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*Claremont Graduate University*

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Bonding Over Bondage: Slavery, Racial Complexities and Commonalities in New Orleans,  
1803-1819

By

Andrew Ruben Rodriguez

Presented to the Graduate Faculty of Claremont Graduate University in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in History.

We certify that we have read this document and approve it as adequate in scope and quality for  
the degree of Master of Arts.

Faculty Advisor, JoAnna Poblete  
Claremont Graduate University  
Associate Professor of History

Faculty Reader, Joshua Goode  
Claremont Graduate University  
Associate Professor of Cultural Studies and History

2020



## Acknowledgments

There are several people that have contributed to this project that I am beyond grateful for. First and foremost, I would like to thank the faculty and staff at Claremont Graduate University. Major thanks to Dr. JoAnna Poblete for being my main advisor on this project and her major contributions throughout the process, from helping me brainstorm ideas to endless patience and advice during the editing process. I would also like to thank Dr. Joshua Goode for being my second reader and a continuing source of inspiration and guidance with my paper as well as during my time as a student. I must also extend thanks to Dr. Janet Farrell Brodie for her help early in the process by helping me break ground on the paper and gain an early momentum as well as providing a structured course that helped me flesh out ideas to finalize my topic. I must also thank Dr. Lori Anne Ferrell, for her genuine advice on how to be a better writer and historian. I owe a lot to each of these professors and am beyond grateful.

I would like to extend my gratitude to the generous Friedman estate and their contribution through the Friedman grant to conduct research for this project. Without the help of this grant I would not have been able to travel to New Orleans, a truly magical place, and do research in the rich archives in the city. Tulane University's special collections and archives provided great resources and the staff helped tremendously during my visit. A deep thanks is owed to the Historic New Orleans Collection in the historic French Quarter. To say this archive was rich in resources is an understatement. This archive provided me with a majority of my primary source information, mostly the access to newspapers, which images I have included in my project. I am thankful to have spent some time in this archive that has helped produce other amazing projects on New Orleans. A special thanks as well to Dr. Connie Zeanah Atkinson from the Midlo Center for New Orleans Studies at the University of New Orleans. Dr. Atkinson had provided advice

early during my research and contributed valuable lectures and secondary source material for my project as well as help with planning my visit to the city. My time in New Orleans will always be memorable.

Lastly, and certainly not least, I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to my friends and family who provided me with an excellent support structure and kept pushing and motivating me throughout this process. Special thanks to Vivian and Art Aguilar for the endless moral and emotional support and a warm and quiet home that allowed me to focus on this project. To my closest friends, Chris, Jacob, Jaime and countless others who helped alleviate stress during my time as a grad student by being a great extended support system and a source for laughter. I must also mention my trusty companions, Arlo and Paco, who endured countless late nights as I worked on this project. To the rest of my family; my parents Maria and Ruben Rodriguez and my other sister Vanessa Rodriguez who pushed me to reach my heights and made sure I made our family proud. Huge thanks to my other family and close friends that I consider family that all played a role in helping me through this paper and my time as a graduate student, they know who they are. And to all my professors of my past, who helped influence me to one day be a great historian, specifically Dr. Robert Lewis from my time as an undergraduate student at California Polytechnic University at Pomona. Dr. Lewis taught me to approach history with enthusiasm and to never stop chasing my dreams. Dr. Lewis was also the first person to call me a historian; his advice, motivation, and influence will continue with me forever.

To everybody mentioned in this paper and those not mentioned but know they made an impact on me, this was for you.

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## Introduction: Marsh to Metropolis

Different events in the nineteenth century have transformed America's sociopolitical, physical and cultural landscape and contributed to the formation of an American identity based on political liberty, a concept that revolved around the notion of freedom. The concept of slavery, which was opposite of liberty, would be a powerful force throughout American history. As Reverend John A. Ryan explained, liberty "consists mainly of the right to engage in an occupation, to make contracts, and to acquire property. From the beginning of our history as a nation, the constitutions of the various states protected this sphere of liberty for members of the Caucasian race."<sup>1</sup> It has been an inherent part of American history that those of lighter skin tones had social benefits that those with darker skins did not; this type of social structure based off race and color would be instilled into the American psyche and be a major component of American life and is a major concept in this paper.

Many scholars would argue about the most important period or event in American history, referring to one or another as a turning point or pivotal moment. The Cold War, World War II, Reconstruction, and the War of 1898, as historian Thomas Schoonover has argued, have changed American society, as well as perspectives of race and culture for many Americans.<sup>2</sup> The Louisiana Purchase of 1803 can also be added to this list as one of the most significant events in America's early development. The \$15 million purchase added 829,000 square miles to the union which doubled the nation's landmass, increased its population,<sup>3</sup> gave the country a key

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<sup>1</sup> John A. Ryan, "Liberty in America: Part II—Economic and Political Liberty," *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, (No. 60, Dec 1926,) 587.

<sup>2</sup> For more information about pivotal moments, see Thomas Schoonover's *Uncle Sam's War of 1898 and the Origins of Globalization* published in 2003, which argues that America has had many turning points that have dramatically changed the course of its history. His main argument is that the War of 1898 sparked a century of intense imperialism.

<sup>3</sup> Sanford Levinson and Bartholomew H. Sparrow, *The Louisiana Purchase and American Expansion: 1803-1898* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 2.



port for trade to support the growing number of residents,<sup>4</sup> and radically changed the demographics of the United States. The population within the Louisiana territory included thousands of free and enslaved Africans as well as numerous French, Spanish, and Catholic individuals, which changed the cultural dynamics of the predominantly white Anglo Protestant United States. The common desire for political liberty and concerns of French and American slaveowners, evidenced in the newspapers of New Orleans at the time of transition, became points of connection between European residents of the territory and Anglo-American newcomers to facilitate the shift from European to American rule.

This thesis examines the transitional period following the Louisiana Purchase through some of the ideological changes about political liberty, race, and slavery that occurred for those living in New Orleans at the time. The main period of transition took place between 1803 and approximately 1820, a time when the United States government worked to incorporate New Orleans into the American South. The period following the Louisiana Purchase was a dramatic transition towards political, racial and social structures based on American ideas of whiteness, white supremacy, and the institution of slavery. What made the transition to the United States unique was this robust ideology around racial hierarchies based on concepts of whiteness and the institution of the slavery. Other moments in New Orleans history prior to the purchase were not dominated by this paradigm.

The French were the first non-native settlers in the area of New Orleans and Louisiana and arrived during an era of intense European colonialism in the Americas. France established a foothold in this region of the world early in the seventeenth century, with colonies such as French Guiana in 1624, Guadeloupe's and Martinique's settlement in 1635, and Saint-Domingue

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<sup>4</sup> Julien Vernet, *Strangers on their Native Soil: Opposition to United States' Governance in Louisiana's Orleans Territory, 1803-1809*, (Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2013), 26.

in 1659. As Francophone studies scholar Dianne Guenin-Lelle argued, the French Crown only explored the area known as the Louisiana territory “primarily as a way of keeping the British and the Spanish from taking control of the Mississippi River.”<sup>5</sup> This area would be known as La Louisiane, named after Louis XIV of France, and eventually be considered the Louisiana territory. Some of France’s colonies, such as Saint-Domingue, were seen as more desirable because of their economic success with the sugar trade, as opposed to Louisiana which had “no clear natural resources or agricultural crops” according to some early observers.<sup>6</sup> Eventually “in 1718 the French formally decided to establish a town on the lower Mississippi River.”<sup>7</sup> Founded by Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne, this city eventually became New Orleans.

The French had already established profitable colonies within the Caribbean before they settled in the lower Mississippi region. However, even though they were one of the first Europeans to have a major settlement in that portion of the Americas, they were by no means the first in the area. There were indigenous inhabitants of the region for thousands of years before any European ever set foot on North American soil. According to historian Light Townsend Cummins, the native peoples of the region were “highly organized tribes” that had already mastered distance travel, created a complex economy, and broke off into various unique linguistic groups.<sup>8</sup> These native groups had made contact with other European explorers before the French, such as Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto in the 1540s. This may have worked to the advantage of later French explorers as high populations of indigenous peoples had been decimated by European disease, making exploration and settlement easier for the French.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Dianne Guenin-Lelle, *The Story of French New Orleans: History of a Creole City* (University of Mississippi Press: Mississippi, 2016), 13.

<sup>6</sup> Guenin-Lelle, *The Story of French New Orleans*, 18.

<sup>7</sup> Guenin-Lelle, *The Story of French New Orleans*, 30.

<sup>8</sup> Light Townsend Cummins, “Part One,” in *Louisiana: A History*, edited by Bennett H. Wall and John C. Rodrigue, 14-15.

<sup>9</sup> Light Townsend Cummins, “Part One,” 19.

Cummins argues that although Spanish explorers had seen Louisiana first, Spanish settlement did not occur because agriculture in the region was non-existent.<sup>10</sup> However, the Spanish did establish territories in the nearby Floridas, such as Pensacola, and slightly further west in Texas, which bordered the Louisiana territory. Britain, on the other hand, for most of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, was mostly preoccupied in Canada, and had little to no territory near the southern end of North America, making this region free of any conflict from the British.

### Sources Used

Despite the plurality of experiences and personalities within New Orleans during the transitional period from French to American rule, common ground between white New Orleanians and white Americans started to take shape through the American ideal of political liberty and the needs of slaveowners, ultimately connecting around concepts of white supremacy. The commonalities that developed were crucial to the transition. I explore these ideas through primary source material from archives in New Orleans, such as the archives at Tulane University and the Historic New Orleans Research Collection in the French Quarter of New Orleans. Sources include correspondence and letters from U.S. officials. Of the American politicians, I primarily examine William C.C. Claiborne, who was the provisional governor of the Louisiana territory, and also look at speeches by President Thomas Jefferson to show motivations for the purchase and to some extent explain how they thought of the transition. I also examine the memoirs of Pierre-Clement de Laussat, the last French leader of New Orleans as a key French figure during the transition. For most white New Orleanians and incoming white Americans, common ground was created through the participation of America's racial system that privileged

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<sup>10</sup> Light Townsend Cummins, "Part One," 25.

whites as well as paranoia over potentially losing sovereignty to blacks in New Orleans. The idea that white New Orleanians and white Americans had to actively engage in and maintain the slave trade in order to uphold white supremacy within New Orleans is a key point of this thesis.

My research also includes a close reading of New Orleans newspapers following the Louisiana Purchase. Advertisements for the trading of slaves and the seeking of runaway slaves provides a lens on slave owning in the city and how Africans were viewed by slaveowners: being more of a product and less of a person. This dehumanization of blacks was a process common in the United States at the time. The newspapers of this era reveal just how prominent slavery and this dehumanization of slaves were at the time of transition in New Orleans. The newspapers I analyzed range from 1803 until 1819. My analysis primarily focuses on eleven issues of *Le Telegraphe* between December 17, 1803 and August 30, 1806. I also examined twenty-nine issues of *The Louisiana Gazette* from May 28, 1805 to November 21, 1819. These dates span from the early transition into the United States and end just shy of two decades after. The analysis of these newspapers will coalesce into a discussion about race and slavery that has been drawn out from my examination of these newspapers, specifically with slave notices.

These newspapers served as a commercial medium for business interactions as well as insight into the racial rhetoric from this transitional period. The newspapers I reviewed helped to maintain the slave trade and support white supremacy in New Orleans. I will explain how U.S. notions of whiteness and white supremacy were indirectly displayed within these newspapers, indicating a move to dehumanize slaves and blacks overall. Racial hierarchies and oppression of slaves were exemplified in the newspapers of this following the purchase.

In this paper, I will refer to anybody outside of New Orleans and Louisiana as Anglo-American or white American or simply just American, although there were exceptions to

different types of Americans who entered New Orleans and not every American was of Anglo descent. Likewise, I will use the terms New Orleanian and Louisianan interchangeably even though there were some individuals who resided in the Louisiana territory far from New Orleans. The term black will also be used throughout the paper, though this term is the most challenging. New Orleans had a complicated and diverse population that included free blacks or *libres*. I will use the term black to refer to anybody of African descent whether they are fully African or mixed with European, known as a creole, which is discussed later in this paper. As Kimberly S. Hanger explains, it is hard to classify the blacks in New Orleans with simple terms specifically because of the distinction between free and enslaved blacks and the blurred lines that defined those distinctions. According to Hanger, some free blacks identified closer to enslaved blacks, whereas other free blacks wants to identify closer to free white persons.<sup>11</sup> The desire by the latter group would be a cause for tension that will be addressed later in this thesis.

### Africans, Slavery, and Whiteness

Slave labor was key to the development of New Orleans during early French settlement. It would take a few years to erect the city of New Orleans and it was not achieved easily. Rigorous slave labor was used for the establishment of New Orleans. According to Gilbert C. Din, “slaves labored building levees, clearing fields for planting, and constructing drainage ditches,” and also during winter months “slaves entered the forests and swamps to gather logs and to turn it into lumber for local construction.”<sup>12</sup> By 1720 African slaves had developed the land around New Orleans to make it more manageable for newcomers as time progressed,

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<sup>11</sup> Kimberly S. Hanger, *Bounded Lives, Bounded Places: Free Black Society in Colonial New Orleans, 1769-1803*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 2-3.

<sup>12</sup> Gilbert C. Din, *Spaniards, Planters, and Slaves: The Spanish Regulation of Slavery in Louisiana, 1763-1803*, (Texas A&M University Press: 1999), 7.

turning it from a swampland to a viable landscape for agriculture. This contribution to the development of the city demonstrated the centrality of Africans in New Orleans history from its establishment. By 1723 city officials believed they successfully managed and altered the environment to make the land livable.<sup>13</sup> After the initial development of the city, during the French colonial period slaves worked in agriculture for “certain periods of the year,”<sup>14</sup> such as during spring and summertime, focusing more on construction during winter months.

Although the French never really had strict practices put in place to maintain their sovereignty over slaves unlike Anglo-American white supremacy, it was clear that divisions based on skin color manifested into real-world actions. For example, the Code Noir stipulated harsh punishments for blacks for certain crimes, but if a freed white man committed those crimes, the Code Noir did not outline what their punishment would be.<sup>15</sup> An inherent white privilege had existed in the early French settlement that was displayed in how the justice system functioned. The Code Noir also prevented slaves from taking legal recourse against their owners. According to Din, “this prohibition granted whites wide latitude in their treatment of blacks.”<sup>16</sup> These earlier attitudes of black inferiority would continue to be part of the French psyche in Louisiana and eventually make it easier to accept incoming white American ideas of strict white supremacy and dominance.

New Orleans and Louisiana remained a French territory until Spanish rule in 1763 and had African slaves throughout the region’s history of European rule. At the time of transition from French to Spanish rule, the free people of color population was estimated at twenty percent

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<sup>13</sup> Guenin-Lelle, *The Story of French New Orleans*, 31-32.

<sup>14</sup> Guenin-Lelle, *The Story of French New Orleans*, 35.

<sup>15</sup> Gilbert C. Din, *Spaniards, Planters, and Slaves*, 8.

<sup>16</sup> Gilbert C. Din, *Spaniards, Planters, and Slaves*, 9.

of the city of New Orleans, which at this time had a population of over 2,500 people.<sup>17</sup> Free people of color were individuals of African descent that had achieved freedom in three ways 1) by purchase, known as manumission, 2) by being born from free blacks, or 3) by suing for freedom during the Spanish regime. These population figures meant that there were approximately 625 free people of color, a robust free black population for the size of the city.

Following the Seven Years' War from 1756 to 1763, that consisted of battles among European powers for dominance in other parts of the world, Louisiana was transferred to Spanish control.<sup>18</sup> According to Guenin-Lelle, Louis XV gifted the Louisiana Territory to Spanish Bourbon king Carlos III, who also happened to be his cousin, in exchange for "his military allegiance to France during the Seven Years' War."<sup>19</sup> The period that followed would create major societal changes in New Orleans.

The Spanish regime in Louisiana viewed slavery differently from other regimes before and after them. Gilbert Din argued that Spanish slavery was cruel in the sense that it initially embraced the Code Noir, or Black Codes, established by the French that outlined how blacks in the region should be dealt with. The cruel aspects of the codes included punishments like hanging for crimes such as practicing Catholicism. However, as will be discussed, some slaves did benefit from the Code Noir through ideas such as Manumission, as well as the prevention of slaveowners beating their slaves. Spain's first governor in the territory, Antonio de Ulloa, at first did not attempt to change how slavery functioned in the territory because he did not want to "disturb the considerable authority that planters had acquired over their bondspeople."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Guenin-Lelle, *The Story of French New Orleans*, 98.

<sup>18</sup> Nick Harding, *Hanover and the British Empire, 1700-1837*, (UK: Boydell Press, 2007), 171.

<sup>19</sup> Guenin-Lelle, *The Story of French New Orleans*, 97.

<sup>20</sup> Gilbert C. Din, *Spaniards, Planters, and Slaves: the Spanish Regulation of Slavery in Louisiana, 1763-1803*, (TX: Texas A & M University Press, 1999) 36.

According to Din, subsequent Spanish governors also attempted to keep the planters pleased. Din argued that Spanish slavery was cruel in order to maintain the status quo and power of planters, which were the highest socioeconomic class.<sup>21</sup>

Under Spanish rule, certain laws expanded the freedom of slaves in Louisiana and New Orleans. During Spain's control of the territory, slaves had the opportunity for manumission, which was the ability to purchase their freedom. Manumission existed under French rule prior to the Spanish and under American rule as well, however, during the Spanish regime manumission was much more frequent than under French or American rule. Shawn Cole references a study by Gwendolyn Hall that examined manumission documents. According to the study, the period between 1770 and 1803 involved 2,606 documents pertaining to the manumission of slaves, whereas between 1804 and 1820, there were 1,296 documents.<sup>22</sup> What was also unique about Spanish rule was that if slaveowners denied a slave manumission, slaves then had a chance to sue for their freedom.<sup>23</sup> They were able to argue for their right in court and not only earn their freedom but penalize the slaveowner for denying that right. Africans also had the right to purchase their freedom. These practices made the cultural composition and racial dynamics in Louisiana more complex as the number of blacks with rights and freedom rose.

As Guenin-Lelle stated "under Spanish rule New Orleans became the most African of cities in North America."<sup>24</sup> The three-tiered system of white, free black, and slave became the dominant form of social organization in the city. In fact, Spanish rule from 1763 until French rule in 1801 actively encouraged increased freedom amongst blacks and promoted "a tripartite,

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<sup>21</sup> Gilbert C. Din, *Spaniards, Planters, and Slaves*, 37.

<sup>22</sup> Shawn Cole, "Capitalism and Freedom: Manumissions and the Slave Market in Louisiana, 1725-1820," in *The Journal of Economic History* 65, No. 4, (December 2005), 1012. As Cole notes in this article, Hall's team compiled the database that deals with Manumission after Spain had already controlled Louisiana. It is still uncertain how many manumission documents existed during French rule.

<sup>23</sup> Shawn Cole, "Capitalism and Freedom", 1016.

<sup>24</sup> Dianne Guenin-Lelle, *The Story of French New Orleans*, 108.



as opposed to a binary, system of race in Louisiana since it was a counterweight to the Francophone elite of the city.”<sup>25</sup> In August 1769, the second Spanish governor of Louisiana claimed that Spanish legal tradition should be applied to the slavery in Louisiana. The Spanish legal tradition stated that “slavery was against natural reason and that slaves were human beings who possessed rights as well as obligations.”<sup>26</sup> Prior to 1769, many of the Spanish residents in Louisiana were not happy with the first governor who was charged with maintaining French rule.

After 1769 the Spanish regime essentially granted more rights to slaves that allowed them to purchase freedom, and granted more benefits if they converted to Christianity, such as marriage and fraternization.<sup>27</sup> The Spanish believed that if Africans could be controlled efficiently, whether free or not, it would make it easier to maintain social order. Spanish slavery differed from American-style slavery because it attempted to maintain the status quo amongst wealthy planters as well as the humanity of slaves. Interestingly, historian Kimberly S. Hanger credits the period of Spanish rule as the key reason why the free black population in Louisiana grew to a sizable amount, and that this established “a distinct sense of identity.”<sup>28</sup> The Spanish approach towards freeing slaves was an economic and political decision since blacks that were free under Spanish rule were assumed to support the Spanish.

Aside from the potential political benefits, there was also arguably a moral component to it too. Manumission was common for enslaved women as many slaveowners had affairs or families with their enslaved mistresses. In fact, as pointed out, “manumission laws initially

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<sup>25</sup> Dianne Guenin-Lelle, *The Story of French New Orleans*, 108.

<sup>26</sup> Gilbert C. Din, *Spaniards, Planters, and Slaves*, 43.

<sup>27</sup> Gilbert C. Din, *Spaniards, Planters, and Slaves*, 43.

<sup>28</sup> Kimberly S. Hanger, *Bounded Lives, Bounded Places: Free Black Society in Colonial New Orleans, 1769-1803*, (Durham, Duke University Press, 1997), 1.

developed so that slaveholders could free children they fathered with bondwomen.<sup>29</sup> Eventually, manumission became a means of financial strategy, as Millward explains that “as wage labor began to replace slave labor, planters used manumission as a means of relieving themselves of the costs of maintaining a permanent enslaved labor force.”<sup>30</sup> Manumission, though at the time was somewhat disguised as a benefit to slaves, was really a bigger benefit to slaveowners, who had created the laws in the first place. Freeing blacks under the Spanish regime was also assumed to benefit Spain as it would lead to more people who were loyal to the crown since they achieved freedom under Spain. Economically, slave owners benefitted in some ways from manumission too, as Din pointed out, it may have seemed like an altruistic practice at first, but as time went on, “white generosity diminished as slave owners realized that profitability of selling freedom.”<sup>31</sup> In many ways, freeing slaves was a white practice for white people, not a practice with the slave’s best interest in mind, which initially may seem contradictory.

This notion of free, but still different than a free white person, would be significant in determining how society would function depending on one’s identity. According to Tamar Herzog, Spain also had a history of differentiating people. Herzog stated that Spain had distinctions between “good” and “bad” immigrants. This designation allowed specific groups of people “certain rights as long as they complied with certain duties,” and this dated to the sixteenth century.<sup>32</sup> These non-race based ideas also became part of the thinking about and treatment of different groups of people in New Orleans because in some cases societal structures tend to transcend race and color. This would create tension and be at odds with American ideas

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<sup>29</sup> Jessica Millward, “‘The Relics of Slavery’: Interracial Sex and Manumission in the American South,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Woman Studies*, (No. 3, 2010), 24.

<sup>30</sup> Jessica Millward, “‘The Relics of Slavery,’” 24.

<sup>31</sup> Gilbert C. Din, *Spaniards, Planters, and Slaves*, 234.

<sup>32</sup> Tamar Herzog, *Defining Nations: Immigrants and Citizens in Early Modern Spain and Spanish America*, (CT: Yale University Press), 2. Also see work by Anthony Pagden and Joshua Goode.

of race, especially with a group of free black elites in New Orleans. Judging a person based off their merit and economic grit was a practice of Spain that did not necessarily mesh well following the transition after 1803.

When Spain had taken control of Louisiana, little was done pertaining to slave laws and practices because Spain wanted to appease the slaveowners of Louisiana who already had a viable slave system. However, Spain eventually revoked certain aspects of the Code Noir or French laws regarding slavery and added some cruel components in order to help slave masters even more. As Din explained, one of the changes made dealt with runaway slaves, in which Spain stipulated that “branding the shoulder of a first-time violator with a fleur-de-lis, branding the other shoulder and hamstringing for a second offense, and hanging for the third and final infraction.”<sup>33</sup> Spain’s cruel changes to slave laws would later match the type of recourse slave masters in American slavery had. These laws and changes brought by Spain would eventually condition Louisianan slave masters to be more accustomed to crueler types of slave management.

Concepts of white supremacy and the high value imparted on the slave system had been an integral part to New Orleans history as a direct result of colonial regimes trying to control and manage the number of blacks in the area. However, the ideas of white supremacy that existed in the French and Spanish regime were not the same as white supremacy brought by white Americans. In the French regime, white supremacy was based simply on white privilege, affording more rights and opportunities to whites as opposed to blacks, and was not necessarily a device or means for total oppression. In the Spanish regime, white supremacy applied to slavery specifically and how they would be treated, especially in terms of punishment and stipulating laws and practices that ultimately benefitted whites, even if it seemed like it benefitted blacks

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<sup>33</sup> Gilbert C. Din, *Spaniards, Planters, and Slaves*, 57.

such as with manumission. Spanish white supremacy was also a heightened form of white privilege that was present within the French regime, that changed from merely easier treatment and certain rights for whites to all out harsh treatment of slaves. Anglo-American white supremacy was deeply rooted in the systematic and societal structure of the United States that only benefitted white land-owning males. Because a sizeable population of free blacks in Louisiana had individual sovereignty prior to U.S. rule, and some even reached the higher economic and social strata, American white supremacy and the dehumanization of slaves became crucial devices to create racial hierarchies that placed blacks in a subjected social cast under U.S. rule.

Historians have understood slavery differently over time and have attempted to explain what caused African slavery to boom in the seventeenth century, especially in the New World. Carl Degler contributed to the discourse of slavery and race in early America by highlighting the irony of slavery in the United States, a country that purported to promote liberty amongst its peoples. Degler continued to point out that this irony is what dictated the United States general public as well as the government's view of Africans. Because Americans claimed freedom for all men, they "could not reconcile their revolutionary principle of political freedom with the institution of slavery," and "kept their philosophy *and* slavery by redefining the humanity of the Negro."<sup>34</sup> In the United States, blacks were commodities and not treated as full humans. The dehumanization of blacks justified slavery and became central to the ideas about racial hierarchies in the United States. The United States' desire for liberty and slavery at the same time ultimately developed a racial dichotomy and stratification in society that benefitted and placed whites over blacks.

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<sup>34</sup> Carl Degler, "The Irony of American Negro Slavery," in *Perspectives and Irony in American Slavery*, ed. Harry P. Owens, (MS: University of Mississippi, 1976), 4.

Degler also critiqued the failure of scholars to make connections between certain aspects of American history and slavery. For example, Degler discussed Frederick Jackson Turner, who argued that the American frontier and westward expansion was central to the development of American culture and democracy. Degler pointed out that not only did Turner not discuss slavery in his work, but that expanding into the Frontier actually gave “a new lease on life to slavery.”<sup>35</sup> Degler also argued against the earlier work of historian Frank Tannebaum, in which Tannebaum claimed that Spanish style of slavery or many forms of slavery in South America were much more “moral” than American slavery.<sup>36</sup>

Historian Betty Wood argued that many historians follow one of two schools of thought; that slavery was facilitated through economic necessity, or that slavery was a result of racist ideologies. Ultimately, Wood argued that it is both of these reasons and stated that “American slavery was characterized by an awareness of ethnic difference that over the course of a century hardened into an overt racism, a racial contempt and hatred that was deliberately cultivated by those who stood to gain financially from the employment of enslaved Africans.”<sup>37</sup> To Wood, slavery in America was a cyclical relationship between racial ideologies and economic requirements. Wood’s analysis helps us understand some of the ideas about slavery and race in the United States that were brought to New Orleans during the transitional period discussed in this thesis.

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<sup>35</sup> Carl Degler, “The Irony of American Negro Slavery,” 14.

<sup>36</sup> For more information on the work Degler critiqued, see Frank Tannebaum’s monograph *Slave and Citizen, The Negro in the Americas*, (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1947.) Although this book is seen as outdated to historians today, it is helpful to understanding how historians and other scholars understood and compared slavery during that time.

<sup>37</sup> Betty Wood, *The Origins of American Slavery: Freedom and Bondage in the English Colonies*, (NY: Hill and Wang Publishing, 1997), 7-8.

In discussing this transitional period, understanding Whiteness is also important. Whiteness has been understood differently over time. As historian Eric Arnese stated, “race is not transhistorical; it is ever changing, always mutable.”<sup>38</sup> In his article, Arnese walks the reader through different understandings of whiteness across disciplines and history. Arnese quoted legal scholar Cheryl Harris who stated that being white meant “gaining access to a whole set of public and private privileges that materially and permanently guaranteed basic subsistence needs and therefore, survival.”<sup>39</sup> Whiteness granted access to a better life and more resources according to Harris. Whiteness may be a form of classification, but as George Fredrickson put it, whiteness and white supremacy “suggests systematic and self-conscious efforts to make race or color a qualification for membership in the civil community.”<sup>40</sup> To Fredrickson, the United States was unique because Americans had “a tendency to push the principle of differentiation by race” so that “people of color, however numerous or acculturated they may be, are treated as permanent aliens or outsiders.”<sup>41</sup> In the United States, race was applied to more than just identity; it allowed and provided a justification for white Americans to keep blacks in a lower social strata.

Many scholars and biologists, Arnese claims, agree that race is not biological and is indeed a social construct. Arnese cites philosopher Charles Mills who stated that race is “sociopolitical rather than biological,” and differentiated whiteness from Whiteness, claiming that whiteness was seen as phenotype or genealogy, and “Whiteness as a political commitment to white supremacy.”<sup>42</sup> Arnese claims that perhaps the most compelling point made by Mills is that

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<sup>38</sup> Eric Arnese, “Whiteness and the Historians’ Imagination,” *International Labor and Working-Class History* No. 60, (Fall, 2001), 6.

<sup>39</sup> Eric Arnese, “Whiteness and the Historian’s Imagination,” 7.

<sup>40</sup> George M. Fredrickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in America and South African History*, (NY: Oxford University Press, 1981), xi.

<sup>41</sup> George M. Fredrickson, *White Supremacy*, xi-xii.

<sup>42</sup> Eric Arnese, “Whiteness and the Historain’s Imagination,” 7.

“Whiteness is not really a color at all, but a set of power relations.”<sup>43</sup> To Mills, Whiteness could have easily been “Yellowness, Redness, Brown-ness, or Blackness,”<sup>44</sup> but because fair-skinned individuals typically held more social and political power, Whiteness became the status quo and standard. Many other fair-skinned Europeans, such as Irish or Jewish individuals, were not seen as white until later in American history. To push this idea further, it could be said that Whiteness was a commitment to the white-black binary and power structure of the United States.

Prior to U.S. rule in the Louisiana Territory, the presence of Native Americans also contributed to the racial hierarchy in New Orleans during the early French regime. French historian Cécile Vidal draws this connection in her monograph *Caribbean New Orleans: Empire, Race, and the Making of a Slave Society*. Vidal argues that in the early French regime, the three classifications for people living in the region were “blancs, nègres,” and “sauvages,” (whites, blacks, and savages.)<sup>45</sup> The presence of Native Americans throughout the history of New Orleans is important not only because of the complexity they added to the racial order, but also, as Vidal argues, Native Americans contributed to the formation and solidification of whiteness in the French regime.

According to Vidal, in the early years of French New Orleans, marriages between white Frenchmen and female natives were fairly common. Vidal also stated that there had been some enslaved Native Americans, but by and large, the freedom and independence associated with indigenous groups made it hard to compare them to enslaved blacks. As Vidal argued, “Natives were not racialized to the same extent as people of African descent because the majority were not

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<sup>43</sup> Eric Arnese, “Whiteness and the Historian’s Imagination,” 7.

<sup>44</sup> Eric Arnese, “Whiteness and the Historian’s Imagination,” 7.

<sup>45</sup> Cecile Vidal, *Caribbean New Orleans: Empire, Race, and the Making of a Slave Society* (NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2019,). 373.

enslaved and lived independently.”<sup>46</sup> To Vidal, “race had to do first and foremost with African slavery.”<sup>47</sup> French conceptions of racial hierarchy mixed with American ideas of white supremacy in New Orleans, during the transitional period. In the end, an ideology of whiteness created connections between incoming white Americans and white New Orleanian slaveowners who both benefitted from white supremacy and racial hierarchies.

The complex nature of the three-tiered racial system in New Orleans also provided a challenging environment for the white supremacy ideals that white American slaveowners were bringing to New Orleans. Free blacks were antithetical to American notions of white supremacy. White supremacy can be defined as “a deeply embedded cultural imagination that assumes whiteness is the norm or the universal, and every white person benefits from it.”<sup>48</sup> In other words, white supremacy is a form of dominance that relies on a racial hierarchy and clear distinctions between whiteness and the other. According to James Oakes, the belief that blacks were inherently different and inferior to whites was crucial to maintaining a viable slave trade.<sup>49</sup> Without concepts of white supremacy to keep blacks in a lower social caste, it would be difficult to maintain a slave trade based off the idea that the enslaved race is inferior. The ramifications of this principle manifested into unfair consequences for those who were not seen as white and resulted in less opportunity in a society, less legal rights, a lack of humanity, and extreme discrimination that could result in physical violence.

White supremacy can also be applied to expansionism and colonialism as argued by Mark Christian. According to Christian, “White supremacy manifests in the social, economic,

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<sup>46</sup> Cecile Vidal, *Caribbean New Orleans*, 386.

<sup>47</sup> Cecile Vidal, *Caribbean New Orleans*, 386.

<sup>48</sup> Marques Armstrong, Sharon Betcher, Bethany Bradley, DeWayne Davis, Christopher Zumski Finke, Sonja Hagander, Jaylani Hussein, Jim Bear Jacobs, Nekima Levy-Pounds, Dee McIntosh, Kellie Rock and Javen Swanson, *Faith in Action: A Handbook for Activists Advocates and Allies*, (MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2017), 39.

<sup>49</sup> James Oakes, *Slavery and Freedom: An Interpretation of the Old South*, (New York: Knopf Publishing, 1990), 206.



political, and cultural history of European expansion and the development of the New World.”<sup>50</sup> Christian argues that White supremacy is more than just racist attitudes, it is a social application that has real-world consequences, in many cases, it kept people of color in lower socioeconomic status. The transition from a Caribbean city to an American city was met with challenges of defining race and whiteness and that had been understood differently by those in New Orleans prior to the purchase.

### The Beginning of a Transition into the United States

In 1800, Spain ceded the Louisiana territory back to France in the Treaty of San Ildefonso. According to Guenin-Lelle, the Spanish government did not want Louisiana and only accepted the territory as a gift. As mentioned earlier, France transferred Louisiana to Spain as a token of gratitude for help during the Seven Years War. However, Spain did not have interest in that region of the continent and was more focused on their territories to the west. While the Spanish Crown used the region as a buffer against potential foreign threats in Texas and Mexico, Spanish officials believed Louisiana had become too costly, thus Louisiana was ceded back to France. By this time, New Orleans was a thriving city because of the slave trade and sugar plantation economies in the Caribbean which drove the port city’s economy.<sup>51</sup> The Treaty of San Ildefonso brought an end to Spanish rule in New Orleans and Louisiana by transferring the land back to France.

At the same time, the Mississippi river was regarded by American politicians and wealthy merchants as a powerful and lucrative trade route for the United States. The fact that the river

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<sup>50</sup> Mark Christian, “An African-Centered Perspective on White Supremacy,” *Journal of Black Studies* 33, no. 2, (April 2002): 180, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3180933>.

<sup>51</sup> Dianne Guenin-Lelle, *The Story of French New Orleans*, 116-7.

ended at New Orleans, which connected the continent to the Caribbean region, compounded desires by United States politicians as well as American merchants to control areas around the Mississippi river. In the 1795 Treaty of San Lorenzo with Spain, the United States gained access to trade in New Orleans which allowed the United States to tap into the economies of the Caribbean region, but was not enough to suffice.<sup>52</sup> According to Gordon Wood, Spain had signed the treaty in an attempt to prevent the United States from taking over more of the continent, especially close to their own territories in the Floridas. To Spain, if the United States was content with mere access to the economy of New Orleans, they would not feel a need to spread past the original thirteen colonies or trans-Appalachia. Preventing another country from claiming more territory near them was a priority for Spain. However, Gordon Wood argues that “Jefferson and other Americans believed that Spain’s hold on its North American empire was so weak” that it would inevitably fall, and America would move into Spanish territory.<sup>53</sup> Jefferson would later be correct about his assumptions.

Due to issues with other European powers, primarily Britain, mismanagement of resources, and a collapse of the colonial structure in the Caribbean, French Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte sold the city of New Orleans along with the vast territory of Louisiana to the United States in 1803. Aside from the aforementioned problems Napoleon dealt with, he also experienced the pressure of a diminishing army that was either dead from combat or yellow fever while they tried to quell slave revolts in Saint Domingue, present-day Haiti.<sup>54</sup> Ultimately, the fear of losing Saint Domingue to a slave revolt that began in August 1791, was the final motivating factor for Napoleon to sell the Louisiana territory. According to Walter Johnson,

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<sup>52</sup> Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 366.

<sup>53</sup> Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 366.

<sup>54</sup> Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 368.

since Louisiana and specifically New Orleans was intended to be an area for provisions for Caribbean operations, Napoleon had no need for the territory after he decided to end French control in the region.<sup>55</sup>

After months of negotiations, the purchase between the United States and France took place on April 30, 1803 outside of Paris.<sup>56</sup> The agreement was facilitated by Robert Livingston and James Monroe, two prominent U.S. politicians that Jefferson trusted to carry out this deal. Both Livingston and Monroe are credited with being founding fathers of the nation, which provided them with the credentials and experience to carry out a process that would expand the country. On December 20, 1803 the first American flag was raised in New Orleans, which put the region's residents through yet another regime change.<sup>57</sup>

The acquisition of the Louisiana Territory changed America in multiple ways. President Thomas Jefferson hoped for an agrarian society where every individual could maintain their own life and their family by the sweat of their brow and tending their land. If people were able to own land, he believed they would take responsibility for it. Jefferson stated that if, "these yeomen owned their own land and provided their own subsistence, they could not be bought or bossed," which would ultimately provide liberty to those individuals and would free them from the control of others.<sup>58</sup> Their lives, property and society would function ideally. To Jefferson, moving west and expanding the United States' territory would ensure an empire of liberty because the United States would be the opposite of the highly concentrated industrial populations of Europe that led to exploitation and dehumanization. To Jefferson, moving westward meant that the yeoman

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<sup>55</sup> Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013), 23.

<sup>56</sup> Walter Nugent, *Habits of Empire: A History of American Expansion* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008), 41.

<sup>57</sup> Nugent, *Habits of Empire*, 69.

<sup>58</sup> Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 24.

farmers could “avoid the miseries of the concentrated urban working classes of Europe.”<sup>59</sup> In Jefferson’s mind, the hierarchical social organization of Europe which was reminiscent of the feudal system as well as people living in tight quarters, forced Europeans into wage labor, a fate Jefferson wanted to avoid for his citizenry.

In his third annual message on October 17, 1803, Thomas Jefferson explained why it was crucial to gain New Orleans and maximize the efficiency of the Mississippi river as a trade route. Jefferson also explained that if the United States gained New Orleans and had better control of the Mississippi it would increase national defense. As Jefferson stated, “previous, however, to this period, we had not been unaware of the danger to which our peace would be perpetually exposed while so important a key to the commerce of the western country remained under foreign power.”<sup>60</sup> New Orleans was a bustling and booming trade hub that had easy access to the economies and products within the Caribbean region. This lucrative port city would complement the nation and help spark faster growth.

White Americans who entered New Orleans prior to and after the purchase had to figure out how to navigate through this city physically and figuratively. The Spanish architecture and French language in conjunction with the black population, both slave and free, provided a scenery unlike any other region in the United States. Americans had to reconcile their differences with their new countrymen and coexist with people who seemed vastly different than them. New Orleanians had a robust identity rooted in European heritage, a stark contrast to the emerging American identity that valued individualism and personal liberty. In an article about American exceptionalism and individualism, Edward Grabb, Douglas Baer, and James Curtis explained

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<sup>59</sup> Gordon Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 357.

<sup>60</sup> Thomas Jefferson, “Third Annual Message”, October 17, 1803, via the Miller Center, <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/october-17-1803-third-annual-message>, accessed March 23, 2019.

where these values came from. Grabb, Baer and Curtis argue that these values stem from the revolutionary era, and the fact that the United States was the first colonial body to achieve its independence created a sense of exceptionalism. To these authors, Americans “from the time of the Revolution, have placed an overriding emphasis on the importance of individualism, especially individual freedom of thought and action.”<sup>61</sup> These authors argued that the United States philosophically is quite similar to other Western democracies and has similar values, however, following the revolution, Americans relished their newfound independence which fostered a unique identity based off that principle for them, while at the same time they believed that those of European descent, such as those in New Orleans, would be more closely tied to their European practices and traditions as opposed to the new American way. This thesis will explain how these two distinct groups of peoples found commonalities over ideas of political liberty, whiteness, slavery, and white supremacy.

### Brief Historical Background of Demographics in New Orleans

Many histories about culture contact between Americans and those in New Orleans are focused on the decades after the Civil War, such as Joseph G. Tregle, Jr., who discussed Creole and American interactions from 1873 onward.<sup>62</sup> In general, most of these early histories attempt to describe mechanics of French culture within New Orleans and only barely touch on the cultural contact between French New Orleanians and Anglo Americans.

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<sup>61</sup> Edward Grabb, Douglas Baer, and James Curtis, “The Origins of American Individualism: Reconsidering the Historical Evidence\*,” *The Canadian Journal of Sociology / Cahiers Canadiens De Sociologie*, (No. 4, Autumn 1999), 512-513.

<sup>62</sup> Joseph G. Tregle, Jr. is credited with compiling some of the most detailed account of interactions between Creoles and Americans as stated in the Introduction of part II of *Creole New Orleans*, a compilation of essays pertaining to Creole topics, of which his essay *Creoles and Americans* is included.

Anthropologist James G. Cusick defined culture contact as “a predisposition for groups to interact with ‘outsiders’ –a necessity created through human diversity, settlement pattern, and desire for exchange—and to want to control that interaction.”<sup>63</sup> Culture contact happens when two or more cultures interact in close proximity, and typically, one group benefits more than the other. This understanding of culture contact can be applied to the transitional period in New Orleans. According to Cusick, culture contact helped contribute to “the creation or development of social identities,” and that culture contact is “inherently disruptive, challenging people’s views of themselves and of others.”<sup>64</sup> The culture contact between the various groups in New Orleans, such as white Americans, white New Orleanians and free and enslaved blacks, likely encouraged individuals to re-consider their identities in the region. The New Orleans’ multi-tiered racial system and Creole culture was at odds with Anglo-American’s racial dichotomy and separation that stemmed from their form of slavery. White New Orleanians who embraced American ideas of whiteness could benefit from the new authority of the United States that systematically kept blacks oppressed.

Gwendolyn Midlo Hall wrote about Creole culture in New Orleans. Hall stated that the city boasted the most robust and diverse Afro population in the Americas. “When Louisiana became part of the United States in 1803, newcomers had to adjust to the existing culture.”<sup>65</sup> To Hall, New Orleans served as a catalyst for a growing diverse Afro-American population explaining how “New Orleans was the commercial center from which the slave system expanded into the Southwest during the nineteenth century. Slaves imported through New Orleans from the

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<sup>63</sup> James G. Cusick, *Studies in Culture Contact: Interaction, Culture Change, and Archeology*, (Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998), 4.

<sup>64</sup> James G. Cusick, *Studies in Culture Contact*, 3.

<sup>65</sup> Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, “The Formation of Afro-Creole Culture,” in *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization*, edited by Arnold R. Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon (Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 58.

Atlantic Coast encountered and were partially socialized by an established, self-conscious, self-confident Afro-Creole slave community. The largest slave plantations of the antebellum South were in Louisiana.”<sup>66</sup> The slaves that entered New Orleans encountered many different types of people of African descent in the city, whether they were of enslaved, mixed blood or free status. Some slaves who encountered free blacks in New Orleans may have been inspired to pursue freedom and would be an issue as years progressed.

It is also important to consider the cultural composition of New Orleans at the time of the purchase in order to understand the culture contact that occurred. Guenin-Lelle pointed out that the New Orleans preserved in legend today is a result of this period of Afro-immigration and immigrants “infusing the city with their traditions and culture.”<sup>67</sup> In many ways, New Orleans would not be the city it is today if it was not for the black population, both those that had already been in the city and those who came following key events such as the purchase and Haitian revolution. Caribbean cultural aspects are still present in Cajun and Creole cuisine styles and practices such as voodoo.

Understanding the demographics of New Orleans in 1803 are also important details for the kinds of the culture contact that occurred. These population statistics have been debated by many scholars and different figures are often presented. Early works attempted to provide logistical information about the purchase such as historian Edna F. Campbell who offered a population figure in her essay “New Orleans at the Time of the Louisiana Purchase” in 1921. According to Campbell, the estimated population at the time of American cession was close to 100,000.<sup>68</sup> This figure is disproportionately higher than the figure historian Julien Vernet offered

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<sup>66</sup> Hall, “The Formation of Afro-Creole Culture,” 58.

<sup>67</sup> Dianne Guenin-Lelle, *The Story of French New Orleans*, 120.

<sup>68</sup> Edna F. Campbell, “New Orleans at the Time of the Louisiana Purchase,” in *Geographical Review*, Vol 11 No. 3, (July 1921), 415.

eighty years later. According to Julien Vernet in 2010, she estimated that there were 43,000 people in New Orleans in 1803, though this included Americans who had entered the entire Louisiana territory, unlike Campbell's figure which is primarily before American arrival.<sup>69</sup> In 2013, Walter Johnson claimed that the population of New Orleans in 1810, well after the purchase, was around 17,000.<sup>70</sup> Similarly, in the same monograph, Johnson claimed the slave population in Mississippi and Louisiana was approximately 100,000, with a majority most likely in Louisiana. Regardless of the difference in demographic figures, this transitional period was probably complicated for some white Anglo-Americans due to the sizable population of Africans and specifically free blacks. Some white Anglo-Americans were likely intimidated by the number of free blacks within New Orleans and might have worried about threats to their political and social dominance.

As historian Elizabeth Fussel stated, "When the U.S government took ownership of cosmopolitan New Orleans on December 20, 1803, it acquired a city that immediately ranked as ninth largest in the country" with an incredibly diverse population that included over 10% of people of African origin.<sup>71</sup> To contrast with the population of the United States around the time of acquisition, around 5,297,000 people lived in the United States with one-fifth of the population being African slaves and the rest being primarily of European descent.<sup>72</sup> Despite the long history of diverse groups, as well as complicated cultural and racial structures in this multi-cultural city, some Anglo-Americans that entered in New Orleans in 1803, especially

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<sup>69</sup> Julien Vernet, *Strangers on Their Native Soil*, 154.

<sup>70</sup> Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 7.

<sup>71</sup> Elizabeth Fussel, "Constructing New Orleans, Constructing Race: A Population History of New Orleans," in *The Journal of American History*, (Dec 2007,) 848.

<sup>72</sup> Gordon Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 315.



slaveowners would continue to view slavery and race as they did before this transition even as they entered a city with its own history and practices.

Along with the diverse population and culture in New Orleans, Anglo-Americans also came in contact with various indigenous groups in the Louisiana territory.<sup>73</sup> Although Native Americans were disregarded by many Euro-American settlers on the continent, historian Tristram R. Kidder argues, “in fact, these native peoples played a vital part in shaping the local ecology of what would become New Orleans, providing added incentive for colonizing this specific location.”<sup>74</sup> Native Americans cannot be disregarded in this history because of their impact on the landscape that allowed European settlement. Kidder argues that Europeans saw Natives that inhabited the New Orleans area, which demonstrated that it could be a livable place. Despite such interactions, many Americans believed “Indians were obstacles to progress and needed to surrender unimproved lands.”<sup>75</sup> American paternalist attitudes towards Native Americans, which implied being more superior and feeling responsible for their well-being, were present in rhetoric from this era, as well as before and after this time period.

The Louisiana Purchase was also a problematic transaction according to legal historians. Spain still had a claim to the land when the United States had purchased it from France. When Spain retroceded Louisiana back to France in 1800, Napoleon had assured Carlos IV of Spain that “France would never transfer, sell, or alienate Louisiana to a third country.”<sup>76</sup> The fact that Napoleon had promised to not sell the land only complicated the entire process and transition

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<sup>73</sup> The history of American expansionism cannot be told without discussing Native American dispossession in the continent. There is a plethora of histories that discuss Native American dispossession such as John P. Bowes *Land Too Good for Indians: Northern Indian Removal*, (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016.)

<sup>74</sup> Tristram R. Kidder, “Making the City Inevitable: Native American and Geography of New Orleans,” in *Transforming New Orleans & Its Environs: Centuries of Change*, edited by Craig E. Colten (PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000,) 11.

<sup>75</sup> Bowes, *Northern Indian Removal*, 57.

<sup>76</sup> Walter Nugent, *Habits of Empire*, 57.

into American control. Furthermore, Napoleon had never consulted his legislature about his decision. He had even been advised by family not to go forth with the sale. Despite such factors, Napoleon had made the decision which ultimately made the sale “trebly invalid.”<sup>77</sup> In the face of this questionable transaction, American officials also had to muddle through the complicated process of incorporating the Louisiana territory with international acceptance of their claim to the land.

### Chapter Breakdown

While this thesis is not a history of New Orleans or the Louisiana Purchase writ large, it is an examination of the transitional period of New Orleans to U.S. control. This thesis is divided into three major sections. The first chapter, “The Struggle to make New Orleans American,” traces the journey of American officials imposing American laws in the new territory and city, as well as general American attitudes at the time, and sets a background for understanding early conflicts and the difficulties to integration. The second chapter, “New Orleanian Culture Following the Louisiana Purchase,” traces the desire for political liberty of some New Orleans elites, both black and white, following the purchase. The third chapter, “Race and Slavery in New Orleans: How Newspapers Maintained the Slave Trade and Inhumanity of Blacks,” examines newspapers from 1803-1819 and how these printed sources demonstrated contours of slave ownership within New Orleans. Slavery-related advertisements illuminate how capitalist relations among both Anglo-Americans and older residents of New Orleans occurred, and more specifically, how common ground among these elites could have been created and facilitated through the commercial aspects of the slave trade and white supremacy. Overall,

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<sup>77</sup> Walter Nugent, *Habits of Empire*, 66.

connections through slave ownership and American political ideals helped in the transition of the region from a European colony to an American city.

## Chapter 1: The Struggle to Make New Orleans American

Following the purchase, American politicians such as William C. C. Claiborne and Secretary of State James Madison, muddled through a complex cultural system based off a multi-tiered racial system in New Orleans and struggled to maintain Anglo-American influence as well as political control in the early years following the purchase. President Jefferson and Claiborne had to reassure Anglo-Americans and New Orleanians alike that the transition was beneficial for all. However, Jefferson believed that New Orleanians were not fit to govern themselves in the new American democratic fashion and appeared too culturally different. Anglo-Americans who entered the city also encountered a large number of blacks, both free and enslaved. While there is no exact figure for the population of blacks in New Orleans around 1803, the Africans already in New Orleans and influx of former slaves from Haiti heightened Anglo-American fears of potential slave revolts in the United States. This section will deal with how American in New Orleans handled this transitional period and how New Orleanians were perceived by political leaders in the United States. Americans worried that New Orleanians were unprepared to run American forms of government, would not be loyal to the United States in times of crisis, and were too culturally different from them. The large black population was also of concern. As this chapter and chapter two will show, increased contact between white American and white New Orleanian elites accelerated a transition into American society as older principles and notions of race were ushered out to make way for the American two-tiered racial system. Ultimately, the desire to maintain slavery created connections among all slaveholders led to common desires to uphold white sovereignty and prevent black, either free or enslaved, from achieving social mobility.

## Establishing American Influence

Even after the territory was acquired, Jefferson had to justify the purchase to the American public. The president was clear in his speeches about what would happen with those who already resided in New Orleans. “With the wisdom of Congress, it will rest to take those ulterior measures which may be necessary for the immediate occupation and temporary government of the country; for its incorporation into our Union for rendering the change of government a blessing to our newly-adopted brethren; for securing to them the rights of conscience and of property.”<sup>78</sup> Jefferson claimed that New Orleans residents would enjoy the same liberties as Americans. Although Jefferson incorporated the inhabitants of New Orleans into the Union, he referred to them as “newly-adopted brethren” which implied a slight power dynamic. According to Jefferson, residents of the Louisiana Territory were not entirely ready for self-government. Louisianans were “adopted,” which implied that the United States was their parental guardian.

Jefferson also signed “An Act for the Organization of Orleans Territory and the Louisiana District” on March 26, 1804, which divided Louisiana at the 33<sup>rd</sup> parallel. The more populated southern section known as the Territory of Orleans was to be governed by the appointed William C.C. Claiborne. As Julien Vernet argued, the appointment of an American to govern New Orleans caused tension amongst the residents of the territory.<sup>79</sup> According to historian Grace King, because Claiborne was unable to speak Spanish or French, he surrounded himself with English speakers which alienated New Orleanians, especially French New Orleanians who were the non-black majority. According to King, “every day produced its crop of

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<sup>78</sup> Thomas Jefferson, “Third Annual Message,” October 17, 1803, accessed via Miller Center on March 23, 2019.

<sup>79</sup> Julien Vernet, “A Community of Resistance: The Organization of Protest in New Orleans against the U.S. Territorial Administration,” in *French Colonial History*, Vol 11 (2010), 49.

duels; the governor's private secretary and brother-in-law, attempting to refute slander, was killed in one."<sup>80</sup> Tensions were high and often resulted in physical violence.

Claiborne boasted extraordinary achievements and credentials such as being appointed a judge for the Tennessee Supreme Court at age 21. However, "because of doubts about the capacity of the French and Spanish people of Orleans for self-rule, Claiborne was given nearly dictatorial powers" over New Orleanians.<sup>81</sup> According to Gordon Wood, Claiborne and Jefferson believed that New Orleanians would not be capable of self-government. Faber explains that in a "notorious January letter," Claiborne had portrayed Louisianans as "'uniformed, indolent, luxurious' and 'illy fitted to be useful citizens of a republic.'"<sup>82</sup> This perception of New Orleanians hindered their path to political liberty.

Vernet stated that Jefferson believed that radically changing the government structure in New Orleans would turn their society "topsy-turvy."<sup>83</sup> Jefferson feared that American government and laws in New Orleans would not be accepted easily and had potential for social conflicts. According to Vernet however, there was another prominent issue that was on Jefferson's mind. As Vernet argued, "an additional or perhaps underlying reason for Jefferson's refusal to use the Northwest Ordinance as a blueprint for territorial government in Louisiana is that he did not believe that Louisianans were prepared for representative government."<sup>84</sup> Jefferson did not think Louisianans were ready to govern themselves. For Jefferson, the acquisition of New Orleans was an economic benefit that came with the burden of a potentially problematic populace.

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<sup>80</sup> Grace King, *New Orleans: The Place and the People* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1926,) 165.

<sup>81</sup> Gordon Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 373.

<sup>82</sup> Eberhard L. Faber, *Building the Land of Dreams: New Orleans and the Transformation of Early America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 181.

<sup>83</sup> Julien Vernet, *Strangers on their Native soil*, 15.

<sup>84</sup> Julien Vernet, *Strangers On Their Native Soil*, 15.

Jefferson's doubts about the incorporation of New Orleans were made worse by correspondence with American officials such as Daniel Clark and Evan Jones. As Vernet stated, "as they assembled the information sent to them by Americans in Louisiana such as Clark and Jones, Secretary of State James Madison and Jefferson became concerned about the possibility of armed resistance to U.S Possession of Louisiana."<sup>85</sup> Jefferson and Madison's fear of potential resistance from New Orleanians to American influences indicated how difficult the transition would be. Jefferson and Madison were both skeptical about what would transpire after the transfer of power. Correspondents in New Orleans reassured Jefferson and Madison that there was no real threat of violence from Louisianans. However, opposition to new rule was always a possibility. Fears from political officials outside of New Orleans were not quelled by the actions of American officials in New Orleans, such as Claiborne, who took a timid and passive approach to any potential lack of cooperation.

#### Fear of Disunity in the New Southern City

New Orleans had been an established city for close to a century at the time of the Louisiana Purchase and had a robust history and culture before the American transition. According to historian Arnold R. Hirsch, the fact that the people of New Orleans did not speak English was a challenge to incoming Americans and government officials in and out of the city, especially for those such as William C.C Claiborne who did not speak French yet was charged with governing a mostly French-speaking population.

French-speaking individuals represented a group of people that could oppose American values and expectations, such as participating in national defense. American government

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<sup>85</sup> Julien Vernet, *Strangers On Their Native Soil*, 33.

officials from the executive branch, such as President Jefferson, to local officials such as Claiborne, feared potential threats to New Orleans and did not believe that a competent armed force could be summoned. Paul F. Lachance argued “the [Haitian] refugees arrived at a time when the United States officials lacked confidence in the willingness of the cosmopolitan and faction-ridden population of New Orleans to defend Louisiana in the event of attack by foreign power.”<sup>86</sup> An influx of immigrants would make the population in the United States less homogenous and a bigger challenge to summon an army. American officials believed that more French-speaking people in New Orleans and the territory of Louisiana in general would make American security difficult to achieve in the region.

Issues, such as the lack of faith in the loyalty of New Orleanians by American officials, problematized the transfer of territory and raised questions as to who would make up the leadership, who could be elected or appointed, and what laws would follow. By 1805, William C.C. Claiborne had to reassure Secretary of State James Madison and the American people that a French-speaking individual would not be an issue if he held public office in the now American city. In a letter to James Madison on March 8 that same year, Claiborne wrote in regard to the Americans in New Orleans leading up to an election in the Louisiana Territory, “the apathy of the people astonished me, but few voted and more appeared interested as to the issue.”<sup>87</sup> Madison and Claiborne took the disenchantment of individuals in the election in New Orleans as a sign of discontent with the current state of affairs in this new American city.

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<sup>86</sup> Paul F. Lachance, “The 1809 Immigration of Saint-Domingue Refugees to New Orleans: Reception, Integration and Impact,” in *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association*, Vol. 29, No. 2, (Spring, 1988), 120.

<sup>87</sup> William C.C. Claiborne, letter to James Madison, March 8, 1805, from the Historic New Orleans Collection, (MSS 59-Folder 3.)



New Orleans was quite different from the Anglo and Protestant United States since the city had a significant population that still identified either as European or Catholic, or both. Faber stated, “the Purchase could not, for example, make a region of French-speaking Catholics into English-speaking Protestants. Nor could it suddenly implant values like egalitarianism and republican virtue into a frankly hierarchical, authoritarian colonial society.”<sup>88</sup> The clash of American and New Orleanian culture challenged the United States government to figure out an effective way to incorporate the new territory. Early on in the transition, New Orleanians were seen as too different from Americans.

There was also tension between white Americans and the white New Orleanians, especially early on. Faber argued that the complexities of the multi-culture population in New Orleans caused dramatic changes for the nation, while on the other hand, the development of the United States also had profound impacts on New Orleans as a city and the Louisiana Territory as a whole. Faber’s approach to the time period is similar to other recent works that analyze the tensions that existed in New Orleans after the purchase.<sup>89</sup> As Faber put it, there was a turbulent period in which there were “brawls of French and American officers, along with the many practical difficulties of the change of regime,” which “led to national tensions that were general but diffuse.”<sup>90</sup> Physical altercations between New Orleanian and American officers indicated a vulnerable social structure prone to disagreements and violence and general struggles for local power and control of the city.

As Arnold R. Hirsch stated, “The largest city to be swept up in the United States’ headlong rush westward, New Orleans was no *tabula rasa*—it did not present the clean slate that

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<sup>88</sup> Eberhard L. Faber, *Building the Land of Dreams: New Orleans and the Transformation of Early America* 2.

<sup>89</sup> As mentioned earlier, Julien Vernet’s *Strangers on Their Native Soil* is a great example of the tensions between French New Orleanians and incoming Anglo-Americans.

<sup>90</sup> Eberhard L. Faber, *Building the Land of Dreams*, 186.

offered a virtual fresh start in Detroit, Chicago, or St. Louis.”<sup>91</sup> The United States did not create a new American city, instead it absorbed a European entity in the Caribbean region and attempted to make it American. In the words of Hirsch, if somebody were to enter the town in 1803, they “would be struck by a kaleidoscope of color and variety of humanity as yet unequaled by any other American city.”<sup>92</sup> Until New Orleans became part of the United States, no other city in the country was as diverse. According to Hirsch, even Thomas Jefferson, who had been used to being around African slaves, was in awe of the number of free blacks in New Orleans, which numbered over 2,000 in an 1806 census.<sup>93</sup> As Gordon Wood stated, “to the consternation of many white Americans, between 1804 and 1806 nearly two hundred slaves in Orleans purchased their own freedom.”<sup>94</sup> The multicultural aspect of New Orleans complicated the experiences of Anglo-Americans whose racial hierarchy clashed with the racial structure in New Orleans. The United States’ black-white binary was not equivalent to the multi-tiered society of New Orleans that featured free blacks and thus needed a way to be reconciled.

The racial composition of New Orleans was hard to navigate for politicians such as Claiborne who really did not know local race relations when he became governor. Faber explains that “Claiborne was puzzled by the intensity of the racial hatreds swirling around him,” and that he did not understand the “great dislike between the white natives of Louisiana and the free men of colour.”<sup>95</sup> Free men of color had believed that the liberty and freedom white New Orleanian elites expected from the United States should be granted to them as well. The expectation of American liberty by white, black and creole New Orleanians caused tension and was difficult to

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<sup>91</sup> Arnold R. Hirsch, “The Imposition of the New Racial Order in New Orleans,” part of the bicentennial lecture series of the Louisiana Purchase at the University of New Orleans, Week 9 of series, 2003, 2.

<sup>92</sup> Arnold Hirsch, “The Imposition of the New Racial Order in New Orleans,” 3.

<sup>93</sup> Arnold Hirsch, “The Imposition of the New Racial Order in New Orleans,” 7.

<sup>94</sup> Gordon Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 373.

<sup>95</sup> Eberhard L. Faber, *Building the Land of Dreams*, 187-88.

subdue by American officials such as Claiborne. According to Faber, “in the crucial years 1805 and 1806, creole-American rivalries intensified, because of a general sense that, in the political battles over slavery, race, the language and the legal system, the future social order of Louisiana was being determined.”<sup>96</sup> Faber argued that conflicts arose because of the desires of the two main groups of people, white Americans and New Orleanians of all races and class. Americans saw the transition and evaluated it based off “its relationship to the nation” and what it “*ought* to look like,” whereas New Orleanians saw the transition “in terms of their local *interests* and social prerogatives.”<sup>97</sup> Conflicts ranged from grand and ideological, such as how race would be viewed, to smaller issues, such as what would be the preferred beverage; wine or whiskey.<sup>98</sup> This shows that even the smaller details of everyday life were affected by the uncertainty of the transition. Everybody in New Orleans, whether a new incoming American or a longtime resident, were both unsure about what political and social changes would ensue, which caused concern for several New Orleanians.

Governor Claiborne had trouble maintaining peace between Americans and New Orleanians who both had their own notions of political liberty and how society ought to function. Claiborne’s lack of a comprehensive and inclusive approach towards racial tensions in New Orleans showed how difficult it was to govern and incorporate the Louisiana territory and specifically New Orleans into American society. Political management of the territory was no easy task. In fact, it took a year for the provisional government to meet quorum and officially have a meeting.<sup>99</sup> This was a combination of many lackadaisical government officials, both American and New Orleanian, and a disregard for meetings because nobody agreed on viable

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<sup>96</sup> Eberhard L. Faber, *Building the Land of Dreams*, 218.

<sup>97</sup> Faber, *Building the Land of Dreams*, 218.

<sup>98</sup> Faber, *Building the Land of Dreams*, 218.

<sup>99</sup> Faber, *Building the Land of Dreams*, 198.

courses of action. Indeed, the establishment of a leadership that would facilitate the needs of everybody in New Orleans was a slow and cumbersome process and was made difficult by stubborn cultural roadblocks.

Overall, American leaders worried about “a renewed global war between Britain and France, a newly independent black republic in nearby Haiti, and a Spanish Empire that thought the Louisiana Purchase was illegal.”<sup>100</sup> Faber explained how the purchase wrought many potential problems such as debates over the legitimacy of the purchase and an emboldened ex-slave population nearby in the Caribbean, which will be discussed in the next section. Uncertainty and discomfort abounded throughout this transitional period. The early years following the purchase would be met with skepticism from local and federal politicians as well as Anglo-Americans entering New Orleans. Anglo-Americans had growing concerns about the racial system of New Orleans. Would Africans be as subservient as white Americans had been used to in the plantation economies of the colonies? Would the free blacks embolden slaves to revolt? Exactly how many blacks compared to whites were there? The early years of transition would involve addressing these kinds of issues and would force white Americans to define clear racial parameters.

### Racial and Cultural Tensions in New Orleans after 1803

The complicated nature of New Orleans’ racial and cultural structure was also problematic for the transitional period. The United States essentially had a two-tier system that separated whites and blacks in a relatively simple binary, whereas New Orleans had a third tier that consisted of freed blacks and people of mixed European and African descent. During the

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<sup>100</sup> Eberhard L. Faber, *Building the Land of Dreams*, 156.

early French period, “new hybrid populations emerged in this new world, populations not limited to the white-black binary notion of race.”<sup>101</sup> French-style slavery was at odds with American slavery because the mixing of races happened more frequently and liberally. There were also a significant number of free blacks.

The cultural and racial makeup of New Orleans has perhaps one of the most robust and complicated histories for settlements in North America. Not only did the three-tiered racial system blur certain lines, Native American populations also made the racial composition of New Orleans unique. Early in New Orleans history, when it was just a small French colony, Native populations were enslaved, mostly through methods of war as explained by Daniel H. Usner and worked side-by-side with African slaves, though according to Usner, on average black slaves outnumbered Native slaves by 5 to 1, which still meant for a sizeable Native slave population.<sup>102</sup> However, as Usner describes, enslaved native populations were different than black populations, Other scholars have argued that Native populations were too difficult to keep enslaved because they each had their sovereign nations across the continent and knew the landscape better than their owners. As Usner argued, “given their knowledge of the region, runaway Indian slaves around New Orleans seriously threatened property and security of slaveowners, even alarming officials into discouraging further enslavement of Louisiana Indians.”<sup>103</sup> Eventually, after Louisiana was transferred to Spain in 1766, laws were passed that prohibited “the enslavement, purchase, or transfer of Indians.”<sup>104</sup> Although Native populations have always played a role in New Orleans history, from the inception of the city that was only brought about because settlers

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<sup>101</sup> Dianne Guenin-Lelle, *The Story of French New Orleans*, 31.

<sup>102</sup> Daniel H. Usner, *Powhatan's Mantle: Indians in the Colonial Southeast, Revised and Expanded Edition*, (NB: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 165.

<sup>103</sup> Daniel H. Usner, *Powhatan's Mantle*, 167.

<sup>104</sup> Daniel H. Usner, *Powhatan's Mantle*, 168.

saw Native groups living in the region, to even later in the early French colony when intermarriages were fairly common. As time progressed, native groups were able to solidify a place in New Orleans society. Natives were also commissioned to help return runaway slaves; this only served to divide the populations of natives and blacks in the area but worked to the advantage of natives.<sup>105</sup> Eventually, the native groups in the region would move closer to major settlements in Louisiana such as New Orleans and participate in business whether it was food sales or nautical work.<sup>106</sup> In many ways, the Natives of the regions occupied a unique position in the racial hierarchy in New Orleans, a sort of de facto fourth tier that was independent of whites, enslaved and free blacks.

After the purchase, immigration of French-speaking groups into New Orleans happened in multiple waves. Paul Lachance examined the ramifications of 10,000 refugees from Saint-Domingue that entered New Orleans. These refugees were French-speaking whites, free persons of color, and slaves. More specifically, “10,000 Haitians arrived in New Orleans, roughly a third of them white, a third of them free people of color, and a third of them claimed as slaves.”<sup>107</sup> This cultural composition meant that approximately 6,000 people of color, with half of those being free, entered New Orleans in 1809.

New Orleans was similar to the societies those refugees had left. Lachance explained, “under French and Spanish domination, New Orleans had developed into a typical Caribbean three-caste society composed of whites, free persons of color and slaves,” which mirrored Saint Domingue and Cuba.<sup>108</sup> The high amount of slaves that were part of the refugee group challenged slave laws of the United States which had stated that no international slaves could

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<sup>105</sup> Daniel H. Usner, *Powhatan's Mantle*, 170.

<sup>106</sup> Daniel H. Usner, *Powhatan's Mantle*, 174.

<sup>107</sup> Paul F. Lachance, “The 1809 Immigration of Saint-Domingue Refugees to New Orleans,” 128.

<sup>108</sup> Paul F. Lachance, “The 1809 Immigration of Saint-Domingue Refugees to New Orleans,” 128.

enter the United States. The 1807 law that aimed to prevent the import of international slaves was banned in an attempt to slow the slave trade. Yet New Orleans' proximity to Haiti and former connection through the French empire attracted this population to the southern port city.

Many Americans feared the number of refugees from Haiti that entered New Orleans following the Haitian revolution after its end in 1804, as it emboldened the Gallic community, or French-speaking individuals, by increasing the French-speaking population and thus retaining French cultural aspects. To Lachance, "the apparent reinforcement of the Gallic population by the refugees was a major factor in the negative reaction of Anglo-Americans."<sup>109</sup> Anglo-Americans did not want the population of French speakers to increase in a territory they had claimed as American. More French-speaking peoples entered New Orleans than Anglo-Americans which made it difficult to incorporate the city due to the persistence of French and overall European customs and attitudes which contradicted American whiteness. American whiteness was linked to more Anglo qualities such as speaking English and practicing Protestantism, the opposite of the Catholic and French-speaking populace in New Orleans.

According to Guenin-Lelle, the high influx of immigrants from Haiti caused alarm to President Thomas Jefferson who "gravely feared the presence of such a large contingent of immigrants from a homeland where a successful slave revolt had just occurred."<sup>110</sup> The fear of a possible slave uprising threatened whites in New Orleans because Haitian expatriates knew it was possible for slaves to rise up and overcome their oppressors. In fact, both white New Orleanians and white Americans feared possible slave revolts and uprisings. Johnson explains in *River of Dark Dreams* that slave revolts often had to be quelled through force. Johnson described a potential slave rebellion that was planned for January of 1811. General Wade Hampton was

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<sup>109</sup> Paul F. Lachance, "The 1809 Immigration of Saint-Domingue Refugees to New Orleans," 117.

<sup>110</sup> Dianne Guenin-Lelle, *The Story of French New Orleans: History of a Creole City*, 120.

responsible for order in the region, and formed a militia “to march up the river road against an insurgent army they had heard was 500 strong, and from which they no doubt feared the remorselessness they had come to associate with the Haitian Revolution.”<sup>111</sup> The successful slave rebellions of Haiti brought the harsh realization to many Anglo-Americans and white New Orleanians that a slave uprising was possible in the United States.

Some Americans who came into the city from the northern and eastern parts of the country did not receive a warm welcome and dealt with protest and disapproval from New Orleanians.<sup>112</sup> The complex and multi-layered society of New Orleans, as well as the number of free blacks, was also a problem initially to white Anglo-Americans who not only entered an unfamiliar area, but were also afraid of being racially outnumbered. As Hirsch stated, “the massive arrival of migrants who had little experience with, and less sympathy for, New Orleans’ tripartite, Caribbean racial order, meant the Anglo-American insistence upon the establishment of an uncompromising racial framework that recognized no distinction beyond that separating black from white.”<sup>113</sup> The black-white racial dichotomy that existed in the United States before the purchase led to a population of Americans that could not understand or accept a society where the racial hierarchy was more layered and complex due to multiple groups of people that existed within this multi-raced society. American attitudes towards slaves and the treatment of blacks as not human impacted how slavery would function throughout American territories, including in New Orleans.

The legality of slavery in New Orleans was unclear due to ambiguous laws and precedents that pertained to where slavery would be allowed. The Louisiana Territory would

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<sup>111</sup> Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 20.

<sup>112</sup> Julien Vernet, “A Community of Resistance: The Organization of Protest in New Orleans Against the U.S Territorial Administration, 1803-1805,” 49. 2

<sup>113</sup> Arnold Hirsch, “The Imposition of the New Racial Order in New Orleans, 10.



follow the same relative structure that the Mississippi Territory received under the Northwest Ordinance of 1787. Although the Northwest Ordinance banned slavery in newly incorporated regions, slavery was still tolerated within Mississippi and Louisiana. When the 1808 federal law prohibited foreign slaves from coming into the country, Governor Claiborne was forced to detain slaves on incoming ships.<sup>114</sup> Slave owners and sympathizers argued that the law was a violation of individual rights and that it “deprived slave-owning refugees an important means of support.”<sup>115</sup> This ideological struggle effectively led to an exemption from federal slave laws, which made New Orleans a unique sanctuary for many French refugees who owned slaves. This would also contribute to the connections among American and New Orleanian slave owners who both worked to maintain slavery within New Orleans.

Complicated and creative ways to foster a viable slave trading network were used to maintain the industry in the United States. While the international slave trade had been prohibited in the United States in 1808, how the domestic slave trade would be handled was a question left unanswered. A way to get around the ban on international slave trading was for ships to touch down in Charleston, South Carolina, first, then head south to New Orleans where the slaves would be sold. Because the slaves had been on American land before they entered the slave market after being purchased at another location, these slave trades were seen as domestic, which had no explicit prohibition. Transactions of this nature were frequent, and the process was known as the South Carolina loophole.<sup>116</sup> As Faber stated, “the so-called South Carolina loophole allowed the importation of over five thousand African slaves over the next three years, until Congress banned the international slave trade nationwide, as permitted by the Constitution

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<sup>114</sup> Paul F. Lachance, “The 1809 Immigration of Saint-Domingue Refugees to New Orleans: Reception, Integration and Impact,” 114.

<sup>115</sup> Paul F. Lachance, “The 1809 Immigration of Saint-Domingue Refugees to New Orleans,” 114.

<sup>116</sup> Eberhard L. Faber, *Building the Land of Dreams*, 207.

on January 1, 1808.”<sup>117</sup> The South Carolina loophole was a way for slaveowners in New Orleans to maintain their control over the trade.

Faber went into more detail about the South Carolina loophole which “was left open inadvertently, at first...”<sup>118</sup> The South Carolina loophole remained open as a way to appease slaveholding New Orleanians. As discussed earlier, in the early nineteenth century, American political elites were too preoccupied with the threat of potential aggressors, such as Britain to the North and Spain to the Southwest, to worry about the details of the importation of slaves. Consequently, Jefferson and Congress did not compose comprehensive slave laws for this newly acquired territory. The maintenance of the slave trade during the transitional period in New Orleans was a complicated and ongoing process that ended up being left to and accommodating the slaveowner class, creating common goals among both white Americans and New Orleanians that supported this institution.

### A Slow Acceptance of a Multicultural American City

The proximity and interaction of Americans and their newly acquired countrymen of French origin in New Orleans was examined by historians such as Dolores Egger Labbé. Labbé stated, “according to legend Americans lived on one side of Canal Street and French on the other.”<sup>119</sup> Labbé argued that Americans who arrived after the purchase coexisted with New Orleanians and were not as polarized within the city. Labbé claimed, “the Americans in New Orleans were an interesting phenomenon for the South,” as they had to adjust to the culture in the

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<sup>117</sup> Eberhard L. Faber, *Building the Land of Dreams*, 207.

<sup>118</sup> Eberhard L. Faber, *Building the Land of Dreams*, 207

<sup>119</sup> Dolores Egger Labbé, “‘The Encouragement of Foreigners’: A Multicultural Population In A New Land,” in *Louisiana Purchase Bicentennial Series in Louisiana History: The Louisiana Purchase and Its Aftermath, 1800-1830* (Louisiana: University of Louisiana At Lafayette, 1998), 544.

area but still tried to bring their own customs. Labbé continued to say how Americans brought ideas “such as the public school system...and they had a strong sense of loyalty to the national government.”<sup>120</sup> Americans tried their best to make New Orleans as close to their homes in other states of the union by institutionalizing their systems and beliefs. Despite how confusing this transitional period may have been to navigate for Anglo-Americans and New Orleanians alike, historians such as Labbé argue that they coexisted despite their major cultural differences. Although one may expect tensions to be high, according to Labbe, social conflict was rare, despite how other historians claimed that physical disputes were quite frequent. It is uncertain what was really the case; whether coexistence was the dominant force in New Orleans or if the social structure was too prone to conflict. It is likely that there are exceptions to both sides, however, what is clear is that Americans and New Orleanians faced an unpredictable and new environment with new social dynamics that both groups were not accustomed to.

Overall, American government officials and everyday Americans had a difficult time navigating through the racial, cultural, and political transitionary process in New Orleans. An entirely new and seemingly foreign population had to be dealt with accordingly. Achieving social and political harmony was hard to accomplish by American political elites such as Claiborne who could not effectively communicate with French New Orleanians. Similarly, from the French perspective, the transition was not an easy period to adjust to. As will be discussed further in the next chapter, New Orleanians expected political freedom that was promised by leaders such as Jefferson. Ideas of political liberty were often present and went hand-in-hand with race. American political officials not only had to deal with a mostly French-speaking population, but also with a sizeable population of blacks and mixed people, both free and

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<sup>120</sup> Dolores Egger Labbé, 543.

enslaved. The accommodation of the slave trade in New Orleans became one way Americans and New Orleanians could support a common cause.

## Chapter 2: New Orleanian Culture Following the Louisiana Purchase

This transitional period was navigated differently by white American and New Orleanian leaders and residents. This chapter will discuss New Orleans leaders, such as Pierre-Clement de Laussat, who begrudgingly muddled through the transition from a French colony to an American territory. While American political elites were often white Anglos, and race played a central role in one's position in U.S. society, in New Orleans social elites were "defined by economic status, not national origin...and closed to most Louisiana natives of humble means."<sup>121</sup> New Orleanian elites earned their status by being wealthy planters or merchants, and because of New Orleans complicated history of regime changes, elite status was open to French, Spanish, Africans and Creoles, or those of mixed descent who were economically savvy and not only reserved for whites. This was certainly not the case in the United States, causing anxiety among both New Orleanians and Americans. Despite these fears and other perceived differences, as the transitional period progressed American ideals of political liberty became attractive to some New Orleanian elites, creating a path toward accepting American rule and influence.

New Orleanian elites were concerned about what would happen when the United States took control. As Historian Grace King stated in regard to how Louisianans felt towards the transition into the United States, "the Louisianans not only felt the humiliation of being sold by their mother country, but of being bought by the Americans."<sup>122</sup> New Orleanians did not know if their rights and cultural structure would be compromised or how slavery would be affected by U.S. rule and American politics of slave versus free regions at the time. French New Orleanians also wondered how real the promises of political liberty would be. In some ways, American leadership was seen as problematic to some of these New Orleanians.

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<sup>121</sup>Eberhard L. Faber, *Building the Land of Dreams*, 217.

<sup>122</sup> Grace King, *New Orleans: The Place and the People* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1926,) 164.

As the provisional governor of the territory of Louisiana following the purchase, William C.C Claiborne was seen as unfit to govern by many New Orleanians and Louisianans for multiple reasons. Historian Eberhard L. Faber explains in his monograph *Building the Land of Dreams*:

His [Claiborne] inexperience, lack of prestige or fortune, inability to speak French, and visible discomfort in elite New Orleans society all counted against him; only his being conveniently located in the neighboring Mississippi Territory accounted for his provisional appointment. Early on, Jefferson had looked to the marquis de Lafayette as the ideal candidate to govern the Orleans Territory; when Lafayette seemed uninterested, the president considered such varied candidates as Fulwar Skipwith, Andrew Jackson, and Robert R. Livingston. Finally in the late spring the administration seemed to settle on James Monroe, then still serving in London as American ambassador; by June, while Livingston penned the Louisiana memorial, Monroe's appointment was generally expected in New Orleans. Claiborne himself agreed that Monroe would be a popular choice and vowed generously that "no one will more cordially approbate that appointment than myself"<sup>123</sup>

Claiborne was seen as extremely unqualified for his job, as multiple candidates were considered before him. The people of New Orleans had expected a different individual to lead them. Ideally, some French New Orleanians preferred the previous leader, Pierre-Clement de Laussat, to still be in control of New Orleans, instead of an individual that was woefully out of touch with New Orleanians.

#### New Orleanian Uncertainty Toward the American System

Pierre-Clement de Laussat was a key French figure in New Orleans. As a political leader, his worldview may have been different than other French-speaking residents of New Orleans. However, his writings provide illuminating evidence to one French attitude towards the United States. De Laussat's memoirs were published in a compilation entitled *Memoires Sur Ma Vie A Mon Fils*. The full title translated in English is *Memoirs of My Life to My Son During the Years 1803 and After, Which I Spent in Public Service in Louisiana as Commissioner of the French*

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<sup>123</sup> Faber, *Building the Land of Dreams*, 191.

*Government for the Retrocession to France of that Colony and for Its Transfer to the United States*. This collection of correspondence is significant because de Laussat's writing was indicative of some French attitudes toward the American acquisition of New Orleans.

De Laussat came from a well-to-do family in France with political ties to Napoleon Bonaparte. After France regained Louisiana from Spain in 1800, Bonaparte looked to de Laussat to help maintain order. "On August 20, 1802, de Laussat was appointed by Bonaparte to go to Louisiana as its colonial prefect the highest ranking French civilian officer there."<sup>124</sup> Unfortunately for the ambitious de Laussat, his time in Louisiana was short-lived; he was said to not be pleased with the transfer of territory to the United States. In his memoirs, he addressed his grievances and dissatisfaction with the sale.

De Laussat articulated his thoughts on the sale of Louisiana in a letter from August 18, 1803. He believed the party that benefitted the least from this deal was France. According to de Laussat, "France would lose a colony with a most beautiful future."<sup>125</sup> De Laussat goes on in the same August 18 letter, and described what he would have done if Louisiana stayed under French control. "Personally, I had hoped to spend six or eight years in an administration that would have at least doubled the population and agriculture of the country and tripled or quadrupled its trade, thus leaving behind a lasting and honorable memorial. Every day, I congratulated myself for having had this excellent idea and for having so well estimated the resources of this colony."<sup>126</sup> De Laussat was not pleased with the French sale of Louisiana. He, likely along with other New Orleans residents, was not too excited for American rule.

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<sup>124</sup> Pierre Clément de Laussat, *Memoirs Of My Life To My Son During The Years 1803 and After, Which I Spent In Public Service In Louisiana As Commissioner of the French Government For the Retrocession To France of the Colony and For Its Transfer To The United States*, edited and translated by Agnes-Josephine Pastwa (Baton Rouge: Published for the Historic New Orleans Collection by Louisiana State University, 1978), 18.

<sup>125</sup> Pierre Clément de Laussat, *Memoirs Of My Life*, August 18, 1803, 56.

<sup>126</sup> Pierre Clément de Laussat, *Memoirs Of My Life*, August 18, 1803, 56.

Historians such as Robert D. Bush have a sympathetic tone toward explaining the impact of the Louisiana Purchase on Prefect Pierre Clement de Laussat and portray him as a victim during the transitionary period. Bush explained how de Laussat was not too pleased with the chain of events that followed France reacquiring Louisiana back from Spain and immediately selling the land to the United States. To Bush, de Laussat's *Memoirs* indicate a feeling of discontent de Laussat had with the entire situation and with being forced out of New Orleans by Americans such as William C.C. Claiborne and James Wilkinson. Other French New Orleanians may have had thoughts similar to de Laussat and would have liked to see New Orleans as a prosperous French city.

Bush argues that de Laussat was left to close the chapter on French rule in North America by himself with no French devices or aid to negotiate a peaceful and seamless transfer of power, on top of pressure from Americans to quickly exit the region. As Bush argued, de Laussat's pride "and sense of deep professional commitment to this particular assignment, one which he had himself requested personally from Bonaparte, was hurt."<sup>127</sup> De Laussat had a difficult time accepting that he had to leave New Orleans, since he had to abandon the area he had high hopes for and was sent to govern an obscure French island colony after his departure from New Orleans.

De Laussat's last memoir as a French official in New Orleans ended on a solemn note when he found out that the Orleans territory had been sold to the United States. As de Laussat stated, "I dreamed constantly of reform, improvement, and new establishment. The place, the inhabitants, the air—everything pleased me and offered facilities for my benevolent plans. All

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<sup>127</sup> Robert D. Bush, "L'Abandon De La Louisiane: The Last Days of Prefect Laussat, 1803-1804." in *Louisiana Purchase Bicentennial Series in Louisiana History: The Louisiana Purchase and Its Aftermath, 1800-1830* (Louisiana: University of Louisiana At Lafayette, 1998), 84.



that vanished, leaving me only the regret of a year of idleness, of a useless migration by my family to the New World, and of many expenses, troubles, and fruitless inconveniences.”<sup>128</sup> De Laussat had entered the new world with optimism and exited with melancholy. As de Laussat stated, he was full of regret and was unhappy with the decision by Napoleon. De Laussat’s demotion would close the chapter on French rule in New Orleans. Overall, New Orleanians did not know how the transition into the United States would affect their culture, daily life and economy. Some Louisianans likely had their doubts about their new country, the promises for political liberty, and their new provisional governor Claiborne.

It was not uncommon for residents of New Orleans to deny the United States their loyalty. For example, many French-speaking residents refused to participate in the United States’ armed forces. On December 31, 1813, Claiborne wrote to Colonel Louis Tousand and asked if the French of New Orleans could be exempted from militia duty since they considered themselves to still be French and did not want to participate in America’s conflicts. In the letter, Claiborne stated how “many individuals, claiming to be French Citizens, and who by accidental circumstances are established in this City, have demanded exemption from militia service.”<sup>129</sup> Even a decade after the purchase, many New Orleanians wanted to claim French identity to abstain from U.S. military service. Despite all his drawbacks, Claiborne did build a bridge with New Orleanians by not making the militia compulsory to every resident and expressing how exemption was acceptable.

French-speaking residents of New Orleans had a variety of ways to maintain their influence in society in the early nineteenth-century. Some were descendants of migrants from France who still retained their language and traditions. There was also a high influx of

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<sup>128</sup> Pierre Clement de Laussat, *Memoirs Of My Life*, August 18, 1803.

<sup>129</sup> William C.C Claiborne, Letter to James Madison, June 25, 1805.

immigrants from France and Saint Domingue into New Orleans. Scholars commonly referred to these groups of Francophone outsiders as the Foreign French. As Historian Paul F. Lachance put it, “The Foreign French” were literate, unlike their creole counterparts. The political savviness and literacy of the French immigrants allowed them to lead French New Orleanians to “resist Americanization and maintain a dominant position” early in the transition.<sup>130</sup> French-speaking immigrants that arrived after the purchase fortified French culture in New Orleans and helped to counter American influence in the city, such as by providing French goods and services, and keeping the language popular. In general, the French-speaking population was persistent in the face of American occupation.

#### The Promise of American Political Liberty to New Orleanians

In *Le Telegraphe* on December 17, 1803, just days before the city officially became part of the United States, the future of the lives of New Orleans residents was discussed. The newspaper stated, “the inhabitants of the surrendered territory will be incorporated into the Union of the United States, and admitted, as soon as possible, in accordance with the principles of the Federal constitution, to enjoy all the Rights, Benefits, and Immunities as United States citizens, and at the same time, they will be maintained and protected in the free exercise of their liberties and properties, and the religion they profuse.”<sup>131</sup> Even though residents of New Orleans likely worried about many potential issues that could arise when a new country absorbed them, the newspaper, run by French refugee editor Jean Renard, assured citizens that their land would not be compromised and that they would be treated equally under the eyes of the American

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<sup>130</sup> Paul F. Lachance, “The Foreign French,” in *Louisiana Purchase Bicentennial Series in Louisiana History: The Louisiana Purchase and Its Aftermath, 1800-1830* (Louisiana: University of Louisiana At Lafayette, 1998), 102.

<sup>131</sup> *Le Telegraph*, December 17, 1803.

constitution. Samuel J. Marino explained that “it may have been the craftsmanship of a [French] refugee editor, Jean Renard, which gave *Le Telegraphe* its outstanding appearance.”<sup>132</sup> The newspaper itself was aesthetically pleasing; the font was bold and easily readable, the layout was neatly organized, the paper contained imagery of houses and ships and was a testament to the residents’ demand for a non-bland piece of media. *Le Telegraphe* advertised itself to French-speaking residents and appealed to their tastes and styles. *Le Telegraphe* was mostly printed in French, with some English translations, but overall it was aimed to serve more French-speaking residents in the city. This article shows the newspaper’s dissemination of the basic tenets of U.S. rule to both English and French-speaking and literate residents of New Orleans.

Pierre Derbigny, a French-born New Orleans resident who was an official under American rule, delivered a speech on July 4, 1804 that was published in *Le Telegraphe* several weeks later. Derbigny delivered a bombastic speech that called for a collective embrace of the United States in New Orleans. Derbigny essentially wanted New Orleans residents to understand that being part of the United States had multiple benefits. Even though he was technically a foreigner, his rhetoric displayed a strong sense of American exceptionalism.

Derbigny stated in his speech, “we are in a word about to partake in the recompense of the glorious toils of the immortal Washington, of that hero whose name has sounded to the confines of the globe and whose virtues will be ever the admiration of the human race.”<sup>133</sup> Derbigny glorified George Washington and his bravery. He claimed that Washington’s grandeur would live on as an American and international legend. Before the aforementioned quote, Derbigny also stated that the residents of Louisiana should revel in the great battles Americans

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<sup>132</sup> Samuel J. Marino, “Early French-Language Newspapers in New Orleans,” 312.

<sup>133</sup> *Le Telegraphe*, July 21, 1804.

fought and won during the revolutionary war. Even though the people of New Orleans did not fight on the American side during those wars, they could still enjoy the victories as if they did.

Derbigny went further in his speech to discuss one of the great benefits to being part of the United States, which was the liberty that abounded in the country. As Derbigny stated, “this is not all my fellow-citizens; we have not only acquired liberty without a sacrifice to obtain it; but we have the great advantage of finding already raised the imposing edifice of the constitution of the United States,” and goes on to claim that the rights granted by the United States are simply the best.<sup>134</sup> America declared itself as a free nation with liberty for everyone. To Derbigny, freedom and liberty were the best benefit to becoming American. Not only that, but the people of New Orleans did not have to shed any blood for the liberties they acquired. Derbigny, as a Frenchman, delivered a speech with highly favorable rhetoric towards America that could have influenced the outlook of some French New Orleans residents.

Derbigny stressed repeatedly the importance of being part of the United States in his speech. Derbigny articulated the significance of the transition and stated, “inhabitants of Louisiana of every class, my Fellow-Citizens, my brothers...remember that upon this union depends the happiness, the prosperity of that great family we belong.”<sup>135</sup> Derbigny tried to appeal to the ethos of New Orleanians through the evocation of words such as family and happiness. Derbigny could have used a different term to exemplify the cohesiveness he had hoped for, but the choice of “family” revealed that he wanted a more intimate and respectful relationship as a result of the transition. The fact that this speech was printed in the local newspaper in both English and French showed potential to reach a wide audience in New Orleans at the time, as well as maintaining an idea of Americanism for those in New Orleans. However, it is also

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<sup>134</sup> Pierre Derbigny, Speech published in *Le Telegraphe*, July 21, 1804.

<sup>135</sup> Pierre Debigny, Speech published in *Le Telegraphe*, July 21, 1804.

important to note that New Orleans at the time of purchase had a very low literacy rate, which meant that only the elite of the city could read the print version of speeches in the city newspapers, so the targeted audience is ultimately unclear.

Some New Orleanians, both white and black, and especially free blacks already desired and pushed for American liberty. As Faber stated, “some fifty-five of them had sent Claiborne an address professing their ‘sincere’ attachment to the United States,” and that the free men of color had vowed “to serve the regime with ‘fidelity and zeal.’”<sup>136</sup> The adamant efforts of these free men of color to organize for political liberty likely made some white New Orleanians and Anglo-Americans feel uneasy. Governor Claiborne had to come up with a creative way to suppress the tension between free blacks and white New Orleanians who wanted to have the same rights. According to Faber, “Claiborne’s course was quintessentially Claiborne-ish: appearing to agree with all sides, defusing tensions, carefully avoiding any confrontation.”<sup>137</sup> Claiborne’s approach towards the situation had no solution in sight, other than prevent conflicts from arising. Whether aware of what he was doing or not, Claiborne was inadvertently stipulating racial boundaries and divides.

Faber also pointed out how the upper class of this port city felt about being incorporated into the United States, claiming “elite New Orleanians thus spent the first week of July imbibing a strange brew of protest and patriotism: condemning the injustices of American rule while simultaneously celebrating their new attachment to the American republic.”<sup>138</sup> Evidently, New Orleanians were not ready to completely accept the new system. Along with the new political system of the United States, New Orleanians also had to adjust to the stricter racial divides that

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<sup>136</sup> Eberhard L. Faber, *Building the Land of Dreams* 188.

<sup>137</sup> Eberhard L. Faber, *Building the Land of Dreams*, 189.

<sup>138</sup> Eberhard L. Farber, *Building the Land of Dreams*, 190.

came with transition into an American territory and ultimately had to live in a different social structure than they were previously used to.

According to Faber, white New Orleanians “asserted a republican civic identity, staked a claim to the benefits of American citizenship, and explicitly denied that identity and those benefits to non-whites.”<sup>139</sup> Furthermore, “Louisiana creoles wanted slavery, and unrestricted slave importation, because they saw it not only as the precondition of prosperity but also as a system of security and racial control.”<sup>140</sup> Consequently, questions over the status of free men and slavery were central to the discussion of American political liberty. Anglo-American and white New Orleanian slaveowners were both concerned with the maintenance of their political sovereignty and their retention of slavery. In order for New Orleanian slave owners to prosper in this society, they had to abide by the American binary of black-white division.

This stance made the city stand out even more to Americans in the northeast. Faber explained how, “antislavery writers across the nation mocked Louisianans for demanding citizenship privileges while taking ‘much pain to shew that they ought to enjoy the power to enslave the poor negroes.’”<sup>141</sup> White political elites in New Orleans came together to demand political liberty for themselves but not necessarily for free blacks or slaves. As will be seen in the next section, the right to own slaves would lead to a New Orleans society more connected to American-style slavery, which functioned through a maintenance of white supremacy within the social and racial hierarchy.

Overall, French and Anglo-Americans alike muddled through this transitional period in New Orleans with difficulty. De Laussat was not in favor of the transition due to his loss of

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<sup>139</sup> Eberhard L. Faber, *Building the Land of Dreams*, 190.

<sup>140</sup> Faber, *Building the Land of Dreams*, 190.

<sup>141</sup> Faber, *Building the Land of Dreams*, 200-01.

prestige and the crushing of his personal aspirations. Individuals such as Derbigny worked to convince French New Orleanians of the benefits of being American, such as the grand political liberty of the United States based on whiteness. The desire for a nation of liberty that benefitted whiteness could only be established and maintained through a viable slave trade, as will be discussed in the next chapter. Ultimately, the years following the purchase would alter the social fabric of New Orleans, which turned it from a Caribbean-style, three-tiered racial system to the American style black-white binary of the south. This racial divide contributed to intersecting interests between incoming Anglo-American and white New Orleanian slaveowners.

### Chapter 3: Race and Slavery in New Orleans: How Newspapers Maintained the Slave Trade and Inhumanity of Blacks

The institution of slavery had been present in the Louisiana Territory since it was first settled by the French. Slavery changed as French control switched to Spanish in 1763, back to French again in 1800, and finally to American control in 1803. Slavery also created connections between Anglo-American and Louisianan slaveowners in New Orleans after the purchase. This section examines newspapers in New Orleans and how they provide insight on slavery in the region under U.S. rule, as well as how print media served as a way to institute, preserve and continue American forms of white supremacy. Ideas of race published in contemporary newspapers of the region portrayed blacks as commodities through the institution of slavery which stripped them of humanity. This rhetoric became acceptable and standard in New Orleans after U.S. rule.

#### Issues of Race and Slavery in New Orleans

Dolores Egger Labbé explained the cultural complexity of Louisiana and New Orleans by the end the transitional period, stating how in 1820 “black women, including slaves and free women of color outnumbered white women by a significant number, 38,457 to 32,051.” Labbé went further to add that “slaves were the largest single group of residents of Louisiana.”<sup>142</sup> The large number of Africans, both free and slave, ultimately made New Orleans a unique city throughout the transitional period, which required the transition from a less robust and more diverse three-tiered European racial system to a strict black-white American binary based on

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<sup>142</sup> Dolores Egger Labbé, “‘The Encouragement of Foreigners’: A Multicultural Population In a New Land,” 538.



ideas of U.S. white supremacy that effectively homogenized all blacks in New Orleans by disregarding distinctions between those that were free or black.

Although there were many services and products that were advertised in newspapers during the transitional period, growing racist attitudes were also apparent in the media of the time. U.S. white supremacy ideology prevented certain services from being rendered to blacks under American rule. Faber explained how in 1804 there was an elderly white man named Regnier who was arrested for giving fencing instructions to a mulatto, a term used for individuals of mixed black and white ancestry. In the United States, certain activities were reserved for whites only, creating a black-white divide. More importantly, as Faber pointed out, “Fencing was the prerogative of gentlemen, after all; a mulatto skilled in swordplay might even have the temerity to challenge a white man to a duel.”<sup>143</sup> This type of lesson was threatening as it trained non-whites in an assumed white activity. Furthermore, the ability for a black person to challenge a white person in a duel and potentially win amplified fears about a possible slave uprising. Fencing could provide both literal and ideological training for challenging and overpowering one’s opponent. As mentioned in chapter one, white Americans were paranoid about slave uprisings and the growing populations of blacks in New Orleans following the Haitian revolution. In particular, American and New Orleanian slaveowners wanted blacks, both free and non-free, to be subservient. Regnier’s ad did not support such an approach.

Regnier’s arrest also happened shortly after an organization of free blacks met to discuss the securing of political liberties. This was the same group of free blacks explained in chapter two who lobbied for the political liberty America promised to New Orleans. These meetings of free blacks heightened paranoia about a potential black uprising. Although a black person

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<sup>143</sup> Faber, *Building the Land of Dreams*, 190.

learning fencing may be trivial, to the whites in New Orleans at the time, any opportunity blacks had to engage in assumed white activities and learn how to challenge and succeed over others in a western way was seen as a threat to white sovereignty and control in New Orleans.<sup>144</sup>

### Newspapers as a Racial Device in New Orleans

Newspapers in New Orleans reveal quite a bit about commercial activity in the city. The multitude of advertisements for slaves in newspapers such as *Le Telegraphe* reflected the importance of this labor source in Louisiana during the transitional period. What was bought and sold through newspapers can reveal certain aspects of a society such as attitudes, biases, activities, and values of a populace. When discussing newspapers, Fiona M. Douglas argued that “newspapers rely on creating a shared community consciousness with their readerships. It is important that readers feel that the newspaper they read is their newspaper, which concurs with their world-view...and is written for people like them.”<sup>145</sup> Although newspapers are not a complete story of social attitudes and relationships, they can reveal what some of the people of the time might have desired in their society.

Samuel J. Marino examined the influx of French-speaking immigrants into New Orleans and how this group impacted culture within the city via the study of French-language newspapers from 1780 to 1825. According to Marino, French-speaking immigrants both black and white, felt comfortable in New Orleans where they shared cultural similarities to some of the residents. As Marino put it, “there, living among a kindred people, they felt secure and derived satisfaction

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<sup>144</sup> Faber, *Building the Land of Dreams*, 188.

<sup>145</sup> Fiona M. Douglas, *Scottish Newspapers, Language, and Identity*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 51.

from serving the cultural and social development of the new American possession.”<sup>146</sup> French-speaking New Orleanians wanted to retain their language in publications causing newspapers to remain predominantly French. It was not until the Civil War when a high influx of Northerners entered the city and English became the dominant language. Until then French and English were equal languages in the city.<sup>147</sup>

# TELE GRAPHE,

[N<sup>o</sup>. 312,] Samedi [Vol III] Saturday  
32 AOUT 1806. AUGUST 32, 1806.

## COMMERCIAL ADVERTISER & NEW-ORLEANS PRICE CURRENT.

NEW-ORLEANS—PUBLISHED EVERY TUESDAY, THURSDAY AND SATURDAY, BY C. BELEURGEY, No. 13, BOURBON-STREET

**Pour la Havane.**  
*Le Brick*  
**ROXALANA,**  
CAPT. ADRIEN NAUTRE,  
Partira pour ledit port le premier  
Septembre prochain, ayant les deux  
tiers de sa cargaison arrêtés. S'a-  
dresser pour fret et passage au Capt.  
a bord dudit navire, ou au sous-signé,  
J<sup>n</sup>. BERTUS.  
Levé Nord, No. 12,  
Qui a à Vendre,  
Cent trente-cinq Caisses Sucre brut,  
Trente Do. de blanc, et seize Bar-  
rils Café de la Havane.  
19 Août.

—  
**FOR HAVANA,**  
*THE BRIG*  
**ROXALANA,**  
CAPTAIN ADRIEN NAUTRE,  
will sail for the above port on the 1st  
of September next, having two-thirds  
of her cargo engaged. For freight or  
passage apply to the captain on board  
or to the subscriber  
JOHN BERTUS,  
No 12, North Levée street  
**WHO HAS FOR SALE,**  
135 boxes of coarse sugar,  
30 do white do,  
16 barrels of Havana coffee.

**A VENDRE,**  
*A six mois de terme, chez le Sous-  
igné No. 5, maison de . Castillon  
Place d'Arme.*  
QUATRE NEGRESSES dont une  
nommée Marie Joseph, âgée d'environ  
35 ans, sa fille âgée d'environ 15 ans,  
bonne cuisinière, blanchisseuse et re-  
passeuse, sa fille a un commencement  
de couture, une autre négresse blan-  
chisseuse et l'autre négresse nommée  
Rosalie âgée de 17 ans, sachant faire  
un peu de tout, un jeune mulâtre  
nommé Ausset âgé de 10 ans, propre  
à faire un bon Domestique.  
JOSEPH PERIER.  
29 Juillet.

—  
**FOR SALE,**  
*At Six Months Credit.*  
*By the subscriber No. 5, in the house  
of . Castillon, Place d'Armes.*  
FOUR NEGRESSES, the one nam-  
ed Mary Joseph, aged about 35 years,  
her daughter, aged about 15 years,  
a good Cook, Washer and Ironer,  
her daughter understands something  
of sewing. An other Negress a good  
Washer, and the other Negress,  
named Rosalee aged 17 years, under-  
stands a little of all kinds of work. A  
young Mulatto named Ausset aged  
10 years, will make an excellent  
waiter.  
JOSEPH PERIER.  
July 29th.

**FOR SALE,**  
 THAT large and com-  
modious building, known  
by the **PUBLIC BATH,**  
having 60 feet front, and  
120 feet in depth, con-  
tains 11 Rooms upon the upper, and  
12 on the lower story, with a very  
good kitchen. A liberal Credit will  
be given. For further particulars,  
apply to **DAVID G. SEIXAS,**  
at Messrs. THOMAS BROOKS, & Co.  
July 29th. 6w.

—  
**A VENDRE,**  
C E grand et très-comode Édifice  
connu sous le nom de BAINS  
PUBLICS, ayant 60 pieds de front sur  
120 de profondeur, composé de 11  
chambres dans le haut et 12 sous le  
premier étage avec une belle cuisine.  
On donnera un long crédit à l'acque-  
reur. Pour plus grand renseignement,  
s'adresser à  
**DAVID G. SEIXAS,**  
chez MM. THOMAS BROOKS & Co.  
29 Juillet 6w.

—  
**Vente à l'Encan.**  
*Les sous-ignés désirant finir les com-  
ptes d'un nombre de consignemens se  
proposent de vendre à l'Encan, le  
Lundi premier Septembre prochain;  
un grand et bel assortiment de*

**A VENDRE,**  
PAR LE SOUSSIGNÉ,  
Couvertures de lits, à fleurs roses, de  
2 1-2 et 3 points.  
Etoffes communes pour l'été et pour  
l'hiver.  
Quelques caisses d'indiennes choisies,  
de 9-8 et 7-8.  
Toiles d'Irlande  
Faux Mouchoirs de Madras,  
Bas & Cotton,  
Etoffe bleue de Guinée,  
Toile d'emballage,  
Clous de ferblanc,  
Verres de vitres,  
Vin de Bordenaux de première  
qualité,  
Do. de seconde, en Barriques et en  
Caisses.  
Vieux vin de Graves, en Caisses,  
Genievre de Hollande et du pays,  
en pipes,  
Vins de Madere d'Oporto, et de  
malaga,  
Quelques boucands de sucre du  
pays,  
Un assortiment général de fer en  
barres, acier, cercles en fer et en ba-  
guettes.  
**BENJAMIN MORGAN.**  
29 Juillet 2m.

—  
**FOR SALE**  
by the SUBSCRIBER,  
# 1-2—3 point, and Rose Blankets;  
Stroud's coarse Cloths & Coatings.

<sup>146</sup> Samuel J. Marino, "Early French-Language Newspapers in New Orleans," in *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (Autumn, 1966), 310.

<sup>147</sup> Samuel J. Marino, "Early French-Language Newspapers in New Orleans," 313.

(Figure 1:) *Le Telegraphe*, August 32, 1806. This layout became increasingly popular in 1806 and was seen as aesthetically pleasing at the time. The newspaper was a hybrid of English and French.

In fact, Marino argued that “The English language newspapers survived precariously, unless they added French pabulum to the contents.”<sup>148</sup> English language newspapers had to cater to French-speaking residents in order to be relatively successful. Not surprisingly, some of the most successful newspapers in New Orleans were ran by French-speaking immigrants, which is shown through Marino’s examination of newspaper formats, such as *Le Telegraphe*, discussed in chapter two. Overall, Marino’s article articulates the importance of French-language newspapers in New Orleans during the transitional period and the French desire to retain some forms of their culture.

#### Slavery in Newspapers: For Sale! Commodification of Africans in New Orleans

The slave trade boomed in New Orleans for several decades from the time of the Louisiana Purchase until the Civil War. The Mississippi river was used as a mega-highway for transporting slaves and the bustling port city served as a reception point for thousands of slaves. In a study by Charles W. Calomiris and Jonathan B. Pritchett to determine the prices of slaves in New Orleans, they claim that nearly 2800 sales of slaves occurred between 1820-1860.<sup>149</sup> Although these studies do not match the time period of this thesis, it is reasonable to believe that even more slave trading occurred before 1820 as after 1820 the popularity of African slavery was slowly diminishing across the United States. Acquiring the Louisiana Territory was crucial not only for Jefferson’s yeoman farmer and his agrarian utopia, but also for the lucrative slave trade that occurred in the United States. Plenty of commodities arrived and left New Orleans, such as

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<sup>148</sup> Samuel J. Marino, “Early French-Language Newspapers in New Orleans,” 316.

<sup>149</sup> Charles W. Calomiris and Jonathan B. Pritchett, “Preserving Slave Families for Profit: Traders’ Incentives and Pricing in the New Orleans Slave Market,” *The Journal of Economic History*, No. 4, (December 2009), 989.

cotton, tobacco, sugar cane, rich lumber and even salt according to Edna F. Campbell.<sup>150</sup> But perhaps the most popular and readily available commodity were slaves, as indicated in the newspapers I examined, such as *Le Telegraphe*.

In the eleven issues of *Le Telegraphe* between December 17, 1803 until August 32, 1806 that were collected for this thesis, over thirty ads seeking or selling slaves were present. However, the number of unique posts that offered slaves is hard to determine as some appeared in multiple issues, and most of the advertisements were present in both English and French. *Le Telegraphe* averaged about two ads an issue as well but would sometimes reach up to five or six ads in a single issue, as in the August 32, 1806 issue that will be discussed shortly. Other newspapers such as *Echo Du Commerce*, *The Orleans Gazette and Commercial Advertiser*, *Louisiana Gazette* and *L'Ami des Lois et Journal du Soir* also had slave advertisements to some extent. In the earlier years of American acquisition, most of these newspapers featured an average of one to two ads for slaves. Whether it was an advertisement for a slave or a plea for the return of a runaway slave, these publications reflect the prominence of slavery within New Orleans. While it is hard to determine exactly how many slaves were bought and sold during this period, newspapers indicated a definite desire for slaves by both Anglo-Americans and New Orleanians.

Advertisements in newspapers selling and seeking slave labor were quite common. Ads for slaves in both French and English indicated that both Americans and the French-speaking residents of New Orleans were interested in slavery. Every issue of *Le Telegraphe* in my study also displayed rhetoric about slaves through these advertisements. In the August 32,<sup>151</sup> 1806

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<sup>150</sup> Edna F. Campbell, "New Orleans in Early Days," *Geographical Review*, No. 1, (July 1920), 33-34.

<sup>151</sup> As shown in Figure 1, the newspaper is dated August 32. It is clearly not a typo or accident as the date is printed in both English and French. Evidently, the month of August had thirty-two days in it. It is difficult to determine

issue, there were six sale ads for slaves or ads seeking slave labor. One advertisement offered “a young, handsome Negro woman, a wet nurse, about 20 years of age,” as well as “several negroes and negresses from 12 to 25 years of age.”<sup>152</sup> Some African slaves were marketed by using adjectives such as handsome to describe them, which could indicate a healthy looking slave. Slaves that were described as strong or field-worthy were considered to be productive assets to any slaveowner. The wide variety of advertisements for slaves and the intensity in which they were marketed showed how slaves were a central part of commerce in New Orleans during the transitional period.

Other advertisements made slaves appear as afterthoughts and a simple commodity. In the same August 32 issue, an advertisement displayed several commodities being sold. The advertisement described the property that was initially for sale. The end of the ad mentioned “also, two Negroes Hatters, and Cooks, who will make two good servants, for further particulars apply to Andrew Vieux.”<sup>153</sup> The last name indicates a seller of French descent, yet the ad was printed in English, which shows that the slave trade was one way Americans and French residents could have interacted in commercial relationships.

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exactly how or why the month had thirty-two days, but it is most likely a result of leap year, as it is said that some months would have an extra day, i.e. February 29, or another month could have thirty-two days as a result as well.

<sup>152</sup> *Le Telegraphe*, August 32, 1806.

<sup>153</sup> *Le Telegraphe*, August 32, 1806.

<p><b>A LOUER,</b> <i>Pour quelques mois,</i> 30 à 35 Nègres d'Habitation, ac- coutumés à vivre ensemble, bons tra- vailleurs et acclimatés. S'adresser à <b>F. PHILLIPE, Jeune.</b> 19 Août</p> <hr/> <p><b>TO HIRE,</b> <b>F</b>OR a few months, 30 to 35 Field Negroes, in families, well dispos- ed and accustomed to the climate. For terms enquire of <b>F. PHILLIPS, Jun.</b> August 19.</p>	<p>2 Août — sn <b>JOACHIM LOZANO,</b> <b>A</b>PPOINTED Interpreter of the county court of Orleans, by his excellency the Governor, for the French, English, and Spanish Lan- guages, takes the liberty to offer his services to the public in general and his friends in particular, to translate any kind of papers in the above lan- guages. He does business as for- merly in the Office of Mr. Pedés- claux, Notary Public, at the Principal, where he is to be found every day at the usual hours, from 9 in the morning till 3 in the afternoon. August 2d. tf.</p>	<p>the terms and conditions will be made known previous to the day of sale. <b>CHEW &amp; RELF.</b> August 12.</p>
<p><b>FONDS DE MAGASIN</b> à Vendre, <i>Par le Soussigné, demeurant maison de M. Castillon.</i> IL A AUSSI, <b>DEUX NEGRES</b> Chapeliers, Sachant faire la Cuisine, propres à faire deux bons Domestiques. Pour plus grands renseignements, s'adres- ser à <b>ANDRE VIEUX.</b> 7 Août.</p>	<p><b>FOR SALE</b> <b>BY THE SUBSCRIBER,</b> A young, handsome Negro woman, a wet nurse, about 20 years of age. Several Negresses, cooks, ironers and sellers. — ALSO — Several Negroes and Negresses from 14 to 25 years of age. <b>P. JOUBERT,</b> Opposite the Theatre. August 17. tf.</p>	<p><b>A VENDRE.</b> <i>Par le soussigné,</i> Une jeune et belle Nègresse nour- rice, âgée d'environ 20 ans, Plusieurs autres Nègresses, Cui- sinnières, Blanchisseuses et Marchan- des. <b>AUSSI,</b> Quelques Nègres et Nègresses de- puis 14 jusqu'à 25 ans. <b>P. JOUBERT,</b> <i>Vis-à-vis la Comédie.</i> 16 Août. sn</p> <hr/> <p><b>FOR SALE,</b> <b>A</b>T the house of Mr. Castillon, by the subscriber, the remains of the contents of a store. — Also two Negroes Hatters, and Cooks, who will make two good servants; for fur- ther particulars apply to <b>ANDREW VIEUX</b> August 7.</p>

(Figure 2:) A portion of *Le Telegraphe* from August 32, 1806. This small cluster from page 4 displays multiple slave ads with their respective English and French versions.

Although multiple newspapers featured slave advertisements, some pushed human commodities with more intensity than others and may have reached a wider group of readers. *Le Telegraphe* had the most advertisements for slaves in comparison to the aforementioned newspapers. Furthermore, the extent to which slaves were described in *Le Telegraphe*, in order to be sold, shows how rigorous the capitalist enterprise of slavery was. Some slaves in *Le Telegraphe* would be described in such a positive way to make them more desirable, such as listing all the qualities that would make them an exceptional slave like being bilingual and skilled in multiple domestic chores. Generally, in most advertisements for slaves the domestic skills of workers were highlighted and promoted slave advertisements also showed potential

similarities in how Anglo-American's and New Orleanians described and ultimately viewed blacks.

The *Orleans Gazette and Commercial Advertiser* did not have as many slave advertisements. In fact, many issues had one or two very brief advertisements, such as the October 9, 1806 publication that only had one slave-related commercial piece. The ad was for an employer looking for field labor. The ad read, "To hire, for a few months, from 30 to 35 field Negroes in families—well disposed, and accustomed to the climate."<sup>154</sup> The ad was short and concise, unlike many ads in *Le Telegraphe* that had an abundance of detail. The number of ads and the real estate taken on the page for advertisements could be an indicator of selling success for a given newspaper.

The *Orleans Gazette and Commercial Advertiser* published the same ad that sought field labor not only in the October 9 issue, but also in the October 16 and October 20 issues. The ad for field labor was published in multiple issues, like other advertisement such as a post for "8,000 gallons excellent Monongahela & Kentucky Whiskey for sale."<sup>155</sup> Sections in newspapers, whether they were advertisements or news such as decrees, had original publication dates at the end of the space. The ad for whiskey was originally published months prior in August, and the portion that sought field labor had been printed since August 18. For the most part, the *Orleans Gazette and Commercial Advertiser* published mostly brief advertisements that got straight to the point. The repetition of the ad seeking field labor could not have come cheap, and therefore indicates that it may have mostly been affluent planters who published these ads.

The *Louisiana Gazette* also had slave advertisements, but mostly in the context of an auction. In the February 9, 1818 issue of the *Louisiana Gazette* the auction portion had for sale

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<sup>154</sup> *Orleans Gazette and Commercial Advertiser*, October 9, 1806.

<sup>155</sup> *Orleans Gazette and Commercial Advertiser*, October 20, 1806.



“a native mulatto man, from 20 to 25 years of age,” who was said to be a good fit for plantation work, as well as “a negro 25 years of age, an excellent painter.” There was also advertising for a 35-year-old negro man, as well as an 8 year old and 14 month old mulatto child.<sup>156</sup> People could make monthly installments on human commodities, which was a way to expand the consumer base for those who could not afford to buy slaves in one transaction. Buying slaves on credit or with payments made it easier for people who may have had limited resources to participate in the slave trade, plantation economy of the region, and ultimately, the new American way of life.

Certain ads for auctions did not attempt to provide appealing details about slaves for sale. The August 10, 1805 issue of *Orleans Gazette* stated items to be sold at an upcoming auction such as “a general assortment of dry goods,” groceries and “also, several NEGROES, of both sexes.”<sup>157</sup> The word negroes was capitalized perhaps to draw attention, but that would have been the only aspect of the ad to garner attention. On June 28, 1806, the *Orleans Gazette* offered “a likely Negro Wench and her child, the wench is about 22 and the child 5 years old.”<sup>158</sup> The woman is not described by any skills, but the availability of a young child could have been an additional attraction.

Another newspaper ad stated that for sale was a “girl, 20 years old, having inhabited the continent of America for 12 years, she is a good servant, knows how to sew and wash tolerable well, and speaks English well enough to exercise it with advantage.”<sup>159</sup> A slave that could speak English fluently could have been targeted toward incoming Americans who did not speak Spanish or French, or on the other hand, could also be beneficial to New Orleanians who did not speak English themselves and could benefit from a potentially bilingual creole slave. The

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<sup>156</sup> *Louisiana Gazette*, February 19, 1818.

<sup>157</sup> *Orleans Gazette and Commercial Advertiser*, August 10, 1805.

<sup>158</sup> *Orleans Gazette and Commercial Advertiser*, June 28, 1806.

<sup>159</sup> *Le Telegraphe*, July 21, 1804.

advertisement goes on to say that she was in perfect condition and being sold for no fault, but rather because her master is leaving for Europe. The slave's versatility was advertised and could have connected white Anglos and white New Orleanians because the slave could be used as a common resource for either group.

Overall, residents of New Orleanians who read these newspapers constantly saw aspects of the slave trade through these ads, exposing them to the ideologies of racist objectification and commodification of slaves under U.S. rule.

### Slavery in Newspapers: Missing! Solidification of White Supremacy Cooperation

Slavery was cruel and immoral and turned real people into commodities. Stephanie Smallwood eloquently explains how African slaves became goods for a market in the eyes of white Europeans. As Smallwood put it, "the economic exchange had to transform independent beings into human commodities whose most 'socially relevant feature' was their 'exchangeability.'"<sup>160</sup> Slave could also be bought and resold multiple times. To Smallwood, "transactions such as this one, whereby Europeans paid for the same captive twice, were frequent, reflecting the power the market held to ensure that captives bore the inedible mark of commodification."<sup>161</sup> Because slaves could be bought and resold multiple times only reaffirmed the belief that they were objects.

Slavery was present in newspapers in more ways than sale ads. Subscribers to newspapers also had space to ask for help finding a runaway slave. The frequency of missing slaves increased as the transitional years progressed. *L'Ami des Lois et Journal du Soir* had four

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<sup>160</sup> Stephanie Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 35.

<sup>161</sup> Stephanie Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery*, 54.

missing slave posts in a March 18, 1818 issue. The amount of missing slave posts outnumbered ads for slaves being sold by four to one and there were no slaves advertised in that issue in English. The way slaves were described, as will be discussed later in the chapter, only reaffirmed that they were merely goods to be traded. Another point Smallwood made was that “European slavers on the African coast relied on the power of language to make the slave cargo truer to expectations, to present a reality that would reflect the beholder’s fantasy.”<sup>162</sup> As was explained earlier in the chapter, slave advertisements employed certain language in order to make these human commodities more desirable.

In general, the runaway and lost ads had a lot more detail than sale ads. One post for a missing slave started with the reward of fifty dollars, for a “young negro man,” that belonged to a Mr. Roux, who was “about 21 or 22 years of age, 5 feet 5 inches high, and stout built; speaks English, French and Spanish.” The message asked to secure the slave in jail or deliver him back to the subscriber, Mr. Roux.<sup>163</sup> Such detail showed that New Orleanian slaveholders took their property rights very seriously as they gave as much detail as possible to make finding their lost property easier.

Rewards were common for lost slaves. Another wanted ad offered a \$25 reward. This post was the most detailed of the wanted ads included in the March 18 issue:

RAN-AWAY from the plantation lately belonging to the subscribers, and now to Mr. James Williams, situated 8 leagues below the city, January last, a mulatto named PAUL, about 27 or 28 years of age: he speaks English, French and Spanish, is well known in town, having formerly belonged to Mr. Eugene Macarty & since to Mr. Tremoulet. Said mulatto has been seen frequently in the two Fauxbourgs, and was met a few days since in a sailors dress, having on a short round jacket, black handkerchief round his neck, &c. He is a plausible fellow, and as he is a good cook will probably attempt to ship himself in some vessel or barge. Masters of such, as well as others, are cautioned against harboring him.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Stephanie Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery*, 51.

<sup>163</sup> *L’Ami des Lois et Journal du Soir*, March 18, 1818, 4.

<sup>164</sup> *L’Ami des Lois et Journal du Soir*, March 18, 1818, 4.

The post contained a lot of thorough information and offered multiple leads to help find Paul.

From his outfits to where he had been spotted, the description was as detailed as could be.

One interesting thing to point out is that the rewards were different for this run-away as opposed to Mr. Roux's runaway. Mr. Roux had offered twice as much as than the ad for the run-away Paul. Why was the reward for one slave worth twice as much as the other? Does this reveal how much individuals really valued their slaves at the time? Or does the difference hint at different roles some slaves played? Mr. Roux's wanted ad had less detail, but perhaps he used a higher sum of reward to help find the run-away, as opposed to having a detail-dense ad. Maybe a lost ad with a high reward could inspire more assistance in finding the slave. Or perhaps Mr. Roux's slave was crucial to his daily business and life. Regardless of the reasons for the higher reward, both Anglo and French slaveowners in New Orleans paid a price to maintain control over their human commodities.

<p><b>25 Dollars Reward.</b></p> <p><b>R</b>AN-AWAY from the plantation lately belonging to the subscribers, and now to Mr. James Williams, situated 8 leagues below the city, January last, a mulatto named <b>PAUL</b>, about 27 or 28 years of age: he speaks English, French and Spanish, is well known in town, having formerly belonged to Mr. Eugene Macarty &amp; since to Mr. Tremoulet. Said mulatto has been seen frequently in the two Fauxbourgs, and was met a few days since in a sailors dress, having on a snort round jacket, black handkerchief round his neck, &amp;c. He is a plausible fellow, and as he is a good cook will probably attempt to ship himself in some vessel or barge. Masters of such, as well as all others, are again cautioned against harboring him.</p> <p><b>Amory, Callender &amp; Co.</b></p> <p>march 10 314W</p>	<p><b>25 piastres de récompense.</b></p> <p><b>E</b>ST parti marron de l'habitation appartenant précédemment aux sous-signés, et actuellement à Monsieur James Williams, située à 8 lieues au-dessous de la ville, en Janvier dernier un mulâtre nommé <b>PAUL</b> âgé d'environ 27 à 28 ans; il parle Anglais, Français et Espagnol; il est bien connu en ville ayant appartenu précédemment à Mr. Eugene Macarty et depuis à Mr. Tremoulet. Le dit mulâtre a été vu fréquemment dans les deux fauxbourgs. On le rencontra il y a quelques jours en costume de marin, ayant une veste courte et un mouchoir noir au cou. C'est un sujet intelligent et; comme il est bon cuisinier, il tachera probablement de s'embarquer a bord de quelque navire ou barge. Les capitaines sont prévenus de ne pas le recevoir à leur bord, sous les peines portées par la loi.</p> <p><b>AMORY. CALLENDER &amp; Co.</b></p> <p>10 Mars.</p>
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(Figure 3:) Post for missing slave named Paul in both English and French. These are included in *L'Ami des Lois et Journal du Soir*, March 18, 1818.

The value of slaves could be determined through these wanted posts. The two male run-aways previously mentioned had a reward for them, and their ads began with the reward being explicitly stated. However, a wanted post for a female run-away appeared a bit different. The March 18, 1818 issue included a wanted post for a 23 year old named Eliza, who was described as “4 feet and some inches high, round face, reddish skin, large nose and lips, common eyes and teeth and very small feet.”<sup>165</sup> Although the ad did not explicitly state the amount to be rewarded, it offered “a reasonable reward.”<sup>166</sup> Eliza may not have been worth as much as the male run-away slaves, which could indicate that some slaveowners may have valued their slaves based on gender or physical capabilities. The lack of specificity for the reward may also indicate that the slaveowner might have wanted to have negotiated a reward with whomever found the slave, factors like her condition upon return.

Bilingual advertisements not only indicate an increase of English-speaking Anglo-Americans in New Orleans, but also displayed the commonalities that might have existed among slave-owning Anglos and New Orleanians. Anglo Americans and New Orleanians could have fostered relationships and mutual understandings by helping each other to bring their slaves back. Despite the tumultuous and drastic changes that occurred during this transitional period, New Orleanians and Anglo-Americans could have bonded over their mutual desire for slaves.

Newspapers from this era contained a lot of information about the social fabric of New Orleans. Print media helped maintain the slave trade in New Orleans and likely expressed inherent white supremacy ideals in American New Orleans. Slaves were a popular commodity desired by whites in New Orleans, both French and Anglo. The desire for slaves was cross-

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<sup>165</sup> *L'Ami des Lois et Journal Du Soir*, March 18, 1818, 3.

<sup>166</sup> *L'Ami des Lois et Journal Du Soir*, March 18, 1818, 3.

cultural and had the potential to allow these two groups to find commonalities through racist white supremacy.

### Conclusion: A Country in Endless Transition

The Louisiana Purchase was a period of transition for New Orleanians and as well as Anglo-Americans. The acquisition of New Orleans benefited America in multiple ways. The United States received more than double its landmass from the Louisiana Purchase. However, the purchase also ushered in a whole new group of people that challenged Anglo-American desires for homogeneity.

Despite the centrality of racist white supremacy in U.S. slavery, America is also viewed as a nation of immigrants with various types of people. That history includes the absorption of the complex multi-cultural population in New Orleans. The Louisiana Purchase in many ways set the standard for how different people would be incorporated into a growing nation, as well as how land would be incorporated. Like Anglo-Americans moving into Transappalachia following the War for Independence after 1776, the Louisiana Purchase continued a major movement to expand westward. This era created the concept of Manifest Destiny, the idea that Americans ought to occupy the continent from coast to coast for personal and national fulfillment. Jefferson paved the way for what actions are possible for a president to take in regard to expansion such as establishing treaties and actually incorporating territory into the union.<sup>167</sup> Incorporating an already bustling and seemingly foreign territory was no easy feat, and Jefferson did not have a roadmap to navigate this transition. However, even though the transition and takeover of New Orleans was complicated, Jefferson knew it was necessary in order to secure the vast territory beyond the Mississippi and facilitate a growing population in the United States. As Gordon Wood put it, “Jefferson was the most expansionist-minded president in American history.”<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> For more information, see Gary Lawson and Guy Seidman’s essay “The First ‘Incorporation’ Debate” included in *The Louisiana Purchase and American Expansion 1803-1898*. This essay discusses the debates that occurred in 1803 regarding if Jefferson had the ability to purchase foreign territory.

<sup>168</sup> Gordon Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 356.

In later decades, subsequent presidents would be at the helm of a nation that was obsessed with expansionism. The United States government would eventually come to control North America from the Atlantic to the Pacific, expanding from the original thirteen colonies on the eastern coast until the Oregon territory was reached and settled on the west coast. The United States' insatiable appetite for land and resources drove expansion into the Caribbean and the Pacific in places such as Alaska in 1867, as well as Puerto Rico, the Philippines, Guam, Hawaii, and American Sāmoa in the 1890s. In those periods of expansion and transition, the United States government worried about how the people of those places, which were of different races, would be incorporated into the United States, similar to when the United States acquired New Orleans. Determining how a foreign population would impact the union is an issue that continues today in U.S. history, and in many ways, reflected similar struggles in New Orleans to impose a racial hierarchy and black-white binary.

This thesis has explored the transitional period from French to American rule in New Orleans, as well as some aspects of political ideology and the enterprise of slavery in this territory. Anglo-American political elites who entered the city and some leaders already established within New Orleans exhorted the positive aspects of American ideals of political liberty. Both Anglo-Americans and New Orleanians also participated in and upheld the institution of slavery. Slavery provided one way for two distinctly different groups of Anglo-Americans and Louisianans to connect and share common goals in New Orleans, a city that had changing conceptions of race and slavery with each regime. Such connections among American and New Orleanian slaveowners came through the oppression of others.

Under French rule, slaves were perhaps treated in a much less cruel manner, as white supremacy was not exactly based off the total oppression of blacks during the early French



colony. Under Spanish rule, manumission, the ability of a slave to purchase their freedom, was allowed and encouraged. When the territory fell under American rule, manumission became less frequent and was actively prevented. The plurality of groups that entered New Orleans and already resided within the city made the transition fairly complicated as each group had its own identity and place in society. Although white New Orleanians may have had an easier time accepting free blacks because it had been part of their society, the transition into the United States with an adoption of American attitudes toward slavery, ultimately created a new paradigm for how blacks in New Orleans would be perceived.

Under American rule, free blacks struggled to enjoy the same privileges they had under Spanish and French rule, such as being able to participate in elite activities like fencing. The oppression of blacks under U.S. rule was exemplified through the various ads published in newspapers that served as a constant reminder that Africans were seen as property that could be bought, sold, and prevented from ever achieving freedom. As a new American territory, Louisiana had to incorporate a system where the economic, political, and social hierarchy was based on white supremacy.

This transitional period and the navigation of New Orleanians and Anglo-Americans through this diverse city also contributed to a developing American identity: the American concept of political liberty for whites was implemented in New Orleans, through institutions that prohibited freedom and limited the rights of non-whites. These white supremacist attitudes would continue as the United States grew into an imperialist behemoth. This could be seen in the case of Hawaii, where an independent nation was taken over and incorporated into the United States without the support of the native people.<sup>169</sup> For decades to come, the United States would

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<sup>169</sup> For more information about the American takeover of Hawaii, please see Noenoe Silva's *Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Colonialism*, (NC: Duke University Press, 2004,) which discusses the occupation

continue to struggle with incorporating new people into the Union. These issues would stem from concepts of race and white supremacy, which, unfortunately, have long been a part of the United States.

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and annexation of Hawaii and how the Hawaiians were wronged by the United States. The United States had overthrown the Queen of Hawaii and had annexed the archipelago against the wishes of Native Hawaiians.

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