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Creole Resistance in Louisiana from Colonization to Black Lives Matter: Activism's Deep-
Rooted Role in Creole Identity

By

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2020

Approval of the Dissertation Committee

This dissertation has been duly read, reviewed, and critiqued by the Committee listed below, which hereby approves the manuscript of Danae Hart as fulfilling the scope and quality requirements for meriting the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Cultural Studies.

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Abstract

Creole Resistance in Louisiana from Colonization to Black Lives Matter: Activism's Deep-Rooted Role in Creole Identity

By

Danae Hart

Claremont Graduate University: 2020

Creole identity within Louisiana emerged as a result of French colonization and as a means of classification denoting birthplace but developed into a cultural identity specific to the lived experience of residents of Louisiana. An often-overlooked aspect of Creole identity is its role within the formation of activist networks and resistance within the American South. Resistance is inherent in the formation of Creole identity because it complicates racial politics that are predicated on reductionist singular conceptions of racial and ethnic identity. An understanding of Creole identity as a challenge to the racial binary imposed within Louisiana illuminates the larger legacies of colonialism, slavery, and systems of inequality within society. Creole identity exists as a result of colonization and was an identity formation formed to cope with the traumatic experiences of living under enslavement, colonization, and systemic racism. A unique culture developed as a survival strategy and aided in the creation of methods of resistance to hegemonic institutions upholding white supremacy.

Creole identity is often merely reduced to a form of blackness because of the constructed Black and white divide within the U.S. South, but Creole identity has both been associated with blackness and had access to the privileges of whiteness, creating a hybrid identity formation. Strategically Creoles have utilized their complex racial formation to mount resistance to

dominant ideologies through their identification with both Black and white identity. Often the historical role Creole identity played within social movements has been overlooked. Since Louisiana was colonized by the French, Creole people have mounted resistance against colonial power, and their activism evolved as the systems of oppression took on new forms. Creole identity was inextricably tied to French colonialism as well as the French language, but as France ceded control of the Louisiana territory Creole identity evolved beyond an identification with French culture into a shared culture built upon lived experiences of oppression. From colonialism to slavery and beyond, Creole resistance has persisted. I have constructed a radical genealogy to highlight the evolution of Creole identity through the use of counterstories. Creoles mounted resistance to systemic oppression during colonization, enslavement, Reconstruction, the Civil Rights Movement, resistance that continues to the present day. Resistance has taken on the form of solidarity networks, print publications, social clubs, spiritual belief systems, and social media communities in order to evolve in addressing the needs of Creole communities. Creole resistance against racial segregation has often been dismissed as seen in Cheryl Harris' pivotal work "Whiteness as Property," as an act of conformity and an attempt to benefit from the privileges of whiteness, but Creole activism intentionally deconstructed arguments perpetuating racial segregation through challenging constructions of race and white supremacy. From *Plessy v. Ferguson* to online collectives today Creole identity strategically protested racial inequality by disrupting understandings of race and embracing a more complex view on racial identity. Creole identity has historically evolved from a racial category to a hybrid cultural formation used by activists to challenge reductionist constructions of race in order to develop a consciousness that forwards activist efforts to achieve racial equality in an intersectional and inclusive manner.

Acknowledgements

Writing a dissertation is not a solitary act, but a process that involves an entire community of support both intellectually and emotionally. Although in writing I experienced unexpected emotions from frustration to fascination, I was most surprised by the feeling of empowerment. Knowing the importance of representation through creating counterstories I chose to delve into a very personal project in hopes of resolving questions I have concerning aspects of my identity. Through challenging dominant misconceptions, I became empowered to tap into ancestral knowledge and highlight the powerful work of Creoles both past and present.

I found strength and guidance in my family: Jose Sandoval, Charkell Clark, Brian Clark, Marteen Sandoval, Marissa Sandoval, Mariah Sandoval, Brian Amani Clark, Kalia Clark, and Lorraine Thomas. I could not have completed this without the endless support of my chosen family: Javier Garcia Perez, Jose Garcia Perez, and the Garcia-Perez family.

I have written this dissertation by drawing upon the voices and wisdom of my ancestors. My grandfather, Errol Jolly, was our family's storyteller and had a love of history that inspired this deeply personal exploration into his hometown of New Orleans and the stories that still need to be told. My aunt Dione Sandoval was one of the most strong-willed women I have ever met and instilled in me a sense of determination to always push myself further. My parents Cheryl and Cedric Hart have always believed in my abilities even when I have doubted them myself. My brother Devon Hart showed me the power in being true to yourself and how that in itself is a powerful act of resistance. My grandmother Carleen Jolly is a counterstory and the true representation of resistance, as the matriarch of our family she unapologetically fights with conviction and inspires me to do the same.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	v
Table of Contents	vi
Introduction: Contextualizing Creole	1
Chapter Outlines	22
Chapter 1: Defying Binaries: A Genealogy of Creole Identity	32
French Louisiana 1682 -1763	45
Spanish Louisiana 1763-1803	52
After the Louisiana Purchase/Antebellum Louisiana 1803-1865	63
Louisiana: Reconstruction and Civil Rights, 1866-Present	69
Conclusion	75
Chapter 2: Into the Archive: Resistance in <i>The Daily Crusader</i>	80
The Role of Publications in Creole Activism	84
<i>The Daily Crusader</i>: Creole Perspectives in Mobilizing for Change	90
Fighting Segregation	91
Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System	100
Political Reform	107
Conclusion	120
Chapter 3: Counterstories of Creole Activism	126
Spiritualism in Creole Activism	128
Social Clubs	143
Conclusion	164
Chapter 4: The Radical Potential of Creole Politics in the 21st Century	166
#Creole	171
Racial Classification	177
Creole Identity in Global Politics	183
Creole Collectives' Online Presence	188

Intersectionality in Creole Activism.....	190
Religion and Spirituality.....	196
Conclusion.....	200
Conclusion: Creole Resistance: From its Formation to Social Justice Narratives	
Today.....	203
Works Cited.....	210

Introduction: Contextualizing Creole

My dissertation was born of my personal struggle to define my own cultural identity and recognize what identifying as Creole means to me. My mother was born in New Orleans, but at a young age her family relocated to Los Angeles. Her family remained in California, and I was born and raised in California, but we would routinely travel back to New Orleans to spend time with our extended family and enjoy the culture of the city. My maternal family has always identified as Creole, and Louisiana was always our concept of home, but even within California my family would often identify as Creole. Each member of my family has a different skin tone and due to our varying complexions people would often ask our race or what we were mixed with. Growing up in California, it was fairly common that the response, “I am Creole,” was only met with further questions. “What does Creole mean? Does that mean your family is not Black? Does anyone in your family speak Creole?” These are just a few of the most common questions that were posed to my family members and me. In the past and within the space of New Orleans I often labeled myself as Creole but have struggled with what the identity signifies. If asked what Creole means, can I properly explain it to others? It is impossible to ignore historical accounts that note the problematic aspects of Creole identity and how it has operated in opposition to blackness as well as its role in promoting colorism. Creole identity has been a caste in a system designed to perpetuate white supremacy. It has operated within a system that categorized individuals by a degradation of blackness and by maintaining a racial hierarchy.

Often throughout this work, Black and Creole are listed separately, but this in no way implies they are mutually exclusive categories. The same can be said for colored and Creole, or white and Creole. Historically these terms are used as if they cannot coexist, restricting people to one designation, but I seek to further complicate this misconception. Noting that Creole-

identified people come from all races seems reductionist because Creole identity transcends limited and imposed racial constructs. Creole identity is not limited to these constructs because it is based solely on the experience of colonization and has transformed to meet the needs of the marginalized within oppressive systems of control. Creole culture is a hybrid culture created as a means of resistance to colonialism and slavery's forced erasure of ethnic identity. It has shaped activism over centuries in organized social movements as well as resistance to colonialism, slavery, and racial injustice. Creole identity within Louisiana must be recognized as a form of hybridity or a postcolonial identity, as its very formation is inextricably linked to colonization. Creole identity has at times been associated with blackness and whiteness, but I argue that its association with whiteness is not merely as a form of "passing" but a challenge to racial inequality. Creoles created and furthered a cultural construct that challenged the limited racial classification system of the U.S. South by actively establishing an identity formation that was not reliant upon racial categories composed to perpetuate racial inequality. Within a limited binary classification system Creoles worked to challenge understandings of race and the way it has been socially constructed. They mounted campaigns to recognize racial classifications and segregation was discriminatory and formed solidarity networks with other residents of Louisiana to challenge dominant institutions. From challenging the system of slavery by forming maroon communities throughout Louisiana to constructing legal challenges to transform racial discrimination within the criminal justice system, Creoles utilized their unique perspective and resources within their communities to create change in society. Despite its legacy as a remnant of the color caste system that existed within Louisiana, Creole identity has always been a complex identity formation based upon resistance that has transformed over time, and this transformation

continues in new ways within online spaces as Creole people are now largely displaced from New Orleans or Louisiana as a whole.

The term “Creole” has been used in several ways including in reference to a cultural identity as well as a language form. It has evolved and holds different meanings within different contexts as well as different time periods. I have chosen to highlight its evolution through tracing Creole identity from its formation to its usage today. I examine Creole identity from a historical perspective to note how Creole identity has operated within New Orleans from the moment it was colonized by the French, but I have focused on its role in post-Reconstruction racial politics leading up to social movements in order to recognize the connections to current day manifestations of Creole identity as seen in online spaces. I have chosen to focus on present day usages through its use on social media because it is a constructed space that is accessible to Creole people throughout the diaspora to be more inclusive of Creoles who have been displaced as a result of Hurricane Katrina or other factors. Understanding Creole identity historically is necessary to construct a genealogy and understand the ways it has transformed in response to and as a means to work within social movements. I analyze the evolution of the term in order to contextualize its usage throughout history in the creation and mobilization of activist networks centered around fighting racial injustice within the city of New Orleans and the state of Louisiana. Through constructing a radical genealogy, I recognize the significance of Creole identity in posing challenges to colonization, slavery, segregation, and racial inequality in a myriad of ways. I am deconstructing conceptions of Creole identity that fail to center resistance as a defining aspect and recognize the hybrid nature of a cultural identity that simultaneously challenges racial oppression and the categories of race upheld by dominant ideologies. Too often Creole identity is viewed as synonymous with colorism and imposed divisions without noting the

challenges Creoles made to social constructions of race and the activism within Creole communities that contested the perpetuation of inequality. I have chosen archival material to help illustrate the role of resistance and conducted my research at the Amistad Research Center¹ housed in Tulane University in New Orleans, Louisiana. I chose to focus on an activist publication titled *The Daily Crusader* because its message is clearly centered around racial justice. It was founded by Creoles and forwards a uniquely Creole perspective. *The Daily Crusader* also played a vital role in mobilizing the community in the years leading to the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case that challenged segregation through a strategic defense based upon Creole identity that noted the limitations of racial classification due to the inconsistent methods of determining racial identity². I also chose this publication because of the time period in which it was published. The newspaper ran from roughly 1889-1899, which is significant because it was published in a Post-Reconstruction society that was being policed through a dependence on a racial binary. Creole activists protested segregation through an appeal to change the way race was discussed prior to the Civil Rights Movement. In the years leading up to *Plessy v. Ferguson*, as a legal challenge to racial segregation was being formed, *The Daily Crusader* highlighted resistance and the ways it was forced to evolve as a result of the legal restrictions placed upon people of color. Resistance was not only visible within publications during this time, but also in the formation of social clubs and the role religion and spirituality played in the lives of Creoles. The complex ways in which resistance was mounted in a myriad of ways was seen in the pages

¹ The Amistad Research Center's mission statement is "Amistad Research Center is committed to collecting, preserving, and providing open access to original materials that reference the social and cultural importance of America's ethnic and racial history, the African Diaspora, human relations, and civil rights"
"HOME: Amistad Research Center: Independent Archive." *Amistadresearchcenter.org*, New Venture, 2020, www.amistadresearchcenter.org/.

² (Smith 283).

of *The Daily Crusader* in a manner that centered Creole experience and Creole culture and transformed resistance strategies throughout different time periods in response to the many forms of oppression they faced.

Creole is not a historical marker relegated to the past or confined to the realm of language, but a prevalent identity to this day. As scholars debate the definition of the term “Creole” and residents of Louisiana struggle with what being Creole truly means, it is critical to ask: “But what, then, of folks for whom the term “creole” circumscribes significant aspects of their social identity?” (Palmié 193). If the term is disputed in its usage, we must recognize the ways in which Creole-identified people use the term to understand its many shifting definitions. I focused on primary resources that were created by Creoles in order to avoid perpetuating any misconceptions or inaccurate definitions. Creole transcends imposed racial categorizations and has evolved over time as a cultural identity. Nick Spitzer notes: “There is not a univocal meaning to Creole ethnicity— though heritage revival movements do sometimes try to make such claims” (Spitzer 38). Attempts to limit what Creole means through a fixation on European ancestry or particular ethnic groups has proven too narrow a conception to characterize the large number of people who identify as Creole. Creole identity is not necessarily a mixed-race identity formation, but an identity that recognizes the inability for imposed racial categories to represent complex identity formations. I have used primary resources as well as the work of scholars to construct this genealogy as a counterstory to dominant misconceptions that have failed to recognize the complexity of Creole identity historically and today. I have built upon the work of researchers like Gwendolyn Midlo Hall and theorists like Cheryl Harris and Gloria Anzaldúa to note the unique position of Creoles in the American South and center the role of resistance. I am contextualizing the work of activists today who have already made these connections between

Creole identity and resistance strategies to combat racial inequality. Creole people created Creole culture during the period of enslavement unifying enslaved Africans from different tribes, languages, and regions of the continent building this shared culture during colonization and continuing to build upon it to combat the marginalization of those with African ancestry within the dominant systems of the American South. Under French and Spanish governments Creoles organized, creating networks that pooled together resources creating maroon communities and spaces where Creoles could fight for their liberation. After Emancipation Creoles continued to build upon these networks to further their activism in challenging discriminatory legislation and the struggle persists today. Creoles have recognized the ways in which white supremacy is perpetuated under new systems of control as seen under two colonizing governments, American statehood, and anti-racism struggles that continue to this day; they have countered hegemonic ideals that oppressed Black-identified residents in order to confront racism and dismantle systems of inequality.

In understanding what Creole means within the context of Louisiana the role of ancestry and language should be recognized as a starting point. Creole is often used in reference to people, food, and the language form. It has been used broadly in the aftermath of colonization and applied to societies throughout the world but has specific meanings for those within the history of Louisiana. Alice Dunbar-Nelson states: “The true Creole is like the famous gumbo of the state, a little bit of everything, making a whole, delightfully flavored, quite distinctive, and wholly unique” (Dunbar-Nelson 9). The unique context of Louisiana is reflected in Creole culture due to the circumstances of two different colonizing forces prior to their statehood that produced a specific experience that impacted the process of identity formation. DuBois and Melancon describe how the term Creole does not have a fixed meaning in their article “Creole Is,

Creole Ain't" noting how the term Creole has been used quite broadly even when only looking within the state of Louisiana. They highlight how:

Creole identity could refer to descendants of the original European colonists in Louisiana White or Black, slave or free... In addition, Creole identity could be applicable to the descendants of the *gens de couleur libres*, the free people of color or 'colored Creoles' who were considered the "elite" class of mixed ancestry in New Orleans for several generations. (DuBois and Melancon 238)

As a cultural identity Creoles transcended race even during the period of enslavement. The culture that evolved from free people of color relied heavily on the divisions that had been placed upon them though the system of slavery. Free people of color or Creoles who identified as colored often desired to be viewed differently from the enslaved in order to attain the privileges the enslaved were denied not necessarily as a form of elitism, but to attain the rights of citizens and the human rights they were far too often denied. They established their own communities and were able to maintain them due to alliances and networks created with the enslaved identified in the historical accounts gathered by Gwendolyn Midlo Hall and preserved within the Amistad Research Center. The relationship between the enslaved and free people of color was often not harmonious but these networks must not be overlooked to contextualize these constructed divisions, which created tension among these two groups as a result of free people of color seeking to establish their identity as isolated from the system of slavery.

The prominent role that free Creoles played in understandings of Creole culture has had a direct effect on the divisive understandings that still persist today. John Lowe notes that: "There were always more free men and women of color in Louisiana than in any other southern state, and the unique cultures that developed by this group of peoples had myriad ramifications for

both Louisiana and southern culture as a whole” (Lowe 18). Creole culture was a reflection of a free Black culture that was suppressed by racial oppression and showed the possibilities of cultures that can exist outside of or in opposition to chattel slavery within the setting of the U.S. South. This culture did not operate outside of the institution of slavery and was not immune to perpetuating racist thinking, but Creole culture created a contested space that showed resistance as well as empowerment. The history of Creole culture as rooted in racial hierarchies has been a factor in conversations surrounding the preservation of Creole culture, but simultaneously many have fought for recognition of a Creole culture that has been transformed from the divisions of the past. Misunderstandings and contested meanings may be a factor in the lack of literature recognizing the ways in which Creole culture has evolved and is not confined to the past. As Sybil Kein argues Creole people are: “Usually ignored or negatively stereotyped, [however] these unique Americans have lived and prospered since the late 1600’s, yet very little has been written about them” (Kein xvii). Although I found boxes and boxes of primary resources at the Amistad Research Center, I found very few academic works that focus on Louisiana Creole identity specifically. The narrow representation of scholarship on Louisiana Creole culture within Africana Studies and academic literature noted in the work may aid in the dismissal of this culture. Even within the substantial amount of work done surrounding Hurricane Katrina, the preservation [or lack thereof] and displacement of Creole culture as many Creoles no longer reside within Louisiana or the city of New Orleans has not been properly addressed.

DuBois and Melançon note within their work the need to identify how Creole identity has transformed, and they posit that many who identify as Creole no longer associate it with the Creole language or directly with aspects of French culture ³. Creole identification has been

³ Sylvie Dubois and Megan Melançon. "Creole is, Creole Ain't: Diachronic and Synchronic Attitudes Toward Creole identity in Southern Louisiana."

reconstructed into an understanding of culture that lies outside of the aspects of its origin. In its evolution it has become divorced from language to an understanding of culture that is moving away from perspectives that confine it to a dependence upon recognized European ancestry. Although French and Spanish ancestry are often claimed, Creole identity is viewed separately from identifications with European culture.

This evolution must be put in conversation with the role self-defined Creole people played within social movements. In the struggle to end segregation Creole people worked to fit within the definitions of whiteness in order to challenge how whiteness is constructed, but Creoles have utilized many different methods to mount resistance to racism that have transformed throughout history including the creation of solidarity networks to further their activism. I seek to interrogate simplistic understandings of Creole identity that note Creoles were focused on attaining the privileges of whiteness without contextualizing how Creole communities adopted survival strategies of “passing” while simultaneously constructing legal challenges to the system of racial classification. When challenging segregation Creoles strategically used Creoles who phenotypically could be viewed as white as seen in the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* to combat how race is defined and imposed. The transformation from a strategy of claiming access to the privileges of whiteness to an approach that recognized the need to unite all people described as colored in resisting racism has been noted as a historical shift but should be recognized as a complex method of resistance to white supremacy.

Shirley Elizabeth Thompson describes this transition in how Creole identity has evolved from “failing to be white” to “choosing to become Black.”⁴ Frantz Fanon talks about how beliefs about the inferiority of Black people become internalized leading Black people to view

⁴ Thompson, Shirley Elizabeth. *Exiles at Home*

themselves as inferior, which leads to a need to disassociate from Blackness⁵. This disassociation is demonstrated historically in accounts of people of color choosing to identify as white in order to differentiate themselves from the marginalized in hopes of gaining access to full citizenship. Frantz Fanon asserts: “The black man wants to be like the white man. For the black man, there is but one destiny. And it is white. A long time ago the black man acknowledged the undeniable superiority of the white man, and all his endeavors aim at achieving a white existence” (Fanon 202). As a result of hegemonic ideologies that uphold white supremacy Creoles advocating for equality were fighting for privileges only attributed to whiteness. Creole attempts to assimilate to dominant norms and constructions of whiteness were not focused on attaining a “white existence,” but should be recognized as attempts to disrupt the racial binary. In order to be accepted as white they worked to reinforce dominant values in order to challenge them. Although this may have drawn attention to the ways in which race was socially constructed to confront racial segregation, it was built upon the message that in the realities of Louisiana the only possibility to be recognized as equal relied upon a need to distance oneself from Blackness, to shed beliefs of inferiority. “Passing” or what Thompson has described as “choosing to be white” was seen throughout the U.S. in response to the racial classification system. Within Louisiana this led to light skinned Creole people identifying and sometimes “passing” as white in public spaces in order to have access to certain aspects of white privilege. However, Creoles did not all attempt to “pass” and many identified openly as Creole rather than rely upon a Black and white divide in establishing their identity as they began to take prominent positions in struggles for racial equality. Thompson notes that the many ways Creole identity was expressed is often overlooked in historical accounts that do not recognize the many roles

⁵ Frantz Fanon *Black Skin, White Masks*

Creole people occupied after the Civil War and Emancipation. Thompson notes: “The discrepancy between the legacy of passing among Creoles of color and the legacy of their leadership in the struggles of radical Reconstruction provides a potentially interesting though rarely addressed dilemma for historians” (Thompson “History and Memory” 234-235). Creole people played a significant role within the Reconstruction Era as seen in the activism of the Citizens’ Committee and the pages of *The Daily Crusader* as they negotiated how to operate within the Black-white binary of the American South.

Within the system of Jim Crow and legalized racial segregation that developed after the abolition of slavery, the Creole population itself became segregated from others. Elitism was a result of the constructed divide by Creoles desiring an identity outside of enslavement reflecting what Fanon would describe as a desire to achieve a white existence ⁶ led to the prominence of colorism within Creole culture and was a major factor in this division. Civil Rights activist and scholar L.H. Welchel notes how the city of New Orleans was divided and highly segregated by race. He describes how: “The Creoles and mulattos generally thought themselves to be not only different but also superior to the rest of those Blacks who had more heavily pigmented skin tones” (Welchel 152). It could be contested whether many Creoles thought of themselves as better or whether dominant viewpoints based upon white supremacy perpetuated these divisions as Shirley Elizabeth Thompson notes Creoles identification evolved over time to more heavily identify with Blackness, but the effects of colorism must be contextualized. This schism between Creoles and colored people within the region led to the Creole population being relegated to a specific part of New Orleans. The segregation within the city kept Creole communities largely confined to a few wards within the city. Welchel elaborates that within the twentieth century:

⁶ (Fanon 202)

“At any rate, the Creoles of New Orleans became the colored elites, and as such they avoided social contact with the other Blacks of that city. Creoles lived downtown in the fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh wards” (Whelchel 152). This physical division acted as a means to differentiate Creoleness from Blackness in a desire to have more access to opportunity, working within the system of segregation and choosing to perpetuate this division.

The extent of this divide may be most notable in the Supreme Court case of *Plessy v. Ferguson*. Homer Plessy boarded the train car designated for whites in a challenge to segregation laws in 1892⁷. Part of this challenge was based upon Plessy’s Creole identity and mixed-race heritage, as: “...phenotypically Plessy appeared to be white” (Harris 1747). Cheryl Harris notes in her essay “Whiteness as Property”, that: “Even after the period of conquest and colonization of the New World and the abolition of slavery, whiteness was the predicate for attaining a host of societal privileges, in both public and private spheres” (Harris 1745). These privileges are inextricably linked to Creole culture and its evolution as a postcolonial identity formation. Identification with whiteness was a survival strategy adopted by some Creoles in order to combat their marginalization. As a result, some Creoles fought to recognize their mixed-race heritage and their status as white legally in order to attain: “a form of racialized privilege ratified in law” (Harris 1745). Harris argues that Homer Plessy was not advocating for racial equality in his challenge to the segregation laws, but rather was challenging if, as a Creole, he could be acknowledged as white. Cheryl Harris argues: “Plessy’s claim, however, was predicated on more than the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Plessy additionally charged that the refusal to seat him on the white passenger car deprived him of property - ‘this reputation [of being white] which has an actual pecuniary value’ - without the due process of law guaranteed

⁷ (Harris 1746)

by the amendment.” (Harris 1747). Harris asserts that the case did not seek to challenge the marginalization of blackness or the privileges attributed to whiteness, but only broaden the conception of whiteness to include Creoles like Homer Plessy. Harris continues: “Because phenotypically Plessy appeared to be white, barring him from the railway car reserved for whites severely impaired or deprived him of the reputation of being regarded as white” (Harris 1747). The value of being perceived as white was a critical aspect of this legal case however the ability of Creoles to challenge the social constructions of race was not realized within Harris’ work.

Cheryl Harris posits:

Plessy demonstrated the Court's chronic refusal to dismantle the structure of white supremacy, which is maintained through the institutional protection of relative benefits for whites at the expense of Blacks. In denying that any inferiority existed by reason of de jure segregation, and in denying white status to Plessy, "whiteness" was protected from intrusion and appropriate boundaries around the property were maintained. (Harris 1750)

Even though this challenge to segregation was not successful, it was orchestrated and planned by the collective action of Creole people. Harris does not note that Homer Plessy identified as colored and was seeking access to white privilege in order to contest the social constructions of race and the privileges afforded to whiteness that resulted in the marginalization of all colored people. Thompson does explicitly note the role of Creoles in fighting against segregation and how often their role is incorrectly described as Creole people taking roles within Black leadership movements, but this does not properly address the complexity of this issue. Thompson argues: “However, underneath accounts that portray Creoles of color as a self-conscious black leadership, not ambivalent about their leadership roles, runs a parallel discourse of distrust

between Creoles of color and black Americans” (Thompson “History and Memory” 234). The schism between Creole and Black activism hinders the recognition of organized Creole resistance that addressed the complex manner in which white supremacy operated within the late nineteenth century. Creoles participation in struggles against segregation were not solely in an effort to be given access to whites only spaces, but as a starting point in identifying how to achieve equality. L.H. Welchel is in agreement with Cheryl Harris by noting *Plessy v. Ferguson* was part of the assimilation process that Creoles adopted as he states: “To continue their efforts to be accepted and assimilated into the White race, the Creoles of New Orleans staged a legal challenge to the doctrine of separate train cars for Whites and Blacks on the railroads. (Welchel 153). This continues the narrative that Creoles wanted acceptance by white society to be understood as white, but accounts within *The Daily Crusader* contest this by highlighting how Plessy identified as colored in order to emphasize the inability for racial constructs to define residents of Louisiana and the inefficacy of a system of racial classification in perpetuating racial inequality.

Creole activism transformed to more actively contest white supremacy in a more unified manner as a result of the outcome of *Plessy v. Ferguson*. Shirley Elizabeth Thompson and L.H. Welchel contend Creoles were forwarding assimilationist narratives in constructing the *Plessy* case, but I argue that Creoles resistance strategies evolved to recognize the need to address anti-Blackness. Thompson and Welchel stop short in addressing how Creoles challenged social constructions of race by arguing the *Plessy* case was planned as an act of protest as well as a legal challenge, but through a perspective that wished to privilege Creoleness in a way that mirrored the privileging of whiteness. Welchel argues: “The mulatto citizens committee selected Homer Plessy to test the constitutionality of the segregation laws. Tragically in their

blindness, the mulatto leaders offered a challenge to the doctrine of separate but equal, not in order to gain more opportunity for all Blacks but instead in hopes of gaining access to Whites-only areas for themselves” (Whelchel 154). Whelchel states that Creole activism challenged institutions that perpetuated racial injustice, but not with the hopes of achieving racial equality. He contends in this effort for reform there was no intention to challenge white privilege. It reinforced the constructed divide between Creoles and Black residents of Louisiana mirroring dominant views predicated on white supremacy by reducing this legal challenge to an attempt to access whiteness by Creoles rather than acknowledging that they were challenging constructions of race and adopting a survival strategy to contest their marginalization. The deep-rooted divisions that were created through the institution of slavery were deepened through the chosen segregation of Creole people from the Black population. Unfortunately, in this challenge to racial segregation by noting the limitations of racial classification, there was not an explicit recognition of how to combat anti-Blackness, which is a crucial step in dismantling white supremacy. Within this complicated history of social activism and the loss of the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case where the system of racial segregation was upheld, Creole people were confronted with the reality that their plight on account of their race could not and should not be separated from the collective action of Black activism. Creoles were not legally successful in truly challenging dominant ideologies and white supremacy, but the *Plessy* case nevertheless represented a critique of social constructions of race in the decades after emancipation.

In response to hegemonic constructs of race in the United States that rely heavily upon dichotomous thinking that place limitations on how people can identify racially, hybrid identities have developed to challenge the binary of Black and white. In a time where the “one-drop” rule was used to characterize all those with any form of Black ancestry into the category of Black,

residents of New Orleans began to identify as Creole to acknowledge the impact of Spanish and French colonialism in Louisiana in respect to their mixed heritage ⁸. Alice Walker notes how the sexual trauma of the Black past is seen in the mixed heritage of Black people, although there is resistance in recognizing it because of the stigma and shame of rape as well as the connection to our oppressors ⁹. There are many mixed-race formations that have often gone unacknowledged due to this stigma as well as the limited established racial categories. The hybrid identity formation of Creole identity resists dominant understandings of race that fail to acknowledge how colonialism has resulted in a *mestizaje* or mixing of races, but Gloria Anzaldúa notes that through an identification with the *mestiza* consciousness we are able to challenge the constructed borders placed upon cultural identity ¹⁰.

Creole identity politics that relied on understandings of “passing” or remaining separate from Black residents in the city had proven unsuccessful but had solidified the role of Creoles as a negotiated identity. This negotiation relied on working within the binary of the South, but instead of identifying with whiteness and connections to European ancestry, the deep connections to racial uplift were embraced. This negotiation is seen throughout the popular press leading into the twentieth century as Shirley Elizabeth Thompson investigates these connections in her book *Exiles at Home*. She describes: “Despite their inconsistent approaches and undesirable outcomes, the Creoles of color associated with *l’Union* and the *Tribune* [leading publications in New Orleans] invested themselves fully in the liberating aspects of Creole identity, thus bequeathing to us a particularly substantial and useful legacy” (Thompson “Exiles at Home” 260). In the early 1860’s the liberating potential of print publications was realized in

⁸ (Guenin-Lelle 91).

⁹ “In the Closet of the Soul.”

¹⁰ *Borderlands: The New Mestiza: La Frontera*.

affirming Creole cultural identity and combating inequality leading to the formation of activism networks. The problematic history of Creole culture has led to a complex process of developing activism that at times has worked to reaffirm dominant ideologies but has also evolved as necessary to actively challenge racial oppression. This evolution can be seen spanning across several publications and evolving even before the Civil Rights Movement began. Journalists and prominent Creole voices used Creole solidarity networks to draw connections and focus on the possibility for change that could be achieved by actively working to challenge the perpetuation of racial inequality. Their work, through publications, social clubs, and activist networks, aided in the creation of a unified response to racism. Publications highlighted the underlying contestation of dominant racial ideologies within all their forms of activism in order to create change that would truly challenge the true roots of inequality. Thompson elaborates: “In the midst of occupied and Reconstruction New Orleans -as chaotic, divisive, and unstable a setting as any- the journalists attempted to synthesize a response to violence and opportunity by tending to their deep roots in a city historically traversed by many competing national and diasporic traditions” (Thompson “Exiles at Home” 260). These distinct and segregated communities were able to unite through the role of journalists and the media in order to advance and transform a social movement for change.

Creole culture is related very heavily to Caribbean culture and this is a reflection of Louisiana’s role within the slave trade. As Roger Abrahams notes: “The best way to begin thinking about New Orleans as the rarified crossroads of artistic development in this hemisphere is to adjust our sense of geography, and visualize the city not as the bottom of the United States, but as the crown of the Caribbean” (Abrahams 1). The artistic expression that is perhaps most identifiable as being representative of New Orleans is jazz music. Jazz was born out of Creole

culture as well as Black culture Amiri Baraka describes this connection in his book Blues People: Negro Music in White America. Baraka notes how jazz evolved from blues in part because of a desire by Creole people to be represented in a more diverse way. They wanted to be recognized beyond the confines of the working class. Baraka states:

Given the necessary social involvement with American culture. Negroes themselves would have drifted away from blues since it no longer was an exact reflection of their lives in America. For the developing black middle class, it was simply the mark of Cain, and just another facet of Negroness which they wished to be rid of. But jazz, even with its weight of blues, could make itself available as an emotional expression to the changing psyche of the 'modern' Negro, just as in less expensive ways, it made itself available to the modern American white man. (Baraka 142)

Black and Creole people worked to redefine their role in society through the medium of music and the ways in which they expressed themselves artistically. This transition was captured through the form of jazz and its role as a hybrid music form as well as an artistic representation of aspects of Creole culture representative of the time.

In recognizing the significant aspects of Creole culture, one of the most notable visible representations is the celebration of Mardi Gras. Mardi Gras has direct connections to Catholicism as a celebration that occurs prior to the ritual of Lent, in which participants engage in celebrations and feast. This celebration occurs before committing to a personal sacrifice during the period of Lent, which culminates in the holiday of Easter Sunday. The actual festival is recognized as a reflection of rituals held during enslavement as Roger Abrahams notes: "Mardi Gras is but one of many festivals that grew not only from the process of creolization, but also from the few ways in which slaves were able to obtain a glimpse of New World freedoms. Slave

holidays seem to have existed even under the most repressive imperial regimes” (Abrahams 37). The taking to the streets in celebration was an artistic and social outlet of culture that existed even under the system of chattel slavery. This festival is one of the many that persist as tradition and its connections to Creole culture are prevalent within it. Abrahams notes the Africanisms present within the Mardi Gras celebrations today as he states: “And, not incidentally, in these a great many of the most African-derived features of performance have been maintained and embroidered upon” (Abrahams 42). The celebration is connected to Creole and Black traditions and the African aspects have been highlighted in manifestations of the festivals that have transformed it from a Catholic tradition to a distinctly Creole ritual.

In looking at representations of Mardi Gras in the media several aspects of the Creole traditions remain unacknowledged, Barry Ancelet states: “Unfortunately many who visit the Mardi Gras are simply fascinated with the strangeness of it all. They often do not seek out background information to help understand and subsequently explain the underlying complexities” (Ancelet 5). This lack of discussion of the many ways in which Mardi Gras is a festival stemming from slave holidays is seen in cinematic representations such as the documentary *Mardi Gras: Made in China*. While the film’s focus is to highlight the plight of workers in China who produce and manufacture the beads for Mardi Gras celebrations, Mardi Gras is represented by mostly white Americans who are tourists coming for Mardi Gras on the commercialized Bourbon Street. This is a very specific performance of Mardi Gras celebrations that is completely divorced from its historical, faith-based, and Creole roots and manifestations. The manner in which the context Mardi Gras is not fully explicated reflects the way that representations and understandings of Creole culture are far too often reductionist and fail to acknowledge the complex ways in which dominant ideologies are resisted.

Recognizing how Creole identity has been based upon negotiations and transformations, informs perspectives of Creole culture today. In the face of displacement caused by Hurricane Katrina and policies enacted in its aftermath, is Creole identity undergoing another necessary transformation? Arnold Hirsch poses a similar question about the fate of Creole culture in his article “Fade to Black: Hurricane Katrina and the Disappearance of Creole New Orleans” where he analyzes the threats to Creole culture that came prior to Katrina. Hirsch asks:

The key question then becomes: Can the Creoles survive in diaspora without a replenishing geographic base? Survival even with that base as it existed pre-Katrina was problematic. Creole institutions such as the oldest black Catholic parish in the country (St. Augustine's in Tremé), already threatened, found themselves damaged or forced to close their doors. (Hirsch)

There are many factors that may lead to what Hirsch describes as the disappearance of Creole culture including its complicated history, but it has persevered through conscious transformations. The displacement that has occurred as a result of the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina must be placed in conversation with understandings of Creole identity in recognizing how distinct cultural identities within the city can no longer operate within the space in the same way. Creole identity has evolved over time and this evolution can be seen in Creole culture and activism. Creole activism has reinforced white supremacy, but it has also recognized the importance of Black activism and challenged constructed racial binaries to truly challenge racial oppression. This evolution can be seen throughout publications and in hashtag activism online. Creole activism has persisted in a way that mirrors Creole identity as a whole by transforming how it challenges dominant modes of thinking and the oppressive systems in society.

With the displacement of New Orleans residents to locations outside of the city or the state, there is the prospect that Creole people will be unable to maintain their connection to the culture because the collective that can transform its meaning is disrupted. Despite the displacement there is an active movement to counter the disappearance of Creole culture. DuBois and Melancon highlight how:

A movement for the preservation of the Creole culture was established by groups of Creole activists, as exemplified by C.R.E.O.L.E., Inc., and the Un-Cajun Committee (both based in Lafayette) and by the Southern Heritage Foundation (in Opelousas). These organizations claim that too much attention is being paid to the White Cajun culture, at the expense of the CCrs [Colored Creoles] and BCrs [Black Creoles] who are the major representatives of Creole culture today. (DuBois and Melancon 247)

There has been active resistance against erasure and correcting the misrepresentation of aspects of Creole culture from Mardi Gras celebrations to racial divisions, that further marginalize Creole communities. Creole identity has racial divisions as seen by DuBois and Melancon's use of terms denoting colored creoles and Black Creoles. These imposed divisions highlight the ways in which Creole culture transcends racial constructs. The media, from print publication to social media, plays a prominent role within the context of Creole culture because of its function in creating unity among the many separate Creole communities in New Orleans, Louisiana and throughout their activism networks. Media and social media networks are recognized as a means for those who are displaced to feel connected to the city and their Creole culture. Social media platforms provide agency for Creole people and organizations to define their identity and mobilize. The disappearance of Creole culture is affiliated with the displacement caused by Hurricane Katrina, but the closure of Creole institutions was occurring prior to this national

disaster. Creole identity is complex, and its history is rooted within systems of inequality, but it has survived through its ability to adapt and progress to directly address the needs of the community. Creole identity has also created unity through a more complex understanding of conceptions of Blackness as a cultural identity within the struggle for racial justice. Within my work I will highlight Creole activists and activism networks from colonization to the present day as counterstories to the dominant narrative of a racial binary within the American South. These counterstories emphasize the hybridity of Creole identity and note the significance of Creole culture within Louisiana in contesting dominant narratives in continuing the push for change.

Chapter Outlines

Chapter 1: Defying Binaries: A Genealogy of Creole Identity

The first chapter focuses on defining Creole identity within the state of Louisiana specifically from its colonial roots to the period of enslavement as a designation taken on by a class of emancipated people and maroons as well as its role during the period of legalized segregation. During the period of enslavement Creoles often resided in maroon communities, which were autonomous and able to persist despite legal attempts to abolish them. Creole identity has evolved over time from an identity synonymous with being free from slavery and the privileges of belonging to a free class into a construct defined by attempts to attain the privileges associated with whiteness. The problematic history Creole identity played within racial politics will be explored. Creoles resisted dominant ideologies, but simultaneously many Creoles worked to uphold oppressive systems. Despite resistant and conforming practices existing within the space and during the same time periods, there is clearly an evolution in the way that Creoles adopted these different survival strategies. Although Creole identity was defined primarily as a means of differentiation to separate colonists from later generations or as a way to differentiate

Creoles from the enslaved, the power of these labels seen through discrimination and segregation must be further explored to recognize the manner in which definitions of Creole evolved over time.

In the first chapter I will contextualize Creole identity through tracing its usage to recognize its evolution throughout Louisiana over time by using historical evidence from primary and secondary sources. I will focus on different periods of time to note the transformations in the definitions of Creole identity in addition to the transformations seen within their lived experiences. I will analyze these historical moments through the lens of the theorists Gloria Anzaldúa, Kimberle Crenshaw, Joy DeGruy Leary, and Frantz Fanon to recognize how Creoles resisted dominant categories in a myriad of ways that have been previously overlooked.

I will identify the roots of Creole activism prior to the formation of recognized social movements, such as the Abolition Movement or the Civil Rights Movement. From its first documented usage, Kevin Fox Gotham notes that up until the late 1800's the term Creole was used in Louisiana to identify those who were indigenous to the state ¹¹. Faustina DuCros notes in her oral history of Los Angeles migrants from New Orleans how: "Migrants often used Creole and Louisianan synonymously and they viewed their convivial practices as markedly ethno-regional" (DuCros 841). The term has been used to describe individuals from Louisiana regardless of racial or ethnic identity signifying a recognition of a distinct Louisiana culture. Creole has been utilized as both a racial categorization and to denote a culture specific to the region. John Lowe's use of the term "the Creole controversy" highlights the way in which Creole identity and early activism failed to challenge hegemonic conceptions of race and the privileging

¹¹ *Authentic New Orleans: Tourism, Culture, and Race in the Big Easy.*

of whiteness. The case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* displayed how Creole people highlighted the social constructs of race in an attempt to challenge racial segregation. The role of assimilation in Creole politics also reflected the assimilationist narratives seen throughout Black activism of the time that relied upon a politics of respectability, which led to aspects of Creole activism reaffirming negative Black stereotypes. The attempts made to challenge the racial binary of the U.S. South rested upon an unchallenged notion of the inferiority of Blackness, that resulted in Creole activism from prior to the Civil War and during the period of the Civil Rights Movement perpetuating notions of racial inequality.

As Tyina Steptoe asserts: “Gens de couleur libre [free people of color] considered themselves to be neither white nor black, but a combination of both races. Their descendants, who referred to themselves as Creoles of color after the Civil War, continued to stress their racial and cultural hybridity” (Steptoe). This hybridity is viewed as a mixture in a way that mirrors the *mestiza* in the borderlands that Gloria Anzaldúa identifies in her work.¹² Although some Creole people used the identity formation to distance themselves from Blackness, it must also be contextualized to show from its conception Creole identity was a means to challenge the dichotomy of racial identity that dominated the U.S. South.

Using the framework of a *mestiza* consciousness (developed by Gloria Anzaldúa) in order to recognize the political possibility of hybrid identity formations, I discuss the destabilization of the binaries of Black and white racial identities. Kimberle Crenshaw posits the term intersectionality to describe how people have multiple intersecting identities that define their life experiences¹³. Noting the connections between a *mestiza* consciousness and Crenshaw’s concept of intersectionality, I argue Creole identity has always acknowledged the

¹² *Borderlands: The New Mestiza: La Frontera*

¹³ “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color.”

importance of identity beyond imposed rigid categorizations. Creoles have strategically utilized the “common sense”¹⁴ as defined by Antonio Gramsci surrounding societal racial categories to challenge hegemonic structures.

Joy DeGruy posits the psychological concept of post-traumatic slave syndrome that has developed as a survival strategy and presents itself in different ways in Black communities today¹⁵. Frantz Fanon also focuses upon the psychological effects of racial inequality within his work *Black Skin, White Masks* to recognize the complexity of how dominant racial ideologies impact individual conceptions of self. In this chapter I expand on these concepts to note the psychological impact of racism and the survival strategies utilized by Creole-identified people. I also identify the ways in which scholars overlooked Creole activism’s challenge to dominant narratives and the role resistance has always played in Creole culture.

Chapter 2: Into the Archive: Resistance in *The Daily Crusader*

Often Creole identity, when it is represented, is limited to the realm of a historical yet mythical past as seen through a range of films from *Eve’s Bayou* to the imagery of Beyoncé’s visual album *Lemonade*. Often Creole culture is represented in a way that equates Creole identity with socioeconomic privilege or perpetuates a division of Creole from Black identity.

In the second chapter I delve into the archive of the Amistad Research Center to uncover the role Creole identified people in New Orleans and throughout Louisiana played within racial activism by noting the issues of ending racial segregation, discrimination in the criminal justice system, and political reform discussed in the publication *The Daily Crusader*. This publication was created with the aim of mobilizing people through a legal challenge to racial segregation by

¹⁴ Gramsci, Antonio. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*

¹⁵ *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America’s Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing*

Creole people. The issues discussed throughout its limited circulation (1889-1899) highlights the myriad of ways in which resistance has been an ever-present aspect of Creole identity. Creoles noted that dominant institutions were the tools of the oppressor in perpetuating racial inequality and laid out ways to challenge these systems mirroring the resistance strategies used to challenge colonization and slavery.

From the publications of *L'Union* and the *Tribune* of New Orleans in the 1860's, Creole identity has always been connected to activism and resistance. Preceding the Civil Rights Movement, when many Creole identified people fought for equality on principles of assimilation and passing, in print publications Creole people were discussing the injustice of racial inequality. Even during the period of enslavement Creoles were resisting imposed racial designations to create their own identity formation separate from the limited racial constructs created by the dominant class. Through pamphlets and popular newspapers activists discussed how their Creole identity was a vital part of their activism. As prominent Creoles fought for assimilation and class privilege, Creole publications publicly criticized these practices within their own communities. Events were orchestrated to promote unity between people of color to demand equality and address pertinent issues even the issue of police brutality was discussed in print prior to the Civil Rights Movement, in a way that mirrors Black Lives Matter activism today.

In this chapter I highlight progressive Creole activism that forwarded thinking in the fight against racial injustice and impacted the way this struggle is viewed today. Through my archival research I trace Creole activism through *The Daily Crusader* publication, a local newspaper that was in print following the Reconstruction period. I analyze the ways in which Creole activism evolved leading up to the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* as well as in response to this failed challenge to segregation. Creole activists continued to fight to end racial equality utilizing a

variety of political and social resources. Creoles created calls to action that focused on addressing institutional racism and challenging dominant ideologies that oppressed the marginalized. The publication highlights the voices of Creoles who called for a separation of politics from corporate interests and critiqued capitalism and its connection to upholding institutional racism. Far from merely embracing the status quo *The Daily Crusader* deconstructed dominant institutions such as the Lottery and criminal justice system in order to shed light on the injustices occurring against the marginalized and to mobilize communities to take action. I further explore Gramscian concepts of “common sense” and “organic intellectuals” to note Creoles resistance as a counterhegemonic moment. Forming an alliance between the masses and “organic intellectuals” through the medium of print publications in order to mobilize and inspire action against racial injustice.

Chapter 3: Counterstories: Creole Activism

The third chapter will build upon the historical activism traced through local New Orleans newspapers and publications from the period of Reconstruction onward through recognizing the vital role of two cultural institutions: religion and social clubs. In the first example, I examine the roles that religion and spirituality play within activism and Creole identity as a whole. Protesting racial injustice has been framed through the lens of religion through the protests against institutional racism in the institution of the Catholic Church as well as the emphasis upon guidance from the ancestors to address discrimination. The impact of the Catholic Church on Creole identity formation is significant, but this dominant institution has furthered racial inequality. Creoles organized to protest against the practices of the church despite its prominent role within Creole communities. Many of the critiques of the Catholic Church led Creoles to adopt their own belief systems that transformed Catholic practices,

African spiritualism, and protest discourse. Creoles formed spiritual circles that addressed injustice within their communities through the framework of a spiritual belief system predicated upon knowledge acquired through the experience of their ancestors. This ancestral knowledge was attained through the practice of séances to call upon spiritual enlightenment to ascertain the best path forward.

Religious clubs began as an extension of the Catholic Church, but often formed their own identities around a philanthropic cause. The creation of social clubs only helped to solidify connections between Creoles and united them in the struggle for equality. Activist networks formed out of these clubs and resistant spaces were created. The physical spaces of organized religion were utilized as meeting places in order to build and strengthen solidarity networks that worked to challenge dominant ideologies. Mobilization happened in the pews and as a result resistance happened throughout the region. I analyzed articles within *The Daily Crusader* that highlighted religious activism and critiqued the institution of the Catholic Church. Recognizing the ways in which this mobilization was facilitated through social networks and within local groups and clubs, the second part of this chapter examines the “organic intellectuals” found within social clubs and organizations who combated hegemony through the creation of networks used to further activism. I analyzed primary resources noting the role of social clubs and religious organizations in mounting resistance to hegemony to contest racial inequality.

I analyzed articles within *The Daily Crusader* that highlighted religious activism and critiqued the institution of the Catholic Church. Clubs and organizations transcended religion creating and furthering activism leading into and during the Civil Rights Movement. This social movement was a crucial time for Creole activism and strategies utilized by Creole organizations and associations focused on addressing hegemonic ideologies that oppressed and marginalized

populations on the basis of race. Practices of prominent social clubs were not always resistant and some of these clubs perpetuated oppressive ideologies, but it is crucial to recognize the powerful moments of resistance that were present within these spaces as well. To merely write off the institution of the Catholic Church and Creole social clubs as instruments to further dominant viewpoints fails to recognize the work of Creole activists in creating resistance strategies through Catholicism, spirituality, and the formation of organizations that challenged hegemony by drawing on “common sense” to establish an infrastructure. The “organic intellectuals” found within social clubs and organizations combated hegemony through the creation of networks used to further activism. I analyzed primary resources including flyers, print publications, and pamphlets to highlight the role of social clubs and religious organizations in Creole communities in mounting resistance to hegemony and dominant institutions in order to contest racial inequality.

Chapter 4: The Radical Potential of Creole Politics in the 21st Century

Throughout social media platforms users are able to create images and personas to represent themselves to others in a carefully constructed manner. Users can highlight their priorities and list the causes they are most passionate about in their introduction within their chosen platform. I perform a comparative analysis of the ways that Creole identity is performed online by focusing on activism within this platform to identify how it is presented within the realm of social media. Identity formation is perhaps even more visible on social media platforms and constructed Creole identities reflect how conceptions of Creole identity have transformed to fit the needs of today. I have focused on the same issues prioritized by *The Daily Crusader* in recognizing the evolution of Creole viewpoints on racial discrimination, discrimination in the criminal justice system, and political reform. I have found these categories have evolved within

activism and discussion online through an emphasis on the following topics: racial classification, Creole identity in global politics, Creole collectives' online presences, intersectionality in Creole activism, and religion and spirituality. Creoles have used the platforms of Twitter and Tumblr to create their own archive to reclaim narratives about Creole identity, combat misconceptions, discuss how to further anti-racism, and as a powerful tool for mobilization. As print publications operated within the nineteenth century to disseminate information and organize activism networks, social media has taken on this role within the twenty-first century to forward Creole resistance.

In this chapter I have searched the platforms of Twitter and Tumblr by tracing hashtags that have significance to Creoles including #Creole and #LouisianaCreole. I have chosen the text-based platform of Twitter and the more creative space of Tumblr to note the similarities and deviations from previous Creole activism. This analysis had its limitations as it only included posts that are made from public accounts and accessible to any users searching these hashtag phrases. I have emphasized current representations and understandings of Creole identity by users that maintain resistance against social constructions of race and dominant ideologies that uphold white supremacy. I have highlighted the ways that associations, social clubs, individual users, and religious organizations have transformed their strategies using the medium of social media.

Analyzing the role of racial and cultural identity within the realm of social media I have drawn upon Lisa Nakamura's *Digitizing Race: Visual Cultures of the Internet* and *Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity on the Internet* to argue how Creole identity functions as a digital counterstory to dominant narratives of race. I have drawn upon adrienne maree brown's concept of pleasure activism from *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good* in dissecting how

discussions of Creole identity have centered around the work, image, and figure of Beyoncé by recognizing the role of entertainment in empowerment. I have referenced the work of Shenesse Thompson in “The Subaltern is Signifyin(g): Black Twitter as a Site of Resistance” to contextualize the political space of Black Twitter and highlight how Twitter has been a powerful tool in shaping racial discourse and how Creoles have contributed to this dialogue. I have drawn on the concept of white supremacy as defined by Andrea Smith in “Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy” to note the complex manner in which it perpetuates inequality and the need to use diverse approaches in forming resistance. I have analyzed Creole activism and resistance strategies that build on the prior work of Creole activists on the same major issues within *The Daily Crusader* to note how Creole perspectives have evolved in discussing and enacting resistance strategies to white supremacy. Although some of these posts may not intend to forward activism, they are constructed by and for Creoles to challenge dominant norms using the tool of social media to engage in a dialogue and build a sense of community.

Chapter 1

Defying Binaries: A Genealogy of Creole Identity

It is important to define Creole identity because of its many contested meanings throughout the history of Louisiana. I have chosen to define Creole identity by centering the ever-present resistance within this identity formation in order to recognize its transcendence of imposed racial constructs and binaries. I have constructed a genealogy in this chapter by tracing Creole identity from its origin through the periods of French and Spanish colonization to American statehood to highlight the ways in which it has evolved to meet the needs of Creole communities. Throughout these transformations Creole resistance has transformed from an imposed identity to a shared culture throughout this time it has challenged the dominant racial classification system of the U.S. South. Creoles resisted colonizers, enslavers, and oppression through the creation of autonomous communities that were predicated on unity with the enslaved, although this solidarity would be tested as divisions arose based on colorism, classism, and ideological differences. Creole identity was imposed by French colonizers, but it brought together enslaved Africans from different tribal and language backgrounds to form a culture. Within this cultural construct under Spanish rule Creoles were able to escape enslavement and form maroon communities. As Louisiana became a part of the United States Creoles were on the frontlines fighting for Emancipation, struggling against racial segregation, and mobilizing activists in the struggle against white supremacy. I have drawn upon historians Gwendolyn Midlo Hall and George Washington Cable to analyze how Creole resistance persisted challenging racial inequality through the psychological perspectives of Frantz Fanon and Joy DeGruy Leary, through cultural perspectives by frameworks based on the work of Antonio Gramsci and Gloria Anzaldúa.

Creole, as used within the context of Louisiana, is a cultural identity that has developed in response to the systems of colonialism and slavery, which Creoles endured over time by adopting survival strategies. Creole identity was constructed within these oppressive systems and this context is a vital aspect of its formation. Stuart Hall notes: “Creolization always entails inequality, hierarchization, issues of domination and subalternity, mastery and servitude, control and resistance” (“Créolité” Hall 16). Creole is a reactionary identity born out of the racialized reality of the Louisiana territory. Despite its understanding as a cultural identity, it has been inextricably linked to race within the racialized binary of the U.S. South. Creole identity has evolved over time from denoting place of birth to a politicized identity. Often theorists disagree on the definition of Creole because it has changed so dramatically. George Washington Cable notes: “In fact, its meaning varies in different times and regions, and in Louisiana alone has, and has had, its broad and its close, its earlier and its later, significance” (Cable 38). This flexibility is in part due to its evolution and transcendence of imposed racial categories through forging a new understanding that did not rely upon a dichotomy but worked within the accepted racial constructions. Within this limited space Creoles were forced to define themselves within the terminology available to them, but in a new way. Melissa Harris-Perry gives the example of cognitive psychologists placing individuals: “in a crooked chair in a crooked room and then asked them to align themselves vertically”¹⁶. In this room individuals: “could be tilted as much as 35 degrees and report they were perfectly straight” (Harris-Perry 29). People define themselves based on their perception of their surroundings and Creoles have defined themselves within that “crooked room” by often utilizing understandings of race that have been imposed by dominant ideologies. It is crucial to trace the meaning of the term Creole in order to recognize

¹⁶ Harris-Perry, Melissa V. *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America*

the context in which it emerged and to acknowledge how it is perceived today. I will construct a genealogy of Creole identity within Louisiana to highlight its evolution from its origin during colonization to the manner it is recognized today. In this chapter I will trace forms of resistance present throughout Creole communities by highlighting Creole identity as a form of mestiza consciousness through the framework of Gloria Anzaldúa and as an intersectional identity as defined by Kimberle Crenshaw. I will also be utilizing the psychological conceptions of race posited by Joy DeGruy and Frantz Fanon to speak to the role of racial inequality in understandings of Creole identity. I define forms of resistance as any means that operated to challenge hegemonic constructions of racial identity and the perpetuation of racial oppression. I argue that Creole identity has often been dismissed as assimilationist perhaps because of its resistance strategies that have drawn on “common sense” in order to deconstruct understandings of racial identity. It is crucial to acknowledge how the role of resistance has been overlooked in discussions of Creole identity and I have chosen to highlight Creole methods of activism and defiance that confronted the social constructions of race from the very formation of Creole identity.

It is crucial to understand Creole identity in relation to hegemony and forms of resistance from its foundation on “common sense” as defined by Antonio Gramsci¹⁷. “Common sense” refers to the: “uncritical and largely unconscious way of perceiving and understanding the world that has become ‘common’ in any given epoch” (Gramsci 322). The ways in which we think about racial identity are accepted as a form of “common sense” and are often adopted uncritically as a form of truth despite their socially constructed nature. Gramsci notes how “common sense” is socially accepted but can rely upon folklore that is not rooted in truth.

¹⁷ Gramsci, Antonio. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*

Gramsci elaborates: “It means rather that common sense is an ambiguous, contradictory and multiform concept, and that to refer to common sense as a confirmation of truth is a nonsense” (Gramsci 423). Applying Gramsci to the struggle against racism may appear abstract, but in “Gramsci’s Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity” Stuart Hall argues: “Gramsci did not write about race, ethnicity or racism in their contemporary meanings or manifestations. Nor did he analyze in depth the colonial experience or imperialism, out of which so many of the characteristic ‘racist’ experiences and relationships in the modern world have developed” (Hall 8). However, his conceptions of the way in which hegemony operates and the methods to be utilized to contest the dominant ideologies present within it are useful in analyzing methods of resistance. Stuart Hall notes in his discussion of Gramscian concepts:

In fact, in national and ethnic struggles in the modern world, the actual field of struggle is often actually polarized precisely in this more complex and differentiated way. The difficulty is that it often continues to be described, theoretically, in terms which reduce the complexity of its actual social composition to the more simple, descriptive terms of a struggle between two, apparently, simple and homogeneous class blocs. (Hall 16)

Rather than describing this struggle as Creoles against the dominant class I frame it as resistance by Creoles against dominant ideologies and constructions of race. Creoles challenge hegemony through dismantling “common sense” to contest racial subjugation. Recognizing the formation of Creole identity and the process of Creolization as the foundation of resistance is the crucial first step in realizing its potential to make change within society to address the needs of the marginalized. It is crucial to identify the importance of dismantling “common sense” when identifying how to mount resistance. Stuart Hall asks:

Why, then, is common sense important? Because it is the terrain of conceptions and categories on which the practical consciousness of the masses of the people is actually formed. It is the already formed and ‘taken for granted’ terrain, on which more coherent ideologies and philosophies must contend for mastery; the ground which new conceptions of the world must take into account, contest and transform, if they are to shape the conceptions of the world of the masses and in that way become historically effective. (Hall 20)

In order to create long lasting change, it is necessary to address “common sense” to call it into question and reject its naturalization. Once it is questioned its constructed nature can be interrogated to disrupt the cycle of oppressive ideologies and practices. In the language form as well as the cultural identity Creole identity has challenged “common sense” and centered a new form of knowledge. Françoise Vergès recounts:

Creolization, we saw, occurred in situations of asymmetry between linguistic and cultural forms, it was the expression of the oppressed who took what they recognized as worthwhile in the ideas of the oppressors but turned these forms around to serve their goals of justice and dignity. Creolization was knowledge from below, an alternative epistemology to European domination. (Vergès 55)

I expand on the concept of knowledge from below and taking from or adapting practices based on dominant ideals within Creole communities. This practice is displayed within the realm of religion as Creoles transformed aspects of Catholicism into the distinctly Creole festival of Mardi Gras or within the artistic expression of jazz. This “alternative epistemology” was how Creoles molded their resistance strategies and mobilized others in fighting against segregation, discrimination, and racial injustice. Creoles took their imposed identity and created a culture, this

culture developed to combat racial classification in opposition to its creation as a means to maintain white supremacy. Working within the “common sense” to dismantle the oppressor’s ideologies, Creoles were able to create a new construction of identity that was not dependent on race and ethnicity but recognized the power this cultural formation has to persistently resist dominant ideologies that privilege whiteness. The first step in mounting resistance to racial inequality today is recognizing the historical role that resistance played in the lives of Creoles, as Françoise Vergès asserts: “Creolization as a common horizon is not obvious and we need, in light of current tensions and contradictions, to insist on its history of resistance” (Vergès 42). Through constructing this radical genealogy I will position Creole identity as a hybrid identity formation that has challenged colonization, segregation, slavery, and racial injustice through identifying racial constructs by establishing their own cultural identity in response to and despite their marginalization in order to redefine the way that race is socially constructed.

The origin of the term “Creole” highlights the vital role that birthplace played in the construction of Creole as a form of identity. Gwendolyn Midlo Hall states:

It derives from the Portuguese word *crioulo*, meaning a slave of African descent born in the New World...In eighteenth-century Louisiana, the term *creole* referred to locally born people of at least partial African descent, slave and free, and was used to distinguish American-born slaves from African-born slaves when they were listed on slave inventories. (Midlo Hall 157)

Creole identity was predicated on race, but it was used as a means of distinguishing who was born within the colony from those who immigrated. Creole identity within Louisiana, and New Orleans in particular, was based on the systems of colonialism and slavery. From its creation as an imposed categorization to its adaptations within the system of chattel slavery by enslaved

Africans, Creole identity is inextricably linked to hegemonic processes that place emphasis upon race and ethnicity as significant markers of identity. Although it was imposed, Creole identity began to evolve into a cultural identity that unified enslaved Africans from many different backgrounds within the state of Louisiana and is heavily grounded and understood in context to this past while changing over time in complex ways.

Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne de Bienville, known as a French explorer and leading colonizer, was the first local to use the word Creole¹⁸. Through the process of colonization, the term developed as a classification. Shannon Dawdy details: “The utilization of Creole as the dominant designation for native New Orleanians dates at least to the 1740s. Virtually abandoned by France in 1731, Louisiana saw no significant new immigration from Europe or Africa until the beginning of Spanish rule thirty-five years later.” (Dawdy 7). The term Creole was widely used, but with a lack of immigrants the designation was a colonial construct used to identify later generations that were born within the colony. Over time the population increased, and a significant Creole population developed. This development described by Diane Guenin-Lelle led to: “The emergence of Creole populations represents new peoples with a new social order resulting in a new hemispheric genealogy” (Guenin-Lelle 7). Through its origin as a term developed and utilized solely by the colonizers the term Creole has always existed through a state of double consciousness as defined by Frantz Fanon¹⁹. The colonized viewed themselves through this constructed label established by the colonizers and dominant ideology. As Fanon notes: “From one day to the next, the Blacks have had to deal with two systems of reference. Their metaphysics, or less pretentiously their customs and the agencies to which they refer, were abolished because they were in contradiction with a new civilization that imposed its own”

¹⁸ (Dawdy 163)

¹⁹ *Black Skin, White Masks*

(Fanon 90). This new social order and new civilization was the result of the new designation of Creole, which was a result of colonization. This state of double consciousness has a profound effect on Creoles' sense of self as W.E.B DuBois first described: "Such a double life, with double thoughts, double duties, and double social classes, must give rise to double words and double ideals, and tempt the mind to pretense or to revolt, to hypocrisy or to radicalism" (DuBois 122). Navigating distinct cultural identities within the confines of the colonizer's forced claim on the land and people of Louisiana through dictating their social, political, and racial attitudes deeply influenced the perception of Creoles and their perception of themselves. This double consciousness was a result of colonization and the complex viewpoints of the colonized that were an integral part of colonial society, yet marginalized. Although it was a new form of identification, Creole identity was originally based upon race and ethnicity, although it later developed as a cultural construct, continuing to center these characteristics in the construction of self. Identity predicated on race was naturalized by dominant ideology. Alfonso Gonzalez argues: "The power of hegemony lies precisely in its ability to make groups believe that the current state of affairs is natural and fixed" (Gonzales 69). The colonizers perpetuated racial classifications by continuing to rely upon them as they created a new system in the region as a means of establishing control, however as the colonial system was introduced new forms of resistance emerged.

When Louisiana became part of the United States, Creole identity emerged as a product of colonial labeling transforming into a means of differentiation between those who were born in the colony from the colonizing Anglo Americans. Gwendolyn Midlo Hall argues:

After the United States took over Louisiana, creole cultural identification becomes a means of distinguishing that which was truly native to Louisiana from that which was

Anglo. *Creole* has come to mean the language and the folk culture that was native to the southern part of Louisiana where African, French, and Spanish influence was most deeply rooted historically and culturally. (Midlo Hall 157)

The term Creole was a method to establish distance from descendants of early colonizers, which was a significant distinction because of the ethnic diversity present within Louisiana prior to American statehood. Creole came to signify all those within the region who were not Anglo encompassing many different races and ethnicities. Of course, relying upon the institution of an Anglo and Creole divide reinforces the use of a binary system, but it emphasizes the construction of Creole as a subjugated form or an “Other” that does not have access to the privileges of whiteness. This division formed the basis of understanding Creole as an intersectional identity transcending other racial and ethnic differences in establishing a unified identity. Through the introduction of a new dominant class, notably Anglo Americans, a diverse population of people came together under the construct of Creole standing in opposition to Anglo. Although Creole classification was common in periods of colonization within Louisiana, its meaning evolved after the Louisiana Purchase when Americans were dramatically increasing in number. As Nathalie Dessens explains:

Creole was always an important denomination in New Orleans, definitely in the colonial period, but also, and maybe increasingly so, in the early American era, because it was used to designate the established residents of Louisiana, as opposed to all the newcomers—mainly Anglo-Americans, the new owners of the territory, but also all the foreigners, French or otherwise, who had come to settle. (Dessens 188)

Creole was viewed in opposition to Anglo American adding to the racial and ethnic divisions within Louisiana, but also reinforcing the legacy established by Creoles in Louisiana who had

resided in the territory during the changes in governments and colonizing forces. “The term became politicized in antebellum Louisiana, as more and more of the Louisiana-born francophone population self-identified as Creole in order to build solidarity in the face of the Anglo-American onslaught” (Cable 15). Creole identity was based on spoken language but became a unified identity as the Louisiana territory once again saw a change in government. Language, but more broadly an intersectional culture created out of a unique Louisiana experience during colonization and prior to American statehood unified residents from different racial backgrounds.

Despite its connection to a shared language, Creole became a more inclusive term for those who did not identify with the new Anglo-American residents immigrating to Louisiana. Its evolution to an umbrella term for many residents that identified as native to Louisiana broke linguistic barriers. Dianne Guenin-Lelle notes: “The Creole identity transcends gender, class, and even race” (Guenin-Lelle 148). Despite its imposition during colonization based on a “common sense” that defined Creole as a racial and ethnic identity formation, Creole became a blanket term for the marginalized standing outside of whiteness. Transcending these constructed divisions highlights Creole’s intersectional foundation and its reliance on a new perspective of identity parallel to a mestiza consciousness. Despite its openness there are contested limitations to Creole identity. It differs from the term “mulatto” even though these terms were used within the same periods of colonization and enslavement. Mulatto was applied with clear racial boundaries; it was a designation that recognized one parent was considered white and the other parent was identified as Black ²⁰. At times it had different meanings, but all refer to a mixed-race status with each parent identifying or being identified as having a differing racial background as

²⁰ (Mills 14)

the basis of claiming a mulatto identity. At times, mulatto refers to any mixed race combination, but often refers to those consisting of African and Native American descent.²¹ The important distinction between mulatto and Creole is that mulatto was developed as a means of perpetuating the one drop rule to acknowledge a heritage with any African ancestry without any other shared aspects of culture. Diane Guenin-Lelle elaborates: “The term mulatto refers to the racial lineage of an individual, their degree of blackness and how much of ‘the tar brush’ they possess, and follows the caste system where ‘mulatto’ refers to being half black, ‘quadroon’ as being one-quarter black, ‘octoroon’ being one-eighth black, and so forth” (Guenin-Lelle 91). Mulatto was designed to recognize a considerable degree of blackness rather than a cultural identity. Even when the distinct fraction of Black ancestry could not be traced, the term denotes what is considered to be a significant percentage but is not limited to individuals who identify as half-Black. The distinction made between Creole and mulatto is significant as well as the distinction between Creoles and Cajuns. Creole is a widely applied term, George Washington Cable details: “and yet the word has its limitations. The Creoles proper will not share their distinction with the native descendants of those worthy Acadian exiles [Cajuns] who, in 1756, and later, found refuge in Louisiana” (Cable 38). There is a critical distinction between Cajuns and Creoles that is often conflated, however, the acknowledgement that Cajuns are descendants from Canada formed a major division between these groups. Cajuns are identified separately from Creoles as often Cajuns were identified as Anglo Americans. This racial distinction is connoted in opposition to Creole identity that transcended racial boundaries where Cajun identity implied a clear racial designation. Although several ethnic and racial groups can identify as Creole, there are ethnicities that are excluded from Creole identity. This is noted by Cable as he writes:

²¹ (Hall 335)

“...while there are French, Spanish, and even, for convenience, ‘colored’ Creoles, there are no English, Scotch, Irish, Western, or ‘Yankee’ Creoles, these all being included under the distinctive term ‘Americans’” (Cable 38). Creole identity was formed around a shared language and culture but continued to be molded in opposition to other local identities. There are limitations to Creole identity that have developed in order to distinguish Creole culture from Anglo American, Cajun, and mulatto identities.

Creole identity has been contested due to its evolution and its politicization throughout different historical moments. The role that race plays in Creole identity has resulted in controversy and contestation in response to attempts to whitewash the legacy of Creole identity without understanding the context in which it emerged. Gwendolyn Midlo Hall acknowledges: “Charles Barthelemy Roussève, the Afro-Creole historian writing in 1937, devoted considerable attention to disproving the claim of white scholars that the word *creole* in its noun form was used only to designate whites of pure French and Spanish ancestry born in lower Louisiana” (Hall 158). Creoles were never exclusively white or only consisting of the socioeconomically privileged within society, but there was a connection to French colonization that formed the foundation of Creole identification. It is important to note that it was French colonizers that imposed this categorization, but it was later accepted as a cultural construct. The connection that Creoles have with France was often a one-sided imagined or desired link to the French empire as Creoles occupied what Dianne Guenin-Lelle terms as an “in-between space”²². The “in-between space mirrors what Anzaldúa terms “la encrucijada” or “the crossroads” where she notes Mexican-Americans occupy as they are not fully recognized as Mexican, but not accepted as American either. This crossroads or “in-between space” represents where Creoles are not

²² (Guenin-Lelle 46)

recognized by France and yet often not recognized as African American or Black²³. Guenin-Lelle elaborates: “The ‘in-between’ space created a colonial capital unique in how it was built upon connections to the French colonizer, real and imagined, while it promoted local agency that was a Creole product” (Guenin-Lelle 46). This local agency is unique to Creole experience but is inextricably linked to the culture of the colonizer. This act of creation is described by Anzaldúa as: “*Soy un amasamiento*, I am an act of kneading, of uniting and joining that not only has produced both a creature of darkness and a creature of light, but also a creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings” (Anzaldúa 103). Creoles were able to create new definitions and contest old ones by defying the binary they were placed within by dominant ideological constructs attempting to limit the possibilities of identification. Through challenging these limits Creoles radically declared their own identity within a term of identification that had been imposed on them to uphold a colonial system that further marginalized this population. Creoles worked within the confines of “common sense” in the dominant framework by utilizing the label provided by the colonizer to construct a new understanding of cultural identity through a formation that resisted a dichotomous categorization of racial identity. Within this “in-between space” and through the act of “kneading,” an imagined connection to France persisted, through language and culture, forming a unified identity that resulted in the creation of a new culture that transcended the colonial connection upon which it was based. Creole identity was formed in a way that was specific to the location and context of Louisiana and the people who resided within the former colony.

There are several contributing factors that helped form and shape Creole culture within Louisiana. Through its origin during the period of colonization it evolved during slavery as a

²³ (Anzaldúa 102)

classification of Creole slaves as a marker of their descent from African nations. Creole identity further transformed into a position chosen to form solidarity in the struggle against oppression, as colonial power shifted and changed hands. Creole's roots are from the period of colonization and enslavement and are shaped by that unique experience. Gwendolyn Midlo Hall points out the importance of this shared experience as she writes: "Both the proportions of particular African nations present in early Louisiana and the conditions in Africa, as well as Louisiana, molded the formation of Afro-Creole culture" (Hall 31). This shared background and experience was the basis of Afro-Creole culture. Creole identity was shaped by enslavement as well as the process of colonization, these shared traumas resulted in the feeling of solidarity and a sense of unity strengthened when new immigrant groups began to arrive. Nathalie Dessens notes the importance of the effects of colonization on the region as she argues: "Many observers name New Orleans the northernmost Caribbean city, accounting for this distinctiveness by its unique colonial past, which is partly true" (Dessens 214). Within the unique colonial experience of Louisiana, Creole identity developed as a response to the particular conditions of the colony and evolved as necessary as the territory took on new governments with new power dynamics. Creoles created resistance against these forms of subjugation from its formation of imposed hegemonic classifications founded on "common sense" principles of classifying people through labels based upon racial and ethnic divides, Creoles created a culture that transcended these limited markers in order to contest systems of domination, a constructed racial binary and the oppression of colored people.

French Louisiana 1682 -1763

In the period of 1682-1763 the French colonized Louisiana and brought enslaved African people to this territory. The enslaved came from many regions and tribes in Africa, but within

the context of slavery and the Louisiana territory came to identify as Creole. The imposed identity of Creole unified enslaved Africans from different countries and languages in an attempted erasure of their distinct cultures, but it produced a new culture. Using the identity forced upon them through the system of colonization and enslavement Creoles used the hegemonic construct and the “common sense” to create a unified identity in forming solidarity to challenge their oppression.

The enslaved were subject to oppressive conditions and resisted in a multitude of ways. The enslaved were governed by the colonizers who instituted laws to dictate their treatment and placed restrictions on them through a set of laws referred to as Code Noir. Under this repressive code enslaved Creole people mounted resistance to the colonial regime through utilizing legal arguments to fight for equality. Through the creation of this new cultural formation Creole slaves were able to unite and challenge this hegemonic code. Françoise Vergès argues: “Creolization was an unexpected, unpredictable consequence of the colonial slave trade and slavery. It was not a return to ‘roots’, a re-creation of a lost world, but a new creation” (Vergès 43). As Creoles embraced the new identity that had been placed upon them through colonialism and enslavement, they also used the discourse of their oppressors to establish legal recourse in order to challenge their marginalization within this new society.

The designation of Creole began within French Louisiana and was imposed by the colonial power.²⁴ Creole people found meaning in their identity through the formation of a culture that formed through social networks and a foundation of shared experience. Dianne Guenin-Lelle notes the importance of the way in which France gained control of Louisiana and its role within the formation of Creole identity. Guenin-Lelle writes: “French policies and

²⁴ (Dawdy 163).

(mis)management in its colonies intensified creolization with their disorderly, even chaotic, process of colonization. Newly arrived peoples had to rely on themselves more than any ‘mother country’ for their survival” (Guenin-Lelle 7). French colonizers influenced the culture of Louisiana, but local populations also adapted and altered aspects of the French culture, creating a unique culture of their own. This negotiated and hybrid formation of identity developed in response to the “*amasamiento*”²⁵ or kneading between cultures that colonization imposed upon Creoles. This process of kneading is the process of Creolization that occurred to reject the hegemonic erasure and displacement of the cultures of the enslaved. Françoise Vergès recognizes: “Creolization as a poetics of relation counters the devastation produced by the abstract discourse of European universalism which assigned rigid roles to colonized peoples” (Vergès 46). From the very formation of Creole identity Creoles have redefined the classifications placed on them as they worked together to fashion a culture as they were forced into slavery under the French colonial regime.

The process of colonization was not the only factor that enabled the creation of a new identity. The formation of a unifying identity was possible due to a shared background among the Creole slaves. Midlo Hall notes: “Bambara slaves were brought to Louisiana in large numbers and played a preponderant role in the formation of the colony’s Afro-Creole culture” (Hall 41). Midlo Hall details: “... Bambara were Mande peoples claiming descent from the Mali empire established by Sundiatta during the thirteenth century...” (Hall 41). Their Bambara ancestry heavily influenced Creole people as their culture was being formed living in a new land and within the institution of slavery. Gwendolyn Midlo Hall noted the revolutionary spirit that

²⁵ (Anzaldúa 102)

was an essential element of the history of Bambara people who later became Creole slaves. Hall details how:

During the late 1720's, when large numbers of Bambara were loaded aboard slave ships destined for Louisiana, the Bambara heroic tradition, the *fadenya* principle, validated above all in troubled times, asserted itself. They revolted at sea. After arriving in Louisiana, the Bambara maintained an organized language community, formed alliances with the Indian nations who were in revolt against the French, and conspired to take over the colony (Hall 55).

The Bambara people resisted enslavement as well as colonization by the French, generations later they would become Creole slaves adopting aspects of the culture and transforming it to fit their needs. The Bambara physically resisted being enslaved and organized revolts. These revolts persisted during enslavement through the creation of solidarity networks with Native Americans in fighting against the French colonizers. Outwardly, the rebellious attitudes of their past were not lost during enslavement, but they evolved through the development of new survival strategies.

As a colony of France, the Louisiana territory dramatically changed introducing a new government, economy, and political system. All of these changes resulted in the reliance upon slaves for labor as the colonists brought in large numbers of enslaved Africans to the region. As more generations were born within Louisiana of African descent, they began to adopt a Creole identity, not only denoting their new language, but the creation of a unique culture. Dianne Guenin-Lelle describes this as: “The demographic transformations occurring through this period of colony building were swift and profound, with new communities, indeed new peoples, being formed with their accompanying cultures, languages, and identities—all of which can be

understood as Creole, whose identity was forged by the creolization processes” (Guenin-Lelle 76-77). The unifying aspect of Creole identity has been central from its creation, as distinct groups were able to come together under this umbrella term. This solidarity was necessary to challenge the oppressive systems that further marginalized Creole people under French rule.

The Code Noir was introduced in 1724, consisting of laws specific to the Louisiana colony describing how those who were classified as being of African descent were to be treated, including the enslaved ²⁶. This system dictated how the enslaved were allowed to interact with others and greater society by placing restrictions within legal terms. Dianne Guenin-Lelle describes: “The slave economy built on the backs of Africans and their descendants operated according to colonial laws seeking to control all important aspects of a slave’s life” (Guenin-Lelle 8). These laws enforced the binary of white and Black by defining all those with any traceable amount of African ancestry to be Black. Code Noir also gave these two distinct races separate laws, placing most Creole people into the category of Black. As Shannon Dawdy notes: “White/black distinctions were built into the French design of New Orleans through the Code Noir of 1724, modified especially for Louisiana” (Dawdy 228-229). The introduction of a system of laws based upon two discrete categories of race had a significant impact on Afro-Creole people and free people of color who identified as Creole, imposing a racial category upon them that they may not have identified with. Code Noir attempted to erase forms of identity that were not rigid or fixed but had been adopted by Creoles of color. Even within the institution of slavery and the implementation of Code Noir, Creole people mounted resistance to the colonial power.

In 1763, slave owner, M. Macarty of Cannes Bruleés brought a legal case against fourteen of his slaves for running away and attempting to conspire against him. ²⁷ The enslaved

²⁶ (Crutcher 22)

²⁷ (Hall 203)

brought forth to testify displayed a knowledge of specific laws within Code Noir that granted them rights and was the basis of their legal defense.²⁸ The slaves were accused of running away and while living as fugitives stealing from their former master. The enslaved Creoles countered these legal charges by referencing the specific language of the Code Noir. They argued they had not legally run away because they had remained on a part of the master's legal property and that they had faced abuse by their master that was deemed illegal by the Code Noir. Gwendolyn Midlo Hall recounts the events through legal documents as she states:

In their testimony, the slaves exhibited a strong sense of justice and solidarity as well as an awareness of their rights under the Code Noir, which prohibited the whippings of slaves with a stick or any hard object. Several of the creole slaves denied they were runaways, because they remained on their master's property, in his *ciprière*. None of the twelve slaves interrogated tried to throw the blame on any of his fellow slaves. (Hall 204)

Their knowledge of legal terms and codes allowed them to work together in creating a unified resistance that was rooted in the imposed laws of their oppressors. The resistance was mounted in a strategic manner that utilized the language and rules set forth by colonizing forces to challenge the very system that sought to control them.

As seen in the testimony of Creole slaves, resistance strategies took on many forms, even legal discourse, despite the marginalized position of slaves within society. The case of M. Macarty and the rebuttal the enslaved were able to construct highlights the importance of the creation of social networks. Gwendolyn Midlo Hall notes: "This testimony reveals the slaves' adaptation to the cypress swamp, their awareness of their rights under the Code Noir, and

²⁸ (Hall 204)

solidarity among slaves who were blacks and mulattoes, creoles and Africans” (Hall 205). This unity across ethnic groups especially among the marginalized persisted within Louisiana in mounting resistance against the colonial powers. Gwendolyn Midlo Hall recounts the legacy of resistance that originated within this period, as she describes:

Colonial Louisiana left behind a heritage and tradition of official corruption, defiance of authority by the poor of all races, and violence, as well as a brutal, racist tradition that was viewed by its ruling groups as the only means of containing its competent well-organized, self-confident, and defiant Afro-Creole population. But it also left behind a tradition of racial openness that could never be entirely repressed. (Hall xiv-xv)

Creole slaves were able to mount resistance when faced with enslavement and colonization, the Bambara revolutionary spirit persisted and gained momentum by building solidarity across ethnic groups within Louisiana.

Creoles resisted the oppressive practices of dominant institutions by challenging legal discrimination through conforming to the language of the oppressors. Creoles created a united front by forming solidarity networks with Native Americans and other marginalized groups. Enslaved peoples unified to resist the imposition of Code Noir through standing together and working with each other, building the foundation to the formation of activist networks to fight against systems of oppression. Utilizing legal recourse and using the tools of the oppressor may be understood as Fanon suggests an appeal to being recognized by working within the construct of a white existence. It is only through the dominant group’s institution that Creoles could fight for equality and recognition as deserving of human rights. I argue Creoles used the “common sense” available to them based on the current legal codes, even though it was imposed as a system of control in order to challenge their marginalization. Their resistance should be

recognized as an evolution of the *fandanya* principle or the Bambara spirit that Gwendolyn Midlo Hall recounts, but it transformed into constructing challenges through the legal system that precedes organized efforts to legally challenge injustice that would occur much later in the work of Creoles forming a legal challenge to racial segregation in the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson*. Creoles used the dominant ideologies present within “common sense” from within the “crooked room”²⁹ they were forced into in a revolutionary way to construct their own understanding of self and utilize the legal discourse of their oppressors to advocate for their rights and fight against their enslavement and oppression.

Spanish Louisiana 1763-1803

During the years 1763-1803 the Spanish colonized Louisiana as a result of the Seven Years' War, as the territory took on a new colonial regime, Creoles protested this new colonial power by evolving their resistance strategies. Throughout this time period Creoles were often overlooked as people were categorized in ways that emphasized their amount of traceable African ancestry. Under Spanish rule Creoles continued to plan revolts against the colonial power and slave masters. Many enslaved Creoles escaped enslavement and formed maroon communities throughout lower Louisiana.³⁰ Creoles resisted through an organized escape to maroon communities that sustained themselves as a result of solidarity networks with the enslaved. The creation of these maroon communities challenged hegemony by working within it to create free communities that were sustained through the assistance provided by the enslaved. Entire communities of Creole maroons were able to live free through the creation of these

²⁹ (Harris-Perry 29)

³⁰ (Hall 212).

networks, however they were maintained by the constant work by the enslaved and the most vulnerable to help protect and aid these established societies.

The unified resistance that formed under French rule was only further strengthened when Louisiana became a part of the Spanish empire. Although Creole identity and many racially mixed peoples were not properly identified, the unification across races persisted. As Gwendolyn Midlo Hall describes: “The extent of race mixture and emancipation in French Louisiana has been minimized by excessive reliance upon Spanish censuses, which overlooked the passing of mixed-bloods into the ‘white’ race” (Hall 239). Despite the failure of records to note those who identified as Creole because of their insistence on the Black and white binary system of classification, racial grouping was the foundation of Spanish censuses. The Spanish imposed identities that were solely based upon traceable African descent. Midlo Hall continues: “The Spanish corporatist concept of racial hierarchy sought to create separate social groupings based upon varying degrees of race mixture, promoting the emergence of separate groups among the free population of African descent: blacks, mulattoes, quadroons, and pardos “(Hall 240). The introduction of new racial identities based upon degrees of African ancestry did not lessen the significance of Creole identity within Louisiana, but the lack of recognition by the Spanish colonial government may have worked to intensify Creoles’ revolutionary spirit.

Even though they were not openly recognized, Creole resistance was a vital part of the Spanish period. Dianne Guenin-Lelle asserts: “Throughout the Spanish period, the local Creole population overwhelmingly resisted Spanish rule” (Guenin-Lelle 97). As a new colonial power took over the region, Creole residents refused to acknowledge this transfer of power. Resistance took on many forms, but some resistance to Spanish rule took on the form of allegiance to France. This loyalty to the French was often explicit, Guenin-Lelle elaborates:

We have seen that names Dauphine, Burgundy, and Iberville Streets suggest the social collective remained connected to France, even when New Orleans no longer belonged to the French physically. Nonetheless, in the hearts of many living in the French Quarter, especially French-speaking Creoles, there was a stubborn resistance to let go of French connections that became more of a cultural and social construct living more in the collective imaginary world than in the physical one. (Guenin-Lelle 72)

Creole adaptations that explicitly identified their ties to France were created in response to the disconnect from France after the Spanish took control of the Louisiana territory, which emphasized connections to the former empire. Fanon notes the connection the colonized often feel to their colonizers because their world is dictated by the norms set forth by the dominant group. The colonized try to conform to the dominant norms to achieve the highest form of existence, which is a white existence. Although these imagined connections to France that Creoles held onto were deeply rooted within a colonial power and a system of oppression, it was a method to openly contest the power of the current colonial regime. Creoles challenged the current colonial government by reinforcing the hegemonic structures of colonization but in the process contested the new racial classifications of the Spanish government. As Spain gained control of Louisiana, they not only perpetuated the binary racial classification system of the French, but furthered racial divides by creating new classifications based on traceable African descent. These new classifications worked to further erase Creole identity. Diane Guenin-Lelle argues: “The trauma of French Creoles, abandoned by France when Louisiana was ceded to Spain, was exacerbated when the Creoles suffered further silencing and marginalization, lost amid the colonial hegemony that sought to control them” (Guenin-Lelle 101). The Spanish government’s insistence on racial classifications that reinforced racial divides overlooked Creole

identity and the possibility of hybrid identity formations. Feeling further marginalized by Spain, many longed for the former French colonial period believing that Creole identity was inextricably linked to a connection to French culture. As Guenin-Lelle asserts: “Once the locals were convinced that they could not negotiate with the Crown to have it reconsider its decision and take back Louisiana, France became a convenient trope of self-fashioning, allowing New Orleans Creoles to distinguish themselves not only from other Caribbean areas and their North American neighbors, but from Spain, their new colonizer” (Guenin-Lelle 83). Creoles of color embraced aspects of French culture as a means to reject Spanish colonization, but also created recognizable markers of Creole identity. I argue this was a survival strategy created as a result of trauma or as Joy DeGruy notes an effect of “post-traumatic slave syndrome”, in this case it is a direct response to the trauma of colonialism as well as enslavement. Despite the limitations of Creoles of color being accepted within French colonial society, there was an imagined relationship that Creoles of color were reluctant to dismiss and adopted tenaciously when a change in government was perceived as a threat to their cultural identity.

Creole resistance was a part of the very start of Spanish rule evident by the uprising that came to be known as the Rebellion of 1768.³¹ The resentment toward the new colonial power led to this rebellion in hopes that France could regain control over Louisiana. The rebellious spirit that formed the basis of Creole identity since their descendance from the Bambara persisted. Guenin-Lelle notes: “In fact, New Orleans Creoles attempted the first rebellion against colonial rule in the New World” (Guenin-Lelle 98). The Rebellion happened as Shannon Dawdy details:

In 1768 [when] a motley crew of Creole merchant-planters, second-generation colonial farmers, and urban tavern-goers of the maritime trades took to the streets of New Orleans

³¹ (Guenin-Lelle 98)

in revolt against the Spanish government's peaceful takeover of Louisiana. They sent the appointed governor packing for Havana. The revolt, however, failed when nine months later Spain sent a more assertive governor backed by 2,600 troops. (Dawdy XVII)

The Rebellion of 1768 led to the ousting of the Spanish governor, although it was not successful in expelling the Spanish, it was an organized effort that the Spanish had to respond to, which led to a military presence. Creole resistance continued not just against the colonial powers, but within the institution of slavery. A significant number of Creole slaves were able to run away and become maroons; Creoles represented a clear majority within the maroon communities of Louisiana.³² Gwendolyn Midlo Hall describes: "The maroon communities that developed during the last half of the eighteenth century consisted almost entirely of creole slaves, though large numbers of Africans were brought in under Spanish rule" (Hall 203). Despite the low status of maroons within society, the maroons living within these communities were able to live autonomously. Midlo Hall notes: "The maroon communities in the swamps of lower Louisiana, especially those near New Orleans, had become an extension of creole slave society, where the creole slaves openly asserted their control of their lives, their families, their property, and their territory" (Hall 212). Creole slaves resisted the institution of slavery and formed their own maroon communities where they were able to sustain their families even when under these oppressive systems of control.

As a result of the freedom formerly enslaved Creoles created within the maroon communities, Creoles began to be viewed as a threat to colonial society by the Spanish government. Midlo Hall details: "Both the syndic of the Cabildo of New Orleans and Governor Miró feared the establishment of a permanent settlement of maroons, as had occurred in

³² (Hall 230)

Jamaica” (Hall 212). These communities were tight knit allowing them to stay safe and isolated. Midlo Hall notes how their solidarity networks preserved these communities as she writes: “The strength of the family ties among Afro-Creoles, slave and free, black and mixed-blood, was recognizable by the syndic of the Cabildo of New Orleans” (Hall 220). The Spanish government recognized the complex networks that had formed and in response created militias, whose sole purpose was to capture maroons in an attempt to suppress the creation of maroon communities throughout the region ³³. The militias encountered obstacles in apprehending the maroons, as Gwendolyn Midlo Hall recounts:

The Spanish officials also discovered from ‘criminals whom we have apprehended that most of the maroons are creoles of this province’ who kinship networks extended into New Orleans and other settlements. Their family ties were so strong and their kinship groupings so numerous that free blacks and coloreds were afraid that the relatives of the maroons they might capture or kill would seek vengeance and retaliate against them.

Thus, the expeditions by the free black and colored militia had proved to be useless. (Hall 220)

The kinship networks of Creole slaves provided them safety from the laws implemented by the Spanish and their communities were maintained due to the power of these social networks.

Through familial relationships and solidarity Creoles were able to attain freedom from enslavement and live in autonomous communities depending on these social networks for resources and protection necessary for their survival. Despite the failure of the militia, efforts were still made by the Spanish to put an end to the maroon communities. Midlo Hall recounts: “Before [Governor] Miró left, he promulgated a special ordinance, on May 1, 1784, aimed at

³³ (Hall 220)

preventing slaves, free blacks, and mulattoes from helping the maroons” (Hall 221). The Amistad Research Center contained documents from the Spanish government dated April 30, 1784 signed by Fernando Rodriguez, Secretary to the Cabildo stating penalties for conducting any trade with the enslaved. This document also includes a passage directed towards free people of color stating:

That it also be ordered with reference to the free negroes or mulattoes that they cannot be recognized from one being slave or savage, for which the free negroes must always have with them a certificate of this government from the Judges or from the Commandants of their districts, if not, they shall be conducted to this City to justify their liberty.

(Rodriguez)

These restrictions were put into place to restrict the movements of free people of color and to attempt to impede the sustainability of the solidarity networks that maroons used in order to maintain their communities. The legal recourse taken by the Spanish government was not successful at putting an end to these maroon communities and the complex connections that were formed between the enslaved and the maroons persisted despite organized attempts to dismantle them through the passage of new legislation. Creoles created their own societies as maroons rather than live under the colonial powers as slaves and attained their freedom on their own terms. Françoise Vergès recognizes how Creole people created resistance strategies to fight for equality, Vergès argues: “They did not merely translate ‘European’ ideas about freedom and equality into ‘Creole’, but rather they invented heterogeneous practices and processes of freedom and equality” (Vergès 43). Creoles resisted enslavement through creating their own societies that were built upon solidarity with the enslaved, these communities can be understood as counterhegemonic. The maroons, predominantly Creole slaves during this period, continued to

resist the Spanish government and enslavement. Despite the various legal efforts of the Spanish government to limit the movement of all colored people to threaten the networks they had created and the creation of militias to disperse maroons in attempts to eradicate their communities, Creole resistance persisted.

One of these maroon communities was known as Bas du Fleuve, the area between the mouth of the Mississippi River and New Orleans which Midlo Hall notes, "...had an old, deeply rooted, heavily creole slave population" (Hall 205). The efforts to apprehend maroons in the region were not working, but the Spanish continued to fear the collective power of the many maroon communities especially Bas du Fleuve, which had the largest Creole slave population. Midlo Hall argues: "The Spanish authorities were concerned that the maroons had formed several bands of considerable numbers in various places in *el monte*, especially in Bas du Fleuve at a place the maroons called Gaillarde Land, far from the settlers' cultivated lands" (Hall 212). Within Bas du Fleuve resided the oldest Creole slave population and its location was extremely important to the Spanish.³⁴ This Creole slave population was viewed as the most threatening because of its strategic location, size, and how deeply rooted it was. Midlo Hall describes how the Spanish government perceived this community as a threat due to: "The danger the maroons posed was the destruction, not of the colony, in which they had an important stake, but of slavery, at least for the creole slaves of the colony" (Hall 226). The Spanish feared the power the maroon community had because a successful revolt would threaten the institution of slavery within the entire colony due to its vast size. Dismantling the Creole maroon communities was a higher priority for the Spanish government because their existence was viewed as a threat to

³⁴ (Hall 206)

colonial power, Creole resistance had the ability to jeopardize the structure of colonial society within Louisiana.

Creoles were viewed as a threat to the Spanish colonial power because of their establishment of these maroon communities and their strategic undermining of the Spanish government through their connection to the colonial French past. Throughout the Spanish period Creole culture did not only rely upon an insistence on connections to the French colonial power, the enslaved preserved their connection to their distinct African cultures. African traditions were embedded within Creole culture highlighting the hybridity of Creole identity and its inextricable link to African ancestry. African influence was seen within the realm of religion. Midlo Hall notes: “Fon and Yoruba religious practices deeply influenced the culture, accounting for the emergence and resilience of voodoo in Louisiana” (Hall 302). The African presence within Creole traditions is apparent through the Spanish period, perhaps because the Spanish censuses did not often distinguish Creole slaves from African slaves, but rather utilized new terms of identification.³⁵ Gwendolyn Midlo Hall describes her analysis of the Pointe Coupee documents made up of a collection of slave inventories and emancipation documents from Point Coupee a remote settlement in Southern Louisiana. Midlo Hall details: “The Pointe Coupee documents, distinguish four racial categories among people of African descent: *nègre*, *mulâtre*, *grif*, and *quarteron*. *Nègre* meant entirely black; *mulâtre* meant half white and half black; *grif* meant a mixture of black and Indian; *quarteron* meant three-quarters white and one-quarter black” (Hall 262). The divisions based upon racial mixture were not the only imposed identities during the Spanish period. Midlo Hall recounts the Spanish attempt at:

³⁵ (Hall 262)

Slave control, never easy in colonial Louisiana, became increasingly difficult during the 1790's. Masters in Pointe Coupee built upon several themes in order to divide and rule their slaves. They created and tried to maintain a hierarchy of status, placing mixed-blood creole slaves over black creole slaves and all creole slaves in a privileged position over Africans. (Hall 318).

The Spanish insistence on racial classifications based upon degrees of blackness placed Creole slaves in a position of privilege, but it was at the expense of those classified as primarily African and those who were classified as Black. The Spanish attempted to define Creole as merely racially mixed and constructed a racial hierarchy that privileged mixed race identities. When legal recourse was not successful in limiting the agency of Creole slaves and maroons, the colonial power relied on racial divisions to mar the unified front constructed by enslaved Creoles that had sought to drive out Spanish forces and posed a threat to the institution of slavery within the colony. The power of Creole resistance is shown in the many organized attempts by the Spanish government to regulate, constrict, and delegitimize the community work of Creoles in actively creating their own spaces and networks in the struggle against oppression.

Resistance against the Spanish was highly organized and persistent, but there were documented incidents where Spain ceded rights to the enslaved, perhaps in an effort to pacify slaves in hopes of stopping a rebellion. Gwendolyn Midlo Hall details: "However, the Spanish legal system allowed slaves the recourse of fleeing to New Orleans to complain against their masters, and there is evidence that sometimes discreet steps were taken to protect the slaves when they return" (Hall 312). This legal recourse was to address the maroon communities without harsh punishment in hopes of convincing the maroons to return because attempts to apprehend them had proven unsuccessful. Hall continues: "Spain was eager to project an image

as a protector of the slaves because of the fragility of its control of Louisiana and its reliance upon the people of African descent for loyalty, intelligence, and defense” (Hall 332-333). The Spanish feared rebellion due to the revolution in Saint Domingue and drew parallels between these two distinct Creole cultures. Nathalie Dessens notes how these parallels were noted in the media as she asserts: “When events made it necessary for the various Gallic communities to join forces, even the newspapers seemed to have willingly erased the distinction between Louisiana and Saint-Domingue Creoles” (Dessens 207). The fear of losing the colony as the result of a slave rebellion fueled antagonisms creating paranoia that the maroons as well as the enslaved were organizing revolts leading to what is referred to by Gwendolyn Midlo Hall as the Pointe Coupee Conspiracy. The revolt was planned but not fully realized, Hall argues: “It [the planned revolt] was led by the most skilled and trusted slaves: by the *commandeurs*, by mulatto slaves, who often played the role of police on the larger estates, and by the creole slaves” (Hall 374). Creole slaves you had been afforded a level of privilege were among the organizers, despite the imposed divisions intended to threaten the creation of unified resistance.

Even though the revolt was never enacted the uncovering of this plot served to justify fears of the slave masters and colonizers that the dominant systems would be challenged by the enslaved and the maroon populations. Midlo Hall details: “Historical myths about the Pointe Coupee Conspiracy of 1795 were deeply implanted into the consciousness of white Louisianans. They became the cornerstone of ideology justifying racist violence and oppression of Afro-Louisianans and of whites who opposed slavery and racism” (Hall 344). The Spanish government made several attempts to put an end to the revolutionary spirit as the resistance of enslaved Creoles was conflated with the revolution further by Creoles of Saint Domingue. The colonial government attempted to create division among slaves, apprehend maroons, and to stifle

resistance. Although Creole resistance persisted the Spanish's concerted efforts did have an impact in creating divisions that would become more pronounced over time. Creoles created communities that relied upon the formation of solidarity networks among the marginalized and resisted the divisions imposed by hegemonic ideologies of race and the institution of slavery.

After the Louisiana Purchase/Antebellum Louisiana 1803-1865

During the period of new American statehood Creole identity took on new meaning. The racial divisions imposed by colonial powers creating a racial hierarchy had persisted leaving lasting schisms between Creoles and other people of color. The privileging of mixed-race identities had caused divisions amongst colored people and Creoles. There were Creoles fighting on the side of the Union army as well as the Confederate army in the American Civil War. In a postcolonial society Creoles were divided on how to proceed in mounting resistance, some adopted strategies of conformity to hegemonic institutions while others fought to overthrow slavery in a variety of ways. There are a multitude of reasons why Creoles had differing or even conflicting viewpoints on significant issues and why their actions must be contextualized to note how these stances developed as survival strategies and acts of resistance.

After persevering through two different colonial governments, Louisiana was now changing demographically with the migration of Anglo Americans. Nathalie Dessens recounts: "New Orleans was definitely already a Creole city when the Americans took over Louisiana. Native, African, and European cultural traditions had blended to produce a syncretic culture, already specific to New Orleans" (Dessens 209). When Louisiana became a part of the United States and no longer under the French or Spanish colonial powers, Creoles were hopeful for more freedom. Michael Crutcher notes: "Following the Louisiana Purchase, Creoles of color confronted Americans with demands for equal citizenship" (Crutcher 26). The privileged status

that the colonial governments had assigned to Creoles was also seen within some Creoles' socioeconomic status. Caryn Cossé Bell asserts: "Under colonial conditions, white men had often bequeathed land and slaves to their black mistresses and racially mixed children. Interracial relationships had formed the basis for the state's prosperous class of Creoles of color; during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, free persons of color accumulated considerable wealth and property" (Bell 50). The prosperous class of Creoles had attained some wealth due to their relationships or connections to white wealthy families. Even though these connections are often described as an affair or insinuate that Creole women played the role of mistress, the inability for the marginalized and in most cases enslaved Creoles to consent to these "relationships" must not be overlooked. The high socioeconomic status of some Creoles is inextricably linked to racialized sexual trauma and the devastating effects of white patriarchal oppression within Creole communities. The shaming of predominantly Creole women for these perceived relationships heightened the schism between those who identified as Creole and those who identified as colored. The legacy of Creoles occupying a privileged position formed during the Spanish colonial period strengthened the divide between Creoles and colored locals, despite the fact these two identities are not mutually exclusive. This socially constructed divide had historical roots from the imposed racial hierarchy of colonizers, but impacted the newly American inhabitants, as Gwendolyn Midlo Hall asserts:

By the nineteenth century, the mixed-blood creoles of Louisiana who acknowledged their African descent emphasized and took greatest pride in their French ancestry. They defined *creole* to mean racially mixed, enforced endogamous marriage among their own group, and distinguished themselves from and looked down upon blacks and Anglo-

Afroamericans, though their disdain stemmed from cultural as well as racial distinctions.
(Hall 158)

Whether these perceptions of Creoles looking down upon other Black identified people are accurate is difficult to verify, but the divisions between these cultural and racial classifications grew out of many recognizable differences among these communities imposed by hegemonic constructs. These distinctions were built upon an imagined relationship to France and a system of racial classification that conflated Creole with racially mixed, allowing Creole people to distance themselves from blackness. Dianne Guenin-Lelle elaborates on this divide as she notes the shifting definitions of Creole identity: “After the Louisiana Purchase the term was redefined by the Creole elite to mean ‘white’ and only of French and Spanish descent, reminiscent of the Spanish codification of the *limpieza de sangre*” (Guenin-Lelle 88). Creole identity was separated from blackness and linked to the colonial powers that Creole people had resisted for over a century, even when faced with these divisions, not all Creoles adopted these ideologies and Creole resistance persisted. Some sought access to the privileges as whiteness by identifying as white and simultaneously challenged the perpetuation of the racial binary of the South, but either by identifying as white in a system that sought to oppress Creoles or by adopting a colored identity Creoles were drawing on the “common sense” racial knowledge to contest the limitations of this dichotomy.

Enslaved Creoles and Creole identified free people of color created a space where they could assert their autonomy and gather within their own environment within New Orleans referred to as Congo Square. This was a gathering space, which was extremely rare at the time because it was often explicitly illegal for slaves to gather in public, but this social space was permitted by law with the restriction that gatherings must occur on Sundays and only within the

limited physical space of Congo Square.³⁶ Michael Crutcher notes: “Most important, whether viewed as performance space or market area, Congo Square must be considered a place of active resistance to the dominant slave society” (Crutcher 28). Although they were enslaved, Creole people had a public space where they could interact outside the confines of the oppressive systems of power that governed their lives.

The conflation of Louisiana Creoles with those from Saint Domingue heightened during this time because of the direct influence the Haitian Revolution had on the region of the southern United States. Caryn Cossé Bell notes after the Haitian Revolution:

In New Orleans, the entry of Colonel Savary and other Saint Dominguan free black soldiers in the 1809 refugee movement strengthened the city’s community of free people of color. Above all, they introduced the city’s Afro-Creole leaders to a strain of radical republicanism that has triumphed over slavery and racial oppression in Saint Domingue/Haiti. Their assimilation into the free black population broadened and deepened the historical and cultural identity of the city’s Afro-Creole people. (Bell 42)

Free people of color influenced by the success of the Haitian people in fighting for their freedom saw an influx of significant leaders and political thought. The Creole population was asserting their autonomy within the space of Congo Square and realized the possibility of ending the system of slavery could be fully realized. Caryn Cossé Bell notes the prominence of Creole people during this period as she writes: “In Creole New Orleans, an intermediate class of free people of color had gained a measure of social acceptance under Latin European influences. Until the 1830s, the city’s liberal religious culture helped to delay the imposition of a sharply defined, two-tiered racial hierarchy” (Bell 43). Creole people were a direct challenge to the

³⁶ (Crutcher 28)

binary racial classification system of the south through interracial identity formations, the accumulation of property and high socioeconomic standing, and the creation of a distinct culture that defied Black and white classifications, Creole resistance took on many forms. Gary B. Mills argues: “They successfully rejected identification with any established racial order and achieved recognition as a distinct ethnic group” (Mills 14). Creole’s ability to transcend racial constructs and challenge them in a way that mirrors Gloria Anzaldúa’s mestiza consciousness highlights the radical formation of a cultural identity that resisted the system and the finite racial classifications that had been enforced. Even though Creole people were marginalized within dominant society, they were often able to take on privileges associated with white identity if phenotypically they were able to “pass” as white. During this period the practice of dueling to settle conflicts was popular among the privileged and also practiced by Creoles. The importance of honor was often the starting point in conflicts and to maintain honor, duels were held. Nathalie Dessens states: “According to New Orleans legend, it was a Creole specialty, and many of these affaires d’honneur were settled under the Dueling Oaks” (Dessens 60). Creoles adopted practices associated with Black and white culture, but often did not fully identify with either of these designations. A distinct Creole culture had emerged, but in the face of a deeply seated schism within the United States, Creoles took on opposing sides within the conflict.

During the American Civil War, there were Creoles fighting with the Union as well as the Confederacy. There is a myriad of reasons that Creoles enlisted in the war as a Confederate and it is not merely the result of the enslaved being enlisted by their slave owners. Creoles who were free may not have had an option in joining the war or may have joined out of fear. In identifying the motivations of Creoles entering the Civil War Caryn Cossé Bell asserts: “Still, fear of retribution was not the only factor in the decision of black Creoles to enlist in the Rebel military.

In some instances, Native Guards attributed their enlistment to fear of an invading army and ethnic pride” (Bell 127). Some Creoles felt allegiance to the Confederacy perhaps because of their ability to attain a level of privilege or their association with whiteness. It is impossible to know if the Creoles that enlisted as a result of ethnic pride exclusively identified as white, but they were dedicated to upholding dominant ideologies and would physically resist in order to maintain hegemony. Creoles who were able to attain a higher socioeconomic status commonly lost their property, belongings and status as a result of the war. Dianne Guenin-Lelle posits: “Another anomaly to New Orleans and other places where Creoles of color resided in the Deep South is that, most free people of color lost wealth and property during the conflict and never recovered their middle-class social standing after the war” (Guenin-Lelle 137). Creoles who had gained wealth and prominence within the region were devastated by the war and often could not recover. The loss of privileges by the Civil War and its outcome intensified the rift between Creoles and colored people. The abolition of slavery was not advocated for by all Creoles, but their positions in the conflict should not be easily dismissed as a fear of losing their privileges as free people of color. Creoles fighting in the war for the Confederacy did so for a multitude of reasons beyond an understanding of a deliberate choice by Creoles because it is premised on the foundation that Creoles had the ability to make a choice. Even though some Creoles enlisted with the Confederacy, I would not argue that they desired to uphold slavery or enlisted in order to maintain their own privileges because they did not all possess the right to decide whether or not they would be used as a tool to uphold hegemony and the dominant institution of slavery. However, in recognizing the status of some Creoles during this time period perhaps fear, associations with whiteness, and their emancipated status did play a crucial role in impeding

Creole resistance preceding and throughout the Civil War, but it did not cease to evolve as a powerful force under American statehood.

Louisiana: Reconstruction and Civil Rights, 1866-Present

During the period of Reconstruction beginning in the year 1866, the division between Creoles and newly arrived Americans became even more pronounced. American is noted as an identity separate from Creole because Creoles that had resided with Louisiana throughout enslavement and colonization identified primarily as Creole in opposition to Americans that had more recently relocated to this region. This division was echoed among the marginalized populations that had unified in the past to resist the system of slavery, but a schism had formed between Creoles and colored Americans. This separation was partly a result of the practice of “passing” for white and gaining access to privileges associated with whiteness by many Creoles. It is also the result of colorism and furthering dominant oppressive practices within Creole communities. However, although some oppressive practices were perpetuated, simultaneously there were acts of resistance challenging racial inequality, in some occasions the tactics of this resistance resulted in the widening of a racial divide. Creoles drew upon the established “common sense” of racial classification in order to challenge the social constructions of race and redefine the limited perspective that confined race to a Black and white binary system in order to contest white supremacy. Creoles constructed a legal challenge against an adherence to racial classifications that fail to recognize the significance of a cultural formation to Creoles’ sense of identity in the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, where a colored Creole who was phenotypically white contested the imposition of racial classifications by noting the inability to police racial categories or use race as a means of differentiation.

The uniqueness of Louisiana and the characteristics of the Creole population were threatened by the outcome of the Civil War, as Gary B. Mills details: “By law and social custom, the black and the part-black, whether slave or free, were usually relegated to the same social status and frequently displayed the same lifestyle and personal philosophy. The primary exception to this general rule was found in Louisiana, although echoes existed throughout the coastal regions of the Gulf South” (Mills 14). The exception of Louisiana Creoles displayed in the gatherings of Congo Square or the development of maroon communities was seen during the period of enslavement and in the aftermath of the Civil War, Creole identity seemed to conflict with an American identity. George Washington Cable argues that the evolution of Creole identity was further by American interests as he writes: “The conversion of the Creole three-caste system into the racial binary of the Anglo South came mainly from American, not Creole, pressure” (Cable 19). Creole identity was often overlooked during the period of Reconstruction as the racial binary was heavily policed. Creole identity was viewed as incompatible with an American identity and synonymous with the colonial past often misrepresented as a defunct colonial construct. This incompatibility resulted in tension. This tension manifested within the leadership of the region, Nathalie Dessens argues: “There was also often a clear political opposition between the Creoles and the Americans and the struggle for the control over institutions and elected positions” (Dessens 171). During this period of Reconstruction leadership was crucial in determining how the region would be rebuilt and restructured. The divide between Creoles and Americans further marginalized Creoles as outsiders and even labeled them as foreigners. Nathalie Dessens states:

The oppositions between Creoles and Americans usually described in the literature were thus no myth, but they were probably more complicated than what people generally

believe. The opposition was not necessarily between Creoles and Americans but often between Americans and French speakers, or even, as in this case, between Americans and everyone else, including recently naturalized foreigners. (Dessens 172)

American patriotism often resulted in failing to acknowledge Creoles, through their subjugation in the name of nationalism. There were clearly marked racial boundaries, providing only two options, white or colored, with the omission of Louisiana Creoles because they could not fit neatly into these racial categorizations. The racial divide was echoed in an ethnic division labeling residents of the territory as Americans or “Other”. Dessens continues: “There was clearly much more than the typically depicted Creole versus American dichotomy” (Dessens 183). Xenophobia fueled a discriminatory perception of patriotism to dismiss any form of identity that was not identifiably American and Anglo. Creoles had persevered under colonial regimes and when faced with American statehood, there was a concerted effort to erase the legacy of Creoles despite their deeply entrenched roots throughout the region’s history.

This attempted erasure was not only seen in the authority of the state, but also within academia and the way in which history has been written. Creole identity has too often been defined by one’s European ancestry through negating the role of Creole culture, which was actually formed by the experience of colonization rather than a measurable percentage of European ancestry. Historian George Washington Cable details: “By the dawn of the twentieth century white Creoles had succeeded in books, lectures, and journals in winning popular acceptance for their redefinition of Creole as something inherent in the properties of blood” (Cable 16). Racial definitions of Creole identity excluded many, this redefinition was also used to perpetuate colorism and the exclusion of those who identified or were perceived to be colored. Prominent Creoles who were free people of color or descendants of free people of color began to

define Creole as disassociated from the enslaved or any traceable African ancestry. Gary B. Mills echoes this sentiment as he writes: “Just as whites entertained feelings of superiority to blacks and slaves, so did Louisiana’s *gens de couleur libres*” (Mills 14). *Gens de couleur libres* or free people of color prioritized their heritage in defining Creole identity resulting in racial divisions, but also far too often relied on markers of socioeconomic status. George Washington Cable highlights the role of class in noting before the Civil War: “Their [Creoles] relatively superior status (the vast majority were artisans and craftsmen) defied the logic of race elsewhere in the South, where free blacks were legally closer to being slaves without masters” (Cable 20). The class division between Creoles and colored people replicated the oppressive racial classifications of past colonial powers and the one drop rule of the American South. Gary B. Mills notes the class division that emerged and separated Creole people from colored people: “In contrast, Louisiana’s *gens de couleur libres* achieved a greater measure of legal rights and opportunities as a *class*” (Mills 15). Despite many Creoles identifying as colored, the racial and class separations caused Creole identity to be socially constructed as racially white of European ancestry and high socioeconomic status, creating further tensions during the period of Reconstruction. This divide that has been widely understood as the adoption of assimilationist strategies by Creoles is often not discussed as a survival strategy adopted as a result of enslavement. As Joy DeGruy Leary notes as a result of “Post-traumatic Slave Syndrome”, many of the formerly enslaved take on attributes and embrace strategies over generations to cope with the suffering they have faced and should be recognized as a response to trauma. Trauma responses are often not fully understood until they are properly contextualized, and the survivor comes to understand their triggers. If facing continued discrimination is acknowledged as a trigger, then attempting to adopt a white identity or attain the privileges associated with whiteness is a trauma response. After

Emancipation the formerly enslaved fought to be recognized as equal human beings utilizing the only framework that had worked in the past to gain access to full citizenship and that was a white paradigm. Using this frame of reference and “common sense” did not challenge the structure of society but attempted to create a new point of access for a group that had previously been marginalized by reinforcing the binary to broaden and redefine the definition of whiteness. In attempting to access whiteness Creoles were contesting the social construction of race and working to recognize the limitations of relying on a racial binary in acknowledging the complexity of racial and cultural identities present within the state of Louisiana.

Using their socioeconomic privilege, Creoles contested their rights through legal means. Their access to the justice system was not a privilege given to all colored people even after emancipation. As Gary B. Mills describes: “By contrast, Creoles of color were permitted free access to Louisiana’s courts of law. Not only were they entitled to defend themselves legally against whites, but they could bring charges against whites as well” (Mills 170). The flexibility of Creole identity was displayed in their ability to challenge the racial binary while simultaneously reinforcing the marginalization of African Americans rights as citizens after the Civil War. The ability of Creoles to legally fight for equal access to dominant institutions in hopes of attaining the same rights allocated to white people was temporary, as the loss of *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896 caused a major shift. George Washington Cable details how this failed challenge to racial segregation resulted in the loss of status by many Creoles: “All that changed during Reconstruction when white Creole intellectuals launched their struggle to prove the gentility of their lineage and the whiteness of their nomenclature” (Cable 15). As Creoles representing the “organic intellectuals,”³⁷ in a Gramscian sense, worked to prove connections to whiteness and

³⁷ (Gramsci 334).

European ancestry to challenge the definition of whiteness through the creation of a legal case representing Homer Plessy, the dominant class worked to exclude them from white spaces and positions within the public sphere during the end of the nineteenth century. Creoles were no longer viewed separately from colored people, but legally treated the same with clear and established racial boundaries. Creoles were categorized within the confines of the racial dichotomy of Louisiana and because they could never attain the position of white, they were relegated to the category of colored or “Other”. Cable elaborates: “By the end of the nineteenth century Creole and American judges and lawmakers alike were vigorously policing the racial boundaries of Louisiana with a one-drop rigor unimaginable at the time of the Louisiana Purchase” (Cable 20). Creoles within society were erased as they were often not identified as Creole because it would threaten the racial structure of society by highlighting the possibility of hybridity or mestizaje. Despite the significance of Creole as a culture that was created within the unique social order of Louisiana, Creole people came to be defined as a racial identity by the dominant group in order to deprive them of their legal rights. Creoles attempting to access white only spaces were utilizing “common sense” to challenge the legal system to acknowledge the social constructions of racial categories and the attempts by the dominant class to preserve privileges by denying access to others. Contesting racial segregation legally through the orchestrated streetcar arrest of Homer Plessy was a means of creating a notable example of the limitations on racial classifications in perpetuating inequality. Plessy could be identified as white physically but was denied access to white privilege because of his assertion that he was colored. As a Creole who was phenotypically white, he willfully identified as colored to challenge discrimination on the basis of race. To deny Creoles access to whiteness the legal system had to set a new definition that did not recognize racial ancestry if there was any determinable amount

of African ancestry and dismissed phenotype. In challenging racial definitions hegemonic classifications were policed even more heavily to reinforce dichotomous thinking because hybridity was the ultimate threat to maintaining the status quo based upon a system of racial segregation and imposed divisions.

Conclusion

During early French colonization Creoles resisted through organized revolts and even legal recourse by citing the mandates listed within the Code Noir. The language of their oppressors was used to highlight mistreatment and establish their legal rights. By conforming to the dictates of the colonizing forces Creoles organized resistance from within the confines of the system. Throughout the period of Spanish rule rebellions persisted and Creoles began forming maroon communities. The enslaved Creoles that were able to escape resided within these communities and avoided apprehension through solidarity networks across racial and ethnic lines. These social networks were intentionally constructed coalitions that gathered so much potency it was recognized as a threat by the Spanish government who brought in military force in an attempt to eradicate these communities. The Spanish struggled to quell Creole resistance as its momentum strained dominant institutions as seen in organized rebellions that threatened to dismantle the systems of colonialism and slavery. When Louisiana became an American state, Creoles began to define themselves differently because they were viewed in opposition to an American identity. Creoles fought for positions within the newly constructed leadership of the state in hopes of furthering racial progress in a postcolonial society. After the Civil War and during the period of Reconstruction, there was an intentional erasure of Creole identity through the strict adherence to a constructed racial binary. Policing this binary was necessary to uphold the privileging of whiteness and the oppression of all deemed “Other”. Creoles represented a

new possibility of defining oneself outside of these racial constructs that threatens the status quo. Françoise Vergès highlights Creole identity has evolved in response to oppression in asserting: “As an expression of groups which experienced brutal exploitation, creolization reflects an ethos of resistance” (Vergès 44). Creoles resisted in a myriad of ways, but this resistance was based upon creating and maintaining social networks, building unity with other marginalized groups, and challenging the perpetuation of the racial binary of the U.S. South.

Creole culture is not necessarily connected to race as it has developed as a cultural identity, but dominant ideology has restricted its development as a culture separate from racial definitions. Gary B. Mills notes the possibility of Creole identity transcending these racial barriers when he states: “Creole is a culture, not a color” (Mills 18). As a culture, Creole identity developed with shared traditions and experiences. Nathalie Dessens highlights the influence of these cultural practices as she argues: “Celebrating Mardi Gras also gradually became a unifying practice” (Dessens 212). Creole culture has been overlooked as it has become defined by its association with white privilege and intentional disassociation from blackness. This disassociation from blackness was always present from its origin due to its creation as a product of colonialism, as Frantz Fanon notes, “All colonized people-in other words, people in whom an inferiority complex has taken root, whose local cultural originality has been committed to the grave-position themselves in relation to the civilizing language: i.e., the metropolitan culture” (Fanon 2). This racist socialization is also noted by Joy DeGruy as one of the results of “Post-traumatic slavery syndrome”. Creole identity has also been utilized to signify a place within a hierarchy of race, which is identified as a form of caste that is used in the perpetuation of dominant ideals. This reinforcement of hegemonic ideals was a strategy intentionally and strategically utilized by the “organic intellectuals” of this subgroup to challenge the racialized

system of oppression, but it has come to define Creoles within Louisiana rather than be recognized as a survival strategy or a form of resistance. The problematic nature of how the term “Creole” has been used in this context is what John Lowe describes as “the Creole Controversy” noting that the term has several contested meanings. It has been used to challenge the policing of boundaries of racial and ethnic identity. However, its use as a means of exclusion must be acknowledged in order to describe the complex ways in which Creoles have strategically mounted resistance.

Despite the legacy of Creole identity and the problematic role it played within race relations in Louisiana, resistance has always been present. The unique context of this region led to the creation of Creole culture and due to the sizable population of Creoles, communities formed around this shared identity as seen in the Tremé which became a central location for political action. Michael Crutcher notes: “Tremé is also noted for the radical political activism carried out by its Creole of color residents in the nineteenth century” (Crutcher 17). Enslaved and emancipated Creoles formed autonomous communities, mobilized others, and combated racial inequality within the nineteenth century. The significant progress achieved and fought for by Creoles is often overlooked because of the racial tension within the South. Nathalie Dessens notes that the “Creole controversy” should not erase the unique aspects of Creole culture, as she writes: “Continuing to focus on the confrontational aspect would, however, be overly simplistic, since, while the numerous groups interacted through opposition, they also progressively mingled and gave birth to a very specific society, making New Orleans the ‘Creole capital’ of the United States” (Dessens 187). Since the origin of Creole people within Louisiana to the present day, the identity formation has evolved in necessary ways in order to address the critical aspects of survival, creating an essential challenge to racial inequality in a myriad of ways. Dessens

continues: “...in early American New Orleans, economic, social, and cultural segregation progressively gave way to interacting and intermingling, and how the various groups evolved toward a cultural continuum...” (Dessens 188). To be Creole is in itself a challenge to clear binaries, which lies in contrast to constructions of the U.S. South that heavily rely upon a Black-white divide as well as historical constructions of Blackness associated with the “one-drop rule” (in which people with any traceable Black descent were considered Black)³⁸. As survival strategies developed to cope with “post-traumatic slavery syndrome”, Creole survival strategies should not be criticized out of the context of a racially unjust society. As Joy DeGruy writes, “We rarely look to our history to understand how African Americans have adapted their behavior over centuries in order to survive the stifling effects of chattel slavery, effects which are evident today” (DeGruy 13). These effects are seen throughout these time periods as Creoles not only responded to the trauma of enslavement, but the trauma of colonialism. These responses and strategies persist to this day but have transformed as necessary. Dianne Guenin-Lelle notes the context of Louisiana today: “In this post-Katrina era with the New Orleans diaspora and the remaking of the city, cultural fusion continues both inside and outside of this urban space. Social equilibrium has shifted; residents have been displaced; new migrations to the city have occurred. Creolization has begun a new chapter in the twenty-first century” (Guenin-Lelle 169). Creole identity will continue to transform in post-Katrina Louisiana in a way that transcends borders mirroring a mestiza consciousness as many of those transformations may be seen across the diaspora. This is highlighted in the correlations between the mestiza who does not have a homeland and as a result is always displaced and the displacement of Creoles from Louisiana due to natural and human-made disasters. Vergès posits: “Creolization is a subversive concept if

³⁸ (Guenin-Lelle 91)

it remains continuously linked to the subterranean struggle and resistance of populations confronted with brutal and raw power, with monolingualism and mono-culturalism” (Vergès 40). Creole identity formed as a result of the oppressive nature of colonization and the attempted erasure of Creoles’ African ancestry, but rather than a deficit Creoles created a culture built on resisting the dominant systems of colonialism and slavery, defining themselves on their own terms.

As Creole identity becomes further separated from Louisiana or even the region of the U.S. South it has evolved to respond to the needs of the many communities in which Creoles now reside. Understanding the distinct Creole culture that is unique to Louisiana allows for the radical belief that racial equality can be realized even within the polarizing landscape of the American South. As Dianne Guenin-Lelle asserts:

We’ve seen ample evidence of how for whites and those passing as white, there was a concerted attempt to lose the multiracial connotations that had been associated with the term Creole; for Creoles of color, it would appear that the opposite is true, thus allowing Creoles of color forms of self-expression in politics, newspapers, literature, music, and commerce that did not exist elsewhere in America. (Guenin-Lelle 94-95)

Creole identity within Louisiana is a distinguishing aspect of cultural heritage that has molded perspectives on racial inequality, but also race as a whole. It has and continues to challenge dominant notions of race and ethnicity through the lens of social activism and through an intersectional approach.

Chapter 2

Into the Archive: Resistance in *The Daily Crusader*

Recognizing the significant role Creoles occupied in the history and culture of Louisiana is the essential first step in reclaiming the narratives of Creole activists who were on the forefront of social movements fighting for change and displayed resistance in complex ways throughout history. Often Creole activism within social movements and its role within the formation of Creole identity has been overlooked because progressive movements appear contradictory to Creole identity, which has connotations of privilege, colorism, and has reflected practices that perpetuate racial inequality. While recognizing the legitimacy of these critiques, it is crucial to note the challenges to dominant ideologies that Creole identity has posed. Creole identity was created during a period of colonization and used as a means of classifying a new culture born from adaptations of living under an oppressive colonial power. Creoles resisted dominant ideologies and racial constructs from the origin of the term Creole and throughout the history of Louisiana. This chapter highlights the Creole counterstories present throughout the history of fighting for racial equality within Louisiana in order to deconstruct the dominant narrative that overlooks and actively erases the legacy of activism within Creole culture. Through primary resources available at the Amistad Research Center I was able to trace Creole activism through print publications. I focused on articles of *The Daily Crusader* and its role in centering Creole resistance at a pivotal moment in resistance leading up to the legal challenge of racial segregation. I focused on activism networks and collectives such as the work of the Citizens' Committee through the figures of Homer Plessy, Louis A. Martinet, Rodolphe Lucien Desdunes, and others whose work I uncovered within the archive. I trace important issues noted within periodicals at the center of Creole activism to note how these issues have evolved and how in

turn resistance has transformed to meet the needs of Creole communities. I analyzed the work of Creole activists and writers discussing racial discrimination, discrimination in the criminal justice system, and political reform. I analyzed their work from perspectives on the criminal justice system posited by Michelle Alexander and understandings of white supremacy and counterhegemony asserted by Lisa Marie Cacho. Although these issues all share the same basis of racial inequality, the ways in which it is discussed reflects what institutions and aspects of society are most significant to Creoles. The mobilization of Creoles during this period in response to racial discrimination represents a counterhegemonic moment because the “organic intellectuals” united with the masses in order to fight for change. Even though the legal case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* was lost, hegemony was contested on several different fronts by Creoles to pave the way for long lasting societal change.

At the Amistad Research Center at Tulane University there were countless boxes full of newspaper clippings, articles, photographs, and artifacts of Louisiana history highlighting activism within New Orleans and throughout the region. Within these accounts several times I saw the word “Creole” used alongside colored noting the activists’ identification to both of these racial/ethnic identities. Identity was often noted by colonizers, slave masters, and those within dominant positions rather than the activists themselves. It can be contested whether each individual labeled as Creole within historical records truly identified as such, however many of the publications I focused on in the archive were created by Creole people to address issues significant to Creoles.

I discovered pamphlets and advertisements of prominent social clubs and publications by progressive periodicals calling to mobilize Creoles within New Orleans. The archive contained articles and calls to action in *The Daily Crusader* publication, a local New Orleans newspaper

that was published from 1889-1899. These dates are an estimate because it is not known when the paper officially came to an end and if articles within this publication remain unrecovered. Many of these articles were very brittle and could no longer be touched and some of the articles had portions of them missing due to age and wear. As a result, some of the articles discussed were not found in their entirety. There was also a limitation on the articles that appeared in *The Daily Crusader* in French and Creole dialects. When attempting to translate these articles many of the translations were not coherent and so I chose to omit these pieces. It is crucial to understand how *The Daily Crusader* was created to contextualize its role within racial politics of the time and why I chose to highlight the articles within this publication when discussing Creole resistance. J. Clay Smith Jr. details its origin by Louis A. Martinet: “In an effort to inform the New Orleans black community about news and current political issues, Martinet began to publish *The Daily Crusader* around 1890, the same year in which the Louisiana state legislature passed a series of Jim Crow laws” (Smith 283). As a Creole, Martinet created a publication to voice opposition to the system of legalized discrimination against colored people. Smith Jr. notes: “The paper was used as a tool to help fight the violence toward and political repression of his people” (Smith 283). The paper’s focus was educating and mobilizing people against Jim Crow legislation as he played a vital role in constructing the legal case of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, a case used to challenge the legality of racial segregation. Smith Jr. notes Martinet’s commitment to this case in noting: “It was Martinet who mobilized the community effort, shaped the case, selected the lawyers, and edited a key document in the appeal” (Smith 285). Although Louis A. Martinet played a crucial role in founding the newspaper and constructing the legal challenge to racial segregation, the editor of the paper Rodolphe Lucien Desdunes wrote the majority of the articles for the paper that had been preserved. R. L. Desdunes was a prominent Creole activist helping

organize the Citizens' Committee (Comité des Citoyens) that organized the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* and he also went on to continue writing Creole counterstories beyond *The Daily Crusader* by publishing a book titled *Hommes et Notre Histoire (Our People and Our History: Fifty Creole Portraits)* ³⁹. There are recovered articles within the archive that do not list an author, so some of the contributors to the publication may unfortunately go unacknowledged within this work. *The Daily Crusader* was a carefully constructed vehicle to mobilize public opposition to Jim Crow at a time that Louis A. Martinet was creating a legal challenge in an attempt to question constructions of race and dismantle racial inequality through a specifically Creole perspective.

Focusing on the writings by activists within *The Daily Crusader* and other publications of the time, I was intrigued by the parallels to social justice narratives in print and throughout social media platforms today. It is fascinating how merely decades after the emancipation of slaves Creole activists created a local publication calling out racial injustices and mobilizing residents to fight for racial equality. Creoles created literary spaces in which they were able to mobilize, addressing the inequalities within the physical spaces that had become key elements of Creole culture. I was fascinated by the language used within this publication because of the focus placed on addressing larger systems of inequality perpetuated by dominant institutions to address the root causes of racial inequality and how it is perpetuated. *The Daily Crusader* addressed macro level inequalities through an appeal to action within the community that reflects the significance of resistance at all levels in creating counterstories to dominant narratives prior to the Civil Rights Movement. "Organic intellectuals" within the Creole communities of New

³⁹ Desdunes, Rodolphe Lucien. *Our People and Our History: Fifty Creole Portraits*.

Orleans constructed a medium used to challenge hegemony by organizing with the masses in legal battles, organized protests, and attempted to create a new “common sense” in understanding race to interrogate systems that upheld white supremacy.

The Role of Publications in Creole Activism

Creoles contested their position within society in the form of print through the use of many different outlets. Many of these publications relied upon the networks Creoles had created for themselves. Social networks and clubs based upon a shared Creole identity were inextricably linked to the creation of Creole publications, directly through the members of some of these associations who went on to publish noted periodicals⁴⁰, as well as their reliance upon the networks created by the clubs for distribution and funding. Creole culture is preserved in the practice of storytelling through oral traditions and subsequently its evolution into print publications.⁴¹ Creoles began publishing during the period of enslavement by creating a journal for intellectuals of color denied access to other outlets. Caryn Cossé Bell documents: “The influence of the French Romantic among free black intellectuals in New Orleans became more evident in 1843 with the publication of a short-lived, interracial literary journal, *L’Album littéraire: Journal des jeunes gens, amateurs de littérature* (The Literary Album: A Journal of Young Men, Lovers of Literature)” (Bell 63). Within this journal, contributors were able to be critical of dominant society as Bell continues:

In subsequent issues of *L’Album* an anonymous essayist discussed the plight of the young men whose literary ambitions the publication was created to promote. Although the series of three articles represented a harsh condemnation of conditions in Louisiana, the author

⁴⁰ (Clark 30)

⁴¹ (Gosnell 156)

made no overt reference to slavery or race prejudice. Still, in a publication dedicated to the work of young Creoles of color, the author's bitter attacks on contemporary society and his aggressive defense of 'Louisiana's youth' represented an unmistakable denunciation of discrimination. (Bell 64)

L'Album was a resistant space created to spread the message of the importance of addressing injustice during the period of enslavement when it was not even legal for the enslaved to read or write. The critique that spoke of injustice within society was published anonymously and without calling out the effects of racism directly, but the ability for this space to exist at this time was a radical statement. *L'Album* was an important publication for Creole activism as Emily Clark notes:

Black Creoles, including Joanni Questy, Armand Lanusse, Camille Thierry, Mirtil-Ferdinand Liotau, and Michel Saint-Pierre, were frequent contributors to *L'Album*. Social commentary was common in its pages. One lengthy essay published in the journal, "Philosophy of History," described how God's spirit enlightened humanity and led it toward progress. However, a "weakening of spiritual ideals" led to a decline and "the harshest slavery" supplanted "gentile liberty." Other essays criticized the class distinctions in Louisiana society (contrasting the local class system to equality), condemned the practice of *plaçage* (arguing that it made black Creole women akin to prostitutes), and lamented the influence of Anglo ("British") materialism (decrying it for destroying "Louisiana's honor" and Louisiana's youth). (Clark 163)

L'Album provided a platform to criticize dominant society from the perspective of the marginalized. During the period of enslavement Creoles had a space to create and distribute counterstories that challenged dominant institutions giving a space for critiques that have been

suppressed in other publications. *L'Album* did not have a long run but laid the foundation for future journals and periodicals from the perspective of the marginalized. Emily Clark notes: “Though *L'Album* did not last beyond a year, many of the same authors published in *Les Cenelles*, an 1845 anthology of black Creole poetry spanning approximately two hundred pages, eighty-five poems, and seventeen authors” (Clark 163). Creoles published essays and poetry providing an outlet for their literary interests and diverse viewpoints. Even though Creoles were often denied access to print within dominant society, especially when providing a critical stance toward the governing powers, they created their own outlets to publish analytical essays as well as poetry to disseminate their messages to a wide audience.

Although clearly limited by their status as free, enslaved, or as a result of their socioeconomic status, Creoles established a literary journal and French language newspapers. This literary tradition was a means to educate Creoles, provide commentary on current events, and work to preserve aspects of Creole culture and language. Johnathan Gosnell documents:

In the south of Franco-America, in Louisiana, one also finds indigenous French cultures in decline. Nothing will likely come close to matching the production of Creole elites in nineteenth-century New Orleans who created a rich cultural life in the Crescent City.

After a century-long run, *L'Abeille de la Nouvelle-Orléans*, the city's French-language newspaper, disappeared in 1925. To this day, however, Cajun and Creole storytellers transcribe postcolonial French cultures of the American South. (Gosnell 156).

Even though *L'Album littéraire: Journal des jeunes gens, amateurs de littérature* and *L'Abeille de la Nouvelle-Orléans* were relatively short-lived, they provided a pathway for the formation of Creole newspapers with larger audiences. During this noted decline of French language newspapers, Creoles were not silenced, but rather their audience shifted to Creole-identified

English-speaking residents through newspapers, such as *L'Union* and the *New Orleans Tribune* in the 1860's.⁴² These newspapers utilized a social justice framework to advocate for racial equality by addressing the injustices present within their communities.

Creole activism took to the medium of print to mobilize fellow Creoles to address oppression. *L'Union* published a front-page condemnation of slavery in September 1862 (Bell 122). Creole writers spoke out against slavery and were a significant part of the abolitionist movement. Caryn Cossé Bell details: "Far from content with the abolition of slavery, Creole editors demanded equal rights for free blacks" (Bell 123). *L'Union* was crucial in gaining support for the Union during the Civil War. Bell continues: "On June 5, 1863, Unionist leaders acknowledged the paper's support by naming *L'Union* the French-language publisher of the association's official announcements. A month later, *L'Union* appeared in both French and English" (Bell 134). The evolution of language spoken by Creoles changed the format of their publications and was critical in reaching a wider Louisiana audience. Creoles created content vital to the abolition of slavery and identifying the horrors of racism furthering the struggle for equality.

Creole activism took on many forms, as many Creoles took to their typewriters as media creators in order to mobilize the population to take action during the period of Reconstruction. Michael Crutcher notes the important role print publications played in furthering Creole activism: "With the onset of the Civil War, radical Downtown Creoles made a concerted push for abolition and equality for FPC [free people of color] at both the local and national levels. Many of the prominent figures in that movement were Tremé residents. Paul Trevigne, for example, edited *L'Union* and *La Tribune*, newspapers that advocated radical Creole politics. The *Tribune*

⁴² (Crutcher 30)

was the nation's first daily black newspaper" (Crutcher 30-31). These newspapers were just a few of the periodicals during this time and their founding and publishing was by Creole activists.

Many Creoles wrote about their lived experiences to highlight the present injustices. Crutcher elaborates: "To give voice to their concerns, Creoles started several radical newspapers. Tremé area Creoles' last concerted civil rights effort came with the organization of the Comité des Citoyens (Citizens Committee), which is most noted for its sponsorship of the landmark segregation case *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896)" (Crutcher 17). The Citizens' Committee was also a common topic of *The Daily Crusader* as many of the writers that contributed to this periodical were active members. The role of the Citizen' Committee as "organic intellectuals" and the publication of *The Daily Crusader* as a tool for mobilization will be detailed later in this chapter. Although this case was lost, Creole people had organized a challenge to segregation through the legal system.

Creoles not only spoke out against racial oppression in print publications, but also discussed the importance of combating patriarchal practices that further oppressed Creole women. Creoles used this platform to criticize the practice of plaçage, a practice that affected Creole women. Caryn Cossé Bell details:

Creole writers also attacked the practice of plaçage, or institutionalized concubinage, as a form of human bondage. Miscegenation and interracial cohabitation had proliferated under the French and Spanish. Even though colonial laws prohibited interracial marriages, the social practice known as plaçage enabled mixed-race couples to enter a quasi-legitimate marital arrangement. In plaçage a *représentant* (the young woman's mother or a close relative) would investigate the financial stability and social standing of the white suitor. If the man was found acceptable, the representative would then negotiate

a contract with the parents of the young woman of color (*the placée*). In the contract, the “prospective” husband would agree to provide financial support for the young woman and any offspring of the “marriage”. (Bell 66).

Plaçage involved a white male suitor and a young Creole woman, the practice perpetuated the exoticization of women of color and Creoles and removed the agency of young Creole women in choosing their own partners. Creoles challenged the hyper-sexualization of Creole women by white men and the continuation of this practice in print. Caryn Bell documents:

For Creoles of color, the decline of Latin European racial attitudes, the increasing conservatism of the American Catholic Church, and the denial of legal recognition for children of interracial unions undermined plaçage’s institutional viability. As portrayed in Creole literary works of the 1840s, plaçage agreements reduced young women of color to the status of prostitutes; these Creole writers saw the practice as a threat to the social fabric of their community. (Bell 66)

Unfortunately, some of the language utilized to denounce plaçage, relies upon shaming the women and the families of those who practice it rather than dissecting patriarchy. Although this practice was critiqued within Creole communities, it was adopted by some Creole families as a means of survival. Michael Crutcher notes: “Outside observers have widely condemned plaçage as little more than high-class prostitution. Scholars of fpc [free people of color], however, are quick to defend the practice as a complex survival technique that existed because of the legal vulnerability of fpc women and the dearth of fpc men” (Crutcher 25). Plaçage could be understood as a form of sex work, but the role of race and gender must be the framework of the analysis. Critiques of plaçage are necessary in recognizing ways to combat racism and sexism by

recognizing the intersectionality of Creole women and the tactics they have taken on to resist oppression.

Creoles used print publication as a means of expression by writing essays and poetry during the period of enslavement and also used print to further their activism. Creoles called for racial equality by calling for an end to slavery, racism, and even practices specific to the community such as plaçage. Print publications were easily accessible and could be disseminated throughout their communities and was a powerful tool to mobilize Creoles in the struggle for equality.

The Daily Crusader: Creole Perspectives in Mobilizing for Change

The Amistad Research Center contained issues of *The Daily Crusader* published from approximately 1889-1899, I focused on issues and articles that documented protests, social injustices, and noted Creole activism. Due to the age and fragility of these artifacts some of the articles were not complete or had tears that prevented the article to be read in its entirety, I did my best to piece together articles and recognize the context of each article I encountered. After the Civil War through the period of Reconstruction, Creoles took to publications such as *The Daily Crusader* to document their protests and provide commentary on the prevalent injustices in society. Even while combating these injustices and mounting a case against legalized segregation referred to as *Plessy v. Ferguson*, activists wrote in *The Daily Crusader* to passionately detail their fight. Highlighting Creole activism within this historical context, I have chosen to focus on the systems of inequality that Creoles addressed connecting racial inequality to the dominant institutions of the Catholic Church, the ideology of capitalism, the political system, the government, and failures in the criminal justice system. I have organized this section by the recurring themes within the articles based upon their focus on fighting racial segregation,

discussing discrimination within the criminal justice system, and calling for political reform. Creoles focused on macro-level injustices to recognize how societal injustices were reflected in their daily lives. Creoles wrote within the perspective of their unique intersectional lived experiences and developed resistance through this point of view. Recognizing structural change was necessary to combat inequality, Creoles wrote to question and critique dominant practices, to mobilize others in a fight to change definitions of race, the law, and the political system by recognizing how these issues were all very much connected by dominant ideologies to preserve white supremacy.

Fighting Segregation

The legal challenge to racial segregation must be recognized as a historical moment of counterhegemony, but it is not a starting point in Creole activism or in fighting against racial discrimination. There was significant work done leading into this carefully planned legal appeal, and *Plessy v. Ferguson* was not constructed as an end within itself, but rather as part of a much larger struggle for equality. Lisa Marie Cacho argues situating this legal struggle as an end point would be harmful when understanding how to mount resistance, she writes: “Moreover, the legal recognition of a population’s personhood is thereby cast as the end point of struggle, whereas an aggrieved group’s humanity is the *premise* of resistance, not its goal” (Cacho 140). This case sought to challenge understandings of race and interrogate white supremacy within society in order to highlight the hegemonic social constructions of race to contest and rebuild “common sense” surrounding understandings of racial identity. Creoles advocated for the ability to purchase a first-class ticket regardless of race forcing the legal system to acknowledge the social construction of race and the inability of the racial binary to represent the racial realities of the Creole residents of the U.S. South. I argue that dismissing *Plessy v. Ferguson* as an attempt for

Creoles to be recognized as white is reductionist because the “organic intellectuals” of Creole communities established a legal attempt to redefine whiteness in hopes of igniting a national conversation about racial inequality.

The first recovered article that details the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* in *The Daily Crusader* describes the arrest of Homer Plessy. In the archive the fragmented article is present but most of the identifying information is not available, only one column of this article remains with no mention of author, date, or title. The arrest of Homer A. Plessy is detailed:

Homer A. Plessy boarded the East Louisiana Railroad, at the foot of Press Street, for Covington. He held a first-class ticket and naturally took his seat in a first-class coach. As the train was moving out of the station, the conductor came up and asked him if he was a white man. Plessy, who is as white as the average white Southerner, replied that he was a colored man. Then said the conductor, “you must go in the coach reserved for colored people”. (*The Daily Crusader*).

This exchange highlights that Homer Plessy is phenotypically white based on the description provided, but when asked if he was white Plessy chose to designate himself as colored. Policing of the racial binary does not acknowledge the many variations of skin color, hair texture, and physical characteristics that are recognized as markers of race are not definitive and are purely subjective. If Homer Plessy sought to “pass” as white he could arguably have done so, but he identified himself as colored when confronted in order to challenge conceptions of race and defy the segregated streetcar law.

When questioned by the conductor and told to move seats within the coach, the article states: “Plessy replied that he has a first-class ticket and would remain in the first-class coach. The conductor insisted that he retired to the Jim Crow coach. Plessy determinedly told him that

he was an American citizen and proposed to enjoy his rights as such and to ride for the value of his money” (*The Daily Crusader*). Plessy made a deliberate stand to not relocate seats because he had purchased a first-class fare and should not be subjected to the segregated coach, this appeal was predicated on a fare representative of a higher socioeconomic status to highlight the value of white privilege. It is crucial to note that colored people were denied access to the first-class coach and to afford to ride within this designated space is in itself a marker of privilege not only racial privilege, but class privilege as well. Within the exchange between Homer Plessy and the conductor there was a bargaining that if Plessy moved to the designated colored coach he could avoid repercussions, but he insisted on taking this stand and with it the legal consequences, the article continues:

The conductor, seeing his own powers of persuasion unavailing, invoked the aid of the police. Capt. C. C. Cain, who was at the station, entered the car and told Plessy that if he was a colored man he would have to go to the colored coach. Plessy again refused. The officer told him he would have to go into the coach or to jail. Plessy said he would go to jail first before relinquishing his right as a citizen. (*The Daily Crusader*).

In this strategic act of resistance Homer Plessy associated his ability to avoid racial classification in having access to a first-class ticket on the train to his inherent rights as a citizen. He advocated for an end to racial designation within the physical space of the train’s first-class in order to highlight the hegemonic privileging of whiteness that allows citizenship to be designated as a white construct. Cheryl Harris argues that whiteness operates as property, as she states, “Plessy additionally charged that the refusal to seat him on the white passenger car deprived him of property - ‘this reputation [of being white] which has an actual pecuniary value’” (Harris 1747). I argue Plessy was not attempting to be recognized as white, but he was advocating for access to

white privilege, which is highly valued within society. Plessy chose to identify as colored but wanted to maintain the right to stay seated in the first-class car, which had been inextricably linked to whiteness. He wanted to interrogate the connection to socioeconomic advantages and their default designation as exclusively accessible to whiteness.

Plessy's arrest was an intentional step in legally challenging the construction of whiteness and the marginalization of all designated as colored. Members of the Citizens' Committee arrived at the police station immediately following his arrest. The article states: "Plessy was conducted to the Fifth precinct station, where a charge for violating the separate car law was booked against him. By this time a few friends of Plessy--'Messrs. Eugene Luscy, Paul Bonseigneur, R. L. Desdunes, L. J. Joubert and L.A. Martinet-hearing of his arrest, had repaired to the station" (*The Daily Crusader*). This case was mounted by the Citizens' Committee to address the institutionalization of white privilege and the priority of the Committee was to bring a case that could be argued at the highest level of the legal system to change the legal construction of white supremacy. *The Daily Crusader* noted another case that had been organized to challenge racial segregation, the article details:

This is the second case the Committee has on hand. The first is that of Prof. Desdunes, which involves, with the question as to whether a common carrier can discriminate among his passengers on account of race, also the right to travel interstate unmolested, which Judge Marr had under advisement at the time of his mysterious disappearance on election day, and is now awaiting the appointment of his successor for further proceeding. (*The Daily Crusader*).

A case was pending but Judge Marr had disappeared although the circumstances were unknown, he was presumed dead as he was seventy-three years old and was "in feeble health" at the time

⁴³. The Citizens Committee representing the “organic intellectuals” of Creole communities challenged hegemonic racial categorization and the institutionalization of white privilege through carefully developed legal challenges to racial segregation. Creoles were fighting for legal recognition of full citizenship by identifying how dominant institutions and ideology uphold white privilege. Lisa Marie Cacho argues: “The institutionalization of white privilege institutes ‘inalienable rights’ as a property of whiteness and personhood” (Cacho 24). The Citizens Committee recognized the role of dominant institutions in upholding hegemonic racial views and sought to create change by addressing these concerns through the apparatus of the legal system. They contested the use of race as a means of identification and as a marker to identify who enjoys the rights of full citizenship. The article asserts: “In other words the Citizens’ Committee will seek to have invalidated the Jim Crow car law as applying to local passengers also-passengers from one point to another point in the State; it will seek to establish the right of the citizen to travel interstate and intrastate unmolested and without danger of legal affront or indignity” (*The Daily Crusader*). This concerted attempt to challenge racial segregation predicated on the exclusion of colored people from the first-class coach recognized the institutionalization of white privilege as the source of legal discrimination and sought to interrogate the denial of the rights of citizenship to anyone identified as non-white. Homer Plessy and the Citizens’ Committee were aiming to expand the definition of whiteness to include Creole but were questioning racial categorization and the policing of the imposed racial binary of the U.S. South as a hegemonic construct to uphold white supremacy. These “organic intellectuals” challenged “common sense” understandings of race that worked to perpetuate white privilege to highlight the way in which dominant institutions naturalized the racial binary as a means of

⁴³ (Lofgren 219).

control and the marginalization of all colored people to exclude them from the rights of citizenship.

In the August 15, 1891 issue of *The Daily Crusader*, the article, “Forlorn Hope and Noble Despair” the author R.L. Desdunes responds to a previously printed article that stated there were feelings of “apathy” as a result of the separate car law ⁴⁴. Fighting against legal segregation had at this point been a long legal battle and as the struggle pressed on, others had discussed losing hope in the possibility of ending racial segregation legally. Desdunes declares: “In that very strain of thought, The Crusader some time ago remarked very forcefully that the decisions of courts were the opinions of men. On the strength of that declaration, as pertinent as it was true, can we not build the hope of succeeding in the future where we failed in the past” (Desdunes). R.L. Desdunes notes that the legal system is a state institution, but it does not stand outside of forwarding the opinions of the dominant class. It is critical to acknowledge the role public opinion plays within legal decisions and the process of reshaping “common sense” in influencing legal decisions. Desdunes compares the loss in the courts to the struggles of many prominent historical figures of the past. He argues: “When Toussaint L’Ouverture from a mountain looked down upon the French fleet and exclaimed: France is in San Domingo! He was leading a forlorn hope, for he had forty thousand men to oppose” (Desdunes). Desdunes connects the struggle against racial segregation to a Creole revolution in Haiti noting a diasporic understanding of resistance. He reiterates how important it is to remain committed to fighting segregation as historically and transnationally all you have struggled against racial injustice have experienced these difficulties in confronting hegemony. He ends the article by stating: “If the separate car suit is a forlorn hope, we trust to see the people show a noble despair and be

⁴⁴ (Desdunes)

prepared to face any disappointment that might await them at the tray of American justice” (Desdunes). Desdunes provides a call to action for Creoles by acknowledging the difficulties in pursuing change, but inspiring activists to stay motivated in their quest for achieving equality. This article is noting the frustration with combating racism through the legal system and the continued resistance to change by fighting within the legal system. Fighting for systematic change is a long process and doing so using a tool of hegemony was a source of frustration. Desdunes calls for perseverance so that people do not lose hope that change will happen, using the pivotal images of the Haitian Revolution, but stresses that it is only through a continued commitment to challenging hegemonic ideology that change will occur.

In the August 8, 1891 article titled “Argument of Facts” the unspecified author notes: “Before and since the passage of the separate car law, *The Daily Crusader* and other champions of equal rights have been unrelenting in their opposition to that unjust and dangerous measure.” *The Daily Crusader* passionately advocated against the separate car law in hopes of challenging segregation and white supremacy. This connection to dominant ideology and the role of institutions in perpetuating white supremacy was explicitly discussed within the publication. The articles within *The Daily Crusader* discussed racial injustice beyond a binary of Black and white while calling on readers to engage in order to address prevalent concerns. In the article titled “White Supremacy” Rodolphe Lucien Desdunes details an incident within New Orleans that highlights the limitations of the constructed racial binary. The article details how Mr. Chrétien of the School Board of New Orleans penned a letter calling for the expulsion of all colored children from white schools that was a problem due to the mixed-race heritage of many colored and Creole families.⁴⁵ Desdunes argues: “According to the terms of the above resolution the teachers

⁴⁵ (Desdunes “White Supremacy)

are supposed to know the extraction of all the children in their charge, or be compelled to resort to extraordinary means if they do not possess the requisite knowledge” (Desdunes “White Supremacy”). It is not possible to ascertain the racial background of each student because race is not discernable merely by appearance, yet this member of the School Board is calling on teachers to identify the racial background of their students in order to remove any students identified as colored. Desdunes notes the inability to ascertain this knowledge by appearance despite social constructions of race that are predicated on phenotype in imposing racial identities. He asserts: “Since Mr. Marign’ys [sic] time, it has always been a matter of the greatest difficulty to find out exactly who is white and who is colored in New Orleans” (Desdunes “White Supremacy”). The racial mixing and history of different racial classifications within Louisiana underlines the limitations of imposed racial categorizations. Desdunes formulates a theory about the motivations of Mr. Chrétien of the New Orleans School Board as he writes: “He has a spite against some poor child who has developed too much of an intellectual precocity, and that in his judgement is a serious menace to his peace and happiness as a Caucasian. Nor is there anything particularly appalling in that supposition, for one half of those cases undertaken in the name of white supremacy are the results of revenge, malice, or jealousy” (Desdunes “White Supremacy”). The driving force in calling for the expulsion of students of color despite the inability to discern the race of all students, is to maintain white privilege. R.L. Desdunes notes that the dominant class work to maintain white supremacy through acts that are often driven by their own personal desires but are reinforced by dominant ideology. The perpetuation of hegemonic conceptions of white supremacy is done through the dominant class imposing their will on the people. Desdunes contends: “This is supposed to be a Republican government, where parliamentary laws prevail, yet we see that on a School Board the minority has no voice- in fact

is not represented at all” (Desdunes “White Supremacy”). He comments on the need for all identities to be represented within leadership to have a more just government and disrupt racial inequality. The lack of representation in leadership transcends local government. Desdunes argues: “And what is true of the School Board may apply with equal force to all other relations where the colored people have to depend upon white supremacy for justice and rights in the Southern part of the United States” (Desdunes “White Supremacy”). The dependence upon racial classifications is a means of control and a tool in maintaining white privilege. It is only through dominant institutions noted within this article in the education system that hegemony is reinforced and so it is within these institutions that Creoles have advocated for change. In the legal and education systems where segregation is the law of the land Creoles have worked within these institutions in order to dismantle how white supremacy has been sustained. Desdunes posits: “If lineal pretensions and race prejudices are not set aside a little, we shall have in Louisiana the curse of caste law” (Desdunes “Caste Rule”). The imposition of constructed racial categories is necessary to maintain hegemony through Jim Crow legal definitions that support a form of caste law. The racial binary does not adequately describe the complex cultural and racial identities of the residents of Louisiana but is a powerful tool of the oppressor to further inequality. However, Creoles and “organic intellectuals” within this group have developed forms of resistance to fight white supremacy and dominant ideologies by using the very institutions working to uphold white supremacy and redefine racial identities. Desdunes notes the importance of challenging imposed racial designations as he writes: “The word negro has been used and recognized in our courts of justice as a proper and legal designation, and The Daily Crusader is the only journal that has ever protested against the act” (Desdunes Sentiment in Politics No. 11). Desdunes advocates against the imposition of the term Negro as he identifies as

Creole and colored by recognizing the dominant class continues to retain the power of naming the marginalized. Creoles advocated to be recognized as Creole or denoted as colored in an act of solidarity but recognized dominant ideology imposing racialized terms such as Negro on the marginalized to maintain control. Creoles recognized the power of language and institutions in furthering dominant narratives and created counterstories of resistance to challenge reductionist constructions of race and the perpetuation of white supremacy.

Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System

Creoles noted the way in which the criminal justice system was utilized as a tool of the dominant class to maintain racial inequality and advocated for systemic change. *The Daily Crusader* highlighted shortcomings in the criminal justice system and the ways in which it upholds white supremacy. Within the article, “The Argument of Facts” a tragic incident in Texas is detailed:

The report states, among other details, that some boys playing near the track of the International and Great Northern Railway, near town, found Daniel Jones, a Negro lad, eighteen years old, lying under a tree and fainting from pain and loss of blood. He had two ribs broken and a hole in his left side, into which a man’s fist could be inserted. Jones says that he purchased a ticket to go to Austin this morning and was standing on the platform of the white people’s coach, when he was approached by one of the trainmen who ordered him to move. The train was running at a high rate of speed. The man threw him off and he struck a jagged rock. (“Argument of Facts”)

As a result of the enforcement of an unjust law, Daniel Jones was nearly killed to protect white privilege for merely standing in an area that was reserved for white passengers. Although the

man who assaulted him could not be identified by the victim, it is assumed he was an employee of the train car company in some capacity. The article continues: “Now here is a man, killed or very badly hurt by a trainman, who will, in all probability, escape punishment, since his duty is to carry out the law of separate cars. The law has constituted him accuser, judge, jury and executioner, in such cases; consequently it will be difficult to make a case against him even if he were arraigned before the courts for the crime” (“Argument of Facts”). The lack of justice for the victim because the perpetrator’s actions are deemed legally justified mirrors the common outcome of acts of police brutality protested by the Black Lives Matter Movement. Even though assault is illegal the employee of the train company can state it was justified in his enforcement of the law. The employee is protected because of his racial privilege just as the officer of the law who often evades any formal charges. The assault of Daniel Jones is the result of legalized discrimination that must be addressed in the dominant sphere of the law and greater society. The article continues: “The argument of facts has laid bare the ugliest side of that law in practical life. It will no longer be a doubtful question that every traveler with dark skin takes his life in his hands whenever he steps on the platform of a railroad coach in the south” (“Argument of Facts”). The author notes that those perceived as colored are the most vulnerable to acts of violence as a result of legalized racial segregation. *The Daily Crusader* noted violent acts of racism to incite action and highlight the need to address these injustices. The article details the act of violence against Daniel Jones to inform the readers, but also uses this tragic incident to highlight the inequality present within the legal system that gives more rights to a perpetrator of violence than a colored victim. To challenge the way the criminal justice system operates to protect white privilege Creoles used *The Daily Crusader* as an outlet to not only draw attention to single acts of injustice, but to detail how the system is built on preserving racial inequality. By publicly

addressing the way that hegemonic conceptions of white supremacy are sustained Creoles aimed to transform “common sense” understandings of the functions of the criminal justice system to note its role in the oppression of the marginalized.

In the article “The Coming Struggle” in the January 2, 1892 issue Rodolphe Lucien Desdunes writes: “We must hold that the enormous wickedness called LYNCHING, which the cruel and violent spirit of caste has invented for life destruction in the South, is no less than unjustifiable homicide. Under the operation of that atrocious and disguised method, men, because colored, have been flayed alive, burnt at the stake, hung and hounded to death by other men without the pretext even of administering ‘justice without law’ (Desdunes “The Coming Struggle”). The article discusses the practice of lynching as a form of racialized violence disguised as a means of killing those guilty of an offense but is only based on the race of the victim. The paper comments on the deceptive use of the term justice in depictions of lynching. Desdunes asserts: “The Constitution and laws guarantee trial by jury and ‘due process of law;’ consequently the assembled voices of the people must be heard against the heinous crimes which make this guarantee a legal lie and a disgusting mockery” (Desdunes “The Coming Struggle”). Again, colored citizens are denied their inalienable rights by denying them the ability to seek justice through dominant institutions. It is only through organized action that the glaring problems in the legal system can be addressed. Desdunes elaborates: “The colored man as a citizen is beyond the pale of the law. There is for him neither liberty nor process of law. His life is in constant jeopardy reason of his color, and because it is deemed necessary to preserve ‘white supremacy’ and a peculiar Christian civilization” (Desdunes “One Ticket Implies Success, but Two Means Defeat”). Dominant ideologies perpetuate inequality within society and activists noted the importance of dismantling the legal exclusions of all people standing outside of

whiteness. Michelle Alexander notes the role of racial oppression within the criminal justice system as she argues: “The system operates through our criminal justice institutions, but it functions more like a caste system than a system of crime control. Viewed from this perspective, the so-called underclass is better understood as an *undercaste*- a lower caste of individuals who are permanently barred by law and custom from mainstream society” (Alexander 13). Denied justice through dominant institutions Creoles were relegated to an “undercaste” and wrote about their position within society to mobilize action to challenge hegemony by raising awareness about the functions of the criminal justice system. Creoles worked to identify how injustice such as the practice of lynching or the assault of Daniel Jones were not just tragic incidents but displayed the way the criminal justice system operated under the will of the State as a system of control to maintain the racial hierarchy.

The Daily Crusader detailed the discrimination colored people face in attempting to obtain a fair trial. In the March 13, 1895 article titled “Come Forward” by Rodolphe Lucien Desdunes notes the paper’s campaign to address discriminatory statements made by a practicing judge. Desdunes writes: “From the time when Judge Moise said that discrimination was a fact in his court, and that colored men were excluded from jury service on account ‘of their lack of intelligence and of moral standing,’ The Daily Crusader and the Citizen’s Committee have set to work and right the wrong, by legal means” (Desdunes “Come Forward”). Judge Moise explicitly stated colored men should not serve on juries due to beliefs of their inability to intelligently and morally produce a verdict. These comments were made without any repercussions and the paper set out to unseat Judge Moise. *The Daily Crusader* did not only look at individual instances of discrimination, but rather the jury system as a whole and how it functions to protect the interests of hegemonic ideals. Jurors are made up of members of the community who have a stake in

preserving the status quo and hold their own prejudices and biases. Desdunes notes: “Race prejudice in truth seems to be the predominating wisdom of most of our jurors. Some of them cannot convict anybody that is white, nor acquit anyone that is black” (Desdunes “Come Forward”). The privileging of whiteness was upheld by dominant institutions, but also by individuals working in their best interest to maintain white supremacy.

When discussing the recent conviction of James Murray, Desdunes noted how quickly he was convicted. Even though Desdunes expresses he was guilty in his opinion, the actions of the jury showed very little concern in deciding the fate of another human being’s life. He argues: “However guilty a culprit might be, ten minutes is too short a time to convict him, if conscience is to be consulted in the matter of a finding” (Desdunes “Come Forward”). Desdunes argues that it was not significant to an all-white jury to condemn a Black man to death because of their racial prejudices and the dismissal of the value of the lives of colored people. He continues: “Such a verdict is simply murder under legal forms, and serves to show what little consideration the average white juror in Louisiana has for even life, when the possessor is colored” (Desdunes “Come Forward”). Sentencing any individual to death is a powerful burden and white juries condemned colored people to death without having to weigh on their conscience because they are not viewed as individuals, but rather the criminalized and devalued Black body. These dominant ideologies impede the ability for all to receive fair treatment. Desdunes argues: “A fair and impartial trial cannot be had, where the question of race is permitted to obtrude. Whenever an accused has not enjoyed fully his constitutional means of defense, his conviction under, the circumstance is legal murder and it would be false to give it any other name” (Desdunes “Come Forward”). A trial within the criminal justice system is as unjust as the act of lynching, even though it has been deemed legal because of the hegemonic constructs of race that pervade the

courtroom, jurors, and operation of the system. Desdunes critiques: “The jury system is said to be the ‘palladium’ of our liberty; if that expression means anything, it should be a symbol of safety and not a ‘Jim Crow’ arrangement where race prejudice sits in judgement over the destinies of men to make them suffer death or imprisonment because they are black or are not considered as Americans” (Desdunes “Sentiment in Politics No.5”). All non-white residents are denied access to citizenship and are excluded from conceptions of American identity.

Hegemonic racial constructs criminalize and deprive colored people of their lives, but their rights are stripped through the facade of a criminal justice system and the guise of the opportunity to receive a fair trial.

The criminal justice system runs to uphold hegemony and maintain racial inequality. Perpetuating white supremacy has political, social, and monetary interests. *The Daily Crusader* noted that dominant institutions relied upon the criminalization, incarceration, and subjugation of colored people. Dominant ideologies reflecting racial inequality were necessary to maintain the criminal justice system, which was inextricably linked to capitalist interests. Desdunes asserts: “The love of money is probably the only affection that occupies their Christian souls, and as long as they cherish those paying convictions, the jails, penitentiaries, and camp convicts; will remain full of their accustomed supply, which is guaranteed by the plantation laws and white juries of our State” (Desdunes “A Lynx or a Mole”). The use of all white juries and the racial inequalities present within the criminal justice system are maintained in order for dominant society to continue to profit from the labor of colored people since the end of the institution of slavery. Although Creoles were writing about the unjust practices they were witnessing, they took it a step further and connected these injustices to the larger system and how hegemonic conceptions of race criminalize and exploit colored people for profit. The criminalization of colored people

was an adaptation in response to the end of slavery and perpetuated by the introduction of Jim Crow. Michelle Alexander makes these connections explicitly as she asserts: “Convicts had no meaningful legal rights at this time and no effective redress. They were understood, quite literally, to be slaves of the state. The Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution had abolished slavery but allowed one major exception: slavery remained appropriate as punishment for a crime” (Alexander 31). In order to continue depriving colored people of full citizenship they were criminalized in order to sustain a society predicated on white privilege and to maintain the power dynamics of enslavement even after the emancipation of the enslaved.

Creoles noted the parallels between the death penalty and lynching by noting how these incidents are racialized acts of violence perpetrated against communities of color. Even when these deaths are viewed as legal or justifiable, the death penalty is used as an extension of lynching because it furthers the same system of racial inequality. Desdunes advocates: “It is just as important to avoid and oppose legal murder as it is to denounce and oppose mob murder” (Desdunes “Sentiment in Politics No.5”). Desdunes notes the racialized implementation of the death penalty and how it is used as a tool of hegemony to act as another means of control. All of the aspects of oppression that the publication discusses are connected through a critique of “common sense” and recognizing the functioning of hegemony. Desdunes writes: “That caste spirit has dictated the separate car law, the anti-miscegenation law so called, the jury law, and many other partisan, mean and obnoxious enactments, which make the life of the colored man, in certain parts of the United States, miserable and bitter”(Desdunes “Sentiment in Politics No. 22”). The true cost of dominant ideologies are the lives of colored people that are sacrificed to uphold white privilege. Desdunes appeals: “Let them remember that more than one hundred human being [sic] have been put to death this year without process of law, and by the wicked

hands of mobs in pursuance of a conspiracy founded of race prejudice and race hatred” (Desdunes “Necessity and Law”). It is necessary to combat the system that murders and oppresses in order to maintain a racial hierarchy and this cannot be achieved through the legal system or an appeal to the dominant class for the privileges of citizenship. Lisa Marie Cacho notes the significance of fighting for change in ways that do not reinforce or legitimize dominant institutions. Cacho argues: “Decentering the state as sole authority over legitimate power and recognized personhood requires being willing to be critical of what makes us vulnerable to state violences *and* what makes us susceptible to the state’s seductions, what makes most avenues for social change not only unthinkable but criminal” (Cacho 145). Citizenship for colored people would not be found in the courts, but true progress is made through contesting hegemony through connecting the ideology brought forward by the “organic intellectuals” of the community to the masses by mobilizing communities into action. In *the Daily Crusader* Creoles argued for a change, but it could not be superficial and had to result in a transformative revolution. Michelle Alexander notes how racism evolved after the end of slavery into the system of Jim Crow legislation that was enforced through the criminal justice system and Creole writers for *The Daily Crusader* also recognized that the discrimination within the legal system was tied to much larger hegemonic constructions of white privilege that was perpetuated through dominant institutions.

Political Reform

Creole writers connected the injustices present within society to develop call to actions and there was an emphasis placed on political action. There were explicit demands to create change through voting and in choosing leadership that would further change. The political process was often discussed in the pages of *The Crusader* with criticism of the Democratic outlet

the *Times-Democrat*. *The Daily Crusader* did identify as a Republican newspaper and often discussed candidates and elections focusing on a Republican perspective but did not hesitate to criticize practices of the party that did not align with their progressive ideals.

The support of the Republican party was explicit as seen in the article, “One Ticket Implies Success, but Two Mean Defeat” as Desdunes claims:

The success of the Republican party is the triumph of justice, of law, of equal rights to all men; the reverse is the perpetuation of injustice, of oppression, of inequality, which have disgraced the State for a long time. The Democratic politicians have ruled this State by violence, fraud, and the Lottery gold, with a rate of taxation totally inadequate for the public needs, they have not only maintained a bold face, but they have forced the people to suffer from the results of several embezzlements. (Desdunes “One Ticket Implies Success, but Two Means Defeat”)

The platform of the Republican party aligned with the counterhegemonic ideals of *The Daily Crusader* and Creole activists used the paper to call out corruption and the perpetuation of oppression associated with the Democratic party. The critiques were not reserved only for the Democratic party, but any politician and member of leadership that furthered the current system of inequality, which was inextricably linked to the system of capitalism.

The Daily Crusader was also critical of capitalism and recognized its connection to racial inequality. The critiques of the Lottery were often rooted in critiques of capitalism. The Louisiana State Lottery Company was able to influence legislators to support bills that were in their best interest. Garnie William McGinty details: “It was stated that the company had every legislature in its power from 1868 to 1892” (McGinty 333). The passing of the separate car law and other racially unjust legislation was tied to the interests of the Lottery. The Crusader notes:

“The separate car law was the enactment of the Lottery boodle Legislature, and not of a Legislature representing the views of the best of Southern whites” (“Impotent Wrath”). The corporate interests of the Lottery and the corrupt political system resulted in the marginalization of people of color. The Crusader draws these connections:

The Lottery effectively controlled the Legislature of 1888-1890. Its people, to better secure the votes of the colored members in its interest, promised to defeat the then proposed separate car law. When their purpose was accomplished, when the Lottery constitutional amendment had been passed, the Lottery supporters forfeited their plighted faith and passed the separate car bill, in order that they might go before the people of the State on a ‘white supremacy’ platform, thinking better to secure success thus. (“Impotent Wrath”)

The Lottery backed powerful politicians and had vested interest in sustaining a system built upon white supremacy to profit from the marginalization of colored people. They strategically gained control by appealing to the vote of colored citizens by false promises of furthering legislation that would desegregate public transportation only to later embrace segregation bills in hopes of establishing an alliance with the majority of white voters. Racial injustice persisted politically and in the name of profit while Creole writers recognized that corporations were only interested in furthering political campaigns that would return higher profits rather than standing behind any principles of fighting inequality. The “common sense” supported white supremacy and the Lottery would continue to back candidates and platforms that reinforced this hegemonic construct.

The Daily Crusader was also critical of the publication the *Times-Democrat* as Desdunes stated: “The T.-D. is a corporation conducted on the principle of dollars and cents that never

gives utterance to one syllable outside of regulations” (Desdunes “Notoriety”). The Times-Democrat was a business run on furthering politicians and political viewpoints that would only reinforce hegemonic ideals. Maintaining the status quo by upholding dominant ideologies legally and politically threatened the progressive potential of Creole resistance and equality for all. *The Daily Crusader* also called out the role of the media to disseminate information to the people without focusing on profit. Desdunes asserts: “The Crusader is the organ of the people, and not any Negro paper with white men’s views. It does not write by contract, but by conviction, and what it preaches now on rights and wrongs, it will continue to preach it as long as it lives under the same auspices” (Desdunes “Sentiment in Politics No. 3”). *The Daily Crusader* notes the importance of standing outside the business of profit to provide a viewpoint that does not merely reinforce hegemonic perspectives or “white men’s views”. The paper was sustained through donations, Desdunes writes: “The Crusader stocking is hanging yet. The appeal to the people is to ascertain whether they are willing to sustain the only Republican daily paper in the South and the only journal of equal rights in the United States” (Desdunes Volume 2 No. 34). *The Crusader* frequently printed these Crusader stocking notes as they appeared in several of the recovered pages and articles within the archive as a means to ask for donations from readers relying upon a system of crowdfunding rather than having to answer to corporate interests. The publication notes: “It is not necessary that any one should give a large sum where all have a common interest and are expected to contribute their mite” (“The Stocking”). *The Daily Crusader* advocated for small donations by the many to sustain this paper without giving control to any supporter in order to publish a periodical that could openly critique the dominant system and did not have to seek permission to advocate for what is truly best for the community it represents.

In their critique of capitalism and how the influence of capitalists on the political system perpetuates racial inequality *The Daily Crusader* not only critiqued the actions of corporations, but of the capitalist class. Desdunes critiques the desire to acquire wealth as a method in which inequality is furthered as he states: “It is an evident fact needing no amplification, that when a person demands more than what is due him, the surplus is what makes the deprivation of his neighbor” (Desdunes “Sentiment in Politics No. 17”). He argues capitalists only take in these profits in order to build their affluence at the cost of impeding the ability of others earning potential. The critiques of the justice system are connected to the interests of capitalists and continuing to profit off the free labor of colored people. Desdunes elaborates: “For the same reasons, our jails, penitentiaries, and ‘convict camps are filled with Negroes’. These Negroes are poor, friendless, and in the hands of their enemies. The only thing that could save them would be mercy, if that virtue existed in the hearts of the politicians and low classes who run the government for the most part” (Desdunes “A Lynx or a Mole”). Creoles advocated for a more just government as a means to combat the perpetuation of capitalism because it has created an economic interest in furthering white supremacy.

R.L. Desdunes argues that hegemonic conceptions of race persist due to the interests of the dominant class and their construction of a “common sense” that represents what is in their best interest. The representatives of the dominant class are white men who fight to maintain white privilege politically and use several hegemonic tools to perpetuate the system. Desdunes argues: “A certain class of white men have imbibed sufficiently of the strange doctrines of white supremacy dished out to them daily by the press, to conclude that the Constitution is a farce, and that justice means the authority of the white race and the subordination of the black race” (Desdunes “Reflexions on Lynx-Eye”). He notes the role the media plays in furthering

hegemonic principles and the significance of the dominant class maintaining control of the political system.

The publication and distribution of a paper that challenged hegemonic conceptions of race and dismantled the “common sense” that was recognized as the foundations of society caused a backlash. *The Daily Crusader* notes the letters it has received that have accused the publication of attempting to incite racial acts of violence and addressed these allegations in print. In answering accusations that the paper was inflaming colored people, Desdunes writes: “Any ordinary man will comprehend that the teaching of rights, can only inflame or exasperate those who are inclined to be tyrannical” (Desdunes “Reflexions on Lynx-Eye Continued”). The paper was noted as a vehicle to raise awareness about the rights colored people have been denied and will only anger the dominant class because it threatens their ability to maintain control over the marginalized. It is through the publication’s role as a tool of education through the dissemination of politically pertinent information that the connection between the “organic intellectuals” and the masses can be realized to create action. As Desdunes notes: “If the Negroes are to be taught their rights by their leaders, it is admitting that those rights are ignored or contested by someone else” (Desdunes “Reflexions on Lynx-Eye Continued”). It is through the information challenging the “common sense” understandings of societal inequalities that have been naturalized that allow for a true challenge to hegemony to be formed by the very communities that have been placated into believing their oppression is acceptable.

Rodolphe Lucien Desdunes wrote a series of articles appearing as a recurring column titled “Sentiment in Politics”. The recurring theme of this series was that emotion is a critical part of politics and should guide our stances on how we are governed. Recognizing the importance of our emotions is a challenge to the hegemonic conceptions of how our government

should operate and has the potential to revolutionize the system. This theme of sentiment echoes the common expression associated with feminism that, “the personal is political”. In this column Desdunes asserts: “The citizen who believes in sentiment is longing for a change, if it should come right. He wants to see the Republican party enlarged and recommended by principles which will appeal to his reason and his sensibilities. He is heartily tired and disgusted with those Republicans whose greatest service is to hold an office, and whose patriotism is to draw the pay” (Desdunes “Sentiment in Politics No. 2”). He criticizes all public officials that do not recognize the significance of being a member of leadership and to stand for the principles of the party platform to work in achieving a more equitable society. Even though the harshest criticism is reserved for the Democratic party, Desdunes notes the problems within the Republican party that mirror the oppressive conditions of the system of slavery. Desdunes writes: “The Democratic party is wicked and oppressive; the Republican party as it is in this state is like a vast plantation, run by a few bosses, and sub-bosses, and hirelings” (Desdunes “Sentiment in Politics No. 2”). The Republican party is identified as a clear symbol of racial oppression through evoking the imagery of slavery, but also noting the complex hierarchy within the political system that is built upon a system of inequality. Desdunes noted the pitfalls of a two-party political system but advocated for a change in an appeal to emotion through electing leaders that have an interest beyond financial interest in governing the people.

The Crusader did speak about elections and supported candidates in print that the writers argued would challenge the current political system. Although they made it clear they did not provide financial support to candidates, they praised candidates that reflected their values of racial equality and bringing sentiment into politics. Desdunes compared the candidate Thomas B. Reed to Benjamin Franklin, noting Franklin was the “first president of the first Society of the

Abolition of Slavery”⁴⁶. Desdunes contends: “In that same spirit, and for the same reasons, we love and recommend Thomas B. Reed. We are not pledging candidates because we have neither the power nor the inclination to make them” (Desdunes “Sentiment in Politics No. 7”). He based his support over a belief that the candidate would advocate for racial equality and shows a passion for creating transformative change. In determining which candidates to support Desdunes makes the argument that politicians must show a passionate drive to fight for equality. He states: “One word for human liberty is better, in our estimation, than a volume on tariff, on gold or silver, or any other campaign slogan imaginable under the sun, and the person who gives that word deserves the highest honors” (Desdunes “Sentiment in Politics No. 7”). It is crucial for candidates to speak to humanity and equality to appeal to voters from marginalized groups. *The Crusader* made an appeal to overlook political party affiliations and note leadership’s stances on race to achieve progress. There must be a centering of justice to challenge racial subjugation. The publication notes: “It is not justice to himself to his family, to his neighbor, to civilization, to Christianity, to endorse murmuringly the consecration of his inferiority. Now is it possible for the generous men of this State, irrespective of past political affiliations, to admit question of right and wrong in the programme of their serious programs? (“The Echo of History”). Writers evoked the ideology of Franz Fanon by noting in denouncing racism there must be an emphasis on humanity, Fanon asserts: “All forms of exploitation are identical, since they apply to the same object: man. By considering the structure of such and such an exploitation from an abstract point of view we are closing our eyes to the fundamentally important problem of restoring man to his rightful place” (Fanon 69). To contest hegemony there must be an appeal made to humanity, to justice, to emotion, and to change the structure of society through taking action.

⁴⁶ (Desdunes “Sentiment in Politics No. 7”)

The Daily Crusader printed an article by David Porter about his travels to the Republican National League Convention in Cleveland. He detailed: “The Louisiana delegates who attended the Convention were well pleased with the hospitality of the people of Cleveland. There is a vast difference in the two sections of our country- the North and South. When I crossed the Ohio river and entered the State of Illinois, I was a welcome guest wherever I went” (Porter “Mr. Porter Writes a Characteristic Letter and Again Hits from the Shoulder”). The appeal to emotion and the promise of a more racially just society as seen in the North gave Louisianans hope for the future of their communities, but the publication did not idealize the current climate in the country and in the future of the Republican party. R.L. Desdunes notes that voters must remain critical of the Republican party and work hard to realize the commitment to liberty and humanity. Desdunes critiques the Republicans who are hesitant to fight for equality and address the issues that the Republican party’s platform is based upon. Desdunes writes:

“What is astonishing is that some of our friends right in this city, whose patriotism cannot be put in doubt, whose liberality and manhood are matters of notoriety whose fathers received the cradle in which liberty was nursed in this State, find that *The Crusader* and the Citizens’ Committee are too rigorous and too exacting in their demand for equal rights, or, rather, in their resistance to methods and schemes brought into play to destroy the creed and to stop the tendency of the Republican party” (Desdunes “Sentiment in Politics No.8”)

The Crusader is calling for a commitment to action by politicians and the people alike. The critiques put forth that against *The Daily Crusader* and the work of the Citizens’ Committee parallel the critique Martin Luther King Jr. made in the “Letter in Birmingham Jail” against white moderates that asked him to wait rather than take action in fighting racism in the present.

Martin Luther King Jr. wrote: “Frankly, I have yet to engage in a direct-action campaign that was ‘well-timed’ in the view of those who have not suffered unduly from the disease of segregation” (King Jr. 838-839). *The Crusader* was clear in its intent to inspire action to address the present conditions and pave a path forward.

In forging the direction there is continued criticism of blindly pledging allegiance to a political party in taking political action. Any impediments to justice must be addressed as Desdunes argues: “An abuse of liberty, whether done by Kings or by Republicans, is nevertheless an abuse, the source from whence it comes being hardly of any determining significance” (Desdunes “Sentiment in Politics No. 19”). He compares this continued struggle to waging a war, a war against hegemony and changing the very basis of society. Desdunes posits: “The ‘war’ will not be ‘indeed over’ long as there will be white supremacy, class legislation, mob law, illegal juries and State discrimination in the schools, in the militia, in public establishments and resorts, and in the administration of the law generally” (Desdunes “Sentiment in Politics No.11”). He advocates for a change in leadership in order to create change and he specifically addresses Republicans that are not willing to fight for change and racial equality. Desdunes argues:

They have run the party long enough in their personal interest, and now the people require a change of methods. Our constituents believe these “practical politicians” should go to work, and learn how to make a living by the sweat of their brow; the way must be cleared of their obnoxious presence, so that competent and deserving leaders may come forward to redeem the shattered fortunes of the State and to right the wrongs of its humble citizens. (Desdunes “Our Constituents”)

The Crusader advocated for change in the Republican party to realize the ideals of the platform and create widespread change within society. The political system could be utilized as a tool in challenging hegemony rather than reinforcing the unjust structure of society. Creoles sought transformation in not just the politicians in leadership roles, but in the party and political system to address racial inequality within the very foundation of dominant institutions and within their communities.

One of the first practical steps *The Daily Crusader* focused on was for every citizen to attain the right to vote. R.L. Desdunes wrote several articles detailing acts of voter suppression and fighting against pending legislation that could further limit voting rights for the marginalized. He recognized that the dominant class had stripped colored people of their freedom within the institution of slavery and had continued concerted efforts of stripping the rights from all colored people after emancipation using any means necessary. Desdunes detailed: “Slavery died it is true in spite of that hostility, but that hostility continued against every measure undertaken by those who killed the peculiar institution” (Desdunes “Sentiment in Politics No. 12”). The hostility and backlash from the former Confederates and members of the dominant class resulted in the establishment of Jim Crow and the evolution of white supremacy through all facets of society fighting against the granting of rights to colored residents.

Dominant institutions attempted to deprive colored citizens the right to vote by utilizing several tactics including the use of literacy tests. Desdunes writes on this proposed legislation to allow only literate voters to cast a ballot through the implementation of testing procedures as he writes: “The latest discovery, after a long line of brutal proceedings, to annul the effect of those amendments is the disenfranchisement of the Negro. We think that true Republicans are expected to oppose this act of treason against the Constitution of the United States, not justified even by

the pretexts advanced that it is to get rid of illiteracy..." (Desdunes "Sentiment in Politics No. 12). The attempts to disenfranchise colored voters were veiled under a pretext of ensuring voters are educated and creating fair voting procedures. In the guise of only bettering the voting systems by requiring literacy tests the dominant class intended to create a system of "qualified suffrage" and continue choosing who has access to the rights of citizenship. This legislation would again deem discrimination legal as Desdunes continues: "But that voter who was so treated, did he fail to be useful to the State, because he was illiterate; or was he prevented by force, trickery and violence, from making his vote answer for his judgment? (Desdunes "Sentiment in Politics No. 16"). These acts of voter suppression were constructed within the dominant narrative as justifiable to create a more just political system. There were also attempts to argue that enacting requirements to voters would combat fraud in elections. Desdunes notes: "We certainly question the wisdom of such plans in a State where fraud is notoriously the virtue of the great and not the direct act of the illiterate, or of the foreigner" (Desdunes "Sentiment in Politics No. 16"). The dominant class used "common sense" perspectives on improving elections and making a fairer political system to construct legislation that would continue to discriminate against the marginalized classes to preserve hegemony and control within the leadership.

These were not the only proposed restrictions to deciding who was eligible to vote as poll taxes had been enacted throughout the South in defiance of voting rights. Desdunes argues that the poll tax is a direct reflection of white privilege and the ability to dismiss the rights of citizenship of the marginalized, he asserts: "Any citizen who has not white supremacy on the brain, must perceive how mean it is to legislate wealth as superior to virtue; to deprive an illiterate man of his citizenship because he cannot show a cash valuation assessment of two hundred dollars, located in this State" (Desdunes "Sentiment in Politics No. 21"). Creating

impediments to voting based upon economic value or literacy targets the impoverished and excludes them from constructions of moral citizenship. This is a constructed “common sense” that connects wealth to the ideal citizen and instills a sense of shame of those who fail to meet these specific criteria. Melissa Harris-Perry notes the impact of shame as she argues: “Something different happens when the state seeks to shame its citizens by imposing a lasting stigma on their very identity: it is proclaiming that the person herself or himself is defective. Rather than motivating restitution, shame debilitates and encourages avoidance” (Harris-Perry 108). By shaming prospective voters of color and citizens of lower socioeconomic status the State establishes who has access to the privileges of whiteness and the privileges of citizenship. Desdunes argues the dominant class can uphold white supremacy in the political arena without any impediment by restricting voting rights. He details: “...qualified suffrage in the South means the last attempt of the rich white man to make a government of his own choice, whose cornerstone will rest on the ruins of popular rights, especially those where those rights are represented by color and poverty” (Desdunes “Sentiment in Politics No. 22”). The government and leadership within the state did not want a racially just society but wanted a system in which control could be maintained by the dominant class by creating campaigns that used terminology advocating for fair elections and improving the education of voters. The dominant class sought to reinforce white supremacy by reinforcing “common sense” solutions to the political system. *The Crusader* detailed the tactics of the leadership by challenging these “common sense” constructions and highlighting the threat to equality being posed by the dominant class. A contributor to *The Daily Crusader* referred to as V.P. Thomas poses this question: “‘The question of to-day’ is truly whether the government of Louisiana shall hereafter be in the hands of only the rich and book-learned, or in those of all men, the rich, the poor, the book-learned and

the unschooled alike of the citizens of our State” (Thomas “ Mr. Thomas Writes an Interesting Letter”). *The Daily Crusader* used their publication as a means to filter the language used by dominant interests in creating a system of qualified suffrage to recognize the way in which “common sense” was being evoked in order to protect the political system based upon white supremacy.

Conclusion

Contrary to belief and generalizations that describe Creoles as assimilationists and eager to conform to dominant society, Creoles advocated for racial equality in many ways including through the medium of print. They organized groups such as the Citizens’ Committee to advocate for the end of segregation through constructing the legal challenge of *Plessy v. Ferguson*. Creoles spoke out against dominant ideologies and challenged the systems of oppression in publications. The power of publications is noted in the pages of *The Daily Crusader*, it states: “It is now a matter of historical truth, that the efforts of L’Union and the Tribune more than any other agency provoked the policy of reconstruction by which the transition from bondage to freedom carried at once the equality of citizenship” (“Eugene Chesse”). *The Crusader* noted the role of publications in influencing policy that shapes the struggle for racial equality. Creoles were a part of the abolitionist movement but recognized the complexities of racism that existed beyond the institution of slavery. During the period of reconstruction, in print, Creoles connected racial injustice to capitalism, corruption, and the hegemonic construct of white privilege. Creoles created their own spaces physically and in the medium of print to contest racial subjugation and oppression.

Although my aim is to highlight the work of mobilizing Creoles in coming together in the fight for change, there were a number of individuals whose stories have been and should be

recounted that played pivotal roles in Creole activism. A major critique of Creole activism was elitism because of the higher socioeconomic status of several prominent Creole activists and their connections to spaces and privileges that were not always accessible to all. Creole activism as seen in the formation of the Citizens' Committee shaped the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, Michael Crutcher notes: "But the legacy of Plessy and the radical Comité des Citoyens was reconstituted into a Creole-dominated NAACP, itself bolstered by professionals" (Crutcher 63). The class division evident within the NAACP was also reflected within a myriad of associations, but these divisions evolved in response to the difficult legal defeat. Michael Crutcher elaborates: "The lifestyle of Downtown Creoles of color experienced the same declines as Creole culture generally but was magnified by the racialized implications of the *Plessy* decision. As a response, Creoles created new cultural institutions in the Downtown wards, including Catholic churches and schools, exclusive social clubs, and ward-based political organizations" (Crutcher 37). The defeat of the *Plessy* case and the perpetuation of racial segregation resulted in the creation of new organizations and new methods in combating racial inequality. Trushna Parekh argues: "While the Supreme Court decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* reduced overt resistance citywide, downtown neighborhoods such as the Seventh Ward and neighboring Sixth Ward, where St. Augustine is located, continued to maintain a tradition of strong Creole leadership" (Parekh 565). Creole activism and leadership adapted in order to persevere despite legal obstacles encountered in the struggle to address racial inequality.

Prominent lawyer, Alexander Pierre Tureaud, also known as A.P. Tureaud was a legal activist fighting to end segregation and racial discrimination after the defeat of the *Plessy* case. Michael Crutcher highlights his role in combating racial inequality: "In 1948, Creole lawyer A.P. Tureaud won a suit demanding that the New Orleans school board offer equal pay to African

American teachers. Two years later, Tureaud introduced a school desegregation suit that reached the U.S. Supreme Court but was overtaken by the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision” (Crutcher 62). Tureaud fought against racial discrimination with a focus on the field of education. After the defeat of *Plessy v. Ferguson* and the court’s decision to uphold racial segregation Creoles still continued to fight against and construct legal opposition to segregation. In *The Louisiana Weekly* John E. Rousseau writes: “Any history of the Black man’s struggle for full, first-class citizenship in Louisiana during the period 1927-1972 must revolve around one quiet-spoken, highly effective, conscientious and relentless fighter in the civil rights arena; a solid tower of strength for many organizations, and an inspiration for black leaders” (Rousseau). Rousseau continues:

“Frequently referred to as ‘Mr. Civil Rights,’ and ‘Mr. NAACP,’ Mr. Tureaud initiated over 30 cases for the desegregation of Louisiana’s schools. Other actions filed by him in the courts of the United States and Louisiana include suits for the equalization of salaries for public school teachers, the admission of black students to Louisiana State University, the desegregation of buses, playgrounds and other public facilities and to compel the Louisiana State Board of Education to use textbooks portraying the black experience.” (Rousseau)

A.P. Tureaud recognized that racial discrimination took on many forms not just in the schools that people of color were permitted to attend, but also in the salaries of educators and within the curriculum itself.

There are too many activists to name and many whose work may not have been documented or preserved, but I have chosen to highlight a few counterstories. A. P. Tureaud built on the legacy of Creole activism seen in the Citizens’ Committee to continue the struggle

against racial discrimination in the legal system. Tureaud did not work alone in fighting racial discrimination in the legal arena, Trushna Parekh notes he often worked with fellow activist: "...Dutch Morial, also a lawyer (who went on to become mayor of New Orleans in 1978), who filed many desegregation suits together [with A.P. Tureaud]" (Parekh 566). New Orleans has had four Black mayors that identified as Creole or have an identifiable Creole ancestry⁴⁷. Throughout the period of the Civil Rights Movement there were Creole activists demanding change. Trushna Parekh recounts:

"Civil rights activists from the Tremé neighborhood, such as Jerome Smith and others, followed in the lineage of this Afro-Creole tradition by protesting segregation and housing discrimination and even scaling back urban renewal during the 1950s and 1960s that displaced many residents of the Tremé neighborhood. Jerome Smith credits another former St. Augustine parishioner and community leader, Mardi Gras Indian Chief Allison Tootie Montana, as an important political influence." (Parekh 566)

These leaders did not act alone but fought alongside fellow Creoles in addressing concerns that affected their communities.

Creole activism should not be reduced to the stories of individuals, I have chosen to highlight counterstories of "organic intellectuals" that may have been overlooked, but the focus is placed on the mobilization of Creoles to impact change. *Plessy v. Ferguson* should not be understood as a case progressed by Creoles to gain access to white privilege, but rather as a legal challenge to the dominant institutions that uphold white supremacy by highlighting the inability for the category of race to define access to citizenship because it is socially constructed and unable to be discerned. Homer Plessy identified as colored as he advocated for his right to sit in

⁴⁷ (Parekh 566).

the first-class coach by deconstructing the definition of citizenship centered around whiteness. Creoles challenged hegemonic constructions of race to contest white supremacy on several fronts. The “organic intellectuals” represented by the Citizens Committee, the writers of *The Daily Crusader*, and the legal work of A.P. Tureaud were ways to fight against hegemonic legal definitions of race. Countering “common sense” that reinforced hegemonic ideals of white privilege, Creoles have worked to create a new “common sense” predicated on racial equality and addressing the role dominant institutions must play in creating this transformative change.

The systems of oppression have evolved as necessary and Creole resistance transformed to counter it. Michelle Alexander argues: “Any candid observer of American racial history must acknowledge that racism is highly adaptable. The rules and reasons the political system employs to enforce status relations of any kind, including racial hierarchy, evolve and change as they are challenged” (Alexander 21). Historically Creoles have resisted colonialism and slavery, after emancipation Creoles recognized the way hegemony perpetuated white supremacy through dominant institutions and organized to challenge it. Creoles advocated against what R.L. Desdunes termed the “caste spirit,” Desdunes posits: “This consequence of habitual inequality is what the friends of genuine liberty call the caste spirit, that wicked and selfish operation of the mind, which is forever demanding or enforcing some measure of spite and of degradation” (Desdunes “Sentiment in Politics No. 17”). By contesting hegemonic constructions of race Creoles forming the Citizens’ Committee combated racial segregation through a carefully designed legal challenge that became *Plessy v. Ferguson*. When Homer Plessy refused to move to the designated colored coach and remained seated in his first-class seat, he sought to challenge legalized racial segregation, but also the very structures within society that uphold white privilege. Through using *The Daily Crusader* to increase awareness and action against

discrimination in the legal system Creoles recognized the legal system's intentional subjugation of colored people as a form of social control. *The Crusader* also advocated for political reform to avoid racism merely taking on new forms and persisting through the political leadership present within the leading political parties. Attempts to change voting laws or require qualified suffrage were orchestrated efforts to draw upon established "common sense" to perpetuate white supremacy. Creole activism persisted beyond this period following Reconstruction and created impactful change in bringing an end to racial segregation and contesting white privilege to the present day. Creoles advocated against dominant institutions and the furthering of hegemony in a daily newspaper distributed in the 1880's. They drew larger connections between white supremacy, capitalism, and the criminal justice system that echo the work of theorists decades later. Recognizing the lack of representation of their progressive ideals Creole "organic intellectuals" came together to crowdfund a publication that was funded by the masses in a counterhegemonic moment of resistance.

Chapter 3:

Counterstories of Creole Activism

The work of the Citizens' Committee laid the groundwork to challenge racial oppression within the legal system and through the creation of *The Daily Crusader* as a publication based upon spreading awareness and mobilizing people to work for impactful change in society. The lasting impact of the Citizens' Committee was seen through the continued work to address institutional racism and through the creation of more organizations founded on principles of progress. This foundation led to the creation of religious associations and social clubs that centered around activism. In this chapter I will focus on the role of religion and social clubs in creating activist networks to continue the fight against racial inequality. Many of these groups had some connection to religion and spirituality at their core and used these shared beliefs as a means to establish an infrastructure to define the intentions and methods of these groups. Activist networks grew out of shared religious and spiritual beliefs, but also Creole resistance strategies were built upon a foundation of spirituality. I will discuss how resistance was adopted through adapting aspects of institutionalized religion seen in the prominence of Catholicism in Creole communities, but also in progressive spiritual ideals that draw upon ancestral knowledge and the spirit world to advocate against injustice.

Creoles critiqued the institution of the Catholic Church because of its role in perpetuating inequality. Within this chapter I continue to cite articles from *The Daily Crusader* that call out the practices of the Catholic Church to note the critiques of institutional racism, but I also highlight the spiritual practices created by Creoles to resist the oppressive ideology of the Catholic Church. Through these forms of spiritual resistance clubs and associations were formed that helped to challenge hegemonic conceptions of religion and transform the way that Creoles

engaged with their religious beliefs. Social clubs simultaneously helped build solidarity networks among Creoles and colored people but also highlighted divisions, as the practices of some clubs perpetuated hegemonic constructed rifts predicated on colorism and socioeconomic disparities. Through analyzing primary documents found within the publication *The Daily Crusader* as well as pamphlets and widely distributed materials from these clubs and associations, I argue that hegemonic ideological constructs based on white supremacy persisted in the practices of social clubs, religious association, and organizations within Creole communities, but these same groups were also used as tools of resistance.

I have read primary documents from social clubs and religious organizations to interpret them similtexually as P. Gabrielle Foreman argues: “Simultexts exhibit their multivalent meanings on the *surface* for those who can access and then interpret them in accordance with collective political and literary concerns” (Foreman 7). There are multiple ways to read the documents and interpret the perspectives of Creole activists, however their strategies are often dismissed as assimilationist without noting the challenges made to hegemonic conceptions of race. Drawing on the work of Andrea Smith in recognizing the complexity of white supremacy and its differing forms of oppression I argue that Creoles challenged white supremacy within their own constructed social and religious spaces by drawing on Catholicism, but creating their own rituals seen the in the celebration of Mardi Gras and engaging with the spiritual world for guidance. Creoles created activist networks based around their spirituality combating racial injustice in a unique way that is still displayed today in online collectives by practicing séances to connect with ancestral knowledge to create new paths forward. Creoles drew from “common sense” to challenge hegemonic constructions of race by working within a dominant framework

but acknowledged that a wide array of methods must be applied in order to challenge white supremacy.

Spiritualism in Creole Activism

Catholicism is a significant aspect of life for Creoles in Louisiana and the central role religion played in the lives of the enslaved was highlighted in the Code Noir of 1724. Michael Pasquier details: “The Code Noir legislated the baptism and catechization of slaves, allowed them to observe the Sabbath and feast days, prohibited sacramental marriages between les blancs and les noirs, and made it possible for baptized slaves to be buried in consecrated cemeteries, among other things” (Pasquier 274). From colonization and the period of enslavement to the present day, Catholicism has been an important characteristic of Creole culture and is the basis for many Creole celebrations. The foundation of Catholicism is reflected in the celebration of Mardi Gras, which centers around the Catholic practice of Lent leading into the holiday of Easter. Although the celebration is based on Catholic traditions, Mardi Gras is celebrated in a distinct way in Louisiana drawing on Creole culture in its performances and unique observance. In the same manner that Creoles have transformed the Catholic practice of Mardi Gras to reflect their beliefs and construct their own culture, Creoles have also little by little forged their own belief system to better address their needs. In response to oppressive ideology furthered by the Catholic Church, Creoles constructed their own system of beliefs to resist the dominant institution and recognize their power to pose a challenge and create a counterstory to the dominant narrative of organized religion. I have highlighted Creole resistance within religious spaces and against the institution of the Catholic Church to recognize and contextualize religion’s link to social activism and the transformative methods used by Creoles to combat racial injustice.

One of the most prominent sites of Creole history in New Orleans is St. Augustine. Trushna Parekh highlights: “St. Augustine Church has been linked to Afro-Creole identity in New Orleans since it was built, and continues to be the main place of worship for the city’s black Catholics” (Parekh 565). The church has been a gathering place for Creole and Black residents of New Orleans, and it was constructed by the community. As Trushna Parekh describes:

The bells of the church were bought at the New Orleans Exposition of 1894. French and Spanish Creoles and free people of color took up a collection to finance the church. When the church was built, half of the congregation consisted of Creoles of French and Spanish ancestry and recent French immigrants; the other half was composed of free people of color, with a few pews reserved for the enslaved. (Parekh 560)

The significance of St. Augustine lies in the fact that Creoles, people of color, as well as the enslaved gathered together in seemingly unprecedented ways. The relationship between Creoles and the Catholic Church was not always harmonious. The institution of the Catholic Church reflected dominant ideologies that perpetuated segregation and racial inequality. From the Amistad Research Center archive an article published on February 14, 1895 written by Arthur Esteves describes an organized protest against the Catholic Church titled, “Citizens’ Committee: Meet and Take Action Against Jim Crow Jury and Jim Crow Church”. The article notes there have been appeals made through the publication to the Catholic Church to end its construction of segregated churches and services. Esteves writes: “Whereas, the ecclesiastical powers of the Parish, in total disregard of timely warnings, and proper complaints on the part of The Daily Crusader, an authorized organ of the people, the separate colored church is being pushed to final completion” (Esteves). Despite the popularity of Catholicism among Creoles in Louisiana there was organized activism against the unjust practices of the Catholic Church, including its role in

perpetuating racial segregation. Writers of *The Daily Crusader* used its platform to demand change and to attempt to halt the building of a separate segregated church for colored worshippers. They argued its role upholding racial inequality threatened the spiritual life of New Orleans residents. Esteves argues: “Whereas, in the opinion of this Committee, there is no reason for the dedication of a separate Catholic church on race lines; and Whereas the Committee view with alarm such prejudice encouraging agency as this church will be in the City of New Orleans where flesh gains ground on spirit in a progressive ratio” (Esteves). Advocating against the use of racial identity as a means of identification, Creoles worked to deconstruct the hegemonic construct of “common sense” that relied upon a naturalization of racial difference to further segregation and inequality. They drew on a spiritual knowledge that could transcend the imposed racial divisions of white supremacy by calling on a unified response from practicing Catholics to demand the dominant institution of the Catholic Church change its position on racial segregation in order to create solidarity rather than continue on a foundation built on imposed separations based on white privilege.

Creoles voiced their opinions on the pages of *L’Union* and *The Daily Crusader*, but the Catholic Church still attempted to silence voices of opposition even prior to the Civil War. The Catholic Church was taking positions to assuage white conservatives seen by Catholic churches like Saint Rose being forced to close because the priest was viewed as sympathetic to abolition.^[48] The Catholic Church’s suppression of abolitionist and desegregationist viewpoints only highlighted the impact of the division between the leadership and followers of the church. Different perspectives on the practices of the church were highlighted in the divide amongst

⁴⁸ (Bell 133)

Catholics on what action should be taken in response to the reluctance of the Catholic Church to take a clear stance against inequality. Caryn Cossé Bell notes: “During the religious controversy, *L’Union* deplored the church’s treatment of Black Catholics, but even before the events at St. Rose, an ideological chasm separated black Creole Catholics from their church leaders” (Bell 245). The institution of the Catholic Church refused to condemn slavery and segregation despite the protests of Creoles and other parishioners. Father Claude Pascal Maistre was suspended from his church for advocating for abolition and the emancipation of the enslaved.⁴⁹ Michael Crutcher recounts: “Father Maistre with the aid of Charles Dolliolle, Charles Honore, and Armand Gonzales constructed a new church known as the Holy Name of Jesus” (Crutcher 32). Creoles created progressive spaces and places of worship in response to the Catholic Church’s adherence to and perpetuation of the oppressive systems that marginalized practicing people of color.

As noted in the previous chapter Creoles enlisted in the Civil War in the ranks of the Confederacy as well as the Union for a myriad of reasons, but their ability to enlist in the Union army came as a result of social pressure. Caryn Cossé Bell details: “By the end of the summer of 1862, military necessities as well as the urgency of Creole requests to enlist in the Union army prompted Butler to authorize the induction of free black recruits” (Bell 126). Through organized protests Creoles has been successful in advocating for their ability to fight on the side of the Union army and voice their opposition to slavery. Bell continues: “Coincident with their dispute with the church hierarchy and their entry into the military, Creole activists had embarked upon an equally determined campaign for political rights” (Bell 134). The organized protests against the Catholic Church through publications as well as religious participation led to the creation of

⁴⁹ (Crutcher 32)

activist networks among Creoles advocating for equality through challenging the injustices of the Catholic Church as well as society at large. The Catholic religion was a prominent aspect of Creole culture and activism, but spiritualism was present in many forms throughout Creole history.

From the archive in the May 10, 1890 issue of *The Daily Crusader* in an article titled “Archbishop Ireland Points out the Way to the True and Only Solution of the Race Problem”, the author notes the archbishop preached on “Social Equality” at St. Augustine’s Church. The archbishop recognized the work being done by Creoles: “He said it was with feelings of pleasure that he came among the Catholics of the parish of St. Augustine, and enjoyed the privilege at all times to speak to his colored fellow citizens, for in them he saw a people seeking to obtain their rights”(“Archbishop Ireland”). The archbishop chose to speak to colored residents choosing the venue of St. Augustine a recognized Creole site. Archbishop Ireland used this moment to speak out against racism and address the commonplace of racial discrimination. The paper also notes the archbishop condemned racism and those impeding progress, he states: “The recognition of the colored man was coming and could not be put off or retarded. The day was near when the prejudiced one would be ashamed of their action and when the colored man would not be discriminated against in the church, hotels, colleges, and business pursuits” (“Archbishop Ireland”). The archbishop was noting the progress that Catholics were hoping to achieve and had been fighting for as a member of an institution that had impeded their progress, but he did place responsibility on white people to challenge their own privilege. Archbishop Ireland went on to say: “...it was the white people who now stood in need of lessons of charity, benevolence, justice, and religion, who had permitted unreasonable causes and prejudices to sway them” (“Archbishop Ireland”). It was powerful to note a powerful member of the Catholic Church hierarchy discussed

the issue of racial inequality, but there is no mention on whether he specifically addresses how the Catholic Church could address racism. Although a member of leadership was speaking to Creole believers on the importance of continuing their fight for equality, the institution of the Catholic Church played an essential part in upholding white supremacy and the ways dominant institutions perpetuate hegemony had to be resisted from within this oppressive structure.

R.L. Desdunes noted in his column “Sentiment in Politics No. 4” the powerful role religious leaders must play in the struggle for racial equality. Desdunes writes a call to action by stating:

If the ministers all over this country will only renew those sentiments of holy indignation against the prejudices and crimes which bring so much sorrow and so much mourning to many hearts and homes of our land, if they will go further and advise political action in line with those sentiments, the result may become more important than probably their present wisdom could anticipate. (Desdunes “Sentiment in Politics No. 4”)

The paper notes that some churches have taken official stances against racial discrimination and it is a necessary step to follow the tenets set forth in the Bible. Desdunes details:

Taking up The Crusader a few days ago, we saw that the First District Baptist Association had adopted some resolutions against race prejudice, against class legislation, against persecution and the unlawful taking of life practiced by the whites upon the blacks, and asking for the protection of the authorities to which all peaceable citizens are entitled, and reaffirming that passage of Scripture which says, that “God hath made of one blood, all nations of men.”(Desdunes “Sentiment in Politics No. 4)

Even though the paper notes the spiritual leaders that have been outspoken in their support of racial equality, they note that support within the religious community must be strengthened.

Desdunes elaborates: “We observe that our ministers, with a few exceptions, have not as yet deposited their mite into the stocking of devotion. This interesting and influential class of our citizens will not, we hope, desert the cause, but will rather hasten to help it by their healthful and appreciated example” (Desdunes “The Discordant Note”). Creole activism was directly influenced by organized religion, but the strategies of resistance transcended specific dominations and took on the form of diverse spiritual beliefs.

Spirituality was inextricably linked to activism and addressing discrimination experienced by the residents of Louisiana. Creoles engaged in the practice of séances to communicate with ancestors in order to seek counsel from the spirits. Caryn Cossé Bell notes the use of spirituality to further activism as she contends: “The spirit messages produced by Creole séances also contained a stinging critique of contemporary society” (Bell 121). The use of spirituality to convey social critiques was a Creole method of challenging the dominant institutions and aided mobilization. Bell argues: “Denied access to traditional avenues of communication and political empowerment, Creole leaders employed nontraditional modes of expression to voice their discontent and affirm their aspirations. They seized upon spiritualism’s universal and immutable principles to repudiate the established order” (Bell 121). Communication with spirits was a method utilized to recognize the pathways forward for activists and intellectuals, it was a powerful form of expression inextricably tied to Creole identity.

In a departure from Catholicism, Creoles engaged in forms of communication with their predecessors to seek advice. Emily Clark asserts: “Out from under the yoke of the Catholic institution’s tyranny, Afro-Creole Spiritualists believed they were on the road to truth and right. This pertained to both their spiritual understanding of the world and the egalitarianism they

desired in society, politics, and religious authority. Afro-Creole Spiritualism was never simply talking to the dead” (Clark 11). These spiritual practices must be recognized as organized resistance to dominant institutions and inequality within society. Creoles created a new perspective to understand how to contest hegemony and forge a pathway from guidance outside of the systems of oppression. The solution to ending their oppression and the perpetuation of these harmful practices came from resistance within society, but also noted their direction must transcend the theories of the mortal. Séances were widely practiced by prominent members of society leading to the formation of activist groups and collectives, such as the group referred to as the Cercle Harmonique. Emily Clark details the formation of this group as she notes: “The Afro-Creole members of the Cercle Harmonique were part of a politically active community in New Orleans that sought self-determination, even if limited” (Clark 4). Clark continues, the group was: “Led by local Afro-Creoles Henri Louis Rey, François “Petit” Dubuclet, and J. B. Valmour, the Cercle Harmonique’s spirit guides included a wide roster” (Clark 3). The communications were recorded and reflect the social concerns of the time period. Clark recounts: “As a group, the Cercle Harmonique filled over thirty register books with spirit messages, reaching their heyday between 1871 and 1874” (Clark 4). The history of the Cercle Harmonique reflects its importance within the history of Louisiana and Afro-Creole culture.

Emily Suzanne Clark documents:

While other members came and went, Rey was a devoted Spiritualist and a leader for the whole tenure of the Cercle Harmonique. Even when alone, he would transcribe the messages he received from the spirits. Rey was born a free man in New Orleans to parents from Saint-Domingue; he was a ‘bright mulatto,’ he was educated, and he volunteered in the army during the Civil War. The other Afro-Creoles in the Cercle

Harmonique were like Rey: male, free, educated, of mixed heritage, and from Catholic families. They recorded spirit messages almost always in French, indicating that all in attendance at the séances came from similar Afro-Creole backgrounds. (Clark 4)

This collective was organized by Creoles of high socioeconomic status, their privileges may have aided in the preservation of their documented séances and the connections they made between Creoles in Louisiana to revolutionary movements throughout the world. The Cercle Harmonique prioritized the French Revolution's conception of the Idea and attaining the Idea within their community. Clark posits: "Through the Idea the Cercle Harmonique memorialized the legacy of the French Revolution and its impact in the wider Atlantic age of revolutions. The Idea was equality; it was harmony; it was brotherhood" (Clark 44). The group viewed the Catholic Church as an impediment to the attainment of the Idea for its role in perpetuating inequality. Emily Clark notes their transcripts noted these concerns:

In the Cercle Harmonique's séance records some of the spirits' criticisms were based on New Orleans Creole Catholicism and the actions of the archdiocese, particularly its support of the Confederacy. According to the spirits at the Cercle Harmonique's table, the Catholic Church and its priests sought domination and power and were corrupted by greed and materialism. Catholics and dioceses across the South supported the Confederacy and the racial status quo, and the local archdiocese's backing of the Confederacy certainly did not help keep the city's Afro-Creoles in its pews. (Clark 99)

The struggle for racial equality was documented as a spiritual concern and the institution of the Catholic Church was criticized for its practices that were antithetical to the proposed Idea. Clark asserts: "The harmonious Idea appealed to Afro-Creoles during the Civil War and into Reconstruction. The city's political instability, its social hierarchy, and the beginning of Jim

Crow confirmed the city's need for harmony" (Clark 45). Fighting against injustice became a spiritual need in order to achieve progress and work toward the realization of the Idea. Clark argues: "Impeding harmony was injustice, and from the perspective of Afro-Creoles and the spirits, injustice could be found easily in American politics and society. Slavery and white supremacy were two key examples" (Clark 45). It was necessary for everyone to work toward the betterment of society and mobilizing was crucial. The power of activism that aligns with spiritual beliefs is how Creole resistance persisted, as Clark argues: "Those on earth, particularly Spiritualists like Cercle Harmonique members, should try to alleviate the suffering of others" (Clark 45). The séances were significant to ascertain knowledge from the spirit world to help put an end to the suffering which was prevalent. Clark explicitly draws connections to the resistance strategies utilized by Creole activists and the spiritual world as she contends: "Those in the spirit world had the advantage of *true* knowledge, which was why they advised the Cercle Harmonique" (Clark 49). Creole spiritualists looked to the supernatural to acquire the tools necessary to create change and recognized the formation of activist networks was the most effective method in contesting dominant ideologies.

Catholicism was not altogether rejected despite the many critiques of its practices that were addressed by Creole spiritualists, but the institution of the Catholic Church was denounced as hypocritical. The utilization of aspects of Catholic beliefs was prevalent in Creole culture, as Emily Clark argues:

The Afro-Creole Spiritualists maintained various connections to their Catholic pasts, but the Catholic Church clearly did not teach the right understanding of the world beyond the material or even a full understanding of sin. Reconciliation and confession did not save one's spirit after passing from the material world, and according to former clergy, the

deadly sins preached by the Catholic Church were not the most egregious. Rather, it was cruelty toward others and prejudice that impeded spiritual progress and harmed one's spirit. (Clark 98)

The sins found within dominant institutions were harmful to society and the spiritual well-being of the populace. Injustice had a profound effect on every individual hindering their ability to connect spiritually and oppressing them in several different ways. The lived experiences of Creole people helped to form this belief system and the context informed their perspectives. Clark argues injustice is what drew Creoles to confer with spirits and look beyond the physical realm for answers, she posits: "The racial hierarchy and racism of New Orleans and the United States illuminate why the Afro-Creole Spiritualists believed that when a spirit left its material body it also left its racial identity behind" (Clark 133). Due to their marginalized status, race was understood as something temporary, but not a part of the spirit. In the way that racism was constructed by dominant ideologies, Creole spiritualists recognized race was a construct for those in power. Spiritualism brought together Creoles from different backgrounds during contentious times. Clark notes the unifying aspect of spirituality as she contends: "As New Orleans became increasingly volatile and violent in the post-Civil War era, Spiritualism continued to keep the Afro-Creole members of the Cercle Harmonique politically grounded and focused on what really mattered—the progress of the Idea" (Clark 183). Mobilization centered around the significance of the Idea and working toward achieving a more harmonious society. Activism was not only centered around combating racism, but all elements that impeded justice in order to better individual spirits as well as the community as a whole.

Traditions passed on from the enslaved, evolved from African customs to further progress into distinct Creole conventions. Richard Turner posits the connection between jazz

funerals, a widely practiced Creole concept and the social space of the enslaved in Congo Square, as he notes:

Although jazz funerals are dynamic, improvised performances that change over time to reinterpret new substitutions of religion, music, history, and politics from black America and the African diaspora, analysis of selected narrative accounts of the connections between churches and the Africanisms in early jazz funerals reveals the historical significance of St. Augustine Church as a site for Congo Square music and the ancestral rituals... (Turner 98)

The adoption of aspects of African culture and elements of Catholicism reflects the patchworking of various recycled attributes of cultures in creating Creole culture.

Creole spiritual and religious practices were visually represented in the practices of Creole funerals. Richard Turner notes: “The performances for the dead that take place on the streets surrounding the church are as important for second-line culture and the ancestral memory of Congo Square as what goes on inside the church” (Turner 101). Funerals highlight the importance of the second-line, jazz music, and spirituality within Creole culture. Turner elaborates: “New Orleans jazz funerals synthesize spiritual and musical elements from Vodou, Christianity, and African American and Congo Square music to recreate, strengthen, and mend the relationships between the community of the living, the ancestors, and the dead” (Turner 105). This synthesis led to the creation of distinctly Creole traditions. Social clubs played a crucial role in preserving the customs associated with Creole funerals and addressed economic inequalities throughout Louisiana. Turner draws this connection: “In the late nineteenth century the rapid growth of black secret societies in the Crescent City—benevolent and mutual aid associations to assist with health insurance and burial—paralleled the rapid growth of black brass bands and

supported their music in funeral processions” (Turner 109). Characteristics of Catholicism throughout the performative aspect of funerals highlights the religion’s prominence in cultural practices. Turner contends Creole culture is inextricably tied to African cultures and spiritual beliefs as he writes: “Celebrated musical and religious traditions from St. Augustine Catholic Church and the Sanctified Church have continued to influence the sacred realm of introspection about African ancestral culture in contemporary New Orleans jazz funerals” (Turner 104). The diverse influences represented in Creole culture represent the various backgrounds that shape this identity formation constructing a unique medley of spiritual beliefs.

Spirituality and Catholicism are key elements of Creole identity, but central to understandings of Creole culture in Louisiana is Voodoo. Martha Ward argues a unique form of Voodoo formed in Louisiana out of the unique Creole culture as she argues: “New Orleans Voodoo is not the same thing as Haitian Vodou, and neither resembles Hollywood ‘voodoo’. Voodoo, Southern Hoodoo, and their sister religions are the intense fusions that happened when the people of the African Diaspora met Catholics and colonists in the New World” (Ward 13). There are distinctions between these practices although there is significant crossover, the variations are the result of the interactions between these different cultures. Creoles, known for blending aspects of different cultures, used this method of synthesis within religious practices as well, this is clear within the practices of Voodoo. Michael Largey asserts: “Blending several West and Central African spiritual traditions with Roman Catholicism, Vodou is a religious practice focused on the spiritual and emotional well-being of its practitioners” (Largey 17). Similar to the séances of Creole collectives, a central tenet of Vodou is communication with the spirit world and with ancestors. The communication is through Iwa or spirits that travel from

ancestral Africa in order to provide guidance. ^[50] It is through Iwa that oral traditions endure, as Michael Largey notes:

Worshippers learn about Iwa not only through Vodou ceremonies but also through the successive retelling of stories about Iwa in which their personal attributes and extraordinary qualities are recounted. Such storytelling has both religious and political significance; worshippers use Vodou narrative to connect themselves with spiritual values and to make sense of political situations in the present (Largey 17).

Voodoo is linked to the storytelling customs of Creole identity both of these are survival techniques adopted in order to resist erasure by the dominant narrative. Gloria Anzaldúa argues that the practice of distinct spiritual beliefs is passed on through generations by the marginalized within society in response to the oppression of organized religion, she contends:

“Institutionalized religion fears trafficking with the spirit world and stigmatizes it as witchcraft.

It has strict taboos against this kind of inner knowledge” (Anzaldúa 59). The power of the spirituality of the marginalized is recognized by dominant institutions that further stigmatize these belief systems. One of the most popular names associated with spirituality but notably

Voodoo within Louisiana is Marie Laveau. Martha Ward details: “Marie was the spiritual child of the Diaspora, the vast involuntary movement of African peoples across the Atlantic to the Americas, as well as the Mediterranean-style Catholic Church into which she was baptized.

Above all, however, Marie Laveau was a Creole” (Ward 19). Ward connects Creole identity to the Diaspora and notes the blending of cultures is reflected in the practice of Voodoo as well.

Voodoo in Louisiana was the result of an interaction of different cultures and religions parallel to

⁵⁰ (Largey 17).

the way in which Creole identity developed, it also influenced the legacy of Creole activism because of its reliance on oral tradition and gaining knowledge from the ancestors.

There are non-traditional methods of religious or spiritual practices among Creoles that were practiced with an emphasis on social justice. Emily Clark argues that spirituality within Afro-Creole culture was inherently political as she states: “Communication with the spirits provided the Afro-Creoles a forum to express their political protests, to identify injustices, and to celebrate republicanism” (Clark 190). Although Catholicism was the basis of many of these customs, they diverged from traditional aspects of the religion, the marginalized utilized these methods in a myriad of ways. Trushna Parekh notes: “The heritage of Mardi Gras Indians is also linked to a non-Catholic, or less explicitly Catholic, legacy that is based in St. Augustine Church. For instance, Mardi Gras Indians celebrate St. Joseph, a Catholic saint, albeit in a non-Catholic ritual, by holding an annual St. Joseph’s night parade” (Parekh 566). Marginalized communities used aspects of Catholicism to celebrate their own cultures in unique ways. Their focus was on the community and meeting the needs of members of their shared culture. This methodology of taking aspects of Catholicism and tying it to characteristics of marginalized cultures was seen in the Afro-centric celebration of the “Dashiki Mass”^[51]. Community members showed an appreciation for their African heritage through their clothing, but also spoke on issues directly impacting their communities.

The key to challenging hegemony was the fusion of different cultural practices that shaped the formation of Creole culture. Through adopting a spiritual belief system that took on the characteristics of African cultures Creoles were able to fashion a new way to respond to the systems of oppression they lived within. The dominant institution of the Catholic Church and the

⁵¹ “The ‘Dashiki Mass’” *DATA Semi-Monthly*, 5 May 1973

oppressive system of white supremacy reinforced the rigid categorization of people based on social constructions of race, but spiritual beliefs highlighted these divisions as impositions that can be transcended as a form of resistance. Connecting to the spiritual realm and having a perspective that is not limited by the racial binary or social constructions of racial privilege allowed Creoles to contest hegemonic ideologies through the creation of spiritual practices that furthered their activism. Creoles attended Dashiki Mass, they engaged in séances, practiced Voodoo, and adopted practices that challenged the Catholic Church and the dominant ideologies it perpetuated. These distinctly Creole philosophies and ideologies were realized through the formation of networks leading to organizations and clubs that worked to develop these beliefs into a praxis.

Social Clubs

In an extension of Congo Square during the period of enslavement, where the enslaved were allowed to legally gather socially on each Sunday ^[52], social groups were created to maintain resistant public spaces for Creole activism. Social clubs predicated upon Creole identity formed among enslaved Creoles as well as free Creoles. These social clubs evolved to meet the needs of Creole communities throughout enslavement, emancipation, and leading into the Civil Rights Movement. These clubs created spaces to contest hegemonic constructions of white supremacy and racial inequality, but despite the resistant potential of these groups the mobilization that happened within Creole communities is often overlooked because of the Creoles clubs that reinforced hegemonic ideology in an attempt to benefit from the system of white privilege. I will analyze Creole social clubs using a framework posited by Andrea Smith in “Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy: Rethinking Women of Color

⁵² (Crutcher 28).

Organizing,” that white supremacy does not oppress all communities within the same manner and different methods must be utilized to combat it. I trace the way social clubs and associations formed within Creole communities in order to recognize their transformative impact in addressing racial inequality and the complex methods of resistance that developed in response to the dominant systems of oppression.

Social clubs existed in the period of enslavement among free Creoles that aimed to create their own societies to combat racial oppression and establish their identity as a culture rather than relying upon the black and white binary of racial classification as a means of defining themselves. The beginning of these social clubs has been documented, as Michael Crutcher explains:

Racially oppressive conditions returned in the 1830s, but black Creoles escaped many of the effects because of New Orleans’s division into three municipalities. The new territorial arrangement provided Creoles some level of security, but the governing decisions of the time reveal a heavy-handed American cultural bias. FPC [free people of color] had already begun to organize themselves into social clubs, the first of which were the Société d’Economie (Economy Society) and the Société des Artisans (Society of Artisans), both founded in 1834. The Société d’Economie was organized by upper-class, professional Creoles of color and distinguished itself based on the members’ elite characteristics. (Crutcher 28-29)

Social clubs were created and associated with high socioeconomic status and freedom from enslavement. They were created for the sense of safety in solidarity within an unjust society that sought to marginalize Creoles. These social clubs were catered to a very specific segment of society partially due to the limitations during the period of enslavement as well as a conscious

effort to distinguish free Creoles from Creole slaves. The clubs' basis upon high socioeconomic status amplifies the connotations of elitism within Creole culture, but several of these clubs engaged in philanthropic endeavors to help support the greater community.

Community involvement is the basis of social clubs in Louisiana through the practice known as the second line, which refers to a parade started within neighborhoods where residents join in the procession following the band. Helen Regis describes: "Both the club and the band are referred to as the 'first'. The 'second line' is therefore composed of the followers, or joiners, members of other clubs, friends, family, and neighborhood residents who participate in the parade by walking next to or behind the club and brass band" (Regis 473). Second lines are utilized by social clubs at sponsored events to advertise and promote the club as well as a method to directly engage with residents. Regis elaborates: "Second lines are parades sponsored by benevolent societies traditionally called Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs" (Regis 473). The active participation by residents is crucial to the event. As Helen Regis notes: "The importance of these joiners is underlined by the fact that the entire event is named after them" (Regis 473). Second lines are celebratory events that focus on the act of establishing solidarity among residents through a visual representation of this connection. Creole social clubs have utilized this practice since their origin. Its significance has persisted, Regis asserts:

The African American working-class tradition of second lining in New Orleans has a long history that dates back to before the Civil War. Yet it speaks to contemporary issues of inner-city life, such as how to maintain strength, dignity, and community in the face of deteriorating urban economies and entrenched patterns of chronic joblessness and unemployment, deteriorating public services, gangsterism, and police brutality. (Regis 495)

Social clubs predicated on a shared Creole culture have relied upon second lines to maintain tradition, but also evolved with changing concerns that can all be addressed through mobilizing passionate members to assemble.

Social clubs were a site of mobilization in a myriad of ways as these groups were also a space in which activists and community members could express themselves artistically. Caryn Cossé Bell recounts: “In meetings of La Société des Artisans and other such organizations, Creole writers exchanged views and presented their artistic works in a favorable setting” (Bell 58). Within these spaces Creole artists were able to present work that was not allowed within dominant settings mirroring social media usage today where users can curate their images for public reception. Denied access to prominent social clubs based upon their race and the elitism of even the most notable Black and Creole clubs, Creoles created their own to address the needs of their communities. Michael Crutcher notes there were several clubs created as a way to contest the exclusion of Creoles from aspects of dominant society, he notes: “Creoles, however, created organizations in the mold of the Société d’Economie, including the Jeunes Amis (Young Friends, founded in 1867) and the Concorde (1878), both of which were headquartered in Tremé” (Crutcher 33). Creole intellectuals were able to create multiple spaces in which they can engage in the arts and academics throughout the period of Reconstruction. Caryn Cossé Bell identifies: “While the Romantic literary movement served as a means of expression for discontented Afro-Creole intellectuals, the lingering influence of the city’s Latin European religious culture enabled French-speaking black activists to create institutional alternatives to an increasingly harsh racial order” (Bell 78). Social clubs such as La Société des Artisans provided an outlet for intellectuals that allowed Creoles to engage in the arts in public spaces, but these

social clubs were still not always as accessible as many of these associations were viewed as a marker of high socioeconomic status.

The class division was also visible within social functions popular within Creole communities that highlighted this constructed separation between Creoles and African Americans. The Quadroon Ball and the Bals Cordon Bleu were social events created by free people of color ^[53]. The Quadroon Ball featured Creole women but was predicated upon the desire for a white spouse. Michael Crutcher details how the practice of *plaçage* was furthered within these exclusive social events as he writes: “The better-known Quadroon Ball was designed to further the institution of *plaçage* by showcasing mixed-race women to white male suitors. Upon approval of the woman’s mother, the woman and her suitor could enter into a *plaçage*” (Crutcher 25). This was a controversial practice and was contested by other Creoles as a regressive tradition not only for the lack of autonomy attributed to young Creole women, but also for an arrangement that catered to the desires of white male suitors. ^[54] In addition to the Quadroon Ball another popular social event was the Bals Cordon Bleu. Crutcher continues: “Cordon Bleu was the name given to the most respected FPC [free people of color] families. At Bals Cordon Bleu, also known as society balls, admittance required an invitation, whereas admission to Quadroon Balls was governed only by the ability to purchase a ticket” (Crutcher 25). These events were intended for the most prestigious Creole people as a means of celebrating and furthering the race. ^[55] The controversial “match-making” process of Quadroon Balls and the invitation only nature of the Bals Cordon Bleu only strengthened the divide between Creoles and African Americans even within the institution of slavery.

⁵³ (Crutcher 25).

⁵⁴ (Bell 66).

⁵⁵ (Crutcher 25).

There were critiques of these imposed divisions, which led to the creation of social clubs that sought to be more inclusive, Michael Crutcher recounts: “The Société d’Economie’s exclusiveness, possibly an outgrowth of the thinking that produced the Bals Cordon Bleu, provoked members of the colored working class — military veterans, artisans, and craftsmen — to form the Société des Artesans “for colored mechanics” (Crutcher 29). The Société des Artesans created a space based upon a shared appreciation of art that was divorced from socioeconomic status requirements present throughout the practices of social clubs throughout the region. Even though there were resistant spaces that formed within social clubs, the most widely known social events hosted by these clubs were balls that mirrored their dominant counterparts class based exclusionary practices. Some clubs were based on the clubs of dominant classes reliant upon holding balls to fundraise and engage with other members. These balls were used to replicate the practices of hegemony within Creole communities rather than pose a challenge to them. Crutcher agrees: “Society balls thus highlight the elitism long associated with Creoles of color, which gave birth to a color fetishism that has divided the city’s African-descended population for more than two centuries” (Crutcher 25). Despite the ability of social clubs to bring together Creole people from different backgrounds, often the customs of these groups only highlighted class divisions hampering the progressive potential of these associations.

Some of these clubs were religion-based and one of the most prominent religions in the region among Creoles was Catholicism. The Knights of Peter Claver is a Catholic association that is inextricably tied to Creoles of Louisiana. Glenn Chambers notes: “The membership of the KPC [Knights of Peter Claver], an African American Catholic lay organization founded in 1909 in Mobile, Alabama, was composed largely of African American Catholics of Louisiana Creole ancestry. The organization was strong in Louisiana and other areas throughout the South and

West, where most Creoles migrated and established black Catholic parishes” (Chambers 138). Creole Catholics were involved with groups such as the Knights of Peter Claver despite the racial tensions within society that were reflected within the Catholic church. Creole activism often placed focus on the racial inequality present within the institution of the Catholic Church. Glenn Chambers notes: “The historical links between the Creole community and the Catholic Church in Louisiana suffered as a result of racial segregation” (Chambers 128). Creole activism against the practices and segregation of the Catholic church evolved into the creation of religious organizations both associated with Catholicism and other spiritual and religious beliefs to address inequalities throughout Creole communities. Due to the contentious relationship between Creole believers and the hierarchy of the church, Creole people created their own spaces in which to worship, practice their religion, form social networks, and educate others through a spiritual framework.

The Couvent School, an outgrowth of social, religious clubs, and Catholicism, was created by prominent members within the community, named after former slave Marie Couvent, the school was also referred to as La Société Catholique ^[56]. The school was formed to educate the marginalized within a social justice framework and address racial inequalities in access to attaining an education. Caryn Cossé Bell asserts: “Afro-Creole intellectuals advocated education as a means to counteract the damaging effects of an increasingly oppressive social and political order. The Couvent School extended educational opportunities to poor children of color” (Bell 76). The school was a direct reflection of activism efforts to address racial inequalities as well as

⁵⁶ (Clark 29-30).

socioeconomic disparities. Creole community leaders were an integral part of the school, as Emily Clark describes:

La Société Catholique member François Lacroix, along with the wealthy Afro-Creole philanthropists Aristride Mary and Thomy Lafon, supplied additional funds for the school. The city's most educated and respected Afro-Creoles served as teachers and administrators, including Joanni Questy and Paul Trévigne (who later served as editor for the *New Orleans L'Union* [*L'Union*] and the *New Orleans Tribune* [*Tribune*], local Afro-Creole newspapers). (Clark 30)

There is a direct link to community work through the Couvent School to their eventual role in forwarding Creole activism through journalism.

These social clubs addressed socioeconomic inequality in several ways. As Terrence Crutcher notes: "Joining one or more benevolent societies offered a means of assuring that health concerns were addressed. Through dues, fines, and taxes, benevolent societies provided or subsidized medical care and burial expenses for their members" (Crutcher 33) These clubs provided for their members by creating support networks that were an extension of the family. This reflected African traditions of community building. Angela Davis details the legacy of this African survival strategy as she argues: "First of all, original African cultural traditions had a much broader definition of the family than that which prevails in this society; it was not limited merely to biological parents and their progeny. Especially during the earlier phases of the African presence in the Americas, the extended family was a vital tradition" (Davis 75). The extended family model was replicated through social clubs and associations that helped to provide services and support for Creoles as an adaptation of an African survival strategy. Social clubs created a necessary space to organize in order to bring together Creole activists in

addressing disparities in socioeconomic status as well as prioritizing education in the struggle for racial equality.

There were numerous clubs, too many to name and some that may not have documentation that has been recovered or preserved, these clubs were created by Creoles with an emphasis on aspects of a shared Creole culture, a few of the most prominent as noted by Richard Turner are: “L’Avenir, Francs Amis, Dames et Demoiselles de la Candor, Jeunes Amis, Young Men’s Philanthropic, United Sons of America, Equal Justice and Marine, United Daughters of America, Ladies of Mercy, Pure Friendship, Young Friends of Hope, Pilgrim Aid, Rising Sons of Liberty, Perseverance, the Young Female Benevolent Association of Louisiana, No. 1, and La Concorde” (Turner 109). Social clubs built on a foundation of a shared Creole culture were also often predicated upon socioeconomic status or religion, but there were spaces that transcended these social constructs and were built upon inclusivity. The practices of social clubs throughout Louisiana promoted Creole culture and brought together Creoles from a variety of backgrounds. The second line that incorporates the community within social events did not always lead to the realization of inclusive practices within the customs of these organizations. Social clubs furthered practices that highlighted disparities such as the Bals Cordon Bleu, but social clubs were not all so narrowly focused and some clubs prioritized the needs of their communities. However, Creole activism was tied to the creation of social clubs which led to community efforts seen in the Couvent School and La Société des Artisans. Creoles were able to forge ties within their communities to respond to the failings of dominant society that overlooked and marginalized them.

Within the Amistad Research Center there were several primary documents from social clubs that highlighted their significance in unifying Creoles from different backgrounds and their

centrality in the social life of Louisiana Creoles throughout history. In the archive the pages of the “Crescent City Pictorial” booklet published in 1926 highlighted the clubs and organizations that were at the center of life for colored residents of New Orleans during this time period. The cover of this book states it is, “a souvenir dedicated to the progress of the colored citizens of New Orleans, Louisiana” with the caption, “America’s most interesting city” in quotation marks⁵⁷. Inside of this published document there are pages showing pictures of the people and locations deemed as noteworthy by the publisher identified as Orlando Capitola Ward (OCW) Taylor, noted as the founder of *Louisiana Weekly*. The pamphlet notes prominent businesses, clubs, and places of worship for colored citizens. The book has pages dedicated to the “homes of colored New Orleans”, universities, public education sites, and commercial enterprises. There are several social clubs and locations depicted including the Autocrat Social and Pleasure Club, San Jacinto Club, Bull’s club, and Lion’s Club. The prominent role social clubs played in the lives of Creoles prior to the Civil Rights Movement is highlighted within the “Crescent City Pictorial” as they are featured as one of the defining aspects of social life.

Although there were resistant spaces within social clubs, they were also spaces that replicated dominant practices, noted in the exclusivity and colorism present within several of these organizations. In the archive there was a document that detailed Andre Lafargue, the commander of the French Legion of Honor speaking to the Young Men’s Business Club in 1929. The document is titled, “Creoles, there are no more: Andre Lafargue Gives New Definition for Disputed Word” this article is noted as originally published in the *New Orleans Item*. When asked to define the term “Creole,” Lafargue stated:

⁵⁷ Taylor, O.C.W. *Crescent City Pictorial*. *Crescent City Pictorial*, Amistad Research Center, 1926.

There's been a good deal of controversy over and misconception of the true meaning. The fact is, there are no true Creoles in New Orleans or in Louisiana today, as is generally thought. There are many persons who boast of being Creoles, but they are not. They may be descendants of Creoles, but unless they fulfill three requirements the closest they can come to being of the 'noble tribe' is just a descendant. (Creoles, there are no more)

Lafargue insists on a definition that relegates Creole identity to the colonial past by romanticizing this identity formation and denying access to this identity to those living in Louisiana in a postcolonial context. He continues by defining the three requirements of Creole identity as: "First, one must have been born on one of the Caribbean islands; secondly, he must have been born of Latin stock; and thirdly, he must be of the white race" (Creoles, there are no more). Furthering definitions that dispute Creoles' understanding of their own cultural identity and imposing racial and specific ethnic limitations on Creole identity impeded Creole activism. Within the spaces of social clubs Creole misrepresentation and hegemonic definitions were perpetuated, but often within these very same spaces Creole resistance was present.

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People referred to as the NAACP had a presence within Louisiana and Creole activism. Founded in 1909 the priority of the NAACP was voter registration and mobilizing colored people to vote without the impediments of discrimination through poll taxes and other methods of intimidation.^[58] In 1930 Walter F. White became the executive secretary of the NAACP: "White presided over the NAACP's most productive period of legal advocacy. In 1930 the association commissioned the

⁵⁸ NAACP. "History of the NAACP." *Naacp.org*, www.naacp.org/nations-premier-civil-rights-organization/.

Margold Report, which became the basis for the successful reversal of the separate-but-equal doctrine that had governed public facilities since *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896)” (NAACP). The time in which Walter F. White held a position in NAACP leadership was a crucial time in mounting resistance. In the archive of the Amistad Research Center an article in the *Sepia Socialite* details reactions over remarks made by Walter White in his speech regarding “Negroes and Creoles maintain a division in New Orleans that is a definite hindrance to their progress”, in 1938. The article notes:

...the Creole element came back with, “We have done more for and contributed more to the progress of the race than the other faction.” Dr. J.A. Hardin, prominent physician and civic leader defiantly answered Mr. White’s charges at a banquet honoring the N.A.A.C.P. secretary. He related several instances where Creoles had shown racial loyalty and had contributed more than a share for the betterment of the group. (“White's Speech Stirs Strife Between Creoles - Negroes”).

This reaction only furthered the divide between Creoles and Negroes because they are being discussed and responding as two distinct groups rather than recognizing a conception of shared identity. Clearly there is a constructed divide, but a shared identification with Blackness that highlights the complexity of this issue. Creoles identified with blackness, but also advocated avoiding racial definitions built on the limited dichotomy completely. This rejection of the term Negro was equated with a rejection of blackness or desire to attain whiteness because of the inability for residents of Louisiana to conceive of identity outside of these imposed racial constructs. This furthered the divide between Creoles and colored people even though they were both fighting for their rights outside of the confines of a white supremacist society that subjugated all non-white identities.

Positioning these groups as if they are mutually exclusive categories only strengthens hegemonic understandings of race that seek division and causes a schism in communities fighting against racial oppression. Andrea Smith details the disputes that form in organizing within marginalized communities that lead to a comparison of different struggles that are too often oversimplified because of the various forms of oppression different groups face. Smith argues: “These incidents, which happen quite frequently in "women of color" or "people of color" political organizing struggles, are often explained as a consequence of "oppression Olympics." That is to say, one problem we have is that we are too busy fighting over who is more oppressed.” (Smith 66). Smith believes the problem is far more complex than the reductionist concept of “oppression Olympics” because there must be an acknowledgement of the way dominant systems operate to oppress groups in differing ways. Andrea Smith continues by pointing out there are commonly ruptures within organizing amongst marginalized groups because the dominant system oppresses them in distinct ways. Smith identifies the problem with applying one strategy of resistance without acknowledging the complexity of white supremacy as she argues: “First, it tends to presume that our communities have been impacted by white supremacy in the same way. Consequently, we often assume that all of our communities will share similar strategies for liberation” (Smith 67). White supremacy does not impact all communities or all lives in the same manner and it must be combatted using different strategies. Creoles were challenging white supremacy through recognizing the hegemonic constructions of race and contesting the imposition of race as means of control while colored people were fighting for a recognition of their culture because it had been forcibly erased and devalued. These methods both challenged hegemony but conflicted with each other leading to tension brought on

by a seemingly insurmountable divide that resulted in Creole and Negro being understood as two different and often opposing understandings of racial and cultural identity.

The comments made by Walter F. White note the disputes between Creoles and Negroes that have created impediments to achieving change were not made in an accusatory fashion but were intended to highlight a problem in organizing. The *Sepia Socialite* article notes: “Although Mr. White’s remark charged only that a division existed, some have taken it as criticism of one or the other group. Each faction has gone about to play up its activity in New Orleans civic life in an attempt to discredit the other” (White's Speech Stirs Strife Between Creoles - Negroes). Through attempting to highlight the hindrance to progress by acknowledging the divisions that have formed, Mr. White spoke directly to activists, but organizers missed this opportunity to address concerns within the NAACP, many associations, and larger society. These comments sparked a dialogue among activists in recognizing the origin of this disjuncture by critiquing the oppressive practices present within the clubs and organization within Creole communities. The author expands on this argument:

Many group division complexes have been revealed as the discussion grows in intensity. Clubs and organizations within the Creole group that have excluded the uptown Negroes from membership have been among the discussion topics. The uptown group charges that only a few years back, Creoles refused to attend Negro public schools which they say, “accounts for the little education prominent within the group.” (White's Speech Stirs Strife Between Creoles - Negroes)

Creole organizations and challenges to segregation were criticized as excluding colored people and some of these methods were exclusionary, as Creoles were adopting survival strategies to white supremacy focused on the preservation of their culture but failed to acknowledge how their

methods may have dismissed the concerns of other marginalized populations. These exclusionary tactics exacerbated rifts and called for some to advocate for activism to divide in order to further change. Criticizing the difference in strategies of resistance failed to acknowledge that these communities were responding to the myriad of ways white supremacy was perpetrated and the need to resist using diverse approaches. In response to Walter F. White's remarks and the subsequent in-group fighting organizations sought change. The *Sepia Socialite* piece argues: "Resultant from this is a threatened split up of the N.A.A.C.P. executive committee whose personnel is composed of both factions. Evidence of this was seen in recent criticism of the local branch by members of the league for civil Rights and Justice whose 'officio' is Creole" (White's Speech Stirs Strife Between Creoles - Negroes). As a result of Creoles advocating for recognition of their culture and the need to defy social constructions of racial identity that work to uphold white supremacy, Creoles isolated themselves from other marginalized groups that were aimed at creating a unified resistance based on a defiant racial pride. Although both of these strategies were combating racial injustice by dissecting "common sense" conceptions of race, they accomplished this in differing ways to challenge hegemonic ideology and promote new understandings of identity to contest their oppression.

In the Amistad Research Center archive there is a printed flyer from 1963 by some of the leading activist organizations describing a call to action addressed to all responsible citizens. The flyer reads:

TO ALL RESPONSIBLE CITIZENS Of Greater New Orleans, YOU KNOW that we are denied employment because We are Negroes! YOU KNOW that We can never hope to attain First Class Citizenship until We secure Equal Employment Opportunities THEN: Why buy where you cannot work above a menial level? A SELECTIVE BUYING

CAMPAIGN IS NOW IN PROGRESS. We will wear last year's Easter Outfits, WITH PRIDE, until we are employed WITH DIGNITY! Stay Away From Downtown New Orleans. Don't Buy Where You Can't Work," ("To All Responsible Citizens")

This call to action is aimed at all responsible citizens to engage in a "selective buying campaign" to combat unfair employment practices. The flyer connects employment opportunities to the conceptions of "first class citizenship". A barrier to obtaining citizenship is identified as socioeconomic status and securing employment that is not "menial". The text uses the words pride and dignity to strengthen the emotional appeal to fair treatment and the value placed on it that transcends an economic or monetary cost. The flyer was created and distributed by a coalition of local organizations. Below the main text of the flyer a list of these organization follows: "New Orleans chapter of the NAACP, CORE [Congress of Racial Equality], the Negro Betterment Council, and the Consumers League of New Orleans" ("To All Responsible Citizens"). The flyer's final lines are, "ATTEND A MASS MEETING & RALLY Date: Thursday, March 28, 1963 Time: 7:30pm Place: Corpus Christi Gymnasium Come Out! Bring A Friend! Hear The Facts!" ("To All Responsible Citizens"). To address economic inequality these associations banded together to establish a strategy that highlighted the power they had in numbers to pressure companies to address their racist employment practices or risk losing a significant amount of profit. This technique was not acknowledging hegemonic ideologies that labeled colored people as less capable workers or the power dynamics that furthers the poverty of marginalized populations. These organizations worked together to formulate a selective buying campaign to address a local concern in hopes of responding to a specific issue in a timely manner, but this strategy and coalition did not create a counterhegemonic moment in this campaign model. This is due to the problems of recognizing a shared oppression while also

acknowledging differences in experience due to intersectional identities. Andrea Smith notes the complex way that white supremacy oppresses different marginalized groups as she argues:

This framework does not assume that racism and white supremacy is enacted in a singular fashion; rather, white supremacy is constituted by separate and distinct, but still interrelated, logics. Envision three pillars, one labeled Slavery/Capitalism, another labeled Genocide/Capitalism, and the last one labeled Orientalism/War, as well as arrows connecting each of the pillars together. (Smith 67)

Strategies of resistance by Creoles and colored people against hegemonic oppression were often not understood as necessary processes in calling for systemic change but recognized as small acts of unified action. These acts of resistance were based upon a shared oppression, but the system of white supremacy oppressed these groups in different ways because of their intersectional identities. The strategy of a selective buying campaign may have addressed one aspect of white supremacy based on understandings of “Slavery/Capitalism” by recognizing these connections, but it also drew on capitalist constructs that relied on socioeconomic privilege that was not accessible to all residents. The unified construct of resistance was not accompanied with a new way of developing strategy and could only achieve a short-term reaction that resulted in momentary acts of solidarity but was not sustainable because the hegemonic constructions of race and racial privilege were not denounced.

Strategies that did contest hegemonic ideologies were employed as the Civil Rights Movement progressed in activism throughout Louisiana that was challenging racial inequality utilizing various approaches. The Amistad Research Center archive held publications distributed by activist organizations including issues of the *Louisiana Corelator*, which was published by the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). Within the November 1966 issue activists identified

crucial dominant institutions in the criminal justice system, the educational system, and the actions of the U.S. government in perpetuating institutional racism. CORE called out policy changes that fail to contest the system of inequality through their discussion of the education system. The *Louisiana Correlator* posits: “It's not necessary for the school board to single out a few predominantly Negro school [sic] to upgrade. A system free of all forms of segregation will upgrade the whole system and not put Negroes in another special class” (“Schools” *Louisiana Correlator*). Only through a reform of the school system and the desegregation of all schools would the marginalized have access to the rights of citizenship mirroring arguments made within the *Daily Crusader* roughly seventy years prior to this publication. This issue was published at the height of the Vietnam War and recognized the U.S. government’s oppressive practices within a global context. The *Corelator* states:

Carrie Washington, sister of David Whatley, was wounded by buckshot Thursday night. Carrie was hit by pellets in the leg, hip and back. Carrie heard a shot outside the house and walked out on the porch to see what it was all about and was shot. Carrie has been active with the NAACP and CORE. Less than a month ago her brother was inducted in the army to defend this country. The question one must raised [sic] is should he be defending his family and home against white racist who have attacked his mome [sic] on a number of occasions or fighting some suppose emeny [sic] in Asia (“Ferriday” *Louisiana Corelator*).

Recognizing the power of white supremacy in shaping the narrative of war as well as domestic issues, activists noted the power in creating their own counterstories through the medium of print. In connecting the power of structuring the narrative activists challenge the labels that have been imposed on them. The issue details: “While city officials continue to brand members of the

Committee of Concerned Citizens on Police Matters as trouble makers members of the police continue to attack citizens” (“New Orleans News” *Louisiana Corelator*). The activism of the Civil Rights Movement as seen through the publication created by CORE identifies the tools of hegemony and the importance of challenging dominant institutions to create change. The activists of CORE and the activists of the Citizens Committee utilized a similar framework even though this issue of the *Louisiana Corelator* was published in 1966 and *The Daily Crusader* was published in the 1890’s, but the parallels in building solidarity were not fully realized.

Another distinct strategy used by Creole organizations was the appeal to indigeneity through Indian groups and performers that were a significant aspect of Mardi Gras celebrations. Mardi Gras Indians occasionally, but not often identify as Native American, but they take on aspects of the culture, customs, and clothing of Native American tribes. There are several prominent groups that refer to themselves as tribes; one of the most notable is the Creole Osceola’s Mardi Gras Indians. In a 2012 NPR interview of Chief Clarence Dalcour traces the origin of this group and tradition as he states: “Well, globally, it started middle 1800s and it started because we wasn't allowed to participate in the Mardi Gras, so we - when we decided that we can participate in it, we say we would pay tribute to the Native Americans because when we ran away as the slaves that's who took us in” (Martin). Participants of African descent created Mardi Gras Indian celebrations because of their exclusion from Mardi Gras parades and festivals and chose to wear traditional headdresses and perform in dances that reflected the cultures of various Native American tribes as a homage to another marginalized culture that contained parallels to the experience of colored people. The enslaved began the tradition of Mardi Gras Indians as an intended constructed performance of solidarity, but as Andrea Smith notes this

relies upon a reductionist understanding of white supremacy that would equate the pillar of “Slavery/Capitalism” with “Genocide/Capitalism.”^[59]

The practices among each of these tribes are similar, but each tribe has distinct characteristics that define it and they often take on customs from different Native American cultures representing their distinct identities. Chief Clarence Dalcour notes the way he decided what culture to use in creating the Creole Osceola Mardi Gras Indians as he details his decision to leave his former tribe: “I just didn't fit in the way I thought I should have, so I started my own group and I took the name Osceola because Osceola was a chief of the Seminoles who married a slave woman” (Martin). The connection across cultures was intentional and an attempt to acknowledge the disparate effects of white supremacy on marginalized groups, but this solidarity does not seem to connect with any forms of resistance outside of an act of visual representation. Those who participate in this groups take on aspects of indigenous cultures in an act of appropriation not as a means to build solidarity networks across communities to address the ways in which white supremacy has impacted them. These constructed tribes fail to realize the counterhegemonic potential of resistance methods that could be unified among Native Americans and individuals with African ancestry across racial classifications.

In discussing the figure of Mardi Gras Indians and the cultural appropriation of indigenous cultures Andrea Smith explores whether this strategy could truly challenge racism in, “Queer Theory and Native Studies: The Heteronormativity of Settler Colonialism.” Smith argues: “But why does appropriation necessarily lead to antiracism? First, this appropriation tends to depend on a very essentialized notion of Native identity that becomes the raw material

⁵⁹ Smith, Andrea, “Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy: Rethinking Women of Color Organizing”

for the building of a complex postmodern identity. Second, where is the evidence that any of these practices actually contribute to solidarity work with contemporary indigenous struggles?” (Smith 53). This appropriation is based on reductionist conceptions of indigenous cultures and has failed to create solidarity to mount resistance in large part because the formation of these groups was not an act achieved through a unification of communities or a dialogue, but rather a constructed effort on the part of some to connect their chosen performance to larger issues of racial struggle.

It is vital to recognize the challenges posed to white supremacy through social clubs and organizations. Creole activism should not be limited to reductionist conceptions of assimilation or conformity without understanding the importance of context. They should not be labeled as divisive without acknowledging the coalitions that formed and the importance of developing and utilizing multiple strategies in fighting racial injustice. It is also just as vital to recognize the limitations of these associations and the ways in which they have reinforced hegemonic conceptions of white privilege. As Andrea Smith notes: “Our survival strategies and resistance to white supremacy are set by the system of white supremacy itself” (Smith 69). In acknowledging the work of our ancestors and in constructing a path forward to achieve progress in addressing the system of white supremacy Smith posits through understanding the way resistance can challenge hegemony in coalition building and dismantle challenges that reinforce the marginalization of other groups we can achieve true change. Smith asserts: “This way, our alliances would not be solely based on shared victimization, but where we are complicit in the victimization of others. These approaches might help us to develop resistance strategies that do not inadvertently keep the system in place for all of us, and keep all of us accountable” (Smith 69). Social clubs were a resistant space although not always fully realized as strategies of

resistance because their methods often drew on a “common sense” that reinforced hegemonic conceptions of racial divisions. Despite this, Creole activism recognized the role dominant institutions played in furthering hegemonic ideology and created their own spiritual beliefs, religious practices, social clubs, and organizations to construct their counterstories.

Conclusion

Although spiritualism takes on new meanings within different contexts, Creoles’ connection to spiritualism is a key element of their culture as well as their activism.

Documentation of séances and other spiritual practices were published in *Le Spiritualiste*, which had a short run in the 1850’s, but Caryn Cossé Bell notes: “Even though the demise of *Le Spiritualiste* ended an acrimonious public debate, spiritualism continued to thrive within the Creole community” (Bell 119). Creole communities connected the struggle for racial equality to their spiritual beliefs. Bell elaborates: “Consistent with the spirit messages published in *Le Spiritualiste*, the Creole communications combined an unrelenting attack on orthodox religion with the egalitarian, liberal ideas of representative figures of France’s Catholic Reformation, Enlightenment, and age of democratic revolution” (Bell 120). Creoles’ connection to spiritualism is inextricably linked to critiques of organized religion and dominant institutions that perpetuate inequality.

Activism utilized many spiritual methods including communication with spirits as seen in the transcripts of the Cercle Harmonique. Catholicism played a major role within Creole culture, but the practices of the Catholic Church were widely criticized by Creoles for its role in perpetuating institutional racism. Aspects of Catholicism were used and adapted within Creole culture and allowed for the formation of activist networks. Social clubs engaged the community in a myriad of ways in response to the lack of opportunities within dominant institutions for

Creoles in the realm of art, literature, and many facets of society. I have placed focus on primary resources from the archive that discuss the role of social clubs and associations along with religious and spiritual beliefs to note the way Creole resistance transformed leading into and during the Civil Rights Movement. I connected social clubs and religion because they represent the spaces where solidarity and activism networks formed within Creole communities and through these mediums, resistance strategies were developed and implemented. Several publications were created through these networks established by social clubs and created as well as strengthened activism networks to advocate for change. The work of Creole activists provides counterstories to dominant narratives and challenge constructed categories of race.

Social clubs and organizations developed strategies of resistance that reinforced hegemonic ideologies by emphasizing division among Black and Creole communities, implementing exclusionary practices, and appropriating aspects of other marginalized cultures. These problematic aspects of Creole activism should not be overlooked, but they must be contextualized to recognize the ways in which resistance can defy “common sense” and truly confront white supremacy without perpetuating the oppression of any other marginalized community. A unique aspect of Creole identity and activism is its connection to spiritualism and the role of the Catholic church. The ways in which Creole Catholics fashioned a new system of beliefs that was built upon yet challenged the Catholic Church exemplifies the methods used by Creoles in constructing their own culture and aspects of their identity. In creating systems of beliefs as well as their own social connections Creoles challenged hegemony through dismantling the structure of dominant institutions and by producing their own ideologies that radically asserted their counterstories against the dominant narrative to contest their oppression.

Chapter 4

The Radical Potential of Creole Politics in the 21st Century

In writing my dissertation I struggled with acknowledging and framing my work in a way that contextualizes Creole identity but does not overlook the various ways in which Creole people resisted dominant ideologies and created spaces for themselves within oppressive institutions and systems. Resistance takes on many forms to this present day, and in this chapter, I will highlight the strategies of resistance present in online spaces. I have focused on online spaces as a result of the displacement of Creoles from Louisiana and to highlight their presence throughout the Diaspora evolving from a firmly located Louisiana Creole identity into a transnational and global identity formation. The archive of Creole resistance being formed today is through social media and I have chosen this platform in constructing my archive. From newspapers and social clubs to the continuation of activism through the new medium of social media, Creoles are reclaiming their identity to combat white supremacy. Presently, social media has become a tool to further awareness of racial inequality and mobilize communities into action. Creole identity is seen in new ways in online spaces as Creoles represent themselves on multiple platforms and engage in dialogue with others about aspects of Creole culture. They thrive within the diaspora and, regardless of location, can be connected to cultural events, other Creoles in the U.S., and Creoles in a global context.

Creolization as a term highlights the ways in which cultures can come together despite imposed hierarchies and create something new as an adaptation to structural inequalities. The process of creolization has created a hybrid identity that challenged the constructed racial binary in Louisiana and has produced identity formations that resist dominant categorizations in a global context. Stuart Hall evokes the questions: “Should ‘creolization’ replace such terms as

hybridity, métissage, syncretism? In short, what is its general conceptual applicability?”

(“Créolité” Hall 12). The definitions of creolization as well as Creole identity have always been debated partly because it is the formation of something new and because it has transformed over time to address the evolving needs of Creole communities within different societies. Important aspects of creolization remain unchanged, including its basis in power struggles between dominant culture and marginalized cultures and its conceptualization within a framework of resistance. Françoise Vergès posits: “Creolization is resistance if it is kept as a process, open to new challenges and new elements” (Vergès 46). Creolization is a process and a survival strategy formed by the marginalized to create a culture in response to colonization, slavery, and attempted erasure by dominant forces. To highlight the ways in which Creole identity continues to be utilized as a tool of resistance to dominant institutions and hegemonic ideologies I have focused on the realm of social media within this chapter. I conducted hashtag searches through social media platforms searching #Creole, #LouisianaCreole, # Louisiana, and #NewOrleans.

Throughout these hashtags there were thousands of posts that I narrowed down by focusing on displays of resistance to white supremacy and understandings of racial and cultural identity. I identified users who noted their Creole ancestry and posted about Creole culture with a focus on posts beginning in 2015 to the present. I have analyzed social media posts created by Creoles residing in or identifying with Louisiana Creole culture as representations of Creole identity today, through understandings of race within cyberspace as identified by Lisa Nakamura in her books: *Digitizing Race: Visual Culture of the Internet* and *Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity on the Internet*. I aim to highlight the ways that Creole identity seeks to challenge dominant narratives through the production of counternarratives that were reflected in many mediums throughout history, but persists in online spaces as a response to Creoles’ location in

the diaspora and as a platform for awareness to mobilize others in the continued struggle against racial inequality. In this chapter I will analyze social media posts by Creole-identified users to highlight trends in resistance strategies that have been adapted to the digital realm. I developed a focus centered around Beyoncé's visual album *Lemonade* because it was often the starting point in conversations about race and Creole identity. I identified common themes across the posts on Twitter and Tumblr as discussions surrounding racial classification, Creole identity in global politics, the online presence of Creole collectives, intersectionality in Creole activism, and religion and spirituality. I will analyze these posts through the work of adrienne maree brown's book titled *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good*, Shenesse Thompson's article titled "The Subaltern is Signifyin(g): Black Twitter as a Site of Resistance", and Paolo Gerbaudo's book *Tweets and the Streets: Social Media and Contemporary Activism*. In understanding Creole resistance in the present, I have recognized the role of online spaces as a tool to aid in the mobilization of activist networks that transcend these constructed virtual spaces.

I have chosen to focus on the domain of social media and blogs because of their popularity and the ability afforded to users in curating their presentation of themselves to the public. These platforms may be dismissed within academia, but the power and popularity of these forms of expression should not be dismissed. Lisa Nakamura argues:

On the contrary, rather than devaluing those online spaces where the small but growing number of American minorities are spending their time and energy, a reenvisioning of what constitutes a "major life activity" or salient "information" may be in order. In the case of people of color, popular culture practices constitute a discursive domain where they are more likely to see cultural producers who resemble them; and most importantly,

these are exactly the spaces that invite participation by users” (Nakamura, “Digitizing Race” 182-183).

Shenesse Thompson expands on this perspective by noting the powerful role social media has played in furthering resistance. Thompson asserts:

Although scholars and experienced activists alike have frowned upon social media activism as a passing fad, often characterizing it as lazy, the tweets reproduced in this essay and the change they created prove that Twitter provides a viable space for African Americans as subalterns to engage in social critique, create change, and demand the justice they deserve. After all, the Black Lives Matter movement started from a hashtag and tweets and became a national movement against police brutality and other forms of state-sanctioned violence. (Thompson 171)

Within social media users have furthered resistance by creating hashtags that represent social movements to raise awareness and create larger networks of activists.

It is through social media where marginalized perspectives can be voiced and participants are able to create content to be disseminated. Users are able to engage in conversations with others through public posts to raise awareness of important issues that are impacting their communities. Shenesse Thompson notes: “Accordingly, users have been unabashedly taking on issues of race, racism, and police brutality as if the conversations were being held in their own living rooms” (Thompson 162). Social media platforms are founded in interactivity and users of these sites are not a passive audience because they can engage in dialogue in several ways whether it is through text, images, or constructed reactions to the material. Nakamura acknowledges the importance of interaction as she writes: “In addition, the dynamic and interactive nature of online communities in particular means that the issue of reception is always

up front and center. Users comment vociferously on each other's visual objects of self-representation" (Nakamura, "Digitizing Race 203). The discursive nature of social media and blogs allows for an interesting dialogue about identity and culture through awareness as well as community building furthering activism throughout Creole communities.

Inspired by the consciousness raising of Black Twitter and campaigns like the #HashtagSyllabusMovement produced by the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, highlighting the significance of social media I traced hashtags to connect Creole issues and activism within these constructed online spaces. I will be using the term cybertypes as popularized by Lisa Nakamura to recognize the complex ways that cultural and racial identity are represented online. Nakamura notes the importance of interrogating descriptions of cyberspace that present it as utopian or somehow divorced from the inequalities prevalent within society but acknowledges there are spaces in which stereotypes and racial essentialism can be challenged. The resistance to the hegemony of the web that Nakamura highlights in her work parallels the significance of Creole activism through the work of the Citizens Committee and print publications in interrogating the social constructions of race. Nakamura references the importance of the Citizens Committee work in the understanding of race as she writes: " The case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* was a landmark because it stood in opposition to what had been common practice, that is, the visual determination of race on a casual, continual, and extremely subjective basis by 'untrained' individuals such as train porters, ticket takers, teachers, and so on" (Nakamura, "Digitizing Race 31). Disrupting the dominant narrative of definitions of race predicated on phenotype, Creoles deconstructed systems of racial classification and have continued to challenge these assumptions across various formats.

Resistance strategies have been developed by users of colors to challenge the inequalities present within the structure of digital spaces. I have chosen to highlight the counterstories created by Creoles in an evolution of prior strategies based around community building and solidarity networks from colonization and enslavement to racial oppression to the present day. The methods used to resist are discussed by Lisa Nakamura as she draws upon the words of Audre Lorde as she posits:

It is naive to expect that corporations and the mainstream media complex will produce the kind of interfaces or content that reflect a noncommodified style of racial diversity. The burden and privilege of creating racial and ethnic community in cyberspace must be taken up by critics, artists, users, and designers of color before the master's tools can be used to dismantle the master's house. (Nakamura, "Cybertypes"135)

The internet can and has been utilized as a space for empowerment for marginalized people by utilizing platforms in resistant ways through a mestiza consciousness. The mestiza resisted the hegemony of the web to create her own spaces and construct solidarity networks among communities of color. The resistance strategies utilized by Creoles mirror those of the mestiza as they have created content on social media that challenges dominant ideologies and seeks to maintain a sense of community throughout the diaspora.

#Creole

I analyzed posts containing #Creole and #LouisianaCreole on Twitter and Tumblr to identify #Creole activism and resistance in online spaces. I chose the platforms of Twitter and Tumblr because Twitter is a text-based site and Tumblr is a visual creative space, drawing upon two diverse digital experiences. My analysis was limited to posts that had been designated as public and were completely or mostly in English. My guiding questions in this analysis are: How

is resistance to hegemony seen within these platforms by Creoles? Are Creole cybertypes challenging racial constructs in new ways within these new digital forms? I found that users create cybertypes that draw on existing stereotypes and play on social constructions of race in order to challenge understandings of culture that overlook Creole identity. Creoles disrupt “common sense” as they have historically and have persisted in this challenge within these digital domains.

The internet provides several platforms in which users can produce content by creating social media posts, blog posts, images, videos, and several forms of content. As the internet is realized as a more equitable place where users of different backgrounds can engage in constructive dialogue, the barriers to racial equality become more visible and are reflected in cyberspace as well. Lisa Nakamura discusses the unique way that racism operates online as she argues how the term cybertype reflects the perspectives users carry over from society when engaging in online spaces. Nakamura posits:

I coined the term cybertype to describe the distinctive ways that the Internet propagates, disseminates, and commodifies images of race and racism. The study of racial cybertypes brings together the cultural layer and the computer layer; that is to say, cybertyping is the process by which computer/human interfaces, the dynamics and economics of access, and the means by which users are able to express themselves online interacts with the “cultural layer” or ideologies regarding race that they bring with them into cyberspace. (Nakamura, “Cybertypes” 3)

Cybertypes develop in response to societal inequalities and are the way in which racial inequality is perpetuated through the new medium of the internet. Nakamura notes the ways in which stereotypes are remastered in order to create cybertypes similar to the way that hip hop

and forms of music remix material to create something built upon the original. She connects this to old stereotypes that have persisted as a means to uphold white supremacy through the process of remastering or translating them into the realm of the digital. She writes: “The weblike media complex of images of the racialized other as primitive, exotic, irremediably different, and fixed in time is an old song, one that the Internet has remastered or retrofit in digitally reproducible ways” (Nakamura, “Cybertypes”18). Building from ingrained stereotypes and prejudices, racist imagery and text is disseminated quickly across many formats and platforms. Nakamura argues it is crucial to note: “There is no ignoring that the Internet can and does enable new and insidious forms of racism” (Nakamura, “Cybertypes” 30). Although technology is drawing upon a Gramscian “common sense” in furthering racist ideology, the ways in which white supremacy is perpetuated within this medium must also be recognized.

Twitter gives the space to contest notions of cultural and racial identity by engaging in dialogue with members within and outside of a user’s cultural community. These dialogues are seen throughout the platform, but in this work, I have highlighted the constructed space of Black Twitter. Black users throughout the African Diaspora can discuss important issues, highlight racial inequality, and posit ways forward in the subcommunity of Black Twitter. Shenesse Thompson highlights: “The online community, then, like the offline one, is linked by shared experiences and perspectives of blackness in America and inclusive of the fact that those perspectives and experiences are diverse” (Thompson 163). Throughout Black Twitter Creole-identified users discuss and debate the definitions of Creole identity and acknowledge the ways it has reinforced white supremacy and furthered strategies of resistance through constructing their own counterstories.

There were notable trends I observed throughout the posts labeled #Creole and #LouisianaCreole that included definitions of Creole identity, discussions of historical facts about Creoles as well as Louisiana, and a focus on mixed race and multiracial identities. As I analyzed the top 100 posts under #LouisianaCreole a dozen of them displayed the Creole Heritage Flag and over half of the 100 posts made statements that reflected a sense of Creole pride. The Louisiana Creole flag consists of four different flags and was created by C.R.E.O.L.E. Inc., in 1987, it is comprised of:

The upper left section, a white fleur de lis on a blue field, represents Louisiana's French heritage. On the lower left and upper right sections, West African heritage is represented by the Mali Republic National flag and the Senegal Republic National flag (both green, yellow and red). Spanish Colonial heritage is depicted by the Tower of Castille (gold tower on red field) on the lower right section. A white cross dividing the four symbols represents the Christian faith accepted by the Muslim and Islamic from Senegal and Mali in Louisiana. (C.R.E.O.L.E. Inc.)

Even though there were a number of prideful posts within these hashtags, not all posts were positive.

Some were critical of Creole identity and noted its history of exclusion and colorism. One Tumblr post simply stated: “Creole culture is lowkey a glorification of colorism. The French really elevated black people who were mixed with white over those who were mostly of African ancestry” (“Currently Writing in the Stars”). The inequalities that led to the formation of Creole identity are a vital part in understanding Creole identity within the present, the ways in which the term Creole was imposed and caused divisions must be acknowledged to contextualize definitions of Creole today.

In curating public profiles and posts users present their cultural and racial identity through recognized constructs built on “common sense” stereotypes and recycled caricatures. Nakamura argues these cybertypes are a result of limited racial constructs and perpetuate dominant racial ideologies. Nakamura asserts: “That is to say, users are drawn to create personae that are culturally coherent and intelligible, and racial cybertypes provide familiar, solid, and reassuring versions of race which other users can readily accept and understand since they are so used to seeing them in novels, films, and video games” (Nakamura, “Cybertypes” 40). When race is specifically noted often users rely on cybertypes based on “common sense” that are easily understood because they align with preconceived understandings of race and culture in dominant ideologies.

In contextualizing Creole identity, it is necessary to challenge racial “common sense”. A prominent resistance strategy among Creoles is combating racial common sense in order to highlight the ways in which it reinforces white supremacy. White privilege must be not only acknowledged but challenged on multiple fronts to create systemic change. As noted by David Ikard and Martell Teasley:

Paradoxically speaking, racial common sense in this context means that combating racial inequality cannot come at the expense of dismantling economic power hierarchies that benefit white Americans. These incompatible goals keep structural equality always beyond reach for all but a select group of African Americans. We see racial common sense thinking at work in, say, the ways in which the Civil Rights Movement played out. Though civil rights legislation in the 1960s struck down officially sanctioned racial inequality, it did so without redistributing wealth or jeopardizing white socioeconomic control. (Ikard and Teasley 106)

Identifying racial common sense and deconstructing it is at the center of Black Twitter and dialogues about race within these platforms.

In creating profiles and public personas throughout social media platforms and several websites, users are able to choose their profile image or use avatars and emojis to represent their likeness. This is one of the ways in which race becomes visible online, but in choosing and constructing avatars race only appears as a visual marker that can be placed similar to an accessory on your image as you choose. Nakamura argues: “Here, race is constructed as a matter of aesthetics, or finding the color that you like, rather than as a matter of ethnic identity or shared cultural referents. This fantasy of skin color divorced from politics, oppression, or racism seems to also celebrate it as infinitely changeable and customizable: as entirely elective as well as apolitical” (Nakamura, “Cybertypes” 53). Internet users can choose how to represent their racial and cultural identity in constructing their online persona, but in the ability to curate their personalities users work within the limited choices made available without inherent discussions of racial politics. The limitations placed on physical markers of race and phenotype as emphasized by the Citizens’ Committee construction of the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case is echoed in the practice of creating or choosing an avatar, but social media communities have developed to specifically address the complexity of racial issues throughout social media. These avatars and emojis reduce race to its physical appearance and users do not have to examine the role of race in any way when navigating the web, but racially conscious users do engage in resistance strategies to recognize the ways that racial inequality is perpetuated on the internet. Shenesse Thompson connects social media to the creation of counterstories as Thompson argues:

In fact, it is precisely because of Twitter’s ability to put various types of Black people in conversation with each other that makes it a useful tool to defend Black people’s

humanity in this historical and cultural moment. In defending blackness, Black Twitter users will continue to use the platform to revise mainstream media accounts and present counternarratives that shed light on the varying perspectives, perceived truths, and individual and collective realities of Black people. (Thompson 171)

Social media has become a powerful tool to disseminate information, construct counterstories, and mobilize communities into action. Throughout social media there are several posts that define Creole by noting how its definitions have changed over time and evolved through a shared culture. Within the similarities and differences among posts by self-identified Creole users I found posts that paralleled the work of the activists in the Citizens' Committee highlighted by *The Daily Crusader* that revolved around fighting against the system of white supremacy, highlighting racial inequality through activism, and discussing Creole perspectives of modern day issues. I have focused on racial classification, Creole identity in a global context, Creole collectives in online spaces, intersectionality in Creole activism, and religion and spirituality within #Creole posts in order to highlight some common themes within Creole dialogues online. These issues build on the work of activism in the past by identifying the ways in which Creoles continue to be impacted. The ways that resistance is mounted to address these issues has transformed as necessary to fight for change in Creole communities throughout the diaspora.

Racial Classification

Creoles have advocated against the imposition of racial classifications throughout different time periods while simultaneously insisting on identifying with Creole culture separate from racial constructs. Through their creation of a culture outside of the constricting racial binary they challenged the social construction of race in order to deconstruct white privilege. Due to these persistent questions of the boundaries placed on racial identifications, the construct

of Creole culture has always lain outside of a specific racial identity. Creole as an identity is not bound by race and Stuart Hall asserts: “It seems impossible to freeze this term in its meaning, or to give it any kind of fixed or precise racial referent” (“Créolité” Hall 14). There is no fixed meaning as Creole has evolved over time as a culture, challenging racial discrimination through advocating to end racial segregation and continuing to resist impediments to racial equality through awareness and mobilization strategies on the internet.

Recognizing the power of the dominant narrative in furthering racial inequality, Creoles have worked to deconstruct white supremacy in challenging “common sense” conceptions of race. Creoles have worked to create counterstories and address misconceptions and ways in which hegemonic racial ideologies were perpetuated within Creole communities. The power of discrimination and the inability for the marginalized to control their own narratives is displayed in a blog post by a user who is only referred to as Julie, Julie writes:

I love America because of our spirit and our potential for altruism, but that’s not really representative of current America, or of current American culture, and I’m not celebrating that. Colonialism and current politics that define America are not what I want the Fourth to mean to me, so I reject it.

Instead, I want to use the Fourth of July to celebrate my Indigenous cultures:

Today, I am proud to be Creole. We get written out of our own history and taken out of our own narratives and yet we are still proud and indomitable. We know what is ours, and who we are, and we do not need others to validate it. That is a spirit that America claims to embody, and it is ours.

And today, I am also proud to be Chahta. We have endured what no one should have to, and yet we're still kind. After all this time, we've stayed patient and we've stayed kind and we've stayed strong. We have a heart that we've proven nothing can break. That is a spirit that America claims to embody, and it is ours.

And to the multitudes of Indigenous American cultures of which I am not a part: I celebrate you, as well. We might not have chosen to be thrown in this pit together, but we are strong both individually and together. We were America before America ever was, and it shows in the strength and values our nation strives towards. Those are yours, as well, and I recognize the important part you all play in creating a country that I hope one day we can all be proud of. (Julie)

The ways Julie defines Creole is influenced by intersectional identities, but the user notes the power of constructing their own narrative. Julie deconstructs the dominant narrative in order to construct her counterstory and reclaim aspects of her cultural identity that have been overlooked and marginalized. This post parallels the Citizens' Committee perspective on *Plessy v. Ferguson* and the importance of having the power to name your own identity in opposition to the imposition of racial and cultural identities upon the marginalized.

Politically Creoles engage in advocating for change through online platforms through cyber community building efforts and in identifying how their Creole identity impacts their perspectives on political change. The user identified as Demon Tyme or @chrilliamsX recognizes the way in which race and ethnicity are distinct categories, but all of these have a profound impact on the development of a political consciousness. Demon Tyme states: "My race is Black, my ethnicity is Creole, my nationality is American but my politic is Blackity Black Black" (Tyme). He challenges notions of Creole identity that subjugate blackness by centering it

in his understanding of his identity and his political perspective. In the political viewpoints he shares on the Twitter platform he continues to focus on Blackness. One post simply states: “Protect Black Trans Folks” (Tyme). Recognizing his viewpoints through posts that challenge heteropatriarchy and white supremacy many of his posts can be understood as political. Although Demon Tyme discusses frustration in the voting process and the need to bring about change, he also connects his political perspectives to prior social movements and struggles. He posts: “The right to vote includes the right not to vote. It was always about choice. Political autonomy” (Tyme). Within the same day he elaborates in a second post stating, “(That said, I feel mad ancestral guilt with just the thought of abstaining.)” (Tyme). Throughout his posts noting the injustices prevalent within society he displays feelings of apathy, but also there is a pointed critique on whether change can ever be achieved utilizing the structure currently in place by voting and participation in the constructed political process. As a Black queer individual, Demon Tyme, chooses to note the significance of his Creole identity throughout his posts and posits a progressive outlook to call for change in the political system to challenge the system built upon racial inequality. Through centering Black identity in representations of his Creoleness, Demon Tyme deconstructs Creole stereotypes to create a new conception of Creole identity that as Nakamura argues “talks back to the dominant” to create a counterstory through embodying a mestiza consciousness that contests the predefined pathways founded on racial and ethnic divisions.⁶⁰

Throughout the #LouisianaCreole posts that were recognized as the “top” posts, roughly one third of the tweets discussing Creole culture or politics discussed Beyoncé and most often referenced her visual album *Lemonade*. Users debated over her use of the term Creole in the

⁶⁰ (Nakamura, “Digitizing Race” 205).

song “Formation,” in which she sings, “My daddy Alabama, momma Louisiana/You mix that Negro with that Creole make a Texas bamma” (Beyoncé). Users debated over whether stating Negro and Creole as two separate racial classifications could reinforce historical conceptions of Creole identity that were based on distancing Creoles from Blackness. User Brandon Patterson under the handle @myblackmindd shared his critique: “Absolutely, Creole race politics is [sic] tinged with anti-blackness. But I think in claiming "Negro" Beyonce rejects that” (Patterson). Through a deliberate mention of her blackness Beyoncé acknowledges the imposed division between these identities and claims membership to both.

Other users critiqued her usage of the two identities because stating them separately could reinforce the schism between Black and Creole identities. User Jaila under the Twitter handle @Jaichanellie believes these two identity formations can and should be recognized separately, Jaila’s post states: “Beyoncé claiming Creole heritage does not undermine her identity as a Black woman. Black is a race. Louisiana [sic] Creole is an ethnicity (there are also specific tribes within that entity). I find it funny that tribalism is completely ok until Black Americans choose to participate” (Jaila). Individuals can identify with the ethnicity of Creole as an ethnic and cultural construct without negating their racial identity or perpetuating anti-Blackness. Many users passionately debated how Beyoncé’s *Lemonade* should be understood as perpetuating hegemonic ideologies or radically contesting them because the visual album contains imagery and lyrics highlighting the strength of Black women within a distinctly Southern and Creole environment. User Stephanie under the Twitter username of @StephKeyaka writes: “how was she supposed to "acknowledge the complicated & often divisive nature of colorism inherent in creole identity politics" in 5 mins?” (Stephanie). The visual album is a powerful depiction of Black identity and represents the intersectional struggles of Black women

but does not interrogate the role of Creole identity fully leaving users to interpret how the identity is being evoked. As a result of the lack of Creole representation within dominant culture, *Lemonade* and specifically the music video for “*Formation*” created a national conversation surrounding Creole identity within the twenty-first century and placed it within larger conversations of police brutality, the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina, and representations of Black womanhood.

In centering *Lemonade* in discussions of Creole identity on social media platforms users are engaging in pleasure activism as defined by adrienne maree brown. The entertainment industry can play a role in forwarding crucial narratives in combating racial inequality and can provide a source of empowerment to contest anti-Black narratives. In defining pleasure activism brown argues:

Pleasure is a feeling of happy satisfaction and enjoyment. Activism consists of efforts to promote, impede, or direct social, political, economic, or environmental reform or stasis with the desire to make improvements in society. Pleasure activism is the work we do to reclaim our whole, happy, and satisfiable selves from the impacts, delusions, and limitations of oppression and/or supremacy. (brown 10-11)

There should not be any guilt or shame in finding pleasure because it is an act of resistance within a society that marginalizes and oppresses Black people. There are several forms of pleasure advocated by brown, but she describes a connection to Beyoncé and the powerful discussion across social media outlets surrounding her work. She notes: “I am fascinated by how culture shapes politics, how culture shapes our daily lives. Beyoncé takes responsibility for culture shaping and shifting. I love that every time she releases something, a thousand people need to write think pieces about what she means by it” (brown 182). In recognizing how

Beyoncé's influence on culture is a significant topic of discussion online and within the space of Black Twitter, it is crucial to acknowledge her identification with Creole culture as influential in online discourse among Creole communities.

In discussing Beyoncé's Grammy performance of her work from the album *Lemonade*, brown recounts: "This performance is, like the best Black speculative work, a spell we cast for a liberated, abundant Black future. The healing we need will require the creative abundance of so many Black women stepping into our wholeness" (brown 184). A Black woman's ability to reclaim her whole self is a resistant act and a reflection of pleasure activism.

As seen through debates on the definition of Creole identity as well as interpretations of the work of Beyoncé, users can engage in conversations across locations and communities to construct a diverse range of resistance strategies. A resistance strategy that has translated to online spaces is the act of signifying, as Shenesse Thompson argues: "Through the use of the retweet and quote functions, Twitter users signify on existing tweets, adding their own commentary and revising along the way. This kind of signifyin(g) happens in reference to the light-hearted, as well as in reference to serious issues that plague the Black community" (Thompson 166). Creoles have engaged in resistant readings through the practice of signifying even within online spaces this cultural construct persists and transforms the predetermined modes of communication available through social media.

Creole Identity in Global Politics

In searching for Creole representation and posts centered around politics I came across the Twitter handle @amdipstories which shares the podcast "The American Diplomat" and describes itself as a forum to hear the stories of diplomats from the United States who have lived abroad. The description reads: "American Diplomat goes behind the scenes to hear real stories

from diplomats who lived newsworthy events overseas” (American Diplomat). In an episode Desiree Cormier who is noted as a former Foreign Service Officer with the United States Department of State shares her personal experience identifying as Black and Creole throughout her life. In the beginning of her interview she discusses growing up in Los Angeles and how even though she was raised outside of Louisiana she still felt very connected to her Creole culture. She states: “And there's actually a very significant Louisiana Creole population in LA that was a major path of migration following Reconstruction so there are a ton of Creole restaurants, Creole festivals, Creole markets” (“Desiree, Encore!”). Cormier felt connected to Creole identity through the constructed community in Los Angeles built by fellow migrating Creoles. I connected with the story of her upbringing perhaps because I am also California-raised with a Louisiana heritage. My grandparents relocated to Los Angeles following Hurricane Betsy in 1965 and we felt that same sense of connection among Creoles through community events and the Transfiguration Catholic Church, which I attended throughout my youth. Cormier notes a strong influence from her grandparents who were all from Louisiana in connecting to Creole culture as well. The ability to strongly identify with Creole culture even as whole communities are displaced from Louisiana is a way in which Creoles have implemented survival strategies by building community throughout the diaspora.

Even though Cormier was close to her grandfather who played a large role in organizing within Los Angeles, she was not a part of Creole organizations because her grandfather recognized the imposed divisions between Black and Creole communities within Los Angeles. Cormier discusses: “For all of its virtues one of the things he really didn’t like about the Creole culture was its tendency to focus on skin color so there is a lot of colorism within the Creole community, the notion of the ‘paper bag’ test or having fairer skin makes you somehow better or

having ‘good hair’ quotation marks” (“Desiree, Encore!”). Her grandfather personally experienced discrimination and colorism as she continues: “My grandfather faced a bit of that growing up because he is darker skinned” (“Desiree, Encore!”). Although she notes a pride in her Creole heritage, she has felt a disconnect due to her identification and commitment to her Black racial identity and politics.

While working in South Africa Desiree Cormier recognized the parallels between Creole identity and the conception of Colored in upholding white supremacy through racial constructs that were predicated on degrees of Blackness and the establishment of racial hierarchies. While in South Africa when she was asked her racial identity, she told a South African woman she was Black, and she was laughed at. Based on her phenotype she was not recognized as Black, Cormier notes: “I would be considered Colored” (Desiree, Encore!”). It was unfathomable to this South African woman that Cormier would choose to identify as Black when she was recognized as Colored. Cormier continues: “During apartheid the hierarchy of that was very important which is why Colored South Africans would never willingly put themselves in the Black category” (“Desiree, Encore!”). Her insistence on combating colorism through identifying and emphasizing her Blackness was a political act of resistance and an intentional denial of the benefits of white and/or light skinned privilege by Cormier. She asserted her Blackness even in times when she felt it isolated her from Creole communities to highlight the harmful dominant practices that were being perpetuated within her community and transform understandings of Creole culture that were predicated on this constructed hierarchy.

Through social media activists noted their Creole identity to deconstruct myths and rewrite narratives to challenge dominant understandings of Creoleness as well as social constructions of race. Engaging in cyberspace and through recognized cybertypes users were

able to draw on “common sense” perspectives on political knowledge to make powerful political statements. Through asserting Creoles presence in discussions of Black politics Creole users not only deconstructed imposed divisions between these communities but advocated for new understandings of Creole identity that have evolved through dialogue between users to address the ways in which Creole identity has marginalized other communities within its past. The path forward is built upon transformation and a direct challenge to dominant conceptions of Creole identity that has overlooked the significance of resistance, which has played a central role in Creole identity formation historically. This process is through dialogue, consciousness raising, and community building throughout the diaspora and can be facilitated through the use of the internet and social media platforms. Social media posts debated definitions of Creole identity throughout online communities where users can deconstruct cybertypes and “common sense” understandings of racial and cultural formations.

Posts throughout Twitter discussed the 2010 census of the state of Louisiana because for the first time cultural identity was listed separate from racial identity and Louisiana Creoles were encouraged to note their Creole heritage on the census ⁶¹. In the year 2010 cultural identity was being formally recognized in a manner that was unprecedented due to the influence of Creole advocates that had fought for recognition. Although Creole note a sense of pride in their culture, within these online spaces there is recognition on how customs within Creole culture have perpetuated inequalities by furthering colorism and socioeconomic divisions. Even while discussing a pride in her Creole identity Desiree Cormier does note the similarities between the

⁶¹ Kréyol, Being. “@BeingCreole.” *Twitter*, Twitter, 23 Mar. 2020, twitter.com/BeingCreole/status/1242200933674647552.

U.S. South and apartheid in South Africa in policing the boundaries of racial identity. Politically Creole users highlight the problematic legacy of Creole identity that has reinforced hegemonic ideologies through colorism, heteropatriarchy, and negating Blackness. The exclusion of the past does not have to define Creole identity or the ways in which it has and continues to be a cultural construct that can resist white supremacy and the imposed racial binary in the dominant imaginary of the United States and specifically the region of Louisiana. Creoles have created spaces online to engage in dialogue and posit new perspectives that recognize Creole identity as ever evolving and online platforms as spaces that can allow for community building. These online dialogues are the spaces that Nakamura argues are important sites for community building as they are: "...informal, grassroots use of communications technology to create a sense of racial identity that is flexible, hybrid, and de-essentializing" (Nakamura, "Cybertypes" 130). Technology can be a site for community building that defies the "common sense" perpetuated throughout dominant institutions in society and gives space for the collective creation of counterstories. The realization of this concept by Nakamura is discussed in Thompson's perspective on Black Twitter as she posits, "Black Twitter activism, then, is not just in the response to certain mischaracterizations of Black people or their suffering, or the racist remarks of a reporter. It is in the changing of outcomes and perspective" (Thompson 170). Black Twitter does not address specific cases of police brutality or racist acts in a vacuum but connects them to the deconstruction of racial common sense to challenge white supremacy and dominant narratives. The emphasis on the process of creation as a collective is furthered in the continuation of collectives, associations, and organizations within the cyber realm. Social clubs have played a prominent role within Creole communities historically and have transformed into a diverse range of associations by evolving their practices as well as their perspectives. These collectives operate

within cyberspace in hopes of achieving more visibility for Creole people throughout the United States and fighting against racial injustice.

Creole Collectives' Online Presence

There have always been social clubs, associations, and organizations for Creoles that historically were not always inclusive spaces that celebrated aspects of Creole culture. Throughout the nineteenth century social clubs were a powerful presence within society whether they forwarded exclusionary practices such as the invitation-only Bals Cordon Bleu events or they created Creole spaces within religious institutions such as Knights of Peter Claver. The most important aspect of social clubs was the involvement of community members visually represented in the second line parades common throughout New Orleans. There are many organizations and social clubs present today throughout the Creole Diaspora that utilize the internet to continue community building and furthering activism. There are several associations that are based online in order to advocate for membership to instill a pride in Creole culture and to preserve aspects of Creole legacy. Social clubs present on social media networks bring together Creoles with a Louisiana heritage that are located throughout the diaspora. There are also local resources and organizations that utilize the internet for promotion and awareness but are based and still operational within Louisiana today.

In a transformation in the way activist groups and organizations have operated within the past the collective #DignityInProcess identifies as, “*an embodied movement and living art-activist toolkit*” (#DignityInProcess). This collective was founded by ChE noted as a: “Liberatory Coach, ChE, is the Founding Synthesizer of Afro-Indigenous Liberatory Praxis, a culturally-rooted equity organizing framework exploring the intersections of race and gender justice, unpacking binarism, decolonized embodiment and movement building from an African

American/Afro-Diasporic/Creole/First Peoples' epistemology" (#DignityInProcess). The collective was founded to create an online framework for activism that can be adopted in online and physical spaces to educate Creole activists on how to utilize an inclusive framework to promote change. #DignityInProcess recognizes the forms of resistance Creoles have engaged in historically by noting an emphasis on building on frameworks constructed by our ancestors. It is only through acknowledging the work of our ancestors can the movement move forward. As they posit: "Grounded in the resilience of our lineages—art, ritual, and community organizing provide a pathway to freedom" (#DignityInProcess). The collective notes its usage of several different forms of activism. #DignityInProcess states:

Through Art Actions—site-specific performance rituals merged with direct action organizing, we call in the power of Ring Shout processions, Afro-Diasporic dance, call-and-response freedom songs, and altar installations to remember our sacred origins. Conjuring kitchen table organizing, intertribal Wisdom Councils lay the foundation for cross-generational accountability and mentorship sustained through Sunday dinner storytelling circles. Freedom Schools decolonize education through a pedagogy embracing interactive art + somatic-based community learning from a Queer Black Feminist lens. (#DignityInProcess)

Community building through the use of art, mentorship, and developing a new pedagogy can challenge dominant ideologies that further white supremacy through recognizing Andrea Smith's argument that white supremacy impacts different marginalized communities in differing ways. The collective notes that more than one strategy must be utilized to create a truly intersectional foundation that is the basis of solidarity networks and activism that can mount resistance to social constructions of race that further white supremacy.

Louisiana Creole Research Association known as LA Creole may be one of the most visible Creole organizations in Louisiana presently. The focus of this organization is to motivate Creole identified people to research their ancestry and recognize the prominent role Creoles have played in the history of Louisiana. Their mission statement is: “Louisiana Creole Research Association (LA Creole) advances family research, provides education and celebrates Creole culture” (About LA Creole). They distribute journals and newsletters to members only and have a guide on how to begin researching your family. Their website states: “Its purpose is to assist Creoles of Color in researching their ancestry, to educate the general public about Creole history and culture, and to celebrate the contributions and legacy of a unique, sometimes forgotten people” (About LA Creole). LA Creole emphasizes legacy and heritage in their approach to call on members to construct their own counterstories to contrast with prevailing depictions of Creoles and the ways in which Creole’s role in the history of Louisiana has been overlooked.

Organizations founded by Creoles evolved to fit the needs of Creole communities utilizing the internet as a platform to disseminate tools in combating hegemony. Through advocating for Creoles to participate in training, teaching, and researching in order to create their own counterstories LA Creole and #DignityInProgress argue challenges to hegemonic ideologies must come from an active rewriting of the dominant narrative by Creoles. Change must come from within our communities and our framework in order to not only deconstruct cybertypes but create a radically new understanding of Creole identity within online spaces that can be reflected throughout society.

Intersectionality in Creole Activism

Recognizing the connection to the articles from *The Daily Crusader* and the work of organizations and activism networks from Reconstruction throughout the Civil Rights Movement

to activism within the realm of social media, I have seen parallels to the work of Michelle Alexander as she notes in *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* that the system of slavery never ended, but evolved into the system of mass incarceration. In the 1890's Creoles were making a similar argument in print publications about the way white supremacy operated within the legal and criminal justice system as a means of control over the marginalized and continue these conversations on social media today. These arguments have relocated from print publications to social media dialogues as Creoles have created solidarity networks with indigenous struggles beyond the limited appropriation in the performances of Mardi Gras Indians seen in the work of L'eau Est La Vie Camp highlighting the evolution of Creole identity and Creole strategies of resistance.

In the realm of social media community building continues through #BlackLivesMatter and several online movements started by users of color to address inequalities through awareness and mobilization. Hashtags are used as a means to unify posts from across regions and highlight common trends within the work of activists; hashtags can identify prevalent issues and strengthen resistance. Paolo Gerbaudo argues:

Social media can be seen as the contemporary equivalent of what the newspaper, the poster, the leaflet or direct mail were for the labour movement. They are means not simply to convey abstract opinions, but also to give a shape to the way in which people come together and act together, or, to use the metaphorical language that will be adopted in this book, to *choreograph* collective action. (Gerbaudo 4)

Realizing a social media presence became the logical next step for Creole activism that relied heavily upon the form on print publication, but today with a displaced population Creoles have formed a global social network utilizing online platforms. The power of social media and

hashtag activism is in choreographing resistance or creating a counternarrative to hegemonic constructs.

However, the internet is not a utopia where users are able to transcend racism, but often replicates limitations of racial constructions from dominant ideologies, which negate intersectional identities. Hegemonic ideologies are represented in the very construction and interface of the internet. Nakamura argues: “This interface feature enforces a menu-driven sense of personal identity that works by progressively narrowing the choices of subject positions available to the user, an outcome that seems to fly in the face of claims that the Internet allows for a more fluid, free, unbounded sense of identity than had been available in other media-or, indeed, in the world-before” (Nakamura, “Cybertypes” 104). Dominant ideologies of racial identity and the interface of the web are both hegemonic constructs recognized as “common sense” as they are affirmed through naturalizing them. The interfaces and limited racial designations are “common sense” in creating an online presence across several different platforms are not questioned so users confined to these racial constructs may not always perceive how they uphold white supremacy. On Twitter, Tumblr, and throughout social media platforms users are able to address the limitations of preset topics by creating their own hashtags or redefining and adding to preexisting hashtags through the process of signifying or talking back to the dominant.

A mestiza consciousness is reflected in Creole users challenge the online constructs utilized by Twitter and Tumblr by centering activist narratives and deconstructing white privilege and default whiteness in cyberspace. I focused on the online presence of community activist organizations to identify the role of Creole identity within these associations. These groups do not exist solely online but utilize social media to orchestrate what Paolo Gerbaudo

coins as the “choreography of assembly,” he asserts: “This practice is made visible in the use of social media in directing people towards specific protest events, in providing participants with suggestions and instructions about how to act, and in the construction of an emotional narration to sustain their coming together in public space” (Gerbaudo 12). Users are able to give vital information to others in a timely manner to aid in organizing, but also provide counterstories that defy the dominant narrative portrayed by corporate news media.

Within online spaces Creoles have taken on campaigns addressing racial inequality within the legal system in many ways. While searching through #Louisiana posts to identify Creole users and their social media activism I came across #leouestlavie or #waterislife. These hashtags identify environmental activism across the world, but specifically highlight the work of activists within Louisiana fighting against corporate interests causing harm to indigenous lands and the environment. The internet has helped to mobilize protestors and place environmental issues into mainstream news surrounding the Dakota Access Pipeline protests in 2016. The organized resistance against the Dakota Access Pipeline was identified through #NoDAPL, defined as: “#NoDAPL is a hashtag for the struggle against the proposed and partially built Dakota Access Pipeline. More than that, it is a struggle for clean water and sustainability. It is a struggle to leave a planet in good shape for the generations to come. It is also a struggle for the sovereignty and treaty rights of the First Nations” (“No Dakota Access Pipeline”). Utilizing hashtag activism, water protectors from across the country came together to fight to stop the building of the Dakota Access Pipeline, but its construction continued into the state of Louisiana. This led Creole activists, indigenous activists, and others to unite in the continued fight against the construction of this pipeline, which would damage lands of indigenous people and the environment.

On the frontlines of the struggle within Louisiana, a camp has formed for water protectors to occupy the land in protest, the camp is named L'eau Est La Vie Camp or "Water is Life." The organization's website defines the collective as: "L'eau Est La Vie camp is a floating pipeline resistance camp. Although we have no leaders, we value the voices of our indigenous, black, femme, and two spirit organizers. We fight in the bayous of Louisiana, Chata Houma Chittimacha Atakapaw territory, to stop the Bayou Bridge Pipeline, an Energy Transfer Partners project and the tail end of the Dakota Access Pipeline" ("L'eau Est La Vie Camp"). This collective not only fights for environmental justice, but also highlights injustices within the criminal justice system to demand reform.

Through the L'eau Est La Vie Camp twitter account titled @NoBayouBridge the camp posts updates, calls to action, spreads awareness, and recognizes connections throughout diverse issues impacting marginalized populations. The Twitter account documents the protests and discusses the methods used by the criminal justice system to suppress resistance. A tweet from April 7, 2020 reads: "While we were all focused on keeping ourselves & our communities safe during this global pandemic, three more states quietly passed unconstitutional, anti-protest laws. #COVID19" (L'eau Est La Vie Camp). Kentucky, South Dakota, and West Virginia passed measures that would allow for more severe punishments for protestors. The L'eau Est La Vie Camp recognizes the criminal justice system as a tool of hegemony that is utilized in order to quell resistance through violence, intimidation, and criminalization. Another tweet from the same day states: "L'eau Est La Vie continues to lead the fight against these unjust laws. We have filed a lawsuit in federal court to challenge the constitutionality of the Louisiana critical infrastructure law. This lawsuit will be precedent setting in this fight to defend our right to protest" (L'eau Est La Vie Camp). Although L'eau Est La Vie camp has created a community of activists working to

challenge dominant systems built upon the displacement of indigenous peoples, they have constructed a counterstory that works within dominant institutions as well changing legal definitions that seek to further marginalize the oppressed.

In a January 12, 2019 post the camp advertised an event to train activists on resistance strategies against law enforcement and how to challenge the system when it unjustly targets them. The post states: “KNOW YOUR RIGHTS & DIRECT ACTION TRAINING! Would you like to learn more about your rights when being approached by the law enforcement? What do you do when you feel that you are being wrongfully detained? Join us this Tuesday at 6pm at Mount Baptist Calvary Church” (L’eau Est La Vie Camp). The L’eau Est La Vie Camp highlights the significance of adopting strategies that can be used within dominant institutions for survival as well as to contest the injustice. Continuing the legacy of Creole activism, they note how the ways in which dominant institutions perpetuate hegemonic ideologies must be addressed in order to bring about change. The L’eau Est La Vie camp utilized social media to orchestrate the choreography of assembly:

The choreographing of public gatherings in which social media are involved cannot be reduced to the circulation of practical information, or the logistics of organising protest events. The choreography of assembly of contemporary movements has its own cultural narrative, and it chiefly requires the construction of common collective identifications among participants, without which such practical information would fall on deaf ears. Throughout the history of social movements, media like newspapers, radio and TV have contributed in condensing *symbolic assemblages* which can later materialise into *bodily assemblies*. (Gerbaudo 40-41)

Creole activists have used social media to construct and further counternarratives that talk back to the dominant and contest the complex and diverse ways in which white supremacy subjugates people of color.

In maintaining solidarity networks among activists, the L'eau Est La Vie Camp depends on furthering understandings of community building to challenge systemic injustices. The Twitter account of the camp also had many posts highlighting the work of other organizations and issues that at first glance may not seem related to environmental justice. There were many posts aligned with the #AbolishICE movement bringing together activists on a wide array of criminal justice issues that disproportionately impact communities of color. The Twitter account of L'eau Est La Vie camp recognizes that the connection between violence against indigenous communities, environmental issues, capitalism, and discrimination in the criminal justice system is through white supremacy. They recognize the framework posited by Andrea Smith that there are pillars of white supremacy that may intersect in how they impact communities of color. It is crucial to build solidarity networks among activist groups but also vital to recognize the need for different approaches across marginalized communities to combat the many ways white supremacy oppresses as a system of control.

Religion and Spirituality

In the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington D.C. throughout the exhibits dedicated to Black experiences there was a display titled, "Race and Sacred Space: St. Augustine Church, New Orleans" featuring stories about St. Augustine church as a site of resistance (Smithsonian). One section of the installation is entitled "Resisting Segregation" and notes:

During the 1890s, the rise of Jim Crow in the South posed a challenge to Creoles of color, who opposed racial segregation in any form. In 1895, when the archbishop of New Orleans established a separate parish for black Catholics, St. Augustine parishioners asserted their right to worship in an integrated sanctuary. They also joined with other Creole citizens of Tremé to protest new state and local laws that mandated racial segregation in schools, transportation, and other public accommodations. (Smithsonian)

The exhibit also contains a Citizens' Committee pamphlet provided by the Amistad Research Center noting the work of Creoles in resisting Jim Crow legislation (Smithsonian). Discussing Creole resistance within the National Museum of African American History and Culture is significant in deconstructing the imposed division between Black and Creole identities. It also challenges constructions of Creoles that categorizes them as benefitting from the system of racial oppression or fail to recognize their activism historically. Seeing this exhibit in the year 2020 was empowering to me as a Creole, but it also highlighted the role of resistance within the realm of religion and the ability of Creoles to contest racial oppression within a dominant institution. Resistance through the means of religion and spirituality persists to this day as Creoles create challenges to dominant ideologies by drawing on their religious beliefs in physical and virtual spaces.

In an extension of the practice of social clubs and religious associations second lines throughout New Orleans persist. On social media there were hundreds of posts labeled #SecondlineSunday often highlighting the collective activity of attending second lines following Sunday services at church. Images and videos from the second line celebrations taking place throughout New Orleans are a form of virtual community building. User L'Dorado under the Twitter handle @LnotAlgreen retweeted a video from a second line and states: "They can't

gentrify this!!!!” (L’Dorado). Current second lines have been appropriated, as not all are associated with social clubs, churches, or philanthropic efforts but have been manufactured performances by the tourism industry. However, second lines created by residents for New Orleans to engage in community building are still prevalent. The social media hashtag #SecondlineSunday highlights the diverse celebrations that continue today. Mirroring the grassroots community building as displayed within the dialogues on social media among Creoles, the visual imagery of Creole culture is celebrated and widely disseminated within virtual spaces.

The collective “#TakinBackSunday: A #DignityInProgress Queer Black Church Series” posits a religious perspective that is founded through an intersectional framework contesting the oppression of dominant religious institutions (ChE). Facilitated by a duo referred to as Black Moon Monastics comprised of ChE and kei slaughter, #TakinBackSunday defines itself as: “A #DignityInProgress Folk-medicine circle series woven with Black Feminist scripture, Indigenous Creatrix storytelling, somatic-centering, Freedom Song ciphers, and ancestor reverence—our meditation is for Liberation!” (ChE). This collective expanded on their activist toolkit to realize the potential for strategies of resistance and liberation within the spiritual beliefs of Creole people and their ancestors. #TakinBackSunday recognizes the prevalence of religion within Creole culture and the power in transforming that belief system into a tool that combats hegemonic ideologies rather than subscribing to the dominant institutions that perpetuate them. In constructing their own form of spiritualism Creoles have created a religious counterstory that rejects the divisiveness of organized religion to design a new system built on intersectionality and furthering a mestiza consciousness.

Resistant readings are counterhegemonic acts that challenge the dominant narrative as utilized by the mestiza and taken on by Creoles as they contest racial binaries and categorizations of race. Despite the limitations imposed, the mestiza is able to combat the hegemony of the web through constructing new pathways and defying the circumscribed routes. Lisa Nakamura argues: “When the new mestiza on the web grasps her mouse and starts clicking she reads in a participatory way rather than a passive one. She surfs through cyberspace, never settling with just *one* category on the list, always moving on to the next and the next” (Nakamura, “Cybertypes” 113). Through composing alternative routes, the mestiza has contested categorizations that fail to acknowledge intersectionality and highlights the inability for hierarchies and binaries to adequately represent the multitude of racial and cultural identities. Online spaces do have opportunities to transcend imposed divisions and represent a powerful pathway forward to address inequalities present within society. Through the ability of users to create images and disseminate imagery, users have more ways to represent their racial identity. Nakamura notes the power of the use of images to overcome impediments to literacy in accessing information and creating content on the internet. She writes: “Envisioning and using the Internet in visual rather than primarily textual ways can be a radically empowering move for nonliterate groups” (Nakamura, “Digitizing Race” 88). The possibilities for empowering the marginalized are realized within cyberspace through resistant readings and the creation of counterstories across various platforms.

Unfortunately, although there is progress in challenging the dominant narrative, there are also simultaneously new avenues to perpetuate racist imagery and narratives online. Users of color have contested the ways racial inequality is present both in cyberspace and greater society through utilizing the tools of the web. Lisa Nakamura details: “Yet at the same time, people of

color and women care *greatly* about how they are visualized on the Internet. They care enough to sign protests about media racism, and when they don't like what you see, they care enough to sign online petitions and perhaps even to sit down and create new templates, new images of themselves, new databodies that talk back to the dominant" (Nakamura, "Digitizing Race" 205). These new templates and content have been utilized by Creoles in deconstructing the social constructions of race and the myriad ways that white supremacy is reinforced in new digital forms. Lisa Nakamura notes unique processes have developed to contest these hegemonic systems. She notes user generated and disseminated content have realized means of contesting the dominant racial narratives. In analyzing an email chain that was forwarded along by users titled, "101 Ways to Tell if You're Japanese American" she highlights the ways in which the specific experience of a marginalized population was discussed among users to engage in a dynamic dialogue. Nakamura argues it is a powerful sharing tool based on lived experience as she writes: "This is an excellent example of an informal, grassroots use of communications technology to create a sense of racial identity that is flexible, hybrid, and de-essentializing" (Nakamura, "Cybertypes" 130). Challenges form through community efforts based within marginalized communities that contest dominant narratives through the creation of counterstories based on lived experiences. These challenges are constructed online within the limited interfaces, but through drawing on a mestiza consciousness, users forge their own approach to navigating the racially biased organization of the internet. Creoles have challenged dominant institutions through a grassroots level organizing online that challenges the ways in which religion, internet interfaces, and social media networks has been used as tools of the oppressor to perpetuate dominant ideologies.

Conclusion

Recognizing the resistance strategies used online by Creoles there are several ways in which Creoles have created their own spaces to “talk back to the dominant⁶².” Creoles have actively deconstructed cybertypes by highlighting hybridity and challenging false narratives about their own identity formation. The mestiza is able to live within the binary and engage in resistant readings of the hegemony of the web in the same manner Creoles engage by creating their own content. Creoles have contested all imposed divisions to forward perspectives that are truly intersectional and counterhegemonic. Creoles are realizing their potential in disrupting the dominant narrative and are active in processes of resistance that seek to dismantle constructed racial and ethnic divisions. Could Creole identity provide a framework for larger challenges to hegemonic ideologies? Stuart Hall contends: “Whether creolization also provides the theoretical model for wider processes of cultural mixing in the contemporary post global world remains to be considered” (“Créolité” Hall 25). Creoles engaging in content creation on the internet show a hopeful path forward. In the posts labeled #Creole and #LouisianaCreole there were many diverse viewpoints represented and users participated in dialogue between different marginalized communities to identify how to construct activism networks and to foster solidarity. From creating a new spiritual belief system and practices through #TakinBackSunday to advocating for political change, Creoles are using virtual spaces to counter hegemonic ideologies and construct new modes of resistance.

In addressing racial discrimination Creoles have advocated for the power to name themselves and construct their own narratives. Through creating communities such as L’eau Est La Vie camp Creoles have joined the fight by recognizing how marginalized communities are impacted by white supremacy in a myriad of ways. Continuing the work of organizations in

⁶² (Nakamura, “Digitizing Race” 205)

Creole communities, Creoles are advocating for the restructuring of activism that is based on a foundation of intersectionality and ancestral knowledge. Challenging the perpetuation through dominant institutions of religion Creoles have forwarded their own spiritual belief system that have only been further disseminated through the use of technology. Recognizing environmental justice and challenging the criminalization of people of color are both strategies for combating white supremacy. There can be unified resistance despite the differences in how hegemonic ideologies impact marginalized populations.

Recognizing the many diverse ways Creoles utilize the internet to forward their activism and resist hegemonic constructions of race and culture is necessary in order to contextualize understandings of Creole identity today. Political reform is advocated for through the use of social media platforms to engage in dialogue among Creoles to contest, redefine, and construct counterstories to dominant narratives in cyberspace and throughout society. Drawing on the legacy of social clubs and associations founded by Creoles, new collectives have formed in virtual spaces with an evolved Creole politics that continues to center resistance, but also recognizes the need to operate throughout the diaspora as a result of displacement. Creoles have created spaces throughout online platforms that increases their visibility as a shared culture throughout the diaspora and continues to build upon their legacy of resistance.

Conclusion

Creole Resistance: From its Formation to Social Justice Narratives Today

When I first began writing my dissertation, I was not sure where my research would take me. Before I set foot in the archive at the Amistad Research Center I wondered if focusing on activism among Louisiana Creoles was even a topic worth exploring. I feared there would be little to no material detailing the role of Creoles within social movements, and, more importantly, I feared that the majority of Creoles had worked against progressive movements to uphold the status quo rather than challenge it. As someone who identifies as Creole, I also worried my personal bias would deeply influence my approach to the material, and perhaps it did in the way our identities influence our understanding of the world due to our unique lived experience. I was empowered when I saw accounts written by Creoles to be disseminated to other Creoles and others within the region that called for systemic change. I passionately read the work of scholars, activists, and journalists that identified how racial inequality was perpetuated through dominant institutions and the construction of a “common sense” built on furthering hegemonic ideologies. I was astonished that throughout the brutal systems of colonization, slavery, and racial discrimination Creoles had resisted in a variety of ways. I intentionally did not focus on acts of physical resistance and revolt because far too often these acts of rebellion are viewed as the only means to resist dominant ideologies and fight for change. Instead I focused on the stories of individuals, groups, and communities who formed social networks through the mediums of print publications, social clubs, and online spaces. Creoles recognized the importance of creating counterstories to the dominant narrative to challenge racism and highlight the systems in place that uphold white supremacy.

Creole identity has evolved, but resistance has always been an inherent aspect of this identity since the formation of Creole culture. Creoles have mounted strategic resistance by what is often dismissed as conformity as seen in the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which was not merely an attempt to “pass” as white or attain the privilege of whiteness but rather a deliberate attempt to challenge dominant ideologies about race. From colonization through the period of enslavement and leading into the Civil Rights Movement Creoles have contested racial constructs. Through their social media presence and online activism in the twenty-first century Creole resistance has persisted. In constructing a radical genealogy of Creole identity, I have highlighted forms of resistance over time and the ways they have evolved and transformed to fit the needs of the time. I have centered accounts of Creoles that have contested social constructions of race to challenge hegemonic ideologies that perpetuated white supremacy. Creoles have mounted resistance to systems of oppression through constructing counterstories to redefine understandings of Creole culture and to realize the power Creoles had in challenging the imposition of racial categorizations and a racial hierarchy. By adopting an intersectional framework and forming a mestiza consciousness Creoles defied the racial binary of Louisiana by deconstructing understandings of racial identity and building a culture based on a unified resistance.

In the first chapter I constructed a genealogy of Creole identity from its formation as an imposed means of classification by French colonizers. Creole identity was formed in response to colonialism by colonizers, but from its formation it has been used as a method of resistance. During French colonization Creole identity was imposed as a means to identify people born within the colony. The enslaved were labeled as Creole although they came from many different African nations, spoke different languages, and had distinct cultures. Despite these cultural

differences, Creoles forged a shared culture predicated on defying the attempted erasure of their African identities and cultures. Under colonization and enslavement oppressive legislation was passed to further oppress Creoles and all others with identifiable African ancestry referred to as the Code Noir. Although the Code Noir reinforced a Black and white binary to reinforce the authority of slave masters, Creoles advocated for fair legal treatment under this code by arguing against forms of abuse. Even under these dominant systems of control Creoles were able to mount resistance by utilizing legal language from the tool of their oppressors to advocate for better treatment for themselves and constructed ways to challenge the authority of their masters.

During the period of Spanish colonization Creoles solidified a shared Creole culture and formed their own communities outside of the system of enslavement. Far from being merely a colonial construct Creoles organized a concerted effort to fight against Spanish rule and continued to utilize tools of the oppressors within their activism. Creoles escaped enslavement and were able to sustain themselves through the creation of maroon communities. These maroon communities depended on the support of the enslaved to provide supplies as well as security. The Spanish government attempted to dismantle these communities in many ways but were unsuccessful due to the tight-knit solidarity networks between the enslaved and Creole maroons that realized the ability of the marginalized to challenge their oppressors' dominant systems of control.

As Louisiana entered into American statehood Creoles were no longer under the colonial power of the French or the Spanish and had to transform their understanding of Creole culture as a result. Creole identity was overlooked and seen as an artifact from the history of the region and Creoles struggled to understand how their identity, associated with the no longer present French, could operate in an American context. This resulted in Creole identity standing in opposition to

American identity and further divisions between Creoles and colored residents. These divisions persisted during a period of time when the country itself became divided and engaged in the Civil War with Creoles fighting on both sides of the conflict. During this period of conflict some Creoles benefited from a level of privilege due to their status as free people of color creating a rift between the enslaved and Creoles that would continue after the war.

From Reconstruction onward class divisions between Creoles and the formerly enslaved heightened. This divide was exacerbated by the creation of exclusionary social clubs and the access Creoles had to privilege based on their socioeconomic status. This schism may have led to misunderstandings about the legal challenge to racial segregation posed by *Plessy v. Ferguson* that reduced the stand Homer Plessy took and the work of the Citizens' Committee to an attempt to gain access to the system of white privilege. Plessy identified as colored and Creole and sought to challenge the imposition of racial categories as a means of depriving individuals from access to their rights as citizens.

The first chapter identified the ways that Creole identity evolved throughout the many government changes in the region of Louisiana. There are clear differences, but also aspects of Creole identity that have endured including the prominent role of resistance played while taking on many different forms. Tracing Creole identity from its formation and contextualizing its usage highlights the way in which it has transformed and strategically evolved in order to meet the needs of Creole communities.

In the second chapter I delved into the Creole counterstories I uncovered in the Amistad Research Center archive by focusing on Creole activism through the means of print publication. *The Daily Crusader* was a tool or a vehicle in which racial equality could be advocated for by Creoles in calling for the mobilization of marginalized communities to challenge dominant

systems and their roles in perpetuating white supremacy. The Citizens' Committee founded *The Daily Crusader* to highlight how racial inequality impacted the citizens of New Orleans and to demand action to create change.

The Crusader detailed the fight to end racial segregation and discrimination as they organized the legal challenge of *Plessy v. Ferguson* and focused on the effects of Jim Crow legislation. The publication noted the discrimination marginalized populations faced within the criminal justice system as they mounted legal challenges to unjust practices such as racially biased jury selections. Creoles within the publication also called for political reform by noting the impediments colored people had in attaining and maintaining their right to vote. The common thread in the articles of this publication was the insistence on addressing the ways in which institutional racism is perpetuated by noting how dominant institutions reinforced a “common sense” that furthered racial inequality. Creoles worked to deconstruct this “common sense” and the tools of hegemony in order to create transformative change.

In the third chapter I noted aspects of Creole culture that furthered resistance strategies in the form of social clubs and the role of religion and spiritual beliefs. Although Creole social clubs exacerbated divisions between Creoles and other colored residents by their exclusionary tactics and promotion of colorism, organizations and associations formed that were inclusive and based on Creole activism. Many clubs and organizations were founded on aspects of shared Creole culture like religion seen in the central role Catholicism played in Creole communities. Creole religious beliefs should not be reduced to the institution of the Catholic Church because Creoles advocated against the unjust practices of the Church and adapted their belief systems to address their concerns. They created their own spiritual belief systems by adopting aspects of Catholicism, traditional African religions, and drawing on ancestral knowledge. Religion and

spirituality were utilized to construct resistance strategies as seen in the holding of séances to seek guidance from ancestors and the spiritual world to identify the necessary approaches to address societal concerns. Social clubs and spirituality were vital components of Creole culture and must be recognized as sites of resistance.

In the fourth chapter I have focused on how resistance strategies transformed throughout the Creole diaspora by focusing on the role of the internet. I highlighted social media platforms due to their popularity as well as the ability for users to communicate publicly with one another. Creole activists are able to engage in public forms of dialogue as well as community building efforts to deconstruct misconceptions and stereotypes of their racial, ethnic, and cultural identities, which Lisa Nakamura terms “cybertypes” when discussing their online presence. In online activism, organizations like LA Creole and #DignityInProcess have built on the legacy of Creole activism to create powerful tools to further Creole resistance in an intersectional manner

Online collectives organize activists and create global communities of solidarity that further transform the role print publications played in mobilizing Creoles historically. The critiques of the Catholic Church have transformed to the creation of online groups such as #TakinBackSunday and #SecondlineSunday in redefining religious and spiritual practices in a digital age. The exclusionary tactics of Creole social clubs have evolved to online dialogues constructing counterstories on how to redefine and reclaim Creole identity. The appropriation of indigenous cultures displayed in the performances of Mardi Gras Indians has transformed into the activist coalitions seen in the work of L’eau Est La Vie camp.

Understanding the context in which Creole identity formed and the ways it lives on through the diaspora is a project of reclamation to deconstruct the erasure and misconceptions of

the dominant narrative. Within online spaces and the realm of social media Creoles are constructing their own archive and reclaiming their identity. Resistance strategies and the persistence of the struggle for equality require a strong sense of commitment to address the seemingly overwhelming impediments to achieving racial equality. Melissa Harris-Perry notes the powerful toll resistance takes as she posits: “Many are emotionally injured in the process, but the irrepressible desire to be seen-truly seen and understood as a human and as a citizen-compels individual and collective efforts to achieve gender and racial equality” (Harris-Perry 300). Creoles must continue to build on the work of their ancestors and the ways in which they have challenged dominant ideologies over time to continue the evolution of Creole resistance to address racial inequality as it persists today. The magazine *Kreol* attempts to bridge Creole communities globally together to recognize its power as a transnational identity (Kreol International Magazine). Perhaps this is the next evolution in Creole identity to engage in community building efforts on a global scale to continue the vital work of contesting white supremacy and imposed racial divisions and hierarchies.

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