louis Malle infamously cast a twelve-year-old Brooke Shields as "Violet" in "Pretty Baby" (1978) – in which she recreated one of Bellocq's portraits of a young, nude woman on a wicker chaise lounge.
[67] Karl Beckson, "Prostitutes on the Promenade," in *London in the 1890s: A Cultural History* (W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1992), 120.
[68] Laura Ormiston Chant, as quoted in Karl Beckson, "Prostitutes on the Promenade," in *London in the 1890s: A Cultural History* (W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1992), 120.

violence had been demonstrably normalized in transatlantic fiction and mass media – which, given the cyclical and fickle nature of fin de siècle and early twentieth century reporting that Ryan Cordell highlights, could be counted as a genre of fiction[70] – and, ultimately, this meant brutality became part of the rhetoric of (and criticisms against) reformers. Already embedded in law enforcement against vice, violence toward women and sex workers infused discussions about (and held by) female reformers, leading to inseparable parallels between crime and justifiable brutality. Consequently, a virulent cycle of language, images, and action meant, with no shortage of irony, that those who thought they worked on the side of fairness or justice were governed by assumptions that "deviants" had to be met with unflinching force in order to be "cured" for their own good.

The perspectives of purported ex-sex workers illustrate the complexities and paradoxes of these beliefs, as do those of reformers. But underlying all of them, especially by the early twentieth century, was a rich sediment of literature depicting slums and vice (*Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* or *Nana,* for example), sensational journalism that thrived on crimes more frightening than any horror fiction, detective stories, and pornography (and much of the pornography was spurred by popular literature like *Nana* or *Trilby).* All of its production or reception had been swayed by grisly realities like the Ripper and Cream cases: it was no longer possible to think about prostitution, or even sexual liaisons, without concurrent thoughts of voyeurism and murder. By implication, the sense that "bad" women must have also had deficient intellects and emotional capacities grew stronger; no sane person would choose a life that was both a crime and permeated by it.

Yet in her 1909 autobiography *The Underworld Sewer*, American ex-madam Josie Washburn rebuffed readers who assumed prostitutes were unemotional and unfeeling. At the time, that readership would have still comprised a large number of people. Washburn, who had once been a sex worker herself in Nebraska, openly refuted the view that such a woman must be inhuman, almost demonic, to partake in the life. "To the warped minds who believe that a fallen woman is incapable of possessing a human emotion," she says, recounting humiliating public raids that were often carried out by police on her boarding house (brothel), "it would be useless to explain our feelings."[71] Without hiding her disdain, calling those who could – or would – not empathize with prostitutes "warped," Washburn made an incisive, rare criticism against society rather than, as was common even at the turn of the century, women who turned to vice as an occupation.

---

[69] Ryan Cordell, seminar at the University of East Anglia, 11 May 2016.

[71] Josie Washburn, *The Underworld Sewer: A Prostitute Reflects on Life in the Trade, 1871-1909* (Bison, 1997), 30.

As Gary Krist explains, many anti-prostitution activists in New Orleans "held astounding beliefs about eugenics," believed that deviance could be “read” and prevented, and would unhesitatingly act on these beliefs for the betterment of the public. For example, Kate and Jean Gordon, reformers who arranged for the sterilization of at least one girl whom they regarded as sexually deviant (and "destitute" in the day's vernacular) were heads of the Milne Asylum for Destitute Girls and, writes Gary Krist:

> Advocated for the forced sterilization of children who showed signs of a future in crime, prostitution, or alcoholism: 'Took Lucille Decoux to the Women's Dispensary [for an appendectomy follow-up],' Jean wrote in her diary. 'This was an excellent opportunity to have her sterilized... and thus end any feeble-minded progeny coming from Lucille.'[72]

To a large degree, the feelings of the "feeble-minded" were believed to be non-existent. Knowing this was a pervasive belief, Washburn declared that "those who are less burdened with ignorance and prejudice regarding us will have a faint comprehension of our sufferings when I say that each time we were taken up in that way [raided by the police] we felt like committing suicide."[73]

Almost without exception, Washburn characterized her “girls” – admitting that she was at one time a moneyed madam – and other women she knew in "the trade"[74] as victims of a corrupted system: individuals who had been failed by their communities and government. They were not simply products of their biology or an unavoidable, gendered immorality. Even more remarkably, she posed a challenge to the rhetoric of "fallen" women as necessarily deviant criminals who were somehow intrinsically fated to commit indecent acts and tempt others to do the same. Washburn's women were definitely prostitutes, but none were necessarily criminals. They were *treated* as criminal. "[The police] would pile us all in the wagon like a lot of criminals" after any supposed transgressions had been committed, Washburn says, "and carry us through the streets"[75] in highly public displays of discipline and shame that were intended to make the women into examples. But for her, prostitutes were explicitly not lawbreakers in the same sense as violent offenders. This evidences a rare, and eventually more common, attitude in spite of her melodramatic language.

---

[72] Krist, 229.
[73] Ibid.
[74] This is Washburn's term for prostitution as a business or job; she uses it both in the full title of her autobiography and in the text, which suggests that she wanted to maintain some sense of social gentility for her readership. It is not an absolutely neutral choice, but it does emphasize the idea of prostitution as work more than a personal moral failing on the woman's part.
[75] Washburn, 29-30.

She believed that the criminal quality of the prostitute was allied with her performative sexuality and especially her occupational role, not her gender. Washburn writes having conducted business predominately in the Midwest, but she astutely situates prostitution as the sector of business that it was in many American cities by the turn of the century. As Beckson notes (citing the final, 1902 volume of *Life and Labour of the People in London* by Charles Booth), Gilfoyle states that engaging in full time or casual prostitution was a viable supplement to the low incomes generated by more acceptable occupations for women, such as teaching or being a seamstress: "As women entered the world of wage labor in larger numbers after the 1870s, prostitution was attractive to some. Most female occupations paid very low and inadequate wages."[76] As shown by powerful Storyville madams and some of their girls, however, sex work could grant a higher income and in some cases a better quality of life than remaining part of the "proper" workforce.

Crucially, Gilfoyle says, "Willingness on the part of some women to choose prostitution over other forms of labor reflected an alternative attitude regarding their bodies."[77] This suggests how representations of the female body, sexuality, and prostitution were also changing. But reformers, Washburn included among their number despite her more liberal beliefs, were often most disturbed by the "very different" idea "of the meaning of coitus" that sex workers – purely via their choice in trade, which was technically a criminal offence under the law – made manifest.[78] This freeness toward the body and what might be done with it, as well as the implication that women could actually enjoy sex, or materially benefit from having extramarital or premarital sex, also impacted the ways in which women who were not sex workers chose to conduct themselves. What it reflected, more than an intentional subcultural consciousness centered on subversive sexual identity, was "the wide range of female sexual behavior" that belied an expansive "variety of personal economies and financial circumstances that encouraged women to prostitute."[79]

Reformers generally did not embrace sex – whether for money, recreation, or both – as a liberating or empowering activity for women; on the contrary, many feminists believed that women should have equal social rights to men and not be subservient to them, but sex was best situated within a marriage. Although turn of the century hysteria about prostitution was different than debates around the topic at the beginning and middle of the century, focusing on capitalist wage structures and ideologies of purity as well as

---

[76] Beckson, 111, and Gilfoyle, 287.
[77] Gilfoyle, 287.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid., 289.

violence, it still oversimplified the "variety" of circumstances that made selling sex a more attractive and feasible move for many women. If, like Washburn, authors and activists did on some level concede that poverty, the need to survive, or simply a desire for "fine clothes and luxuries"[80] were powerful motivators for women to become sex workers, they often spun them into tragedies rather than pragmatic actions.

As researchers and scholars have established, like London, New Orleans was a battlefield between the presence of vice, and citizens who were keenly interested in divesting the city of its sinful industries.[81] This battle can be glimpsed in letters to newspaper editors, which expressed decided opinions not only on vice itself, but on how to curtail it, as well. These responses varied according to the author's gender and political persuasion, but rarely demonstrated empathy for any sex workers. The language used in these letters was often reminiscent of descriptions of sexual violence. Further, it reinforced specific gender binaries in which women were supposed to be subservient while pathologizing manhood and womanhood. On May 31, 1914, E. C. G. Ferguson, president of the Arena Club, wrote to the editor of the *Times-Picayune*, convinced that "the voter [...] the maker and enforcer of public morals and all law" should "enforce his own will on the community even for its own good."[82] Ferguson wrote:

> It is with profound gratitude that the Arena Club notes the proposed action of the clean manhood of New Orleans relative to eliminating the "restricted district of our city.
>
> This step is a verification of [our] position that the abolishment of that district was man's work, for only the voter, molder of public opinion, the maker and enforcer of public morals and all law can enforce his own will on the community even for its own good. The thanks of Louisiana womanhood are due the men who are in very truth and in fact to be the "protectors" of the youth of both sexes, the "sons of women" as well as their daughters, of our city and State. God speed you, gentlemen, in your wise and just efforts to remove from our city's escutcheon the shameful blot now on it, of having a "law-protected" red-light district.[83]

Several days later, William C. Harder said in his letter to the editor that the current "coterie of vice crusaders" was going about confronting Storyville in the wrong way – that their

---

[80] Beckson, 111.

[81] Asbury gives us perhaps the earliest contemporary history of vice in New Orleans. See also: Thomas Ruys Smith, *Southern Queen: New Orleans in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Continuum, 2011), and Alecia P. Long, *The Great Southern Babylon: Sex, Race, and Respectability in New Orleans, 1865-1920* (Louisiana University Press, 2004). They elaborate in many fashions upon tensions between citizens, reformers, and vice. This is true of many other scholars, including Court Carney, Emily Epstein Landau, and Emily Clark, among others, so it hardly seems possible to study New Orleans at the turn of the century without acknowledging the many struggles that often resulted in hostile exchanges and bloody crimes.

[82] *Times-Picayune*, May 31, 1914.

[83] Ibid.

focus on redrafting laws was "unnecessary" because ones that should have better controlled or ultimately be used to eradicate Storyville already existed.[84]

Harder explained the "Storyville law" in great detail, ending with the complaint:

> But it is not enforced. The police department's hands are seemingly tied. Therefore, you dear vice crusaders [...] your only recourse will be to strive to get rid of our present city ring of administration at the next election, and with it will naturally go to oblivion the present lethargic police department, to be replaced by a police department that will have hands free to enforce the various laws upon this social evil.[85]

Because many of the most notorious "vice crusaders" were women, Harder's disdainful tone implies that he directed his words at them. And like Ferguson's, his terms are extremely bodily: the "police department's hands" are tied; if they are replaced with a new order of police, they "will have hands free to enforce the laws." The entire topic of vice had been saturated with corporeal, blunt discourse. Indeed, Lottie Watcher demonstrates how this consciousness even affected her perception of the female anti-vice campaigners. In her letter to the *Times-Picayune*, she declared:

> I do think that Miss Jean Gordon and her followers should attend to feminine affairs, and let men's work alone.
> Women should stay home. Political work and speeches are not in their line. Men were made to rule. [... Gordon and her followers] should not try to gain notoriety and criticism by outstepping their bounds.[86]

In an ironic turn of events, during the last few years Storyville was in business, female "vice crusaders" were coming under fire for exhibiting similar traits to Storyville's female sex workers. They, too, disregarded normal boundaries and took on mannish behavior. Some of the more adamant reformers, such as the Gordon sisters, were natives, while others detested New Orleans because of its reputation and not because they lived within the city.

Carrie Nation, an outspoken activist known throughout the United States for wielding hatchets against saloons, is exemplary of the intense conviction that came with this belief. Like her supporters, easily some of Washburn's "warped minds," she maintained that prostitutes should be reformed and became more hostile about them over time. In a display of aggression directed toward prostitutes rather than saloon landlords, she entered a Butte, Montana dancehall and engaged in a physical altercation with madam

---

[84] *Times-Picayune*, June 4, 1914.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid.

May Malloy during January 1910. Malloy, however, tossed Nation from her establishment complete with a "wrenched elbow." The incident made national papers, generally with Nation's role being cast as that of comical victim instead of moral crusader.[87] Interestingly, journalistic reports in more socially liberal – or more "lawless" and generally less federalized – locations tended to treat Nation as a joke as her escapades grew bolder. What this suggests, then, is that there was skepticism toward female reformers, even though admittedly Nation was one of the easiest and most convenient to parody with her self-claimed name (Carry or Carrie A. Nation, though she was born "Carrie Amelia Moore") and bombastic rhetoric. Ironically, Nation did not seem to realize, or never acknowledged, that many of the women in the Blue Books also took working names.

Before the fracas with Malloy, though, Nation passed through New Orleans and had decided opinions about the city. Unhesitatingly, she relayed these to a *New Orleans Item* reporter in 1907. Upon being asked how long she would stay, she replied, "Just as long as it takes me to go from this train to the one for Washington [...] I would like to stay here a week and teach you wicked people how to live, but business calls me East and I am compelled to go straight through."[88] She had not properly visited New Orleans yet, which the reporter pointed out; her response was characteristic of a woman whose reputation had been made by taking hatchets to local watering holes across the United States. She pugnaciously retorted:

> I have not [...] But I am just aching to take my axe and go down Canal Street, bursting out the plate glass fronts of the grog shops and other vices of sin I read about that are here. [...] Why, New Orleans is one of the biggest drinking places in these United States [...] I have seen people who have spent some time here and they tell me that you are not in it unless you can put down a keg of beer and a flask of whiskey every twelve hours.[89]

For Nation, alcohol was deeply allied with all "vices of sin" but especially sensual gratification. She did not make the short trip to Storyville from the train station because she was only staying enough to change trains. One imagines that her urge to dismantle it was deeply pressed, that day. However, what resonates most about her remarks is that the District was not the only worthless part of New Orleans: the entire city was full of "wicked people" who were complicit and benefitting from the vices that surrounded them. This was the reputation the city had inherited; turn of the century spurred a resurgence in the

---

[87] *Los Angeles Herald* 37 (119), January 28, 1910.
[88] "Carrie Nation to Bring Her Hatchet to this City – she says New Orleans is wicked City and needs Reforming – passes through on Way East," *The New Orleans Item*, May 12, 1907 (transcript via Louisiana Works Progress Administration, n.d.)
[89] Ibid.

national perception of New Orleans as sensually, sexually charged. Such a lawless place, it was imagined, needed to be met with – and would encourage – more unflinching violence and discipline.

Conclusion: "Bellocq never said anything and they always let him go" – Imposed Criminalities

The crucial connections between this chapter's discussions and the Storyville Portraits are the beliefs – as portrayed in print culture and popular literature, largely – that are used to conceptualize Bellocq's portraits as a portrayal, or the result, of something shameful and criminal. High-profile criminal cases, Kitty Winter's contributions to Baron Gruner's downfall, and the tone of female reformers (as well as the backlash against them) in New Orleans demonstrate how easily facts and fictions support the idea of the portraits as secrets that had to be kept hidden due to their subject. This perception does not have as many consequences for Bellocq as it does for his models: they are, once again, cast as a locus of corruption and violence either instigated by, or directed toward, them.

The defaced Storyville Portraits often rouse concerns over violence toward women, if not specifically violence toward sex workers. Of the canonical portraits, some of the most conspicuous are the ones where – for an ultimately unknown reason – models' heads have been gouged out, leaving behind a faceless body. Friedlander's efforts to replicate Bellocq's printing process suggests that the scratches most likely occurred while the negatives' plates were still wet, which means that Bellocq would have had to make the marks himself.[90] In several photographs, this appears to be hastily or sloppily done with part of a face still left behind, while in others, black scratches have eradicated any identifiable features. Plate 33 [Figure 14] is one of the most dramatic defaced portraits; it was also made from one of the most physically damaged negatives, which adds to its visual impact. A nude woman stands in front of a bed, posing for the camera in stockings and shoes. One of her arms rests along the footboard, while the other is bent at her hip. Her defacement paired with the poor condition of the negative produces a visceral, potentially disturbing effect.

Because I wanted to avoid the clichés that can dominate conversations about Bellocq's work, I have chosen to address the defaced portraits only after discussing themes of hostility, disease, and delinquency on a larger cultural scale. Although Plate 33 is indeed unsettling without context, and has probably motivated work like René Rondeau's self-

---

[90] Szarkowski, 16-17.

portrait [Figure 43], I would like to suggest that the need to explain it as evidence of "violence" or "domination" is merely hard to avoid rather than inevitable. The portrait itself predisposes viewers not to accept either a less egregious explanation, or that we might never know precisely why Plate 33's model was defaced. By making assumptions that Bellocq maliciously destroyed the photographs, we are participating in the same process of mythmaking that has followed his work. As Steven Maklansky wrote to Laura Thomson in 2005, explaining the timeline of the 1996 reissue of *Storyville Portraits* (which was produced by Random House):

> Szarkowski is the guy I think who shaped the first exhibition/book- if you read the original transcripts of the interviews that he used to create the "play" in the introduction you can see how he picked and choosed [sic] to create a compelling story- remember, back then photography was still trying to gain acceptance as an art form- Szarkowski created the Toulouse Lautrec of New Orleans to help make the case.[91]

He then explains:

> One thing that Friedlander and Random House did have access to was all of the negs – and they could have made a very different book simply by selecting different images – i.e. examples that show Bellocq showing different women at different times in the same place and same position- or images that feature what is obviously the same woman with her face scratched out in one but not another.... [sic][92]

One of the more modern myths, then, is about Bellocq as a Baron Gruner figure, or someone who – despite clues within the portraits that he was not malicious – was secretive and manipulative, as well as potentially violent. Conversely, in her short essay about the defaced Storyville Portraits, Chelsea Nichols raises the idea of Bellocq's "unusual corporeality" motivating the defacements as an expression of "self-loathing."[93] Although the notion that Bellocq was physically disabled has been largely discredited, her suggestion is more evidence that the myths surrounding Plate 33 are fixed in discourses about masculinity and the artist, as well as folklore having to do with Bellocq himself.

Meanwhile, Maklansky makes the point that "[Random House] could have made a very different book simply by selecting different images," and this cannot be overlooked. Because of the images that *were* selected, which, as he writes, do not "feature […] the same

[91] Email from Steven Maklansky to Laura Thomson, "Appendices," in "A Thoroughly Modern Man: EJ Bellocq and the creation of a Modernist myth. [sic]," pp. 32-35, p. 35.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Chelsea Nichols, "Defacement: E.J. Bellocq and the Storyville Prostitutes," (Submission for Edgar Wynd Journal, on the theme of "destruction," 2002), 2.

woman with her face scratched out in one [photograph] but not another" it is tempting to imagine a scenario where the defacements were personal and possessive. Further, Bellocq has deprived the woman in Plate 33 of her ability to "gaze" at the viewer, which is a loaded act in the context of his model's presumed occupation and echoes the final scene in Zola's *Nana*.[94] However, as many cartes de visite and cabinet cards show, photographers could and did alter bodies and faces: Bellocq was just as likely to engage in this practice.[95]

I am not arguing that the systemic issues of power and misogyny raised by the defaced portraits are irrelevant, but I am trying to discuss these respective images in a less sensational (and predetermined) manner that allows room for more pragmatic possibilities regarding their existence. The inconsistency in the defacements – especially if, as Maklansky notes, there are other, intact images of the women whose faces have been scratched away – does not quite support the proposal that Bellocq was trying to maintain the models' anonymity. However, it also negates a voyeuristic scenario that Nichols describes as a potential reason for the defacements; she writes:

> The defaced photographs, then, might be seen as the ultimate manifestation of [Bellocq's] voyeurism: rather than understanding it as destructive, perhaps we should see the act of scratching the negatives as his means of 'taking' these women purely through looking.[96]

Because of its model's inability to "look," Plate 33 adds to the mystery of the Storyville Portraits by playing into the well-established vernacular of deviance that surrounds not only the voyeuristic male artist (or pornographer, as some might specify), but also the prostitute – who, within the paradigm, is always female.

Margaret Olin explains, "Respect for the power of the gaze survives today in the injunction not to stare, and the need to ask permission before watching someone at work or play,"[97] yet this formality of "ask[ing] permission" to "[watch] someone at work" was denied to sex workers due to their choice of work. However, mainstream society did not recognize "sex work" as an acceptable occupation. There was an "injunction not to stare" at pornography or prostitutes because of their perceived immorality. But as it was in other instances, this "injunction" was still motivated by "many negative constructions of looking" and a concern with the wellbeing of the "gazer" – their moral purity, in this case

---

[94] The "gaze" has a long and complex use in feminist visual and film theory, as well as in art history. Here, however, I have referred to Margaret Olin's essay "Gaze" to frame my ideas. See Margaret Olin, Chapter Sixteen: "Gaze," in *Cultural Terms for Art History,* eds. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff, 208-219.
[95] See Taschen's *1,000 Nudes* for countless examples of this, as well as the photograph of Bellocq's desk [Figure 2].
[96] Nichols, 2.
[97] Olin, 214.

– rather than the person who was being looked upon.[98] Olin also states, "Culturally determined precepts regulate photography, which involves having ones image looked at in one's absence. It is customary at least to ask permission, in some cases to obtain a release or pay a fee."[99] However, we are uncomfortable with Plate 33 (or others like it in Bellocq's oeuvre) and rush to explain it because, not only has this nude woman's identity – or at least her face – been obscured, without her face, we are looking at her "image" in her "absence" in more than one sense. We have no way of judging how she felt while this portrait was being taken; her face has no way of conveying her "permission" to us because it has been omitted. We then might feel as though we are participating in a non-consensual act of looking when we view Plate 33. Even if all other evidence points to the contrary – that there was and is a far less negative transaction occurring – the mythologies of prostitution are too powerful a force on our imaginations.

After all, brutal attitudes toward sex workers and vice at the turn of the century had dangerous precursors. There were subliminal ideological links between the supposedly righteous acts instigated by Nation, for example, and more unconscionable, criminal violence – such as the Ripper murders, the Axeman's murders, or Cream's international murder spree – that had been present for much of the century. Clearly Nation never said she meant to kill the people she targeted, yet she, like the Axeman, took a hatchet as her weapon and symbol of choice. The interest I have in violence in this chapter is not meant to insinuate that the more extreme reformers' actions were the same as murders. However, the casual way in which Jean Gordon seems to mention having young Lucille Decoux sterilized does demonstrate the dangerous links between representations of and beliefs about prostitution, and the concrete, dehumanizing actions taken against girls and women who were believed to be at risk of "deviance" – e.g. poor women, women without families, and often black women or women of color – so that they would never be able to reproduce.

What I want to establish is the thought that both symbolic and literal types of violence, as well as a hierarchy of pragmatic and less premeditated aggression directed toward sex workers, were all present and intermixed at the early twentieth century. Brutality – in an enormous variety of forms – influenced representations and perceptions as much as it influenced social politics. In light of these views, one remarkable aspect of Bellocq's portraits is that they are ambivalent about their erotic, violent contexts. Unlike

---

[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid.

the Ripper postmortem photographs, they were not placed in the public's eye to shock or titillate, and unlike Baron Gruner's private book of conquests, they are not invasive images.

Yet, regardless of how they appear, they are subject to these narratives and part of them. Although they do not conform exactly to what we might expect of photographs of sex workers, the unanswered questions about their purpose make them seem insidious because we are inclined to understand Bellocq and his models within a criminal-victim dichotomy. Thus, Bellocq becomes a suspect, while the models become victims. Michael Ondaatje's *Coming Through Slaughter* (1976), in which Bellocq is a secondary character, characterizes him in a Doctor Cream or Baron Gruner-like way. A detective, Webb, says that every time the police found a woman's body under questionable circumstances, the police department took Bellocq in for an interrogation. He says:

> [We] knew Bellocq. He was often picked up as a suspect. Whenever a whore was chopped they brought him in and questioned him [...] But Bellocq never said anything and they always let him go.[100]

Because of the influences of sensational crime and its ensuing photography, as well as the presence of rife pornography, when we look at the Storyville Portraits it is easy to regard them as illicit. Ondaatje capitalizes on this; Bellocq's hobby ultimately makes him a suspicious character. According to the mass culture of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, no photograph of a naked woman (or a sex worker) could be innocent. If the images were not in the open as a didactic tool – or as a way of selling papers to a public eager for gore – they must have been dangerous, indicative of some criminal persuasion.

Since the figure of the fin de siècle prostitute cannot exist without sensational melodrama and violence, it is uncomfortable to admit that Bellocq's portraits – even Plate 33 and the others that, like it, have been defaced – might have no salacious explanation, yet they must be read and understood within contexts of violence and crime. Quite feasibly, they were just taken by an intrigued photographer who liked to frequent the district (perhaps to have sex, perhaps not) and used its women as models for whatever aesthetic he attempted to achieve. Especially compared to what Holmes aptly called a "lust diary" in "The Illustrious Client," they are not representative of a genre that would have been damning in the 1890s. However, they are still indeed found objects. As I have mentioned, most sources claim that after Bellocq died in 1949, his surviving brother found the cache of his work shoved away in his desk. Evidently not knowing what to do with them – but not intending to destroy them, either – he hid them in a sofa. Eventually, the portraits were

[100] Michael Ondaatje, *Coming through Slaughter* (Bloomsbury, 2004), 53.

rediscovered after both brothers had died.[101] What can be agreed upon, even if the story varies (others have said all the negatives were found in Bellocq's desk), is that there is an element of secrecy inherent in the portraits. They had to be found, and they are still mysterious in their intention.

The models are, with very few exceptions, unknown to us today.[102] Like the "brown volume" that finally came to the safe confines of Baker Street, Bellocq's portraits were hidden away in a desk in his study – as though they were painful or frightening to behold. Meanwhile, Storyville – itself a living, breathing "lust diary" – was saturated with pornography. There seems to be no pragmatic reason why Bellocq should have kept his work private. Wiggs recounted, in agreement with Adele's statements, "Well [lewd photographs] were so commonplace; I mean, we knew all the people who [Bellocq] was taking pictures of. There were a vast number of people [in Storyville], you know."[103] Even at the time, apparently, there was confusion about why and how Bellocq, who could not have gone unnoticed in the very busy district, kept his finished portraits from becoming part of the deluge of "dirty pictures." Wiggs further elaborated, asserting that there was an enthusiastic market for not only sex but pornography, too, that "there was this saloon on South Rampart, and above this saloon was a little room, and in this room were thousands of pictures; they looked like they were made in France, of fornication and anything related to that in all its possible [...] positions."[104]

While we may always be left to wonder about the veracity of some recollections of Storyville, if we consider the trends of the period and its intense shifts between what comprised acceptable morality and sexuality, anecdotes that concern the pornographic trade within the District cannot be too embellished. Invariably, the Bellocq portraits do not rival what would have been in the "little room" above a saloon on South Rampart.[105] Of the ones reproduced in Storyville Portraits, there are only a handful of photographs, if that, that would be considered explicitly pornographic. None, as Wiggs tactfully put the matter, show models in "positions."[106] There are no portrayals of any sexual acts. Instead, they "possess a sense of leisure in the making" that lends itself well to the idea that they were

---

[101] Rose, "The Last Days of Ernest J. Bellocq."

[102] For example, there is "Adele." Further, several years ago I was under the impression that one of Bellocq's portraits was of Lulu White, but Pamela Arceneaux mentioned that White actually passed off the photograph of one of her "girls" in her own souvenir booklet as herself. This, along with White's arrest records from the New Orleans Police Department, made me reconsider whether the Bellocq portrait is of White at all. (Rose's "Man About Town" leads readers to believe her skin is very dark, not that either he or Rose is necessarily the most reliable of narrators.)

[103] Wiggs, as quoted in *Storyville Portraits,* 12.

[104] Ibid.

[105] Ibid.

[106] Ibid.

not intended to gratify predatory urges.[107] A sense of voyeurism is not present; each woman is aware that she is being looked at and photographed. The portraits suggest Bellocq's fascination or rapport with their models, but they are not exactly the malicious records of women we would imagine being kept inside a "beastly book:"[108] the women look at us and knew Bellocq was looking at them. But, nonetheless, nothing is especially purposeful about the images. Bellocq was not an insider of the underworld who seemed interested in using his work for any social or political commentary, and it does not seem likely that he used the photographs to commemorate personal conquests or for blackmailing.

However, given who his work is about – sex workers, or at the very least, women who might pose naked – and where they are from – New Orleans – it is almost inevitable that the portraits carry the stigma of imagined exploitation, violence, or obsession. This may be due to the fact that they were not made available like the varieties of pornography that abounded. To be sure, they would not have had a place in public discourses where prostitutes were victims, criminals, pornographic objects, or some strange mixture of all three categories. Anwer observes that the Ripper post-mortems, with the exception of Mary Kelly's:

> Resemble portraits of sleeping women, photographed clandestinely, voyeuristically, without their knowledge. All that is required of us, the viewers, is a slight associative legerdemain, and the sleeping women transform into the women who sleep around.[109]

"Associative legerdemain," however, also occurs when applied to the nude Storyville Portraits. We are often presented with women who have disrobed, women who are, then, used to being nude.

We can surmise, even without necessarily knowing who took these photographs or where they were taken, that these were "the women who sleep around." However, the portraits categorically deny any ontological neatness, and they furnish no false assurances that we can understand exactly what takes place within their frames. They are neither what Anwer calls "an archive profiling streetwalkers—a female counterpart to the predominantly male mug-shot compilations of criminal types,"[110] nor images produced exclusively for pleasure, and it is not easy to associate them with crime because there are so few allusions

---

107 Szarkowski, 13.
108 Doyle, 1048.
109 Anwer, 434.
110 Ibid.

to Storyville. A few of Bellocq's models, for instance, are clothed in what appears to be Sunday best or their leisure clothes. The woman in Plate 9 stands outdoors in a crisp, white dress trimmed with lace and clutches a bunch of flowers: this image does not confirm how we would expect sex workers, perhaps especially Storyville prostitutes, to look [Figure 29]. Plate 13, similarly, portrays a woman wearing a large, fashionable feathered hat, and her white blouse is tucked into a long, dark skirt; the cameo pin at her neck could belong to any middle class woman [Figure 37]. Unlike the crib workers who made far less money in appalling conditions, one gets the impression that these women could afford quality items for their wardrobes.

Without any knowledge of their occupation, these particular models can become examples of the new, independent, modern woman: well-attired, but with a few dubious trademarks such as messy or short hair – the model in Plate 12 sports cropped locks like several of her peers, which leads me to wonder if some of the portraits might have been taken a little later than 1912, when shorter hair was more in vogue [Figure 38]. Another model in Plate 21 is attired in an intricate evening gown that drips with pearls and glossy ribbons; over the gown is a fur stole. The tight, delicate choker she wears and her bracelet, a discreet glimmer on her forearm, are both accessories for a wealthy woman, or one who can access fine things [Figure 39]. My point is this: all of these women fall far from the likes of Annie Chapman's illustrations, as well as her photograph, and they do not appear remotely "criminal" or "unpleasant." For the most part, they are young, and as Wiggs said in disbelief, they are "pretty" – which was doubtless his most diplomatic way of saying they did not look diseased, haggard, or deviant.

We might get a sense that they are not exactly conventional, but their unconventionality calls to mind the variety of young, respectable women who frequented London streets during the turn of the century, as described by Judith R. Walkowitz:

> A few independent women adopted a less "ladylike" public style to match their heterodox views. Annie Besant affronted the sensibility of many by her working-class dress, her heavy laced boots, short skirts and red neckerchief, and close-cut hair. Novelist Olive Schreiner, a so-called "colonial comet" who talked with her hands and rode on the top of omnibuses, was only slightly less shocking to conventional sensibilities.[111]

[111] Walkowitz, 69.

Irene Adler, the eccentric New Jersey-born "adventuress" of Doyle's "A Scandal in Bohemia"[112] is another representative of these new (American) women, and she is another woman who falls under scrutiny for her sexual activities – yet remains able to negotiate boundaries between her sex life and daily life. The distinctions between the "prostitute" and the :normal" woman, therefore, had been blurred in fiction and reality.

By the time the twentieth century loomed, it was no coincidence that some young women were stopped by police on the suspicion that they were actually sex workers even if they were not. Schreiner herself was publically "accosted" in 1887 by an officer because he believed she was soliciting male clients.[113] At the turn of the century, it became obvious that although vice was treated no less seriously than it had ever been, fashions and social habits shaped by a strange collision of early feminist beliefs and the presence of sex workers in everyday life were changing how women could be read and interpreted by those around them.

While this was not without its own complex repercussions that varied for women of different races and classes, it started to render old typologies of women – those exhibited by newspapers, art, or pornography, among other media – inert when respectable, if eccentric, young women looked like they could be prostitutes. Worse (by the day's standards, anyway), sex workers who were not on the clock looked and lived like "respectable" young women. It was no longer always possible for appearances to account for internal qualities or unspoken facts; rather, the illusion of that possibility was under strain at the fin de siècle in a way it had not yet been. The circumstances that bred Dupin's amazing deductive abilities and allowed him to understand, in detail, what varieties of people he observed over half a century before, were gone:

> He boasted […] with a low chuckling laugh, that most men, in respect to himself, wore windows in their bosoms, and was wont to follow up such assertions by direct and very startling proofs of his intimate knowledge.[114]

Of course, people had never been open texts to be read easily by those who knew how to do it, but the early twentieth century made this comparatively palpable and apparent. The detectives were obsolete, prostitutes had become even more subversive and difficult to discern in a crowd, and any women who took more control of their self-presentation,

---

[112] Doyle, "A Scandal in Bohemia," originally published in *The Strand* (July 1891) or alternatively available in any of our contemporary editions of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*. See also Arthur Conan Doyle, "A Scandal in Bohemia," in *Favourite Sherlock Holmes Stories – Selected by the Author* (London: Atlantic Books, 2009), 106-132.

[113] Walkowitz, 69.

[114] Poe, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue."

much less their sexuality, were suspect. Bellocq's portraits underscore this reality in their refusal to reiterate a criminal narrative – or to provide the subservient eroticism – we have come to expect from images like them.

Chapter Three: The White Slave, the Sex Slave, and the Question of Ambiguity

In this chapter, I assert that the Storyville Portraits existed at the core of tensions regarding how prostitutes were represented at the turn of the twentieth century. By then, some significant artists, such as John Sloan and George Bellows of the "Ashcan School" in New York City, started to portray them without traditional, moralistic markers of their role. I also investigate how representations of sex workers in New York and New Orleans were impacted by narratives of the prostitute as a victim of white slavery, which erased the idea of consensual sex work while it deflected focus from the most vulnerable demographics of women. Conversely, the new, much more ambiguous representations of sex work reflected the facts of living in a city: that there were single women and sex workers who existed more openly and casually than they had in the 1800s.

Through the "Ashcannners" and Sloan especially, I also trace what might be termed Bellocq's visual arc. Neither explicit nor chaste, his portraits are similar, unceremonious portrayals of women whose "independent behavior" – even apart from their potential occupations – as Rebecca Zurier and Robert W. Snyder have said, was "branded as vulgar, deviant, or unwomanly."[1] Set against the backdrop of a New Orleans fraught with arguments against miscegenation and white slavery – while a variety of women experienced more public freedoms – Bellocq's reluctance to overtly classify women becomes one of his portraits' most distinctive qualities. They evoke associations with sex, yet still function within a maelstrom of, to borrow from John X. Christ's analysis of Sloan's paintings of women, "slippery" contemporary identities: namely sexual, racial, and cultural identities.[2] As Snyder explains, "Sex roles [...] were being played out in a kind of interregnum, in which the old ways were fading but the new ways were not entirely clear."[3] Alongside the fact that urban women were exploring more public ways of being, the sustained worry about "white slavery" was only strengthened by concerns over crumbling gender roles and white power. It was used as a blanket term for both sex work and sex

---

[1] Robert W. Snyder and Rebecca Zurier, "Picturing the City," in *Metropolitan Lives: The Ashcan Artists and Their New York* (National Museum of American Art, 1995), 179.

[2] John X. Christ, "A Short Guide to the Art of Dining, Slumming, Touring, Wildlife, and Women for Hire in New York's Chinatown and Chinese Restaurants," *Oxford Art Journal* 26 (2003): 84.

[3] Robert W. Snyder, "City in Transition," in *Metropolitan Lives: The Ashcan Artists and Their New York* (National Museum of American Art, 1995), 47.

slavery, with there being no difference established between the two from reformists' – though perhaps not the public's – perspectives. As a theme, it was prolific in mass media as well as political discourse. Yet skepticism toward these narratives did exist. Some of the Ashcanners portrayed an aspect of this "interregnum" through their images of women, and so did Bellocq. They represented a far different view from the ones normally granted: these unsettling changes were part of an ordinary urban experience and were not symptomatic of either social catastrophe or sexual depravity.

There is a large amount of scholarship on the Ashcan School and vice in nineteenth and early twentieth century New York City. In particular, here I build upon Rebecca Zurier, Robert Snyder, Rachel Schreiber, and John X. Christ's respective works: each of them approaches the Ashcan School from an art historical or visual culture perspective. Though the Storyville Portraits have been discussed in a handful of recent, and one very recent, art historical and museological dissertations and theses, none have accounted for the portraits' visual or thematic similarities to the Ashcanners' work.[4] Meanwhile, Timothy Gilfoyle's studies of vice in Gilded Age New York City, and Christopher Difee and Mara L. Kiere's research on white slavery in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Europe provided more sociological and historical perspectives on the subjects. Because I also link "white slavery" as a theme found in mass media to the concrete presence of slavery and overt racism in New Orleans, I draw again on Storyville scholarship by Emily Epstein Landau and Alecia P. Long. Overall, the Ashcanners' images of women triangulate the Portraits as images that were not anomalous, but were part of a shift in modern representations of women, sex, and sex work. Though the portraits were not purposefully works of art, satires, or trenchant social commentaries, they nonetheless possess subversive qualities and need to be contextualized and understood within larger transatlantic contexts in order for their subversiveness to be explored.

Overall, there are three key threads in this analysis: interpretations of "types" of women (including racial types), the white slavery scare in popular culture, and the uncertainties of modern city life. My focus is on how these intersect and therefore inform the Storyville Portraits, and predetermined interpretations of working-class sex workers and sex workers of color at the 1900s. My first section establishes the idea of white slavery as it was understood in New York City and manifested in its popular media. Then, I

[4] See Christian Waguespack, "Reframing E.J. Bellocq: A Vernacular Reading of the Storyville Portraits" (MA thesis, University of New Mexico, 2015), Jasmine Mir, "Marketplace of Desire: Storyville and the Making of a Tourist City in New Orleans, 1890-1920" (PhD diss., New York University, 2005), and Glenda D. Skinner, "The Storyville Portraits: A Collaborative History" (MA thesis, Virginia Commonwealth University, 1999).

compare this with the reception of the concept in New Orleans. Finally, I move to a discussion of the ambiguities present in the Storyville Portraits – of "moral" and racial identities, especially – using Ashcanners' and Sloan's images of women to demonstrate how the old visual differences between vulgarity and acceptability were fading.

Without intimating that we can (or need to) retrieve the intentions that motivated the Storyville Portraits, I posit that viewing them within frameworks inspired by other images of women that blurred the distinctions between "kinds" of women accounts for how unembellished they are – without imposing a rigid interpretation upon them. I am less concerned with whether or not we should focus on Bellocq as "an artist" who has been excluded from or misrepresented by art historical canons, and most interested in the heterogeneous emotions and meanings in the portraits.[5] Investigating this visual arc allows for us to preserve the enigmas in Bellocq's photographs, and lets them function as the images' key revealing qualities.

"Degrees to which a woman could be considered fallen": white slavery scares and Sloan's *Three A.M.*

The notion of white slavery garnered impassioned responses elsewhere in America and the western world. But fascination with the subject reached an especially intense manifestation in New York City during the years leading up to World War I,[6] which was also when vice was being tenaciously combatted in American cities. For many Americans, the epicenter for this battle, or at least the most emblematic city where vice was being contested, was New York City. Shelley Stamp Lindsay explains, "Local panic escalated sharply in 1909 when *McClure's* magazine published an exposé of vice trafficking and police corruption in Manhattan penned by muckraker George Kibbe Turner," and this further primed the nation for a slew of films and plays that capitalized on the trope of white slavery.[7] In turn, these were often adapted from novels such as Reginald Wright Kauffman's *The House of Bondage* (1910), which ensured the presence of an eager audience already accustomed to the

---

[5] Susan Sontag, "Introduction" in *E.J. Bellocq: Storyville Portraits, Photographs from the New Orleans Red-Light District, Circa 1912*, ed. John Szarkowski (New York: Random House, 1996), URL: http://www.masters-of-photography.com/B/bellocq/bellocq_articles2.html.

[6] Mara L. Keire provides an exhaustive list of sources that discuss international perspectives on white slavery in her first endnote for "The Vice Trust: A Reinterpretation of the White Slavery Scare in the United States, 1907-1917," *Journal of Social History* 35 (2001): 5-41. For the purposes of this thesis, I have also found Judith R. Walkowitz's *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) and Alain Corbin's *Women for Hire: Prostitution and Sexuality in France after 1850*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Paris, 1978; reprint Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1990) to be extremely useful.

[7] Shelley Stamp Lindsey, "'Oil upon the Flames of Vice': The Battle over White Slave Films in New York City," *Film History* 9:4 (1997): 353.

jarring blend of moralistic rhetoric – even the title comes from Bible verses[8] – and supposedly covert sensual gratification.[9] The inverse was also true, with fashionable plays like George Scarborough's *The Lure* (1914) inspiring spin-off novels that were popular in the United States and Great Britain.[10]

There was a growing sense that the market for these entertainments was motivated most by a keen interest in vice rather than any desire to eradicate it, which posed a complication to the reformist rhetoric. Indeed, in the summer of 1913, the New York Times declared that so-called "brothel plays" were "veiled thinly with the pretense of deploring the social evil" but "their real purpose [was] to hold it up to morbid eyes."[11] Theatres and cinemas possessed stimulating and visual qualities that proved more dangerous than print: the fact that "white slave films" took in many female spectators deeply troubled activists and reporters.[12] While it was true that women could just read the novels on which the films and plays were based, blurred boundaries between public entertainment and private lives caused no small amount of disquiet. Not coincidentally, white slavery's value as a persuasive device was questioned in reformist circles at this time because of its massive popularity and presence in "questionable" media.

As Mara L. Keire observes, Wirt Hallam, based in Chicago, and Frederick Whitin, based in New York, did not agree on using "sensational stories" from either the news or popular culture to further their initiatives. Their concerns were characteristic of many similar discussions:

> Wirt Hallam, a Chicago white slavery activist, and Frederick Whitin [...] were both passionately committed to closing vice districts, but in their correspondence they argued about the value of white slavery narratives in the campaign against commercialized vice. Hallam advocated telling lurid tales of wasted youth, while Whitin touted the power of a tempered legalism. Both Hallam and Whitin believed that sensational stories would "arouse human sympathy," but Whitin feared that these stories would discredit anti-vice reformers.[13]

---

[8] See, "I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage," *King James Bible*, Exodus 20:2, and, "I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage," *King James Bible*, Deuteronomy 5:6.
[9] Reginald Wright Kauffman, *The House of Bondage* (Grosset & Dunlap, 1910).
[10] George Scarborough, *The Lure* (G.W. Dillingham, 1914).
[11] *The New York Times* quoted in the *New York Dramatic Mirror*, 10 September 1913, 8.
[12] See Shelley Stamp Lindsey, "'Is Any Girl Safe?' Female Spectators at the White Slave Films," *Screen* 37 (1996): 1-15.
[13] Mara L. Keire, "The Vice Trust: A Reinterpretation of the White Slavery Scare in the United States, 1907-1917," *Journal of Social History* 35 (2001): 5-41.

Journalism – even in its muckraking forms – did not problematize white slavery for reformists in a crucial way by rendering it an unstable didactic tool. However, the trope's popularity in fiction, stage, and cinema did: these were all media consumed by rising numbers of women, including working-class women. With its film and theatre industries, New York functioned as an epicenter for the production of white slavery imaginaries while its thriving sex work industries flourished alongside popular entertainment venues. There was a strong and not at all unfounded sense that women were avid consumers of these representations – fictions that, according to the newspapers, deceptively served as proxies for the real thing. However, with sex work being so commonplace in New York, one wonders how much of the chagrin directed toward white slavery overall was really the sublimated desire, as Christopher Diffee writes, "To police working-class female sexuality in particular and working-class culture more broadly."[14]

Compared to New York's fascination with white slavery as an undermining, sensationalized force that had the potential to entice women into a life of vice, New Orleans had more specific concerns motivated by entrenched racism. It was already accustomed to the thought of chattel slavery as a whole. Still, "white slavery" had crept into its consciousness. By 1908, a new main rail terminus was completed and it was roughly adjacent to Storyville, which caused an uproar amongst those opposed to the vice district's already considerable prominence in city life. The women who were active in reformist politics were especially offended. Emily Epstein Landau writes that "vociferous female moral reformers in New Orleans," among them Jean Gordon, whom I discussed briefly in the last chapter, were "worried that the Terminal Station would serve as a recruitment ground for procurers looking for young girls from the countryside."[15] In effect, they were worried about sex work's – which they understood only as criminal prostitution or sex slavery – impact on white women and girls.

The city's "most prominent women's reform and suffrage organization, the Era Club, convened a committee to investigate the conditions of vice," writes Landau, which led to the founding of the Travelers' Aid Society of New Orleans.[16] This society was devoted to protecting females in a continued crusade against the intertwined evils of miscegenation and prostitution. It was now armed with the momentum of a growing,

---

[14] Christopher Diffee, "Sex and the City: The White Slavery Scare and Social Governance in the Progressive Era," *American Quarterly* 57 (2005): 418. John X. Christ also explains that "what [some women] did was known as 'treating,' the offering of sexual favours and companionship in exchange for gifts such as food, clothing, rent, or a night out," 87.

[15] Emily Epstein Landau, *Spectacular Wickedness: Sex, Race, and Memory in Storyville, New Orleans* (Louisiana State University Press, 2013), 167.

[16] Ibid.

national anti-vice movement.[17] Although many reformists could not agree on how to (or even if they should) use the languages provided by the popular culture garnered by white slavery, these frameworks were readily accepted by white female reformers in New Orleans who sought to preserve the perceived purity and superiority of their race and social class.

In this way, they hoped to combat Storyville – which still slyly and knowingly drew on expansive, erotic melodrama provided not only by white slavery, but also longstanding narratives of the tragic octoroon – and foster a proactive stance against vice in their city. Themes that were used to entice cinema and theatre patrons in New York in particular, and the North more generally, were being fiercely fought over in the singular Southern city. For New Orleans, the tropes of white slavery and bondage possessed unique and very real complications – the largest of these being that madams and their "girls" employed orientalist, sensationalist, and sensualist tropes to market themselves.[18] Iterations of what served as fodder for films in New York just sounded like stories from Storyville.

New York, of course, was not without vast numbers of both full time and casual sex workers, yet they had not exactly amassed the same collective notoriety of Storyville's women.[19] And despite prostitution's prevalence in New York, writes Lindsay, a naïve belief still existed that "film versions of the slave trade offered what no other medium could: an actual glimpse into the city's brothels and red-light districts" – when in fact many New Yorkers had already taken this "actual glimpse," as we can observe in contemporary visual and print media.[20] The press and local politicians were worried precisely because vice had become so commonplace, not because citizens had never experienced or been exposed to it.

Nonetheless, despite the pervasiveness of white slavery fictions and beliefs about both the prostitute and working-class women, images created by John Sloan and George

---

[17] *New Orleans Travelers' Aid Society Papers*, RG 365, Louisiana and Special Collections, Howard-Tilton Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA.

[18] Some of the best examples are Lulu White's souvenir books and photographic advertisements for Josie Arlington's brothel. A copy of White's book at The Historic New Orleans Collection is packed with references to Octoroons, the "Colored Carmencita," etc., while Arlington's various "parlors" – the Turkish Parlor, the Japanese Parlor, etc. – are depicted in enticing bids to get clients' attention. For the Arlington's advertisements, see: Billy Struve, *Blue Book*, Eighth Edition (New Orleans: 1907), The Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana, Call Number: HQ146.N6 B58 1907, Permalink: http://hnoc.minisisinc.com/thnoc/catalog/2/4579 and the earlier *Blue book: Tenderloin 400*, (New Orleans: s.n., 1901), Call number: HQ146.N6 B58 1901. An example of Lulu White's souvenir books can be seen here: Lulu White, *New Mahogany Hall*, (New Orleans, La. : s.n., between 1898 and 1899), Call Number: HQ146.N6 W55, and is even earlier than Struve's books.

[19] Although there were many well-known madams and sex workers in New York, I posit they were not viewed as part of a corrupting entity, e.g. Storyville, or with the same fetishization as sex workers of color, or black sex workers, in New Orleans. Storyville's physical location – in a city long known for its lax attitudes toward activities that the rest of the nation regarded as immoral – had most to do with this.

[20] Lindsey, 355.

Bellows – such as their illustrations for *The Masses,* a socialist magazine – belied skepticism toward the fervor cultivated by lurid "brothel play" trends. As Snyder and Zurier observe:

> The ferment accompanying [social] changes was a difficult subject, and not all of the Ashcan artists addressed it directly. [...] Of the six artists, Sloan and Bellows, who tended to seek more socially complicated subjects, were especially inspired to create art that addressed the changing relations between men and women.[21]

Their art countered the rather militant and alarmist stances of Progressive Era reformists. Regardless of how individual reformists chose to interact with and address popular culture, the city was embroiled in complex changes in thought and policy that impacted working-class women. They were the demographic considered most at-risk of turning to prostitution, and their families' welfare was constantly cause for concern.

Closely allied with anti-prostitution sentiment was the desire to improve these family units and their respective wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters. Diffee states:

> Only after the turn of the century was the working-class residence seen as a family at all, undoubtedly menaced by vice, intemperance, pauper-ism, delinquency, and immorality, but nonetheless an institution deserving of assistance and advice.[22]

This was a marked change from what he terms "the unilateral dismemberment" of households that often occurred in the 1870s and 1880s, when children were commonly taken from parents deemed to be unfit by regulatory societies and placed "into middle-class families or properly administered foster homes."[23] The shift in perception did not, however, mean that women were better respected as being able to oversee their own family lives, or that there was a larger variety in their representation.

And while very select aspects of life had improved for working-class women, they were still believed to be most susceptible to vice. Long points out how "in this era, most Americans understood vice to include several objectionable activities, including prostitution, gambling, and the intemperate use of alcohol,"[24] all "objectionable activities" that were often taken up by poorer classes. As such, working-class women's participation in, or proximity to, these activities was still a major source of worry. In 1913, it led the *New York Times* to lament that media, and particularly films, were definitely pouring "oil upon

---

[21] Snyder and Zurier, 173-174.
[22] Diffee, 422.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Aecia P. Long, *The Great Southern Babylon: Sex, Race, and Respectability in New Orleans*, 1865-1920 (Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 180.

the flames of vice," and not helping to curtail it.[25] About a month later, the pronouncement was made that film "tends to deprave the morals of those whose minds are open to such influences."[26] The fact that more young women found themselves working outside the home and engaging with popular entertainment in cinemas, theatres, and dancehalls fuelled concern, too: they had far less familial and community supervision than previous generations of girls.

"One of the most disturbing aspects to the general public about America's transition from a rural to an urban economy was that thousands of girls were leaving the watchful eye of parents and small-town neighbors," writes Suzanne L. Kinser, "and streaming into the cities to seek employment."[27] As Kinser remarks, vulnerable young women being pressed into sex slavery or otherwise exploited was a focal point in popular fiction before the strong advent of white slave films and plays, with Stephen Crane's novella *Maggie, Girl of the Streets* (1893) and Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1901) expressing, as Kinser writes, sharp "unease" with their heroines' plights in the city.[28] Though they were sympathetic and written with an aim toward informing and potentially reforming the reader politically, these novels reaffirmed anxieties instead of offering a critical, or at least less dramatized, portrayal of women and sex work, or of sex slavery and human trafficking.[29]

However, dissenting depictions of both working-class women and sex workers began to surface in New York during the 1900s, largely because of the number of sex workers present in working-class neighborhoods, and the rise of leftist politics on either side of the Atlantic. Though she did not support the idea of consensual or decriminalized sex work and was indeed critical of all capitalist infrastructures, Emma Goldman pointed out what others gestured toward in their sympathetic art, illustrations, and photographs. Referencing George Bernard Shaw's play *Mrs. Warren's Profession,*[30] she said:

> With Mrs. Warren these girls feel, "Why waste your life working for a few shillings a week in a scullery, eighteen hours a day?" [...] Whether our

---

[25] "Vice and Motion Pictures," *New York Times*, November 4, 1913.
[26] "More Vice Films Are To Be Withdrawn," *New York Times*, December 29, 1913.
[27] Suzanne L. Kinser, "Prostitutes in the Art of John Sloan," *Prospects* (1984): 232.
[28] Kinser, 232. See also Susan Sontag, "Introduction" in *E.J. Bellocq: Storyville Portraits, Photographs from the New Orleans Red-Light District, Circa 1912*, ed. John Szarkowski (New York: Random House, 1996), URL: http://www.masters-of-photography.com/B/bellocq/bellocq_articles2.html.
[29] In fact, the novels were similar in their tone to Josie Washburn's *The Underworld Sewer*, which I discussed in the last chapter. However, Washburn's autobiography claimed both authenticity (allegedly being written by an actual, retired madam) and first-hand experience, which would have made it more appealing to many reformists than a fictional tale.
[30] George Bernard Shaw, *Mrs Warren's Profession,* (first performed in 1902), URL: http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1097/1097-h/1097-h.htm.

> reformers admit it or not, the economic and social inferiority of woman is responsible for prostitution.[31]

Bellows and Sloan, apart from the "Ashcan" artists who were unified by their affinity for portraying and exploring what Zurier outlines as "commerce, the city's diverse population, changing mores and above all looking" provide the most intriguing examples of these less judgmental, not sensationalized images.[32]

Shifting sexual values and a preoccupation with observing – for looking without necessarily judging or imposing didactic plots – are key qualities in their depictions of sex workers or women in general. Overall, Zurier explains, the combined presence of these themes amounted to a new visual ambiguity, one result of New York's "representational challenge to visitors and natives alike" that the Ashcanners were negotiating and interpreting in their art.[33] Sloan created many images of contemporary, urban women that I argue can be used to reframe and reinterpret Bellocq's Storyville Portraits. "In 1892," writes Janice M. Coco:

> John Sloan joined Robert Henri's circle of artist-reporters from the *Philadelphia Enquirer,* including William Glackens, George Luks, and Everett Shinn. After moving to New York City, these artists comprised part of The Eight – a group that later expanded into the popularly-known Ashcan School.[34]

Artists of "The Eight," then eventually the "Ashcan School," tended to make realist depictions of modern New York influenced by their respective backgrounds in painting, etching, illustration, printmaking, and journalism. As Coco notes, "True to their nineteenth century predecessors Winslow Homer and Thomas Eakins, these artists preferred representational realism."[35] This proved to be a marked resistance to the established aesthetic "hierarchy of the National Academy of Design," because "prior to the 1913 Armory Show, the first major exhibition of European Modernism in America, Henri's 'gang' distinguished itself as a revolutionary force."[36]

---

[31] Emma Goldman, "The Traffic in Women," in *Anarchism and Other Essays*, Second Revised Ed. (New York and London: Mother Earth Publishing Association, 1911), URL: https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/goldman/works/1910/traffic-women.htm.
[32] Rebecca Zurier, "Introduction," in *Picturing the City: Urban Vision and the Ashcan School*, 4. But by mentioning the Ashcanners directly after Emma Goldman, I do not want to imply that they were anarchists – only that amongst others whose politics and ideas were critical of the status quo (regardless of how they politically or ideologically identified), Sloan probably agreed with the thought that women engaged in sex work (or promiscuous sex) as a reality of modern society.
[33] Zurier, "Introduction," 8.
[34] Janice M. Coco, "Re-Viewing John Sloan's Images of Women," *Oxford Art Journal* 21:2 (1998): 79.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid.

Along with being part of this new "revolutionary force" of artists, Sloan was also engaged in the Socialist Party. Between 1912 and 1914, he was the art editor of *The Masses*, a socialist publication. As Rebecca Zurier, Janice M. Coco, Robert Snyder, John X. Christ, David Peters Corbett, and other scholars have established, Sloan's politics influenced his depictions of (frequently working and middle-class) women. However, I am more interested in the visuality of these images and how Sloan depicts aspects of modern, 1900s womanhood that are sensual and private. He called himself an "incorrigible window watcher"[37] and was undeniably voyeuristic, but his work is often non-judgmental and even sympathetic toward unorthodox women. I argue that Bellocq did not engage in the same kind of voyeurism as Sloan, but because of his interest in depicting sex workers, his portraits inevitably prompt concerns over consent and exploitation.

These dynamics are crucial for my consideration of Bellocq's work in this chapter. They demonstrate both the "realism" of the Storyville Portraits – which separates them from salacious tales of white slavery while connecting them to a fractious, contemporaneous American visual culture pioneered by the Ashcanners – and Bellocq's lack of voyeurism compared to Sloan, who portrayed women of similar stations at the same moment in American history. Coco elaborates:

> The rear window of [Sloan's] west twenty-third street studio furnished him with intimate views of tenement life. […] Sloan used binoculars to watch his subjects within their private spaces.[38]

By recalling these "intimate views of tenement life," Sloan created images such as *Turning Out the Light* (1905) [Figure 48], an etching from his series *New York City Life* (1905-06). In *Turning Out the Light*, which Coco writes was deemed "too risqué" even though *New York City Life* was met with "critical acclaim,"[39] a woman reaches over to turn out a light while looking at her male companion lounging in bed. The scene is enigmatic and sensual: the woman is dressed in a voluminous, sleeveless nightgown, and her stockings hang over the bedframe as though she has just removed them. She is smiling and seems unrushed, while her companion also appears to be at his leisure. There are no details to specify whether this is a married couple, an unmarried couple, or a sex worker and client. Nevertheless, both the man and woman in *Turning Out the Light* are comfortable with their situation.

---

[37] Van Wyck Brooks, *John Sloan: A Painter's Life* (Dent: Dutton Books, 1955), 61.

[38] Coco, 79. As given in her personal interview with Helen Farr Sloan, Sloan's second wife after Anna M. Wall (called "Dolly"), who had been a sex worker before she married him, and was also a suffragette.

[39] Deborah Wye, *Artists and Prints: Masterworks from The Museum of Modern Art* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2004), 120

Other examples of Sloan's work, such as *Bachelor Girl* (1915) [Figure 48], portray similar rooms and women, though without companionship. *Bachelor Girl* suggests a relationship or the woman's desire for one in its details – the title does hint at her availability, but the possibility that the woman could attract someone to bring home is equally evident in the way she considers her dress, holding it before her, and the coat and hat resting on her bed. They are all clothes and accessories to be worn in public. Again, we have no indication of her marital or relationship status: viewers know only that this is a woman in her bedroom. Both *Bachelor Girl* and *Turning Out the Light* share many qualities in common with Bellocq's portraits: they do not give viewers strict narratives, do feature details of modernity – e.g. bedframes, electric lights or evidence of electricity being fitted to the rooms, modes of dress – and do not impose moral, negative judgments on their subjects. However, I would like to reiterate Sloan's presence as an unseen observer within his work. This, as much as the similarities between his work and Bellocq's, also highlights how much the Storyville Portraits – especially the nudes – need to be reexamined. Although the portraits indicate Bellocq's interest in looking at his models, they do not suggest that he felt compelled, or entitled enough, to observe them without their consent.

Sloan takes pleasure in depicting both of the women in *Turning Out the Light* and *Bachelor Girl*, giving them an earthy charm. However, this pleasure takes a different turn in *Prone Nude* (1913) [Figure 45], an etching that portrays a nude woman on her stomach. Her face is hidden from view – it rests on her arms, which are crossed under her head. Without context, the scene raises many questions: she could be asleep, yet the nudity gives viewers pause, especially since Sloan provides no indication of where the woman rests and nothing else is visible, except for her body and the sheet beneath her. Although Sloan often depicts small interiors, *Prone Nude* is more claustrophobic, free of minutiae, and dark, except for the light falling on the woman's body; viewers have no sense of a room around her. Unlike other instances of his work, including his 1913 painting *Prone Nude (Nude Lying Down)* [Figure 46], *Prone Nude* expresses Sloan's voyeurism in a potentially more sinister manner. Due to the woman's position, spectators are presented with her entire back and the side of one of her breasts. At first glance, *Prone Nude* is nothing more than a study, but it is invitational and suggestive in a manner that Sloan's tenement scenes are not, because without anything else present in the frame, we are forced to focus on her body. However, the most well-known of Sloan's work is far more rooted in recognizable tenements and streets. His refusal to sensationalize these circumstances (although he does fetishize the women, who are all young and conventionally attractive) jarred his contemporary audience.

In 1910, about a year after Kibbe's piece about vice and police corruption was published in *McClure's* magazine – and two years after New Orleans witnessed the completion of a new rail station next to its thirteen-year-old vice district – Sloan submitted a painting of two women for an exhibition by the National Academy of Design.[40] He mused wryly that the submission would have the shocking effect of "a pair of men's drawers slipped into an old maid's laundry."[41] Abstrusely titled *Three A.M.,* his painting depicts two women in a small tenement apartment in the Tenderloin district [Figure 25]. One woman is stylishly dressed, sitting at a table with a mug of tea or coffee in hand. The other is in a white shift while she cooks a meal and enjoys a cigarette. We know from Sloan's diary that he watched these women through their window before he completed the painting, but we can surmise very little about them from his portrayal alone.

He was unsure of whether or not they were sex workers, and he observed two different men in the apartment on separate occasions.[42] Among other things, this suggests that both women could have had partners. It also reveals that if they were sex workers, they probably did not entertain clients where they lived. Sloan only noted the presence of two men, and practicing prostitution from within a private dwelling was illegal – though not, of course, unheard of. Crucially, though, this situation emphasizes the indeterminacy of many urban, working-class women's statuses. (It also reveals Sloan's interest in observing women without their knowledge.)

Old ways of identifying "prostitutes" had become ineffective despite police efforts to document them, because the work and social habits of working-class women in particular had changed. Some readings of the painting assert that these women are, however, sex workers. Kinser firmly states:

> It is apparent that the critics of the day [...] could hardly have overlooked the fact that the seated woman, sipping a cup of tea, is a prostitute. Indeed, the other woman, who is busily engaged in cooking her a meal, would appear to be one also.[43]

While there are plausible reasons for assuming this, such as the thought that the seated woman's hat appears to have just been placed on the chair opposite her – implying that she has returned from work or being out – or the day's belief that only immoral (or avant-garde) women smoked, there are as many to problematize the interpretation. Schreiber,

---

[40] Zurier, 231.
[41] John Sloan, *John Sloan's New York Scene: From the Diaries, Notes and Correspondence, 1906-1913*, edited by Bruce St. John (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 396.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Kinser, 231.

however, helpfully notes, "Other scholars have agreed that numerous readings [...] are possible, none more conclusive than the other."[44] She proposes that instead of focusing on who the painting is, or is not, portraying and assuming that determining this identity dictates its political or thematic value: "Sloan's intended ambiguity is precisely the political message of this painting."[45] I also want to draw attention to *Three A.M.'s* undeniable narrative vagueness as its most important quality, more so than any of the scholastic arguments that the women it depicts are, or are not, sex workers.

Sloan's painting was influenced by the growing social discomfort with women's increasingly hard-to-read roles, and it challenged that discomfort by depicting women in a difficult to interpret situation. There are no definitive markers of status or profession, but there are heavy suggestions without confirmations. Instead, viewers must trick themselves into creating artificial closure to resolve their confusion. It is as though Sloan is testing the thought that "reformers might have […] encouraged the belief that single women in the city must be prostitutes," writes Schreiber.[46] This was an assertion encouraged by the fear that single women who moved to, and lived in, the city would come to harm. But it created further, contrived reassurance and that deviant women could be identified. Of course, this was extremely evocative of earlier beliefs in phrenology and pathology, because making the deduction still relied on reading markers of marital and social status. Yet, for the first time during the 1900s, Christ notes, "there were degrees to which a woman could be considered fallen."[47] Sloan counters the presumption that women could be "typed," writes Schreiber:

> By giving us a variety of possibilities, demonstrating that one should proceed with caution before making assumptions regarding these women and how they earn their living. In so doing, he also acknowledges that working-class women were exploring their sexualities in ways that challenged traditional values.[48]

By acknowledging these explorations, he offers an alternative view of the working-class woman and, depending on the readings of his respective images, the "prostitute." His drive to present this alternative may have had much to do with the fact that his first wife, Dolly, had been a sex worker[49] and was an "active suffragist."[50] But his perspective was not "characterized by arguments that the problem was less a matter of personal sin than of

---

[44] Schreiber, 174.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Christ, 87.
[48] Schreiber, 174.
[49] John Loughery, *John Sloan: Painter and Rebel* (Henry Holt & Company, 1995), 49-50.
[50] Snyder and Zurier, 178.

societal forces requiring systemic legislation," either.[51] It did not give in to "the intensity of public hysteria over the 'white slave trade,' manifest in the establishment of several government investigatory commissions and the popularity of the subject in film and the press."[52]

Intersectional taboos: interracial sex, interracial women

Meanwhile, in New Orleans, the sexual potential of slavery in any form had never mellowed or left public consciousness. Still, earlier in the nineteenth century, the words "white slavery" implied the literal enslavement of white individuals. This situation was exemplified and made especially of interest to locals during the convoluted Sally Miller case between 1844-45. The case involved contentions when, writes Marouf Hasian, Jr.:

> Several antebellum communities fought over the racial identity of an individual who at various times was called 'Salome Muller,' 'Bridget,' 'Mary,' and 'Sally Miller.' This 1844-1845 decision would be forgotten in the twentieth century, but in the nineteenth century this 'white slavery' case was considered to be one of the seminal decisions that showed how 'law made the performance of whiteness increasingly important in the determination of racial status' (Gross 112).[53]

However, anti-slavery activists were reluctant to use the situation to bolster their cause, and similar cases failed to rouse national interest in white Southerners' fears that racial mixing could threaten their "superior" status.[54] For the rest of the nation, Keire states:

> White slavery acquired its sexual connotations unevenly over time. Abolitionists had sexualized chattel slavery, so it is not surprising that anti-vice reformers, one of the many groups that incorporated abolitionist language, should have kept its sexual overtones.[55]

The “sexual connotations” that were brought to the forefront of the debates had complex ramifications, one of which being that Storyville readily harbored and encouraged the enormous, infamous vogue for octoroon women – women who were white enough to be elevated above their black counterparts in both racial and moral purity, as well as educated enough to entertain upper and middle-class (white) men. Yet, they were still black enough

---

[51] Ibid., 187.
[52] Ibid., 187.
[53] Marouf Hasian, Jr., “Performative Law and the Maintenance of Interracial Social Boundaries: Assuaging Antebellum Fears of 'White Slavery' and the Case of Sally Miller/Salome Muller,” *Text and Performance Quarterly* 23 (2003): 57.
[54] Carol Wilson, *The Two Lives of Sally Miller: A Case of Mistaken Racial Identity in Antebellum New Orleans* (Rutgers University Press, 2007), 106.
[55] Keire, 7.

to suggest antebellum slavery and attract a considerable number of clients to particular brothels.

Initially, though, white slavery's usage as a reference to forced prostitution had its beginnings in France and Great Britain. In 1870, after the Civil War had finished in the United States:

> Victor Hugo wrote to British reformer Josephine Butler that 'the slavery of black women is abolished in America, but the slavery of white women continues in Europe and laws are still made by men in order to tyrannize over women.' In this context, Hugo used white slavery to represent state-regulated prostitution, particularly the medical examination of prostitutes required by Britain's Contagious Diseases Acts. Ten years later, however, Alfred Dyer, an ally of Butler's, shifted the meaning of white slavery away from the systemic metaphor representing unequal power in the capitalist state to the meaning with which we are most familiar: involuntary brothel prostitution.[56]

The phrase came to be used extensively in America, where it did not fail to produce visceral reactions because of its simultaneous evocations of whiteness, slavery, and sex. During the 1900s, explains Keire:

> For reformers all along the rhetorical spectrum, red-light districts were the strongholds of organized vice. Also known as 'restricted' or 'segregated' districts, these areas of municipally-tolerated prostitution represented the commercialization of sex at its worst.[57]

Storyville, being one such district among many in American cities, still posed a challenge to these common rationalizations for vice districts because it blended almost every quality reformists were trying to control in various ways: sexuality, alcohol, drug use, extreme poverty, violence, disease, gambling, and racial mixing.

Landau writes, “Jim Crow segregation and the creation of vice districts [...] emerged in the late nineteenth century as ways to create order out of the increasingly disorderly urban experience.” Further, she notes that the growth of national tourism and to some extent, boosterism and its goals to cultivate tourism, were linked to Storyville and other red-light districts' creation.[58] Before then, at least, the red-light districts were regarded more pragmatically as utilitarian necessities, not marked destinations for pleasure.
They served a purpose by giving specific classes of men a sexual outlet with debased women they could not possibly corrupt. Landau writes:

---

[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid., 12.
[58] Landau, 78.

> As pleasure travel and tourism grew, along with new business practices and the growth of a new class of professional urbanites, red-light districts arose to serve men on the make and to employ (or entrap) women adrift. This situation was not unique to New Orleans, and indeed New Orleans was typical in this regard. So while Storyville is often conceived as part of an entirely different history, it was, to the contrary, an extreme example of a common trend.[59]

There were, however, key reasons why Storyville caused more than its fair share of trouble, even though it was indubitably "an extreme example of a common trend," and they all had to do with New Orleans's cultural uniqueness and the ways in which it dealt with class and race. It was simpler – at least from the day's ideological perspectives – to speak so straightforwardly about prostitution in other cities.

In the Crescent City itself, attitudes toward Storyville were intensely polarized, and this was not unusual. But they were rooted in different historical, cultural, and socio-economic influences that had never been shared by other regions in the country – even other Southern regions. Among the most notable, Landau says, was "the legacy of a three-tiered racial structure of whites, free people of color, and slaves endured culturally for years after the color line," a boundary that was well under construction by the 1900s, "was sharply drawn."[60] This was partially because people "had long been distributed according to a salt-and-pepper pattern, and lines between and among groups were less than fixed."[61] Crucially, it meant Storyville was an intersectional taboo – it thrived on so many fears to such an extent that there was no way it could comfortably exist within federalized, "American" culture.

Whiteness, too, was being solidified as an ideological, legal, and racial category by the early 1900s, and its preservation (not to mention elevation) was prioritized by many reformists. The Travelers' Aid Society, which I referenced earlier in the chapter, was only one specialized group whose purpose was to keep white women and girls from falling prey to New Orleans brothels. Landau asserts:

> The formation of these territorial groups was a strong reaction against the ways "class, culture, language, and the physical landscape of the city had as much impact as race in determining settlement and movement. The struggle to segregate the city was a struggle against centuries of habit.[62]

---

[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid.

Eventually, “the struggle to segregate the city” was tied directly to the struggle to rid the city of Storyville, which did not segregate its women in the full legal sense, though the argument could be made that the women self-segregated by shade because certain skin tones were more conventionally attractive or alluring. Overall, these changes (and all their complexities) were linked to heavy national uncertainties and were not simply isolated attempts to enshrine white Southern culture. There were nationalist responses throughout the country that encompassed asserting "masculinity" and "Anglo-Saxon" dominance. These fed into accompanying ideologies about whiteness and indeed, gender.

Zurier and Snyder note how, during the early twentieth century:

> Simultaneous male assertiveness produced an exaggerated masculinity. At a time when some expressed fears that middle-class men were becoming too soft in white-collar jobs, or that Anglo-Saxons would become displaced by more 'vigorous' immigrant 'races."[63]

In conjunction with this heightened "masculinity," there was also a renewed focus on femininity. Of most interest to my consideration of the Storyville Portraits and the popular culture of Storyville is how white, female activists reacted to blackness and correlated it with what they believed to be the theatrical sexuality of sex workers. The Travelers' Aid Society went out of its way to specify that it helped white women because black and mixed-race women were already stereotyped as naturally inclined to sexual excess or deviance. Therefore, by the reformists' logic, they were not salvageable.

After all, one of Storyville's most tenacious strategies was to sell exactly what reformers sought to repress. For example, Gary Krist writes, Emma Johnson's brothel "offered some of the youngest (the very youngest) prostitutes in the District [and] purportedly gave nightly 'sex circuses' in which every form of fetishism, voyeurism, and sadomasochism" could be indulged.[64] The success of these services – or simply the rumors of their existence, which probably drew clients, regardless – was inseparable from Storyville's reliance on taking advantage of what Jennifer Greenhill calls the time's "exaggerated masculinity" – found particularly in middle-class men who were worried they might become "too soft" due to the supposed ease of white-collar jobs and what they perceived to be the diminishing femininity of women.[65] Concurrently, women of color posed a crisis to both white femininity and whiteness in general when they could pass, or

---

[63] Snyder and Zurier, 179.

[64] Gary Krist, *Empire of Sin: A Story of Sex, Jazz, Murder, and the Battle for New Orleans* (Stroud: Amberley, 2014), 149.

[65] Greenhill, 746.

were light skinned, but continued to claim the sexual prowess of "blackness." Ironically, Greenhill notes that "whiteness would remain an abstract idea in the courts into the twentieth century – it would evade precise location."[66]

"Think I want to get pinched under the white slave law?": Ambiguity in representations of sex and sex work

Like these ideas of race, expressions of female sexuality were being tested and changed during the 1900s. Part of this process involved the erosion of the "prostitute" archetype itself – women were experimenting with new types of relationships and existences in the city, which led to a spectrum of sexual experiences (and sex work) in urban environments. Christ explains:

> In addition to dress, in action, too, there were degrees to which a woman could be considered fallen. 'Charity girls,' for example, did not accept money for sex and were officially, therefore, not prostitutes. What they did was known as 'treating,' the offering of sexual favors and companionship in exchange for gifts such as food, clothing, rent, or a night out. Further muddling the lines between 'fallen and respectable' were the 'occasional prostitutes.' These women usually turned to the more lucrative business of prostitution only when wanting of money, because unemployed or otherwise.[67]

Although New York City was evidently filled with women who occasionally had sex for money, the situation in Storyville was more extreme, almost exaggerated by comparison. Working-class women in New York were, according to popular perceptions, all but expected to treat men or become prostitutes. But in New Orleans, there was a caste of women who had been working-class or middle-class at home, then gravitated toward prostitution, later becoming sex workers who ultimately were wealthy or at a social advantage in middle age – this includes Josie Arlington and pre-Storyville madam Kate Townsend.[68]

Their situations, as well as those of other, now unknown women, were far different from what Christ describes regarding "a woman who was between jobs" and turned to casual sex for pay. He writes, "For these and other reasons, working-class sexuality often could not be limited to bourgeois moral standards."[69] Storyville's madams in particular problematized these assumptions because they were "prostitutes," but were decidedly not

---

[66] Ibid.
[67] Christ, 87.
[63] Greenhill, 746.
[69] Christ, 87.

working-class. However, as I have noted earlier in the chapter, there were also a vast number of cribs in New Orleans where poor, often obviously black (dark-skinned) women worked thankless hours; their decisions were decidedly not framed by "bourgeois moral standards" but rather, necessities and oppressive realities.

Bearing dynamics of the understanding of race, monetary power, and changing gender roles in mind, I now want to consider how interpretations of the Ashcan's images of women can be brought to bear on the contemporaneous Storyville Portraits. In particular, I have focused on Sloan because as others have rightfully pointed out, his paintings and illustrations of women provide a similar sense of ambiguity.[70] They also enable us to productively notice contrasts that lead to more nuanced considerations of the Portraits that do not just rely on what is known about Bellocq, and instead take into consideration what he omits to portray. (Dark-skinned women, for example, make no appearances, despite their undeniable presence in the sex trade in New Orleans, and their presence in popular culture media such as *Mysteries of New Orleans*. Even the "Man About Town" I quoted in Chapter One said that Lulu White was very dark, though his credibility is debatable.) These omissions are often of more interest than what Bellocq *does* depict. But, starting with what is perhaps their most obvious quality, the portraits are of attractive, albeit ordinary-looking, women who are neither hard nor malicious looking, as reformist rhetoric might have claimed about prostitutes. For example, this statement about Sloan's paintings could easily apply to Bellocq's portraits:

> The physicality of the women's bodies conveys an erotic, earth-mother appeal when wasp-waisted figures were still in vogue and 'liberated' women of Sloan's own social group were debating whether to discard their corsets.[71]

I have not yet directly addressed whether these portraits are of sex workers, a question which occasionally surfaces not only in scholarship about them, but also in discussions about Sloan's images of women. I assert that it is most productive to avoid fixating on whether or not they are: like Christ, I posit that "a more fruitful understanding of the issue of prostitution in these images can be found in an interpretation in which identity loses fixity" and add that a less stereotypical understanding of Storyville can also be found when we address the enigmatic, amorphous qualities of the images.[72] There is very little, visually,

---

[65] Sloan's reluctance to provide specific visual narratives garners comment within nearly all of the scholarship I have consulted for this chapter.
[71] Snyder and Zurier, 178.
[72] Christ, 84.

that binds the portraits to New Orleans. Aside from where they were found, their creator's origin tales, and scattered details in the photographs themselves (a few university pennants, etc.), there would be little reason to situate them in Storyville at all. Pragmatically, however, it is not sensible to avoid the assumption that these women were indeed sex workers in Storyville.

At the same time, though, applying discourses that have been generated by studying and interpreting some Ashcanners' images of women is helpful. It temporarily and helpfully distances the portraits from New Orleans scholarship to include them in the heated dialogues about women that were going on throughout the United States, Great Britain, and Europe at the time of their creation. Among the issues under scrutiny was a notable deviation from "art historical tradition," say Zurier and Snyder: "Unlike some of the Ashcan artists' other subjects, there was a long art historical tradition to contend with in depicting the sexes."[73] The Ashcanners' respective artistic productions were compounded by increasingly contentious debates about how women were expected to behave in a jarringly modernized, urbanized world. Artistic and visual portrayals were still moored to moral and representational traditions that were becoming rapidly outmoded by life's realities. Regardless, portraying women as they appeared in the moment was not yet normal or acceptable. "In practice," Zurier and Snyder elucidate, it was still the case that "depicting women as objects of aesthetic pleasure" was normal. In many regards, Sloan and Bellocq do this by simply offering an alternative picture of attractive womanhood, and consequently do not radically break from "art historical" or aesthetic traditions.[74]

For Sloan in particular, it is clear that he enjoyed looking at the women he painted and, as Snyder and Zurier write, "In his own way, [he] idealized or even romanticized these women, as if they represented a truer, more instinctual femininity than their counterparts uptown," an assertion that is upheld by the fact that he observed these women without their knowledge.[75] On the other hand, Bellocq worked with models who all knew they were being photographed – and were used to being photographed, if the tales about pornography made in Storyville are not half so exaggerated – so the dynamic between photographer and model is more reciprocal. Nonetheless, Bellocq too seems to enjoy the

---

[73] Snyder and Zurier, 178.

[74] Ibid. "Sloan's images of women challenged both the traditional depiction of women in art and the ideal of femininity that it constructed, thus challenging the status quo. But although Sloan was the husband of an active suffragist, he never used pictures of his own social peers to disrupt sexual stereotypes. Instead, his work presents and celebrates a type of working-class woman whose physique, activity, and frank sexuality defied conventional representation and polite codes of behavior, and offered an alternative, powerful femininity."

[75] Snyder and Zurier, 178.

act of looking. However, though the women these men have painted, illustrated, and photographed are visually appealing, they still do not conform to portrayals of "women working, or misbehaving, [who] appeared only as picturesque characters from other times and places" at a time when ironically, "even the imagery of the women's suffrage movement conformed to accepted ideals of feminine beauty and moral purity."[76]

This insistence on how even misbehaving or rebellious women were supposed to be portrayed within established paradigms cannot be ignored. It immediately impacts how all of Storyville's visual culture, advertisements included, was formed, read, and ultimately ejected from American mainstream culture. Further, the district added another layer that the New York scene did not: a fluid sense of race shrewdly being used to optimize transactions. Nevertheless, there were certain indications that the very term "white slavery" was as inert and nonsensical as these outdated representational traditions, even in a city that did not boast an entire vice district that was thriving on the subversion of racism.

May 1914's issue of *The Masses* contained a cartoon by George Bellows, which depicted a scene that if taken out of context would not seem out of place in a Storyville mansion brothel [Figure 26]. In a finely furnished room complete with the edge of a gilt-framed painting, a white woman in a draped, light gown sits on a sofa with a sheaf of papers on her lap. She has paused in her reading to address a black woman, who has apparently come to talk about a job advertisement. The caption ran as follows:

> 'But if you've never cooked or done housework – what have you done?'
> 'Well, Mam, Ah – Ah's been a sort of p'fessional...'
> 'A professional what?'
> 'Well, Mam – Ah takes yo' fo' a broad-minded lady – Ah don't mind tellin' you - Ah been one of them white slaves.'[77]

There is no mistaking the black woman for a usual servant or cook; she stands to the right of frame wearing white gloves, earrings, and a large feathered headband.

On closer inspection, she also appears to have a fur stole and a delicate handbag dangles on her wrist. This satire functions on a number of levels. The black woman refers to herself with a term that divorces her racial identity from the suggestion that she could be unwillingly (or just reluctantly) involved in sex work, the white woman seems entirely unruffled by what the media constructed as a terrifying or titillating threat to (white) femininity, and viewers might wonder why a woman would apply for a servant's position in a household when she already owns such fine things. Extra money – as well as a means to

---

[76] Ibid., 174.
[77] George Bellows, "But If You've Never Cooked or Done Housework...," *The Masses* (May 1914).

subsist – was why many women entered sex work in either New Orleans or New York, after all. The illustration almost seems to place the white woman in the position of a madam, too, even if she is ostensibly not: her applicant calls her a "broad-minded lady," and the demure turn of phrase sounds like it could be a euphemism for madam found in the Blue Books.[78]

In the years following the passage of the Mann Act (1910), *The Masses* published this and several other satires that poked fun at the hysteria over white slavery. The act, a federal law named for James Robert Mann, a Republican Congressman from Illinois, was "known and referred to as the 'White-slave traffic Act'" in its own text.[79] While the legal treatment of prostitution as such was still left to individual states, the Mann Act owed much to progressive campaigns that demanded the eradication of sex slavery rings that purportedly operated in large cities. There was a number of influential women involved in the vice commissions whose pressure and enquiries led to the eventual formation of the act, including New York suffragist Harriet Burton Laidlaw, who worked in New York's Chinatown with young women who had been tricked into sex slavery.[80] Yet only a few of these activists explicitly acknowledged the many non-white women who were sex workers out of necessity, much less those who were coerced or forced into sex slavery. Among the number who did was Goldman, who said:

> What is really the cause of the trade in women? Not merely white women, but yellow and black women as well. Exploitation, of course; the merciless Moloch of capitalism that fattens on underpaid labor, thus driving thousands of women and girls into prostitution.[81]

Illustrations in *The Masses*, by comparison, criticized the act's lofty applications by calling into question officials' actual ability to ascertain which women were either willingly "deviant" or being exploited. Whereas Goldman, as was usual for her, indicted all of capitalism as the driving force of "prostitution," Bellows steps back from any causal relationships and instead comments on the absurdity of "white slavery" as a concept.

Although Bellows overtly used the figure of a black woman to underscore the irrationality that was inherent in calling sex work (or prostitution) white slavery, he was an exception. There was a tendency of avoiding depicting non-white women and instead,

---

[78] Ibid.
[79] Sixty-first Congress, Sess. II. Chs. 393-395, 1910.
[80] H.B. Laidlaw (b. 1874), "Papers, 1851–1958," via Harvard.edu.
[81] Emma Goldman, "The Traffic In Women," in *Red Emma Speaks: Selected Writings and Speeches* (New York: Random House, 1972).

more emphasis was brought to bear on the ambiguity of white urban women's statuses. As Rachel Schreiber writes:

> Glenn O. Coleman's cartoon from the February 1914 issue of *The Masses* responds to the Mann Act, exposing its spurious claims of protecting young women from sexual predators, while simultaneously gesturing towards the difficulty in distinguishing between women who worked as prostitutes and those who did not.[82]

Like Sloan often did, Coleman depicts women at their leisure. His cartoon is of a crowded dancehall filled with men and women, a common enough place for sex workers to find or meet with clients [Figure 27]. But all types of women were frequenting them more often, a point Coleman makes with the caption. The couple in the left foreground of the illustration seems to be the one having this exchange:

> 'Are you going to see me home to Jersey to-night?'
> 'Think I want to get pinched under the white slave law?'[83]

Overall, the humor rests in the impossibility of being able to tell a deviant woman (or man) from any of the others in the scene. Prostitution, then, looks "normal," and there was little reason to assume that "prostitutes" would appear to be any different from Coleman's young woman. In effect, if there really had been any Victorian markers that denoted sex workers in a crowd, they were now ineffective – even if they were still being used in fiction.

Conclusion: "Infinite stories whose endings we will never know" in Bellocq's portraits

Despite insinuations that the Storyville Portraits are different for being "sensitive" or "alternative" portrayals of prostitutes, the concurrent trends in art and visual culture of their day affirm that this is not an accurate assumption. Further, this chapter makes a case for shifting our perspectives: rather than clichéd Victorian prostitutes or fin de siècle "white slaves," we are looking at early twentieth century women whose roles in society had plainly changed. White slavery was a persistent and prominent idea, even though, as some of the Ashcanners and others portrayed, numerous urban women were more openly promiscuous, turned willingly to sex work, and sought out materially beneficial relationships. Rather than accept this – especially the amount of sex work in cities –

---

[82] Rachel Schreiber, "The Influence of the Mann Act," in *Constructive Images: Gender in the Political Cartoons of the Masses* (PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University, 2008), 204.
[83] Glenn O. Coleman, "Are You Going to See Me Home...", *The Masses* (February 1914).

detractors were eager to maintain the illusion that sex slavery was the only reality experienced by anyone who sold sexual services. This must be interrogated when discussing Bellocq's portraits. Although the circumstances they often hint at were not ideal, they do not depict women who were forced to take photographs, or who were made uncomfortable by the photographer.

Plate 12 of *Storyville Portraits* [Figure 38] is an example of Bellocq's work at its most endearing and perplexing. It is also useful for problematizing the "white slave" narratives of exploitation. The model perched on a chair is probably in her late teens, and she appears to be waiting for Bellocq to finish taking the photograph; her grin is good-natured, and one imagines they could have just been joking with each another. Her pose, though not fully relaxed, hints more at imminent fidgeting than fear or resentment. The young woman's chemise is settled above her thighs but does not expose her to the viewer, while her bare legs are crossed at the ankle. Recalling the "Trilbymania" I explored in Chapter One, we can consider if her naked feet are displayed to arouse: though they are noticeable, Plate 12 is not dedicated to a foot fetish. This is a full portrait, and although it casually ventures into the erotic, the background is too incidental, the model too present, for this image to allow viewers to immerse themselves in an erotic fantasy.

I have mentioned before that it is possible Bellocq meant to crop or otherwise modify these portraits, which might account for why they generally display such disorganized surroundings. This photograph, for example, gives us a strange triangular composition to the left of frame between the model and a small table, which is echoed by her extended arm and fist on her hip. To the right and just behind her chair, someone has draped a large chest of drawers with a shawl, while a framed image, or perhaps a mirror, is turned away from us as it sits on the ground. This room, then, is either lived in or used for her work; there are even books and a folded newspaper piled on the table.

Furthermore, Plate 12 does not show us a "white slave," despite the fevered worries over white slavery. It portrays a young woman in her everyday surroundings. Though she is almost fully undressed, this does not suggest her discomfort. Like the standing woman in *Three A.M.,* she seems at ease with not wearing "proper" clothes while interacting with another person, indoors at least. A key difference between Plate 12 and *Three A.M.,* however, is that this model engages with Bellocq and understands he is looking at her. In short, she has consented to this photograph being taken, and that sense of consent destabilizes any assumptions that she was always being exploited. If we recalibrate our expectations of what the portraits represent or register, even their settings – the

decisions to obscure some objects but not others, the eccentric compositions, the objects and furniture that are out of focus – lend credence to the idea that Bellocq represents "modern" women accompanied by the debris of their lives. Consequently, they sell sex for money, but they are also part of a changing urban order, one in which women negotiated new sexual habits both within and outside of sex work.

One of the portraits' most striking characteristics is the fact that all of the women knew they were being photographed, and seem comfortable with Bellocq, which implies free agreement rather than subjugation. The expressions on their faces vary, but no woman is caught in what David Peters Corbett calls the "private, unself-conscious and intimate" moments that characterize Sloan's work – these models may not be self-conscious, but they are not being spied upon in a "private" moment – and there are no given instances in which Bellocq simulates the pretense of spying.[84] Of itself, this is not necessarily strange. In the day's pornography, which I will be discussing in the next chapter, women often looked at their viewers, and Bellocq was no doubt aware of Storyville's voracious appetite for erotica. So, my comparison between his portraits and any of the Ashcanners' respective artworks and illustrations, but especially Sloan's, may seem odd for the simple reason that Bellocq worked with his models' knowledge.

As Corbett writes, Sloan displays a strong "fascination with working class women" in situations he observed but was not necessarily part of himself. He did not know these women, and they did not know they were being watched. Conversely, regardless of any beliefs about their potential relationships beyond the frame, Bellocq's models were engaged in a transaction with him when they posed. I mean to underscore several, powerful themes by drawing comparisons between these previously unallied topics. First, even if the Storyville Portraits are still part of unclear genres – whether erotica, portrait photographs, or professional commissions – they undeniably encapsulate tension and certain misgivings with their subject, namely sex workers or "deviant" women.[85] Though familiarity (or even fondness) between the photographer and models is always evident, as in Plate 12, that does not mean that these are all comfortable photographs. Indeed, this sometimes renders them even more uncomfortable because – despite the rapport between Bellocq and his models – on their own, the portraits do not readily declare meaning, function, or conform to

---

[84] David Peters Corbett, "Difference, Similarity and the 'Anglo-American' in the Work of Walter Sickert and John Sloan," *Art History (Special Issue: Anglo-American: Artistic Exchange between Britain and the USA)* (2011), ed. David Peters Corbett and Sarah Monks, 788.

[85] As I have noted, there are different theories about what function Bellocq's portraits were meant to have, and these vary depending on era and scholastic discipline. If we keep in mind the photographs he had in his apartment, it is possible that he could have cropped the women out and placed them into new scenes with art nouveau inspired backgrounds.

negative and derogatory stereotypes about sex work. However, tension in images with similar content is often understood differently, with the concepts of voyeurism and a lack of consent driving the suggestion of conflict. What I want to address here is Bellocq's reserve: Sloan looks very freely, but despite what has been said about him, Bellocq does not.

His portraits are just as morally ambivalent toward sex work as Sloan's. Still, they suggest different personal reservations, cultural boundaries, and physical restrictions. This even becomes evident in Bellocq's compositional choices or more precisely, the portraits' haphazardness – within what Brian Wallis calls the "tawdry background details" that are cut off or left unfocused.[86] It also has something to do with the interiors themselves. Instead of the populous and busy city, Bellocq's models are in small, semi-public rooms that have been made to appear sumptuous and private. This has an intimate effect. Intriguingly, too, Bellocq seems to be aware that the women he uses as models are emblematic of Storyville's highest promises of "pretty" women: he keeps a reasonable physical distance from them. More than that literal distance, they are light-complexioned and demonstrative of a specific aesthetic often referenced in the Blue Books – when police reports and Bertillon cards feature women with a variety of skin colors, and many who have very dark skin [Figure 28].[87] There is dissonance between the dirty, dangerous Storyville written about in civic records, and these interiors, which housed pretty, young, light skinned women.

Bellocq's avoidance of the outside world and its fetid alleys and drunken arguments should be regarded as the result of choice and repulsion, not ignorance. After all, he lived close enough to Storyville (and went to it often enough) to understand exactly how unpleasant it could be, and in his youth at least, he was a man of relative means who could probably afford to spend money there. In conjunction, New Orleans and New York's citizens were preoccupied with vice at the turn of the twentieth century, much like the rest of the nation and western world. Though New Orleans had the most infamous decriminalized vice district in the United States until 1917, New York possessed its own technically illegal, but still thriving and long-established sex trade. A difference between the two was that many New York women were evidently more inclined to engage in casual

[86] Brian Wallis, "The Mysterious Monsieur Bellocq," (International Center of Photography, 2004), 5.
[87] See numerous Bertillon cards (originating from the New Orleans Police Department between the 1890s-early 1900s), for example, those used in the "Hidden From History – Unknown New Orleans" exhibit at the New Orleans Public Library curated by Emily Epstein Landau (full catalogue available online), URL: http://nutrias.org/exhibits/hidden/hidden_contents.htm.

relationships to supplement an income,[88] whereas in New Orleans, career sex workers were – though it is difficult to know accurately why, or with what regularity, all the women who did so would have offered sexual services for money – promoted as part of Storyville. New York parents, for example, might sometimes be shocked upon discovering that their daughters, whom they assumed had only respectable jobs, were also being paid or compensated to have sex and viewing it as an acceptable way to earn extra money.

Further complicating this new sexual culture was the common tendency amongst young women to trade sex for outings, meals, or pragmatic favors within the context of a monogamous, or more casual, relationship. Because it was not full-time sex work as such, the practice continued to destabilize already fragile, imagined boundaries between "prostitutes" and other women. This environment allowed Sloan to cultivate and demonstrate his "fascination with working class women in private, unself-conscious and intimate moments."[89] Regardless of what their families might have thought, the women who made these choices were part of a new social order that did not have the same misgivings toward either sex work or trading sex for favors. But this was entrenched in a much broader social shift: women were negotiating a new presence in the city, and images like Sloan's and as I suggest, Bellocq's, cannot be viewed as indicative of their creators' indifference to social politics.

Some, however, posit that the Storyville Portraits do indicate disengagement. Waguespack, for example, addresses Bellocq's intentions to give the portraits a new "vernacular reading,"[90] writing:

> Bellocq's seeming disinterest in Storyville's politics and social issues reflects his interests as a commercial photographer whose day job was to record objects and events without casting judgment or effecting change.[91]

Although it is true that Bellocq casts no negative judgment on his subjects – and was not politically or socially oriented in the same way that Lewis Hine and Jacob Riis were, as Waguespack rightly points out – this should not be regarded as evidence of his disinterest in "Storyville's politics and social issues."[92] On the contrary, it seems as though he did have some interest in civic matters. When called to be a juror in a murder case of a woman called Annie Lavin – who, although she was never named as a sex worker in the newspapers' coverage of the case, fits the profile of modern young women I have been

---

[88] Christ, 87.
[89] Corbett, 788.
[90] Waguespack, 99.
[91] Waguespack, 99.
[92] Waguespack, 99.

discussing[93] – Bellocq was excused because he "did not believe in capital punishment."[94] This could be a cover for any number of reasons – perhaps he knew Lavin or possibly sided with her accused murderer, her lover George Cassanova – but fellow potential jurors cited these types of conflicts of interest as reasons why they would not serve on a jury. He, then, would have had little reason to lie. While only a small incident, it points to some kind of awareness of, and engagement or discomfort with, social issues relating to sex and crimes of passion.

Bellocq's portraits of Storyville women reveal his stake in Storyville's and New Orleans's social spheres, as well as the influence of unstable, national popular cultures that were still fixated on prostitution. Bellocq seems to have avoided taking portraits of dark skinned women, which is no accident when we also consider that his models were considered conventionally attractive. He did not work in "black Storyville" or poor areas of "white Storyville," so far as we are currently aware. The differences between these and the mansion brothels, including Mahogany Hall, where Bellocq supposedly took many of his pictures, were striking; Landau and Long have described these inequities in detail. Tales of injustice, poor hygiene, and drug use also abounded in the press and amongst reformers.[95] While some of this was no doubt sensationalized, the searing headlines and homilies were still derived from hard truths. For every "Diamond Queen" of a madam who made her own fortune, there were also "girls" who worked out of miniscule, dirty cribs. Their lives were punctuated by violence and exploitation because they were afforded little legal protection and burdened with social shame. These women went unlisted in Blue Books and unmentioned in newspapers, but they made up a sizable and presumably underreported – taken for granted – number of available women in Storyville.

Yet, if we were to form an impression of the district based purely from Bellocq's photographs alone, none of the cribs' women would factor into our inferences. In itself,

---

[90] See "George Cassanova Is Home On Parole Lifetime Convict, for the Killing of a Girl, Freed," *Times-Picayune*, January 25, 1915, "The Cassanova Case As Viewed By Experts. Surgeons Discuss the Wounds Found on the Lavin…," *Times-Picayune*, November 28, 1908, "Cassanova Is Guilty; Escapes Execution. Jury Out Four Hours, and Brings in Qualified Verdict, Youth…," *Times-Picayune*, November 29, 1908, and "Cassanova Case Comes Up To-Day, But Neither Side May Show Its Full Hand, Leaving the…" *Times-Picayune*, August 7, 1908.

[94] "Cassanova On Trial For Woman Murder. Jury to Decide Whether He Slew Annie Lavin, Or…," *Times-Picayune*, November 25, 1908.

[92] See "White Slavery Awful Business, But There Are Women's Souls to Be Saved, And There Is…," *Times-Picayune*, March 10, 1910, "Letters From The People," *Times-Picayune*, August 6, 1914, "Era Club Probes Expo And Racing Wants 'Storyville' Abolished and S. and W. Board Law," *Times-Picayune*, June 28, 1914, "City Will Control Segregated Area Under New System Jackal Landlordism Is to Be Abolished…," *Times-Picayune*, January 24, 1917, "Shamelessness Of The Vicious Classes," *Times-Picayune*, March 18, 1900, and "Police Lesson Taught. Notorious Negress Treated Too Tenderly By the Law's Officer," *Times-Picayune*, February 13, 1909.

this reveals a bias best explained by Bellocq's family heritage, and perhaps by his class standing. He chose not to portray Storyville's true underbelly if he ever ventured into it, and omitted even to depict it from a distance. Instead, he overlooked any suggestion of it. Omission is a strong theme in the portraits in many respects, and this is particularly significant. There was a hierarchy of vice in New Orleans – and there was a dichotomy between rich madams who were essentially socialites, and women who worked long hours in narrow, cramped rooms. While the prior often transgressed social and cultural boundaries, or at least influenced matters beyond their immediate social spheres, the latter held little power. In comparison, they were in no position to dictate their working or living conditions. Bellocq does not acknowledge this substantial aspect of Storyville life, which could have fallen closer to the grisly narratives of white slavery: but this only hints at an acceptance of certain kinds of vice over others, as well as his own position in New Orleanian cultures, rather than neutrality toward his models' profession.

After all, most of the men who frequented Lulu White or Josie Arlington's brothels would most likely not make visits to the cribs. There were too many layers of classism, and tacit assumptions that the richest madams manipulated to garner custom, for us to think that all men visited all kinds of sex workers. As Ann Scholfield and others have noted, high-end Storyville brothels were sumptuous and employed markers of respectability to strengthen their attraction to affluent clientele.[96] It is sensible to assume that Bellocq operated within the same paradigms as others who frequented the district. He was native to New Orleans, white, and from a Creole family. When Storyville was established, he would have been in his twenties. Thus far, scholars have not fully addressed how embedded he would have been in certain aspects of his city's culture – aspects that were under fire at the turn of the twentieth century – and if they have, it has often been to create a Francophone stereotype that owes more to Montmartre than to Storyville.[97]

Conversely, a more troubling undercurrent runs through these images. This has less to do with the mysterious, defaced photographs that are part of the original cache of Bellocq's negatives, and more to do with the social dynamics, misogyny, and misogynoir that none of the portraits show. While Bellocq was not a voyeur, his preoccupation with the women of Storyville is not totally benign, either; after all, the sex worker – regardless of how she was portrayed – was believed by society at large to be "deviant." At its heart, this

---

[96] Ann Schofield, "Respectability, Decadence, and the American Piano," lecture, University of East Anglia, November 3, 2015.

[97] Waguespack notes, "Most of what is written about Bellocq serves to construct the image of a tragic New World bohemian, the Toulouse-Lautrec of New Orleans, with Storyville as his Montmartre and Mahogany Hall as his Moulin Rouge," 29.

would have been regarded as a transaction wherein the client or photographer had the most power. Because of its location, Storyville provided a unique setting for this situation. In many regards, like Corbett says of Sloan's work, "perhaps" the Storyville Portraits "are darker images than we usually think, marked by voyeurism, desire [and] visual power," and that darkness simply manifests itself differently in New Orleans and through Bellocq's work.[98]

These qualities must be understood as part of a larger whole that was being subjected to immense change. Snyder and Zurier end their essay on the Ashcans with the acknowledgement that their art denies definitive "endings" to the viewer:

> These pictures are filled with details and incident: light on a tenement wall at the end of a day [...] the confident gestures of single women enjoying a night on the town. But for all their insights, the pictures also show us that there are things we cannot see: the inner thoughts of people on the street. They present a city of infinite stories whose endings we will never know.[99]

The Storyville Portraits share this trait. Indeed, when we take into account Wallis's statement that Bellocq filled his portraits with "posh and tawdry" minutiae, it is imperative to consider these aspects of Storyville's visual culture in the same way: as images that provide insight by reminding us "that there are things we cannot see." In spite of the lingering assumption that sexual deviance could always be read (or attributed to race and class), they present "infinite stories whose endings we will never know."

---

[98] Corbett, 788.
[99] Snyder and Zurier, 189.

Chapter Four: (Self)-Representing Storyville Women

Having examined the ways in which transatlantic ideas of the fin de siècle sex worker influenced how prostitution was understood in New Orleans, it is time to return to the city itself. This chapter is concerned with the way that sex work was represented in New Orleans – but also, crucially, the ways that sex workers represented themselves. Even though New Orleans's exceptionalism is often overstated without much thought, as I have demonstrated in the previous three chapters, in this instance it is arguably unique. Storyville was exceptional despite being one of many American red-light districts, and as such, it seemed to attract sex workers who possessed an uncommon amount of intrinsic motivation. Apart from their drive to not only operate, but also construct, some of the costliest brothels – thereby changing the actual landscape and social fabric of the city – they also engaged with mass and popular culture representations of sex work to configure and present their own images.

This chapter looks at the threads of self-representation and media portrayals by exploring predominately primary source materials, then contextualizes them with the representations of sex work in the Storyville Portraits. One trend manifests in the local press, which was ostensibly motivated by presenting facts, but was always subject to bribes and what sold copies to the reading public. Among the many mainstays, newspapers such as *The Daily Picayune* (in 1914, this became *The Times-Picayune*) and *The Sunday Sun* were popular options. Both featured relatively factual stories that were sometimes overblown for dramatic effect, but remained essentially unaltered in their details. Satire and sensation followed in similar media: *The Mascot*, a weekly magazine, blended sensationalist journalism and caricature to comment and report on troubling issues. Among the variety of seedy topics on the minds of "respectable" New Orleans residents, these most frequently included prostitution, opium dens, and overindulging in alcohol.

In contrast to more mainstream media, though not totally separate from their influences, there were the self-produced personas cultivated by madams and "working girls" alike. Fabricated and calculated origin stories, sometimes paired with a well-placed photograph, appear in souvenir booklets. Meanwhile, the ubiquitous Blue Books –

directories of brothels – circulating in the city helped entice clients.[1] Eric Platt and Lillian Hill explain:

> [They] were meant to inform and direct clients toward lavish, enticing houses filled with women ready to provide song, dance, and sex. [...] Blue Books allowed madams to learn from their competition. Successful madams kept their houses ornately decorated and well advertised and regularly introduced new forms of entertainment, such as live sex acts and private carnal circuses.[2]

These were never mailed due to obscenity laws, and numerous similar directories existed before Storyville was legislated. They form a large survey of how sex workers marketed and represented themselves while also providing an indication of what kinds of women – relatively affluent, but not always white – could engage with the practice of advertising.

Pornographic photographs form another aspect of the regional mass culture that the Storyville Portraits were part of: according to many, the pornography trade in Storyville thrived. Supposedly, most of Bellocq's models were also present in lewd images.[3] This is hardly a surprise given what we know about pornography markets in fin de siècle Paris, London, and New York, but to underscore how the portraits were both similar to and different from the day's "obscene images," I discuss how the "prostitute" as an icon changed through the influence of pornography and its versatility as a source of income. Further, fetishes for bestiality, interracial sex, and lesbianism were rampant in New Orleans for decades before they became prevalent in what might be called "popular" pornography; therefore, the lack of these overtones in any of Bellocq's portraits is both significant and noticeable.

Indeed, the portraits surface away from the newspapers, Blue Books, and explicit pornography, because they were apparently never published and left hidden until years after the red-light district was shut down in 1917. When considered collectively, these sources all form a previously unexamined milieu of visual and print culture that has not been situated in a unified framework of late nineteenth or early twentieth century social histories. By considering these representations together in this chapter, a method of understanding Storyville as a space unique in its situation can emerge. Concurrently, I also

---

[1] See Emily Epstein Landau, "Where the Light and Dark Folks Meet" in *Spectacular Wickedness: Sex, Race, and Memory in Storyville, New Orleans* (Louisiana State University Press, 2013), 109-131. In this, she explores and analyzes the Blue Books in great detail. See also Pamela D. Arceneaux, *Guidebooks to Sin: The Blue Books of Storyville, New Orleans* (The Historic New Orleans Collection, 2017).

[2] Eric R. Platt and Lillian Hill, "A Storyville Education: Spatial Practices and the Learned Sex Trade in the City that Care Forgot," *Adult Education Quarterly* 64 (2014): 295

[3] Johnny Wiggs as quoted in *E.J. Bellocq: Storyville Portraits – Photographs from the New Orleans Red-Light District, circa 1912*, (Meriden: The Museum of Modern Art, 1970), 12.

acknowledge how the Storyville Portraits were not fully anomalous; rather, this pronouncement has been imposed upon them because of where they originated. New Orleans has always been conceptualized as exotic, different, and strange compared to the United States and even the rest of its region and its home state of Louisiana: Storyville acquired some of that same status in the national imaginary. American history seems to regard it, when it regards it at all, as an isolated incident, while its women are largely forgotten. Though nothing strictly like it appeared afterward, the conversations about and representations of both sex workers and prostitution that it generated are neither unusual nor shocking. But they have yet to be addressed in their own circumstances as part of their time.

Through exploration and analysis of these representations (some mainstream, some self-determined by the women, and others – the portraits – decidedly clandestine and more enigmatic), a visual and print – or popular mass – culture of Storyville sex work is established in a fin de siècle setting. The beginning of my considerations of these representations and discussions was not in Storyville at all. But here, they emerge in New Orleans the city – even before the new tenderloin district was proposed as a solution to rampant brothels that had, in the minds of the supposedly upstanding, corrupted too much of the city. Deceit, race, sex, and money mingle in mass media and the Blue Books, creating a uniquely New Orleanian perspective on the perennially popular topic of prostitution.

"The Terrible Fate of Kate Townsend": melodrama and morality in the media

On the morning of November 4, 1883, *The Daily Picayune* reported a murder that had occurred in one of the expensive city brothels. Kate Townsend, a popular Irish or British (depending on the source) madam who had immigrated to Louisiana, was stabbed to death by her "fancy man" Treville (also called Troisville or simply Bill) Sykes, who lived in his own private quarters in her establishment.[4] New Orleans newspapers had long internalized the grisly artifice of transatlantic journalism: consequently, it sets the tone for the Storyville Portraits and Bellocq's narratives. *The Daily Picayune* capitalized on the brutality of the murder rather than details of their affair, which had lasted for over ten years. These included, among many other dubious things, habitual domestic violence at the hands of

[4] *The Daily Picayune*, November 4, 1883.

both partners. Evidently, Townsend was fond of beating Sykes with a marble rolling pin when she was inebriated; by all accounts, Sykes retaliated similarly.

A spectacle used to sell the morning editions to a city already accustomed to crime and sensational weeklies like *The Mascot*, the murder was illustrated in a style derived from the world-famous *Illustrated Police News of London* [Figure 22]. Townsend's life story is displayed in dramatic panels, from her introduction into the world of “vice” as a teenage barmaid in a Liverpool dancehall, to her abrupt death in her own New Orleans "public harem" [Figure 30].[5] Inset cameos pointedly display the cast of characters in a gripping drama, a demonstration of vice that led to an inevitable disastrous conclusion. These include Kate Townsend, successful madam and businesswoman but now definitely "The Victim" in death, the younger "working girl" Molly (or Mollie) Johnson, unfortunate witness to the crime, and Sykes himself. Almost gleefully, the headline that accompanied the illustrations blared in all capital letters:

> CARVED TO DEATH! THE TERRIBLE FATE OF KATE TOWNSEND AT THE HAND OF TREVILLE SYKES WITH THE INSTRUMENTALITY OF A BOWIE KNIFE.[6]

Even without photographs, the graphic impact of the illustration paired with the specific mention of the murder weapon was blunt and powerful.

Readers' sympathies were engaged in a typical motif that would change as Storyville neared the twentieth century: Townsend is presented as a victim of prostitution's snare, a casualty of social corruption in spite of her considerable wealth at the time she died. One scene depicts her leaving two young children in a barren but reasonably furnished sitting room; the seemingly older of the two clutches at her full skirts in distress. As a young woman, the paper shows here, she gave up the proper feminine status of mother and left her native country to come to the United States. Despite the facts of her life, the illustration implies that this was not an easy choice to make. Newly arrived in the Crescent City, she lingers in the doorway of a "harem," thinner than all the other women – whose telltale plump bodies are draped in lingerie. They beckon her toward them; again, readers understand that although she sought out this life, it was not an ideal option. She is forced, then coerced. More than anything else, Townsend is a fallen woman. The illustrated guide to "The Townsend Tragedy" [Figure 30] neatly, and melodramatically, encapsulated the life and death of the prominent New Orleans madam. The narrative wants to show that she

---

[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.

made a harrowing choice to leave her family. Though she ultimately engaged in the deplorable trade of prostitution, she did not choose her profession as a matter of enjoyment. Even here as the preface to a murder story, the mythology of the prostitute as a type is turned into a polemic guided by headlines and illustrations. In reality, report Alan G. Gauthreaux and D.G. Hippensteel, Kate, whose birth name was either Bridget or Katherine Cunningham, abandoned the "twins born as a result from [sic] her liaison with a sailor" in Liverpool, and arrived in the United States through New York City before moving to New Orleans in 1857.[7]

The vignettes, done in a style typical of the time and reminiscent of other nineteenth century magazines and newspapers, promote sympathy rather than disgust by linking Townsend to the more acceptable ideals of womanhood that she lost. It is implied that she was forced or compelled to shed them by events that were out of her control: thus, she gave up the trappings of a more feminine and acceptable life. Before she entered sex work, for example, she was a mother who had to "[bid] adieu to her children," and although they are not told why explicitly, contemporary readers would have been able to surmise that she probably fled poverty or a sour marriage. The veteran women in "a public harem in New Orleans" are larger than Townsend, which implies that their work is viable and leads to a full income, and they lean toward her while she stands uncertainly on the brothel's threshold. It is as though they mean to trap her inside and corrupt her to living their way of life, although ironically, Kate became one of the most affluent pre-Storyville madams.

The prostitute as "fallen" implies that the woman necessarily departed from a higher or more moral state that befit her femininity. This was a facet of earlier reports about prostitution in New Orleans, and it eventually became less of a focal point as the years drew closer to Storyville and such melodramatic rhetoric was replaced by a more violent vernacular in the twentieth century. Linda Nochlin writes:

> Fallen in the feminine [...] understood as any sexual activity on the part of women out of wedlock, whether or not for gain--exerted a peculiar fascination on the imagination of nineteenth-century artists, not to speak of writers, social critics, and uplifters.[8]

Though prostitutes were not always synonymous with tragic fallen women, and indeed the idea also could apply to villainesses popularized in sensational literature or female criminals

---

[7] Alan G. Gauthreaux, D.G. Hippensteel, *Dark Bayou: Infamous Louisiana Homicides* (McFarland, 2015), 41.
[8] Linda Nochlin, *Woman, Art, and Power, and Other Essays*, (Westview Press, 1989), 57.

known on either side of the Atlantic, Townsend herself was characterized as fallen rather than intrinsically deviant. *The Monroe Bulletin,* in fact, scoffed:

> [Sykes's] wounds [were] so trifling that a child could have inflicted or an infant borne them. If the law can be construed to excuse such a crime [...] then it will be high time to change it to something more consonant with the ideas of advanced civilization.[9]

Perhaps the sympathy extended toward her and the newspapers' forthright attitude had to do with New Orleans, a place infamously relaxed in matters of the flesh, and a city where some madams and "working girls" reached near-celebrity statuses and lived almost, but not quite, respectably.

The Times-Picayune meant to establish Townsend in anything but a criminal light: its illustrations following the morning of her murder reinforce the intention. Though a madam, she is also indicated as a member of the community – with her popularity serving to indict Sykes despite any maltreatment he might have suffered. (That potential aspect of the story is neglected, omitted from a conveniently scintillating and didactic newspaper narrative.) Intriguingly, Townsend was no stranger to the city or the press by the time her ghastly murder, surprisingly sedate funeral, and the ensuing court battles over her will were headlining stories.[10] In her early days as a new madam, apparently, a report of her personal boudoir was made for readers and it accounted for all details – from the types of linen in her wardrobe, to expensive oil paintings on the walls.[11] A distinction had been drawn between her establishment, which catered to a better class of customer, and the common cribs that could be found in the poorer, rougher parts of the city. If Townsend did have a hand in the story's publication, the use of a daily newspaper in this fashion would have been calculated to reach as large a readership as possible.

On the other hand, the readers of Blue Books, or souvenir books, were assuredly male and indubitably read them in specific environments – well away from any family

---

[9] *The Monroe Bulletin*, November 14, 1883.

[10] Gauthreaux and Hippensteel write, "Kate's wake and funeral were not elaborate affairs, but they did demonstrate her love of the finer things in life. Her gown was made of the finest white silk […] The mourners enjoyed the finest champagne and wines, and one of Kate's last wishes was that no men be allowed to attend," 44, and they also describe the very lengthy, convoluted court case over Townsend's will and assets, 44-51.

[11] The text of this article was made available on a website entitled "Storyville New Orleans," where it was attributed to *The Daily Picayune* without a date or other documentation. However, the many verifiable newspaper reports of her relationship with Sykes, murder, funeral, and the legal disputes over her will do attest that she was well-known and wealthy. Therefore, I have tried to keep my distance from this purported report of her new brothel, but it is worth mentioning for context. See: "Carved to Death; Terrible Fate of Kate Townsend, at the Hands of Troisville Sykes," *The Daily Picayune*, November 4, 1883, "Kate Townsend Killed," *The Daily Telegraph,* Monroe, LA, November 3, 1883, "Townsend Laid to Rest," *The Daily States,* New Orleans, November 6, 1883, and "Sykes and Townsend," *The Daily Picayune*, New Orleans, August 2, 1879.

obligations. The preface to one (an Eighth Edition from 1907 published by Billy Struve, who also "signed" the Blue Books as "Billy News") explains:

> WHY NEW ORLEANS SHOULD HAVE THIS DIRECTORY
> First – Because it is the only district of its kind in the States set aside for the fast women by LAW
> Second – Because it puts the stranger on a proper grade or path as to where to go and be secure from hold-ups, brace games and other illegal practices usually worked on the unwise in Red-light Districts [sic].[12]

Newspapers, conversely, had vast readerships comprised of all genders and most classes. Whether Townsend bribed the newspaper's editors as she reputedly did the police and other officials is unknown for certain, but we can imagine that she benefitted from the glowing account. In some ways, it was a precursor to the Storyville advertisements; the continuation and solidification of vernaculars used to discuss prostitution in New Orleans are present in the media's later choices of stories. Townsend was already well-known before she died, and her murder was a fantastic bookend to a tempestuous life. She was representative of what several Storyville madams would later become: rich, shrewd, and fat – bearers of physical hallmarks of a fiscally sound industry, as well as financial excess and voracious "appetites."

The *Picayune's* readers were regaled with the story of Townsend's funeral not long after the tale of her murder, which was, while not ultimately stranger than fiction, certainly comfortable in an ideological milieu shaped by sensational journalism. Townsend was able to afford the best in death as she had in life, and according to the press, her procession was a study in understated wealth.[13] Evidently, noted the press with relish, she had grown corpulent in her middle age: the coffin was both top quality and far larger than expected for an average woman.[14] While mourning was performative for Victorians in general and an art in both Southern and New Orleanian culture, this public display was upheld differently given who was being commemorated. No one could or wanted to forget that this was a madam who had been murdered. Under the beautiful coffin lid, Kate Townsend's corpse still bore wounds created by "the instrumentality of a Bowie knife,"[15] as the *Picayune* had explained. This predates the Ripper murders; unlike the autopsy photographs of the London victims, for example, the public would never actually see any

---

[12] Billy Struve, *Blue Book*, Eighth Edition (New Orleans: 1907), The Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana, Call Number: HQ146.N6 B58 1907, Permalink: http://hnoc.minisisinc.com/thnoc/catalog/2/4579.
[13] Gauthreaux and Hippensteel, 44.
[14] "Townsend Laid to Rest," *The Daily States,* November 6, 1883.
[15] "Carved to Death; Terrible Fate of Kate Townsend, at the Hands of Troisville Sykes."

photographs or illustrations to that same effect. But, the newspaper described the scandal as dramatically as it could manage in text. Inadvertently, Townsend was a readymade icon of prostitution. From her beginnings as a barmaid from Liverpool who sadly gave up a life of motherhood to become a prostitute, to her domination of a corner of the pre-Storyville New Orleans demimonde, she provided a variety of material for the press to use as an attractive story. Though it was true that the public had also been perversely curious about the details of her bedroom and the types of paintings she displayed on its walls, her abrupt death created a novelistic ending. It was a brutal – and ideal – finish to the narrative of the young, foreign woman who eventually rose, or fell, to the role of upscale New Orleans madam.

But what the paper indicates most of all is not only the nineteenth century fixation on the ideas of the demimonde: it established a precedent for later pieces on vice and Storyville, while also demonstrating a characteristic sensationalism that saturated New Orleans culture in respectable and, more expectedly, muckraking newspapers. It equally laid foundations for representations of the prostitute as an archetype, and the most celebrated madams became characters. Some of the best examples of this process can be found in *The Mascot* magazine, which ran every Sunday between 1882 and 1897.[16] Readers could expect to find satire, commentary, and sensationalism in its eight weekly pages and were not disappointed; according to Sally Asher, "It was the largest illustrated journal in the South."[17] Although these kinds of dynamics have been discussed in studies of Victorian Britain, with a considerable emphasis on the massive boom in newspapers and magazines as evidence for insatiable public appetites for stories of the strange, grisly, and unsavory, they have not yet been applied to discourses around Storyville. The biggest decriminalized vice district in American history remains oddly separate from these broader considerations. In the usual narratives, it is not always an indicator, or the result of, social trends that were present in the western world at the time, but the primary explanation for this is probably the tenacious moral and legal campaign pressed by the United States Navy just before the end of World War I. Ultimately, the resultant Selective Service Act of 1917 would outlaw any vice districts within several miles of a naval base in the hope of "containing" moral and physical disease.[18]

---

[16] Ruth Laney, "The Mascot: New Orleans Newspaper," *Country Roads: From Natchez to New Orleans* (October 2012), URL: http://www.countryroadsmagazine.com/culture/history/the-mascot-new-orleans-newspaper.
[17] Ibid.
[18] "Selective Service Act of 1917," Chapter 15, Act of May 18, 1917, United States Congress, 1st Session.

To many, sex workers was a walking contagion best understood through the mediation of hearsay or the press and not in person, as various covers of *The Mascot* make clear in different ways regarding the menace of loose or conniving women. The headlining story on May 21, 1892 featured the headline "Lewd and Abandoned" [Figure 31] under a caricatured Emma Johnson leaning from of the doorway of her brothel on Gasquet Street, fat tentacles slithering out to grab unsuspecting people from the street.[19] The article explains a raid on her premises and the ensuing court hearing, all brought about by, apparently, Johnson sitting in her window even after a new law was drafted that forbade the practice. A dichotomy is made between night and day versions of New Orleans, and this is meant to correlate with understandings of morality and immorality, honesty and evasiveness. Most importantly, night is understood as time for the insidious conduct that is, ideally, curtailed by daylight. "When one strolls at noon down one of the beautiful avenues of this city, the whole world appears fair," the magazine proclaims, as though “sin” could not happen under the sun:

> On every hand are green, well-trimmed lawns, set out with palms and other sub-tropical plants; or gardens where roses, pinks, violets, lilies, forget-me-nots, crocuses, and many other flowers blend into a variegated mass of color.[20]

After the beauties of nature in harmony with man are declared, the lines are drawn even more deeply:

> But behind and beneath all this is the reverse of the picture. Behind the beautiful houses are the receptacles of ordure, flushed by the sewerage system, the effluvium of which mingles with the atmosphere and, on misty days, assails the olfactories of the people.[21]

"Behind" is repeated numerous times in the piece, conjuring thoughts of deception, which, no doubt, many citizens of New Orleans feared most. There is more to the scene than "beautiful houses" and "gardens." Indeed, even the idea of a "picture" is summoned to connote deceptive qualities that are latent in the city. Like a picture or a photograph, the magazine seems to imply, the streets can hide and deceive. Women like Johnson, but not anything intrinsic to New Orleans itself, are to blame for enabling vice. The Mascot separates its city from the activity that characterizes its reputation. It does so through the

---

[19] “Lewd and Abandoned,” *The Mascot*, May 21, 1892.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.

caricature, which needs little elucidation to be understood and the accompanying article, which makes it perfectly clear that Johnson and other "procuresses"[22] like her are regarded as a public problem.

The reader, or at least New Orleanian readers, are implicated as complicit in the epidemic of prostitution, so the text and the comical illustration are slightly at odds with one another: although Johnson appears to abscond with a young boy, a little girl, and several innocent men at different stages of life in her octopus guise, sex work could be a lucrative business and it always had consenting clients. The most profitable brothels relied on willing customers and a level of what might politely be termed as friendliness with local officials.[23] There were, though, areas of New Orleans, like the infamous "Smoky Row" on Burgundy Street, whose sex workers were believed to be dangerous and ruthless when it came to gaining any custom: their reputations did not encourage the presence of wealthy visitors. Smoky Row was raided and shut down in 1885, about thirteen years before Storyville existed. Writer Errol Laborde claims that "the police, fearing the worst, looked for bodies in the patios and courtyards. There were none, but there were bloodstained wallets and piles of men's clothing."[24]

The desire to control these types of places (and women) was predominately why Storyville came into existence. Violence directed at clients was supposedly going to be more limited there, or it would in theory be limited to that area. Instead of sex workers mugging and killing men, as the police thought was the case in Smoky Row, Storyville clients would, in theory, enter altercations with each other more often than they did with sex workers. It was rare for a woman to have turned a man over to the police (or the records were not well-kept enough to tell us, now), but “girls” and madams alike used various methods for discouraging assault and rape: a sharp, pretty hatpin within strategic reach on the dressing table was widely considered a warning that a woman was willing to defend herself on the job, for example, while many madams vetted their patrons before letting them go upstairs into private spaces.[25] The idea was that crime within the district would, hopefully, be better reported and recorded.

However, prostitutes were still blamed as the cause of many other sins, regardless of who actually instigated them. Knowing this context, *The Mascot* implored in 1892, "Why

---

[22] Ibid.
[23] Katy Coyle and Nadine Van Dyke, ed. John Howard, "Sex, Smashing, and Storyville," in *Carrying on in the Lesbian and Gay South* (New York University Press, 1997), 58.
[24] Errol Laborde, *I Never Danced with an Eggplant (on a Streetcar Before)* (Pelican Publishing, 2000), 109.
[25] Platt and Hill, 295.

are the gutters allowed to remain filthy?"[26] after an impassioned, vociferous tirade about vice. Through a diatribe that evokes every western cultural reference about sin, from its presence as "the filth-begotten Frankenstein" or the "dragon" of legends in which "an ancient legion [...] tells of a dragon," and after saying that "Vice [sic] protrudes its Medusa head from its lair" to "grin sardonically" at nightfall,[27] The Mascot's agenda is clear to us today. It means partially to satirize, and totally to sensationalize, common concerns over immorality that continually arose in New Orleans because of the houses of prostitution, opium dens, and dancehalls that punctuated the city's nightlife and in some cases, its daytime economies.

Some readers completely agreed with the flowery and forceful arguments, if letters to the editor about Storyville are any indication. Like the *Picayune* and *The Sunday Sun*, *The Mascot* wanted to sell copies. Whether it did so via tapping into humor, fear, or both, does not matter as much as what it reported. If it poked fun at the morality tracts and sermons about prostitutes, drink, and drugs, it probably echoed powerful madams over dinner: they would often meet to trade business tactics and gossip. Nell Kimball, a retired Storyville madam, recounts in her purported autobiography, "We'd sip brandy [...] in each other's parlors... and talk of our protection and costs and girls."[28] Although the veracity of Kimball's account could be questioned,[29] the milieu she – or her author – describes is not totally fabricated.

At times, these gatherings would include politicians whose interests were well established in Storyville and its brothels,[30] such as Kate Townsend's and later, Emma Johnson's, Josie Arlington's, and Lulu White's. The dank, dangerous cribs of Smoky Row were not their world, and they lived the distinction. If Johnson saw the ridiculous caricature of herself as a chubby cephalopod in the May twenty-first edition of *The Mascot*, one hopes she laughed. As the illustration and its story demonstrate, while the divisions between morality and immorality were stark for the upstanding, in the demimondes of New Orleans they were far more malleable. After all, vice was seemingly integral to the

[26] Laborde, 109.
[27] "Lewd and Abandoned."
[28] Nell Kimball, *Nell Kimball: Her Life As an American Madam, By Herself* (MacMillan Publishing Company, 1970), 193.
[29] The Progressive movement brought a vogue for accounts of prostitution from supposed "insiders." As such, as Sharon E. Wood writes in the introduction to Josie Washburn's autobiography *The Underground Sewer: A Prostitute Reflects on Life in the Trade* (Bison Books, 1997): "Authentic writings by prostitutes from the nineteenth century are few" but fabricated autobiographies abounded. There were also many erotic novels supposedly written by women (and sex workers) circulating at this time, as well.
[30] Coyle and Van Dyke, 58.

city; it had been for decades. Tom Anderson and his ilk understood this situation readily, and took advantage of it.

Blue Books and manufactured personas

The directories of sex workers were alongside the media: in relative contrast to newspapers like the *Picayune*, these presented a more commercial, though no less pointed in its own way (they were laden with double entendres), vision of the underworld to their readers. While newspapers published discreet advertisements for balls and dances, the many versions of Blue Books were devoted exclusively to the taxonomy of New Orleans sex workers – with accompanying advertisements for other entertainments, services, and products, including booze, medicinal tonics, and funeral carriages. They dominated how more expensive brothels in Storyville were advertised. At least one madam, Lulu White, published her own versions of "Blue Books" to communicate directly with prospective clients.[31] This was to become useful: after 1900, "lewd and abandoned women" could not advertise themselves in public according to the law, which stated:

> Notoriously lewd and abandoned women are forbidden to stand upon the sidewalks in front of or near the premises they may occupy, or at the alleyway, door, or gate of such premises, or to occupy the steps thereof, or to accost, call, or stop any person passing by, or to walk up and down the sidewalks, or to walk up the city streets indecently attired, or in other respects so as to behave in public as to occasion scandal, or disturb and offend the peace and good morals of the people.[32]

But media illustrations often showed women in the interiors in the same way the depiction of the "public harem" in "The Townsend Tragedy" made sure to reveal prostitutes in underclothes. Women needed to be contextualized as prostitutes and brothels had to be contextualized as such, not simply buildings that housed women.

Activity, albeit the sort that was repugnant to mainstream culture, was at the core of the Blue Books and newspapers' stories about vice. These activities were the point of Storyville, a demarcated space devoted to almost every act that upper class, or just "moral," fin de siècle society attempted to control. Parameters of the laws that created the district were a reflection of common applications of science and reason to what were regarded as moral failures, even diseases, as though vice – which was necessarily devious and wrong – could be contained by spatial regulations and rationalism. The Navy eventually started

---

[31] See Landau, "Where the Light and Dark Folks Meet," 109-131.

[32] *L'Hote v. New Orleans*, Case 177 U.S. 587, 1900.

public campaigns warning people about, for example, how anyone could be a carrier of diseases like syphilis, yet show no symptoms.[33] Though the Blue Books and other publications were aware of these dynamics and capitalized on curiosity about their liminal space by teasing and implicating, Bellocq's oeuvre is, in contrast, frank, made dramatic only because of the interpretations imposed upon it after its rediscovery. 1883 was only the start of what would later characterize Storyville, and Kate Townsend's murder seemed to mark an eventual shift in how the city's press treated prostitution. Though successful brothels and their proprietors were always a spectacle before, popular Storyville madams now had a distinct forerunner. Townsend was proof that they could be noted as celebrities both during life and in death; even *The New York Times* had a short announcement in February regarding Sykes's acquittal.[34] There was no such thing as a totally private life for them, and that helped business.

Unlike magazines and newspapers, Blue Books and souvenir books could not be mailed. They were often obtained at the train station, where newcomers could easily access them. They were also available in pubs, saloons, and barber shops, as well as other establishments that catered to men. Their audience was as specific as the mass and popular media's was varied: Blue Books especially targeted patrons who could pay, as it was assumed that the cheaper brothels would not be advertised.[35] Sporting men, as they were called in the day's vernacular, knew Blue Books were constructed with this in mind. Whereas the *Picayune* concentrated most on Kate Townsend's belongings and story, her hypothetical Blue Book entry would be oriented toward her location and trade – though Blue Books' references probably seem oblique or quaint to twenty-first century readers, they would be obvious to a fin de siècle man.

We can trace some of the biggest Storyville personalities, Kate Townsend's ideological and professional "ancestors," in the Blue or souvenir books. Two were Lulu White, one of the most famous Storyville madams due to her Mahogany Hall, featured in the song "Mahogany Hall Stomp," and Josie Arlington, madam of The Arlington, a popular 1900s mansion brothel.[36] Among other madams who did the same, both of these women contributed her own variations of a Blue Book or advertisements to the myriad available in New Orleans. Arlington's could have been orchestrated by Tom Anderson, a

---

[33] American Social Hygiene Association, *Keeping fit to fight* (New York: s.n. 1918), Harvard University Library, Harvard University, URL: http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:3821877.
[34] *The New York Times*, February 2, 1884.
[35] Arceneaux, in discussion with the author, 24 May 2016.
[36] Many Blue Books advertise for The Arlington; one of the earliest (c. 1901) contains numerous photographs of the sumptuous bordello's themed rooms, such as "the Chinese Parlor," "the Vienna Parlor," and "the Turkish Parlor." See *Blue book: Tenderloin 400, (*New Orleans: s.n., 1901), Call number: HQ146.N6 B58 1901.

state senator of Louisiana often known as "the Mayor of Storyville" because he maintained so many interests in the area (he had longtime associations with Billy Struve, Josie Arlington, and another madam called Hilma Burt), and eventually married Gertrude Dix, who managed Arlington's business affairs when she retired.[37] White's souvenir books, however, are some of the most prolific examples of Storyville-era souvenir books orchestrated by a madam.

Neither of these madams was murdered. More importantly (for this discussion, at least), neither seems to have the extensive press coverage that Townsend garnered, and they did not need it. Arlington's well-kept residence in a very respectable neighborhood became fodder for disdainful gossips who did not approve of her occupation – especially when she returned home to live among them – regardless of her income or ability to purchase property. Thomas Ruys Smith notes that she could not buy "respectability," only the semblance of it,[38] while Louise Coleman explains that the house itself was moved to a different location after Arlington's death – to discourage curious members of the public who came to gawk at it.[39] Arlington and White's advertisements provide examples of the presence of self-determined personas in Storyville, which flew in the face of their detractors' claims. Previously, this idea of self-determinacy has been applied mostly to jazz musicians and some other New Orleans figures like politicians and policemen, but less often to considerations of the working women.

A manufactured image was just as crucial to madams and high-end sex workers as it would have been to any musician: perhaps even more so because their business relied on advertisement and, though sensationalized in the press, it was carried on behind closed doors. Almost anyone could read a newspaper article about Mardi Gras or murder. Fewer would read a Blue Book, and only men who paid for the privilege could go upstairs somewhere such as Mahogany Hall. Any professional, well-paid sex worker was fully aware of the power of advertising, and the impact a phrase or photograph could have on prospective clients. The expense of this, too, limited the ability to reach affluent men to those women who could afford to have photographs taken or advertise via other means.

Arlington and White seem to have retained a measure of distance from anything reported or said about them. Instead, they manufactured impressive arrays of social influence and personal myth. But this was purposeful; in order to keep control of their respective empires, it would have been easier not to engage openly with newspaper or

---

[37] Coyle and Nadine Van Dyke, 58.

[38] Thomas Ruys Smith, *Southern Queen: New Orleans in the Nineteenth Century* (Continuum, 2011), 169.

[39] Louise Coleman, in discussion with the author, 26 May 2016.

tabloid conversation, instead spending more time crafting an image and maintaining business standards. In many ways, this creation and maintenance depended on shrewd direct advertising that could lead to word of mouth and, ideally, repeat customers – like the "Man About Town" and his father in Chapter One – who would come back for either the same women or to discover new ones, and possibly bring friends or family. Since the Blue Books could not travel the same distances or transgress the same spatial and class boundaries as newspapers, encouraging customer loyalty as well as attracting new clients were both key.

One of the most common uses of the Blue Books was to sell experiences that crossed the color line. This was done in a fashion that was not at all unrelated to master-slave dynamics of the antebellum city: many women were advertised as women of color, and according to Platt and Hill, "Madams created lavish households reflective of antebellum decor to attract clients nostalgic for an age of white male power and female subordination, especially black female subjugation."[40] For customers, this all implied nostalgia and exoticism generally, but it also implied a lineage, a genetic predisposition to sexual talents and overall promiscuity. The Blue Books and souvenir books, as well as their advertisements for "Quadroon Balls" and "French Balls," conditioned patrons of Storyville to prize "octoroons" and "quadroons," those women who would have looked like – or so they imagined, at any rate – the enslaved concubines of the old, antebellum South.[41]

This further marginalized and factionalized back sex workers because it elevated white-passing (whether or not they were actually black) women to have more cache, which reinforced shadism. As displayed in its surviving ephemera, this tier of the district was based on luxury and appearances, never just sex on its own. Madams knew what kind of language and nostalgic associations to evoke in the advertisements that were associated with their respective houses. It was not enough simply to provide black women for white men, or to provide a space for almost any sexual fantasies, including rape, bestiality, and bondage. One also had to manipulate existing myths about prostitution, slavery, women, and the South, and be able to discern which were most lucrative. In 1883, a madam's murder was shocking, thrilling news. But twenty years later, the madams had more influence over what was news in the first place, revealing that for all its faults and

---

[40] Platt and Hill, 294.

[41] *Blue book: Tenderloin 400, (*New Orleans: s.n., 1901), Call number: HQ146.N6 B58 1901 and Lulu White, *New Mahogany Hall*, (New Orleans, La.: s.n., between 1898 and 1899), Call Number: HQ146.N6 W55.

indubitably hidden sins – the ones that would not lead to profit – Storyville itself was influential in New Orleans life.

One of the advertisements for "the famous Mademoiselle Rita Walker" – perhaps the "Rita" referenced by Al Rose's "Man About Town" in his reminiscences of Mahogany Hall, depending on how seriously we take him – uses pictorial and verbal references to the exotic Orient as well as France, but transplants them to Storyville. Walker was evidently known for her dancing and she is called the "Oriental Danseuse" in the text that accompanies her photograph. She leans on a slender arm toward the viewer, smiling at him, and she is decked in a headdress and matching beaded bustier with her bare legs splayed beneath her on a leopard skin carpet.[42] The advertisement entices potential clients by promising:

> Yes, this [...] is the Oriental Danseuse who some years ago set the society folk of Chicago wild about her 'Salome' dance. She was one of the first women in America to dance in her bare feet. Aside from her marvelous dancing, Mademoiselle has a $5000 wardrobe which [sic] she uses for her dances. Mademoiselle is at present a guest of Mrs. Bertha Weinthal, 311 N. Basin St., where she can be seen in her marvelous dances.

A repeated assertion that Rita's dancing is "marvelous" is hyperbole characteristic of the advertisements, but what is also found regularly is the emphasis on cosmopolitan and European influences on women of the District, along with uses of popular Orientalist and sensationalist vernacular. The proud distinction that Rita "was one of the first women in America to dance in her bare feet" is most a result of the standard of always covering the body, especially the female body, and rigid codes of comportment between genders. Seeing a woman's bare feet within a home environment, much less a brothel, would have been titillating. Given the concurrence of Trilbymania, too, the foot fetish had been well-established and made its appearance in newspapers.[43]

There is also a frequent genteelly coded phrase of the woman being "a guest" of a certain madam; the advertisements are never vulgar enough to attract obscenity charges or offend sensibilities. Nothing was brought into a public vernacular with men and women speaking openly of sex. As Pamela Arceneaux explains, there was, however, a fabricated "Blue Book" published in 1963 that contains extremely graphic descriptions of individual women. One, Maria Henry, is completely fictitious: her address is in fact a Parisian address,

---

[42] Blue Book, (New Orleans: s.n., between 1913 and 1915), HQ146.N6. B58.

[43] "Wistful And Sweet Are These Dainty Female Feet of the Stage. Some of Them Are...," *Times-Picayune*, February 24, 1895, "Du Maurier's Own Trilby. She Was Not a Professional, Like His Novelistic Heroine...," *Times-Picayune*, March 19, 1902, and , "Du Maurier And Monet. Returns from "Trilby" Literally Took Him Off His Feet," *Times-Picayune*, September 1, 1899.

which shows how conflated Montmartre and Storyville were in American popular culture.[44] By contrast, the lack of explicit language in the originals was pragmatic: although prostitution was decriminalized in Storyville, women could not legally exhibit themselves "along the sidewalks in front of or near the premises they may occupy, or at the alleyway, door, or gate of such premises." They also could not:

> Occupy the steps thereof, or to accost, call, or stop any person passing by, or walk up and down the sidewalks, or walk up the city streets indecently attired, or in other respects [so as to] behave in public as to occasion scandal.[45]

Sex happened quite explicitly within the confines of brothels, but the advertisements that sold it were careful not to be obscene. They were, however, always indicative of the prostitute as an "other" and made that distinction by placing her in an ideology of the exotic, most often one of exotic New Orleans.

Many women in the advertisements also carry some reference to being an "octaroon" or having a native birth status, along with the reiterations that if a man frequented a Storyville brothel he could be assured of the best quality women and a sensuous experience. Rita Walker's wardrobe, for example, is emphasized in her short description, in spite of the photograph that displays what must have been an expensive costume. The special consideration given in advertisements to the amount of money that women invested in their own professional repertoires, including a sumptuous work wardrobe, is one manifestation of that reassurance. The lure of money was a attractive marker of desirability. Overall, the connections between good sex and cost uphold the connections between means and exclusivity - a new evolution of the master-slave dynamics that had been openly present in the antebellum South. The most consistent trope that is upheld in the souvenir Books, aside from the European refinement of the women and their rareness when compared to other American women, is the sexual prowess of the black and mixed race ladies. Emily Clark writes:

---

[44] As Arceneaux explained to me, the Blue Books were marketing tools and not meant to be pornographic. Descriptions like Maria Henry's would never have been included in Blue Books, yet many like them are mistakenly thought to be correct for the period – no doubt because of the "fake" Blue Books being passed off as genuine ones: "A CHARMING, baby face, with lovely eyes, pretty little nose, teeth like a terrier's, and chestnut locks, not disfigured by hair dye. Her charms are in symmetrical proportion, but her breasts and buttocks are soft; now about twenty-eight, has been for some years the toy of the general public. She possesses every vice in the harlot's catalogue, being an inveterate sucker of women's seed, and a facile Ganymede for rich sodomites. She will obey the orders of all who can afford to pay very highly to play with her softened globes, or recline on her flabby belly." See *Guide to Pleasure – For Visitors to the Gay City, Directory to the Red-Light District of New Orleans in the Gay Nineties (Mardi-Gras Edition)* (1963), The Historic New Orleans Collection, William Russell Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana, Call number: MSS 536, 92-48-L.62.483.

[45] *L'Hote v. Louisiana.*

> The quadroon sex slave became the quadroon prostitute in postbellum New Orleans, marketed to locals and visitors alike as descendants of the beautiful, exotic women described by Karl Bernhard and Frederick Law Olmstead.[46]

Many brothels featured "colored" and mixed race women, but two in particular were strong examples of brothels that specialized in octaroons and "born and bred Louisiana girls."[47] At "Countess" Willie V. Piazza's brothel there were "without doubt, the most handsome and intelligent Octaroons in the United States" and clients were told, "You should see them; they are all cultivated entertainers."[48] The second of these brothels was White's Mahogany Hall. White exemplified how the combination of a New Orleans origin story, monetary resources, and a tale of black ancestry – fabricated or factual – could work to a business advantage. Her self-published souvenir booklets were distributed separately from the Blue Books, and they bragged specifically about the cost and quality of her establishment. It was never referred to as a crib or a brothel, but as a boarding house:

> The NEW MAHOGANY HALL, A picture of which appears on the cover of this souvenir was erected especially for Ms. Lulu White at a cost of 40,000 dollars. The house is built of marble and is four story; containing five parlors, all handsomely furnished, and fifteen bedrooms [...] The elevator, which was built for two, is of the latest style. The entire house is steam heated and is the handsomest house of its kind. It is the only one where you can get three shots for your money:
> The shot upstairs
> The shot downstairs
> And the shot in the room.[49]

Apart from the sumptuousness of Mahogany Hall itself, Lulu described her own ancestry as a "West Indian octaroon" but declined to give detailed stories of her "girls" even though these "would no doubt prove reading of the highest grade."[50] In advertisements that featured individual women, there was a painstaking effort made to showcase their ladylike, educated qualities and ability to entertain, sometimes paired with their New Orleanian or Louisiana origin. This practice distinguished Storyville from other districts of prostitution by underscoring how its women – always referred to as "ladies," "boarders," "girls," or "darlings," and in a few of the later adverts, "jolly good fellows" – were of a high class

---

[46] Emily Clark, "Selling the Quadroon," *The Strange History of the American Quadroon: Free Women of Color in the Revolutionary Atlantic World* (University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 181.
[47] Lulu White, *New Mahogany Hall*, (New Orleans, La.: s.n., between 1898 and 1899), Call Number: HQ146.N6 W55.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid.

standard[51] and offered the exoticism of a mixed-race heritage. Clara Miller, meanwhile, was promised to be:

> Demure, everybody's friend, can sit up all night as necessary she has been [sic] in the principal cities of Europe and the Continent, and can certainly interest you as she has a host of many others. When we add that the famous octaroon was born near Baton Rouge we trust you will certainly call on her.[52]

Her picture, set above the text, reveals the face of a young woman with long dark hair and high cheekbones. She smiles invitingly with her chin resting on one slender hand. Unlike Mademoiselle Rita Walker, her photograph is not focused on her full body. Sadie Levy, featured shortly after Clara to a similar effect, looks similar to a model in several of the Bellocq photographs. She worked in Mahogany Hall, where her entry proclaims accordingly:

> Miss White's Octaroon Club would certainly be incomplete without Sadie. Accomplished, beautiful, and charming. We are not given to flattery, so invite you to call and convince yourself that, while there are others there is only one Sadie Levy. Born and bred right here in this city and a girl any city should feel proud of.[53]

Though she never claimed to be anything but white, the name "Josie Arlington" was also a fabrication, a stage name created by a young woman called Mary Deubler whose ambitions led her to New Orleans – and before she went by Arlington, she used Lobrano, the surname of her lover at the time.[54]

Like Kate Townsend, Arlington eventually grew to be a powerful and influential player on the scene. Arlington and White were, like many others in Storyville, self-created. Their identities were contingent on a whirl of fetishism, panache, and varying degrees of falsehood. Storyville displayed and promised almost everything if one could pay: some of its most successful madams were more selective about what they divulged and how they did so, but seemed to believe they earned that right. Instead, they focused their attentions on advertisements, maintaining reputations, and running businesses. Unsurprisingly, there were brothels whose lures were far less cultured. Among these were Emma Johnson's, which housed "sex circus" performances that attracted regular enthusiasts.[55] These

---

[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Smith, 169.
[55] Smith, 169.

"circuses" were comprised of a mixture of burlesque acts, explicit strip teases, and according to some (not for the fainthearted, or those accustomed to well-read and well-travelled young ladies who also happened to be sex workers), acts of bestiality with animals such as dogs and auctioning off virgin girls for the night.[56]

Needless to say, these activities would not have been explicitly advertised in Blue Books, but they would have been familiar in outright pornography. Of course, there had to have been niches in Storyville for those whose tastes were either unusual or sadistic, but this does not surface in either souvenir or Blue Books. It comes instead through retrospective accounts, through memories of people left on the fringes such as musicians who were treated like fixtures by clients. (Few come from ex-sex workers.) Being at the center of a place eventually closed by moral and legal campaigns, where Smith says the "patina of glamour [...] often wore thin very quickly,"[57] they were hardly given credibility after the fact. They were subsumed back into a society that relished their escapades only in select circumstances: perhaps in pornography, as the cautionary or sensational tale in morning newspapers, or as the villainess or fallen woman of novels. In practice and in person, the prostitute functioned differently.

The district's infamy grew in tandem with stories of its women, who were still regarded as contagious and deviant. As Smith notes, "Though marginalized from polite society, Storyville's residents left indelible marks on the city's culture,"[58] and the only question is what sort of "indelible marks" were left. They were not of the wholesome variety, and further, Platt and Hill explain, "Although the district was legally sanctioned, many New Orleanians did not agree with its existence."[59] More importantly, the "indelible marks" show that power in New Orleans was not exclusively the province of the respectable. In fact, between 1897 and 1917, some New Orleans culture moved from the demimonde outward. According to a popular story recounted by several sources, Josie Arlington once bribed the police to raid a particular Mardi Gras Ball which was held for the wealthiest New Orleans residents and visitors.

---

[56] Al Rose's *Storyville, New Orleans, Being an Authentic, Illustrated Account of the Notorious Red-light District* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1974), probably contributed the most to these assertions, which have percolated into nearly every other source about Storyville and certainly impacted the popular culture surrounding it. Although live sex shows took place in the red-light district, it is important to consider whether the stories about underage (or virgin) girls were actually the result of the "white slavery" scares intended to ensure the closure of vice districts. However, by maintaining an amount of skepticism toward Rose's "primary source material" (some of which was not genuine) I do not mean to downplay the disturbing nature of these issues or suggest that they could never have happened.

[57] Smith, 169.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Platt and Hill, 292.

The issue for Arlington was that this Ball was taking place near Storyville and, most vitally, her brothel. As the tale goes, any woman in attendance who could not produce identification that legally allowed her to practice prostitution would be arrested, which benefitted business by leaving a bevy of unattended men free for the taking.[60] Years later, Piazza, Dix and White[61] worked separately to keep Storyville "unsegregated," which meant that black and mixed-race women could continue to work together in brothels within its limits. Its patrons, however, were already segregated along racial and social lines: as Jelly Roll Morton remarked, "No poor men could even get in these mansions" which would have ruled out many black men at the time, regardless of changes in law.[62] A black man could theoretically frequent Storyville as a customer if he passed as white and possessed enough money, but mixed-race and black women who passed were always one of the tantalizing options available for those men who went to Storyville. White was fully aware of this fetish; her background story often varies depending on the year and the source, suggesting that it was fabricated or elaborated upon at need. She always identified herself as mixed-race (or not fully "white"), but on several occasions her exact ancestry varies.[63]

If the French Quarter was a fashionable, romantic destination for foreign travellers, it could be expected that some of the men would make their way a few blocks over to Storyville, which locals often called "Anderson County" in reference to Anderson's extensive investments and affable personal relationships with so many people working in Storyville.[64] Anderson understandably took to being allied with Storyville far more readily than the unfortunate Alderman Sydney Story, whose planning led to the laws that created the new tenderloin district. Before 1898, men would have had their choice of a variety of brothels that were not regulated to one part of the city. After 1898, they still could seek out cheap, now illegal, alternatives that most resembled their frightening predecessor, Smoky Row. But as one Storyville Blue Book cautions its readers:

> If you are in the A.B.C. class you want to get a move on yourself [...] to do it proper is to read what this little booklet has to say and if you don't get to be a 2 to 1 shot it ain't the author's fault. To eliminate any confusion, it

[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Alan Lomax, *Mister Jelly Roll: The Fortunes of Jelly Roll Morton, New Orleans Creole and "Inventor of Jazz,"* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1950), URL: https://archive.org/stream/masterjellyroll000705mbp/masterjellyroll000705mbp_djvu.txt.
[63] Lulu White, *New Mahogany Hall*, (New Orleans, La.: s.n., between 1898 and 1899), Call Number: HQ146.N6 W55.
[64] Billy Struve, *Blue Book,* Seventh Edition, (New Orleans: s.n., 1906), Call Number: HQ146.N6 B58 1906, and see Gary Krist, *Empire of Sin: A Story of Sex, Jazz, Murder and the Battle for New Orleans* (Stroud: Amberley, 2014).

> gives the precise boundaries of the young "Tenderloin District commonly known as Anderson County or Storyville," which were "North side Customhouse St. to South side St. Louis and East side N. Basin to West side N. Robertson streets [sic].[65]

Yet in New Orleans, the role of sex worker was significantly more complex than what the newspapers and Blue Books reveal, and the resulting, enticing hierarchy of women was not at all simple. It was complicated by race, ethnicity, age, income, geography, and a host of other factors, and all of these sources only hint at any of them. Some sex workers gained notoriety, wealth, and influence, and as Platt and Hill state, "Storyville was created as a separate, socially perceived space fueled by capitalism that afforded women in financial need an opportunity to make money."[66] Many other sex workers remain unknown, possibly subject to poverty, and abuse at the hands of pimps or clients alike. However, according to some women, being a sex worker granted them more respect and social mobility than working as, for example, a maid. This was not the kind of opinion that reformers wanted the general public to embrace:

> I don't say – never did – that whoring is the best way of life, but it's better than going blind in a sweat shop sewing, or twenty hours work as a kitchen drudge, or housemaid . . . Wages were low for women in the town, and no one had much respect for a girl who had to work.[67]

The assertion is echoed by others' tales after Storyville was shut down.

Former sex workers were forced to find new occupations that generally did not pay as well and required longer hours for less pay, under what were often more immediately hazardous conditions. However, one also has to wonder what their races and ages might have been, as well as which sector of Storyville they worked before: the "white" Storyville that characterizes the entire district now in popular culture, or the "black" section that was also mandated by law in late 1897 and remains even more elusive to history.[68] The latter was distant in reality and ideology from the glitter and monetary power of the former, and its working conditions were not as favorable. Less was recorded about this side of Storyville because it was saturated by cheap cribs that were the destination of blue collar workers and laborers, and cribs did not generate souvenir books.

---

[65] Billy Struve, *Blue Book,* Seventh Edition, [New Orleans : s.n., 1906], Call Number: HQ146.N6 B58 1906
[66] Platt and Hill, 292.
[67] Kimball, 229.
[68] Alecia P. Long provides excellent scholarly considerations of both "Storyvilles" in her work. In particular, see "Poverty is the New Prostitution: Race, Poverty, and Public Housing in Post-Katrina New Orleans," *Journal of American History* 94 (Dec 2007): 795–803.

Further, the working lives of Storyville women were not as advertised. They were not even reflected by media tales. In general, they were repetitious and, as the police records of the era indicate,[69] life could be dangerous. While there was a notable caste of madams and other sex workers who lived sumptuously, many more now-unknown women worked the district, and even the famous women who had taken on a persona for work had to step out of it sometimes: one could hardly be the Miss Lulu White of legend every second. She existed primarily in imagination, not in reality. Until nightfall, Storyville almost projected a persona itself. It was, when it was not working, nearly sedate; those women who worked evenings and nights slept through daylight. If saloons and bars were open, the activities they engaged in during the day were a (slightly) tamer version of those offered at night. There is a distinct distance between how the District and its women were depicted, and how they functioned. But no one wanted to regard Storyville as a destination without its makeup and costume, so to speak. To do so would be to acknowledge its existence as normal, the result of law and practicality. It would also mean acknowledging that prostitutes provided services to clients, much like other tradespeople.

By the late nineteenth century, then, the icon of the prostitute was at a turning point. She still proliferated the media, yet a distinction could be made between the imagined creatures of the earlier half of the 1800s and the latter. While both were cast as a contagion whose influence had to be contained like a disease, from the middle of the century forward, sensuality and independence grew to be a much larger factor in her characterizations. She was not only a disease, she was also a scintillating muse, an active agent in her own destruction and that of others. She encompassed much more of a "proactive" sort of deviance: often engaging in same-sex acts or relationships,[70] or leading to the ruin of the men who fell in love with her, for example.[71] This transformation meant that sex work and pornography were finally addressed together, or with the same terminologies and mythologies behind them. Focus went from the legal and scientific to

---

[69]Although we cannot expect that all the crimes that took place in Storyville were meticulously recorded, steady incidents of violent crime seem to coincide with the popularity and population density of the district. Deaths often involved teamsters, laborers, and those whose professions were listed as "none" or "unknown." Intoxication and altercations were frequently cited as factors. See City Archives, New Orleans Public Library: TP205h, New Orleans (La.) Police Dept. Homicide Reports,1893-1947*,* URL: http://nutrias.org/~nopl/inv/nopd/homicide.htm. The digitized records are available through the Criminal Justice Research Center of Ohio State University as part of their Historical Violence Database, URL: https://cjrc.osu.edu/research/interdisciplinary/hvd/united-states/new-orleans. The digitized versions were made from the "Reports on Homicide" microfilms held by the New Orleans Public Library.

[70] Coyle and Van Dyke, 58.

[71] Nana is one of the most obvious examples; she had an enormous amount to do with the trope as it appeared elsewhere, which I explored in Chapter One. But the prostitute-as-disease trope is also implied in *The Mascot*, and female reformers such as the Gordon sisters and Carrie Nation (whom I referenced in Chapter Two) believed that – like disease – vice not only had to be contained, it had to be eradicated.

the social and ideological: prostitutes represented impetus and active deviance, not just society's ills. They exemplified the potential that women possessed to act outside of the prescribed boundaries of society, and more troublingly, that they might either enjoy or gain from it.

This was echoed in Storyville's print culture, from the newspaper report that sneered at Lulu White for being "treated too tenderly" by "the law"[72] to the souvenir book advertisements that boasted of massive expenses. It was also echoed in the transatlantic mass culture, particularly in "obscene" publications, that Storyville produced and interacted with: the publication of *Nana*, for example, was preceded and surrounded by both pornographic and prostitute archetypes. Zola's novel might have encapsulated the late nineteenth century courtesan, but he was not the only author to have offered his interpretations of the trope. *Nana* merely heralded the latest in a slew of novels, some explicit, others less so, which fed into the market for even racier plays, pornography, and erotica. Leslie Choquette observes that these were often written in English and capitalized on other aspects of modern culture that were likely to incite interest or fear, such as racism, homophobia, and misogyny:

> Five years after the publication of *Nana*, Paul Adam, another of Zola's imitators, invented a lower-class prostitute who resembled Nana [...] but who no longer merited a name. His book, entitled *Limp Flesh: Naturalist Novel,* contained only one new twist; the prostitute who initiates our lump of flesh into lesbianism is a Jew.[73]

Thus, eroticism found itself offset by problematic portrayals of xenophobia and social transgressions – e.g. a distrust of non-whites and Jews, and fascination with the idea of same-sex activities as lewd and immoral. Storyville made sure to provide this brand of eroticism.

The "indelible marks" of "lewd and abandoned" women - pornography and print culture

While there has been sustained debate about what constitutes "erotica" as opposed to the implicitly less erudite "pornography," and further, there are often contentious and emotional associations with the subject of women in pornography (or sex work

[72] "Police Lesson Taught. Notorious Negress Treated Too Tenderly By the Law's Officer."
[73] Leslie Choquette, "Degenerate or Degendered? Images of Prostitution and Homosexuality in the French Third Republic," *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques* 23 (1997): 210.

generally),[74] I will use "pornography" and "erotica" interchangeably. Pornography, and the themes of sex work and sex workers, were so well integrated into popular culture by the late 1800s that there would have been no more "ethical" merit in, for example, *Nana* than in its explicit, pornographic imitators. Due to public opinions about immorality, literature about "prostitution" would have been regarded as being roughly as base as "pornographic" novellas, and the old erotic novels meant for a higher echelon of consumers were a fixture of the Enlightenment rather than the fin de siècle. Still, pornography was consumed by almost all genders and classes in the United States, Great Britain, and France.[75]

Though purchases and preferences were not discussed openly, there were many genres and media available for a variety of demographics. Michael Millner says that from a legal standpoint "it [was] extremely difficult to know what exactly constitut[ed] an obscene print"[76] because so many existed as "artistic" nudes or "academic" studies [Figures 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, and 13]. Collectively, all were prolific, and Storyville must have offered a vast amount of pornography, even though this is not possible to fully corroborate. During the 1800s, like sex work, pornography was not so much a clandestine industry as it was an open secret that was extremely resistant to categorization or, despite legislative efforts, regulation because of how copious and heterogeneous it was. Carolyn Dean writes:

> The vagueness of nineteenth-century criteria for pornography is infamous. The British jurist Alexander Cockburn, for example, wrote that pornography "deprave[s] and corrupt[s] those whose minds are open to immoral influences," and although his nebulous statement gave rise to some debate about the dangers of such imprecise definition, no sources suggest that contemporaries had any doubt about what constituted pornography.[77]

[74] The charged discourses focused on pornography are relevant to a consideration of Bellocq's portraits as pornographic or "obscene," which I plan to use as a point of departure for more scholarly work. However, I should make it clear that I do not believe his portraits (nude or otherwise) demean the models, or that the women were his "victims." That would do them a disservice, and it is too simplistic. See Gail Dines, *Pornland: How Porn has Hijacked Our Sexuality*, (Beacon Press, 2011), Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1981), Rae Langton, *Sexual Solipsism: Philosophical Essays on Pornography and Objectification* (Oxford University Press, 2009), and Steven Marcus, *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth Century England* (Basic Books, 1964).
[75] Jamie Stoops, "Class and Gender Dynamics of the Pornography Trade in Late Nineteenth Century Britain," *The Historical Journal* 58 (2015): 137-156, and Michael Millner, "The Senses of Reading Badly: The Example of Antebellum 'Obscene Reading,'" *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 57 (2011): 274-313, as well as Charles Bernheimer, *Figures of Ill Repute: Representing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century France* (London: Harvard University Press, 1989), and Timothy J. Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790-1920* (London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992).
[76] Millner, 281.
[77] Carolyn Dean, "The Great War, Pornography, and the Transformation of Modern Male Subjectivity," *Modernism/Modernity* 3 (1996): 59.

I am most interested in the intersections of general pornographic material with the theme of "prostitution" or pornography about prostitutes (and the presence of sex worker characters in literature and art, which generally would have led to it being categorized as "obscene"), as well as the perceived accessibility and convenience of modeling for pornographic images. These issues overlapped considerably, and we can imagine that they found a foothold in Storyville without much conjecture. After all, Jamie Stoops observes:

> In the popular "whore biography" genre, for example, prostitutes recounted their erotic experiences for the reader. As one middle-class author observed, ads offering payment for erotic anecdotes hung in bookshop windows next to copies of popular whore biographies.[78]

"Whore biographies" probably influenced Rose's "Man About Town," whom I discussed in Chapter One and referenced earlier,[79] and surely, they were available in Storyville.

Stoops also asserts, "Terms used to describe pornography included 'pestilence,' 'plague,' 'scourge,' and 'pollution,' all of which imply transmission between individuals or groups."[80] Prostitutes, pornographers, pornography, and Storyville (not to mention New Orleans), then, were described with the same terminology: that of a sickness. However, far from being an aspect only of the underworld, they were all part of public culture. Millner explains that "[pornography] unfold[ed] as a popular, even mass cultural form" in early 1830s America, and continued to be a visible part of mass culture well into the 1900s;[81] this trend was paralleled in France and Great Britain. Thomas J. Joudrey states that nineteenth century pornography "allow[ed] the presence of certain [...] desires that were excluded, suppressed, distorted, and demonized within the major fiction of the century,"[82] and in addition, Storyville and so much of that fiction – as well as mass culture more generally – was focused on the prostitute. Distinctions between pornography, erotica, and popular culture that was obscene – but not explicitly "pornographic" – were not steadfast. They indicated anything but repression, especially as representations of the prostitute changed to encompass different subversive qualities, such as her ability to appear "respectable" or ensnare both women and men.

This suggests that unspoken attitudes toward sexuality and even prostitution were not necessarily as "demonizing" or "suppressive" as Joudrey and others maintain, which

[78] Stoops, 148.
[79] Rose, 154.
[80] Stoops, 154.
[81] Millner, 276.
[82] Thomas J. Joudrey, "Penetrating Boundaries: An Ethics of Anti-Perfectionism in Victorian Pornography," *Victorian Studies* 57 (2015): 423.

was exactly why reformists were so adamant to change hearts and minds. Most controversy was, overall, about maintaining appearances of – and the safeguards for maintaining – the public propriety that was still integral to many individuals' senses of self. Further, progressive reformers in New Orleans were obsessed with ensuring that there was no racial mixing: this was construed as moral dilution. Within pornography, however, there had been a longstanding trope of – in particular – "white" with "black" women. Acknowledging this gives another dimension to why Storyville was so iconoclastic and undesirable: it literally brought the trope to life.

Many examples exist of darker skinned women with white (or just pale) women well into the 1900s, such as a variety of Franz von Bayros's drawings, which he completed in the early 1900s, and images by predominately unknown photographers [Figures 33 and 34]. For example, Von Bayros's "Der Rivale" depicts two women, presumably of different races, together [Figure 32]. (Bellows was certainly aware of these kinds of images when he made "But If You've Never Cooked or Done Housework…" [Figure 26] for *The Masses*.) Interestingly, in the case of "obscene" or risqué photographs, there was an assumption that the models were almost always sex workers, a suggestion reiterated by Johnny Wiggs.[83] This is more telling than settling the question of whether not they were: sex workers and the sex work industry – pornography included, in this instance – were so ideologically intermixed that it is difficult for us to imagine that any women in pornographic photographs were not also providing sex for money. However, many other sources assert that the connections between pornography and prostitution were far more casual, and not causal. Early "obscene" photographs, including daguerreotypes [Figures 12, 35, and 36], were created and sold by a range of professionals or tradespeople, including optometrists, doctors, and commercial photographers like Bellocq, who already had access to the necessary technology.[84]

Additionally, advertisements were put forward in various urban, reasonably public places for models; at times, their discreet but loaded language would have been interpreted as a call for models who would be in "saucy scenes" (i.e. pornography).[85] Not all of the

---

[83] Johnny Wiggs, as quoted in *E.J. Bellocq: Storyville Portraits – Photographs from the New Orleans Red-Light District, circa 1912* (Meriden: The Museum of Modern Art, 1970), 12.

[84] See Stoops, Bernheimer, and Millner. As I stated in Chapter Three, scholars such as Timothy Gilfoyle, John X. Christ, and Rebecca Zurier also point out that many young, urban women "treated" their partners to sex in exchange for money or favors, especially by the end of the century. Since "casual" sex work and promiscuity with the goal of material rewards were both so prevalent, it is logical that pornographic or nude modeling was also subject to similar trends. Importantly, it could be done anonymously and provide a quick source of income.

[85] As Stoops summarizes, "Classified sections of penny and half-penny newspapers frequently contained advertisements for artists' models. [... Some] contained more questionable features. Some specified the need

women who engaged in this kind of employment were full-time sex workers. Yet, "scenes" ranged from whimsically coy to completely explicit, homosexual and heterosexual, and – though they can be separated by chronology as well as genre – catered to almost any imaginable fetish at any given time. Depictions of heterosexual sex were rife, especially amongst anonymous models and photographers [Figure 35], but these scenes also included practices derided by polite society, including oral sex, same-sex activity [Figure 36], bondage (notably male subservience to a female), and especially the use of props or everyday objects with performative pleasure [Figure 36].[86] Conversely, there was a large number of socially acceptable female nudes or "academic studies" that were erotic, yet "artful" enough to be "tasteful" [Figures 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, and 13]. The nude Storyville Portraits may rest in this category.

Given stigmas against sex work and moralistic views of pornography that led to the destruction of primary source materials, conjecture and details that exist in remaining ephemera have to be taken into account. But the idea of a woman posing for any of these images, yet not having sex for pay, was still antithetical to "acceptable" womanhood. Because of this, the prostitute served as a symbolic buffer between these worlds – although the separations themselves were fading by the twentieth century. Even the means of production and circulation of pornography were not strictly gendered: women oversaw their husbands' business interests if they had been jailed for violating obscenity laws, continuing to sell and perhaps also creating the images.[87] Storyville madams, meanwhile, orchestrated the publication of their own souvenir books, and as I have previously noted, Landau explains in *Spectacular Wickedness* that Lulu White commissioned a series of pornographic photographs of herself with a dog in "the late 1880s or early 1890s."[88] It is difficult to verify if other women undertook similar projects because so many of Storyville's records and so much of its ephemera were destroyed, but the intersections of self-directed print culture – the Blue and souvenir books, and even pornography – with the

---

for a young woman with a 'good figure' or asked for applications with a photo in the 'most advantageous position,' listing only anonymous post office boxes as contact information," 149.

86 Stoops also remarks upon the "performative" expressions in pornographic scenes (especially on women's faces), which meant that actresses or actors could have an advantage: "Recognizing the performative nature of Victorian pornographic photography raises serious questions about the validity of discussing pornographic models and actresses solely as passive objects," 150.

87 Stoops writes, "Middle-class publications provide clear evidence that women participated in the pornography trade as consumers and distributors. This industry operated in many respects like other businesses of the lower classes; just as the wife of a butcher or tailor might keep the books or manage other parts of her husband's business, a pornographer's wife often worked in his shop or took over his business while he served a term in prison," 147.

88 Landau, 139. To return briefly to the connections between Paris and New Orleans, as well: Landau also writes, "New Orleans was of course the 'French' city within the American South, and later on archive officials at the Kinsey […] labeled White's dog photographs 'French,'" 139.

much larger vice trades in Storyville are intricate. Women were involved in key ways, and this involvement clashes with the narratives of the forced "white slave," not least of which because Storyville's women were not all white and not all forced into prostitution.

Overall, what the prostitute signified in this context of prolific "pornography" and "obscenity" was a willing mobility and willful movement from social outcast to social norm. While she might have been part of a subculture and a demimonde, she was insidiously present in the "daylight" world, too, as *The Mascot* implied with its illustration of Emma Johnson and the accompanying report about vice. Johnson was also allied or synonymous with homosexuality and pornography – which were corrupting, taboo forces. However, sex workers and pornography were already public. Ironically, all of these efforts tamed the prostitute as much as they picked out her difference: by making pornography and the prostitute a fixture - even a warning - in a popular culture that also promoted tourism, they tried to diffuse her influence but reinforced her potential to fascinate. She was also, once again, allied with other women who were "outsiders" – artists' models, actresses, and single promiscuous women, which implied a fear of the loss of cultural propriety more than it did sexual impropriety alone. After all, the wealthiest madams could afford beautiful houses in respectable New Orleans neighborhoods. As Louise Coleman notes, Josie Arlington's house drew curious gawkers after her death. The sex trade, spectacle, and tourism collided again, though with a different effect: the house was relocated to a new street.[89]

Conclusion: Depictions of Collateral Damage

This chapter demonstrates the differences between sex worker and madam-instigated representations of themselves, and media representations of prostitutes and prostitution. These topics and their respective narrators prompted production and consumption, including the production and consumption of pornographic literature and images. Amongst both representations in the Blue Books and New Orleans's print and mass cultures, however, Bellocq's portraits are unique. Discussions of these media in this chapter accentuate how, within New Orleans particularly, his work is unusual for not supplying us with tangible evidence of a practical or economic purpose. It does not have the same strong, identifiable pattern of intent as these other contemporaneous materials – for example, collectively, it does not target a particular group of consumers.

[89] Coleman, in discussion with the author, May 24, 2016.

Without the context and assumptions provided by the Storyville Portraits as a collective set of works, viewers would not say that Plate 9 [Figure 29] is a photograph of a "prostitute." In fact, had it not been rediscovered with them, there would be no reason to assume it was meant to be included amongst nude or traditionally risqué portraits. Indeed, as Laura Thomson writes, there are effectively "three categories of image" amongst the entire group, an idea that I support for the sake of interpreting the portraits with more precision than has been afforded them.[90] The woman in Plate 9 wears her "Sunday best" attire: a lacy, light-colored dress with a high collar and elbow length sleeves. Even without an accompanying hat, the effect is demure and "respectable." She stands outside on the grass and in front of a tall hedge, looking away from the camera with a small, calm smile. Unlike most of Bellocq's portraits, this was taken outdoors and evidently not near a building in Storyville.

Plate 9 flouts both the self-representative and media portrayals of prostitution that I have explored in this chapter. However, since it has been interpreted as the portrait of a prostitute, it is entrenched in several clichés: among others, that the woman could look like "other" women, and this was a rare moment that Bellocq captured or was evoking for the purposes of a photograph. In actuality, like other early twentieth century sex workers, she would have dressed this way on many occasions while she was not at work. Susan Sontag writes that "at least a third" of Bellocq's models do not readily look like sex workers, and the model in Plate 9 is a particularly strong instance of Sontag's observation.[91] This, then, begs the question of what "the inmates of a brothel" (as she writes) are supposed to be like, and we find our answers in newspapers, pornography, and the Blue Books.[92] In the end, we can surmise that what this means: they are sensational, exotic, tempting, and without a doubt, sinful. Even in the early twentieth century there were still visual cues that signified and represented "respectable" femininity, though they were changing, so a young woman standing outside in a modest, delicate lace dress would not summon the word "prostitute" to mind.

However, it is important to remember that Bellocq was first and foremost a commercial photographer, so any photographs he took in Storyville relied upon this

---

[90] Thomson, 4.

[91] Susan Sontag, "Introduction" in *E.J. Bellocq: Storyville Portraits, Photographs from the New Orleans Red-Light District, Circa 1912*, ed. John Szarkowski (New York: Random House, 1996), URL: http://www.masters-of-photography.com/B/bellocq/bellocq_articles2.html.

[92] Ibid.

expertise. His normal work encompassed school portraits for First Communions[93] and being called to give "expert" evidence for "the celebrated case of State of Louisiana against State of Mississippi, with relation to a settlement by the courts of the oyster boundary line between these two states."[94] Although I argue, as others have, that Bellocq must have had a personal concern for the women he photographed, perhaps the Storyville Portraits that look so surprisingly mundane to us – especially one like Plate 9 – are better framed as part of his "commercial" continuum of daily work, rather than part of his "risqué" and "artistic" work. Plate 9 is not a woman's studio portrait. But it is an offhand snapshot, the kind of portrait a photographer could take for his friend if she asked him.

Plate 9 captures the tensions between "morality" and "immorality" by erasing common pictorial and ideological boundaries between the two categories, if indeed the woman was a sex worker. But within many of Bellocq's known portraits, there are no definitive reminders that can be used to conclude that the women are – yet their portraits are included with images of women in a state of déshabillé. Though *The Mascot*, for example, implies that the boundaries between vice and respectable life are thin, it does this through shock and for a different effect. Bellocq muddles them almost unwittingly or carelessly. For example, at least three of his photographs show women playing with or holding their dogs: in one, a woman sits in her underclothes with a happy dog on her lap. Behind them is a white sheet that seems to have been placed as a background for other photographs [Figure 6]. The presence of incidental details like the sheet indicates that the point of these particular images was not to advertise Storyville, or be printed as titillating cabinet cards.

But the fact that these models are not so much posing as sitting with their pets is also significant. If, for instance, bestiality was present in Storyville as rumored and claimed, and since contemporary illustrators, authors, and photographers did go so far as to depict women in sexual situations with animals, the same themes could be shown in these portraits – if that is what Bellocq intended. Instead, we see photographs of women who also happen to be Storyville sex workers, only they are enjoying time with their pet dogs [Figures 4, 5, and 6]. There are no suggestions of sexual proclivities or sexuality more generally. With the exception of the women being in their underclothing (and in these images, it is being worn less like lingerie and more like a rough equivalent of today's loungewear), there is nothing else to hint at the women's occupation, or what society

---

[93] Laura Thomson, "A Thoroughly Modern Man: EJ Bellocq and the creation of a Modernist myth" (MA essay, University of Sussex, 2005), 9.
[94] "OYSTER HEARING IS RESUMED HERE…", *Times-Picayune*, August 26, 1904.

thinks of them and their work. It is almost as though Bellocq is not concerned with depicting this overtly.

However, he was certainly aware of the prevalent newspapers, magazines, and Blue Books. These saturated his home city as much as tourists did. Representations of prostitution and of sex workers had been part of discourses about New Orleans for generations, and their presence only intensified in new ways during the late nineteenth century. As *The Mascot* said in the headline on the cover of its June 11, 1892 edition, there was, and had been, a decided "Plague of Prostitutes" in New Orleans.[95] No doubt this history was part of Storyville's prelude when politicians and citizens attempted to address and contain the single vice that monopolized so much of their concern even in comparison to other sins like drinking, gambling, and smoking opium. Prostitution was generally regarded as the worst of other vices. Platt and Hill note that by 1913, only four years before it was officially shut down in 1917, "Storyville was described as a den of labored captivity, vice, and depravity" in "Prostitution, an Appeal."[96] Bellocq conveys nothing that might echo what the "Appeal" rails against: his women are, in a word, normal, and not at all frightening or monstrous. They are often awkwardly posed. They appear tired, wan, unoccupied, sometimes amused, and at other times, resigned. What the varying moods of his work might reflect most is the timeline of Storyville itself – these women's timelines – rather than any individual or premeditated commentary.

The "Appeal" also contradicted Nell Kimball's claim that the more affluent madams would meet to discuss their "girls" and businesses; she implies that all of their people worked willingly and the madams banded against coercive labor practices that did not benefit them. But the features deplored in "Prostitution, an Appeal" were hinted at even in 1883's "Townsend Tragedy," with the key difference being that vice – shown as a descent into prostitution – and depravity – the violent actions of a crazed ex-lover – were used to create a stirring morality tale instead of political or legal impetus. The passage of time had witnessed a shift in representation and practice: Storyville was now a thriving economy and tourist lure to New Orleans, an absolute antithesis of what Alderman Story intended when he proposed its creation. Some of its madams dined with (or were married to) local politicians. They were all members of a community, and that community gained a decided social edge and much more stubborn penchants for certain high-maintenance lifestyles.

---

[95] "A Plague of Prostitutes," *The Mascot,* June 11, 1892.
[96] Platt and Hill, 295.

Bellocq did not either reflect or actively confront the representations of Storyville and prostitutes in local and transatlantic media. His works do not quite fit all the accepted narratives of their subjects, but this is never fully intentional. They also never replicate the same level of finery and self-awareness that is present in the souvenir booklets or the pitch of alarm and sensationalism in newspapers and magazines. There is something nebulously amiss about the portraits. In details as varied as out of focus mirrors in the corner of the frame, or a crooked mask that skews across a woman's eye, a sense of unease often manifests. Some of this unease can be attributed to the portraits' settings: Bellocq worked indoors more than he did outside, although some of his photographs show brick courtyards, wooden sidings, and glimpses of gardens. Presumably, when his models are indoors, they are in their respective workplaces (which, for some of the women, might have also been where they lived, depending on how well-off they were). While it is a possibility, no current evidence suggests that they went to his studio. Indeed, at least two people who supposedly knew him have stated that they could not remember Bellocq ever being without his camera – and this was also true of his habits later in life – which supports the idea that he travelled to the district rather than having women travel to him.[97]

Indoors, the women, who are often nude or nearly nude, become more subversive. Popular culture espoused a view that prostitutes were always insidious in some manner, but the way that Bellocq uses these indoor spaces destabilizes their usual, intentional uses and directly challenges how interiors were understood by the fin de siècle public, which would have been more provocative. One implication of all the mansion brothels was precisely that you could be as comfortable as you were at home; in fact, you could be more comfortable than you were at home – and become more cultured – while you were being "entertained." As an advertisement for the Arlington read, it was:

> Absolutely and unquestionably the most decorative and costly fitted out sporting palace ever placed before the American public. The wonderful originality of everything that goes to fit out a mansion makes it the most attractive ever seen in this and the old country. […] Within the great walls of the Arlington will be found the work of great artists from Europe and America. Many articles from the Louisiana Purchase Exposition will also be seen.[98]

[97] *E.J. Bellocq: Storyville Portraits – Photographs from the New Orleans Red-Light District, circa 1912*, (Meriden: The Museum of Modern Art, 1970), 8-18.
[98] Billy Struve, *Blue Book* (New Orleans: s.n., 1905), Call Number: HQ146.N6 B58 1905, 8-9.

Storyville customers had grown to expect the perversion of a woman's place in the interior. But it would be another matter entirely to be confronted with the images of naked women, sex workers or not, in settings that were dangerously close to the domestic. Bellocq never foregrounds his portraits as part of, or from, Storyville, which may not have been intentional. It does, however, create a paradoxical sense of displacement, even though some of the portraits contain small nods to Louisiana, like university pennants and postcards. Their lack of a published presence also adds to their ability to unsettle because they have not left traces in the surrounding advertisements. After all, some of the main concerns over prostitution were its visibility – thus its supposed ability to percolate outward to influence the rest of society – and these concerns were visible in mass culture.

As such, perhaps the most striking element of the portraits is that they do not always try to represent the women as, first, prostitutes and second, prostitutes who interact with the city. They feel sealed off and segmented, moments isolated from the hypersexual, racist rhetoric and outrageous performances of Storyville. Though some of the women are naked, this is not wholly tantamount to a sexual performance. Nudity alone was not what sold anything in the district. Because of the subtext of nude women being inside otherwise innocuous rooms, the finite margins between respectable conduct and vice are dissolved. Storyville Blue Book advertisements were overt about the finery present in the brothels and so were newspapers; customers expected luxury and safety in the district.

But without accompanying explanations or appearances, the portraits become an exercise in impropriety and strangeness. There is no evident motivation or reason for them. In comparison to people like Kate Townsend, Tom Anderson, Emma Johnson, Gertrude Dix, Josie Arlington, and Lulu White (with whom he could have been most affiliated), Bellocq is more enigmatic. His portraits share the same ambiguity as their maker, and lead to more questions than actual answers. Though the images taken indoors could ally with some contemporaneous pornography, for example, they still resist fully having that categorization, again because of the details rather than overarching or intentional themes.

They do not interrupt the status quo of Storyville representations because they are sharply critical, or because they try to "save" the women by taking an opinion against their work, for example. Yet they are interruptive, and allow us to question established histories because of their vagueness. Even in the wake of so many sources calling prostitution lewd and demanding a re-examination of the prevalence of vice in New Orleans (as in many “great” cities around the western world), the photographs remain calm, in a sense. They

are also ambivalent: there is nothing about them that either incriminates vice, or supports it outright. The latter is especially unexpected, particularly if one considers any potential links between Bellocq, Storyville, and all the various madams that inhabited the district. If his portraits used the women as erotic objects, that would be more explainable; it would make some sense in the wake of the cultural products and discourses about and within Storyville itself. Conversely, if they were used in Blue Books with the advertisements, that would suggest a business interest on Bellocq's part. Overall, they remain a murmur under the mainstream hum and represent an alternative view of sex work in Storyville. His portraits underscore, however implicitly, that the demimonde's culture was more than what manifested in concrete visual or textual documents. Together, the portraits represent Storyville outside of its public persona.

Erotic as they sometimes are, they still provide a foil to the façades of the madams and "girls." Bellocq's models do not appear to be the glamorous, "handsome and intelligent Octaroons" of Willie Piazza's,[99] or *The Mascot's* outlandish and poisonous "procuresses."[100] They are anonymous and unguarded, reminders that for whatever happened in Storyville publicly and was recorded, we possess only an incomplete archive and there are always untold stories. Some of these might have been jarring tales, like the supposed crimes in Smoky Row. Others might have been more quotidian, the daily, mundane happenings in any neighborhood – a few could have fallen under both categories. In spite of its high profile, Storyville functioned because of desires and events that were not considered topics fit for polite society; it was assumed that it was better for an attempt at containment to be made, and so officials tried. Within this flawed infrastructure there were things that happened only to be disregarded: Bellocq's portraits remind us that the women he depicted probably became collateral damage.

---

[99] Billy Struve, *Blue Book*, Eighth Edition (New Orleans: 1907), The Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana, Call Number: HQ146.N6 B58 1907, Permalink: http://hnoc.minisisinc.com/thnoc/catalog/2/4579.
[100] "A Plague of Prostitutes."

Conclusion

> "I was so sure it would happen. That the past was an abused record with no choice but to repeat itself at the crack and no power on earth could lift the arm that held the needle."[1]
>
> "Being able to earn a little money makes the child of fourteen or fifteen very independent and only too willing to listen to the temptations offered by advocates of a gay life as against the advice of a mother. Where are the fathers of the girls from whose mothers I receive note after note telling me of the downfall of their daughters?"[2]

Turning from the archives of visual and written material that I have consulted thus far, I would like to draw from another rich New Orleanian tradition: music. Beginning with a reflection on jazz (music that was and is so synonymous with vice and Storyville), this conclusion addresses issues of location, cultural memory, erasure, and stigma that have been raised in the thesis as a whole. Bellocq left us with portraits that both trouble and uphold the narratives of early twentieth century prostitution, but by reframing his models as sex workers rather than "prostitutes" (but still keeping in mind their relationship to the icon as it was constructed and understood), the portraits are allowed to remain elusive. We, in turn, are made to consider what we do not know, and what we assume, about them. Though Storyville is gone, these photographs remain (or were resurrected), and I have used them to question what folklore and history tells us.

Overall, when we acknowledge the limitations imposed by Storyville's mythology – yet engage with that mythology as a complex cultural product that was not necessarily just "American" – we also acknowledge the difficulties inherent in investigating a subject whose archive is crowded by myths. There are strong parallels between the structure of histories (or stories) of New Orleans jazz and Storyville's women: they are of marginalized people, they are suffused with legends, and they are, in the end, predicated on infamous events, individuals, and places. Further, their modes of storytelling counter loss and destruction. My conclusion, then, postulates that Bellocq's portraits – within these stories, but also within other frames of reference – are at their most powerful when we refuse to impose strict judgments or explanations upon them. They have inspired a range of fictions,

---

[1] Toni Morrison, *Jazz* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 220.
[2] Jean Gordon, as quoted in the *Daily States*, January 16, 1917.

but in order to demonstrate the parallels between jazz and Storyville that most include Bellocq, I discuss his presence in Michael Ondaatje's *Coming Through Slaughter* (1976), and to a smaller extent, his role as a primary character in Louis Malle's "Pretty Baby" (1978). This moves into a consideration of Storyville and Bellocq's portraits as metaphorical entities with symbolic impetus, and their own links to nineteenth and twentieth century ideologies of the city, detective, and flaneûr. A discussion of "forgetfulness" and memory in the context of urban history then underscores how the portraits are such crucial interlocutors for Storyville, "deviant" women, and sex work. I also reflect on my personal subjectivity within the context of undertaking a historical research project on these topics, which are still fraught with debates.

Jazz, as a genre and concept, is intrinsic to Storyville's tale. But the problem with the history of Storyville, like that of the early jazz that permeated its streets, is not that it was forgotten. The problem – if it really is one – is the way everything has been remembered and reassembled in the present. History is often stuck "in a groove" of fin de siècle New Orleans, repeating the same stories while neglecting to negotiate both pervasive stigmas against sex workers and inevitable lapses in memory.[3] This has been complicated by more aggressive social and governmental measures that affected not only laws, but the conservation of records as well. The sound of New Orleans jazz was disassembled alongside its folklore by American and European popular culture – into Harlem jazz, Chicago jazz, and even cabaret shows in Paris – but both the district and jazz were consciously remembered and re-articulated decades after the music's genesis. Far from its locality and the contexts within which it developed, the genre was transmuted by a world now technologically capable of documenting the sounds and histories of music. Jazz and its mystique have been recalled by a culture interested in what it can standardize and codify for novelty, nationalism, and scholarship's sakes.

Though the musical style was originally characterized by innovation, synthesis, and difference, because of how it has been remembered, contemporary audiences often regard it as a hallmark of a golden time – or pure good times. For many people of the twenty-first century, jazz means raspy trumpets on neon-lit Bourbon Street while one has a frozen strawberry daiquiri in hand, and a slice of pizza in the other. It could also be the happy music played at New Orleans Square in Disneyland, a clean Californian simulacra hundreds

[3] Emily Epstein Landau writes, "The popular celebration of the district as part of New Orleans's storied past serves to mystify that very past," in *Spectacular Wickedness: Sex, Race, and Memory in Storyville, New Orleans* (Louisiana State University Press, 2013), 206. It is not problematic to "celebrate" the district's history, but we should not oversimplify that history or force it to conform to, for example, melodramatic or dramatized narratives. These can and do, as she points out, "Mystify that very past."

of miles away from the actual Congo Square. The largest similarity between the New Orleans jazz of today and any heard at the dawn of the twentieth century is that it is still performed live. But just as the audience has changed, so too have the delivery, the reception, and the mythos.

While his influence might escape the general knowledge of many who pass through Disneyland or Bourbon Street's bars today, Charles "Buddy" Bolden remains emblematic of both the pathos and romance attached to the Jazz Age in New Orleans. This is encapsulated in Michael Ondaatje's *Coming Through Slaughter* (1976), which was inspired by Bolden's life. Appropriately, most historians of jazz and many New Orleans historians credit him in their analyses of the development of jazz as a genre, even though few of the people who knew what his music sounded like actually survived into the late twentieth century. His enigmatic history only enhances any imagined echoes of his music, and a style of musicianship that was reportedly as tempestuous as his life. As Court Carney explains in "New Orleans and the Creation of Early Jazz:"

> Never recorded, Bolden's legacy relates as much to the heroic, paternalistic elements of jazz history as to the significance of myth, rumor, and speculation. A black man born in Reconstruction-era New Orleans who performed a style of music that escaped preservation and produced a formidable legend that imparted a shadow across the entire history of early jazz, Bolden's life suggests the transitory nature of early jazz in New Orleans.[4]

A hopeful rumor that at least one cylinder recording of Bolden playing his horn exists, but it has not been rediscovered. As Carney points out, this could simply be one of the myriad speculations about Bolden, albeit one of the optimistic variety.

Bolden's story is cluttered by retrospective accounts, interviews, and the "formidable legend" that has been imagined by both popular and academic culture. What remains behind is sparse, but pervasively embellished. Spontaneous as the music he played in saloons and brothels, Bolden's life was fraught with poverty, dramatic arguments with lovers, and his emotional instability. By 1907, relates Donald M. Marquis, he was committed to the mental asylum in Jackson, Louisiana, totally incapacitated by a psychosis that was brought on by his rampant alcoholism and what was most likely a type of bipolar disorder.[5] He was arrested earlier that same year for violent actions during a bout of "insanity," a condition that Samuel Chambers, adding to Bolden's infamous reputation as a

---

[4] Court Carney, "New Orleans and the Creation of Early Jazz," *Popular Music and Society* 29 (2006), 304.
[5] Donald M. Marquis, *In Search of Buddy Bolden: First Man of Jazz,* (Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 125.

relentless womanizer, claimed was the result of advanced stages of syphilis.[6] Marquis, however, has refuted the suggestion, saying that Bolden's attending physician "did not mention" any presence of the common venereal disease in his charts.[7] Bolden died in Jackson in 1931, which was long after jazz gained the momentum and popularity that caused historians and folklorists to reexamine New Orleans as the particular contributor to what became known as Dixieland music.[8] But without much extended contact with the outside world after 1907, and a conspicuous lack of preserved communications with anyone but his doctors, Bolden was presumably unaware of the new and often lucrative trends that changed the jazz he had known. After his body was brought back to New Orleans, his burial ended in an unmarked grave.[9] But Bolden remains mysterious yet celebrated, a fitting state in the context of his home city, a place that has been similarly treated throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

"The enigma of black life during the 1890s coupled with the mythomania of early twentieth century New Orleans creates a number of difficulties for historians," writes Carney, "both in terms of constructing a sensible narrative of early New Orleans jazz and in defining an unpreserved sound."[10] This "mythomania" becomes obvious when one investigates any causal or thematic relationships between the early jazz that Bolden helped propel, and Storyville, the vice district whose name litters jazz in its songs, tales, and histories. It is a place that Bolden, like other jazz musicians, would have intimately known. Razed foundations covered by low-income housing from the mid-twentieth century and new condos are all that remain;[11] this physical lack is accompanied by memories of the erased place. However, like many of the tales concerning Bolden and his peers, most memories have cleansed Storyville of what must have been a complex nineteen years. They are memories contingent upon assumptions about vice, race, and sex that are, by some arguments, reductive and harsh, or romanticized and embellished, or both. Early jazz

---

[6] Samuel Charters, *Jazz New Orleans, 1885 – 1963, An Index to the Negro Musicians of New Orleans* (Oak Publications, 1963), 12.

[7] Marquis, 124.

[8] Dixieland could also be envisioned as a movement or transition in conjunction with a genre. Many musicians moved north in the 1910s and brought a repertoire of songs with them. These had merged with early swing by the 1930s to create a sound that roughly correlates with those of jazz bands at Disneyland and on Bourbon Street today. Since recording was only encouraged and relatively widespread by the thirties, the skeleton of early New Orleans jazz is present in this mixture. Court Carney, Joanne Saul, and John S. Saul address this process in their respective works.

[9] Joanne Saul and John S. Saul, "Voicing Silence: The Legend of Buddy Bolden," *Critical Studies in Improvisation* 3 (2007), URL: http://www.criticalimprov.com/article/view/243/429

[10] Carney, 304.

[11] As of 2002, hardly any of Storyville's original premises remained standing. In May 2016, I was fortunate enough to visit three sites (in what is now New Orleans's business district) that were Storyville-era buildings. One of these, the Eagle Saloon, has been the subject of local campaigns trying to raise money to reopen it to the public.

evades because it was not recorded and preserved in its original form: it was instead absorbed and then fixed into more contemporary jazz styles. Storyville evades because it has been made digestible, understood through compartmentalized notions of prostitution and race, and it was most immortalized through a transient genre of music.

It could be said that, as jazz was, Storyville was also tamed and fixed into popular culture in order to mitigate any need to examine its implications too closely. It makes appearances in Louis Malle's film "Pretty Baby" (1978), Ondaatje's novel, various photographic pastiches that imitate Bellocq, volumes of poetry, and New Orleans street tours. Even a post-Hurricane Katrina episode of the American television show "Ghost Adventures," which claimed that all of Storyville's women were violent and conniving, managed to cram scattered facts into an episode whose stories would not be out of place in an 1860s sensation novel.[12] Yet, like Bellocq's portraits themselves, none of these examples are particularly mainstream, praised, or even well-liked. That both jazz and the district existed at a time of great political and cultural upheaval within the city made it simpler to forget – but later recall – Storyville as a microcosm of the scintillating possibilities afforded by moral transgression. Perhaps fittingly, everything about it has become a story, a tale that has helped brand New Orleans for longer than a century.

But Storyville was a place bred by dying Victorian morality and extreme racism. New Orleans, meanwhile, underwent an enormous transition to being more federal and therefore "American," especially in the two decades before World War I. These were the years when Storyville and jazz flourished, then diminished. One of the most important transitions involved a shift in the perceptions of race within the city as well as the state of Louisiana: racial and ethnic categories shifted from a spectrum demarcated by mixed European, Caribbean, and American lineages to a more stringent binary motivated by federalist laws and standards. The Code Noir recognized in Louisiana prior to its status as an American territory – a set of laws that was always strict regarding free people of color, slaves, and non-Catholics – explicitly prohibited interracial marriage or cohabitation by at least 1724, but in New Orleans, this was generally not as harshly enforced if the relationships were between free individuals.[13] By contrast, three years after the United

---

[12] "Ghost Adventures," Season Seven, Episode 24, URL: http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xxpyho_ghost-adventures-s07e24-new-orleans_shortfilms. The "investigation" focuses (in part) on a bar called Mae Baily's Place, which is operated by the Dauphine Orleans Hotel and features some of Bellocq's photographs on the walls.

[13] The *Code Noir* consistently mandated that non-Catholics could not marry Catholics. Marriages were also only legal between free men and women, never between slaves or a slave and a free individual (under any circumstances). Interracial marriage was made explicitly illegal by a 1724 revision of the code. "The Code Noir (The Black Code)," English translation, URL: http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/d/335/

States gained the Louisiana Territory from France in 1803, American law banned interracial marriage outright, ostensibly between blacks and whites. Later miscegenation laws included marriages between whites and Native Americans. According to one self-identified Creole guide and historian at Laura Plantation (about an hour's drive from the city), many Louisiana state residents would often be hostile toward interracial associations like their fellow Southerners, but many New Orleanians generally did not share the same vitriolic views until the early twentieth century. Until then, apparently, the city was more lax in its treatment and perception of relationships between, at least, free people of color – or black people – and white people.[14]

This was only one piece of legislation that contributed to tensions in the city over the course of the century, as a young country's laws and aspirations jostled New Orleanian perceptions and traditions about race, ethnicity, and culture. Black Creoles, for example, were well subsumed into the category of "black" by the late 1800s: this was partially a result of the increasing associations within American minds of "Creole" with the qualities of being overtly sexual or morally lax, and the correlation was helped by Storyville's enticing advertisements of Creole, Louisiana born women. Individuals of varying ancestries were effectively forced to assume an either white or black identity in a far more abrupt way than before, and this was very often decided by how they physically appeared – not which upbringing or social status they might have had. Speaking Creole or Cajun French, or indeed, any dialect or language other than English often became problematic and discouraged. Because of these tensions and many others, attempts at passing as white were to become far more common. In many cases, passing was a coveted, necessary ability to attain a livelihood or maintain one's safety in the South.[15] These factors all had their effect on New Orleans, and collectively, they had an extreme effect on people of color, whether mixed race or black. Storyville happily took on the myths of the "quadroon" and "octaroon" as representational calling cards: already known for providing spaces for interracial sex, the district's madams thrived on selling promises of mixed-race beauties to white men.

Even in light of all the change beforehand, Carney observes that 1917 – one year prior to the end of World War I, three years prior to the "roaring" twenties, whose bands would take jazz and play it for wider audiences in the north and south, and over a decade

---

[14] Laura Plantation guides (who chose to remain anonymous), in conversation with the author, June 2013.

[15] Emily Clark gives thorough explanations of the myths of the New Orleans quadroon and octoroon, and she frequently addresses the theme, as well as the credibility, of "histories" of plaçage. See *The Strange History of the American Quadroon: Free Women of Color in the Revolutionary Atlantic World* (University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

before the 1930s, which would see jazz syncretized with swing music – was pivotal for New Orleans as well as the United States at large. It was the year that best marked the moment when an old New Orleans gave way to a new Big Easy, the year of federal legislation that closed Storyville, and also the months which saw a final migration of musical talents to northern cities like Chicago and New York. Due to technological inability and this steady migration, a negligible amount of the music played in 1890s and early twentieth century New Orleans that came to be recognized as jazz was recorded at the time.

Jazz's function, history, and lineage were oral and aural, and all utterly reciprocal. It was interdependent on the musicians who learned and pioneered with other musicians. They earned a living playing their music for a city that knew Storyville and recognized Creoles, a city with legal riverboat gambling dens and socialite madams. After World War I, these qualities changed whether New Orleans wanted them to or not. Jazz moved with those who recognized the sound without it being named and compartmentalized. The names of the era carry a patina of intrigue because of their fragmented and often self-reported stories – Jelly Roll Morton is probably the most notable musician to give an account of his escapades in Storyville. Historic fetishism has been mingled with the considerable folklores attached to New Orleans, and facts and fictions have tangled enough to rival anything produced within the Southern Gothic genre.

Jazz Age New Orleans, and its personalities of players and sex workers, have been built into a cultural memory as much as they have been addressed by academia in their own right: this process is an unconscious mirror of how the music came to be. It is also a mix of fanciful integration and historical discipline, although it is equally the logical result of a lack of records that was influenced and even brought about by later years, specifically the 1920s and 30s when resources concerning Storyville would have been lost. This has been compounded by an inability to verify or replicate sounds and stories with full certainty. The lack that these circumstances have created is confronted and bridged through art and fiction: fiction steeped in history has become one main way of navigating the complexities of influence between music, vice, and the city itself. It is the reactions to Storyville – its interpretations – that remain telling, because they indicate what themes and events have had the most lasting cultural importance. Recognizing this distinction is more useful than continually attempting to prioritize "authentic" fact over "inaccurate" memory, which is a continual struggle in any attempts made to ascertain what the "real" Storyville, Bellocq, Bolden, and jazz were like in their heyday.

Although some jazz bandleaders and musicians have achieved the status of legends, Bellocq is one male figure in the history of Storyville and fin de siècle New Orleans whose work and personal biography remains comparatively unexamined and unelaborated. Bellocq provides a strange series of images that equally illuminate and complicate the connections between prostitutes, vice, photography, and of course, between the place in which the women worked and the women themselves. His portraits raise questions of authenticity, ethics, censorship, interpretation, and representations of the female body within art and cultural history. In *Coming Through Slaughter*, Ondaatje fictionalizes details of Bolden's life and uses the improvisations of jazz as an inspiration for his novel's loose, frenetic structure. Intriguingly, he inserts Bellocq as Bolden's particular confidante. Outside of their use in the novel, the portraits are otherwise absent from writings about jazz and many histories or analyses of Storyville. Instead, they have remained a curious footnote conveniently encapsulated by the idea of Bellocq as a Toulouse-Lautrec of New Orleans, an idea that had its origins in the late 1950s and early 60s.[16] Bellocq was not a known artist, or even an artist in the conventional sense. Evidently, and Ondaatje's iteration of Bolden muses about this decision, he kept these portraits private and for himself.

Whether the two men knew each other remains unclear, but it is not an unfounded connection for Ondaatje to make. Bellocq probably would have known of Bolden and could have heard him play depending on which establishments they both frequented. In Ondaatje's novel, Bolden facilitates Bellocq's work by convincing his wife, Nora, to be Bellocq's first model. Before marrying Bolden, Nora was a sex worker and she still maintains friendships in Storyville. It is implied that after her, other girls follow suit and pose for the crippled photographer; Ondaatje most likely saw a range of the photographs himself before writing his novel. The effect of juxtaposing known fact with fictional elaboration – for example, Bellocq was not a "cripple" or a "hunchback," but he was a relatively small man who became smaller in his elderly years– is a tense reconciliation of the dead, one that is not unexpected in a story set in New Orleans. To locals other than Bolden, Bellocq seems reclusive and bizarre; when Bolden disappears from his home and usual business, Bellocq is automatically suspected in his disappearance. This seems to be a usual assumption made about the photographer based on his work: he must have been insidious, necessarily voyeuristic and manipulative. However, there are very few, if any, indications in his portraits that he was coercing the women. Entering a brothel with camera

[16] David Bowman, "Strange and vanished flesh," Salon.com, URL: http://www.salon.com/2002/01/25/bellocq/.

equipment in the late nineteenth century would have been difficult to do covertly, too, suggesting that his endeavors were known to anybody who encountered him.

However, Ondaatje characterizes the photographic process, including the interactions between model and artist, as intensely private. Even Malle's "Pretty Baby" characterizes photography as a secretive, sexual act: until Violet kisses him during a game of "sardines," Bellocq only has any physical passion when he photographs Hattie – Violet's mother – behind closed doors. To Bolden, a performer, photography is perhaps not as invested with the same material necessities and human reciprocity as jazz. Bellocq seems questionable because, unlike other men who go to Storyville, he keeps to himself. In general, Bellocq being personified as socially inept and misunderstood, possibly dangerous, is the result of the catalogue text of and talks garnered by the 1970-71 exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art. But – as is the case with Bolden – there are few resources that directly deal with him and particularly, any details of why, exactly, he worked in Storyville.

It was easiest to portray him as contemporary audiences expected him to behave, and in the 1970s, Ondaatje had few alternatives. Bellocq was superficially comparable to Toulouse-Lautrec because of his reported solitary habits, supposed disabilities, and the subject matter of his work.[17] More to the point, under that description, he fits into a long and favored trope of the photographer or painter of nude women as reclusive, misunderstood, and perhaps morally questionable. There is, of course, an obvious amount of interpretive artistic license at play in *Coming Through Slaughter*. It is an impressionistic sketch of New Orleans at the turn of the twentieth century, a purposefully disjointed collection of anecdotes and narratives that mimics jazz's loose but internally disciplined form. The deliberate jumps in the narrative structure reflect the uncertainties of the time, all while following Bolden's inevitable, mysterious decline. History does not tell us how he comes to be committed to an asylum: it only tells us why. Likewise, nothing explains Bellocq's work. Ondaatje's writing exemplifies one way with dealing with those questions, but he does not offer specific closure and instead chooses to leave the tale open-ended, much like the events that inspired it.

Importantly, Ondaatje treats Storyville like a character that, like Bolden and Bellocq is also in decline. The district is not purely a passive setting that allows for events to occur.

---

[17] *Storyville Portraits* contains an edited transcript of multiple conversations combined into one "conversation" between people who claimed to know Bellocq and the women who modelled for him. However, it is not at all likely, especially in light of more recent research, that Bellocq was all that much of a social outcast. See Rex Rose, "The Last Days of Ernest J. Bellocq," *Exquisite Corpse: A Journal of Letters and Life* 10 (2002), as posted to "American Suburb X," URL: http://www.americansuburbx.com/2011/02/e-j-bellocq-the-last-days-of-ernest-j-bellocq.html.

He uses the names of prostitutes like clues of someone's physical appearance to construct a geography of women, an impressive topography of brothels that echoes the Storyville Blue Books in a lewder manner:

> The best was Olivia the Oyster Dancer [...] Or at 335 Customhouse (later named Iberville)... you could try your luck with French Emma's '60 Second Plan.' [...] Grace Hayes even had a pet raccoon she had trained to pick the pockets of her customers.[18]

This personification of a place could be applied to any of the different sections of New Orleans, including the French Quarter and the Garden District, but none had quite the same panache as the vice district. While Storyville is described far less after the first sections, it remains a dynamic presence in the course of the novel until Bolden is confined in the asylum. It assumes the qualities of a decaying but addictive entity that no one has full immunity to for long, and it alternately parallels Bolden's unstable mind and Bellocq's odd neuroses. Alongside Storyville being given the importance and function of a person – if not a person, then still a fundamental contributor to what occurs in the novel rather than a passive backdrop – Bellocq's photographs are invested with a persona of their own. In effect, Ondaatje employs them as a collective temporal marker, a New Orleanian portrait of Dorian Grey. They remain hidden in a box while everyone, Bolden and Bellocq included, ages, dies, or grows morally corrupted. Readers cannot forget, either, that Storyville no longer exists in its physical location, even if in the story it is alive and subversive.

These photographs function within the narrative as fragments of a past time, even if the past is not hundreds of years ago but occurred only last night, subject to the contexts of that moment as well as reinterpretation and the passage of time. They may be still, but they are not static – they have been confined to their narratives, their frames. As Roland Barthes says, "When we define the photograph as a motionless image, this does not mean only that the figures it represents do not move; it means that they do not emerge, do not leave: they are anesthetized and fastened down, like butterflies," and Ondaatje captures a specific, "fastened" moment.[19] The same "anesthetized" quality can be attached to recordings of music, but the women in Bellocq's photographs have been captured and "fastened down" in folklore, given movement and dynamism only in a limited and limiting narrative about the relationship between maker and models. This idea of being "fastened"

---

[18] Michael Ondaatje, *Coming Through Slaughter* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), 6.
[19] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (Vintage Classics, 1993), 57.

is telling in the context of the subjects of the portraits: women who worked long hours and were, once the law determined their work was fully illegal, unable to truly leave it. The photographs intrigue us because, visually, they represent these women before their decline. Likewise, perhaps if Bolden's band had been recorded, there would be much less of a fascination with him now.

The lack of concrete information, of sounds, texts, or photographs, seems to be what is most fascinating about these topics – at least as much as the resources that actually exist. Recorded history about Storyville contains evidence that ranges from Bellocq's photographs to legal documents, to census counts and assorted letters. But the spaces between these pieces of ephemera always become most intriguing about everything they represent: the surrounding time period and occupations, as well as social perceptions of sex work and African Americans, are unified factors in Storyville and jazz's demise. Without the means or particular desire at the time to create memories or records, each subsided. Storyville, in spite of all its character and characters, is more easily remembered as a caricature but not for what it was, a neighborhood riddled with equal parts corruption and livelihoods.

The start of the twentieth century was a locus for this selective memory in cities, though, and New Orleans is hardly alone in its possession of the attribute. Norman Klein and Daniel Hurewitz address a prevalent Angelino "forgetfulness" during this time in their respective books *The History of Forgetting: Los Angeles and the Erasure of Memory*[20] and *Bohemian Los Angeles and the Making of Modern Politics*.[21] Forgetting, as they continually emphasize, is a requisite condition of most urban centers' cultural histories just before the twentieth century, particularly in light of so many shifts in both morality and politics in the western world. There are problems and paradoxes, even abuses, that had to be forgotten for the sake of governmental and epistemological stability, issues that did not exist a century or even fifty years before without the influence of cities or modern life. It is not surprising or accidental that between the combination of a lack of technological ability to record sound, the changing treatment of race in New Orleans, and the relationship between jazz and Storyville, both jazz and the district were forgotten for a span of time and then reassembled as part of a tighter narrative.

Whether embellished or factual, the connections between music, memory, and place in the city are still present and inexorable. 1890s Los Angeles did not contend with

---

[20] Norman Klein, *The History of Forgetting: Los Angeles and the Erasure of Memory* (Verso, 2008).
[21] Daniel Hurewitz, *Bohemian Los Angeles and the Making of Modern Politics*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

the same cultural milieu as 1890s New Orleans, but its notoriety became very similar and ebbed into infamy for certain moral transgressions: among the reasons that Hurewitz addresses for its own pronounced and developed "history of forgetting" are the budding queer subcultures that were unique to its geography of hills and valleys, and the Southern California social strata of vaudeville stars and entertainment moguls. These subcultures, which arose in what Hurewitz calls the safety of bohemian "thirdspaces," grew to be involved with leftist movements, art, and the formation of distinct political identities well into the 1950s.[22] In many cases, New Orleans should be regarded as a "thirdspace," too: Thomas Ruys Smith notes that it gained a reputation for being a "bohemian refuge" in the late nineteenth century and this is affirmed by its reputation in popular culture.[23]

The questions of "black" or "white" were not necessarily relevant to Los Angeles in the way they were to New Orleans. Still, Hurewitz and Klein cite the presence of new subcultures as an important manifestation of the wider social changes in Los Angeles, much in the same fashion that Carney cites the development and migration of early jazz as an indication of the broad changes in motion for musicians and the city of New Orleans. This suggests that qualities of nineteenth century American, urban life were triggers for radical changes in thought and action, ones that had not been encountered before the birth of the city: cities facilitated them. Many of these breaks from the perceptions and practices of the earlier part of the nineteenth century were imposed, often forced rather than organic, but they also occurred as an inevitable feature of modernity. With their lack of space and high populations, cities contributed to a collapse of literal and ideological boundaries between the upper and lower social classes, people of all genders, and individuals of different races. Most crucially for the theme of forgetfulness, urban paces of life were quicker than anything experienced before the advent of industrialization, and this was only enhanced by the progression of capitalism and its mass technologies.

It allowed for a new rapidity in the dissemination of thought and fostered intellectual and artistic merging, as well as networking. Modes of authoritarian control had to change, too, to answer new forms of resistance and so-called deviance bred by urbanity. Methods of control became more invisible than reorganizing law enforcement or engaging in tactical city planning, and Storyville was one last, anachronistic attempt at a "proactive" control of vice rather than banning it outright as criminal. What I would term "obligatory" forgetting – forgetting assisted by civic legislation, the exclusion and editing of certain

[22] Hurewitz, 13.
[23] Thomas Ruys Smith, *Southern Queen New Orleans in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Continuum, 2011), 184.

records or recalled events in history, or other intentional parameters that ultimately decided what was remembered and what was not – became a defense against unwanted changes or behaviors even if they were not strictly illegal. Forgetting was also easy to do when the pace of everyday life was, for the first time, marked by the process of "earning" a living in the mechanized city. Stories that were undesirable or simply ephemeral were lost in their original forms. A process of cultural memory, or remembering, tried to fill the resultant lapses, and eventually fictions entwined with facts. This is evident when one tries to piece together, to borrow Carney's term, "a sensible" story of Storyville and Bellocq's portraits with the histories and claims that have accompanied them.

Overall, this thesis gives valuable perspective to the Storyville Portraits by acknowledging that they are at home amongst other representations of fin de siècle sex workers, indeed other "obscene" representations – and this is not a negative or demeaning quality. They originate from a time when "the prostitute" was at the forefront of debates about vice, so by allowing the portraits to be refracted by contemporaneous representations of urban women and sex work, they become less mysterious and confined to, or by, tropes of the New Orleans "courtesan." They retain and conform to these imaginaries, yet manage to refute them in key respects. Bellocq is not trying to "humanize" his models, either: he just photographs them, which lends the portraits a straightforward quality. This, perhaps, is part of what makes them so resonant. They challenge our assumptions about the relationships between photographer and model. Further, they force us to examine why, because some of these images of women are feasibly erotic (or, by certain standards, pornographic), we might first venture to explain them differently – or maintain that their creator was somehow perverted or obsessed.

At the same time, though, these are challenging images: as Emily Epstein Landau and Alecia P. Long have demonstrated, Storyville was not a kind place, especially to black women and women of color. It was chaotic and brutal, as well as extraordinary. When considered in that local context, the portraits do become poignant because, despite images like them or the self-directed representations in souvenir booklets or Blue Books, there was still rampant inequality. Even amongst Bellocq's portraits, there are reminders that life in Storyville had its hazards: a tired young woman posing next to another woman asleep in bed (supposedly, this was taken in a ward for venereal disease, but even if this is not the case, it is still sobering), and a woman with a long scar near one of her breasts make appearances, for example [Figures 40 and 41, respectively]. Newspapers and police reports,

meanwhile – even when treated with skepticism – corroborate that there was violent crime and disease.

Consequently, one limitation of this thesis reflects the limits of its primary and early secondary source material: I have not addressed in full either the presence of sex trafficking in Storyville, or problems in individual women's lives, although it is possible to trace some women both within and past the district. My work is concerned with representation, visuality, and to an extent, aesthetics, rather than social history alone. I have also deviated from the majority of historians who write about prostitution in what may seem to be a subtle manner: I have tried to use "sex work" when I refer to sex work, and "sex workers" when I refer to voluntary sex workers – instead of "prostitution" and "prostitutes." I felt it was too reductive, even when writing about an infamous vice district (where every kind of proclivity, consensual or otherwise, was apparently catered to) not to make these distinctions.

By failing to actively characterize nineteenth and early twentieth century "prostitutes" as people who were aware of their labor and how it was stigmatized, I believed I would be upholding the same biases that I was trying to test. Because of the countless stigmas that it endured (and flouted), Storyville and its memory were fragmented. Conversely, the hypocrisies and racism of some early twentieth century reformists were disregarded. The majority of Storyville's sex workers, though, must have been aware of the sociopolitical issues impacting their community and neighborhood, too. Indeed, it is demeaning to suppose that they would not have understood or navigated them – that all their time was instead spent taking drugs, assaulting clients, or being assaulted. Further, there is reason to assume that they did deem themselves employees of, or businesspeople in, a controversial industry. In January of 1917, for instance, around 300 sex workers from San Francisco's tenderloin district organized a protest march, clashing with a local reverend. Therefore, there were already demonstrable senses of solidarity and shared identity amongst urban, American sex workers at the time.[24]

While it was vital to acknowledge how grim life could be for these women, that condition was not exclusive to their work (and would have been considerably alleviated if they, and it, were not criminalized) – I was wary of oversimplifying their experiences. It would have turned injustices into morbid clichés. Considering my use of language, and listening to the sex work community, were both important – much of the story I tried to tell, after all, had to do with their histories. I discussed my early ideas with sex workers who

[24] *San Francisco Chronicle,* January 26, 1917.

were interested in my research, and we broached whether I should avoid terms like "whore" or "prostitute." In the end, I used them in source quotes, or otherwise to refer to the constructed concepts and icons that I call into question via the portraits. But without a doubt, women who offered sexual services in Storyville were called, among other things, "prostitutes" or "whores." Many were referred to, or referred to themselves, with racial epithets, as well. My choice is not meant to insinuate that they did not – or should have adhered to any ideas of feminine or racial "respectability," instead – and I do not disregard that reality.[25]

Rather, I want to foster a dialogue about representations and histories that also includes people who have been traditionally alienated from the archive. To do so, I tried to reposition fin de siècle women as agents, not just talking points in moral paradigms; issues facing today's sex workers are often rooted in those very representations and histories. Significantly, I am also not suggesting that there was no rape, abuse, or sex trafficking in Storyville. However, I do assert that trafficking was (and is) not the same as sex work, and branding "prostitutes" as criminals did not help prevent either trafficking, or the abuse of willing sex workers. "Prostitute," especially, connoted a gendered criminality that was imposed upon these women. It also erased women who were actually forced into "vice," not to mention men entirely ("*male* prostitutes"), and I wanted to problematize those connotations.

I also hoped to acknowledge my privileges as a white woman and non-sex worker, while underscoring two primary issues. First, women in Storyville provided services for pay, which allowed them to survive or profit. (Exploitation – and violence – happened in other industries women had entered, too, and was not limited to vice trades. Women who chose sex work or nude modeling did not inevitably do so under duress: comparatively, it could be a better option.) Secondly, the Storyville Portraits became representative of the iconic prostitute, so we can look at them in new ways if we interrogate how that icon and trope were constructed in the first place: by a complex mix of mass culture, law, and politics. Vocabularies and their implications were not a large consideration for me at the start of this project, which began while I completed my MA in 2013: my thoughts changed as my research evolved, and I am still learning. In addition, since I discussed women who were not "prostitutes" in the classic sense, but had sex to gain material advantages, it

[25] This is also not meant to be a criticism of contemporary scholars of Storyville, at all – they are equally aware of these issues and simply approach them differently than I have. For instance, Landau states, "I use 'prostitute' rather than 'sex worker' because the latter term connotes a kind of autonomous existence that many of these women did not enjoy. This is not to say that all prostitutes were, or conceived of themselves as, 'victims' with no agency," 10.

became even more apparent that "prostitute" was an archetype that needed to be examined.

Moreover, I do not explore the portraits within a dedicated history of Storyville. But this thesis owes much to Landau and Long's works, which are both admirably meticulous and helped inspire it. Instead, I used a lateral approach to look across representational practices and tendencies. The portraits, due to their appearances – many do look more like something John Sloan would have painted or etched (had he been less voyeuristic) than anything that emerged from Storyville – require us to orientate them differently: as images that are part of a transatlantic imaginary of urban prostitution. I reframe them as images of sex workers rather than criminal prostitutes. There has been some thorough and painstaking research on Storyville in recent years, and there has also been some renewed interest in Bellocq. However, his portraits' significance become limited when only these histories are consulted within those frameworks. They can shift the portraits into icons of Storyville rather than powerful representations of, for example, a new "type" of modern woman, or even specifically Storyville sex workers. The portraits should not be expected to stand as a visual metonym for a place or criminal class, especially when they bear few visual cues that they are from that place. Storyville itself now often functions as an urban legend, a story to spice up histories and memories. It allies itself well with, as Long says, the vision of New Orleans as a "languid and alluring courtesan"[26] and merges seamlessly with the most audacious perceptions of the city. In some respects, the "courtesan" overtook the city for roughly two decades, so this is not unexpected. But hardly any physical traces are left of the district, and the Storyville Portraits are among the most memorable.

This lack of resources contributes to "scandalous" imaginaries, although it is also true that Storyville madams and saloon landlords actively encouraged a bombastic image laced with sex, money, and unfettered morality. Yet Bellocq's portraits do not sensationalize to titillate, or moralize to educate, viewers. They do not mimic the beguiling haze that characterized New Orleans in the late nineteenth century, either; nothing within them is specifically emblematic of the city. Since Bellocq's purpose remains, and will probably remain, vague, his portraits provide an invitation and the space to examine how they relate to pornography, representations of sex work, and women. They come from a city and a period within that city whose histories, as Carney writes, are extremely

[26] Alecia P. Long, "Poverty is the New Prostitution: Race, Poverty, and Public Housing in Post-Katrina New Orleans," *Journal of American History* 94 (2007): 797.

"embellished" and difficult to separate from "mythomania,"[27] so the clash between the portraits' thematic familiarity – to other aspects of mass, popular, and even "high" culture – and their simple, often haphazard, visual narratives creates an uncomfortable state. We expect them to make sense within set expectations, to echo and reinforce other tropes about New Orleans, yet they still remain unusually unembellished portrayals of Storyville women and where they worked. It would be inaccurate to say that they have not been impacted by the perceptions and biases held by contemporary viewers.

As such, my point is not to assert that the photographs possess (or should have) a revelatory meaning that has been ignored or misunderstood. Rather, this thesis puts them in dialogue with what occurred around them, and stresses that they are part of a spectrum of "obscene" representations that were created and are best read in the context of urbanity, sex crimes, and gender roles. Asserting that there are relationships between Bellocq's photographs and what occurred in especially the late nineteenth century to the representation of the prostitute and prostitution counters the lack of what we know about them. And instead of exotic or deviant ladies, we are shown women – sex workers. Contemporary reactions to the portraits belie how underwhelming this is: "Some [of the models are] dumpy with distinctly overripe curves," writes one journalist in her review of their 2002 exhibition.[28] This mild disdain is a common enough response to how "ordinary" the women are, which is, apparently, a dramatic contradiction to how they are expected to look – because of the rhetoric generated around the prostitute archetype. The photographs are atypical because of how they survived to be seen today and how "normal" the women seem, regardless of what popular culture tells us about their lives – not because they are salacious. In regards to this realism, another reviewer of the same exhibit simply reminds his readers, "As for these women's naked bodies, onlookers need to remember these assorted breasts and bellies predate Calista Flockhart, let alone Marilyn Monroe."[29]

But Bellocq started something dynamic: the portraits have enthralled twentieth and twenty-first century spectators. Their enigmatic qualities allow viewers to be detectives, voyeurs who partake in what Patrick Brantlinger terms the "romance of vice."[30] The fascination with crime and vice was well popularized in the nineteenth century by fiction, expository newspaper and magazine articles, and eventually the detective: an ultimate

---

[27] Carney, 304.
[28] Vicki Goldberg, "So at Ease with Life on the Edge," *The New York Times*, January 6, 2002.
[29] David Bowman, "Strange and vanished flesh," Salon.com, URL: http://www.salon.com/2002/01/25/bellocq/.
[30] Patrick Brantlinger, "What is 'Sensational' about the Sensational Novel?," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 37 (1982): 6

fantasy of male infiltration and control. He had his origins in the short stories, French literature, and British sensation fiction of the Victorian era, but was more legitimized as "respectable" in 1890s novels. Unwittingly, Bellocq, then Lee Friedlander – or perhaps John Szarkowski, more than Friedlander – replicated this cultural obsession in the Storyville Portraits by creating images that facilitate detective work. They allow for chains of suppositions and questions, and this is only enhanced by their status as "found objects." After all, Bellocq depicts prostitution: something part of what Christopher Pittard calls a "cultural and spatial invasion" of cities at large.[31]

As I have explored, late nineteenth century culture was repulsed and enamored with crime, especially crime that involved or implicated women. Ironically, Storyville existed because of attempts to contain active female sexuality and prostitution, both regarded as the same kind of "contagious criminality" that made the genre so popular.[32] In many of these stories, erotically charged female villainesses instigated the contagion, but were clever enough to appear innocent or reformed while bringing criminality into the home or private spaces. Unsurprisingly, Storyville itself was claimed to be infectious or poisonous to respectable society, even though it was supposed to contain vice within specific, demarcated parameters, and not spread it. In light of these views, it is remarkable that the portraits are both blunt and ambivalent about their sexual contexts.

They divest the women of most scandalous qualities – barring nudity – and contain neither a strong sense of time, nor overt markers that these women were sex workers and not simply nude models, even if the two categories were problematic under the day's morality. Officially, Bellocq's models would have been criminals only a decade or so earlier; they would be again after 1917, as evidenced by police mug shots. But, as Sontag underscores in her introduction of Friedlander's prints, "The year is 1912, but […] the ballooning clothes and plump bodies could be dated anywhere from 1880 to the beginning of World War I."[33] The portraits deny an instant association with Storyville, but the association has been supplied and strengthened by the passage of time. Sontag also articulates one of the reasons why this has been able to take place so strongly: the portraits have an amorphous relationship with their original years of creation, a span of particularly tumultuous, formative years for the United States and the western world. Despite – or

---

[31] Christopher Pittard, *Purity and Contamination in Late Victorian Detective Fiction*, (Ashgate, 2011), 81.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Sontag, "Introduction" in *E.J. Bellocq: Storyville Portraits, Photographs from the New Orleans Red-Light District, Circa 1912*, ed. John Szarkowski (New York: Random House, 1996), URL: http://www.masters-of-photography.com/B/bellocq/bellocq_articles2.html.

because of – this, they generally appear to the twenty-first century viewer as nostalgic and indicative of New Orleans in the early 1900s.

The photographer whose presence has been assumed to be alternatively voyeuristic or sensitive exists in a similarly cinematic way: he is a natural character of the city scene. Most information on Bellocq comes from research done by Al Rose, then John Szarkowski for the first 1970-71 exhibit, an ensuing monograph on the portraits, and eventually some investigative work done by Louis Malle for "Pretty Baby." Rose's son Rex later conducted his own inquiries to better understand the photographer and acted as a panel member at public talks held for an exhibit in 2002. In his mid-twenties when the district first opened, "Bellocq often ventured one block from his front door into the legally sanctioned district of prostitution," Rex Rose explains; he also emphasizes the fact that Bellocq never moved away from the French Quarter and was a white Creole who spoke French.[34] Most scholarship and other pieces of writing specifically about the photographs, but not the district, have a distinctly biographical bias because little else about the portraits has surfaced. One aspect of my project was, then, to recast Bellocq as less outlandish than the 1970s led us to believe. His role as a frequenter of brothels (and allegedly, in an almost Baudelairean turn, opium dens) was a familiar one in the nineteenth century city – and would not be unallied with his role as a potential artist or bohemian. Tellingly, *Storyville Portraits* asserted, "Bellocq – whoever he was – interests us [...] as an artist: a man who saw more clearly than we do, and who discovered secrets,"[35] and this is how we might like to see him. He clearly transgressed spatial and ideological boundaries to discover these "secrets," all of which indicate that the glamour Storyville cultivated for itself was simply an illusion. At the time, for locals like him, that would have been no secret.

Both his initial creation of the portraits and our continued fascination with them are indicative of a desire to put them in order and control what they represent: control was a common undertone in nineteenth century conceptualizations of both the detective and the flâneur, his less methodical twin. These archetypes preconfigure our reception of Bellocq as much as they bias our reception of his models. Paul Smith notes that Charles Baudelaire's "comparison between his flâneur and the detective is also a way of suggesting

---

[34] Rex Rose, "The Last Days of Ernest J. Bellocq," *Exquisite Corpse: A Journal of Letters and Life* 10 (2002), as posted to "American Suburb X," URL: http://www.americansuburbx.com/2011/02/e-j-bellocq-the-last-days-of-ernest-j-bellocq.html.

[35] John Szarkowski, *E.J. Bellocq: Storyville Portraits – Photographs from the New Orleans Red-Light District, circa 1912*, (Meriden: The Museum of Modern Art, 1970), 10.

that both figures exist as fantasies of control born out of insecurity [...]."[36] Baudelaire, arguably the originator of the term as used by twentieth century scholars like Walter Benjamin, often cast the detective and the flâneur as related archetypical – even satirical – figures. An acknowledgement and assessment of Bellocq's transgression, or infiltration, and how it might be playing into our contemporary fantasies about masculinity and authenticity – Bellocq providing an authentic portrayal of these women as they "really" were – and not just those of the outsider artist, are not found in many considerations of these photographs. In the subjects of Storyville and Bellocq, memory, fictions (of sex, masculinity, and art), and fact have entwined in a demonstration of William Faulkner's aphorism, "The past is never dead. It's not even past."[37]

Although the portraits' ties to Storyville rely more on context than their overt content, Bellocq's connections with the district and the French Quarter were explicit; as a member of those communities, he could enter them. He did not necessarily intrude upon them. Rex Rose proposes, "Perhaps Bellocq thought of himself as a Storyville dandy," which seems likely.[38] Effectively, the young photographer waited for the opportune moment to "follow his eye" before beginning his new work.[39] Once he could, he took ownership of the space with the help of his camera and Storyville became his haunt. From all of this, viewers are left with the belief that there must be more to the portraits, that they must be conveying some piece of an entire story – and the story only needs to be put together properly to reveal some underlying truth. This is, of course, not true.

Still, Bellocq's own story leaves plenty of room for conjecture, and more than enough space for the photographs to become clues that might explain something dramatic. However, they always refuse that resolution. By contrast, though, early twentieth century detective and crime stories "were [...] 'healthy' crime narratives"[40] that demonstrated typically male mastery over the illnesses of crime. They supplied a logical, comforting resolution to the problem. Crime took place in public, in the knowable, diagnosable city rather than inside closed rooms. Bellocq is within secluded borders, yet the photographs he took do not amount to taxonomies of the "real" Storyville. Even so, the portraits seem as

---

36 Paul Smith, "'Le Peintre de la vie moderne' and 'le peintre de la vie ancienne,'" in *Impressions of French modernity: art and literature in France, 1850-1900* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 79.
37 William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun* (Vintage International, 2012), 73.
38 Rex Rose, "The Last Days of Ernest J. Bellocq," *Exquisite Corpse: A Journal of Letters and Life* 10 (2002), as posted to "American Suburb X," URL: http://www.americansuburbx.com/2011/02/e-j-bellocq-the-last-days-of-ernest-j-bellocq.html.
39 Ibid.
40 Pittard, 83.

though they should be part of such a tale of vice, and the lack of closure is equally frustrating and enticing. Many just look like other "obscene images" of the time.

But in some respects, they do help us test Benjamin's assertion that:

> To live means to leave traces. In the interior these are emphasized. [...] The traces of the occupant also leave their impression on the interior. The detective story that follows these traces comes into being.[41]

Part of what keeps the portraits both engaging, and difficult to categorize, is their position as "traces" themselves, ones providing glimpses into interiors and social orders that no longer exist. Further, the portraits could be more explicit or exploitative due to associations between sexuality, ethnicity, criminality, and disease, but they are not. And unlike the proclamations of the newspapers or Blue Books, there is not a strong sense of place in Bellocq's portraits. Bellocq himself ultimately became a reclusive old man, a human vestige of the Gilded Age city that still lingered as the twentieth century progressed. According to a supposed eyewitness, he was the "photographer, slowly going senile [...] who wandered around downtown" until he passed away in 1949.[42] He almost took on the frenetic and garish properties of his surroundings, and the way they persisted and lingered – despite repeated attempts to sanitize, or romanticize, Storyville's questionable and undesirable aspects. Yet in spite of the rather unsettling presence he was said to have later developed, as Sontag writes, "No one was being spied on" and "everyone was a willing subject" in his portraits.[43]

This presents an intriguing paradox: though none of the women seem to have been coerced or unhappy, their photographs only resurfaced far later. We know who Bellocq is; we do not know much about his models, though we may believe we do. "By all appearances the physical legacy of the district has been swept away, but the past has a way of surfacing at unpredictable moments, no matter how hard you try to bury it," as Eric A. Powell observes.[44] The physical portraits possess a secretive tinge of found objects, which is enhanced by how notorious New Orleans, and in particular New Orleans as the home of the French Quarter and Storyville, was for the early twentieth century public. That is essentially Bellocq's most enduring legacy: while his portraits instigate questions and inquiry, ultimately, they do not reveal anything definitive. Their survival is extraordinary.

---

[41] Walter Benjamin, "Paris: Capital of the Nineteenth Century," in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writing,* trans. Edmund Jephcott, (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), 155.
[42] Rose, "The Last Days of Ernest J. Bellocq."
[43] Sontag, "Introduction."
[44] Eric A. Powell, "Tales From Storyville – Digging the 'Sporting Life' in Old New Orleans," *Archeology Magazine*, Volume 55: Number 6 (November/December 2002).

But their appearances are a jumble of the unexpected – genuinely smiling women – and quotidian, for fin de siècle or Gilded Age pornography – women posing in stockings and lingerie. They elicit their own reevaluation because they are not as insidious as we might expect. Even when they are considered as a collective set, are explored as art objects – or are incorporated into fictions, as they have repeatedly been – they raise more questions than answers. Bellocq took photographs that are at once melancholic and unapologetic, detailed and noncommittal. To borrow from Edgar Allen Poe's "The Man of the Crowd" (1840), they "[do] not permit [themselves] to be read" with much certainty and suggest that there are "some secrets which do not permit themselves to be told."[45] Yet, they invite us to make an attempt to read them. This is their lure: these women are so evocative of a certain kind of fin de siècle woman, and their portraits remain on the edges of obscenity and obscurity.

[45] Edgar Allen Poe, "The Man of the Crowd" (1840), URL: http://poestories.com/read/manofthecrowd

Bibliography

"Bankoff and Girlie in Big Modern Dancing Act Headlining Orpheum Bill This Week." *Times-Picayune*, 1916-09-03.

"Carrie Nation to Bring Her Hatchet to this City – she says New Orleans is wicked City and needs Reforming – passes through on Way East." *The New Orleans Item*, 12 May 1907. Transcript via Louisiana Works Progress Administration, n.d.

"Green Room Players," *Times-Picayune*, c. 1907, (n.d.).

"Introduction," Stephen P. Ryder, editor, *Casebook: Jack the Ripper (1996–2015),* URL: http://casebook.org/.

"Killing Of Kate Townsend. The Testimony Taken Before coroner LeMonnier." *Times-Picayune*, 1883-11-08.

"Letters From The People." *Times-Picayune*, 1914-06-08.

"Ripper Letters," Stephen P. Ryder, editor, "Casebook: Jack the Ripper (1996–2015)," http://casebook.org/ripper_letters/.

"Sykes And Townsend." *Times-Picayune*, 1879-08-10.

"Sykes Dismissed From the Executership of the Estate of Kate Townsend, by Judge Houston." *Times-Picayune*, 1884-02-19.

"Sykes In Prison. Committed by Judge Houston Until he Produces Kate Townsend's Jewelry." *Times-Picayune*, 1886-02-19.

"Wistful And Sweet Are These Dainty Female Feet of the Stage. Some of Them Are..." *Daily Picayune,* 1895-02-24.

"'Amusements [Illegible] Rustieana' at the French Opera House." *The Daily Picayune,* 1897-01-22.

"Another Jack the Ripper." *Times-Picayune*, 1893-12-09.

"Carved to Death; Terrible Fate of Kate Townsend, at the Hands of Troisville Sykes." *The Daily Picayune*, November 4, 1883.

"Cassanova Case Comes Up To-Day, But Neither Side May Show Its Full Hand, Leaving the…". *Times-Picayune*, 1908-08-07.

"Cassanova Is Guilty; Escapes Execution. Jury Out Four Hours, and Brings in Qualified Verdict, Youth…". *Times-Picayune*, 1908-11-29.

"City Will Control Segregated Area Under New System Jackal Landlordism Is to Be

Abolished…”. *Times-Picayune*, 1917-01-24.

“Era Club Probes Expo And Racing Wants "Storyville" Abolished and S. and W. Board Law.” *Times-Picayune*, 1914-06-28.

“George Cassanova Is Home On Parole Lifetime Convict, for the Killing of a Girl, Freed.” *Times-Picayune*, 1915-01-25.

“Ghost Adventures." Season Seven, Episode 24. URL: http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xxpyho_ghost-adventures-s07e24-new-orleans_shortfilms.

“Green Room Gossip of Plays and the Players,” running column. *Daily* and *Times-Picayune.*

“Hidden From History: Unknown New Orleans,” curated by Emily Epstein Landau, City Archives, New Orleans Public Library, URL: http://nutrias.org/exhibits/hidden/hiddenfromhistory_intro.htm

“Kate Townsend – Storyville.” Storyville NOLA.com*,* http://www.storyvilledistrictnola.com/kate_townsend.html.

“More Vice Films Are To Be Withdrawn.” *New York Times*, 1913-12-29.

“Police Lesson Taught. Notorious Negress Treated Too Tenderly By the Law's Officer.” *Times-Picayune*, 1909-02-13.

“Selective Service Act of 1917.” Chapter 15, Act of May 18, 1917. United States Congress, 1st Session.

“Shamelessness Of The Vicious Classes.” *Times-Picayune*, 1900-03-18.

“The Cassanova Case As Viewed By Experts. Surgeons Discuss the Wounds Found on the Lavin…”. *Times-Picayune*, 1908-11-28.

“The Code Noir (The Black Code).” English translation, URL: http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/d/335/

“The Optimist Goes Slumming. Search for Horror in Whitechapel, London--None Found—“. *Times-Picayune*, 1906-10-21.

“Trilby Glee.” *The Daily Picayune*, 1895-07-02.

“Vice and Motion Pictures.” *New York Times*, 4-11-1913.

“White Slavery Awful Business, But There Are Women's Souls to Be Saved, And There Is…”. *Times-Picayune*, 1910-03-13.

“Wistful And Sweet Are These Dainty Female Feet of the Stage.” *Times-Picayune*, 1895-02-24.

America's Newspapers online databases

American Social Hygiene Association. *Keeping fit to fight*. New York?: s.n. 1918. Harvard University Library, Harvard University.

Anonymous. *My Secret Life*. Auguste Brancart, 1888.

Anwer, M. "Murder in Black and White: Victorian Crime Scenes and the Ripper Photographs." *Victorian Studies*, 56:3 (Spring 2014), 433-441.

Arceneaux, Pamela D. "Guidebooks to Sin: The Blue Books of Storyville, New Orleans." *Louisiana History* 28 (Fall 1987): 397-405.

Archdiocesan Archives for New Orleans

Armstrong, N. *Fiction in the Age of Photography : The Legacy of British Realism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

Asbury, H. *The French Quarter: An Informal History of the New Orleans Underworld* (London: Arrow, 2004).

Barthes, R. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (London: Vintage, 1993).

Baudelaire, Charles, trans. William Aggeler. "Sed non Satiata/Unslakable Lust," *The Flowers of Evil.* Fresno, CA: Academy Library Guild, 1954.

Beckson, K. *London in the 1890s: A Cultural History* (W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1992)

Beller, Anne-Marie, and Tara MacDonald. *Rediscovering Victorian Women Sensation Writers* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014).

Benfey, Christopher E. G. *Degas in New Orleans : Encounters in the Creole world of Kate Chopin and George Washington Cable* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

Benfey, Christopher. *Degas in New Orleans* (University of California Press, 1997).

Benjamin, W. "Paris: Capital of the Nineteenth Century." *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writing,* (New York: Schocken Books, 1986).

Bernheimer, C. *Figures of Ill Repute: Representing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century France* (London: Harvard University Press, 1989).

Blue book: Tenderloin 400. New Orleans: s.n., 1901. Call number: HQ146.N6 B58 1901.

Blue Book. New Orleans: s.n., 1909. Call number: HQ146.N6 B58 1909.

Blue Book. New Orleans: s.n., between 1913 and 1915. Call number: HQ146.N6. B58.

Bordeau, C. "The Power of the Feminine Milieu in Zola's "*Nana*." *Nineteenth Century French Studies* 27(1/2, 1999), 96-107.

Bowler A. E., Leon C. S. and Lilley T. G. “"What Shall We Do with the Young Prostitute? Reform Her or Neglect Her?": Domestication as Reform at the New York State Reformatory for Women at Bedford, 1901-1913.” *Journal of Social History* 47:2 (2013), 458-81.

Bowman, David. “Strange and vanished flesh,” Salon.com, URL: http://www.salon.com/2002/01/25/bellocq/.

Carney, C. “New Orleans and the Creation of Early Jazz.” *Popular Music and Society*, 29:3 (July 2006), 299–315.

Chopin, Kate. *The Awakening*. Chicago & New York: Herbert S. Stone & Company, 1899.

Choquette, L. “Degenerate or Degendered? Images of Prostitution and Homosexuality in the French Third Republic,” *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques*, 23:2 (Spring 1997), 205-228.

Christ, John X. “A Short Guide to the Art of Dining, Slumming, Touring, Wildlife, and Women for Hire in New York's Chinatown and Chinese Restaurants,” *Oxford Art Journal*, 26.2 (2003), 71-92.

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

Cohen, P. C. *The Murder of Helen Jewett: The Life and Death of a Prostitute in Nineteenth-Century New York* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998).

Cohen, W. *A Sex Scandal: The Private Parts of Victorian Fiction* (London: Duke University Press, 1996).

Cooper, H. H. A. “A Review of ‘Portrait of a Killer: Jack the ripper Case Closed,’” *Journal of Applied Security Research* (2010): 365.

Corbett, D.P. "Camden Town and Ashcan: Difference, Similarity and the 'Anglo-American' in the Work of Walter Sickert and John Sloan," *Art History*, 34:4 (September 2011), pp. 774-795.

Corbett, D.P. “'Gross Material Facts': Sexuality, Identity and the City in Walter Sickert, 1905-1910,” *Art History* 21:1 (1998), 45-64.

Corbin, A. *Women for Hire: Prostitution and Sexuality in France after 1850*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Paris, 1978; reprint Cambridge, Mass., 1990).

Cordell, Ryan. Lecture. May 11, 2016.

Cornwell, P. *Portrait of a Killer: Jack the Ripper - Case Closed* (London: Sphere, 2002).

Coyle, K. and Nadiene Van Dyke. "Sex, Smashing, and Storyville in Turn-of-the-Century New Orleans: Reexamining the Continuum of Lesbian Sexuality," *Carryin' on in the Lesbian and Gay South*, ed. John Howard (London: New York University Press, 1997).

Crane, Stephen. *Maggie, A Girl of the Streets*. Signet, 2006.

Daguerreobase

Daily Advocate, 1897-09-14.

Dean, C. "The Great War, Pornography, and the Transformation of Modern Male Subjectivity," *Modernism/Modernity* 3:2, Johns Hopkins University Press (1996), 59-72.

Denisoff, Dennis. *Sexual Visuality from Literature to Film, 1850-1950* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

Dijkstra, B. *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin De Siècle Culture* (Oxford University Press, 1986).

Doyle, A. C. *Favourite Sherlock Holmes Stories: Selected by the Author* (Atlantic Books Crime Classics, 2009).

Doyle, Arthur Conan. "A Scandal in Bohemia," *The Strand*. July, 1891.

Doyle, Arthur Conan. "The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton," *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*. New York: McClure, Phillips & Co, 1905.

Duchovnay, G., ed. *Film Voices: Interviews from Post Script* (State University of New York Press, 2012).

Eckstein, B. J. *Sustaining New Orleans: Literature, Local Memory, and the Fate of a City* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

Ellis, Havelock. *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* , URL: http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/author/2654.

Erbeznik, Elizabeth. "Workers and Wives as Legible Types in Eugene Sue's Les Mystères de Paris," *Nineteenth Century French Studies*, 41:1 & 2 (Fall-Winter 2012-2013), 66-79.

Felter-Kerley L. "The Art of Posing Nude: Models, Moralists, and the 1893 Bal des Quat'z-Arts," *French Historical Studies* 33:1 (2010), 69-97.

Flint, K. "The hour of pink twilight": Lesbian Poetics and Queer Encounters on the Fin-de-siècle Street," *Victorian studies* 51:4 (2009), 687-712.

Freeman, N. *Drama, Disaster and Disgrace in Late Victorian Britain*: (Edinburgh University Press, 2011).

Garrison, L. *Science, Sexuality and Sensation Novels: Pleasures of the Senses* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

Gauthreaux, A. G., and D. G. Hippensteel. *Dark Bayou: Infamous Louisiana Homicides* (McFarland, 2015).

Gilfoyle, T. J. "The Moral Origins of Political Surveillance: The Preventive Society in New York City, 1867-1918," *American Quarterly* (1989), 637-52.

Gilfoyle, T. J. *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790-1920* (London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992).

Goldberg, V. "So at Ease with Life on the Edge," *The New York Times*, January 6, 2002.

Goldman, Emma. "The Traffic in Women," *Anarchism and Other Essays*, Second Revised Ed. New York & London: Mother Earth Publishing Association, 1911.

Gordon, Jean. *Literary Digest,* March 24, 1917.

Greene, G. "Reflections of Desire: Masculinity and Fantasy in the Fin-De-Siècle Luxury Brothel," *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide*, 14:3 (Autumn 2015).

Grimes, H. "Power in Flux: Mesmerism, Mesmeric Manuals and Du Maurier's Trilby," *Gothic studies* 10:2 (2008), 67-83.

Guide to Pleasure – For Visitors to the Gay City, Directory to the Red-Light District of New Orleans in the Gay Nineties (Mardi-Gras Edition). 1963. The Historic New Orleans Collection, William Russell Collection, New Orleans.

Hasian, Jr., Marouf. "Performative Law and the Maintenance of Interracial Social Boundaries: Assuaging Antebellum Fears of 'White Slavery' and the Case of Sally Miller/Salome Muller," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 23:1 (January 2003), 55-86.

Hess, T. B., and Linda Nochlin. *Woman as sex object: studies in erotic art, 1730-1970* (London: Allen Lane, 1973).

Hurewitz, D. *Bohemian Los Angeles and the Making of Modern Politics* (University of California Press, 2008).

Illustrated Police News, Saturday 22 September 1888.

Jackson, J. J. *New Orleans in the Gilded Age: politics and Urban Progress, 1880-1896* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, for the Louisiana Historical Association, 1969).

James, L. "From Egan to Reynolds: The shaping of urban 'Mysteries' in England and France, 1821–48," *European Journal of English Studies* 14:2 (August 2010), 95–106.

James, S. "Detecting Paris: the character of the city in Eugène Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris* (1842–1843)," *Modern & Contemporary France*, 8:3 (2000), 305–313.

Johnson C. D. "That Guilty Third Tier: Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century American Theaters," *American Quarterly* (1975), 575-84.

Jones, K. “Lady Wildcats and Wild Women: Hunting, Gender and the Politics of Show(wo)manship in the Nineteenth Century American West,” *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 34:1 (2012), 37-49.

Joudrey, T.J. "Penetrating Boundaries: An Ethics of Anti-Perfectionism in Victorian Pornography," *Victorian Studies* Vol 57: No 3, Indiana University Press (2015), 423-32.

Joyce, S. *Capital Offences : Geographies of Class and Crime in Victorian London* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003).

Kauffman, Reginald Wright. *The House of Bondage*. Grosset & Dunlap, 1910.

Kimball, Nell. *Nell Kimball: Her Life As an American Madam*, *By Herself.* MacMillan Publishing Company, 1970.

Kinser, S.L.“Prostitutes in the Art of John Sloan,” *Prospects* (1984), 231-254.

Klein, N. *The History of Forgetting: Los Angeles and the Erasure of Memory* (Verso, 1997).

Koetzle, H. *1,000 Nudes* (Taschen, 2005).

Korda, A. *Printing and painting the news in Victorian London : the Graphic and social realism, 1869-1891* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2015).

Krist, G. *Empire of Sin: A Story of Sex, Jazz, Murder and the Battle for New Orleans* (Stroud: Amberley, 2014).

L'Hote v. New Orleans. Case 177 U.S. 587, 1900.

Laidlaw, H. B. (b. 1874). *Papers*, 1851–1958.

Landau, E. E. *Spectacular Wickedness: Sex, Race, and Memory in Storyville, New Orleans* (Louisiana State University Press, 2013).

Laney, Ruth. "The Mascot: New Orleans Newspaper," *Country Roads: From Natchez to New Orleans* (October 2012): http://www.countryroadsmagazine.com/culture/history/the-mascot-new-orleans-newspaper.

Larson, E. *The Devil in the White City: Murder, Magic, and Madness at the Fair That Changed America* (Bantam, 2004).

Laura Plantation guides (who chose to remain anonymous), in discussion with the author, 3 June 2013.

Law, G. *Serializing fiction in the Victorian Press* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000).

Leckie, B. *Culture and adultery: The Novel, the Newspaper, and The Law, 1857-1914* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999).

Letter published by the *Times Picayune*, dated 13 March 1919.

Linder, S., Caroline Morris and Keith Skinner, eds. *Ripper Diary: The Inside Story* (Stroud: The History Press, 2003).

Lindsey, S.S. "'Is Any Girl Safe?' Female Spectators at the White Slave Films," *Screen,* 37:1 (1996), 1-15.

Lomax, A. *Mister Jelly Roll: The Fortunes of Jelly Roll Morton, New Orleans Creole and "Inventor of Jazz,"* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1950).

Long, Aecia P. *The Great Southern Babylon: Sex, Race, and Respectability in New Orleans*, 1865-1920 (Louisiana State University Press, 2004).

---- Alecia P. "Poverty is the New Prostitution: Race, Poverty, and Public Housing in Post-Katrina New Orleans," *Journal of American History*, 94 (Dec. 2007), 795–803.

Los Angeles Herald, Vol. 37, No. 119, 28 January 1910.

Loughery, J. *John Sloan: Painter and Rebel.* Henry Holt & Company, 1995.

Coleman, Louise. Personal tour and informal interview with the author, May 26, 2016.

Malcolm, J. *Diana & Nikon: Essays on Photography*. New York: Aperture Foundation, 1997.

Malle, Louis. "Pretty Baby." 1978.

Maltz, D. "Ardent Service: Female Eroticism and New Life Ethics in Gertrude Dix's The Image Breakers (1900)," *Journal of Victorian Culture* 17:2 (2012), 147-63.

Mangham, A. *Violent Women and Sensation Fiction: Crime, Medicine and Victorian Popular Culture.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

Matlock, J. *Scenes of Seduction: Prostitution, Hysteria, and Reading Difference in Nineteenth-Century France*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.

Mclaren, A. *A Prescription for Murder: The Victorian Serial Killings of Dr. Thomas Neill Cream.* University of Chicago Press, 1995.

Miller, D. *Dark Eden: the Swamp in Nineteenth-Century American Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Millner, M. "The Senses of Reading Badly: The Examples of Antebellum 'Obscene Reading,'" *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance*, 57:3 (2011).

Mir, J. "Marketplace of Desire: Storyville and the Making of a Tourist City in New Orleans, 1890-1920." PhD diss., New York University, 2005.

Munford, Rebecca. "Re-Presenting Charles Baudelaire/Re-Presencing Jeanne Duval: Transformations of the Muse in Angela Carter's 'Black Venus,'" *Forum Modern Language Studies* (2004) 40 (1): pp. 1-13. *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 37:1 (Jun., 1982).

Museum of Modern Art Archives

Nead, L. *Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988.

Néret, G. *Erotica Universalis*. Taschen, 2004.

New Orleans Museum of Art

New Orleans Travelers' Aid Society Papers. RG 365, Louisiana and Special Collections, Howard-Tilton Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA.

Oharazeki, K. "Listening to the Voices of 'Other' Women in Japanese North America: Japanese Prostitutes and Barmaids in the American West, 1887-1920,"*Journal of American Ethnic History* 32:4 (2013), 5-40.

Ondaatje, M. *Coming Through Slaughter*. London: Bloomsbury, 2004.

Arceneaux, Pamela. Discussion with the author. May 24, 2016.

Parent-Duchâtelet, A. *De la prostitution dans la ville de Paris : considérée sous le rapport de l'hygiène publique, de la morale et de l'administration... ; suivi d'un Précis hygiénique, statistique et administratif sur la prostitution dans les principales villes de l'Europe*. J.-B. Baillière et fils, Paris: 1857.

Pinzer, M., et al. *The Maimie Papers: Letters from an Ex-Prostitute*. Bloomington: The Feminist Press and Indiana University Press in cooperation with the Schlesinger Library of Radcliffe College, 1985.

Pittard, C. *Purity and Contamination in Late Victorian Detective Fiction.* Farnham: Ashgate, 2011.

Platt, E. R. and Lillian Hill. "A Storyville Education: Spatial Practices and the Learned Sex Trade in the City That Care Forgot," *Adult Education Quarterly* 64:4 (2014), 285–305.

Platt, Polly. "Pretty Baby" screenplay. Transcription PDF. Scriptfly.com.

Plott, M. "The Rules of the Game: Respectability, Sexuality, and the Femme Mondaine in Late-Nineteenth-Century Paris," *French Historical Studies* 25:3 (2002), 531-56.

Poe, Edgar Allan. "The Man of the Crowd," *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine, Atkinson's Casket.* December, 1840.

Poe, Edgar Allan. "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," *Graham's Magazine.* April, 1841.

Powell, E. A. "Tales From Storyville – Digging the 'Sporting Life' in Old New Orleans," *Archeology Magazine*, 55:6 (November/December 2002).

Pykett, L. *Reading Fin de Siècle Fictions.* London: Longman, 1996.

Reilly, Jim. *Shadowtime: History and Representation in Hardy, Conrad, and George Eliot*. London: Routledge, 1993.

Reizenstein, Ludwig von. *The Mysteries of New Orleans*. London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002.

Reynolds, D. S. *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989.

Rose, A. *Storyville, New Orleans, Being an Authentic, Illustrated Account of the Notorious Red-light District*. Tuscaloosa, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1974.

Rose, R. "The Last Days of Ernest J. Bellocq," *Exquisite Corpse: A Journal of Letters and Life* (Issue 10).

Rubery, M. *The Novelty of Newspapers: Victorian Fiction after the Invention of the News*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Saul, Joanne and John S. Saul. "Voicing Silence: The Legend of Buddy Bolden," *Critical Studies in Improvisation*, 3:1, 2007.

Scarborough, George. *The Lure.* G.W. Dillingham Co., 1914.

Schreiber, Rachel. "Before Their Makers and Their Judges: Prostitutes and White Slaves in the Political Cartoons of the 'Masses' (New York, 1911-1917)," PDF: www.rachelschreiber.com.

Schofield, Ann. "Respectability, Decadence, and the American Piano." University of East Anglia, 3 November 2015.

Shaw, George Bernard. *Mrs Warren's Profession.* URL: http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1097/1097-h/1097-h.htm.

Sixty-first Congress, Sess. II. Chs. 393-395, 1910.

Skinner, G. D. "The Storyville Portraits: A Collaborative History." MA thesis, Virginia Commonwealth University, 1999.

Sloan, John, ed. Bruce St. John. *John Sloan's New York Scene: From the Diaries, Notes and Correspondence*, *1906-1913*. New York: Harper & Row, 1965.

Smith, T. R. *Southern Queen New Orleans in the Nineteenth Century*. London: Continuum, 2011.

Snyder, Robert W., and Rebecca Zurier. *Metropolitan Lives: The Ashcan Artists and Their New York*. National Museum of American Art, 1995.

Sontag, S. "Introduction," *E.J. Bellocq: Storyville Portraits, Photographs from the New Orleans Red-Light District, Circa 1912*, John Szarkowski (ed.). New York: Random House, 1996.

Sontag, S. *On Photography*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977.

Special Collections, Tulane University

Steedman, C. *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History*. Rutgers, 2002.

Stern K. J. "Rule Bohemia: The Cosmopolitics Of Subculture In George Du Maurier's Trilby," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 38:2 (2010), 547-70.

Stith, B.L. "The Influence of Jeanne Duval on the poetry of Baudelaire" (1943), ETD Collection for AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library, Paper 1558.

Stoops, J. "Class and Gender of the Pornography Trade in Late Nineteenth Century Britain," *The Historical Journal* 58:1 (March 2015).

Storyville Portraits: Photographs from the New Orleans Red-Light District, circa 1912 (E. J. Bellocq, reproduced from prints made by Lee Friedlander, pref. Lee Friedlander, ed. John Szarkowski). Boston: The Museum of Modern Art, Distributed by New York Graphic Society, 1970.

Stott, R. *The Fabrication of the Late-Victorian Femme Fatale: the kiss of death*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992.

Struve, Billy. *Blue Book*. Eighth Edition. New Orleans: 1907. Call Number: HQ146.N6 B58 1907.

The Historic New Orleans Collection

The Mascot, 21 May 1892.

The New York Times, quoted in the *New York Dramatic Mirror.* 10 September 1913.

The Times, 3 September 1888.

Thomson, L. "A Thoroughly Modern Man: EJ Bellocq and the creation of a Modernist myth." MA essay, University of Sussex, 2005.

Times Picayune, 1902-03-19.

Times-Picayune, 1910-12-13.

Times-Picayune, 31 May 1914.

Times-Picayune, 4 June 1914.

TP205h, New Orleans (La.) Police Dept. Homicide Reports,1893-1947. City Archives, New Orleans Public Library.

Traxel, D. *1898: The Birth of the American Century*. New York: Vintage, 1999.

Trethewey, Natasha. *Bellocq's Ophelia.* Graywolf Press, 2002.

Waddington, C. “Unlocking Bellocq’s Secrets,” *The Times-Picayune*, 09-23-1996, L20.

Waguespack, C. "Reframing E.J. Bellocq: A Vernacular Reading of the Storyville Portraits." MA thesis, University of New Mexico, 2015.

Walker, T. "Prophetic Chronotope and the Sexual Revolution in Baron Ludwig von Reizenstein's *Mysteries of New Orleans*." MA thesis, Georgia State University, 2015.

Walkowitz, J. R. *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late Victorian London.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

Wallis, B. *The Mysterious Monsieur Bellocq*. International Center of Photography, 2004.

Washburn, J. *The Underworld Sewer: A Prostitute Reflects on Life in the Trade, 1871-1909*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997.

Wellcome Images

White, Lulu. *New Mahogany Hall.* New Orleans, La.: s.n., between 1898 and 1899. Call Number: HQ146.N6 W55.

Willis, Nathaniel Parker. *The Rag-Bag: A Collection of Ephemera.* New York: Charles Scribner, 1855.

Willson, Nicole. PhD thesis, draft, University of East Anglia, 2015.

Wilson, C. *The Two Lives of Sally Miller: A Case of Mistaken Racial Identity in Antebellum New Orleans*. Rutgers University Press, 2007.

Wilson, Steven. “Nana, Prostitution and the Textual Foundations of Zola's *Au Bonheur des Dames*,” *Nineteenth-Century French Studies,* 41.1.

Woolf, Paul. “Prostitutes, Paris, and Poe: The Sexual Economy of Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue,'” *Clues: A Journal of Detection* 25:1, 6-19.

Zola, E. *Nana.* Hayrapetyan Brothers, 1933.

Zola, Emile. *L'Assommoir: Nouvelle édition augmentée.* Arvensa editions, 2014.

Zurier, R. *Picturing the City: Urban Vision and the Ashcan School.* London: University of California Press, 2006.