Nourishing Networks: The Public Culture of Food in Nineteenth-Century America

by

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of History in the Graduate School of Duke University

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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

“Nourishing Networks: The Public Culture of Food in Nineteenth-Century America” examines how daily practices of food production and distribution shaped the development of New Orleans’ public culture in the long nineteenth century, from the colonial era through the mid-twentieth century. During this period, New Orleans’ vendors labored in the streets of diverse neighborhoods where they did more than sell a vital commodity. As “Nourishing Networks” demonstrates, the food economy provided the disenfranchised—people of color, women, and recent migrants—a means to connect themselves to the public culture of the city, despite legal prohibitions intended to keep them on the margins. Those who were legally marginalized exercised considerable influence over the city’s public culture, shaping both economic and social interactions among urban residents in the public sphere. To the vexation of some elites, these vendors helped determine what New Orleanians ate, how much it cost, and how they ate it. More than that, they shaped the cultural meanings of food. Exploring key sites of public culture including the municipal markets and their surrounding streets, the dissertation situates New Orleans’ local food culture within broader changes like slavery and abolition at the national and even international level—a perspective that places the city’s vendors at the center of a much larger transformation in Americans’ relationship to food, which was always about much more than sustenance. In fact, food became a
mode through which disenfranchised Americans participated in the political culture: those without the vote claimed a voice through their role in the country’s food culture and economy.
Dedication

To my parents, Sharon Rose Young and Walter Charles Young III, who have been with me every step of the way.
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Acknowledgements

It seems fitting to begin writing my acknowledgements while sitting on the banks of the Mississippi River with the French Market right behind me. Earlier this morning, I was conducting follow-up research at the Historic New Orleans Collection. It was a perfect day in New Orleans when I stepped on the streetcar: sunny, 70 degrees, and lacking the bayou’s usual cheekily oppressive humidity. I caught the streetcar on St. Charles and watched the avenue’s iconic mansions whisk by as I made my way towards Canal Street. At the end of the line, I got off, strolled through the French Quarter, and soaked in the city’s deep history as I passed through its oldest neighborhood. New Orleans has taught me so much about the history of the United States and the pathways through which communities foster a sense of belonging even in the face of incredible hardship. I am indebted to the New Orleanians who have shared their stories, their recipes, and their city’s history with me.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Overview

“Nourishing Networks: The Public Culture of Food in Nineteenth-Century America” examines how daily practices of food production and distribution shaped the development of New Orleans’ public culture in the long nineteenth century, from the colonial era through the mid-twentieth century. An exploration of these relationships, both amicable and confrontational, represents longstanding dynamics in the United States between those who made and distributed food and those who consumed it. These dynamics served as building blocks of identity on both an individual and group level in the public sphere. By paying special attention to the men and women who grew, prepared, and vended foods in the city and their relationship to those who purchased their wares and those who regulated those transactions, this dissertation reveals how food culture and economy influenced the development of a public culture in New Orleans. In this work, public culture is defined by the development of social relationships and cultural norms through the daily act of provisioning. The evolution of New Orleans’ public culture highlights the interplay of feast and famine, of inclusion and exclusion, of modernization and romanticization within and of New Orleans’ food system and how these seemingly polarized concepts co-existed and shaped one another.
Throughout New Orleans’ history, vendors labored in the streets of diverse neighborhoods where they did more than sell a vital commodity. As “Nourishing Networks” demonstrates, the food economy provided the disenfranchised—people of color, women, and recent migrants—a means to connect themselves to the public culture of the city, despite legal prohibitions intended to keep them on the margins. Those who were legally marginalized exercised considerable influence over the city’s public culture, shaping both economic and social interactions among urban residents in the public sphere. To the vexation of some elites, these vendors helped determine what New Orleanians ate, how much it cost, and how they ate it. More than that, they shaped the cultural meanings of food. Exploring key sites of public culture including the municipal markets and their surrounding streets, the dissertation situates New Orleans’ local food culture within broader changes like slavery and abolition at the national and even international level—a perspective that places the city’s vendors at the center of a much larger transformation in Americans’ relationship to food, which was always about much more than sustenance. In fact, food became a mode through which disenfranchised Americans participated in the political culture: those without the vote claimed a voice through their role in the country’s food culture and economy.

While historiographical debates about food culture in the United States have focused largely on the development of large scale agro-export economies, I argue that such a broad perspective overlooks the complex dynamics at play in intimate, urban
economies. Using legal, municipal, and business records as well as an array of archival and ephemeral materials that detail the personal histories of food vendors and their customers, my dissertation looks inside New Orleans’ municipal markets and street stands to examine the material culture of community formation. In these highly social environments, a diverse group of vendors—from enslaved Africans to European migrants—labored together to make and distribute the materials of culinary culture. The movement of vendors and food defined their trade, as vendors who roamed through city streets, homes, and restaurants distributed raw ingredients and prepared foods. Vendors exercised unprecedented mobility to navigate socio-economically and racially diverse neighborhoods to the dismay of elites who sought to exclude the disenfranchised from their public culture. Food distribution networks challenged the boundaries of white supremacy, rendering porous the social boundaries between distinct neighborhoods. Food allows us to explore the fluidity of New Orleans’ public culture and observe the power of disenfranchised groups that would otherwise be obscured by the structures of Jim Crow.

1.2 Historiography

Food, specifically the culture and economy that developed through its distribution, is the lens through which I examine public culture in the United States. As a result of my focus, I approach elements of the historiography from a different angle
and therefore see new connections between fields and new methods through which to study the impact of economic exchange on the development of community-based relationships and cultural practices. By focusing on food, I make three major contributions to U.S. historiography. First, I imagine people’s attachment to communities, which I define as belonging, differently than previous works of scholarship. My work highlights the material ways in which people interacted with each other and created the communities in which they lived—dynamics that only food can reveal. Second, given my emphasis on food and the peculiar paths that delineate its culture and economy, I provide a distinctive view of change over time in America. Last, I provide an alternative view of economy by looking at local, rather than international economy. My work extends the sphere of economic activity within those local communities in ways that those who focus on legal sources do not, braiding together the history of informal and formal food economy in America.

My work brings material culture and U.S. history together to examine the material modes through which people built attachments to communities to foster a sense of belonging. Historical studies of belonging in America generally define engagement with one’s community through political culture. Specifically, those studies focus on a person’s ability to own property and vote. Many of these studies explore white men’s political power and the lack thereof for women, people of color, and other marginalized groups. They also observe a fissure between men and women’s political realms in
America, identifying their primary spheres of influence as public and private, respectively. Further, these studies make note of women’s dependence on men, remarking on their political disenfranchisement within the private sphere. Such a distinction between spheres defines the lived experiences of women as marginal. Scholarship has since added to and revised the observation of separate spheres, discerning that domestic spaces are contested sites of disempowerment and empowerment for marginalized communities. Feminist literature, for example, has challenged the separation of public and private spheres and has shown connections between those realms. That same vein of scholarship has emphasized the political nature

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Commenting on this body of scholarship, Dylan Penningroth questioned studies that defined the experiences of the disenfranchised in the public and private spheres primarily through resistance. Instead, he posited a more representative approach, arguing that disenfranchised communities were creative and generative and that a resistance-focused analysis overshadowed these other components of their lives. These generative practices, many of them forms of cultural expression like music and dance, were modes through which to foster belonging. Dylan C. Penningroth, *The Claims of Kinfolk: African American Property and Community in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003).
of issues that previous scholars identified as “private” and, therefore, not “political,” aspects of food culture and economy among them. One such scholar, Barbara Young Welke, examines the “borders of belonging” where the politically disenfranchised made claims of personhood, citizenship, and nationhood despite their limited access to the legal sphere. Welke argues that across the long nineteenth century, subordinate groups did not gain full access to legal rights despite major events like the Civil War and Reconstruction, thus forcing the disenfranchised to find creative ways to define their citizenship in America.²

My study brings a key material aspect to the work of scholars, like Welke, examining alternative means of belonging in the public sphere by focusing on food. I am interested in how disenfranchised people built a sense of community in the city streets through their work as hucksters and municipal market vendors. Unlike domestic workers, who were largely isolated from their peers and community, food vendors were comparatively connected to their immediate community and to an entire network of

² Martha Jones, too, explores the ways in which marginalized groups, mainly African-American women, integrated themselves into public political and legal life through daily interactions. Cynthia Kennedy’s work also speaks to the public presence and visibility of black women’s labor in the antebellum South, demonstrating how these women, through the local economy, exercised considerable influence in urban America. My work draws upon these important works and adds a new perspective on modes of belonging through my focus on food. Barbara Young Welke, Law and the Borders of Belonging in the Long Nineteenth Century United States (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Martha Jones, All Bound Up: The Woman Question in African American Public Culture, 1830–1900 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Cynthia M. Kennedy, Braided Relations, Entwined Lives: The Women of Charleston’s Urban Slave Society (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).
customers. They cooked, shopped, and ate in public. Their experiences contradict notions that consumption in the colonial and antebellum periods, particularly that of women, was restricted to the private sphere. New Orleans’ food scene explicitly contradicts this rigid conception of public and private spheres. In fact, an examination of food distributors and their customers demonstrates that “the public” was a malleable concept shaped by daily food distribution. Within this flexible notion of the public, the borders between public and private blurred as vendors and customers labored to feed the city.

The distribution of food touched many aspects of American life including the social and political. In fact, food sat at the center of sociality in New Orleans. The daily interactions between vendors and customers forged bonds among community members, who then solidified those bonds through rituals of consumption. My focus on material culture also allows me to show how food was political. Local government officials created laws that determined who could vend foods, where they could vend, and when they could carry out those crucial transactions. Those same politicians determined which communities had access to municipally regulated food markets, and therefore had

3 There are noted differences between the labor of food vendors and domestic workers, mainly in the history of their compensation as enslaved workers. Rebecca Sharpless notes that it was rare for enslaved people to be compensated for their work as domestic laborers, and thus African-American women working as paid domestics found themselves in a new situation in the post-Civil War South. In New Orleans, however, it was not uncommon for enslaved workers to accumulate some income from their work as food vendors, and so emancipation was not as abrupt a transition for food vendors as it was for domestic workers. Rebecca Sharpless, Cooking in Other Women’s Kitchens: Domestic Workers in the South, 1865-1960 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010).
steady access to affordable, fresh food. Yet as my research shows, vendors and customers, many of whom were women and people of color, regularly lived outside of those laws, creating an alternative kind of politics around food—a system of their own making. That same system served as the backbone of their local communities.

Studies of material culture tend to focus on cities in the Northeast like Philadelphia, Boston, New York, and, on occasion, Chicago or Los Angeles. Rarely are cities situated in the American South used as case points for American cultural development. Although studies of material culture touch upon diverse categories of inquiry, those that tell the history of American cities typically explore immigration and ethnicity. In contrast to cultural histories of the U.S. that emphasize urban communities, ethnic identity, and assimilation, cultural histories of the American South tend to focus on rural communities and racial tensions between blacks and whites. Those studies, indicative of the field of inquiry, are concerned with a specific region. By consequence, they are not regularly integrated into the study of American material culture, thus contributing to the idea that the South is an exceptional region whose social and cultural history is not representative of trends across the U.S. It is not that historians actually


5 Angela Jill Cooley’s *To Live and Dine in Dixie: The Evolution of Urban Food Culture in the Jim Crow South*, for example, studies white southerners’ reactions to an expanding national food culture and the ways in which they strategically and legally excluded African Americans from restaurants and public eateries. Angela Jill Cooley, *To Live and Dine in Dixie: The Evolution of Urban Food Culture in the Jim Crow South* (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 2015).
believe that the South is unrepresentative of American culture or that it was not part of modernization in America, but that scholars’ attention to regionalism has created an artificial division in the historiography. My study explicitly contradicts the idea of Southern exceptionalism that pervades the current historiography. It rejects the binary in the historiography by offering a multilayered lens into the history of New Orleans, not just as a city in the American South, but also as a city in America and one whose history was profoundly influenced by its lasting connection to the Atlantic World.°

My study of food culture and economy in New Orleans explores the city’s connection to communities along the Atlantic Rim. Scholars that focus on the Atlantic World tend to confine their studies to the colonial era and occasionally the antebellum period, and rarely incorporate the postbellum period and beyond. This demarcation limits the study of the Atlantic World, preventing scholars from exploring the lasting importance of Atlantic World cultures in the modern United States. Scholars’ analytical focus on the impacts of the African slave trade, for example, shaped the parameters of the field. Philip Curtin’s study of the forced migration of millions of people across the

Atlantic Ocean restricted his study to the years of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. The study of European colonization, too, creates a particular chronological limit in regard to U.S. history, truncating America’s connections to Atlantic World cultures.

Food allows us to see more clearly how New Orleans remained part of the Atlantic World long after it became part of the United States. Historiographical debates about food culture in the Atlantic World have focused largely on the development of large scale agro-export economies. Richard Dunn, for example, was one of the first scholars to focus on the impacts of a single agricultural industry, sugar cane production, on English planter society and culture in the Caribbean. Dunn’s careful examination of the impacts of industrialized agriculture through the production of sugar led Sydney Mintz to inquire into a previously under-examined side of agro-export economies: consumption. Mintz’ sweeping study detailed the impacts of Britain’s sugar industry on everyday eating habits of British people, demonstrating how sugar quickly came to dominate the modern palate. Their focus on Atlantic-wide economies, however, overlooks the complex dynamics at play in small-scale, urban economies.

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My study, by contrast, focuses on municipal-level and even neighborhood-level economic activity to examine the impact of food distribution on the lived experiences of New Orleanians whose stories have, until this dissertation, been overlooked. Although a study at the local level, this history is not insignificant or unconnected to larger networks. As scholars have shown, network analysis is an effective means of conceptualizing power dynamics within the Atlantic World, demonstrating how taste preferences or consumption rituals within coastal communities in West Africa influenced those of communities in Appalachia.11 Employing a similar conceptual framework, one that focuses on individual vendors and customers, this study breathes life into the nourishing networks that stretched across New Orleans and out into the Atlantic World. Although a microanalysis of the food economy and culture in one city, my study also sheds light on the dynamics that fueled the movement of material goods and cultural practices across more expansive networks.

Last but not least, my study engages the work of historians who examine the economy of food and other material goods, and who tend to focus on legal sources that create a false divide between formal and informal economy.12 A study of local food

economy enables us to rectify that misleading distinction. Within the context of New Orleans, this artificial divide manifests as a legal distinction between public market and street food culture, roughly defined as formal and informal economy, respectively. Although legally they appear distinct, in practice, they were two sides of a single urban food economy, both distributing provisions to city residents and businesses (e.g., taverns, hotels, and restaurants). By studying the two halves of New Orleans’ local food economy as interdependent entities, I am able to bring together the histories of people that are typically approached separately. I study, for example, the enslaved African vendor alongside the European butcher, both working to establish a life in America, both struggling to build a community and economic network in New Orleans, though often treated as having unrelated, unconnected experiences. My work sheds light on the cooperation and competition among public market vendors and street vendors and how these groups lobbied municipal officials to support their particular livelihoods, often at the cost of those of their competitors. In addition, my work explores the contested relationships between customers and vendors and the ways in which buyers criticized and complained about the business practices and tactics of food vendors. Such conflicts were informed by racial, ethnic, and gender prejudices, in addition to economic

concerns, thus providing insights into how the food economy shaped social experiences and community formation in New Orleans.

1.3 Dissertation Structure

My study begins in the colonial period when early encounters and experimentation among Atlantic World peoples—Europeans, Native Americans, and Africans—created a new public culture through food. In regard to food production, distribution, and consumption these groups exercised considerable agency on the periphery of the empire, regularly depending on one another in ways that contradict traditional understandings of colonial power. Distance from colonial oversight and regulation created spaces in which the exchange and distribution of foods was spontaneous and inclusive, involving both enslaved and free people. These interactions took place in informal spaces along bayous and rivers—the waterways and pathways along which people, goods, and cultures moved throughout the Lower Mississippi Delta. As this chapter, “Cultures of Necessity,” shows, a unique food culture emerged from those encounters. Enslaved and elites alike claimed the fusion foods born out of these interactions as their own, suggesting that New Orleans' food culture and economy rendered porous the barriers that typically prevented socially diverse communities from building cultural ties in the public sphere.
Having established the deep colonial roots of New Orleans’ food culture, the next chapter, “Cultures of Mobility,” moves into the antebellum period, focusing on the paramount role that people of color played in creating a public culture through food distribution that aligned with their needs. Having established trading networks in the colonial period, black vendors strengthened their toehold in New Orleans’ local food economy by expertly using public spaces to build their businesses. Specifically, they constructed alternative spaces of belonging within the municipal markets and the surrounding streets while elites’ attention was on the region’s agricultural boom and on growing their importance in international economies. Despite legal and social disenfranchisement, Africans and African Americans exercised considerable mobility through their food labor. They worked in the city streets, at informal and open-air markets, and in the central public market, navigating the miles that stretched between plantation and city center. Because they were often barred from renting or owning a storefront, they set up itinerant food stalls and restaurants on public lands, displaying brimming baskets of seasonal fruits and offering steaming bowls of gumbo to passersby. As people of color, they were subject to major structural inequalities, yet within those constraints found ways to defy said restrictions to integrate themselves into the public culture and, ultimately, shape it to their advantage.

Customers, too, exercised power over the development of New Orleans’ food scene. “Cultures of Belonging,” the subsequent chapter, examines the ways in which
New Orleans’ diverse residents created their own public culture through food. They did so by lobbying for the construction of neighborhood-based municipal markets for the public good. In the 1820s, the municipal government of New Orleans responded to citizens’ demands by building additional public markets in growing communities. In the 40-year period starting in 1822, the number of public markets grew exponentially, totaling 14 by the beginning of the Civil War. Petitions for markets came at a time when new waves of European migrants came pouring into the city just as they were pouring into port cities across America, demonstrating, once again, that the movement of people into New Orleans had tremendous impacts on the evolution of the city’s public culture. Built in neighborhoods that served as ethnic, religious, and racial enclaves, New Orleans’ municipal markets took on the traits of their surrounding communities, supplying foods that met the needs and tastes of urban residents. Street food vendors continued to move through these neighborhoods, clustering near markets, bringing diverse people into contact with one another on a daily basis through the simple act of food procurement. Thus, different modes of belonging continued to thrive in and around the public markets, rendering malleable the concept of “the public” through the first half of the nineteenth century. That malleability enabled disenfranchised people to define community on their own terms through their participation in the local food economy.
The growing New Orleans market system, along with the rest of the city’s street food scene, captured the attention of a burgeoning Southern tourism industry in the postbellum period. The next chapter, “Cultures of Imagination,” delves into the role of food in the creation of a mythical New Orleans, one that was generated by publishers eager for content, and consumed just as eagerly by a curious American populace. The tourism industry, and its customers, did not see the city’s street food culture as something that was growing and evolving. Rather, they saw the markets and street stands as part of a static economic system, a relic of its pre-Civil War history. This view of New Orleans’ local food culture and economy became apparent as the city prepared to host the 1884 World’s Fair. In this period, the Crescent City captivated the imaginations of Americans who were intrigued by its antebellum past and lasting cultural ties to the Atlantic World. In anticipation of the event, writers and publishers connected with and contributed to the burgeoning Southern tourism industry that fixated on New Orleans, and in particular, the public culture that developed around food. The image that was created, and consumed by the American public during this time period presented New Orleans as different because of a longstanding impression that the city was a foreign one in America—more like Paris than New York or Boston. Further, that image depicted New Orleans’ food culture as “backward”—a relic of America’s past—even though new influences from throughout the Atlantic World continued to shape the city’s food culture and economy in dynamic ways. Writers and
publishers transformed the history of the city’s fusion food culture into a mythic American past by employing stereotypical Southern imagery and derogatory depictions of minority groups in the public sphere, demonstrating the political power of food to categorize and disparage. The conflation of New Orleans as foreign/exotic and antiquated through these new narratives served to position the food culture and economy of the city in opposition to the progressive North, thus cementing the city’s position as exceptional within a national framework. While this cultural ideal generated a sustained demand for New Orleans as a tourist product, it also skewed and solidified Americans’ perception of what the city’s food vendors had to offer – a bias that continues to the present day.

My final chapter, “Cultures of Enclosure,” focuses back in on New Orleans and its neighborhoods to examine how New Orleanians, predominantly white men and women, publicly reacted to that fictionalized public culture in the American national imagination. I contextualize their struggle in the escalating racial and ethnic tensions in the American South and in a rapidly expanding national food culture. Many of these conflicts played out within the city’s public markets, which had been largely neglected for the second half of the nineteenth century and were thus a major source of aesthetic criticism and public health concerns for twentieth-century New Orleanians. As discussed in the penultimate chapter, the municipal markets were the mechanism through which American writers characterized New Orleans as “backward” and
“foreign.” Street food vendors, too, came under sharp scrutiny as white activists sought to bring order and establish stricter public health standards in the city’s urban food economy. Both initiatives were tied up in racial and ethnic prejudices and discriminatory policies that disproportionately affected minority workers, while the efforts were conducted under the guise of “civic progress.” At the great cost of sacrificing the livelihoods, mobility, and civil liberties of minorities, white New Orleanians adopted a modern food culture that resembled that of other cities in America by the close of World War II. They flocked to newly-opened supermarkets in neighboring suburbs, abandoning the city and its public food markets. That process of modernization led to the collapse of New Orleans’ nourishing networks and the once robust public culture that provided marginalized groups a political voice and a mode through which to foster a sense of belonging in the public sphere.

In the conclusion, I explore major themes embedded in New Orleans’ local food culture and economy through the life of an exceptional African-American chef named Lena Richard who lived and worked in the Jim Crow South. Through her professional and personal history, the conclusion reflects upon the import of Atlantic World migrations on the development of Creole cuisine; the racial tensions and structural inequalities that prevented many African Americans and other marginalized groups from having publically recognized professional careers; the opportunities that mobility afforded food entrepreneurs both in New Orleans and on a national scale; and the
integral role that food-related business and community networks played in fostering a
sense of belonging within minority communities. Ultimately, the conclusion
demonstrates that through the malleability of public culture, marginalized communities
can develop integral social relationships and cultural bonds that enable them to grow
their business, while also fostering a sense of belonging through the daily act of
provisioning the city.
2. Cultures of Necessity

The history of New Orleans’ food culture is one both illuminated and obscured by myth. The introductory essays of historic and contemporary New Orleans cookbooks alike are riddled with fictionalized histories about the city’s food culture. The first New Orleans cookbooks, published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, created a narrative that erased the importance of the cultural fusion and experimentation that took place during the city’s colonial period. Early cookbook authors gave ownership of New Orleans’ food culture to people of European descent by foregrounding their culinary traditions; yet these authors skirted over or omitted entirely the similarly powerful contributions of enslaved Africans and Native Americans and their descendants. These cookbooks did political work, creating a lasting legacy that to this day defines New Orleans’ culinary history as a product of European culture.


I have witnessed the legacy of these myths and the ways they continue to shape Americans’ understanding of their food cultures first hand. For example, on my first day as a collections intern at the Southern Food & Beverage Museum in New Orleans, one of my colleagues handed me a copy of the sesquicentennial edition of The Picayune’s Creole Cook Book to read. She identified this work as one of the quintessential primers on New Orleans’ food culture. The broader New Orleans community also sees this cookbook as exemplary of New Orleans-style cooking. Recent customer reviews made by Louisianans on Amazon.com reflect the common perception that this cookbook is “[t]he ‘bible’ of Creole cookery.”

Contrary to the introductory essays in those cookbooks, early encounters and experimentation among Atlantic World peoples—Europeans, Native Americans, and Africans—created the bedrock upon which New Orleans' food economy and culture were founded. Diverse colonial people experimented with agricultural practices, ingredients, and cooking techniques from throughout the Atlantic World in order to survive the harsh environmental conditions of colonial Louisiana. This experimentation created a new public culture around the production, distribution, and consumption of food. It was during this period—one of starvation, disease, and hardship—that iconic New Orleans dishes, like gumbo, first emerged. The city's daily fusion of Atlantic World food cultures became a painful representation of hunger, but also of the innovation that emerges out of that hunger. Some of the richest food cultures, those of enslaved and maroon communities, were created in the midst of seemingly debilitating poverty, on the outskirts of the city center, and on the periphery of citizenship. Regardless of their

Cook Book. Sesquicentennial edition (New Orleans: The Picayune Publishing Company, 1987). Accessed March 11, 2015, http://www.amazon.com/Picayunes-Creole-Cook-Book-Sesquicentennial/dp/B000FPIQJM. Note: Editors modified the language of that original introductory essay for reprint by replacing derogatory language. For example, African-American cooks who were originally described as "Creole negro cooks" are identified simply as "Creole cooks" in the sesquicentennial edition. They then share the same identifier as European American cooks who in the colonial period were commonly identified as "Creole." Another example of language modification includes replacing "younger darkies" with "young girls." These changes obscure the demeaning language of the original introduction.

15 For an important work on early frontier exchange economy that examines the role of Native Americans, Europeans, and Africans in the making of colonial Louisiana, see: Daniel H. Usner, Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley before 1783 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992).
humble beginnings, these dishes became an essential part of New Orleans’ food scene. Enslaved and elites alike claimed these foods as their own, suggesting that food cultures transgressed traditional economic barriers and helped forge cultural ties between some of the most socially diverse communities in New Orleans. Participating in that shared consumption, therefore, was a political act that drew ties between groups that otherwise had little in common. It also served as the base of their shared public culture.

The assemblage of diverse cultures in colonial New Orleans created an ideal environment for fusion to take place. The hybrid food culture that formed was particular to the Lower Mississippi Delta, but reflective of similar cultural fusions occurring throughout the Atlantic World. The creation of this culture is deeply embedded in the movement of ideas and practices about food through New Orleans. Yet it is also about a process of fixation and how culture “sticks” to a particular locale and takes on new meaning in an equally new context.

This chapter is specifically interested in the development of local food economy and culture in the colonial period, exploring the ways in which people living in what would become the city of New Orleans fed themselves and created meaning out of consumption. My analysis contributes to the literature that focuses on colonial powers’ regulation of the vast Atlantic trade network. Because these histories are framed in

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16 Richard S. Dunn’s *Sugar and Slaves* (1972) is a foundational text in the study of agricultural economies and their impacts in the Atlantic World. Dunn was one of the first scholars to focus on the impact of single agriculture industry, sugar cane production, on English planter society and culture in the Caribbean. His
terms of empire, they often skirt over the complex dynamics at play within local food economies and the everyday negotiations between colonial elites, the working poor, and enslaved people. A study of New Orleans’ nascent food system reveals the development of an unusually egalitarian food culture—one that operated under the umbrella of European rule, yet simultaneously contradicted its totalizing hegemony.  

In order to understand the development of New Orleans’ food culture, we must first understand its connection to the Native American culinary traditions that developed prior to New Orleans’ founding in 1718. Native Americans were active agents shaping the Louisiana landscape through their production and consumption of sugar in the Caribbean and Atlantic World. In Oceans of Wine (2009), David Hancock builds upon the work of both Dunn and Mintz, focusing on what he defines as an understudied aspect of global trade: distribution. He focuses on the people who distributed these commodity goods in both populated port cities and isolated rural villages, questioning the cultural hegemony of the British metropole in the creation of American taste. Richard S. Dunn Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1972); Sidney Wilfred Mintz, Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History (New York: Penguin Books, 1985); David Hancock, Oceans of Wine: Madeira and the Emergence of American Trade and Taste (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009). See also: Marcy Norton, Sacred Gifts, Profane Pleasures: A History of Tobacco and Chocolate in the Atlantic World (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008).

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17 As scholars have demonstrated, colonial power was irregular, its reach often sporadic. See, for example, Lauren Benton, A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400-1900 (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

18 New Orleans was founded in 1718 and became the capital city in 1721. For a history of New Orleans’ founding that enumerates Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne de Bienville’s role in nominating the city as the capital see: Lawrence N. Powell, The Accidental City: Improvising New Orleans (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 33-59.
habits, procuring food through hunting, gathering, and agricultural endeavors. The product of these activities, including the dishes indigenous groups created, served as a base for the culinary culture that developed in New Orleans during the colonial period—a culinary culture that literally fueled European colonization of the Lower Mississippi Delta.

Native Americans had occupied the Lower Mississippi Delta since roughly 2000 B.C.E. and lived continuously in the region through roughly 1900 C.E. Over generations, Native Americans honed a complex set of skills necessary to work the land, maximizing crop yields to provide food for their communities. In the Lower Mississippi

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19 The image of “the ecologically noble savage”—an image of a person who lives with the land and therefore does not impact the land—is prevalent in broader American culture. The perpetuation of the ecologically noble savage stereotype denies Native Americans their rightful place in the creation of the landscape and around New Orleans—one that influenced the food cultures brought to, adapted within, and developed in this altered environment. In fact, their millennia-long manipulation of the Louisiana landscape contributed to the region’s appeal to European settlers, enticing them to establish outposts along the Mississippi River. What Europeans might have interpreted as a “natural” marshland, was not natural at all, but contained the detritus of thousands of years of Native American occupation. For example, during the colonial period, European hunting parties often made camp on raised ground in the bayous. Archaeological evidence has shown that those mounds are actually shell middens: heaps of discarded shells from shellfish consumed in large quantities by Native American peoples. These shell middens are found in significant quantities in the region and are so large that they have different ecologies than the lower lying bayous that surround them.


Delta, they relied primarily on locally harvested shellfish and fish for protein—varieties that would eventually become the staples of New Orleans’ food culture. Native Americans in this region consumed clams and oysters in great quantities. Fishing along rivers was also common. Early European explorers, seeking to learn successful culinary practices, took note of Native American knowledge of prime fishing locations, frequently visited in the warmer months when fish were more abundant. They caught catfish along these rivers using nets, a fish that European settlers praised for its excellence. Redfish, or red snapper, were also abundant and remain a favorite protein in Louisiana cooking, both in New Orleans and in the rural hinterland.

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21 For some Native American groups, life was defined by the cyclical, seasonal nature of hunting, gathering, and cultivation. In fact, conceptions of time were marked by those elements. The Natchez people in the Lower Mississippi Delta, for example, lived by a 13-month calendar (each month marked by the phasing of a new moon). The months were represented by essential game and seasonal foodstuffs including deer, strawberries, corn, watermelon, peaches, mulberries, great corn, turkey, bison, bears, cold meal, and various nuts. Le Page du Pratz, *The History of Louisiana, or of the Western Parts of Virginia and Carolina* (London: T. Becket, 1774), 319-325.


In addition to their reliance on local fishes, Native Americans operated seasonal hunting camps, typically run during the winter months. Hunters and trappers provided vital foods, packed with protein and fat, which sustained both Native American communities and the European settlements that would eventually develop in Louisiana. Hunting camps consisted of roughly ten families and were mobile so that they could follow migrating game. In addition to deer, other large game included bear and bison; smaller game included opossum, muskrat, and beaver. Fowls were also abundant and Native Americans commonly hunted duck, turkey, and various water birds. As the Columbian Exchange brought invasive species from Europe and other places along the Atlantic Rim, Native Americans began to hunt wild goat, cattle, suckling pig, and mutton. After a new kill was made, the meat was either butchered

25 Some tribes including the Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Natchez were noted for using disguises made out of animal skins while hunting. As observed by one European settler, a Natchez hunter killed, gutted, and then utilized a deerskin as a type of puppet. This costume shows the ingenuity of this hunter who was able to conceal his presence by mimicking the movements of a deer. Jean-François-Benjamin Dumont de Montigny, The Memoir of Lieutenant Dumont, 1715-1747: A Sojourner in the French Atlantic, trans. Gordon M. Sayre; eds. Gordon M. Sayre and Carla Zecher. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 339.
28 Shannon Lee Dawdy, “‘A Wild Taste’: Food and Colonialism in Eighteenth-Century Louisiana,” Ethnohistory 57, no. 3 (2010): 397-399. Note: The Columbian Exchange is a term used to describe the exchange of animal and plant goods between the Old World and New World in the early colonial period.
and prepared that day or preserved for later consumption. Drying was a common means of preservation. Meat was typically sun dried or hung over a low flame, and then pounded and sometimes seasoned with berries. Tallow, too, was used to lock out moisture in dried meats—a process similar to the use of Shea butter in some preservation practices of Africa, and thus a familiar form of preservation for enslaved Africans.

Native Americans supplemented hunting and fishing with gathering and cultivation, an additional skillset that was highly coveted in the colonial period. Their acumen with planting and harvesting edible goods made them powerful figures in the local food economy of colonial New Orleans; city residents became dependent upon both the knowledge gathered and product created by Native American labor. The Lower Mississippi Delta provided a great variety of flora that enlivened Native American palates. Fruits included strawberries, raspberries, blackberries, and wild varieties of

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29 On some occasions, the hides, bones, and other parts of animal carcasses were incorporated into Native American dwellings or put on display. For example, Pierre Le Moyne d’Iberville noted a display that was placed between the Ouma’s and Bayogoula’s camps: “On the bank are many huts roofed with palmettos and a maypole with no limbs, painted red, several fish heads and bear bones being tied to it as a sacrifice.” Note that the maypole in this passage is the famous “baton rouge” for which the town of Baton Rouge is named. Pierre Le Moyne d’Iberville, *Iberville’s Gulf Journals*, trans. and ed. Richebourg Gaillard McWilliams (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1980), 65.


31 These early colonial meats may have developed overtime into what we now know as a Southern Louisiana specialty meat called tasso. Tasso is made from pork. The cut of meat can vary from recipe to recipe. The meat is typically spiced with various peppers, salt, and sometimes sugar. It is then smoked. It can be added to gumbos and other stews.

grapes. Native trees were equally diverse and included pecan, pawpaw, wild apple, persimmon, chestnut, and hickey. Native Americans extracted oils from some of these trees, including the pecan, to flavor dishes. Herbs also provided rich flavor to indigenous dishes. They harvested sassafras, dried it on a stone mortar, and pounded into a powder to thicken and flavor soups and stews. Bay laurel, which we know as bay leaf, was also commonly available. In addition to foraging, Native American groups also farmed, growing staples like maize, squash, and beans. Other crops included potatoes, pumpkins, and eventually watermelons, which were brought from Africa. These farming practices, including the knowledge of how to successfully grow crops in the semi-tropical environment of New Orleans, would prove essential for the survival of New Orleans’ urban community.

Native Americans used this wide variety of native plants, animals, and cultivated crops to build a distinct regional food culture that also incorporated global culinary practices from as far away as South America. Just as New Orleans’ food culture would come to rely on local ingredients that connected them to geographically disparate communities, so too did Native American culinary practices. Maize was a key ingredient

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35 It is unclear whether or not Native American groups used bay laurel, or bay leaf, as a flavoring agent in their cooking. However, the herb eventually became a staple ingredient in the hybrid cuisines that emerged in Louisiana.
in food culture in the Lower Mississippi Delta. One of the more common means of serving it was in a corn stew called sagamité.\textsuperscript{37} Indigenous groups also ate parched corn meal, prepared by lightly roasting the meal.\textsuperscript{38} In addition, they prepared and consumed maize beer and maize brandy, both of which were fairly common throughout maize-growing communities in North and South America and likely share origins with the fermented maize beers found outside of the Lower Mississippi Delta region.\textsuperscript{39} European colonists would eventually partake in the consumption of maize beer, incorporating it into their diet even when imported French beer was available in New Orleans.\textsuperscript{40}


\textsuperscript{39} For example, in the Andes mountain range of Peru, local people prepared a fermented corn beer called \textit{chicha de jora} made from Jora corn—a type of corn indigenous to the Andes. In fact, anthropologists surmise that maize may have originally been domesticated for the purpose of fermenting corn into alcoholic beverages. The tradition of doing so dates back to the Wari people, c. 600-1000 C.E., and has remained fairly unaltered since this early conception. Just as the Wari consumed \textit{chicha}, so do people in Peru today. Similarly fermented corn beverages are found in modern day Bolivia, Ecuador, Colombia, El Salvador, and Nicaragua, among other areas in Central and South America. Lidio M. Valdez, “Maize Beer Production in Middle Horizon Peru,” \textit{Journal of Anthropological Research} \textbf{62} no. 1 (2006), 53, 75.

The innovative and highly skilled culinary practices of Native Americans were well entrenched in the communities living in the Lower Mississippi Delta region when French official, René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, claimed the land in 1682 for France. He named the territory Louisiana in honor of King Louis XIV. It was not until 1698 that French explorers made a serious effort to navigate and survey the Mississippi River and its surrounding environs. In that year, Pierre Le Moyne d’Iberville and a crew of 200 men, comprised of pirates, Frenchmen, Canadian Frenchmen, and Spanish deserters, anchored their ship at the mouth of the Mississippi and sent a number of the crew upriver in canoes to explore.\(^{41}\)

Iberville and his team, like many early European explorers, relied upon Native Americans to secure consistent food supplies; food was not readily accessible from France, and hunting, fishing, and trapping were generally difficult.\(^{42}\) Europeans regularly found themselves in a position of reluctant dependence—a dependence that embedded indigenous agricultural and culinary practices into what would become Louisiana’s hybrid food culture. Iberville kept a journal cataloging his progress along the Mississippi and his interactions with Native American people. Iberville makes

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\(^{41}\) Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne de Bienville, Iberville’s brother and the eventual founder of the city of New Orleans, was among the men who set off into the Louisiana wild. Iberville and Bienville, who came from French colonial settlements in Canada, were also charged with mapping the region, which would enable France to establish a stronger colonial presence in key locations. This strategic presence would help France stymie Spanish infringement on French colonial territory.

\(^{42}\) Starvation in Louisiana became exasperated by the War of Spanish Succession (1702-1713) as supply chains from France and Saint-Domingue were broken, leaving colonists in North America often without provisions. During one three-year span their supplies did not arrive. Lawrence N. Powell, The Accidental City: Improvising New Orleans (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 33.
regular references to the culinary cultures of both Europeans and Native Americans and the meeting of those distinct groups in the New World. His recollections provide a window through which to study some of the earliest examples of culinary experimentation and processes of cultural hybridization in Louisiana between Europeans and Native Americans.

Hunger and sickness defined the daily rhythm of Iberville’s journey. He obsessively cataloged all of his activities around food, demonstrating how preoccupied he and his men were with finding enough to eat. Journaling even provided a coping mechanism for dealing with hunger pains. The metropole did not allocate enough funds to furnish his team with adequate foodstuffs for the duration of the exploration, so Iberville’s men made do with the supplies they could easily transport after departing the main ship. They carried 200 pounds of bread in each of the long boats they took with them upriver, which they hoarded for the return journey. Even with these supplies, several team members developed dysentery or contracted other diseases when damp conditions and malnutrition weakened their immune systems.

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43 Scholars disagree on when Creole cuisine came into existence. Shannon Lee Dawdy, for example, cites the origins of Creole cuisine, as we know it today, to the mid-nineteenth century. I am not so much concerned with naming a specific year in which to pinpoint the peak of New Orleans’ food culture. Rather, I recognize that New Orleans’ food culture was constantly in flux as disparate groups came into contact, for brief and prolonged periods of time, in the Lower Mississippi Delta region. Shannon Lee Dawdy, “‘A Wild Taste’: Food and Colonialism in Eighteenth-Century Louisiana,” *Ethnohistory* 57, no. 3 (2010): 407, 413.


When conditions permitted, Iberville sent his men into the swamps to hunt and scavenge for food. They were often unable to successfully track and consistently kill game.\footnote{Pierre Le Moyne d’Iberville, \textit{Iberville’s Gulf Journals}, trans. and ed. Richebourg Gaillard McWilliams (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1980), 149.} Their lack of familiarity with Louisiana flora also made it difficult to distinguish poisonous from non-poisonous plants, so even gathering became a perilous task. Their attempts to live off the land were not marked completely by failure, however. On occasion, they successfully hunted water birds and even caught fish along rivers and streams.\footnote{Pierre Le Moyne d’Iberville, \textit{Iberville’s Gulf Journals}, trans. and ed. Richebourg Gaillard McWilliams (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1980), 57.} Overall, Iberville and his team depended heavily upon Native Americans to acquire edible food and to learn better ways to hunt and gather in the Lower Mississippi Delta, a landscape strikingly different from the more temperate climates of Europe.

The ready embrace of Native American food cultures by Iberville’s team is indicative of the critical role that food played in establishing political relationships between Native American and European groups.\footnote{The French, more so than the English, Spanish or Dutch, sought to establish their political authority in the New World by establishing an alliance with Native American peoples. Iberville’s choice to collaborate with and even depend upon Native American supplies was testament to French approaches to colonization. Patricia Seed, \textit{Ceremonies of Possession in Europe’s Conquest of the New World, 1492-1640} (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 3, 63-68.} Both parties understood that the language of consumption was something powerful, with a purpose that stretched beyond nourishing the body. When Iberville’s team formally met with Native American tribes, the two groups participated in a ceremonial greeting. These greetings often had
elements of symbolic consumption and, in general, were highly sensory—a total body experience.

According to Iberville, the ritual began with his team announcing its presence by firing off shots from their rifles. The two groups would then approach one another, and upon sighting each other, Iberville typically stepped forward to meet with the leader of the tribe. Both men would rub their bellies, a customary greeting among Native American groups in the region. After that initial contact, the tribe leader would escort Iberville and his team to the camp where they would be invited to sit on animal fur or woven rugs around the campfire. The two groups smoked tobacco, forging initial ties by passing pipes, or calumets of peace, among one another. After sharing pipes, tribe members paraded out and presented a wide variety of dishes representative of the wealth of game and forageable goods in Louisiana. Often, women and children were involved in these processions, thus involving the entire community in the ritual of consumption.

Participating in that shared consumption was a political act that drew ties between groups that otherwise had little in common. As a universal act, eating was a powerful means through which to foster connection among new allies, a language of consumption in which all parties could partake. After the completion of this ritual, a bond, mimicking kinship ties, married Iberville and his men to the Native American community they had encountered. With that connection came the possibility of access to fresh ingredients as well as that community’s body of culinary knowledge—both necessary to establish French settlements in the Lower Mississippi Delta.

Experimentation fused Native American food cultures into the early colonial cuisines of Louisiana, making indigenous culinary practices the cultural bedrock upon which colonial European communities would build their culinary traditions—ones that became an important part of community identity. The absence of familiar European ingredients in this environment necessitated the use of unfamiliar ones and also encouraged the adoption of new cooking techniques. After meeting the Bayogoula and Mogoula peoples, for example, Iberville and his team began experimenting with

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51 The types of Native American foods that Iberville notes in his journal varied among tribes and hunting groups. During one of his earliest encounters near Biloxi Bay, Iberville came across a group of Indians carrying bags of corn and beans—both staple crops of Native American groups in the area. Later, he notes that a different group near Amnochy offered bear meat and buccaneer buffalo meat. When meeting with the Bayogoula and Mogoula groups, Iberville notes that he and his men were served sagamite. In addition, Iberville notes the presence of bread at this particular meal, which was likely made from cornmeal, although it may have been made using the flesh of the persimmon fruit, which was also a common practice. Pierre Le Moyne d’Iberville, *Iberville’s Gulf Journals*, trans. and ed. Richebourg Gaillard McWilliams (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1980), 44, 55, 59. Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 68-70.
locally available ingredients to recreate some of the Native American foods they had encountered. Iberville acquired many of these ingredients through exchange with Native American groups. With these supplies in hand, he attempted to recreate dishes like sagamité.\textsuperscript{52} Adopting Native American food cultures was a practical choice on Iberville’s part. By using ingredients and cooking techniques refined by generations of Native Americans in Louisiana, he and his men had greater odds of surviving their initial expeditions into largely uncharted territory.

The adoption of these dishes carried over to the early colonial period. By this time, European colonists had fully incorporated Native American foods into their daily consumption habits, which, in turn, shaped their sense of self and sense of community. An Ursuline nun, Marie-Madeleine Hachard, who came to New Orleans in 1727, recalls eating sagamité prepared with butter, sometimes with bacon fat. For Hachard, this was not a “survival food” consumed out of desperation. Rather, it was something that had culinary merit and provided a sense of contentment and community during her displacement from France. Hachard claimed sagamité as an essential part of her own consumption habits, yet its popularity stretched beyond her individual enjoyment of the dish. Acknowledging the universal consumption and appreciation of sagamité throughout the colony, she noted that all people living in Louisiana believed it to be a

very good dish. Thus, sagamité, a food originally adopted out of necessity, became a staple in the colonial European diet a few decades later—a diet that a diverse colonial population claimed as a part of its emerging hybrid food culture.

In addition to influencing the general makeup of colonial European foods, Native Americans helped develop a lively frontier exchange economy and demonstrated great influence over nascent economies in colonial settlements. In order to capitalize on Europeans’ dependence on their food supplies, indigenous groups, such as the Acolapissas, Chitimachas, and Houmas, moved from the Louisiana interior to the riverfronts near colonial settlements. They provided Europeans with staple foods such as corn-based products (corn kernels, cornbread, cornmeal), dried and fresh meat, and fish in exchange for luxury items from Europe like “axes, knives, kettles, mirrors, scissors, awls, needles, shirts, blankets, and jackets made of red cloth.” They were important figures at the market that developed along the levee in front of the central

54 By the 1760s, petites nations, or smaller tribal groups, such as the Alibamons, Biloxis, Pascagoulas, and Chahtos participated in trade along the Mississippi River and in New Orleans’ informal levee markets. Daniel H. Usner, American Indians in the Lower Mississippi Valley: Social and Economic Histories (Lincoln, NE: The University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 69.
56 Early European colonists became so reliant on Native American corn supplies that the crop became a kind of currency in the Lower Mississippi Delta in the early eighteenth century. Amos Stoddard, Sketches of Louisiana: Historical and Descriptive (Philadelphia: Mathew Carey, 1812), 47, 51.
square, or Place d’Armes, of New Orleans. At that market, they set up their wares in woven baskets along the ground, joining a diverse cohort of food vendors who brought goods from urban farms and the surrounding hinterlands to the city center. Thus, from farm to table, from planter to distributor, indigenous groups occupied positions of power within the local food economy.

Europeans’ dependence on indigenous groups for local provisions had strategic benefit: it was the most efficient means of provisioning colonists. Iberville, for example, willingly accepted a position of dependence in order to survive the immediate challenges of exploring and charting the Mississippi Delta. This is not to suggest that colonial officials like Iberville were averse to the idea of experimenting with farming to grow their own provisions. For Iberville, it was more an issue of convenience and reliability. In fact, he wrote about potential agricultural experiments in his journal, musing that he might have his men attempt to grow corn on plots of land that Native Americans had once used for that very purpose. He then dismissed this idea, admitting that “[e]ven more corn might be found through trading with Indians.” In the midst of near constant failure when it came to self-provisioning, Iberville chose to rely on a consistent source of food, demonstrating the immediacy of malnourishment and starvation as well as his acceptance of his dependency.

58 For a more detailed discussion of the levee market in New Orleans, see the chapter in this dissertation entitled “Cultures of Belonging.”
Yet even within that position of dependence laid a shadow of empowerment and privilege. Iberville was a European colonial official who may not have been supplied with an abundance of food, but was supplied with a more powerful, more desirable form of currency within Louisiana’s frontier exchange economy: luxury goods. For Iberville, dependency was only fleeting, a state he and his men endured to lay the political alliances necessary to establish a colonial settlement in the future, one that could eventually sustain itself.

After Iberville’s early explorations from 1698-1699, the French were slow to colonize the Lower Mississippi Delta. It was not until 1717 that John Law of the Company of the West secured a contract with the government of France to develop Louisiana and establish an agro-export economy. This economy supplied France with tobacco, circumventing the British monopoly over that commodity’s trade in the Atlantic World. Although initially created to export tobacco out of Louisiana, the process of building this kind of economic center necessitated a near constant influx of people, goods, and ideas into the territory. The movement embedded in this kind of migration, of both people and ideas, would prove to be the lifeblood of New Orleans’ early fusion food culture.

From the conception of the Company of the West’s charter, board members wanted to create a hybrid plantation economy that consisted of the best elements from pre-existing economies in the New World. Law originally proposed building a tobacco
industry in Louisiana in order to relieve France’s dependence on British tobacco imports from the Chesapeake region of North America.\textsuperscript{60} Thus, Law envisioned an agro-export industry that mimicked that of the Chesapeake: large plantations fueled by slave labor that would be set up along rivers connected to major ports. However, the Company wanted to streamline the infrastructure of this plantation system. Instead of having the plantations sparsely laid out along hundreds of miles of riverfront, they wanted to concentrate early agricultural production around a single urban center. This more concentrated design was modeled after Spanish colonial settlements in Latin America.

The resulting geography of New Orleans and its surrounding plantations is visually stunning, and also represents the interconnectivity of plantation culture with that of New Orleans’ urban culture—a connection that influenced the development of the city’s local food culture as well. Looking at historic maps delineating the property lines along the Mississippi River shows those plots of land fanning out from the banks of the river like rays emanating from the sun. Each plantation had access to a thin strip of prime riverfront; the width of the property generally expanded out from there. Access to the riverfront was key for both transportation and irrigation purposes. The proximity of plantations near the city of New Orleans facilitated regular communication and contact among people living on plantations and those living within the city. The history of Louisiana’s plantation society, therefore, was closely tied to that of the capital, fostering

\textsuperscript{60} In addition to tobacco, Louisiana also supported a relatively small indigo industry.
a shared culture between the two; in other regions, these two cultures were more independent. This situation allowed a cohesive food culture to develop between populations, both free and enslaved, living on plantations or living in the city center.

The migrants that came to New Orleans were diverse, coming from different regions within the Atlantic World—all with their own local culinary cultures and traditions. Under the terms of the Company of the West charter, Law recruited some 7,000 Europeans to populate Louisiana from 1717-1721. Many of these people were French. There were also subsets of people from the war-torn Alsace and Lorraine regions in France. This population of European settlers was socio-economically diverse, ranging from people who were arriving in the New World with land grants to indentured servants, peasants, and vagabonds. These communities joined the approximately 30,000 Native Americans who populated the Lower Mississippi Delta. There was also a group of itinerant sailors, soldiers, and traders who moved through the territory, making up a more fluid part of its population.

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61 I hesitate to use national identities to describe those immigrants from the Alsace and Lorraine regions. Their food cultures were deeply community-oriented and did not prescribe to modern notions of French, German, or Swiss cultures. Those from Alsace, often referred to as German migrants in works of history, initially settled along the Arkansas River, but moved within 30 miles of New Orleans when the Company of the West failed in 1731. On Saturdays, they rafted down the Mississippi River to New Orleans to trade wares. Some settlers became wealthy sugar planters and many francocized their names.

62 Some of the migrants from France, for example, were forced migrants who were deported from the metropole in an attempt to reduce crime and poverty in France. Glenn R. Conrad, “Emigration Forcée: A French Attempt to Populate Louisiana, 1716-1720,” in Alf A. Heggy, Proceedings of the Fourth Meeting of the French Colonial Historical Society (1979), 57-66.

In addition to the 7,000 Europeans that John Law recruited to populate Louisiana, he also promised to furnish the nascent tobacco and indigo plantations with 6,000 enslaved Africans who brought their own distinct culinary traditions with them.64 Louisiana’s slave society developed more rapidly than most others in North America.65 Whereas other plantation-based societies gradually shifted from a mixed labor to a slave labor force, Louisiana transformed into a full-blown slave society seemingly overnight. The colony essentially passed over the interstitial period that the Chesapeake and Lowcountry went through in which both African and “Creole slaves,” or enslaved people born in the New World, arrived in a fairly sporadic, random way.66 Louisiana’s slave population, by contrast, consisted primarily of migrants arriving directly from Africa who brought vivid memories of their homelands and the food cultures that sustained them in those places. Their forced migration was both rapid and purposeful. Some enslaved people were placed within developing urban centers like New Orleans, but most were put to work in the fields of plantations outside of those city centers.

The local food economy that developed in New Orleans mirrored those along the coast of West Africa in tangible ways, demonstrating the cultural influence of African

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peoples on the hybrid food culture of the city. The very first enslaved people to arrive were from the Gulf of Benin and Angola, but were eventually surpassed in number by those from Senegambia. Of those from Senegambia, many were from Bambara and Wolof groups and had cultural commonalities. They hunted and cultivated the same lands and embedded meaning into their rituals of consumption that mirrored one another. These groups were known for rice cultivation, which would become a staple of New Orleans’ food culture. They also cultivated maize, introduced during the Columbian Exchange, and a few varieties of cereals. They implemented their

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69 Mungo Park, Travels in the Interior of Africa (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1799), 8-9. Note: Enslaved Africans from Senegambia and the Bight of Benin consumed soupy stews that feature the slimy, slippery texture of okra—dishes that influenced the creation of New Orleans-style gumbo. After its introduction to the New World, okra became a common ingredient throughout North America, showing up in dishes all along the eastern seaboard. That being said, for much of the twentieth and early twenty-first century, Americans’ common perception of okra was that it was a vegetable sequestered to the American South. The opposite, however, was true of colonial North America, where it was pervasive. For example, in 1748, okra showed up in what food historian Jessica Harris identifies as a “Philadelphia-style gumbo” commonly called pepperpot. The influences of African continental cuisines, then, were not simply found in major Southern cities with large African populations, but rather throughout North America and especially in major port cities connected through transatlantic trade and migration. The Columbian Exchange, therefore, shifted consumption habits on both sides of the Atlantic and particularly in towns and cities
agricultural expertise in the New World, regularly under the oppressive conditions of forced field labor on plantations.

The gardening and food distribution practices of West Africa also influenced New Orleans’ food scene. Gardens supporting polyculture were crucial in Africa. Gardens near trading towns, for example, could be quite varied and contained produce such as “onions, calavances, yams, cassavi, ground-nuts, pompions, gourds, [and] water-melons[,]” among other plants. Many of these ingredients became integral to New Orleans’ food culture. African women played a major role in distributing these fresh ingredients in the markets of trading towns; in the New World, they became where diverse peoples came together on a regular basis. Jessica Harris, *High on the Hog: A Culinary Journey From Africa to America* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2011), 17.

70 Not all African crops, however, made it across the Atlantic—largely because they could not grow along most of the eastern seaboard of North America. Early European settlers and enslaved people, for example, did not grow tropical species such as ackee, the oil palm, kola, African yams, or other tubers. However, some plants could survive and eventually thrived including: okra, watermelon, and black-eyed peas, the latter likely introduced from Africa through the Caribbean. Mungo Park, *Travels in the Interior of Africa* (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1799), 9; Jessica Harris, *High on the Hog: A Culinary Journey From Africa to America* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2011), 16.

71 The prevalence of ingredients like okra, watermelon, and black-eyed peas are most commonly associated with Southern food cultures today. Southern food, however, is a complicated culinary culture in that both whites and blacks consumed this food, yet whites, who had better access to presses and publishers, claimed it as their own through the publication of Southern and regional cookbooks starting in the nineteenth century. Barred from claiming ownership of Southern food in print into the twentieth century, African Americans adopted a new term, “soul food,” to identify and make claims upon historically African-American dishes. The soul food movement was part of a multivalent movement in the 1960s informed by campaigns like Black is Beautiful and the philosophy of Black Power. For an excellent study of the origins of soul food in America see: Adrian Miller, *Soul Food: The Surprising Story of an American Cuisine One Plate at a Time* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013), xiii-10.
dominant players in New Orleans’ market scene, demonstrating, once again, the cultural carry-over from Africa to Louisiana.\textsuperscript{72}

Cultural continuity between the Old World and New World stretched far beyond the planting and distribution of crops. Enslaved Africans’ taste preferences and knowledge of staple ingredients like rice, corn, and wheat flour enabled them to create hybrid foods that resembled familiar foods from their homelands. One such look-alike food was “bread.” Because wheat and refined wheat flour were difficult to procure in the early colonial period, New World residents resorted to alternative ingredients to create foods that resembled the familiar comfort food.\textsuperscript{73} For example, they made loaves from a combination of wheat flour and rice, a mingling of European and African

\textsuperscript{72} Note that the next chapter of this dissertation explores the role of enslaved Africans in the local food culture and economy, including their influence in the city’s markets, in depth. Daniel H. Usner, \textit{Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley before 1783} (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 202.

\textsuperscript{73} In and around New Orleans wheat was difficult to grow due to the hot and humid climate. Even if New Orleanians had wanted to experiment with growing wheat during the contractual period of the Company of the Indies, previously known as the Company of the West, it was illegal to do so. French settlers from New Orleans up to Illinois were not allowed to grow grapes, wheat, barley, or flax for linen. The Company had granted itself the right to import those commodities. The scarceness of wheat flour made it a form of currency in more remote regions of Louisiana along with luxury goods like fur pelts, oil, ham, and bars of silver. By the mid-1700s, however, Illinois Country, also known as Upper Louisiana, became an important food source for Lower Louisiana, including New Orleans. In the rich alluvial soil of Illinois Country, French planters successfully grew wheat, which they then shipped downriver to feed the capital and its surrounding communities. Jean-François-Benjamin Dumont de Montigny, \textit{The Memoir of Lieutenant Dumont, 1715-1747: A Sojourner in the French Atlantic}, trans. Gordon M. Sayre; eds. Gordon M. Sayre and Carla Zecher. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 376, 379. Daniel H. Usner, \textit{American Indians in the Lower Mississippi Valley: Social and Economic Histories} (Lincoln, NE: The University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 69; Cécile Vidal, “Antoine Bienvenu, Illinois Planter and Mississippi Trader: The Structure of Exchange between Lower and Upper Louisiana,” in \textit{French Colonial Louisiana and the Atlantic World}, ed. Bradley G. Bond (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 114-115.
culinary traditions. Sometimes, the dough was left overnight to rest and then baked the next morning. This resting period would have allowed natural yeasts to ferment, giving the bread a slightly sour taste reminiscent of sourdough breads made in Europe. This hybrid bread likely had a similar sour taste to fermented beverages and porridges popular in Africa, such as buttermilk-like lar and tchiakri of Senegambia. Europeans and Africans had common flavor profiles in their respective food cultures that likely reminded them of their homelands, thus fostering lasting emotional connections with overseas communities. Further, these commonalities may have encouraged the fusion of culinary practices in the context of the New World. This particular flavor profile, slight

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74 Jean-François-Benjamin Dumont de Montigny describes the process of making these hybrid breads in great detail, making note of the important role that African and Native American labor and culture played in the creation of these dishes. He acknowledged that the bread can be made from either rice or corn. “The rice has to be husked, but for the corn, this is not needed. Then you soak either of the two grains from sundown until sunrise the next morning in some water that is a little warm. The following day, the negro men or women pour out the grain onto a table to drain, after which they pound it in wooden mortars. The many blows from the pestle reduce it to flour, which they pass through fine sieves made from slivers of cane, the work of Indian women of the country, which they have brought to the height of perfection. But because this flour, particularly the rice flour, is coarse like sand between the fingers and cannot by itself hold the form of a loaf, it has to be mixed as it cooks with husked rice. When the latter is well cooked and, as they say, like gruel, you pour it into the rice flour, which dries or thickens it, and then put yeast in to make it rise. You must not stir it as one does with dough in France, but when the oven is hot, you take a pot and pass a long stick through the handle. Then you put a little water into the pot and then some of this thinned dough. You put some tree leaves on top of the dough, and you put this pot into the oven, turning it upside down. The heat of the fire strikes it immediately and prevents it from spreading out, thus forming a loaf of bread, which is very good and excellent to eat, especially when it is fresh and soaked in broth. The bread made from corn is done in the same way, but put in half rice flour or half corn and half French flour, and you will have excellent bread.” Jean-François-Benjamin Dumont de Montigny, The Memoir of Lieutenant Dumont, 1715-1747: A Sojourner in the French Atlantic, trans. Gordon M. Sayre; eds. Gordon M. Sayre and Carla Zecher. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 382-383.

75 Mung Park, a Scottish missionary who traveled in Senegambia and inland along the Niger River in the late eighteenth century notes a similarly fermented dish made from sour milk and cornmeal, which he ate near Doolinkeaboo. Jessica Harris, High on the Hog: A Culinary Journey From Africa to America (New York: Bloomsbury, 2011), 55.
fermentation, had a long life in New Orleans’ food culture that stretched beyond the early colonial period.\textsuperscript{76}

Experimental bread-like dishes were not only a result of African-European hybridization. It was also common to combine cornmeal, a trademark of Native American food cultures, with wheat flour and rice flour.\textsuperscript{77} Enslaved Africans were familiar with the use of cornmeal in porridges prior to their arrival in the New World. Corn had been brought to the West Coast of Africa through transatlantic trade and was quickly incorporated into various African culinary traditions. Mung Park, a Scottish missionary who traveled in Senegambia and inland along the Niger River in the late-eighteenth century, noted the common consumption of a porridge made from sour milk and cornmeal—one that would have mimicked the fermented taste of African and New World dishes like tchiakri from Senegambia and calas from New Orleans.\textsuperscript{78} The tendrils

\textsuperscript{76} The sustainability of colonial tastes indicates the power of early American food cultures to shape our modern taste preferences. Food cultures, like political or economic cultures, are ones that build up over time. The fermented breads of colonial Louisiana, for example, may be precursors to one of New Orleans’ most iconic nineteenth-century street foods: calas. Calas are sugary rice fritters. They are made from a batter consisting of day-old rice, flour, milk, eggs, sugar, and aromatic spices such as cinnamon. By the early nineteenth century, they had become a popular street food and were deep fried and peddled right on the streets by enslaved Africans. Rice breads, such as calas, demonstrate the evolution of early colonial dishes over time. Their existence reiterates the point that food cultures are rarely, if ever, static. Rather, they are constantly in flux as people adapt familiar recipes. In this case, New Orleanians wanted a cheap, easily transportable food that they could consume quickly. Yet, even amidst this kind of evolution, there are certain elements, such as flavor profiles, that remain constant: people liked the taste of fermented breads made from a flour-rice combination. This culinary connectivity ties New Orleanians together through common modes of consumption—ones that can stretch across generations.


\textsuperscript{78} Mungo Park, \textit{Travels in the Interior of Africa} (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1799), 161. Note:
of commonality that extended across the Atlantic World eased migrants’ acclimation to New World environments and helped forge bonds, at times fragile and temporary, between diverse people.\textsuperscript{79}

Many of these experimental hybrid foods were created not by choice, but out of a survivalist instinct. They simultaneously represented the ingenuity of New Orleans’ diverse population, but also the shared marginalization that people experienced on the outskirts of empire. Within the first decade of colonization, the population of European settlers and enslaved people had decreased significantly as a result of deaths caused by starvation, exposure, and disease. As reported by settlers and later published in memoirs about living in New Orleans, morale was low because they experienced incredible instability.\textsuperscript{80}

\textsuperscript{79} These early hybridizations were culturally potent and remained in the canon of iconic Louisiana foods for generations. For example, Mary Land’s \textit{Louisiana Cookery} (1954) contains a recipe for “rice bread” that instructs the reader to mix “one cup of corn meal [sic], [and] one cup of cooked rice” to create a batter. Cornbread, too, is a staple of New Orleans’ food cultures (as well as many regional cultures throughout the United States and abroad). From community cookbooks to nationally published works, cornbread is ever present in New Orleans’ historic and contemporary culinary literature. Interestingly, though, it is rarely associated with Native American culinary traditions. Rather, this dish (and its primary ingredient, cornmeal) is more often than not associated with African-American and Southern food cultures. This trend demonstrates how American collective memory of its culinary history has largely ignored the contributions of Native American groups and is entrenched in stereotypes of the antebellum South—ones that associate Southern food culture with African-American women cooks. This trend also demonstrates how readily foods can be adopted, incorporated, and ingrained in the cultures of communities who were previously unfamiliar with a particular ingredient, method of cooking, or dish, as is the case with cornmeal and African and European migrants to the New World. Mary Land, \textit{Louisiana Cookery} (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1954): 250.

Colonial life in New Orleans was frightening, creating an emotionally and physically difficult environment in which to procure and prepare food—food to sustain the body and build community. Colonial people regularly saw themselves as “at the mercy of the weather.” Accounts of early settlement in New Orleans in the 1720s and 1730s fixated on the impending threat of the local environs. Settlers described the tortuous summer heat: how French bodies were brutally burned by the sun, their skin peeling off in long strips. The sun was so strong that it made it nearly impossible for settlers to even attempt to go fishing for fear of dying of heat stroke. They were forced to seek shelter in the summer months, to live off of salted or smoked meat killed during the bountiful winter months, knowing that abundant schools of fish swam beneath the glimmering waters of the Mississippi. They lived in a hinterland, but could not reap the harvest, knowledge that undoubtedly haunted them when bland provisions and near constant hunger were their only option.

83 A major source of employment, food provisioning in colonial New Orleans took on many forms. Some French settlers, for example, mimicked Native American hunting groups and traveled up into the Louisiana territory from New Orleans during the winter months. They crafted special canoes that were wide enough for them to salt bear meat, among other game, right in the boat. In the summer time, when game was scarce, they migrated back to New Orleans with their hauls to take advantage of shortages and provision the city with necessary protein. Jean-François-Benjamin Dumont de Montigny, The Memoir of Lieutenant Dumont, 1715-1747: A Sojourner in the French Atlantic, trans. Gordon M. Sayre; eds. Gordon M. Sayre and Carla Zecher. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 372, 376-377.
The intimidating landscape—one that could so easily take the lives of settlers—also provided them with bountiful foods that could sustain them. The winter months were “not as difficult to survive as in the summer, because in the cold season there is an abundance of game of all sorts: geese teals, ducks, bustards, swans, moorhens, deer, bear, and buffalo.”\(^{84}\) Fowl were so abundant at this time of year that settlers described huntsmen killing 30 game birds with a single shot.\(^{85}\) Settlers found this local game appealing and delicious. As noted by Marie-Madeleine Hachard, venison, in her opinion, was “better than beef or mutton that you eat in Rouen.”\(^{86}\) In addition to these proteins, beans and greens were also plentiful in the winter months. In sum, settlers were constantly engaging this fickle world, whose bounty could provide them both a sense of comfort and instability.

Amidst these unsettling conditions, groups adopted starvation foods that they might not otherwise have eaten. For example, early European settlers describe the consumption of a Native-American porridge made from cane seeds during particularly

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difficult periods. These foods were not refined and did not resemble the regional or national cuisines of the Old World. They were born out of the Louisiana landscape, characteristic of New World living conditions, and representative of the equalizing effects of food shortages in the colonial period. The need for starvation foods was equalizing because a vast majority of the population, regardless of race, gender, ethnicity or socio-economic status, was sick or dying from malnourishment.

Those difficult conditions manifested in unrest that resulted in the collapse of New Orleans’ tobacco economy, and the temporary collapse of Europeans’ control over the Louisiana territory. In 1731, faced with bankruptcy and fallow fields, the Company of the Indies (previously known as the Company of the West) surrendered its charter. As the slave labor system imploded, profits plummeted and plantations failed. Once tobacco production came to a stop, and fields became barren, there was no longer a demand to bring enslaved people from Africa. The Company’s extraction, therefore, profoundly impacted Louisiana’s slave society and changed the very nature of slave

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88 The Company’s financial demise had roots in the Natchez revolt of 1729. During this uprising, nearly 300 slaves joined Native American tribes to rise up against white settlers, destabilizing whites’ control in the Natchez region, which was the heart of tobacco production in the colony. The effects of this hinterland revolt echoed along the Mississippi River. Some plantations were growing indigo with relative success, but even these plantations were not profitable enough to take the place of the failing tobacco plantations in the territory’s economy. Lawrence N. Powell, *The Accidental City: Improvising New Orleans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 87-88, 94.
labor and community in Louisiana. Small numbers of slave ships continued to arrive in Louisiana over the next three decades, but the population of enslaved people went largely un-supplemented by new arrivals from Africa.

Enslaved people originally brought to the colony by John Law remained at the heart of the food cultures that were developing in Louisiana. Unlike in other parts of the New World in which forced African migrants constantly arrived to fill labor demands on plantations, Louisiana’s slave population did not absorb new migrants for nearly three decades. Instead, the existing slave population grew naturally, bearing a second and third generation of Creole slaves. By 1732, enslaved people would far outnumber free settlers and soldiers in the Lower Mississippi Valley, with approximately 3,800 of the former and 2,000 of the latter.

Enslaved Africans relied on their own cultivation, hunting, and gathering skills to survive, providing them with a sense of agency through food procurement within the overarching constraints of a slave society. It was not uncommon for slave owners to employ enslaved people as hunters to acquire game for the plantation. In turn, these enslaved hunters could hunt for themselves. In fact, slave owners relied on enslaved

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90 Both groups’ populations, however, were comparatively small in comparison to the Native Americans that lived in the region at that time. Daniel H. Usner, *American Indians in the Lower Mississippi Valley: Social and Economic Histories* (Lincoln, NE: The University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 59.
people to self-provision because plantations, in general, were not profitable enough to supply them with substantial rations. Out of necessity, slave owners allotted significant freedoms to enslaved people. As a result, enslaved people moved freely between the plantation, the city center, and key hunting grounds and were not required to carry a pass to do so until 1751.\textsuperscript{92} That mobility created pathways along which food cultures traveled, and afforded enslaved Africans an opportunity to engage in New Orleans’ local food economy.

Plantation owners also encouraged enslaved people to plant gardens, granting them plots of land to cultivate in their free time. Enslaved people tended to these gardens, raised domesticated fowl, wove baskets, made pottery, and sold those surplus crops and craft goods at the levee market in New Orleans.\textsuperscript{93} Their labor contributed to the impressively diverse offerings of the market—an array of foodstuffs that European settlers marveled at in their writings. Marie-Madeleine Hachard, for example, wrote of the abundance of game and fresh produce available in New Orleans, praising the diverse fish unknown in France as well as a variety of fruits like pineapples and watermelons, and thousands of other fruits that she could not identify by name.\textsuperscript{94}

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People living in New Orleans, both free and enslaved, relied upon the foodstuffs and craft goods provided by enslaved vendors, thus creating another layer of European dependence upon disenfranchised groups. The *Code Noire*, the official French policy outlining the rights of enslaved people under French rule, granted enslaved people the right to earn income from these types of exchanges. Further, it legally obligated slave owners to give enslaved people one day off a week, the Sabbath, which they often used to vend goods at the levee and other informal markets. Although the Code Noir was enforced sporadically and regularly manipulated by free people to suit their needs, enslaved people worked to secure what mobility they could within the parameters of this colonial law. In doing so, they reinforced their importance in the local food economy. They took advantage of these opportunities to vend wares on Sundays or to hire themselves out as itinerant laborers. Eventually, they became so entrenched in the local food economy that whites became concerned by their reliance on enslaved vendors, but could do little to change the habits of people living in New Orleans.

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96 After the mid-eighteenth century, the municipal government regularly passed ordinances to prevent people from illegally purchasing wares from slaves without permits. These ordinances indicate that enslaved people, often skirting around local law, impacted and contributed to the local food economy.
Although relatively independent, enslaved people were not left to refine their skills in farming, hunting, gathering, and craftwork in isolation. They established strong relations with Native American groups just as their European counterparts did. Because the “charter generation” of enslaved people, the first group to be brought to Louisiana under John Law, were largely men, many of them sought companionship with free and enslaved Native-American women. Often, they married one another, solidifying social bonds and merging cultures through marriage. These familial ties created community spaces in which the food cultures of the two groups could interact and fuse together.

Additional forms of cultural coalescence occurred on the outskirts of New Orleans in the unchartered bayous and coastal islands that provided shelter for illegal activity and communities. In this way, the treacherous environs that destabilized colonizing efforts in New Orleans and disrupted European power, provided a safe haven for maroon communities. Those refuges enabled maroons to exercise considerable autonomy within close proximity to the symbolic heart of French colonial rule in North America.

Daniel H. Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley before 1783* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 214. *I will refer to the founding cohort of migrants, free and enslaved, as the “charter” generation. I will refer to the subsequent generation, largely comprised of the charter generation’s offspring, as the “creole” generation.*
The Lower Mississippi Valley hosted some of the largest maroon communities in North America, indicating the extent to which disenfranchised people took advantage of the irregularity of French colonial authority. The makeup of these communities was diverse, bringing people of different cultural backgrounds together. In some cases, enslaved people, both Africans and Native Americans, escaped and found refuge within neighboring tribes or in quickly expanding maroon communities. These groups also had some of the highest number of women maroons, which enabled them to form family units. Many of the men and women who made up these communities were Africans, not second or third-generation African Creoles, and they worked to rebuild the social structures and partake in the cultural traditions of their homelands, including culinary traditions. Some maroons, however, were Native Americans, and their cultural practices inevitably influenced the heavily Africanized ones developing in maroon communities.

One might think that maroon communities would isolate themselves from urban centers to conceal their locations and resources from previous masters. The extremely marginalized, those technically living outside of the parameters of colonial law and

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98 Lauren Benton envisions the geography of the Atlantic World not as a map demarcated by solid blocks of colonial authority, but rather as a tangled network of contested European claims of authority with varying degrees of intensity. Authority, in Benton’s imaging, is not constant, but rather interrupted and constantly shifted. She sees colonial influence as saturating certain regions while barely permeating geographically isolated regions such as mountain communities and isolated rural plains. Lauren Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400-1900* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

society, regularly worked in the heart of the capital. Many colonial settlers had become dependent upon the supplies that maroons brought to the city and sold at the informal markets along the levee. In fact, it was common for known maroons to walk openly in the streets of New Orleans. They sold what they hunted, fished, and gathered at the levee market in exchange for guns, ammunition, and other luxury or manufactured goods.100

Ultimately, necessity created a situation in which maroons became a staple of colonial New Orleans’ local economy, occupying a space of power in the local food economy and culture. They used the natural resources available to them in Louisiana’s swampland and capitalized on Native American techniques of enriching alluvial soil and harvesting surplus crops. They grew all manner of plants, many of which were native to North America. They also cultivated rice, influenced by the charter generation of enslaved people who were familiar with cultivating the crop. They, like the enslaved men and women selling goods in the streets or the levee market, provided essential

100 Ironically, maroons were also a vital source of free labor in Louisiana. For example, it was common for them to work in lumberyards cutting cypress trees. Yard owners, in exchange, allowed them to plant crops on cleared lands. The relationship, then, was mutually beneficial for both parties. Over time, the presence of known maroons in and around New Orleans became normalized and colonial officials, for the most part, did not actively seek to destroy those communities. There was, however, a renewed interest in controlling maroons under Spanish colonial rule in the 1770s. Even then, small-scale slave owners would not back the interests of large-scale slave owners whose slaves tended to permanently run away in higher numbers than the former group’s slaves. Lawrence N. Powell, *The Accidental City: Improvising New Orleans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 238-240; Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992): 201-2012.
goods and services in a colonial settlement that struggled to feed its population and develop surrounding lands solely through traditional free labor.

Maroon communities, however, were not completely self-sustaining. Working the porousness of European boundaries to their advantage, just as enslaved food vendors and hunters did, maroons relied on the support of neighboring tribes and family members who remained enslaved on plantations. It was not uncommon for maroons to help enslaved counterparts tend to their gardens. These communal garden plots, allotted for self-provisioning by slave owners, were spaces in which to share knowledge of cultivation and food preparation techniques. It was a productive space for both communities and supplied them with much-needed provisions. Enslaved people also coordinated to supply maroon communities with wares from plantation storehouses, and, on occasion, to help them secure livestock. Enslaved people and maroons alike took great risks in acquiring goods from plantations and sometimes from the markets and storehouses in and around New Orleans. These daily acts of defiance proved vital to the sustainability of maroon communities, and to the development of the city’s food economy.\textsuperscript{101}

The local food economy that the marginalized contributed to—one built upon fusion foods—was indicative of colonists’ reliance on groups of people who were

supposed to have little or no power within the colonial system. Yet in the context of the local food economy, these marginalized groups were central, and that centrality threatened Europeans’ control over the colony and over their daily lives in colonial Louisiana. In addition to the perceived threat of marginalized groups gaining a strong hold over the local food economy, the natural environment of Louisiana, of which Europeans’ experiences were embedded, was an ever-present threat to colonists’ well-being. Combined, these threats, both physical and emotional, created a difficult environment where European settlers could independently procure and prepare food that could sustain the body and build community.

Familiar foods and agriculture practices, ones that resembled those in Europe, became an important means through which European colonists regained a sense of empowerment in the face of these destabilizing forces.¹⁰² Their everyday gardening contributed to a larger project of empire building by reinforcing the notion of European control over New World environments. As conditions became more stable, colonists experimented with agricultural practices. They started to grow Old World foods in the New World and recreate familiar dishes with those raw ingredients. The planting, harvesting, and preparation of familiar foods was much more than a means of survival. Innovative culinary experimentation was a means to cope with a sense of

¹⁰² Those same dishes were sometimes unappealing to other groups. For example, Native American groups demonstrated a reluctance to eat French culinary staples including salads, soups, wine, and poultry. Daniel H. Usner, Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley before 1783 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 195.
marginalization within empire, a near constant fear of death, and physical and emotional pain. Food became infused with loyalties to homelands and with emotions ranging from nostalgia and despair to hope and inspiration.

Jean-François-Benjamin Dumont de Montigny, a French colonist living in Louisiana, relied heavily on gardening and culinary experimentation as a coping mechanism for the tribulations of colonial life. Born in France in 1696, Dumont traveled to Louisiana in 1717 as an officer in the French army. He remained in the territory through 1738. He eventually wrote a two-volume history of Louisiana that provides vivid details of the early colonial period, including his experiments in his garden and kitchen.

Planting and maintaining gardens was one way French colonials attempted to create order out of the chaos of Louisiana’s natural environment; colonials gave themselves choice over what ingredients they prepared for daily meals instead of relying on others to procure food, restoring a sense of agency. For colonial elites like Dumont who actually tended to his own garden by trimming back hedges and harvesting fruits, the process of ordering the New World was grounded in a very real, tactile experience. One can imagine that when the precariousness of one’s life was so immediate, the opportunity to plant and maintain a life-sustaining garden would have been reassuring,

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103 He was in charge of developing lands in the interest of absentee landowners.
104 Jean-François-Benjamin Dumont de Montigny, Mémoire de L___ D___ (1747), Edward E. Ayer Manuscript Collection, MS 257, Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois.
perhaps restoring to Dumont a sense of control over his own fate. Dumont could have left the labor of his garden solely to the enslaved men and women who labored for him, but instead he chose to partake in certain aspects of that process. For Dumont, it appears that gardening was more than just planting and harvesting—immersing his hands in alluvial soil had a more profound impact on his quality of life. Subsequently, he would often rent out the labor of his slaves, as a means of earning cash, and work the garden himself in their absence.\footnote{As noted by Gordon M. Sayre and Carla Zecher in the introduction to The Memoir of Lieutenant Dumont, 1715-1747, many of the French settlers who migrated to New Orleans came from urban France and may not have had experience tending gardens prior to their arrival in the New World. Dumont, therefore, seems to have had an exceptional and fortunate affinity for gardening. Dumont himself notes the practice of French settlers growing their own produce: “Our French people […] spend their time working in their gardens and support themselves by selling their produce. And if they are lucky enough to have negro slaves, they rent them out to others by the month. The going rate is twelve to fifteen francs.” Jean-François-Benjamin Dumont de Montigny, The Memoir of Lieutenant Dumont, 1715-1747: A Sojourner in the French Atlantic, trans. Gordon M. Sayre; eds. Gordon M. Sayre and Carla Zecher. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 44, 374.} However, other elite colonials were not so inclined to share tasks, and they assigned slave labor forces to tend their gardens instead.\footnote{Gordon M. Sayre and Carla Zecher, introduction to The Memoir of Lieutenant Dumont, 1715-1747: A Sojourner in the French Atlantic, trans. Gordon M. Sayre; eds. Gordon M. Sayre and Carla Zecher. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 43-44.} They then assigned enslaved Africans to sell surplus crops at New Orleans’ levee market, increasing personal revenues of the slave owners.

Dumont sometimes involve his slaves in the cultivation of his garden and his agro-experiments, and thus their labor and their experiences were entangled with his attempts to bring order to his New Orleans property. Involving them in his agro-experimentation reinforced the notion that ordering the natural world was natural—not
only the containment of plants, but also the containment of enslaved people. Dumont planted a trellis of hops in his garden—a plant that grew naturally in Louisiana. In training this plant to grow on a trellis, he took something wild and gave structure to its otherwise unregulated growth. To contain the plant, it had to be trimmed regularly. On one occasion, Dumont designated this task to his slaves. First, he demonstrated the technique for them, cutting back a few plants, and then had them complete the task.107 Dumont’s hands were not the only ones that brought order to his world through a careful manipulation of the natural environment. The hands of his slaves also pared down the wild, bushy tendrils—hands that belonged to people who were under an oppressive regime that also sought to keep them contained and controlled within colonial society. Together, their hands contributed to the development of agricultural knowledge that in turn shape the city’s food economy and culture—one that stretched from elite’s gardens to the street food vending along the levee.

Attempts to order the world through manicured landscapes, to build a uniform French empire, originated with Louis XIV’s court culture, tying New Orleans’ gardening practices back to aesthetic principles developed in France. These aesthetics principles, when applied to the local gardens of New Orleans, enabled colonial subjects to contribute to a larger process of empire building. During his reign, Louis XIV

concentrated court life around the Palace of Versailles, which, to this day, is still known for its expansive *parterre* gardens. In their simplest form, this style of garden contains garden beds laid out in a geometric pattern with gravel walkways in between those beds. The gardens at Versailles are not solely impressive because of their sheer size. Their majestic design and well-ordered landscape reflect a particular outlook: that French landscapes should be tamed and ordered to reflect the control that nobles exercised not only over the environment but also over the people who lived in it. Their control stretched from the suburbs of Paris across the Atlantic Ocean—a global project that symbolically touched all people, enslaved and free, living within the French empire. A structured environment reinforced the idea that society was ordered (and that nobility held a prime position at the top of that hierarchy) and the notion that that order was natural.  

The private gardens of wealthier settlers in the city of New Orleans mirrored the design of those at Versailles and also reinforced notions of social order by structuring the colonial landscapes. New Orleans’ gardens, both public and private, symbolized French colonists’ control over New World lands through the production, distribution, and consumption of food. This symbolic control stood in contrast to European colonists’ dependence on disenfranchised groups for food. By ordering a landscape that was

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notoriously “savage,” French settlers were contributing to a larger goal of French colonialism: “civilizing” the New World. The ultimate goal was to mold Louisiana’s environment in the fashion of the Old World so that it could become a functioning part of the French empire, providing colonial people with steady food supplies. Taming those landscapes, however, was no easy task in the semi-tropical climate of New Orleans, which promoted rapid regrowth of vegetation after clearing. Although City Architects Adrien de Pauger and Le Bond La Tour had drawn up plans for a gridded city, the edges of that grid were often overtaken by the resurgence of surrounding swampland. On a much more intimate scale, creatures from the outside world encroached upon peoples’ lives, blurring the boundaries between the “civilized” world (i.e., the domestic space) and the natural world. Dumont, commenting on the uncontrollable bounty of Louisiana’s natural landscape, notes that there were so many crawfish in New Orleans that “people caught them even in their houses”—a playful description of a relatively benign aspect of Louisiana’s fairly dangerous flora and fauna.109

Closer to the central square of New Orleans, however, lands were diligently maintained, examples of colonials’ more successful attempts to create order in New Orleans’ semi-tropical environs. The most prominent government officials and

successful entrepreneurs kept residences in the heart of the city, just off of the central square, Dumont among them. These individuals also maintained impressive gardens, which, like those in France, were symbolic of their economic and social power.110 Dumont’s urban garden, for example, was quite symmetrical and mirrored the French parterre style. Long, rectangular beds lined the front portion of it like church pews.111 In the back garden, Dumont planted an orange grove alongside additional planting beds. Those rectangular beds were filled with vegetation organized in horizontal, vertical, and diagonal lines. Two symmetrical pools that held both practical and aesthetic purpose marked the entrance to the back garden. These plantings and pools gave a simple, yet visually pleasing look to the garden. Similar to the parterre gardens in France, one could walk through the garden along pathways, which were likely gravel. The garden represents Dumont’s efforts to order Louisiana’s countryside and put that land to use

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110 Although not initially popular, gardening became increasingly common among French colonists. For example, when visiting New Orleans in the 1760s, Captain Philip Pittman, a British officer who traveled to Louisiana to assess lands that Britain had recently acquired in the territory, noted that there were between 700 and 800 houses in New Orleans and of those, most maintained gardens. Private gardens, however, were not the only ones in the city. Over the years, public gardens were created, especially those in public squares. Of particular note were orangeries, or orange orchards, that bordered the Place d’Armes. Philip Pittman, The Present State of European Settlements on the Mississippi (1770), in Louisiana Sojourns: Travelers’ Tales and Literary Journeys, edited by Frank de Caro (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998), 75; Shannon Lee Dawdy, Building the Devil’s Empire: French Colonial New Orleans (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 160.

111 Jean-François-Benjamin Dumont de Montigny created a detailed image of his garden in New Orleans, labeling its different aspects and some of the major plant varietals grown in particular sections. The descriptions in this paragraph are drawn from that image, which Dumont included in the section of his original manuscript entitled “Natural History and the Story of Juchereau de Saint Denis.” Jean-François-Benjamin Dumont de Montigny, The Memoir of Lieutenant Dumont, 1715–1747: A Sojourner in the French Atlantic, trans. Gordon M. Sayre; eds. Gordon M. Sayre and Carla Zecher. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 373.
toward France’s larger civilizing mission, and to relieve colonists’ dependence on disenfranchised groups.

Figure 1: Jean-François-Benjamin Dumont de Montigny’s Garden in New Orleans. Source: The Edward E. Ayer Collection at The Newberry Library, Map no. 14.

The residential portion of Dumont’s plot contained the main house, a pavilion, and the detached kitchen, which also served as the slave quarters. At this time, kitchens were often detached as a means of fire prevention. This was particularly

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important in colonial New Orleans when most buildings were constructed out of highly flammable cypress wood, which was readily available. The detached kitchen also provided a buffer between slave owners and enslaved people whose labor and culinary ingenuity upon which they had grown dependent. The area between the main house, the detached kitchen, and the garden served as a residential part of the property, but also housed livestock, which would have roamed freely in the gated plot of land. Despite elites’ attempts to separate themselves from production of foodstuff in the back yard, they were still in close proximity to enslaved people and the livestock they kept. The detached kitchen was primarily a symbolic partition. The lives of the enslaved and free were too entangled to create anything but a fictional separation.

French colonists approached their gardens scientifically, planting and strategically experimenting with varietals as a means to bring order to their lives and make sense of the unfamiliar landscape. These small-scale experiments tied into a much larger colonial project of collecting, categorizing, sharing, and experimenting with the flora and fauna of the New World. It was not uncommon for colonists to experiment with both New World and Old World crops to see which ones they could successfully grow in their gardens. In fact, once French colonists abandoned their initial resistance to cultivate crops, they undertook an impressive set of agricultural experiments involving

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113 The common use of this particular wood likely led to two devastating fires in New Orleans, which eliminated all but a few French colonial era buildings in the mid-eighteenth century.

Old World foods. Some staple crops such as wheat and olive trees were quickly ruled out as viable crops in the humid climate of Louisiana.\textsuperscript{115} Colonists such as Dumont also attempted to grow grape varietals common in Europe to varying degrees of success.\textsuperscript{116} Other Old World crops, however, flourished and soon became synonymous with Louisiana food cultures. Fruit trees, for example, were quite successful. Varieties of these trees included: orange, lemon, peach, apple, cherry, plum, and several kinds of nut bearing trees. Many of these trees were brought directly from orchards in France and successfully planted in New Orleans.\textsuperscript{117} Like the traditions of Native Americans and Africans, the culinary traditions of Europeans, too, became an important influence on New Orleans’ hybrid cuisine.

For the laboring poor, gardens’ practical qualities and revenue-generating potential were also important. After the Company of the Indies collapsed, many French farmers lost their slave labor force and were forced to abandon the land promised to


\textsuperscript{116} Dumont, for example, grew muscat grapes along a trellis in his garden and conjectured that if he had had more time to cultivate the crop before leaving the country, he would have been able to produce wine from its harvest. Note: Thomas Jefferson was one of the more famous persons to invest in American vineyards. As early as 1773, he gave financial assistance to a neighboring farmer to plant an initial crop. Although his neighbor’s experiments were not successful, Jefferson went on to grow grapes on his own land and continued to finance others’ attempts. All of those experiments, however, also failed. Jean-François-Benjamin Dumont de Montigny, \textit{The Memoir of Lieutenant Dumont, 1715-1747: A Sojourner in the French Atlantic}, trans. Gordon M. Sayre; eds. Gordon M. Sayre and Carla Zecher. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 379; Damon Lee Fowler, ed., \textit{Dining at Monticello: In Good Taste and Abundance} (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press., 2005), 81.

them under the Company’s jurisdiction. They sought refuge, reluctantly so, in New Orleans and attempted to make a living by cultivating urban gardens and selling that produce at market. Within the context of empire, and in comparison to Dumont and his peers, these small farmers had become marginalized people, working alongside enslaved African and Native American vendors. Within their disenfranchisement, they found financial relief by integrating themselves into the heart of the city’s local food economy and adding to its fusion food culture. The stories of these small planters reveal the precariousness of political status in colonial Louisiana and the enduring role that urban food distribution played in sustaining the working poor and feeding the city.

Gardening, whether conducted by elites, working poor, or enslaved, became a symbolic gesture of ordering the natural world, but it was not the only food-related practice that tied New Orleans back to European cultures of empire. The alluvial soils that gardeners toiled over eventually produced a variety of crops that served as the basis through which European colonists sought to create Old World foods and reinforce Europe’s cultural presence in the New World.

Some of the early colonial fare shared considerable characteristics with the French cuisine developed within Louis XIV’s court, indicative of French colonials’ attempts to retain connections to their homeland and to demonstrate their civility in an

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otherwise chaotic colonial environment. The composition of France’s new elite cuisine will appear familiar to those who know about the basic tenets of modern French cuisine. Between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, French chefs began phasing out the vibrant spices that had been so prominent in medieval cuisine.\textsuperscript{119} In their stead, chefs began to rely more on local herbs such as chives, rosemary, thyme, and other seasonings such as shallots, anchovies, and black truffle to flavor dishes.\textsuperscript{120} They not only highlighted herbal flavors native to the French countryside, they also sought to bring out the “natural” flavors of meats in a new set of sauces. Instead of smothering meats in sweet and sour sauces, as was tradition in Medieval Europe, they began to use meat drippings and juices from the pan to created \textit{savory} sauces. Thus, court dishes became much less sweet (although sugar consumption, in general, was on the rise).\textsuperscript{121} In addition to meat-based sauces and stocks, many sauces were made with butter and were milder in flavor.\textsuperscript{122} Butter became so popular that it replaced lard as the major cooking fat in French haute cuisine. One such technique—starting soups and sauces with a \textit{roux}—not only became a marker of food culture in France, but it also became characteristic of those


\textsuperscript{122} The famous béchamel sauce—a creamy, white sauce—first appears in print in \textit{Le Cuisinier François}. François Pierre de La Varenne, \textit{Le Cuisinier François} (Troyes: J. Garner).
in Louisiana. In terms of key vegetables, French haute cuisine became defined by the *mirepoix*: made up of carrots, celery, and onion. This vegetable trifecta is one of the most iconic markers of modern French cuisine. In the context of colonial Louisiana, the mirepoix was slightly modified to fit the availability of produce and the taste preferences unique to the New World context.

For French colonials, prepared food was a means of fostering a sense of control not only over one’s body, but also over the hardships and misfortunes of life in New Orleans—a sense of control similar to the one garnered through gardening. Aligning with culinary trends standardized by the Sun King’s court, French settlers regularly consumed meat-based stocks and sauces made with butter, when available. They also used fresh herbs in their foods rather than spices that had for so long defined European

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123 One creates a French roux by combining equal parts flour and fat and toasting that mixture over a low flame until the flour is cooked through. In France, the roux came to replace bread crumbs as a thickener in soups and stews. In the court of Louis XIV, butter and wheat flour were commonly paired together to prepare a roux. In New Orleans, the first iterations of roux were likely made with lard, specifically bear fat, because butter was not readily available in colonial Louisiana. Once the roux was slightly toasted, making a “blonde roux,” it was treated as both a thickening and flavoring agent, adding a light, nutty flavor to dishes. In general, the darker the roux (i.e., the longer it toasted), the more flavorful the sauce. Note: There is a common understanding in New Orleans and in Louisiana, more broadly, that many local dishes start by making a roux. In fact, there are numerous recipes in Louisiana-based cookbooks that begin with the phrase, “first you make a roux.” Some books are even titled with the phrase. See, for example: Les Vent Quarter Club for the Lafayette Museum Association, *First - You Make a Roux* (Lafayette, LA: 1954); Marcelle Bienvenu, *Who’s Your Mama, Are You Catholic, and Can You Make a Roux?* (Lafayette, La: Acadian House Pub., 2006).

124 Bell peppers, which came from South and Central America through the Caribbean and eventually to the Gulf Coast, replaced carrots. In modern Louisiana cooking, this vegetable combination is known not as the mirepoix, but as “the holy trinity,” a name that makes reference to the Catholic faith.
court cuisine. They sourced their herbs locally, drawing flavor inspiration from the land, while also demonstrating their ability to control and tame those environs. The preferences for more basic soups and stews is also a product of the fact that early settlers did not have regular access to spices and had to make do with what was locally available. They therefore flavored those dishes with bay laurel and sassafras, mimicking French national preferences for indigenous herbs and spices.

Within the early colonial context, the power of prepared food lay in the meaning it held for the people who consumed it. In many cases, the ability to taste a familiar food or, at least, recreate it to the best of one’s ability with available ingredients, was a powerful grounding experience for colonial people. French innkeepers in colonial New Orleans, for example, prepared dishes popular in France that used domesticated meat,
rather than wild game (c. 1720-1760). One inn, owned by a French woman named Madame John, served less than 10 percent wild game to its clientele, a majority of whom were Europeans traveling into the Louisiana interior or to parts of New Spain. Settlers also raised and consumed familiar domesticated animals such as cow, pig, sheep, goat, chicken, and pigeon on their residential lands. Settlers attempted to recreate French dairy farms and tried to make cheeses and other dairy products, like butter, popularly consumed in their homeland. These latter experiments were futile because the Louisiana landscape could not support the kind of dairy production popular in Northern European regions. Settlers experienced similarly disheartening failures in their early attempts to grow wheat. Louisiana’s climate prevented these agro-experiments from succeeding, demonstrating the stronghold that the local environs had over colonial populations. The environment, though, did not altogether stop resilient Europeans from trying to recreate Old World food cultures in New Orleans.

The struggles of the colonial period gave birth to innovative flavor combinations, demonstrating once again that some of the most inventive food cultures were born in

the midst of hardship rather than comfort. When familiar French ingredients were not available, for example, French colonists exercised creativity in trying to recreate the texture and tastes of French dishes from completely unfamiliar foods. For example, Dumont created an asparagus sauce out of burned and boiled wild cane stocks.\textsuperscript{132} He also tried to create a salad dressing, most typically made with olive oil and vinegar, out of bear oil and oak sap, the latter ingredient which he let sit out in the sun until its taste resembled vinegar.\textsuperscript{133} He was compelled to improvise because he wanted to dress the greens he had harvested from his garden. He added further flavor to the greens by foraging for wild sorrel leaves and incorporating them into the salad.\textsuperscript{134} His other culinary experiments included making French fry cakes out of hickory nuts instead of almonds.\textsuperscript{135} The resulting dish probably had a similar mouth feel, or texture, to the almond cakes, but took on the aroma and flavor unique to the hickory nuts—a simultaneously familiar and foreign dish.

Under Spanish colonial rule, New Orleans, and Louisiana more broadly, would undergo another transformation after the re-opening of the slave trade. As thousands of

Africans were imported against their will to the colony, the Creole slave population would be inundated with African migrants from the southwest coast and interior of the continent. The creolized culture that enslaved people in Louisiana had been able to foster for roughly three decades would be turned on its head as the slave population quickly became a majority African rather than Creole. However, certain aspects of New Orleans’ food economy and culture were too entrenched to collapse, even after such a dramatic population upheaval. Enslaved black vendors and laborers would continue to play critical roles in the local food economy through their work in gardens, markets, and in various odd-jobs around the city that ranged from dock to construction work. As New Orleans’ slave population grew, so did its population of free persons of color, many of whom were involved in food-related businesses.

The diverse labor force of New Orleans created a customer base with large appetites. By the late-eighteenth century, New Orleans would establish a reputation as a place of both extravagance and debauchery. The wants and desires of growing elite populations, both white and black, created opportunities for further improvisation with cultures of consumption. From elaborate meals prepared in plantation kitchens to quick treats made right on the streets, food was ever present in the lives of this rapidly developing city. And those foods were wrapped up in a process of constant change, of progress, to meet the seemingly insatiable appetites of residents and sojourners alike.
In the midst of this economic and cultural boom period, vendors, many of them people of color, dominated the local food culture and, in doing so, were able to shape public culture in New Orleans to suit their needs. Within the public sphere, they not only built up their businesses, but also carved out spaces to socialize and build community. Their deft navigation of both economic and cultural networks openly defied municipal law that sought to quash their unmistakably powerful presence in New Orleans’ local food economy.
3. Cultures of Mobility

Street hawking in antebellum New Orleans is a study in how disenfranchised groups, seemingly against all logic, integrated into the city’s commercial core. After the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, New Orleans’ economy and population grew rapidly under the auspices of American governance. What was once a problematic city on the outskirts of European empire quickly became a center for the export of agricultural goods and one of the busiest ports in the world. With the elites focusing on international and national economies, the business of feeding the city—of distributing agricultural products for everyday consumption—became the domain of the disenfranchised: enslaved people, free people of color, and a diverse population of Atlantic World immigrants, free and enslaved. These small-scale entrepreneurs endeavored to make themselves indispensable figures in New Orleans’ food scene despite the fact that the local government sought to restrict their physical and economic mobility through municipal laws.

This chapter examines the peculiarities of distributing food outdoors, rather than in an enclosed space, and how that environment shaped the experiences of African Americans. In the antebellum period, African Americans made up a substantial part of

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1 In 1803, Napoleon Bonaparte sold the territory of Louisiana to the United States. In December of that year, New Orleans’ first city council replaced the Spanish Cabildo, the major governing body of the city during Spanish rule (1769-1803). In 1805, under the new city charter, the Conseil de Ville was created and replaced the interim government established in 1803. The territory of Orleans, in which New Orleans was located, became a U.S. state in April of 1812.
the labor base around the production, distribution, and consumption of food, and so this chapter focuses on their lived experiences. In particular, it explores how the constraints of a slave regime and the mobility of food vendors outdoors fostered community through economic transactions. Scholars have recognized the integral role that enslaved people and marginalized groups have played in local food economies.\(^2\) They have written about slave gardens and the produce enslaved people sold at local markets, building economic, social, and political relations to diverse populations, both enslaved and free. This chapter builds on that foundational scholarship and defines blacks'

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contributions to the local food economy through the concept of street food. New Orleans’ antebellum street foods were a product of the urban outdoors. These dishes were exposed to the elements and distributed through the movement of people and animals through the city. Those factors shaped street foods in important ways, creating a distinct urban terroir, or taste of place, defined not just by the soil and weather that initially produced them, but also all the particulates that they gathered as they moved through urban streets. The street food of New Orleans was perfumed with smog, infused with wild yeast, and dusted with a nearly invisible layer of grime—elements that have begun to make their debuts in the restaurants of modern molecular gastronomists and in experimental culinary centers around the world.

The streets became a crucial space of belonging for marginalized groups and a place where they could shape the city’s public culture to meet their needs. In the early

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3 Street food culture in New Orleans was comparatively affordable, inviting all urban residents, regardless of socio-economic standing, to partake in its consumption. It drew heavily upon local ingredients and fusion culinary techniques, and often transformed undesirable or inexpensive products into something delicious. Street food businesses had low upfront costs for entrepreneurs, and therefore had low barriers to entry. Street food retail spaces were mobile and could be easily moved and stationed in a locale.

4 One such culinary center, the Center for Genomic Gastronomy, created an “aeroir” experiment. Aeroir is a play off of terroir and seeks to understand the taste of air. In their experiment, they created meringues that were flavored with the smog of polluted locations. Those meringues were served to members of the Center across the globe, giving people a chance to taste the subtle difference in the taste of contaminated air. Nina Levent and Irina D. Mihalache, “Last Course of the Volume,” in Food and Museums, eds. Nina Levent and Irina D. Mihalache (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 348-349.

5 Within the context of this chapter, I define belonging as the practice of defining who was welcome and able to live and work in a particular place. My examination of belonging through social interactions and economic transactions around food cultures contributes to the work of scholars in the fields of legal and social history. See, for example: Barbara Young Welke, Law and the Borders of Belonging in the Long Nineteenth Century United States (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Martha Jones, All Bound Up: The Woman Question in African American Public Culture, 1830-1900 (Chapel Hill: The University of North
antebellum period, blacks claimed the streets as their own, turning them into spaces of culture and business for African Americans. In the streets, food had to be portable; it had to be affordable; and it had to be quick. Those needs created a very particular set of business strategies—ones that stood in contrast to the strategies of those fortunate enough to rent or own a storefront, largely white men. The tenacity of these mobile vendors did not go unnoticed or unchecked by local lawmakers and their constituents. Lawmakers sought to regulate street food culture in a way that was not merely about organizing the distribution of local foods, but also about controlling food vendors and defining a sense of belonging through local law that excluded people of color. White lawmakers were uncomfortable with the presence of hundreds of black vendors in the city streets. In New Orleans, lawmakers restricted the movement and economic contributions of blacks and other marginalized groups, attempting to control who could move within and vend in certain neighborhoods and who could access private kitchens and domestic spaces. The regulation of food distribution became a mechanism of defining who was and was not welcomed to live and work in particular neighborhoods in the city.

The streets, therefore, were a microcosm of the daily tensions between dominant and subordinate groups in antebellum New Orleans. They were a space in which the entrepreneurial spirit and cultural significance of the disenfranchised became apparent, so much so, that whites regularly expressed discontent with the potency of their subordinates’ agency. Yet whites’ discontent did not outweigh their dependence on and desire for the city’s street foods. Their efforts to regulate businesses operated by black New Orleanians through local laws were largely symbolic, and irregularly enforced. At times, officials even created loopholes in the law that enabled black entrepreneurs to vend otherwise prohibited items. Perhaps these legal exceptions were representative of city officials’ acknowledgement of the indispensability of black entrepreneurs who had a stronghold over the local distribution of prepared foods and beverages. Within the malleable realm of regulation, blacks and other marginalized groups successfully carved out a space for themselves and their communities amidst the foot and cart traffic of urban New Orleans. They did so not through typical political means, e.g., the vote, but through an alternative political modality stemming from their central position in the local food economy.
In her romantic description of the *Vieux Carré*, Grace King paints an image of a French Creole family on a typical morning. The beginning of their day is marked not only by soft morning light, but also by “the calls in the street, musical negro cries, heralding vegetables, fruits, and sweets,” and a visit by their local food vendor who carries a basket of produce on her head. This *marchande* delivers fresh fruits and vegetables, as well as neighborhood gossip, commanding the attention of the breakfast table cohort. The ripe figs that she picked were but a few dozen of thousands of fresh fruits distributed in the city that morning, the bulk of which was sold in the city’s central market, or French Market. The stalls of the French Market were but a few blocks away from another key retail space: the slave auction blocks. The proximity of those sales reinforced the idea that consumable fruits and consumable bodies were part of the same

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6 “Vieux Carré” is another name for the French Quarter. Note also that Grace King was born in New Orleans in 1851 and wrote about the city’s culture in publications circulated nationally. Some of her works include: *New Orleans: The Place and People* (1895) and *Stories from Louisiana History* (1905). Grace King, *New Orleans: The Place and People* (New York: MacMillan & Co., 1895); Grace King, *Stories from Louisiana History* (New Orleans: L. Graham Co., 1905).

7 The ability to successfully navigate the cityscape of New Orleans and accrue profits depended upon vendors’ physical strength and stamina. Those vendors who provisioned the city’s neighborhoods or remotest corners of New Orleans, had to carry their wares on their person: laden baskets of fresh produce or baked goods. Some carried baskets in their arms; some rested them on their hip; others balanced them on their heads, nimbly navigated city traffic without dropping their product or allowing their baskets to slip. Their ability to balance so many things was almost acrobatic. As described in *Gumbo Ya-Ya Folk Tales of Louisiana*, “A Negress will balance one basket on her head, carry two others, one in each hand, hawking any vegetables and fruit in season.” They also used baskets that suited their needs. Certain vendors, for example, crafted specialized baskets to house particular products. One mustard seller carried his wares in a basket partitioned to carry bottles of spicy mustard, which he called “the spice of life.” *Gumbo Ya-Ya: Folk Tales of Louisiana*, eds. Edward Dreyer, Lyle Saxon, and Robert Tallant (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1945), 28; “The Mustard Dealer,” *Times-Picayune*, December 29, 1846, pg. 2.

local food economy. Slaves were the strange fruit plucked from demented trees that Billie Holidays sings about in the song by the same name.⁹

New Orleans’ slave society depended on a vast Atlantic World economy and the trafficking of humans. That system brought shipment after shipment of enslaved people from West Africa and the Caribbean to the city. Although Congress abolished the African slave trade in 1807, illegal shipments of enslaved people continued to arrive into major American ports. And although the importation of enslaved people from abroad had “ended,” America’s domestic slave trade blossomed in the antebellum period, and New Orleans became a major hub of that trade.¹⁰

Arriving in a key port city like New Orleans, slavers prepared enslaved people for sale, just as vendors prepared produce for market.¹¹ Before auction, slavers washed and shaved enslaved persons’ bodies and then slathered them with oil to create the illusion of physical vitality.¹² They covered their wounds and sores in palm oil—an ingredient popularly used in West African food cultures, although used to nourish the body, not cover up its malnourishment. Slavers’ preparation of bodies eerily parallel the methods employed by food vendors. Vendors of blemished fruits, for example, worked

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¹⁰ For a comprehensive history of New Orleans’ role as a major port in America’s domestic slave trade, see: Walter Johnson, Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).


to hide bruises on their products. They placed fruit so that the vibrant, unblemished side faced upward. They waxed fruit to give it a faux luster just as slavers oiled bodies to achieve the same effect. Aware of these tactics, slave buyers were naturally skeptical. They were concerned with making a poor choice; “[l]ike buyers in any market, they had to weigh the commodities on display against the idea of their minds eye.”

The bruised and weeping flesh of the enslaved elicited a brutal sensory experience that could trigger feelings of disgust. Yet accompanying that disgust, perhaps, was a strange fascination. White observers recorded exactly those contradictory emotions: they were simultaneously repulsed and hypnotized, pushed away and drawn closer to the strange fruits of New Orleans’ markets. Steps away from the auction

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14 Disgust is a feeling elicited through our senses, and regularly through taste. Charles Darwin aptly notes in *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872), that disgust is a feeling that “refers to something revolting, primarily in relation to the sense of taste, as actually perceived or vividly imagined.” The mouth, therefore, is a critical point of metaphorical consumption of black bodies. The mouth is also a critical point of physical consumption of the city’s local foods. In New Orleans, these iterations of consumption co-mingled on a daily basis. Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (London: John Murray, 1872), 254. See also a modern work that explores the topic of disgust in relation to the metaphorical consumption of black bodies: Kyla Wazana Tompkins, *Racial Indigestion: Eating Bodies in the 19th Century* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 4.

15 My burgeoning academic interest in the feeling of disgust and how it relates to the consumption of bodies and food was inspired by a talk given by Neetu Khanna titled “The Visceral Logics of Decolonization” at Critical Consumption: The Future of Food Studies hosted by the American Studies Department at Princeton University, April 1-2, 2016. Khanna began her talk by describing the broken, sick body of a prostitute. The literature she drew from was detailed and gruesome in its account of the sores and viscous liquids oozing from this woman’s body. Her weeping wounds reminded me of the wounds covering the bodies of enslaved Africans who had endured the horrific conditions of the Middle Passage. I then became increasingly interested in how battered bodies were prepared for market through the tricks that vendors have long used to entice customers to purchase a bruised or battered item (hiding blemishes, waxing, polishing) – whether it be a bruised piece of fruit or a bruised body. The parallels are disturbing. And the proximity of these
block, free white New Orleanians nibbled on delicate cakes and sipped steaming cups of chicory coffee while countless black bodies were dragged onto a stage and sold—a sickening kind of dinner theater. Families were torn apart as people broke bread together. Men and women screamed and wept as diners exchanged gossip and told jokes. The act of sitting for a meal in such close proximity worked to normalize the slave auction; it rendered palatable the black bodies available for purchase.

That strangeness becomes even more pronounced when we think about the transition from being sold to something that sells—a transition from a passive to an active position in the local economy, and one that afforded enslaved people a chance to establish social belonging through their role as food vendors and purchasers.16 As told in King’s novel, hundreds of black food vendors worked in the city streets of antebellum New Orleans. They hawked wares mere blocks away from where they themselves were sold into slavery and where their status as enslaved people rather than as citizens was reified. One African-American woman, identified in the local newspaper as “Toto,” was all too familiar with the chafing proximity of the slave auction block.17 According to the

simultaneous preparations can be described as “strange.” That strangeness drew me in and invited me to theorize about the tensions inherent in that proximity.

16 For an in-depth exploration of how marginalized communities, mainly African-American women, integrate themselves into political and legal life through daily actions, see: Martha Jones, All Bound Up: The Woman Question in African American Public Culture, 1830-1900 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

17 “Toto the Creole Praline Woman,” Springfield Republican, August 20, 1894. This article draws from one published in the New Orleans Times-Picayune.
article, Toto’s master killed himself after squandering away his money through
gambling, at which point his plantation and slaves—including Toto, her husband, and
her son—were put up for auction in the lobby of the St. Louis Hotel on the corner of St.
Louis and Chartres streets. On that auction block, her family was separated. Her
husband and son went to Tennessee without her. A man identified as Monsieur John
purchased Toto and “gifted” her back to her original mistress in New Orleans. The
arrangement, according to the article, was amenable to Toto, although she might have
told the tale differently, if given a chance. It was at that time that Toto began selling
pralines, distributing them in front of St. Louis Cathedral in Jackson Square, just two
blocks away from where she and her family were similarly sold back into slavery.
There was little spatial differentiation between the slave auction block and the steps
upon which Toto sat to display her sweet candies. The St. Louis Hotel, visible from the
cathedral steps, was a sickening landmark of the loss of her family whom she never saw
again.

That auction block represented Toto’s disenfranchisement. On that block, she
was presented as a commodity, as a piece of property, to be bought and sold by other

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18 The St. Louis hotel opened in 1838.
19 “Toto the Creole Praline Woman,” Springfield Republican, August 20, 1894.
20 Pralines are candies made of caramelized sugar and toasted pecans. In the nineteenth century, there were
different kinds of pralines ranging in color from pink to white to caramel. In addition to caramel pralines,
the ones that you can still purchase in the French Quarter today, there were also “cream pralines.” A
favorite of elite Creole families, cream pralines were made up of two shelled pecans held together with a
people. Yet the cathedral steps upon which she vended foods represented something else. They represented her ability, as an entrepreneur, to engage with other city residents. Her actions created relationships with customers, which then fostered a sense of belonging within the New Orleans community. Vending was a means of resisting the totalizing impacts of slavery, a sense of isolation among them.21

Toto was one of many enslaved or otherwise marginalized food entrepreneurs who through gardening, foraging, vending, or purchasing wares participated actively as members of the New Orleans community. Their participation necessitated their engagement with the outdoors, embedding their experiences between fertile ground and open sky. The vastness of that landscape afforded them certain opportunities to engage in food distribution largely uninhibited by social and legal regulations, but never a complete escape.

African Americans’ experiences, and their mobility in particular, was deeply dependent on environments unbounded by physical walls, but still bounded by the rules that governed slave society. Those invisible barriers threatened what physical
mobility blacks could exercise. As demonstrated in the last chapter, the dire conditions of colonial New Orleans necessitated that slave owners afford enslaved people the opportunity to maintain gardens and sell what surplus they had in the streets and markets of New Orleans.\textsuperscript{22} With the independence to cultivate land, feed themselves, and contribute to the local food economy, enslaved people and free blacks deftly met the needs of a hungry urban populace. Without direct governance from slave owners, blacks built up their food businesses, but did so quietly so as not to incite violent backlash.\textsuperscript{23} Over time, the city grew dependent on the small army of black food hawkers and market vendors, something about which whites regularly complained.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{22} This paragraph is informed by a talk given by Fred Moten and Saidiya Hartman at Duke University discussing the impact of the environment on the experiences of African Americans, particularly that of enslaved people. Fred Moten and Saidiya Hartman with J. Kameron Carter and Sarah Jane Cervenak, “The Black Outdoors” (presentation, Durham, NC, September 23, 2016).

\textsuperscript{23} Although a case study of Southern economy and culture in the 1980s, Yvonne V. Jones’ examination of African-American street peddlers is relevant to my exploration of their historical precedents. She combines anthropology and economic analysis to study the organizational techniques, capital raising activities, and marketing strategies of African Americans in the urban South. Like Jones, I am interested in individual vendors’ innovation and how they adapted to maximize their profits given their subordinate position as people of color in the antebellum South. Yvonne V. Jones, “Street Peddlers: As Entrepreneurs: Economic Adaption to an Urban Area,” Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural System and World Economic Development 17, no. 2/3 (Summer-Fall, 1988): 143-170. See also the work of Joseph A. Schumpeter, an economic theorist, who also wrote about individual entrepreneurism and how an individual’s innovation could overcome “historical patterns, institutional barriers and economic forces of wider society” that make it difficult for people to succeed in business. Joseph A. Schumpeter, Change and the Entrepreneur: Postulates and Patterns for Entrepreneurial History (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1949).

Street food vending stands in juxtaposition to narratives about black people transgressing the boundaries of the plantation. When thinking about the experiences of enslaved people out of doors, for example, one might think about the restrictions that permeated plantation property and their efforts to flee that environment. The experiences of runaway slaves were defined by a profound fear—the fear of being placed back into the dehumanizing cycle of slavery. Runaways’ relationship to the outside world was marred by terror and anxiety. For street food vendors, however,

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25 This paragraph is also informed by the talk given by Fred Moten and Saidiya Hartman at Duke University discussing the impact of the environment on African Americans’ lived experiences. Fred Moten and Saidiya Hartman with J. Kameron Carter and Sarah Jane Cervenak, “The Black Outdoors” (presentation, Durham, NC, September 23, 2016).

26 Scholars have addressed the significance of slaves’ participation in public spaces outside of the plantation. For example, Barbara J. Fields and Cynthia M. Kennedy explore slavery in urban spaces, encouraging one to identify the characteristics of urban economy and society that marked urban slavery as distinct from that on slave plantations. Barry Gaspar scrutinizes the importance of public food markets to enslaved populations in Antigua, arguing that a study of slaves’ reaction to the regulation of said markets reveals the importance of the public market space in slave life, the role of slaves in the domestic economy of Antigua, and the political consciousness of enslaved populations prior to emancipation. Robert Olwell’s work is particularly revealing, arguing that economic demands often outweighed ideological concerns of patriarchy in the market space. Olwell and Gaspar emphasize the point that the public market space had a characteristic set of racial and gender hierarchies that met the economic needs of larger urban populations. Barbara J. Fields, Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland During the Nineteenth Century (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); David Barry Gaspar, “Slavery, Amelioration, and Sunday Markets in Antigua, 1823-1831,” Slavery & Abolition vol. 9 (1), 1988; Cynthia M. Kennedy, Braided Relations, Entwined Lives: The Women of Charleston’s Urban Slave Society (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005); Robert Olwell, “‘Loose, Idle and Disorderly’: Slave Women in the Eighteenth-Century Charleston Marketplace,” in David Barry Gaspar and Darlene Clark Hine, eds., More Than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996).

access to places outside of the homes and plantations of their masters was not necessarily defined by the same negative emotions. Without direct oversight, enslaved vendors were able to define their mobility in new ways—ways that operated outside of the paradigm of flight and operated instead in a paradigm of individual ingenuity and entrepreneurism.27

Gardening was a catalyst for mobility and path-breaking entrepreneurism.28 Gardens were technically within the boundaries of slaveholders’ plantations or homes. Yet enslaved Africans could create a sense of independence within those bounds through a relationship with the land and by employing their hands in the careful manipulation of soil. The slave garden, for some, was an oasis, an escape from the

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27 For key works analyzing the ways in which enslaved communities navigated space and built community within that space in ways that differed from slave owners and white elites see: Anthony Kaye, Joining Places: Slave Neighborhoods in the Old South (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Stephanie Camp, Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

28 Fred Moten and Saidiya Hartman with J. Kameron Carter and Sarah Jane Cervenak, “The Black Outdoors” (presentation, Durham, NC, September 23, 2016). During the discussion, Moten referenced the work of Sylvia Wynter, specifically her arguments in “Novel and History, Plot and Plantation.” In this essay, Wynter makes a distinction between the field and the plot. The field, in the context of Caribbean slave society, is one dominated by market forces and the desire to respond to supply and demand while also making a profit. That field is controlled by elites. The plot, by contrast, is “the indigenous, autochthonous [sic] system.” The plot is not defined by capitalism, but by sustenance and community. The plot, Wynter argues, is a means of defining the land that slave owners granted slaves in terms that aligned with their values. It was in these spaces that enslaved Africans retained connections to the spiritual and culinary cultures of West Africa. Whereas Wynter treats the garden plot as a crucible of folk culture that existed within the plantation proper, I am interested in the ways in which that folk culture broke out of the bounds of the plantation and into the urban spaces of New Orleans. In the city streets, for example, Africans and African-Americans forged a position in the local food economy that embodied their West African roots, but also embedded them in local capitalism—they themselves becoming part of the larger Atlantic World economy that had placed them in slavery. Urban food culture, and the role that black entrepreneurs played in it, therefore, extends the concept of resistance within the plantation and community within the garden out into the streets and into public view. Sylvia Wynter, “Novel and History, Plot and Plantation,” Savacou no. 5 (June, 1971), 95-102.
backbreaking work of the field and the supervision of the overseer. Whereas monoculture dominated the plantation field, polyculture was normative for the garden. Gardening had the potential to be a form of artistic expression as well as a practical endeavor; the soil was the gardener’s canvas and the crops a paint palette. Enslaved people could choose what they planted and tended to in their gardens and could harvest, save, and trade seeds among one another. There was a sense of preservation and curation involved in seed collection and trading, which fostered a renewed sense of agency and collectivity for some. Those seeds, when carefully tended, could give rise to a life sustaining harvest—one that could nourish both body and soul from one generation to the next. The harvest rendered the boundaries of the plantation porous.

Gardening enabled enslaved people to act out the behaviors afforded to free people and, through action, establish social belonging. Some were able to curate their garden plots, to walk unaccompanied in the streets, set up itinerant stalls, and engage passersby in economic transactions. These actions resituated enslaved people, placing them in positions where they interacted with others as a free people, not slaves. That repositioning was unsettling for many whites, so much so that some attempted to quash the entrepreneurial endeavors of enslaved vendors in the early antebellum period, although they never fully succeeded.29 Enslaved people continued to tend garden plots,

29 When Louisiana became a territory of the United States, local elites, finally free of colonial oversight, sought to create a society that reflected their desires to order New Orleans and restrict the movement of enslaved people. Between 1805–1835, the Conseil de Ville passed all ordinances and by-laws in New

sell products, and solidify their position within the center of the local food economy by building a vast network of interconnected entrepreneurs: a business community.

Their entrepreneurial activities took place in the public sphere, turning public spaces into an often-overlooked community of black entrepreneurs. Although whites often imagined local businesses as ones owned by other whites, black food vendors, too, operated businesses embedded in New Orleans’ landscape and local food economy and culture. The legal and social barriers that made it difficult for enslaved people to rent or own property pushed them into businesses that did not require permanent storefronts: as itinerant food vendors in the city’s streets and markets. They thrived within those positions, developing a variety of skillsets to build their mobile food businesses.

The French Market, for example, was a key center of business and community for African Americans in the early antebellum period. At that time, black women were the primary vendors in the French Market. Vendors’ display areas varied. Some used stands or tables, others sat on the floor surrounded by wooden bowls and baskets filled with

Orleans, which then went on to the mayor for approval, and then became law. Through new legislation, the Conseil de Ville sought to take away slaves’ rights to keep garden plots and animals, and to sell products in the markets on Sundays. These were rights that had been granted to slaves under the French Code Noir and the Spanish adaptation of that law. Under the new slave code of 1806, the public gathering of slaves was more severely restricted. The law specifically prohibited the gathering of slaves on Sunday mornings—a time when slaves had traditionally gathered to hawk their wares in the city streets and along the levees. The new code, however, was not regularly enforced. Lawrence N. Powell, The Accidental City: Improvising New Orleans (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 332.
fresh fruits and vegetables, beans, and other goods. Their displays spilled out into the surrounding streets, which were almost un-navigable by foot because of the volume of products for sale. For vendors, the market served a dual purpose. It was a space to display and sell their wares, but also a space to build community with other black entrepreneurs. While visiting New Orleans, Anne Newport Royall observed the tight-knit community of African Americans that thrived under the market’s awnings. She noted the ceaseless conversations among black women, speaking in French or Creole patois, exchanging news, gossip, and all manner of information. For black vendors, the market was much more than an economic center, it was a social and community center for them that, most importantly, existed outside of the bounds of the plantation.

Black women were not only sellers at the market; they were also the primary shoppers, extending black social networks beyond those who vended foods. Everyday, small-scale sales were therefore made between blacks in an economic system dominated by whites. Those mundane, intimate transactions, however, were another means of resisting the isolation and disenfranchisement of slavery. In some instances, vendors

30 Anne Newport Royall, Mrs. Royall’s Southern Tour, vol. III, (Washington: 1831), 18. Note: The original work was published in 1830. I read from what appears to be a reprint.
31 Anne Newport Royall notes: “Besides several rows of benches, the floor and the outside of the market are strewed so thick with vegetables and bowls of beans, as to render it difficult to walk through them; and not only the markets, but the levee, is lined with oranges—these are brought from the West Indies, the orange trees in the neighborhood being nearly all killed by a frost some years back. Every thing is brought to market very neat.” Anne Newport Royall, Mrs. Royall’s Southern Tour, vol. III, (Washington: 1831), 18-19.
32 Anne Newport Royall notes: “But it is very amusing to hear them talk. These old negro women will gabble French so fast that it appears to be nonsense. Many of them, however, can speak very good English, but the universal language of New Orleans is French.” Anne Newport Royall, Mrs. Royall’s Southern Tour, vol. III, (Washington: 1831), 19.
were able to keep a part of the profits for themselves, therefore accruing personal wealth.

Elite and working-class whites made note of the power that blacks exercised through purveying and purchasing foods across the city. They noticed, for example, that blacks fostered a sense of belonging through those economic transactions. They noticed that enslaved people were enacting a form of independence and agency through their roles as producers, distributors, and consumers in the local food economy. As discussed in the New Orleans Bee, in 1835, enslaved people were “at liberty to purchase what they please, and where they please, without the personal inspection of any member of the family.”\(^{33}\) It was not uncommon for enslaved shoppers to purchase wares without direct governance, a behavior that challenged their status as subordinate to free white citizens.

The presence of municipal regulation, however, was never too far from these centers of business and community life for African Americans. Guards were stationed at the French Market, keeping watch over the heart of the city’s local food economy. As observed by Anne Newport Royall, two guards stood at each entrance of the market. Royall noted that they were “perfectly silent,” as the lively market life swirled around them.\(^{34}\) They were a sonic foil to the gregarious market women, symbolic of the ever-presence of white regulation in black lives, however muted. Guards not only stood


\(^{34}\) Anne Newport Royall, *Mrs. Royall’s Southern Tour*, vol. III, (Washington: 1831), 18.
watch in the central market, but also walked the streets—joining the constant flow of people and goods through the city. Their watchful eyes grazed over the thousands of economic transactions initiated by black vendors on a daily basis.

The French Market served as a nucleus of the local food economy and was surrounded by an expansive, overlapping network of itinerant food vendors. Their businesses were defined by the fluid mechanics of city life. Once out of the shadow of the great house, black entrepreneurs faced a dynamic, ever changing urban landscape—one marked by the construction of new roads, new buildings, and the arrival of new people. They had to employ strategies to find customers within the city’s developing neighborhoods to build their business communities. They moved through the city searching for particularly lucrative trade routes or street corners to set up shop. Theirs was a business sense defined by agility and adaptability.

For street food vendors, moving through the city was a means of knowing the city and creating an alternative definition of belonging—one that contradicted popular understandings of economic belonging as a stationary phenomenon. Street food vendors’ sense of belonging did not depend on paying taxes or having a storefront; instead, it depended on their ability to navigate the city’s complex neighborhoods—each with their own set of cultural and social norms.

Street food vending was a catalyst for a complex process of social interactions and community formation between vendors and customers. Some vendors had consistent routes that brought them into contact with clients on a regular basis. This regularity enabled vendors and customers to build rapport and establish trust. That sense of trust was important to solidifying vendors’ customer base, thus stabilizing their revenues. Trusted vendors came directly to the kitchen doors of certain residences, carrying baskets of goods, and, in a gesture of good faith, would present their customers with some herbs or a special product as lagniappe, or a little something extra. A creative business strategy, lagniappe was a means of incentivizing customer loyalty and building a sense of community around economic transactions. The ability of black vendors to enter the homes of loyal customers is reflective of their knowledge of developing meaningful relations with clientele.

Scholars acknowledge that food was not the only thing that circulated through these nourishing networks. Ideas and information, too, moved along them from one person to the next. It was common for a housekeeper, for example, to speak with

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37 Studies of the Atlantic World, for example, have examined the transference of goods and ideas on an oceanic scale, demonstrating the porousness of national boundaries between Atlantic Rim nation states. Particularly adept at exploring this porosity are commodity studies, many of which focus on the large-scale distribution of food. While some historians have drawn upon an Atlantic framework, others have long depended upon a national framework to shape their study of the colonial period and the Early Republic. These scholars have taken political boundaries as a given, tracing the developments of those boundaries as they transition from colonial territories to an independent nation state. Yet even within the frame of these political boundaries, scholars have explored their porosity. Bernard Bailyn in *The Ideological Origins of the*
vendors about the goings on of the neighborhood and city and bring “the morning news to the family sitting around the breakfast-table.” By exchanging information about their shared community, the housekeeper, in some capacity, acknowledged the food vendor as a fellow New Orleanian, as someone who was a part of her community. Those seemingly mundane interactions worked to undermine efforts to suppress blacks’ claims of belonging.

There were also vendors who seemed invisible, unable to establish strong business relations with customers, yet were still apart of the community fabric. These vendors were depicted as wandering around listlessly, without purpose. The local newspaper, for example, describes one such vendor, a mustard vendor, as slowly trudging through the streets. The newspaper goes on to say that “[e]very one seems to know him, and as he walks his rounds many an honest housekeeper and bright-eyed dame nod familiarly to him if they do not buy his wares.”

Unlike the typically vocal

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street vendor, “[h]e rarely speaks.” He is an anomaly in a vibrant, aggressive, and loud food vending scene. “He is one of those strange beings,” the paper states, “that may be found in every crowded city, whom everybody sees and nobody knows anything about.” Although community members acknowledged his presence, tipping their heads or waving, his relationships to them were weak because he engaged people neither in economic transactions or verbal interactions, which were pathways of belonging.

Another means through which vendors established long-term relationships with customers was by setting up temporary stands in familiar locations, enabling customers to come to them. They built a space for themselves in the local community, not by renting or purchasing a storefront, but by building a mobile one that could have a similarly recognizable and consistent a presence. These vendors mimicked a means of belonging perpetuated by property-owning New Orleanians, but through public rather than private, outdoor rather than indoor spaces. Some of the more recognized vendors sold pralines. “Toto,” who was introduced earlier, set herself up in Jackson Square—right in the heart of the city. In this prime location, she had access to a large number of...
residents and visitors. She could capitalize on the flow of people that passed through the city center without having to pay high rents or a high mortgage.

There are countless examples of vendors defining belonging in new ways, not through owning property, but by occupying public spaces. Some vendors would carry entire dining rooms to prime locations, setting up itinerant eateries in places that they otherwise could not afford, thus skirting around the laws that prevented enslaved people and the working poor from securing property. Anne Newport Royall, for example, noted the ability of black women to carry mobile dining rooms on their heads.44 One such woman carried a complete dining room set and prepared meal in this manner. This vendor took a table that sat four people, turned it upside down, and placed a full meal in the table’s frame. Royal describes the contents and accouterment of that breakfast as follows: “coffee-pot, steak, (bread, butter and cream she gets at the market-house,) plates, knives, and forks, cups and saucers.”45 In order to get the table on her head, the vendor had someone assist in hoisting it into place. Dodging people and carts, she made her way to the French Market, all the while maintaining her balance. Once there, she unloaded the meal and set the table. Then, she entreated pedestrians to

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dine at her roadside café. After serving her meal, she packed up her things, placed the table back on her head, and returned home.46

Others would set up entire kitchens, carry furnaces, utensils, and other necessary accouterment to the central market or levee where there was an abundance of customers.47 Even without full access to property, these vendors could build strong reputations for themselves and their products. Coffee vendors, for example, set up furnaces in key commercial spaces, preparing aromatic beverages, and crying out “Café noir!” and “Café au lait!”48 They easily won over the loyalties of New Orleanian coffee enthusiasts, which was unsurprising considering the city’s longstanding love affair with the caffeinated beverage.49 One such vendor, Zabette, kept a stand in front of St. Louis Cathedral.50 Other African-American women set up stands on Canal Street, another

46 Royall compared the physical labor of black women vendors to that of an itinerant male gristmill peddler. In Royall’s estimation, the women possessed more strength than the gristmill peddler. Anne Newport Royall, *Mrs. Royall’s Southern Tour*, vol. III, (Washington: 1831), 69.
48 *Gumbo Ya-Ya: Folk Tales of Louisiana*, eds. Edward Dreyer, Lyle Saxon, and Robert Tallant (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1945), 43. See also the observations that George Augustus Sala made of New Orleans’ coffee: “The coffee made in New Orleans is the most aromatic and most grateful to the palate that I have ever tasted; and I am told that is comes from the tierra caliente about Cordova in Mexico. Still there is a large variety of other coffees—Java Puerto Rico, Rio, Jamaica, and Hayti [sic] among the number—from which to choose…” This observation was originally published in *America Revisited: From the Bay of New York to the Gulf of Mexico, and from Lake Michigan to the Pacific* (London: Vizetelly, 1882). George Augustus Sala, “The French Quarter,” in *Louisiana Sojourns: Travelers’ Tales and Literary Journeys*, eds. John James Audubon, F.A. De Caro, and R. A. Jordan (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998), 88.
major commercial corridor. Others, including Manette and Rose Gla—the latter made famous by Catherine Cole’s *The Story of the French Market*—were able to secure coveted places within the French Market itself. Gla, known as “Old Rose” had such a presence at the French Market that Cole described her memory as one “embalmed in the amber of many a song and picture.” She was emblematic of the French Market—a figure that belonged there and defined visitors’ experiences through her business. Gla’s process, her art form, was such that Cole took the time to describe it in great detail, enabling the reader to appreciate Gla’s masterful skill:

It was something to see the black ‘Old Rose’ pile the golden powder of ground *French Market* coffee into her French strainer—a heaping tablespoonful for each cup—and then when the pot was well heated, pour in just two tablespoonfuls, no

51 The position of these women at key places of commerce is also reflective of their connectivity to oceanic and inland trade networks. Coffee imports came from Latin America, and were then shipped through the port of New Orleans. Once in the city, roasters processed the beans and shipped them to other parts of the United States. Yet that vast trade network was also married to a very intimate one in New Orleans itself—one in which African-American women controlled the distribution of fresh brewed coffee to urban residents.

52 Although less common today, children were regular customers of vendors like Manette at the French Market. According to *Gumbo Ya-Ya*, children would save up a few cents to purchase a sip of coffee before heading home with groceries in hand. *Gumbo Ya-Ya: Folk Tales of Louisiana*, eds. Edward Dreyer, Lyle Saxon, and Robert Tallant (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1945), 44.


54 Coffee vendors, like Rose Gla, not only captured the attention of Catherine Cole, but also a number of writers throughout the nineteenth century. Reflecting on a trip to New Orleans in 1848, for example, Walt Whitman wrote that “[o]ne of my choice amusements during my stay in New Orleans was going down to the old French Market.” He noted the key role of Native American and African-American vendors in the market and how he purchased food and drink from them: “I remember I nearly always on these occasions got a large cup of delicious coffee with a biscuit, for my breakfast, from the immense shining copper kettle of a great Creole mulatto woman.” Whitman directly associates his experiences of drinking coffee in the market with an African-American woman vendor, gesturing to the key presence of these vendors in New Orleans’ local market scene. Walt Whitman and Grace George, *Complete Prose Works: Specimen Days and Collect, November Boughs and Good Bye My Fancy* (Boston: Small, Maynard & Co, 1901), 440.
more, of boiling water. In ten minutes this had soaked the coffee, and then, half a cup at a time, the boiling water was poured on and allowed to drip slowly.\textsuperscript{55}

The result? “[C]offee, black, clear and sparkling—ideal \textit{French Market} coffee!”\textsuperscript{56} Gla’s persistence to hone her craft enabled her, according to Cole, to manumit herself, indicating that on the rare occasion women of color could find meaning in their everyday labor to not only build their businesses, but to earn their freedom one cup of coffee at a time. That freedom gave black entrepreneurs like Gla access to property and belonging in the traditional sense, albeit limited access because of her status as a woman and as African American.\textsuperscript{57}

Coffee vendors like Gla and her contemporaries were some of the first businesses open in the city each morning. Although coffee vendors tended to station themselves in one place after setting up their furnaces and display areas, most early-morning vendors operated in near constant motion. Among the first people walking through New Orleans every morning, these vendors set the pace for how people moved through the city streets. Of all of the people walking to and fro, it was the street vendors who caught the attention of visitors. According to one observer, they led the parade of diverse people who occupied the urban center.\textsuperscript{58} The thumping of shoes on dirt and paved roads

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\textsuperscript{57} Coffee vendors were not the only vendors to manumit themselves. Those selling calas and pralines, for example, were also known to have purchased their own freedom through the sale of sweet treats.
\textsuperscript{58} The calas vendors led, “while the little short-coat, wooden nutmeg fellows are close at their heels, in a run, the New Yorker, in a sleek coat, striding with his long legs; the white ladies, with a bandbox of ribbons on
created a communal rhythm reflective of the interconnectivity of their urban experiences. Vendors’ process of knowing the city by moving through it, engaging people and making sales, was integral to building a sense of community.

Location, and the ability to navigate the city’s terrain, was key to creating a space to foster belonging through economic transactions, but there was also an entire set of business skills and tactics that vendors employed to establish their businesses—businesses that afforded them a place in New Orleans’ economic and cultural community. These skills ranged from product display to vocal advertisements. In order to make the most of her prime position at the foot of the cathedral steps, for example, the praline vendor, Toto, carefully presented her wares to the public. Her set-up was simple, yet effective. She sold her pralines from as basket set up on a table. She offered several kinds of pralines: pink and white pralines as well as “savory ones made of ‘syrop,’ with ‘pecans.’”\(^{59}\) She stacked the treats carefully, and drew attention to her wares by calling out to passersby: “Oh! ma belle demoiselle, you go’ne buy some pralines for sure; dey so pretty for de pretty lady.”\(^{60}\) When asked how long she had worked in Jackson Square, she exclaimed, “‘Mon Dieu,’” and elaborated, “‘so long, she most done forgot.


But ‘Toto’ not always bin like dat.”61 She went on to explain that she had started off as a field hand, spending her youth toiling in plantation fields. Eventually, she became a handmaiden, and later in life made a living by selling pralines in addition to cooking and cleaning. Selling pralines, therefore, was a profession she held after her body was no longer able to perform the physically demanding tasks of the plantation field. It was common for slave owners to employ elderly slaves as street food vendors.62 Her longstanding presence in Jackson Square made her a feature of the cityscape, so much so that out-of-state newspapers published articles about her. From both insiders’ and outsiders’ perspectives, she belonged in the city.

Like Toto, other vendors carefully staged their wares to catch the attention of passersby, employing the aesthetics of display to their advantage. One praline vendor arranged her “round pink and white cakes” and her “dainty molasses praline sprinkled with juicy pecans” in tiny molds of white cut paper.63 Another vendor used an arrangement of colors in her presentation to create a focal point on her pecan pralines.64 She surrounded the tray of sweets with red, green, and yellow peppers, drawing the eye of passersby with the kaleidoscopic produce. An observer commented that she was an

62 Gumbo Ya-Ya Folk Tales of Louisiana acknowledges this trend in antebellum New Orleans noting that “those slaves too old to be of other use were often put out into the city streets to peddle the surplus products of the plantations.” Gumbo Ya-Ya: Folk Tales of Louisiana, eds. Edward Dreyer, Lyle Saxon, and Robert Tallant (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1945), 30.
63 “Are Pralines Losing Ground?,” Times-Picayune, November 13, 1893.
64 “A Relic of the Past,” Boston Daily Advertiser, August 29, 1887. This article was based off of one originally published in the New Orleans Times-Democrat.
artist and that “[t]he true artistic instinct dominated everything about her, even to the dark tray half resting on her knees.” Once at her station, located on the uptown side of Canal Street, customers could look more closely at the other wares that she offered, which included crystalized coconut cakes and sugared shredded fruit, which she tinted a mouthwatering pink. It was not only the products themselves that praline vendors used to attract attention. Just as she crafted her sweet treats, she also crafted her costume, which was “the brightest patch of color” on the city street. She was considered “an integral part of the landscape, landing a vivid interest to the otherwise monotonous scene.” Her costume, of great interest to the observer, was elaborate. In addition to her antebellum-style dress, she wore several kinds of ornamentation including a silver ring and large gold hoop earrings, which the observer described as “mere details of the genuinely artistic costume.” According to this observer, the “chiefest [sic] crown and beauty [of her costume] is the striking turban tied over the woman’s fine wrinkled brows.” The bandana was not merely a means of personal expression, but was also an effective business tactic—it drew attention of potential customers. It was the “brightest” spot on the street.

Visual display was but one means through which vendors enticed customers to purchase their wares, thus building their businesses and solidifying connections within

65 “A Relic of the Past,” Boston Daily Advertiser, August 29, 1887.
66 “A Relic of the Past,” Boston Daily Advertiser, August 29, 1887.
67 “A Relic of the Past,” Boston Daily Advertiser, August 29, 1887.
68 “A Relic of the Past,” Boston Daily Advertiser, August 29, 1887.
the economic and cultural community of New Orleans. Vocal advertising, too, played a key role. With so many people, residents and tourists alike, moving through the city, food vendors had to develop certain strategies to distinguish their movement from that of the masses. Otherwise, they would not attract customers to make sales. Wasting not a sliver of daylight, vendors began to hawk their wares just as the faintest hint of dawn colored the sky blackberry instead of pitch black. Their cries were a natural alarm clock for the city, rousing even the soundest sleepers. As Mark Smith suggests in Sensing the Past, street cries were part of an intricate sonic landscape that “served to coordinate civic, political, economic, and social life.” They were as constant and influential as other urban sounds such as the ringing of church bells to call people to worship. By the time sunlight skimmed over the placid waters of the Mississippi, their cries, especially the ones of vendors clustered around the central market, grew to a dull roar. As observed in Gumbo Ya-Ya: Folk Tales of Louisiana, the sounds of street cries were so loud that the city streets seemed to have “reverberated” with them.

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69 Mark Smith, Sensing the Past: Seeing, Hearing, Smelling, Tasting, and Touching in History (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2007), 44. See also Aimée Boutin’s study of the soundscape of Paris and the integral role that street vendors played in organizing life in a major European city, and one of particular import to this dissertation. Aimée Boutin, City of Noise: Sound and Nineteenth-Century Paris (Chicago: The University of Illinois Press, 2015).

70 In How Early America Sounded, Richard Cullen Rath argues that in colonial New England, the ringing of church bells was far more than an act of signaling a call to prayer or calling a town meeting. For Puritans, in particular, who were not able to ring bells in England, the act of doing so in the New World was “an act of sonic identity” and an expression of religious liberty. Richard Cullen Rath, How Early America Sounded (New York: Cornell University Press, 2003), 66.

We can think of the dull roar of street cries as a sonic means of making a claim of belonging. The street cry was not just a vocal advertisement; it was, within the parameters of local law, a permissible vocalization of the enduring pain of slavery and slave society. We can think of it as a means of reminding elites that blacks were ever-present in the city. That their voices may have been muffled in the legal system, but were not similarly silenced in the local food economy and culture.

Black vendors, and the working poor generally, secured their position in that economy through these street cries, tailoring them to be useful tools for their businesses. Some vendors bellowed, others yelled, and many sang out about their products. Gumbo Ya-Ya Folk Tales of Louisiana, for example, describes coffee vendors’ cries as “melodious.” Those vendors who catered to children were regularly described as

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72 Noisy street vendors were not unique to New Orleans. In any major city where itinerant vendors worked, there were complaints of their street cries that would rival the ones made in New Orleans. These were the cries of the disenfranchised, the working poor, who made their presence known through crowding the soundscape of cities. In June of 1849, for example, a report in the Times-Picayune describes the raucous soundscape of Paris during election campaigning: “Those persons who in our country complain of the noise made by news-boys while selling their papers, should have been here in Paris last week, or rather the week before. Along the Boulevards in front of the different passages, and facing the more frequented restaurants, the cries of those who were hawking election journals were stunning—absolutely deafening—and one was fairly obliged to run to get clear of the terrible din. Even the clatter of the huge omnibuses, and the thousands and thousands of other vehicles, was drowned by the loud shouts of the itinerant vendors [sic] of electioneering literature, each man, woman and child straining throat and lungs to out-shout their neighbors.” “European Correspondence,” Times-Picayune, June 17, 1849.

73 The discipline of performance studies illuminates the importance of repeated, intentional actions in the making of community cultures—patterns that are reflected in the street vendor cries that were arguably “performed” in New Orleans. As Deborah A. Kapchan notes, “performance genres play an essential (and often essentializing) role in the mediation and creation of social communities, whether organized around bonds of nationalism, ethnicity, class status, or gender.” Deborah A. Kapchan, “Performance,” in The Journal of American Folklore, 108 (1995), 479-508.

having pleasant voices, or, at least ones that appealed to their young customers. The *Times-Picayune*, for example, described praline vendors as having “soft, crooning voices the little New Orleans children love to hear.” There were practical reasons that vendors may have chosen to sing rather than yell or call out about their products. In fact, singing might have been the most practical choice in that it can prevent the voice from tiring out quickly. Singing, when performed with the intent of projecting one’s voice, engages the diaphragm, using muscles to support the careful flow of breath through the vocal chords and out of the mouth. Engaging the diaphragm places less strain on the vocal chords, thus prolonging one’s ability to keep singing and to keep selling wares. The longer one can sing, the more money one can potentially make. So, singing made good business sense. Vendors may not have necessarily made a conscious decision to preserve their voices in this way, but through example, by observing other vendors, singing became a popular means of communicating. Singing was also advantageous to those working in a particularly crowded soundscape, especially those who could sing in a higher register. Falsetto voices, or male voices sung in a higher range, as well as women’s voices, which are typically higher than men’s, would have carried over the general din of the crowd—

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75 In *Real Men Don’t Sing: Crooning in American Culture*, Allison McCracken explores the ways in which variations in voice and timbres carry specific connotations of masculinity in the first half of the twentieth century. Her research illuminates the powerful ways in which vocalizing impact listeners’ perceptions of the person vocalizing. Although she focuses on professional singers, those same principles can be applied to the skillful vocalizing of New Orleans’ street food vendors. Allison McCracken, *Real Men Don’t Sing: Crooning in American Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

76 “Are Pralines Losing Ground?,” *Times-Picayune*, November 13, 1893.
a sweeping melody that may have been more easily heard than those of their competitors.

Although the street vendor cry was a prominent feature of food vendors’ advertising strategies, not all vendors employed them. The *Times-Picayune*, for example, notes that a vendor known as the Candy Man, who sold “caraway comfits” and other sweets to children, caught the attention of his clientele by “incessantly play[ing] upon a triangle, and every afternoon his tink-tink-a-tink, tink-tink-a-tink may be heard in the streets.” The paper described him as possessing a “musical turn of mind” like the other street vendors. The same article noted that like “all the other street-dealers,” the Candy Man “understands but little English.” We can think of the musical street cry or street melody, whether it be sung or played, as a kind of universal language, understood by vendor and customer regardless of their ability to communicate through speech. The song, when paired with a compelling display, could communicate enough to facilitate an economic transaction. This phenomenon was particularly advantageous to new migrants who may not have been able to communicate effectively in French or English, the predominant languages in antebellum New Orleans.

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78 Another noteworthy vendor of cakes included the Gaufre Man or Shaving Cake Man who sold pastries that looked like timber shavings out of a metal tin. Similar to the Candy Man, this man played the triangle to make his presence known. *Gumbo Ya-Ya: Folk Tales of Louisiana*, eds. Edward Dreyer, Lyle Saxon, and Robert Tallant (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1945), 35.
Black vendors commonly cried out in Creole patois of French, knowing that many city residents could understand them. Speaking the language of their customers reinforced cultural continuity between vendor and customer, building a sense of community. Stationed with mobile furnaces in the streets or with baskets of piping hot fritters perched on their heads, calas vendors would cry out:

*Belles calas,*
*Madame, mo gaignin calas,*
*Madame, mo gaignin calas,*
*Madame, mo gaignin calas;*
*Mo guaranti vous ye bons*
*Beelles calas….Beelles calas.*

Or in English:

Beautiful rice fritters,
Madame, I have rice fritters,
Madame, I have rice fritters,
Madame, I have rice fritters;
I guarantee you they are good
Fine rice fritters…Fine rice fritters.

Another common feature of the calas cry was to exclaim that they were “*tout chauds*” or “very hot!” Even visitors of the city, those not necessarily fluent in French or Creole patois, understood what was for sale. When Anne Newport Royall traveled in New Orleans, for example, she made observations of the calas vendors, attempting to transcribe their cries. She phonetically recorded what we know as “*Tout chauds calas,*”
as “Toshow culler!” Her transcription was not technically accurate; yet she was able to uncover the general meaning, inferring that the vendors were selling “nice hot cakes.”

Although an effective communication tool, the street cry worked in tandem with product display and reputation to attract and communicate to customers.

Street vendor cries were not always effective communication tools. Some vendors cried out in a way that made their cries difficult to understand to some observers, as was the case with the “Green Sass” men who sold vegetables and cream cheeses. As described in the local newspaper, their cry, “as near as it can possibly be translated, is ‘E-a-r-s yerfineniccartatics, artichokes, cantelopes feegs and arwicerkereama-cheeses! Ear! ear! [sic].’ These cries, though, did not prevent them from making a profit.

Lafcadio Hearn, too, commented on some of the incomprehensible cries in the late nineteenth century, humorously noting that vendors supposedly selling “Fresh figs” sounded like they were selling “Ice Crags.” The point, however, is that Hearn still understood what wares they were offering, indicating, once again, that sound and sight worked together to inform customers of what goods were available for sale.

In order to expand the reach of their product and communicate in innovate ways, some vendors worked in pairs, braiding their street cries together in a duet:

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80 Anne Newport Royall, Mrs. Royall’s Southern Tour, vol. III, (Washington: 1831), 70.
81 Anne Newport Royall, Mrs. Royall’s Southern Tour, vol. III, (Washington: 1831), 70.
82 “Street Hawkers,” Times-Picayune, June 26, 1846.
1st: Calas, Calas,—all nice and hot
Calas, Calas,—all nice and hot
2nd: Lady, me I have calas! Laaa-dy, me I have calas!
All nice ‘n hot—all nice ‘n hot—all nice ‘n hot...

Working in pairs enabled vendors to cover more ground. In the case of calas vendors, one could stand at the furnace preparing the rice fritters, while the other took the piping hot products out in the streets to catch people who might not pass directly in front of the stand. Other vendors, too, worked in pairs including young black vendors, who, according to Gumbo Ya-Ya Folk Tales of Louisiana, each took one side of the street, carrying their wares and crying out at the same time or alternating: “I got mustard greens ‘n Creole cabbage! Come on, Lady. Look what I got!” Others cried out “Irish po-ta-tahs! Dime a bucket! Lady, you oughta see my nice Irish po-ta-tahs!” Working the streets in pairs was a means of extending the reach of one’s business, potentially making it more profitable—a necessary step when competition was so high among vendors.

All necessary information to complete a sale, from the price of goods to the way to carry them home, could effectively be braided into the street cry because of its

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85 During my culinary apprenticeship at the Hermann-Grima House in New Orleans, I worked in a nineteenth century open-hearth kitchen. I cooked calas over a furnace in that kitchen. After I fried the fritters, they held their heat for at least 15 minutes. Vendors who prepared the fritters and then carried them in baskets throughout the city streets, therefore, would have likely had at least 15 minutes to sell them before their cries of “piping hot rice fritters” were no long true. They likely stayed within a few blocks of the furnace where the fritters had been prepared.
malleable form. Vendors regularly incorporated their prices into their street cries. They did so because it was an effective way to communicate on bustling streets and to reach the broadest customer base possible. Their selling, bartering, and buying traditions were conducted aurally, so street cries were the most efficient means through which to initiate a transaction. Vendors, for example, would incorporate into their cries phrases like, “I got blackberries, Lady!/ Three glass fo’ a dime” or “Strawberries, Lady! Fifteen cents a basket!” Working in such close proximity, vendors could get into price competitions with one another, seeking to provide the lowest price in order to gain a larger number of customers. They used their street cries to accommodate price fluctuations in order to stay competitive. *Gumbo Ya-Ya Folk Tales of Louisiana* reports a twentieth-century incident: one vendor who was selling mandarins from a truck cried “Mandareeeens—nickel a dozen!” whereas, down the street, another vendor selling from a wagon, called out, “Madareens—twenty-five fo’ a dime!” Competition was fierce among vendors, and the ability to adapt quickly was key to building a stronger customer base.

Street vendors, whether working in pairs or individually, used all manner of literary techniques to capture the attention of passersby: wit, humor, and irony, among them. These literary techniques worked to create a captivating street cry, one that brought new customers to vendors. One can read the lyrics of a street cry as one might

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read a poem. In doing so, we can think of the street cry as vernacular poetry, as something that was carefully crafted with specific intentions in mind to grow a vendor’s business and thus secure their place in the city’s local food culture and economy.

Poetry is about play in language, and street vendors’ cries embrace that artful manipulation. Humor is one of the more common ways in which street vendors played with the language in their calls. It was a means to catch the attention of passersby, to encourage them to think about the jingle and perhaps grab their attention long enough to entice their interest in the actual wares for sale. As noted in Gumbo Ya-Ya Folk Tales of Louisiana, one vendor “with curious humor” cried out “I got artichokes by the neck!” Observers like Saxon regularly included these humorous cries in their writings about the city, suggesting that humor was a fairly common business tactic among vendors. The use of humor not only tells us about the marketing techniques employed by vendors, but also the expectations of their customers. Shoppers likely expected to hear humorous vocal advertisements, responded to them positively, and thus reinforced their popularity as a marketing strategy. Humor, like wit, was a way in which to build human connection to potential customers.

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90 A special thanks to J. Peter Moore and the poets and critics who attended “In Others’ Words” — a Lute & Drum event held on May 3, 2016. During that conversation, David Need made the excellent observation that poetry is really about play and the manipulation of language.

Humor has another purpose in that it can make light of the difficult living situations of street food vendors, some of who actually lived in the streets.\textsuperscript{92} Their displacement sheds light on the fact that although these vendors integrated into the communities of New Orleans through their roles as food vendors, they regularly faced structural inequalities that led to finical hardship and displacement. One such vendor, simply known as the “Waffle Man,” was a favorite among young children, who “eagerly thrust their nickels forward to purchase one of his delicious hot waffles sprinkled liberally with brown sugar.”\textsuperscript{93} His cry was one that was self-reflective of his living conditions, making a note that he had to bathe in the streets. Yet he took his difficulties and made them part of his marketing strategy through humor and rhyme:

\begin{verbatim}
The Waffle Man is a fine old man.
He washes his face in a frying-pan,
He makes his waffles with his hand,
Everybody loves the Waffle man.\textsuperscript{94}
\end{verbatim}

His humor seems geared towards children who may have found this lighthearted presentation of discomfort funny—a Three Stooges kind of humor, if you will. This vendor, therefore, occupied an in-between space, simultaneously accepted

\textsuperscript{92} The working poor, in many kinds of professions, regularly labored and lived outdoors in streets, yards, fields, etc. They made due with what resources were available. For an excellent study of the integral role of disenfranchised communities in local economic spheres and how they demonstrated adaptability when resources were scarce, see: Ellen Hartigan-O’Connor, \textit{The Ties That Buy: Women and Commerce in Revolutionary America} (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).  


within the community, but not to an extent that afforded him financial stability or material comfort.

Another common means of engaging potential customers was to address them directly in a street cry. The street cry therefore, had the potential to elicit a conversation between two community members, vendor and customer—a conversation that could lead to an exchange of neighborhood gossip or other information. In order to kick-start these conversations, vendors called attention to customers’ presence and seamlessly incorporated them into the existing rhythm, rhyme, and repetition of their call. In the example below, an African-American vendor candidly and playfully engages potential customers:

Watermelon! Watermelon! Red to the rind,
If you don’t believe me jest pull down your blind!

I sell to the rich, I sell to the po’;
I’m gonna sell the lady
Standin’ in that do’.

Watermelon, Lady!
Come and git your nice red watermelon, Lady!
Red to the rind, Lady!
Come on, Lady, and get ‘em!
Gotta make the picnic fo’ two o’clock,

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95 I experienced this kind of business strategy when shopping in the vegetable hall of Cleveland’s West Side Market in 2014. I was wearing a Yale University sweatshirt that morning. As I listened to vendors calling out about their wares, I heard one advertising blackberries: “Blackberries! Blackberries! Two cartons for six dollars!” When he spotted me, he modified his street cry: “Yalies love blackberries too! Two cartons for six dollars! C’mon Yalie! Buy some beautiful blackberries!” The parallel between the strategies of twentieth-century Cleveland and nineteenth-century New Orleans was uncanny, demonstrating the continuities that exist in street food culture across temporal and geographic planes.
No flat tires today!
Come on, Lady!96

Specifically, the vendor directed his call at a female customer, alluding to the fact that most purchasers of food were women. One sees this direct engagement with women in many cries: “Com and gettum, Lady! I got green peppers, snapbeans, and tur-nips!”97
And, “I got blackber—reeeess, Lady!” or “I got strawberries, Lady!”98

This vendor not only addressed potential customer directly, encouraging them to engage in a two-way conversation; he also described the quality of his produce, simultaneously promoting his product. The watermelon was not just watermelon, it was a fruit that was “Red to the rind”—a guarantee of quality.99 To further impress upon the potential buyer the excellence of his produce, the vendor would have sliced open a melon for display so that customers could visually inspect and smell the product, using their senses to make an informed decision. The wares were displayed in such a manner so as to allow for this kind of exchange that would ease the skepticism of prospective buyers. The cry also created desire for the watermelon. Mouth watering with

anticipation, the listener would have had a greater need for the ripe, bright, sweet flavor of the watermelon after having heard the song. All of these descriptive tactics influenced potential customers, drawing some to the vendors’ business, and strengthening their economic and culture presence in the community.

The sonic waves of the successful street cry not only had to travel down streets, but also had to pass through walls, literally penetrating the barriers that stood between the public and private spheres, between the outdoors and indoors. The ability of vendors’ cries to pass through seemingly solid barriers is indicative of the fact that the barriers between the public and private spheres were porous, allowing for economic exchange to occur in both spaces. The activities of the street seeped into the inner sanctuary of the hidden courtyard, and the domestic activities of the home spilled out into the streets.

Housekeepers made up an important part of food vendors’ customer base and their community network. When vendors passed through the streets, these housekeepers were often working inside of the home or in gardens or detached kitchen, in a separate sonic arena from the streets. Those spaces were in the large, open courtyards tucked behind clusters of residential buildings in the French Quarter. The inner courtyards were community spaces where balconies and terraces were nearly touching—the distinctions between different households blurred among the collective
activities that took place within shared courtyards every day.\textsuperscript{100} As described by Grace King, the French Quarter neighborhood was intimately connected, “close, contiguous, continuous.”\textsuperscript{101} These interior spaces were distinct from the streets, a refuge to which only a select group had access.

The robust street cry acted as a summons for the housekeeper to engage with the vendor in a commercial exchange, and to name them as a member of the community by partaking in a public commercial transaction. As described earlier, “[t]he Negro vendor cups his hands before his mouth and bellows: Watermelon! Watermelon! Red to the rind, If you don’t believe me jest pull down your blind!”\textsuperscript{102} The vendor’s summons was both sonic and textual, grabbing attention through its loudness, but clarifying its purpose by encouraging the listener to take action, to peer out their window, and engage the vendor as a part of the community. These seemingly benign summonses were the lifeblood of enslaved vendors’ businesses, building community through the sale and distribution of fresh foods.

Although enslaved vendors operating their businesses outside of the plantation or urban home had ways to embed themselves within the local community and grant themselves a certain amount of freedom from direct oversight, they were still tethered to slave owners through licensing laws. Local law, therefore, bound them in a position of

\textsuperscript{100} Grace King, \textit{New Orleans: The Place and People} (New York: MacMillan & Co., 1895), 264.
dependence, legally denying them the flexibility and freedom necessary to fully develop their businesses, build relationships, and solidify connections to their communities.

Local law required that hawkers and peddlers obtain a license to sell wares. Slave owners purchased these licenses for the slaves they tasked with selling surplus produce and artisan goods. The purpose of the license was manifold. Their sale provided the city with necessary funds to maintain public amenities and retain a workforce to monitor the sale and distribution of food. Licenses also enabled the local government to police food vendors. City officials could keep watch and regulate retail transactions so that distributors did not sell their produce at exorbitant prices or through illegal channels (e.g., the black market).

The implications of licenses for blacks’ mobility were significant, rendering them beholden to the economic support of slave owners who could more easily afford to purchase the licenses. In the antebellum period, the rate for licenses changed over time. In the 1830s and 1840s, the annual tax to vend wares was approximately forty dollars per year or ten dollars per quarter. Many enslaved people and working poor could not

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103 According to an ordinance pertaining to hawking and peddling: “No person shall hawk or peddle, or expose for sale, in public places, in any manner whatsoever, within the limits of the city of New-Orleans, any produce, eatables, merchandise, or articles of trade generally, without having first obtained a license to that effect from the Mayor of the city.” Donatien Augustin, A General Digest of the Ordinances and Resolutions of the Corporation of New-Orleans (New Orleans: J. Bayon, 1831), 155. Note: according to the digest, the ordinance was approved on February 18, 1831. See pages 158-159.

104 Hawkers and peddlers were required to pay a tax of forty dollars annually, and in addition to that tax, pay one dollar to purchase a license. The dollar went to the collector of duties on hawkers and peddlers once a quarter. Donatien Augustin, A General Digest of the Ordinances and Resolutions of the Corporation of New-Orleans (New Orleans: J. Bayon, 1831), 155; A Digest of the Ordinances, Resolutions, by-laws and Regulations of
readily purchase these licenses. Elite whites, however, could afford them, and in some cases made significant profits.\textsuperscript{105}

There was some flexibility within local laws to distribute free licenses to certain people upon submitting a petition to the City Council. In January 1832, for example, a resolution made an exception for 36 vendors, stating that each of the listed persons “are and remain granted” $30.00 “for the purpose of helping them pay peddlers’ licenses.\textsuperscript{106} Of the 36, 16 appear to be women and some of them were likely enslaved or free people of color. The city council approved several other resolutions in that year, extending or renewing the duration of free licenses for some vendors.\textsuperscript{107} Vendors with those licenses were at the mercy of the local government, waiting to be notified if their licenses would

\textit{the Corporation of New Orleans: and a Collection of the Laws of the Legislature Relative to Said City} (New Orleans: Gaston Brusle, 1836), xix-xxi, 97, 137.\textsuperscript{105} According to \textit{Gumbo Ya-Ya}, some slave owners “added thousands of dollars per year to their incomes” by employing their slaves as itinerant vendors. One such slave owner, Étienne De Boré, “‘produced at least six thousand dollars per annum’ in this fashion, according to one authority.” \textit{Gumbo Ya-Ya: Folk Tales of Louisiana}, eds. Edward Dreyer, Lyle Saxon, and Robert Tallant (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1945), 30.\textsuperscript{106} The listed recipients of the indemnity are: Pertonille H. Jean, Pauline Frouby, f. d. c. l., T. B. Debuc, Catherine Godof, Victoire Champiaux, [?] Belmont, Antoinette Gilbert, Mrs. Ambroise, Sanibe Reynold, Paul Gaulet, Maria Acori, Marie Jacques Vassale, Rosalie [?], Emilie Belisse, Thiat, Joseph Avril, Jeanne Duharlay, F. L. Petard, Widow Coeur de Roi, Francisco Diaz, Placide Bueno, T. Damery, Sabino Jiminez, Desire’ Carcassone, Philips Cale, Bonito Ferres, Simon Petavin, Medie’ Daviau, Paignon Guichard, Pierre Pinet, Manual Creci, Moses Plumer, Pigeon, Daniel Clements, and a person whose name is illegible. “Session of Wednesday, January 18, 1832,” Collection AB311: Ordinances and resolutions (translations), 1805-1832, New Orleans (La.) Conseil de Ville, City Archives, New Orleans Public Library, New Orleans, LA. Note: Further research can be conducted with the city directories to better identify the demographics of the listed individuals and their particular sub-specialty in peddling.\textsuperscript{107} “Session of Saturday, February 25, 1832” and “Session of April 18, 1832,” Collection AB311: Ordinances and resolutions (translations), 1805-1832, New Orleans (La.) Conseil de Ville, City Archives, New Orleans Public Library, New Orleans, LA.
be renewed and their ability to continue their businesses a possibility. Their businesses, therefore, occupied an interstitial space, not quite on stable footing because their licenses could easily be revoked or defunded.

The implications of licenses, whether they were paid by the city government or paid by the vendor or slave owner, were such that the businesses that black people created in the streets were fragile. Black entrepreneurs were constantly susceptible to the threat of municipal regulation—a regulation informed by the ideology of slavery and a desire to control the activities of black people and the working poor. The ability to hawk on the street corner or to vend under the covered market, therefore, would never fully operate outside of the regime of slavery, regardless of whether or not there was direct governance over daily business transactions by slave owners. City employees including any city guard, for example, could approach a hawker or peddler, demand to see their license, and if one was not present, discard all of their goods and fine them between five and 100 dollars.  

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108 According to the ordinance, “The collector, the commissaries of police, and officers and members of the city guard shall have the right to demand from all stall-keepers, peddlars [sic] and hawkers, the exhibition of the license by virtue of which they sell, and in default of the exhibition of said license, are authorised [sic] to seize and detain the merchandize of such stall-keeper, hawker or pedlar [sic], so refusing to show his license, and carry the same to a place of deposit, to be selected by the Mayor. The person so refusing to show his license, shall be fined, and his goods shall not be delivered to him until payment of the costs and all expenses of seizing and depositing the same.” Donatien Augustin, A General Digest of the Ordinances and Resolutions of the Corporation of New-Orleans (New Orleans: J. Bayon, 1831), 155-159. 

The local newspapers occasionally reported on license infractions, as was the case on November 6, 1845 when Commissary Prados, of the First Municipality, seized the wares of a peddler who was selling without a permit. That vendor’s wares included: dry goods, beads, and umbrellas, among other things. In December of 1846, policed seized two peddlers’ goods because they were selling without a license in the Second
Even with these regulatory systems in place, the city government was not able to consistently regulate vendors or prevent the illegal sale of goods. One solution that the city posed was to adopt a badge system that would require vendors to wear their licenses, in the form of medal badges. The proposed badge system indicates that vendors who chose to illegally sell their wares were agile enough to evade detection. The need for badges also indicates that authorities desired transparency in the local food economy: they wanted to see if a vendor was selling legally or illegally. However, the municipal government was not able to successfully implement the system. Instead of badges, the city continued to implement the comparatively unsophisticated paper licensing system.

Municipality. Such arrests and seizures of goods were made public in order to elicit fear and prevent others from breaking the law. In a more comical story that shows how vendors could escape arrest or incurring a fine, the local newspaper reported on a peddler who had been arrested for purveying without a license. He arrived at the police station, sold all of his goods while there, and was discharged because he was no longer a peddler. His wares, which were minimal, included “Indian moccasins, purses, &c.,” which he allegedly sold very cheaply. The verity of this story is perhaps questionable, but what it demonstrates is that regulation of vendors was fairly lax and attempts to regulate were, at times, humorously so. “Selling Without License,” Times-Picayune, November 6, 1845, pg. 2; “City Intelligence,” Times-Picayune, December 29, 1846, pg. 2; “A Lucky Peddler,” Times-Picayune, October 14, 1849, pg. 2.


It appears that Charleston was the only city to implement the metal badge system—the oldest badge dating to 1800. These badges came in different shapes and sizes and were composed of different metals. Sometimes the shape of the badge correlated to the skillset or role of the wearer: fisher, huckster, fruiter, and blacksmith, among others. The fact remains, though, that many economic transactions were performed illegally, between unlicensed food vendors and customers, suggesting that the need to feed that city outweighed the need to abide local law. Harlan Greene and Harry Hutchins, Slave Badges and the Slave-Hire System in Charleston, South Carolina, 1783-1865 (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co, 2004).
Interestingly, there were exceptions built into the local law that enabled vendors to sell certain wares without having to purchase a license. Those prepared foods included baked goods and sweets, fruit in baskets, and domestic beers.\textsuperscript{111} Black vendors typically vended these wares including iconic treats like calas and pralines.\textsuperscript{112} The exception made in the licensing ordinance enabled enslaved people and the working poor to occupy a space in the local food economy. The provision may have been included in the law because those vendors, regardless of their ability to purchase a license, were integral to the local food culture and economy. In this vein of thought, the exception may have been made as an acknowledgement of their contributions and indispensability—an acquiescence, if you will, made by the municipal government that acknowledged the importance of local food traditions and black vendors’ successes in cornering the market on prepared foods and beverages. Like today, customers valued quality and likely wanted to be able to purchase piping hot calas from a vendor who knew how to make them well—the most skilled calas vendors at that time being enslaved people who had perfected their recipes through years of practice.

\textsuperscript{111} According to article 11 in the ordinance: “Persons selling only eatables, that have been baked, confectionary, fruit in baskets, or beer of the country, are not subject to the provisions of this ordinance.” Donatien Augustin, \textit{A General Digest of the Ordinances and Resolutions of the Corporation of New-Orleans} (New Orleans: J. Bayon, 1831), 157.

\textsuperscript{112} Calas are sugary rice fritters. They are made from a batter consisting of day old rice, flour, milk, eggs, sugar, and aromatic spices such as cinnamon.
Municipal authorities skillfully crafted local laws to define belonging through seemingly mundane economic transactions: the sale and distribution of food. The previously mentioned legal exception came with certain stipulations that limited the mobility of black vendors who sought to build businesses without the financial support of white men. The law afforded vendors of prepared foods, fresh fruits, and domestic beer a financial break, but it restricted their ability to vend those specific foods to the river levee—the location of some of the earliest, informal markets in New Orleans. The implication of the law is that it contained the entrepreneurism of African Americans to a specific place, legally and physically separating their economic transactions from the ones occurring in the streets and the public markets, the latter conducted by those privileged enough to afford licenses (e.g., white men).

Authorities also used local laws to inhibit the mobility of the white working poor. At times, local laws discriminated against recent migrants from Europe, highlighting tensions between whites who had lived in New Orleans for generations

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113 In the antebellum period, when currency was not regulated, vendors built financial relationships based on promissory notes. In an article arguing that currency should, in fact, be regulated, the author cites that “every man” from the president “to the petty peddler in pumpkins, who issued his individual shinplasters [...] has exercised his financial skill in regulating the currency. Although the unnamed vendor is not trading in gold, he is trading goods and is doing so through informal economy. In a way, this author writes off the contributions of the food vendor, naming vendors as people who had little impact on the national economy. Yet in terms of their local economy, these food vendors were central. They facilitated many transactions, however “small” or “insignificant.” “Regulating the Currency,” Times-Picayune, October 30, 1841, pg. 2.


114 By “informal market,” I mean that the city government did not construct the market nor did city officials monitor it closely; rather, it developed as an impromptu gathering place of economic exchange and was loosely monitored by municipal authorities.
and recent immigrants whose status as “white” was tenuous at best. It was common for new migrants to initially partake in the local food economy, especially street food vending, because there were low barriers to entry, especially for those who chose to vend illegally. It was not uncommon for peddlers to capitalize on peak seasons, living and working in New Orleans only when there was a seasonal harvest of which to take advantage. Then, after the harvest, they would move on to another location. Their mobility and transience aggravated shopkeepers who felt that their businesses suffered because of transitory peddlers. Municipal officials found fault with these itinerant salesmen because they could not easily require them to pay vendor licensing fees or taxes; thus, their presence in the city had no real economic advantage to those in power.

Tensions mounted in 1841 when the second of the three municipalities that made up New Orleans moved to ban most peddling and hawking within its borders.115 The Second Municipality, or “American Sector,” sat just upriver of the View Carré.116 Alderman Lockett, chairman of the Police Committee, proposed the ordinance on January 5, 1841. He made several arguments against the “evils growing out of the present system of hawking and peddling [sic],” convinced that the practice should be

115 On March 8, 1834, the state legislature amended the 1805 charter of the city of New Orleans to create three distinct corporations. The mayor and General Council oversaw all three municipalities, but each one had its own council, police, schools, and amenities. The city re-united as a single municipality in 1852. For more information on the ethnic rivalries and tensions that resulted from New Orleans’ 16-year experiment, see: Richard Campanella, “Culture Wars, Ethnic Rivalry and New Orleans’ Messy Municipality Era,” Times-Picayune, March 11, 2016. http://richcampanella.com/assets/pdf/Picayune_Cityscapes_2016_3-11_Municipalities.pdf

116 The Second Municipality ran from Canal Street up to Felicity Street. After the Louisiana Purchase, Americans had moved into the city of New Orleans, settling in the area, thus giving it the descriptive name.
abolished.\textsuperscript{117} He characterized itinerant peddlers as predatory in that they took advantage of seasonality. He argued that they did so “without any outlay for store rent, clerk hire, or taxes, to the great injury of the regular dealer, whose expenses are necessarily heavy, and whose interests should be protected.”\textsuperscript{118} Lockett used food vending as a means to define citizenship and belonging. For him, belonging was tied to an entrepreneur’s ability to pay taxes and rents and create jobs for fellow citizens. That particular vision of citizenship was irrevocably tied to property, and one’s access to an enclosed storefront.\textsuperscript{119} For Lockett, belonging was a landed phenomenon and one also located indoors, rather than the outdoors.

The City Council found Lockett’s notions of belonging compelling. Members of the Council, too, framed their critique of itinerant vendors in terms of citizenship. In their opinion, vendors “fulfill none of the duties of citizens,” and in fact “exert an influence on the business of the tax-paying store keepers, much to their prejudice.”\textsuperscript{120} They thought of these vendors as “a nuisance.”\textsuperscript{121} Thus, the Council approved the ordinance, preventing those who they saw as non-citizens from partaking in local

\textsuperscript{120} “Second Municipality Council,” \textit{Times-Picayune}, January 6, 1841, pg. 2.
\textsuperscript{121} “Second Municipality Council,” \textit{Times-Picayune}, January 6, 1841, pg. 2.
commerces. The ordinance, then, was not merely about controlling the number of peddlers in the neighborhood or their interactions with residents, but a way of controlling who was included in their community. Itinerant vendors, many of them European immigrants or the working poor, did not belong, at least in the Council’s opinion.

Once again, the local food system afforded blacks an opportunity to break out of the total enclosure of slavery and gain access to an exclusive community. The above ordinance had a provision that created an exception for the vendors of “fruits, flowers, ice cream and cakes,” many of those vendors being enslaved. Although black vendors were not barred from the Second Municipality, their permissible presence did not indicate that the Council considered them citizens. Their presence, however, may indicate that the Council, and the community they represented, envisioned black vendors as an essential part of the culinary culture of the Second Municipality. Their inclusion in whites’ vision of culinary culture afforded black entrepreneurs access to an

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122 Ordinance No. 117 read: “Be it Ordained that from and after the passage of this ordinance, no person shall hawk or peddle within the limits of the Second Municipality, goods, wares, merchandise, or any other articles whatsoever, except fruits, flowers, ice cream and cakes, under a penalty of not less than twenty-five nor more than one hundred dollars, for each offence, recoverable before any court of competent jurisdiction.” The ordinance was passed on January 12, 1841 and approved by the mayor on January 13, 1841. “Proceedings of the Council of the Second Municipality,” Times-Picayune, January 14, 1841, pg. 2; “No. 117. An Ordinance,” Times-Picayune, January 30, 1841, pg. 4.

123 As noted in Gumbo Ya-Ya Folk Tales of Louisiana, “Flowers are not sold in the streets as frequently as they are in some other cities, but in the Vieux Carré elderly flower women and young girls and boys peddle corsages of rosebuds and camellias in the small bars and cafés, chanting at your table, ‘Flowers? Pretty flowers for the lady.’” In the antebellum period, black vendors likely sold flower in residential neighborhoods of the three municipalities as well. Gumbo Ya-Ya: Folk Tales of Louisiana, eds. Edward Dreyer, Lyle Saxon, and Robert Tallant (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1945), 37.
exclusive area designated primarily for privileged whites, creating a sense of quasi-belonging for those purveyors.

For those who had permission to vend foods in the Second Municipality, there was a second set of restrictions within the ordinance that drew clear divisions between the public sphere and the private sphere, which mapped onto the division between outdoors and indoors. This part of the ordinance made it illegal for any person to enter a house in the municipality with articles for sale, or pretending to sell articles, without first “having obtained the permission of the tenants of said house.”\textsuperscript{124} This provision speaks to the somewhat more “aggressive” or “invasive” tactics employed by some vendors who would enter the homes of potential customers in order to initiate a sale. This part of the ordinance restricted their mobility within the residential parts of the Second Municipality, drawing divisions between the streets and a person’s home. Those vendors who had established a strong connection to their customers could enter homes, bringing baskets of fresh produce right into the kitchens of their regular customers.\textsuperscript{125} Thus, their business acumen, and ability to foster strong relationships with long-term customers, afforded some vendors more mobility, greater access to domestic spaces, and a position of quasi-belonging even within closed communities.

\textsuperscript{124} Those who violated the law were subject to a fine of no less than five dollars and no more that fifty dollars. "Proceedings of the Council of the Second Municipality," \textit{Times-Picayune}, January 14, 1841, pg. 2.

Vendors resisted the city government’s attempts to limit their mobility and thereby define their sense of belonging. Some chose to vend illegally, taking their chances, and betting on the fact that historically the city had been lax in enforcing its regulations, particularly when it came to itinerant vendors. On occasion, though, the Second Municipality did make examples of violators in the city newspaper. Within one month of passing the ordinance, arrests of some illegal vendors were made public. A police officer, for example, successfully seized the goods of a Dutch peddler, only after the two had a scuffle.\footnote{A police officer…” \textit{Times-Picayune}, February 6, 1841, pg. 2.} Illegal peddling continued in the city, indicative of its ability to overwhelm the police by force of sheer numbers: it was difficult to keep track of all peddlers and hawkers working the streets. Essentially, the city’s crowded streetscape served as cover for illegal activity. Ten years after passing the 1841 ordinance, the newspaper continued to report issues of unlawful vending. It was not an occasional peddler here and there, but “scores” of peddlers, whom the newspaper identified as “interfering, prying, impertinent and lazy fellows.”\footnote{“Peddling Without License,” \textit{Times-Picayune}, December 3, 1852, pg. 2.} In the eyes of many New Orleanians, the mobility of peddlers and their presence in the city was a pervasive problem.

New Orleanians’ general aversion to itinerant vendors played into much larger anxieties associated with the movement of people in and out of New Orleans in the
antebellum period. When the Council of the Second Municipality approved the street peddling ban, New Orleans was growing rapidly. Between 1803–1840, the city’s population went from under 10,000 to 500,000 people, making it the third largest in the United States after New York and Baltimore. In the early 1830s, visitors of the city noticed that New Orleans was attracting people like a magnet: “Everything comes to her [New Orleans]. She goes abroad for nothing. Already the centre [sic] of attraction of the remotest parts of the globe, what will she be in a few years hence.”

New Orleans, like other major American port cities, took in large bodies of migrants from Germany and Ireland during the antebellum period. From 1800–1850, for example, 50,000 migrants emigrated from Germany. The incredible influx of people into the city placed it in a cultural upheaval. The city was not a veritable gumbo pot; it was, for lack of a better word, a “dump casserole”—a nonsensical, unplanned mélange of people and cultures. There was no end goal; no recipe in mind. That change incited a sense of instability for many residents and encouraged fear of outsiders, or xenophobia.

Controlling the flow of commerce in one’s neighborhood was one way of coping with that sense of instability. For city administrators and their constituents, food was a means through which to preserve local community and business—a way to preserve a

129 I hesitate to use national identifiers such as “German migrants” when regional identities were so strong in countries like France and Germany throughout the nineteenth century. When I use “German,” “Irish,” “French” and other European nation state identities, I do so with some trepidation and with an underlying understanding that regional cultures were still powerful and that identities continued to emerge from both regional and national cultures.
particular sense of belonging within pre-existing communities. City newspapers were filled with pleas to support local businesses rather than purchasing from out-of-region competitors. As reported in the *Times-Picayune* in 1842: “Peddling, or buying and selling western produce on the Levee is, as dear, departed Dickey Riker would say, ‘carried to a great extent in this community.’ The permission of such a course is a positive injustice to our permanently settled merchants and tax payers.”\(^{130}\) Again, the protagonists are portrayed as those who are “permanently settled” — people with a connection to the land and the community of New Orleans. This group stood in sharp contrast to what New Orleanians saw as mobile, fleeting droves of vendors whose loyalties, tax dollars, and cultural norms resided elsewhere. At this time, many New Orleanians carried a sense of urban nativism. They did so in order to support the economic success of their communities, which they believed migrant populations threatened with their mere presence.

Although itinerant vendors inhabited a precarious position in the late antebellum period, those fortunate enough to rent stalls in the city’s public markets were afforded a much more tangible sense of economic and social security. As will be discussed in the next chapter, these neighborhood markets were fruitful, building strong community ties within the ethnic and racial enclaves that made up New Orleans’ distinct neighborhoods. Whereas itinerant vendors regularly crossed the invisible boundaries

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\(^{130}\) “Peddling,” *Times-Picayune*, October 13, 1842, pg. 2.
that separated these communities, the activities around the public markets served to reinforce them. These markets were less about the ability to move across the entire stretch of New Orleans, and more about the movement of products and cultural forms within an enclosed environment. This sense of enclosure was one created by choice and stood in sharp contrast to the one associated with the plantation and many blacks’ experience in slave society, more broadly.

The enclosure of the public markets served as a crucible for community culture to coalesce and take a more tangible form, allowing new forms of public culture to emerge in New Orleans. Those food cultures worked to strengthen bonds between neighbors who lived and worked near the markets. In essence, food, its production, distribution, and consumption were the glue that held working and middle class whites together, just as it did for the laboring poor and enslaved people. The vendors who worked in the streets and worked in the public markets touched the same products with their hands. The business communities and social groups that coalesced around that distribution of food, however, fostered belonging in different ways. Whereas African Americans created communities that stretched far across neighborhood and city boundaries, working and middle class whites created insular communities within defined neighborhoods. These differences manifested in tensions that would continue to play out between street food and public market vendors throughout the second half of the nineteenth century.
4. Cultures of Belonging

New Orleanians conceptualized belonging through a local food distribution system made up of municipal markets. Whites, in particular, made claims on these public amenities as community spaces and as places in which to create a new public culture. The prevalence of these neighborhood-based food markets reveals that local identities remained strong even as a broader national consciousness developed in the nineteenth century. The strength of local identities was due in part to the fact that New Orleanians organized their lives around the municipal markets. Their construction influenced where people settled and where commercial corridors developed, sculpting the physical and cultural geography of the city. Each market, therefore, served as the economic, social, and cultural center of a particular community in New Orleans. Largely understudied, a history of these neighborhood markets reveals the organizing power of food distribution—a force that not only served as a catalyst of community development, but also sustained a sense of belonging over generations.

New Orleans’ reliance upon relatively small neighborhood markets provides a rich case study in the subtle, yet daily, influence of food provisioning on conceptions of local and national identity in the nineteenth century. From 1791 to 1822, the French Market was the only municipally-owned and -operated market in the city of New Orleans. Urban and rural residents flocked to the market to trade and purchase fresh

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1 Municipal markets, or public markets, were structures built and regulated by the city for the public good.
produce, meats, and prepared foods. As the city’s population grew more rapidly in the 1820s, the French Market could no longer provision the entire city. The municipal government began building a series of smaller, neighborhood-based food markets to cater to burgeoning communities. They constructed the first neighborhood market, St. Mary’s Market, c. 1822. It was located upriver of the French Market in a part of town that had been steadily growing since the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. By 1911, the city government of New Orleans had built 33 auxiliary neighborhood markets to supplement the French Market. At its peak in 1911, New Orleans’ public market system looked nothing like any other system in the country because of the sheer number of markets and the individual communities to which they catered. That these local food markets were so numerous and so well served their communities is evidence of the city administration’s understanding of the importance of food distribution in New Orleans.”

2 This number includes quasi-public markets. Quasi-public markets were erected by private entrepreneurs with the permission of the city government. This agreement was memorialized in a contract between the municipal government and a private entrepreneur. The entrepreneur then agreed to pay the city a monthly fee to lease the building and maintain its use as a fresh food market. They did so for a specific period of time, typically 20-30 years. Then, the market would become city property. In this dissertation, I treat quasi-public markets as public markets because they were still subject to the regulations of the municipal government and operated in a similar way to public ones. As noted in the Times-Picayune, “The only difference between [quasi-public markets] and the public markets is that the dues are collected by the contractors, and not by the city.” “The ‘Quasi’ Market Facts and Figures,” Times-Picayune, January 24, 1901, pg. 7; Robert A. Sauder, “The Origin and Spread of the Public Market System in New Orleans,” Louisiana History 122, no. 3 (Summer, 1981): 288.

3 Although distinct within the United States, New Orleans’ market system did mirror that of Paris at the turn of the twentieth century. Paris and New Orleans both had markets that consisted of one central market
centers were of lasting importance at the same time that an industrial food system developed nationwide demonstrates that local food traditions were not necessarily incongruent with the adoption of a more homogenous, national food culture as often assumed in so much of the scholarship on food culture.4

This chapter seeks to build upon the work of scholars who examine the history of municipal markets in the nineteenth century, bringing to light the particularities of New and 33 smaller, auxiliary markets c. 1910. At that time, municipal officials throughout Europe and the United States saw Paris’ municipal market system as an exemplary one. Although New Orleans’ system appears to have deviated from American municipal market systems in the mid-nineteenth century, the parallels between New Orleans’ and Paris’ systems in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries suggests that the former likely drew inspiration from the latter. In fact, New Orleans’ system paralleled those of several major European cities who had a central wholesale-retail market and a series of auxiliary markets. Antwerp, for example, had a robust system consisting of 21 markets. Clyde Lyndon King, “Municipal Markets,” Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 50 (Nov., 1913): 11. 4 Take, for example, William Cronon’s seminal work: Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West where he outlines the rise of the national meat packing industry that led to the decline of local butcher trades in northeastern cities. He explains that the rise of the refrigerated rail car enabled pre-packed frozen meat to ship across state lines from the Midwest to the East Coast, eventually leading to a change in customers’ preferences for pre-packaged meat rather than freshly butchered meat. With less demand for fresh meat, local butchers lost their customer base, and many went out of business. William Cronon, Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991): 207-362.

Food studies scholars have delved into Americans’ perceptions of industrialization and how those technologies impacted their experiences with food. Camille Begin’s Taste of the Nation: the New Deal Search for America’s Food, for example, examines how many American food writers romanticized local and regional food cultures that, in their opinion, had yet to be influenced by industrialization. Her research demonstrates that Americans were wary of the industrializing forces that could lead to a homogenous national or even global food culture. Further, her research demonstrates that these food writers, many of them white, valorized white cooking traditions while marginalizing those racial and ethnic minorities. For key works that explore the complexities of the industrialization of food in America throughout the twentieth century see: Camille Bégin, Taste of the Nation: The New Deal Search for America’s Food (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016), Rachel Laudan, “A Plea for Culinary Modernism: Why We Should Love New, Fast, Processed Food,” Gastronomica: The Journal of Critical Food Studies 1, no. 1 (2001): 36-44, Susanne Freidberg, Fresh: A Perishable History (Cambridge, MA: Belknap of Harvard University Press, 2009).
Orleans’ history within a broader national context. Municipal market histories focus largely on the American Northeast and Midwest and how city governments regulated food distribution in the name of the public good. They are primarily concerned with the impact of regulation on the development of urban food economies. These studies rarely examine the history of municipal markets in the U.S. South and the role of racial minorities in the making of local food systems. Nor do they focus on the markets as spaces in which ethnic and racial identities were forged through the daily act of feeding the city. A study of New Orleans’ public markets enables us to examine how the distribution and purchase of food by New Orleans’ diverse population not only shaped the local economy, but also fostered new modes of belonging through economic exchange. This chapter disentangles those different kinds of belonging, demonstrating that “the public” was a malleable concept shaped by local economic activity. That malleability afforded marginalized groups a place at the proverbial table and a means to define community through urban food distribution.

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Markets were important spaces in which the construction of American identities took place. Throughout the nineteenth century, most American cities operated one or two public markets, with the exception being the country’s largest cities, which operated more, usually around ten. Markets acted as community spaces, bringing city residents together during a market’s operating hours. The habitual migration of people to the markets gave rise to chance encounters with neighbors, relatives, and new acquaintances and offered ample opportunity for conversation and exchange of both material goods and information between diverse people. These exchanges were crucial community-building activities in urban America, as they took place in key public spaces.

There are a few general categories that serve as guidelines for understanding how markets occupied space in cities: open-air markets, curb markets, pavilion markets, and market houses. Open-air markets typically took place in large community squares or along major throughways, including the banks of rivers. As indicated by their names, open-air markets did not have any permanent structures. Rather, they consisted of vendors coming together and displaying their wares on the ground, in baskets, or at temporary stands and stalls. Some open-air markets were curb markets where vendors displayed wares on a street corner or sidewalk to purvey goods to passersby. These were not dissimilar from the “I [heart] New York” t-shirt vendors one might come

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across while walking down a street in Manhattan today. Other places of exchange were pavilion markets where vendors set up stations or carts under a shed, which provided some shelter from inclement weather. These sheds could be constructed in a street or on a designated plot of land, similar in size and structure to twenty-first century covered farmers’ markets. Like open-air and curb markets, vendors in pavilion markets typically sold goods directly to customers and were thus designated as retail markets.

Depending on the needs of the city and the size of its population, open-air, curb, and pavilion markets could be the size of a tennis court or larger than a football field, stretching down several city blocks. People, animals, and goods easily moved through them as did wind, dust, and other particles of urban life, some of them dirty and dangerous byproducts of industrialization. The markets, people, and goods were exposed to the outside world—both the natural world and the industrial one. This exposure provided necessary natural ventilation, yet also invited unwelcome elements including pollution, vermin, and disease. Citizens, therefore, had contested relationships with open-air, curb, and pavilion markets and saw them as a public necessity that came with many dangers related to public health.

There were also market houses that were enclosed buildings, many of which still stand in cities as diverse as New Orleans, Baltimore, and Cleveland (although most no
longer function as public markets). Market houses came into vogue in the United States around 1850, and were modeled after ones in major European cities. These structures were typically much larger than pavilion markets. They could house retail markets and/or wholesale markets. In wholesale markets, vendors sold bulk goods to food entrepreneurs like restaurateurs and grocers—the latter fell into the category of huckster. Market houses, or market halls, were generally seen as more modern than open-air, curb, and pavilion markets, but they also faced serious public health problems (as did most eateries and places of food distribution in urban communities).

At the start of the antebellum period, New Orleans’ market system was actually reflective of broader national trends in regard to public health, food safety, and the public provisioning of urban populations. Like most cities in the United States, New Orleans operated a central wholesale-retail market, the French Market, and, when needed, built auxiliary markets in growing neighborhoods. It was not uncommon for large cities to have several auxiliary markets to support population growth. Like most major American cities in the antebellum period, the municipal government of New Orleans built pavilion markets to meet the needs of city residents. Thus, New Orleans’

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8 City governments and real estate developers have turned a majority of historic enclosed markets into other kinds of residential and retail spaces. Some are abandoned. There are key historic markets, however, that still function as food retail spaces. The Westside Market in Cleveland, for example, hosts both prepared and fresh food vendors. Other historic markets, like the Quincy Market in Boston, have adopted a new retail model that combines prepared foods with other retail shops including clothing and kitchenware stores.

9 Hucksters are middlemen in an urban food system. They are neither producer nor consumer, but are rather distributors who buy directly from the producer (e.g., the farmer) and sell the farmer’s goods to the consumer for a profit.
local food distribution system was not entirely unique at first; rather it reflected general public market culture throughout the Atlantic World, especially those parts that were or had been European colonies, including the United States.

American public market culture was informed by a basic principle embedded within the governing structures of the United States: the government was supposed to regulate on behalf of the health and welfare of the people. There existed in New Orleans, and in local governments throughout the United States, a vision of the public interest that was defined in terms of consumption. New Orleans’ local government sought to provide affordable, quality food for city residents. In turn, New Orleanians expected that the government would maintain a public retail space and regulate the people who vended foods within it and the products they sold to customers.

This government-regulated food system fostered a sense of collectivity for community members who drew upon this government-sponsored retail space for daily provisions. For example, if a customer believed that a meat vendor wrongly charged them, they could reach out to the commissary of the market, a city official, and ask for the market scales and weights. If the vendor indeed violated the customer’s trust, the

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vendor would be fined ten dollars.\textsuperscript{11} City officials, customers, and fellow vendors saw the vendor’s digression as something that threatened the public welfare and the overall health of the community, and therefore should be punished. Above all, members of the community fought to maintain trust between customers and vendors—a trust that fueled the markets’ growth by encouraging customers’ patronage.

As a group, customers in New Orleans were diverse. Their protected status was not necessarily defined by race, ethnicity, class, or gender, but rather by action: purchasing. The power to purchase, therefore, created a fairly egalitarian economic environment. Similar to the exploration of food vending in the previous chapter, food purchasing afforded typically-marginalized groups influence over the local food economy. As vendors and customers, enslaved people, Native Americans, and recent migrants from throughout the Atlantic World found a place to exercise agency and foster community through economic transactions. This was a form of belonging that operated within the constraints of an overarching slave society without disturbing major power dynamics that privileged whites, and white men in particular.

As the symbolic heart of many neighborhoods in the city, and as a representation of municipal responsibility, the markets were important spaces that directly reflected the health and productivity of local communities and their governing bodies. New Orleans’

\textsuperscript{11} Donatien Augustin, \textit{A General Digest of the Ordinances and Resolutions of the Corporation of New-Orleans} (New Orleans: J. Bayon, 1831), 193. Note: according to the digest, the ordinance was approved on November 17, 1828.
city government, therefore, felt compelled to invest in the upkeep of these public spaces. In order to maintain their appearance, the city government employed “negroes belonging to the city gang,” and eventually prisoners in Orleans parish, to clean the markets.\(^{12}\) Moreover, it was not uncommon for city residents to petition the local government to improve a market’s roof, sidewalk, or some other part of the facility if it had fallen into disrepair. Even the vendors themselves, and most often the butchers, would speak to their local government representative to address these kinds of issues.\(^{13}\) Although the markets were a government-owned and -operated space, there was a sense of collective responsibility among vendors and customers to contribute to their maintenance. Like government officials, city residents believed that the markets served a practical and symbolic purpose as the center of their community.

The complex, multi-market system that developed in New Orleans had its origins in the colonial period when government regulation of economic exchange was less developed than it was in the nineteenth century. As discussed earlier in the dissertation, a culture of necessity persisted in colonial New Orleans, one defined by starvation and disease, which created opportunities for marginalized groups to establish

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\(^{13}\) Most market maintenance was fairly routine and involved re-painting the posts and eaves as well as repairing leaks in the roofs. Even during the Civil War, the municipal markets were maintained. For example, in 1862, Henry Deming, the acting mayor of the city, approved some necessary renovations to the market system. He approved “to have the paint work scrubbed and cleaned and the brick and plaster work whitewashed.” The Chairman of the Bureau of Streets and Landings as well as that of the Bureau of Finance were copied on the announcement, which indicated that these two bureaus were also involved with the policing and upkeep of the city’s markets. *Daily Delta*, October 17, 1862, pg. 4.
themselves as key players in the local food economy. In the colonial period, daily exchanges were dispersed across the city and therefore difficult for the state to regulate. Under Spanish colonial rule, however, local food exchange became centralized within a public market system in order to protect the interests of customers.

Known for their strong regulatory presence, the Spanish colonial administration sought to instill order upon colonial communities by policing the distribution of food. Officials believed that the city government should work to provide residents with safe, affordable food. At first, the Cabildo (the city council) attempted to control the informal economy that flourished along the river—an informal economy that benefitted vendors seeking to turn a profit during food shortages.¹⁴ The commissioner decreed that the boats anchored in front of the central plaza with the intent of selling their wares, first

¹⁴ The Cabildo also monitored the price of certain products, as was the case under the French colonial administration. Further, the Cabildo drew revenues from food and beverage purveyors in the city through annual taxes. Count Alejandro O’Reilly, a Spanish colonial administrator who had been stationed in Havana took control of New Orleans in December 1769. On February 22, 1770, Captain-general O’Reilly created an annual tax of forty dollars on taverns and coffee houses; one dollar on every barrel of brandy imported into the city; and a 370 dollar tax on butchers. This taxation created a precedent under the Spanish colonial administration to draw profits from food and beverage distributors and imports of alcohol into the city. The tax on butchers, in particular, cemented a strong standard of taxing a group of artisans who would soon be legally bound to conduct their businesses within the municipally regulated markets of the city. In order to find funds to maintain the levee, O’Reilly also created an anchorage tax of six dollars for every vessel of at least two hundred tons. As noted by Howe in *Municipal History of New Orleans* (1889), “These exactions were not exorbitant, but they were the seed of a system which has since become extensive and vicious. New Orleans to-day [sic] is exacting large sums in the way of license taxes on pursuits which require no police regulation, and in the guise of wharf dues which are really a tax on commerce.” Although, my research does not focus on the wharf, Howe’s point about license fees of food vendors becomes a major point of contention in the development of New Orleans’ market system and is discussed in greater detail in the chapter of this dissertation entitled “Cultures of Enclosure.” William Howe, *Municipal History of New Orleans* (Baltimore: N. Murray, publication agent, John Hopkins University, 1889), 11-12; Food, Fuel and General Supplies, Book 1, pg. 41, 10/5/1770, Alphabetical and Chronological Digest of the Acts and Deliberations of the Cabildo, 1769-1803, City Archives, New Orleans Public Library, New Orleans, LA. Accessed November 3, 2014, http://nutrias.org/~nopl/inv/digest/digest32.htm.
had to sell directly to customers for a period of four hours before they could sell wholesale to retailers.\textsuperscript{15} In addition to concentrating the hours of retail shopping to protect costumers, the Cabildo also restricted people from traveling up and down the river to buy provisions.\textsuperscript{16} Although the Cabildo had not yet erected a physical market, it concentrated the purchase of goods in front of the central plaza, creating a municipal open-air market that was easier for city officials to regulate. Within a few months of establishing the levee market, the Cabildo appointed two commissioners to regulate food provisioning in the city. This enabled the city government to more closely monitor the local food system.\textsuperscript{17} It was also in this era that the Cabildo appointed a gauger “to approve the weights and measures of liquors and foodstuffs,” in order to ensure that customers received the amount of food they were entitled to at the correct price.\textsuperscript{18} In

\textsuperscript{18} In 1772, the Attorney General recommended the purchase of a set of scales and measures to be retained by the city government in order to verify the ones used by the public. The need for a second set of scales indicates that city officials, customers, or both were suspicious of the accuracy of the ones used for public provisioning. Issues of food fraud likely encouraged the city government to hire a professional gauger to reduce the threat of adulterated foods. Weights and Measures, Book 1, pg. 110, 12/4/1772; Weights and Measures, Book 1, pg. 121, 3/5/1773; Alphabetical and Chronological Digest of the Acts and Deliberations of the Cabildo, 1769-1803, City Archives, New Orleans Public Library, New Orleans, L.A. Accessed November 3, 2014, http://nutrias.org/~nopl/inv/digest/digest74.htm.
sum, the Spanish colonial government prioritized the protection of customers, which solidified their status as a protected class in New Orleans.

The order imposed upon economic transactions influenced the fluid conceptions of economic community that developed in the French colonial period. Creating physical boundaries for economic exchange also bounded the agents of that exchange: New Orleans’ population. The demarcated levee market, therefore, gave city officials a space in which to regulate the exchange of food, but also a space to regulate who was able to partake in that exchange and build community through economic transactions. As we saw in the previous chapter, when marginalized groups were not able to legally participate in formal exchange within the markets, they either skirted around the law and worked within the markets anyway or turned towards the streets where government oversight was more irregular. Their adept navigation of local law becomes apparent when one examines the early history of public markets in New Orleans.

It was not until 1779 that the city government decided to build a covered market at the levee where open-air provisioning had historically taken place. The market shed

19 The structure was constructed in 1780 at the corner of Dumaine and Chartres. It was a sixty-by-twenty-two foot wooden pavilion. Its primary function was to act as a meat market, although other products could be sold there. In 1782, the Cabildo replaced the original structure with a studier one, and in 1784 it added a second market structure to accommodate vendors. The structure had plaster walls and a paved brick floor. Markets, Book 1, pg. 39, 9/14/1770; Markets, Book 2, pg. 139, 9/13/1782, Alphabetical and Chronological Digest of the Acts and Deliberations of the Cabildo, 1769-1803, City Archives, New Orleans Public Library, New Orleans, LA. Accessed November 3, 2014, http://nutrias.org/~nopl/inv/digest/digest51.htm; Beth A. Jacob, “New Orleans’ Historic Public Markets: Reviving Neighborhood Landmarks Through Adaptive Reuse” (master’s thesis, Tulane University, 2012), 53; Richard Campanella, Bienville’s Dilemma: A Historical

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gave structure to the city’s containment of economic exchange and the community born of that exchange. The Cabildo justified their decision by drawing attention to “the great abuses committed in the sales of provisions” along the levee.\textsuperscript{20} City officials argued that a central market “would result in untold good to the public.”\textsuperscript{21} The levee structure was a temporary solution to house the steadily growing number of retailers in the city. Soon, it became apparent that a new structure was needed, one that would accommodate all food purveyors. In 1784, the Cabildo chartered the construction of a second market, “large enough to accommodate all the daily food supplies.”\textsuperscript{22} Again this space was seen as one built for the public good, so that city officials could inspect the quality and

\textit{Geography of New Orleans} (Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, The University of Louisiana at Lafayette, 2008), 243.

\textit{Note:} Although histories of New Orleans have typically identified the levee market as the first public market in the city, there is also evidence that the Cabildo approved a public meat market in 1770. In September of that year, a group of four butchers approached the Cabildo to create a contract, which, according to the Digest of the Acts and Deliberations of the Cabildo, the commissioners approved. Later, the Digest refers to “the public meat market, established by O’Reilly in favor of the City Treasury,” confirming the idea that the Cabildo and Governor approved the proposed contract of the butchers and created a public meat market. Markets, Book 1, pg. 39, 9/14/1770; Markets, Book 1, pg. 68, 8/2/1771, Alphabetical and Chronological Digest of the Acts and Deliberations of the Cabildo, 1769-1803, City Archives, New Orleans Public Library, New Orleans, L.A. Accessed November 3, 2014, http://nutrias.org/~nopl/inv/digest/digest51.htm.


pricing of fresh produce, meat, fish, and game.\textsuperscript{23} The city market burned down four years later in 1788.\textsuperscript{24}

In 1791, the city, still under the jurisdiction of Spain, constructed a new market where the current French Market stands today.\textsuperscript{25} Over the next 20 years, the market was remodeled and rebuilt several times.\textsuperscript{26} In 1813, the city, now under the jurisdiction of the United States, rebuilt the French Market based off of plans created by Jacques Tanesse. That structure, which served as the meat market and was technically called “Les Halles des Boucherries,” or “Les Halles” for short, still stands today at the head of the French Market “Complex.”\textsuperscript{27} Complex is an appropriate descriptor for the French Market because the municipal government expanded the retail space over time. It eventually

\textsuperscript{24} To provide context, the city’s population in 1788 was 5,388—New Orleans remained a relatively intimate city, one that could survive with just one central market for the entire population. Richard Campanella, \textit{Bienville’s Dilemma: A Historical Geography of New Orleans} (Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, The University of Louisiana at Lafayette, 2008), 24.
\textsuperscript{25} At first, in 1790, the city government set up an open-air market to facilitate daily provisioning, and then through 1792 renovated the market to create covered pavilions and vendors stalls. Richard Campanella, \textit{Bienville’s Dilemma: A Historical Geography of New Orleans} (Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, The University of Louisiana at Lafayette, 2008), 244-243.
\textsuperscript{26} In 1808, the city decided to replace that market with a new, grand structure. From 1808–1812, the city invested in a market designed by Arsène Lacarrière Latour. Just after its completion, a hurricane destroyed the new market.
\textsuperscript{27} Note that the central municipal market in Paris was also known as “Les Halles,” indicating a cultural continuity between New Orleans and its previous colonial metropole. Note also that the “French Market” did not become commonly known as such until the mid-nineteenth century. Beth A. Jacob, “New Orleans’ Historic Public Markets: Reviving Neighborhood Landmarks Through Adaptive Reuse” (master’s thesis, Tulane University, 2012), 53.
encompassed five separate pavilion markets: meat, fruit, vegetable, fish, and bazaar markets.28

By virtue of its geographic location, the French Market was at the literal heart of the city. As noted by travel writer Catherine Cole, “To find the old French Market one must go to the very cornerstone of the old town’s history; to the gay, green remnant of the Place d’Armes” and then “even further, where the river wraps the town in its tawny scarf as the mane of a lion caresses his neck.”29 As described by Cole, the French Market sat between the political and economic centers of the city, the latter of which was located at the port of New Orleans.

The French Market was an interstitial space, at once regulated by the city and governed by Atlantic World trade along the Mississippi, which brought diverse people and cultures into New Orleans. This meant, too, that market vendors and customers were wedged between those two entities and constantly shaped by the pressures of local government regulation and intercontinental and transatlantic trade. Between those two forces, the remarkable diversity of the French Market took shape; it thrived in the in-

between and exerted its own influence on New Orleans’ urban population. A carry-over from the French colonial period, the need to feed the city often outweighed the need to carefully police the distribution of food and the movement of the people who sold it, both enslaved and free. Thus, the market’s physical and metaphorical juxtaposition enabled marginalized communities to retain their positions of power within the local food community well into the antebellum period.

The offerings of the market itself reflect the powerful cultural influences coming from local sources as well as far-off ports in the Atlantic World. Visitors regularly made note of the abundance of Atlantic World foods including vegetables like cabbages, peas, beets, artichokes, radishes, corn, and varietals of beans. Market fruits included blackberries, oranges, bananas, apples, and tomatoes. In addition to produce, there was game from the Louisiana hinterland and an impressive variety of seafood from surrounding bodies of water—ingredients that Native American groups introduced to the city in the colonial period. Everything within the market, from the people to the food being sold, represented the interplay between the local and the global and how New Orleans’ local officials sought to contain those powerful cultural influences, many of which empowered minority groups, through the regulation of food distribution.

30 Captain Basil Hall visited the French Market in April, making note of food that would have been in season at that time of year. Basil Hall, *Travels in North America in the Years 1827 and 1828, Volume III*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh and London, Cadell and Co. and Simpkin and Marshall, 1830), 331.
The French Market was a magnet for the city’s entire population. In part, local law strengthened the market’s magnetism. In the antebellum period, for example, legal codes regulating the provisioning of butchers’ meat (including beef, veal, mutton, and pork) encouraged community building by legally mandating that city residents buy their products in the municipal markets. Although the laws were written with the intent to protect customers’ interests by centralizing the sale of meat, an unintended consequence was the creation of a ritualized habit, in which for a few hours each morning, city residents gathered together at the markets to buy meat.\(^{32}\) This legally-enforced rhythm created a central meeting ground for New Orleanians in a concentrated period of time and encouraged the happenstance meeting among city residents.\(^{33}\) These

\(^{32}\) According to the butchers’ market ordinance passed in 1828, “The butchers’ market shall open at the break of day, and will close at noon from the first of April to the first of November, and close at one of the clock in the afternoon, the remaining part of the year.” The ordinance goes on to say that, “All persons who shall sell or cause to be sold the meats in the said market before ten of the clock in the morning shall pay for each offense, twenty-five dollars,” suggesting that, although the market was open sunrise to noon, the sale of meat was only permissible for two to three hours depending on the time of year. Donatien Augustin, \textit{A General Digest of the Ordinances and Resolutions of the Corporation of New-Orleans} (New Orleans: J. Bayon, 1831), 189.

\(^{33}\) The concentrated power of the public markets was fleeting. It was based primarily on the markets’ operating hours. After that, the gravitation pulls of the city markets dispersed as the ability to provision switched to the other half of the city’s local food economy: street food vending. The French Market’s Vegetable Market, like the Meat Market, opened at dawn. However, unlike the Meat Market, which only sold meat to customers from 10:00 to noon (sometimes 1:00 depending on the time of the year), the Vegetable Market operated from dawn until 10:00. Thus, the two parts of the French Market did not overlap in terms of retail hours. Vendors of fresh produce, seafood, and game were permitted to take what wares they had left after 10:00 and sell them in the streets, thus extending their businesses out into the surrounding residential areas. After 10:00, the invisible barrier that kept provisioning within the city markets essentially evaporated. Vendors were then able to pass into parts of the city that existed outside of the marketplace. That brought provisioning activities out to communities that were not yet furnished with a public market. Donatien Augustin, \textit{A General Digest of the Ordinances and Resolutions of the Corporation of New-Orleans} (New Orleans: J. Bayon, 1831), 205. Note: according to the digest, the ordinance was approved on November 17, 1828.
informal run-ins within the formal realm of municipal regulation were the lifeblood of New Orleans’ local community—a community forged through the act of daily provisioning.

The French Market was a metaphor for the composition of New Orleans’ urban community and remained the city’s most diverse market throughout the nineteenth century. When Swedish adventurist Frederika Bremer wrote about her tour of the French Market in 1851, she referenced the market’s eclectic population: “Here are English, Irish, Germans, French, Spanish, Mexicans. Here are negroes and Indians.” 34 In Bremer’s estimation, the market was akin to the grand markets of Europe: “One feels as if transported to a great Paris marché.” 35 Yet unlike the relatively homogenous population in Paris, the central market of New Orleans was a place where one “meets with various races of people” and “hears many different languages spoken.” 36 Bremer was privy to the phenomenon in which the seemingly innocuous act of purveying was a path to inclusivity that regularly amazed observers and chafed local elites.

Although a vernacular practice, food distribution in New Orleans was not mundane nor did it go unnoticed. Rather, the daily purchase of food by New Orleans’ multifaceted population captured the attention of residents and visitors who wrote

about the French Market in great detail. Captain Basil Hall, like Bremer, was one of
dozens of visitors who quickly recognized the importance of marginalized groups
within the epicenter of New Orleans’ local food economy. During a trip in 1828, he
noted that a majority of prepared-food vendors were people of color and observed that
at “every second or third pillar [in the French Market] sat one or more black women,
chattering in French, selling coffee and chocolate.”\(^{37}\) In addition to those wares, they also
sold “smoking dishes of rice, white as snow,” which Hall thought was curry, but came
to realize was New Orleans’ famous soupy-stew, gumbo.\(^{38}\) Gumbo became an important
dish for New Orleanians, white and black, who claimed it as part of their local
culinary canon and an essential part of their identities.

Because the government sought to protect customers, vendors, like the ones Hall
made note of, were subject to local laws that threatened the viability of their businesses
and the strength of their business communities. Food vendors were denied a guaranteed
space in which to sell their wares; they were not a community whose interests the city
prioritized.\(^{39}\) In fact, they were legally quite vulnerable. A law originally passed in 1807
and retained through much of the antebellum period, noted “the Mayor is authorized at

\(^{37}\) Basil Hall, *Travels in North America in the Years 1827 and 1828, Volume III*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh and London,
Cadell and Co. and Simpkin and Marshall, 1830), 332.
\(^{38}\) Basil Hall, *Travels in North America in the Years 1827 and 1828, Volume III*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh and London,
Cadell and Co. and Simpkin and Marshall, 1830), 332.
\(^{39}\) It was not only those vendors privileged enough to vend in the markets who found themselves legally
defined in opposition to New Orleans’ consumer community. Street vendors, too, faced certain legal
barriers—ones that prevented them from fully participating in market activities. As discussed in the
previous chapter, local law constricted the movement of food vendors by limiting the places where they
could vend and the times in which they could sell foods.
any time, to remove the individuals, to whom licenses are granted, from the places occupied by them, and assigned to them other places, without such individuals having any right to claim an indemnity from the city for their approval." Legally, vendors had little stability; they were at the mercy of city officials. Yet these regulations were lauded because they contributed to the public welfare, creating a local food system that protected a community of customers.

In some cases, disenfranchised groups found themselves a part of the protected consumer class, demonstrating that economic belonging was a malleable concept within the markets. Black women regularly bought and sold goods on behalf of slave masters who sent them to market to sell surplus crops or purchase goods for consumption. These women were excluded from the imagined political community created by city officials because many of them were enslaved. Yet as shoppers, they represented elite classes whose interests the government sought to protect. Black women became a protected group of customers via their association with elite masters, demonstrating the pliability of the concept of “the public” in public welfare. Thus, during daily trips to the

40 Donatien Augustin, *A General Digest of the Ordinances and Resolutions of the Corporation of New-Orleans* (New Orleans: J. Bayon, 1831), 155-158. Note: according to the digest, the original ordinance was passed on December 12, 1807.

41 The practice of elite families sending enslaved people and eventually domestic workers to the market continued throughout the nineteenth century. A newspaper article in 1877 notes that wealthier families living uptown would regularly send their domestic workers to the French Market to purchase fish that was viewed as being of high quality and sold at a fair price. “Cheap Fish at Dryades Market,” *New Orleans Times*, September 16, 1877, pg. 12.
market, black women buyers became the face, so to speak, of New Orleans’ public welfare.\textsuperscript{42}

The French Market remained a crucial community center for the city well into the twentieth century, yet the gradual development of New Orleans’ neighborhood markets created alternative community centers. They tended to serve less diverse clientele than the French Market in that they catered to ethnic, racial, religious, and socio-economic enclaves in the city, rather than the city’s entire population. By virtue of the homogenous communities that lived in close proximity to the neighborhood markets, many of them were less inclusive than the catchall that was the French Market.\textsuperscript{43} They therefore encouraged division, cultural distinctiveness, and a strong sense of identity-based belonging within New Orleans’ developing neighborhoods. Thus, the inclusivity that defined the French Market did not necessarily radiate out into the neighborhood

\textsuperscript{42} On Sundays, that representation changed. It was on Sundays that elite women, primarily white, would tour the French Market after Catholic mass. This ritualized promenade enabled elite white women to act out their roles as a protected consumer class. Many would walk through the pavilions of the French Market Complex accompanied by their black slaves who carried increasingly laden baskets. That Sunday stroll, however, did not reflect the typical daily happenings of the market; rather it was an exception to the everyday practice of food provisioning in New Orleans in which blacks were included in the protected class of customers via association.

\textsuperscript{43} Even the labor force within the neighborhood markets appeared less diverse than the French Market, which, through much of the antebellum period, employed minority groups including women and people of color. By the second half of the nineteenth century, when the neighborhood market system had grown larger than those of any other American city, many of the vendors working within them were white men. Although, exceptions to that rule existed. Mrs. A.P. Rabito, for example, owned and operated a fishmonger stall at the Poydras Market. She was also politically active, joining her fellow fishmongers in protests against the city government’s regulation of certain items like shrimp. Mrs. Anthony Bertucci was a vegetable vendor in the Dryades Market and was a “Well-known and Beloved Figure Around Dryades Market.” She resided at 1402 Saratoga Street and operated a fruit stand at the Dryades Market for 25 years. “The Shrimp Law,” \textit{Times-Picayune}, June 4, 1906, pg. 8; “Death of Mrs. Anthony Bertucci,” \textit{Times-Picayune}, April 29, 1911, pg. 3.
markets, demonstrating that each commercial space had its own pathways of belonging. The particularities of these neighborhood markets are evidence of the fact that identity was deeply engrained in what was local even as a larger community consciousness existed on the scale of the city, region, and even the nation.

The St. Mary’s Market, which like the French Market was designed by Joseph Pilie, provided a space for American migrants to funnel their cultural particularities—ones that stood apart from the entrenched traditions of the French Market Complex. As previously stated, the city constructed the original St. Mary’s Market c. 1822 at the intersection of Annunciation and Tchoupitoulas. The location of the market is significant in that it was located just under a mile upriver of the French Quarter. It was therefore constructed in what was popularly known at that time as the “American Sector,” a part of town that had grown in response to American migrants coming into the city after the Louisiana Purchase. There were apparent cultural differences between

44 Joseph Pilie was an engineer and surveyor in New Orleans and was an immigrant from French colonial Saint Domingue. Stanley Clisby Arthur, Old New Orleans: A History of the Vieux Carré, its Ancient and Historical Buildings (New Orleans: Harmanson, 1936), 137.
45 In the 1830s, the St. Mary’s Market moved to the neutral ground (or grass/dirt space between two lanes of opposing traffic on a major street) between North and South Diamond Street at Tchoupitoulas Street. The market was renovated several times and extended towards New Orleans’ modern day Convention Center. In 1836, for example, the City Council approved the enlargement of the St. Mary’s Market. “City Council, Saturday, 30th January, 1836,” New Orleans Commercial Bulletin, February 1, 1836, pg. 2.
46 The adjacent city of Lafayette was witness to the immigration of German and Irish people in the 1820s through the 1850s. Old Lafayette is now the heart of the Garden District neighborhood in New Orleans and
the populations living in the Vieux Carré and the American Sector. Those tensions were popularly defined as ones between French Creoles and “Yankees.” Although at first glance the construction of the St. Mary’s Market seems like a benign response to logistics—i.e., the American Sector was growing to an extent that an auxiliary market would be welcome—the construction of the first auxiliary neighborhood market had unintended consequences that fueled divisions in New Orleans’ community. Whereas the French Market had long acted as the sun around which the entire city oriented itself, the construction of the St. Mary’s Market introduced a second, albeit smaller sun around which people and businesses gravitated.

Even though the market was in a part of town governed more by “American” tastes, the market was designed in a similar architectural style to that of the French Market and was an extension of the market system already in place in New Orleans. Thus, St. Mary’s Market, and the community that frequented it, could never fully divorce itself from the overarching market culture developing in New Orleans. Like the French Market Complex, “all kinds of meat, poultry, game, fish, vegetables and all other

is known for the opulent homes that wealthy American migrants built along St. Charles Avenue. Richard Campanella, *Bienville’s Dilemma: A Historical Geography of New Orleans* (Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, The University of Louisiana at Lafayette, 2008), 171.

47 As noted by cultural geographer Richard Campanella, “In antebellum New Orleans, the charter groups mostly comprised the upper classes of French Creoles (as well as *Français de France*) and Anglo-American society, who tended to live in townhouses in the French Quarter and the Faubourg St. Mary, respectively. Richard Campanella, *Bienville’s Dilemma: A Historical Geography of New Orleans* (Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, The University of Louisiana at Lafayette, 2008), 171.
items destined for the daily supply of the city and its suburbs” could be bought and sold at St. Mary’s Market. Like in the French Market, municipal law governed daily purveying. That legal code created an underlying cultural continuity across the city in terms of hours of food provisioning and who was permitted to provision what items, etc. For example, certain foods had to be vended in the markets and not in the streets including “all vegetables, melons, potatoes, onions, fishes, shrimp, crabs, crawfishes, turtles and game.” There were, of course, exceptions to these market regulations that impacted a sense of belonging in the markets. These exceptions were similar to the ones made in the street food vending laws discussed in the previous chapter. For example, enslaved people who tended to come into the city on Sunday and holidays “for the purpose of selling the product of their own industry” and Native Americans “who sell daily the proceeds of their industry or their hunt” were permitted to sell prohibited items in the streets and in other parts of the market. The city government, once again, defined belonging through food provisioning on a citywide scale. Further, it enabled

48 Donatien Augustin, A General Digest of the Ordinances and Resolutions of the Corporation of New-Orleans (New Orleans: J. Bayon, 1831), 2011. Note: according to the digest, the ordinance was approved on November 17, 1828.

49 Although the sale of produce, seafood, and game was restricted to the market structure itself, all other goods could be set up alongside the Meat and Vegetable Markets at itinerant stands including “all kind of grains (except corn) fowls, eggs &c. […] dry peas and beans.” These goods, however, had to be sold by market vendors. The law expressly forbids “all hawkers or pedlars [sic]” from selling “any kind of merchandize [sic] whatever in said market.” Donatien Augustin, A General Digest of the Ordinances and Resolutions of the Corporation of New-Orleans (New Orleans: J. Bayon, 1831), 203, 205, 207. Note: according to the digest, the ordinance was approved on November 17, 1828.

50 Donatien Augustin, A General Digest of the Ordinances and Resolutions of the Corporation of New-Orleans (New Orleans: J. Bayon, 1831), 203. Note: according to the digest, the ordinance was approved on November 17, 1828.
marginalized groups a legal means through which to participate in the local food economy, which enabled them to build community through their roles as food vendors.

Figure 2: Norman’s Plan of New Orleans and Environs, 1845. Source: The Historic New Orleans Collection, Acc. No. 1949.7 a,b.

After the St. Mary’s Market, the city built the Washington Market c. 1836, located in what has become known as the Bywater, just two neighborhoods downriver of the French Quarter. Free people of color, French Creoles, and migrants from the Spanish
colonial empire occupied the Bywater at that time.\textsuperscript{51} The early growth of the market system catered to established communities, providing them with a highly-desired public amenity. Like the St. Mary’s Market, the Washington Market was not too far from the French Market, reflective of the fact that most of New Orleans’ population was still concentrated near the heart of the city. In c. 1838, the city added the Poydras Market, located in the American Sector. Next, the city furnished the Treme neighborhood with a market around 1840. That same year, the city built the Port Market a few blocks away from the French Market.\textsuperscript{52} The first auxiliary markets were all constructed within a mile

\textsuperscript{51} As noted by Richard Campanella, The “Catholic peoples of the Latin world,” which he defines as those coming from “Spain, regions of modern-day Italy, Cuba, Mexico, Haiti, West Indian islands, and Central and South America,” tended to settle in the working-class neighborhoods below the French Quarter. Richard Campanella, \textit{Bienville’s Dilemma: A Historical Geography of New Orleans} (Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, The University of Louisiana at Lafayette, 2008), 174.

\textsuperscript{52} The exact date ranges of the markets’ construction are difficult to determine because most of the municipal records of the public markets were destroyed. Regularly, the city would approve the construction of a public market, making a public announcement in the local newspapers. The city engineer or private contractors would not break ground until several months later, thus the date of the city government’s approval of a market does not necessarily correspond with the market’s construction. The below dates are estimations based on city ordinances, city directories, newspaper articles, and the scholarly research of academics who have written about the history of public markets in New Orleans. The French Market Complex was founded in 1791 and was built along the Mississippi river levee between St. Ann and Barracks. The St. Mary’s Market was built c. 1822 at Annunciation and Tchoupitoulas and eventually was rebuilt at Tchoupitoulas and North Diamond. The Washington Market was built c. 1836 at Chartres between Louisa and Piety. The Poydras Market was built c. 1838 at Poydras and Baronne, and an extension was built in 1866 at Poydras and Rampart. The Treme Market was built c. 1840 at Orleans, Marais, and North Robertson. The Port Market was built c. 1840 at the Mississippi river levee at the base of Elysian Fields. The Carrollton Market was built c. 1846 at Dublin and Maple. The Magazine Market was built c. 1847 at Magazine, Camp, and St. Mary (note: Camp became Sophie Wright Place). The Dryades Market was built c. 1848 at Dryades and on both sides of Melpomene (note: Dryades became Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard and Melpomene became Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard). The Ninth Street Market was built c. 1850 on Magazine between Ninth and Harmony. The Soraparu Market was built c. 1852 at Soraparu and Tchoupitoulas. The Claiborne Market was built c. 1852 at Claiborne and Common (note: Common became Tulane). The St. Bernard Market was built c. 1856 at St. Bernard and Claiborne. The Jefferson Market was built c. 1860 at Magazine and Berlin (note: Berlin became General Pershing). Le Breton Market was built c. 1867 at the intersection of Bayou Road, Dorgenois, Bell, DeSoto, and Kerleree. The Pilie Market, an extension of the Poydras Market, was built c. 1867 at
of the French Market Complex. It was at this time that New Orleans became the third largest city in the United States with a population in 1840 estimated at 102,193 (double the size of the city’s population in 1830).\textsuperscript{53} It was not until 1846, that the Carrollton Market opened far uptown past the current location of Tulane University, stretching the reach of the market system several miles upriver.\textsuperscript{54}

The public markets were organizing forces of urban development in New Orleans, especially for communities on the outskirts of the city center. The auxiliary

Poydras and Rampart. The Keller Market was built c. 1867 at Felicity and Magnolia. The St. John Market was built c. 1872 at Patterson between Olivier and Verret in Algiers. The Second Street Market was built c. 1873 at Second and Dryades. The St. Roch Market, also known as the Washington Market, was built c. 1875 at St. Claude and St. Roch. The Guillotte Market was built c. 1882 at Alvar and Burgundy. The Delamore Market was built c. 1882 at Claiborne and Elysian Fields. The Rocheblave Market was built c. 1882 at Rocheblave and Customhouse (note: Customhouse became Iberville). The Prytania Market was built c. 1890 at Prytania between Lyon and Upperline. The Suburban Market, also known as the Mid City Market, was built c. 1896 at Carrollton and Customhouse (note: Customhouse became Iberville). The Zengel Market was built c. 1900 at Piety and Burgundy. The Maestri Market was built c. 1900 at Orleans and Broad. The Lautenschlaeger Market was built c. 1902 at Burgundy and Touro. The Ewing Market was built c. 1907 at Magazine and Octavia. The Memory Market was built c. 1907 at Common and Lopez (note: Common became Tulane). The Mehl Market was built c. 1907 at Howard and Seventh (note: Howard became LaSalle). The Doullut Market was built c. 1907 at Dauphine between Egania and Lizardi. The Behram Market was built c. 1909 at St. Maurice and Douglass. The Foto Market, also known as the Central Market, was built c. 1910 at Homer and Teche. The McCue Market was built c. 1910 at Painters and Prieur. Beth A. Jacob, “New Orleans’ Historic Public Markets: Reviving Neighborhood Landmarks Through Adaptive Reuse” (master’s thesis, Tulane University, 2012); Sally K. Reeves, “Making Groceries: A History of New Orleans’ Public Markets,” \textit{Louisiana Cultural Vistas} (Fall 2007): 24-35; Robert A. Sauder, “The Origin and Spread of the Public Market System in New Orleans,” \textit{Louisiana History} 122, no. 3 (Summer, 1981): 281-297.\textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{53} The city’s population consisted of 59,519 whites, 23,448 black slaves, and 19,226 free people of color. Richard Campanella, \textit{Bienville’s Dilemma: A Historical Geography of New Orleans} (Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, The University of Louisiana at Lafayette, 2008), 32-33.

\textsuperscript{54} The Carrollton neighborhood saw population growth with the help of the New Orleans & Carrollton Railroad, which opened in 1835. The railroad brought greater mobility between the city center of New Orleans and communities like Lafayette, Jefferson, and Carrollton. Richard Campanella, \textit{Bienville’s Dilemma: A Historical Geography of New Orleans} (Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, The University of Louisiana at Lafayette, 2008), 155.
markets provide a case study for how many of New Orleans’ neighborhoods and commercial districts actually grew up around the local market. Essentially, in order to create a new neighborhood to accommodate population growth in New Orleans, city officials had to agree to construct a municipal market to serve as the economic and cultural core of the community. Without a market, it was difficult for a community to thrive. Thus, markets became indispensable public amenities in the antebellum period.

One such example of a neighborhood market was the Dryades Market, located at the intersection of Dryades and Melpomene Streets in New Orleans’ Second Ward. In the first decade of the nineteenth century, the neighborhood that would eventually become known as Dryades Market was undeveloped swampland—a patch of wetlands.

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55 Another commercial area of interest is the Magazine Street corridor, located upriver of the French Quarter. Beth Jacob, a historical preservationist, made an important observation about the commercial and social clustering around public markets. Her case study of Magazine Street in New Orleans refutes the common notion that Magazine Street is one continuous commercial district. Jacob notes that the district is actually composed of four commercial-social hubs that each orient around one of the four public markets on Magazine Street. These hubs represented individual nodes not only within the local food economy, but also within the city’s residential and social geospatial dynamics. Beth A. Jacob, “New Orleans’ Historic Public Markets: Reviving Neighborhood Landmarks Through Adaptive Reuse” (master’s thesis, Tulane University, 2012), 72-73.

56 Today, these streets are named Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard and Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard, respectively.

Note: The Dryades Market was one of four markets constructed in the part of the city just upriver of the French Quarter, which became defined as the First and Second Wards. The construction of these four markets between 1848–1852, all within fairly close proximity to one another, indicates that an initial population had begun to settle in the area and that those communities had successfully petitioned the government for a market.

Three more markets were constructed before the Civil War. Two of the markets, the 12th and 13th constructed, were located in the growing suburbs just beyond the Treme neighborhood. The 14th market, the Jefferson Market, was located uptown. Together, the markets built between 1848–1860 created a secondary ring around the first seven markets (except the Carrollton market which was far uptown). Those market furnished the nearly 70,000 additional individuals that moved into New Orleans after the census of 1840. Richard Campanella, Bienville’s Dilemma: A Historical Geography of New Orleans (Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, The University of Louisiana at Lafayette, 2008), 36.
connecting expansive cotton fields to the city of New Orleans.\textsuperscript{57} A 300-foot long rope bridge was one of the first amenities in the Dryades neighborhood, acting as a vital lifeline between the cotton fields and the burgeoning neighborhood in the 1820s.\textsuperscript{58} The neighborhood sat “at the back door” of the First Ward, or American Sector. The land that eventually became the Second Ward was wild and held a certain gravitas that captured the imaginations of New Orleans’ residents. It is not difficult to image people traversing the unstable rope bridge in the early morning as tendrils of fog slowly crept over the still, murky water, and folded around the bases of ancient Cyprus and Oak trees. The trees were (and still are) symbolic of the Louisiana countryside. It is unsurprising, then, that developers named the Dryades neighborhood after the mythological dryads—wood nymphs—who they believed could have lived amidst those ghostly Cyprus and Oak trees.\textsuperscript{59} How did this natural and dangerous wonderland eventually become a major residential area and shopping corridor in New Orleans?

In the first decade of the nineteenth century, the swampland captured the interests of property investors who sought to expand the American Sector of the city.\textsuperscript{60} The land was drained to prepare for the growth of both a residential and commercial

\textsuperscript{57} \textit{New Orleans Times}, November 5, 1865, pg. 2.
\textsuperscript{58} \textit{New Orleans Times}, November 5, 1865, pg. 2.
\textsuperscript{59} The name was also fitting for this part of town because the streets in the First Ward were named after the nine muses and generally inspired by other figures in classic mythology such as Hercules. \textit{New Orleans Times}, November 5, 1865, pg. 2.
\textsuperscript{60} Early investors included Thomas Banks, James H. Caldwell, and Maunsel White. \textit{New Orleans Times}, November 5, 1865, pg. 2; “New Orleans, the Dual City,” \textit{Times-Picayune}, March 4, 1934, pg. 40.
sector. As city officials developed the land, they understood that a neighborhood market was necessary to sustain a growing urban population.61 The local newspaper noted that, prior to the construction of the Dryades Market, “the rear of the first district was underdeveloped and lacking infrastructure and community (good roads and residences).”62 The newspaper goes on to clarify that “Only a few scattering houses were to be seen in that portion of the city,” occupied largely by German and Irish immigrants.63 In the late 1840s, the municipal government began to organize the construction of the market by approving plans to build it in December 1847. Although the land lease changed hands several times and contractors were hired to build the market, Patrick Irwin is credited with erection of the market and several other buildings on Dryades Street.64

The market was more than a central retail space for the new Dryades community, it was a symbol of that neighborhood’s potential as both a residential and commercial hot spot. Those fortunate enough to own property or a business in this area


Note: In the late antebellum period, New Orleans was the second-largest immigrant port city in the country after New York. The migration patterns in New Orleans are reflective of broader national trends between 1820–1860. Richard Campanella, *Bienville’s Dilemma: A Historical Geography of New Orleans* (Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, The University of Louisiana at Lafayette, 2008), 170-171.
64 According to the *Times-Picayune*, the construction of the market, as of December 1848, was contracted to Messrs. Mathew and Fonbene; and although the land was originally leased to T. Calujanini, it was transferred to Thos. Butterfield in December 1848. The second Municipal Council approved this contract and lease transfer. With the sources currently available, it is not clear when the Patrick Irwin became involved with the construction of the market. “Lafayette Council,” *Times-Picayune*, December 13, 1848, pg. 2.
of town had an opportunity to make a good living off of the neighborhood’s growth. Their participation in that economic boom would solidify their position in the community, embedding their businesses into the fabric of neighborhood residents’ everyday life. In sum, those businesses were considered the pathway towards economic belonging—a kind of belonging that afforded people a stable income and the chance to build a strong reputation as purveyors. For some, entrepreneurial efforts led to political connections and public service. Thus, food entrepreneurship was a means to secure a different kind of belonging within the realm of local politics.

Waiting with anticipation for the Dryades Market’s official opening, community members gathered just outside of the market along Dryades and Melpomene Streets on the morning of January 10, 1849. The market opened its stalls to the public at 7:00. Vendors had worked tirelessly to prepare their displays, hoping to make strong first impressions with potential customers and solidify their good reputations within the market’s scene. A walk through the market a few hours prior to opening would have revealed stall keepers working with fierce efficiency to prepare their retail spaces as a near-constant flow of mule-drawn carts laden with fruits and vegetables arrived at the scene. Produce vendors would have taken care to artfully arrange their wares in baskets and on top of barrels to showcase the vibrant colors and rich textures of seasonal produce. Winter citrus fruits were likely halved or sliced for display so that their cloying

65 “City Intelligence,” Times-Picayune, January 10, 1849, pg. 2.
scent carried along the halls of the market. Bakers would have stacked steaming loaves of fragrant, German-style breads, still hot from the oven, in their stalls. The coffee stand keepers, too, would have showcased the robust aroma of their product by roasting, grinding, and brewing their coffee on site. These sensory delights were but a taste and a whiff of what was to come for the neighborhood.

From its very first hours, the market was deemed a place of the people of the Dryades neighborhood and a place that bolstered a belief in the importance of public welfare. Events at the opening were geared towards fostering a shared sense of ownership over the market. City politicians, vendors, and community shoppers were all invited to participate. The opening ceremonies culminated at 2:00 in the afternoon with a luncheon. The elaborate collation marked the market’s opening as an important event not only for the surrounding neighborhood, but for the city of New Orleans as well. Fathers, mothers, children, and even city council aldermen attended the event, which transformed the market from a retail space into a community space. According to the *Times-Picayune*, “[t]he long tables of the market house groaned beneath the weight of roast turkeys, ducks, chickens, beef, &c. champagne, claret, &c. were provided in profusion to wash the aforesaid articles down.”

The community lunched for a good hour. A series of toasts were made to commemorate the market and wish market entrepreneurs future success. Spirits rose as the event continued (and as attendees

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66 “City Intelligence,” *Times-Picayune*, January 10, 1849, pg. 2.
consumed more champagne and other libations). Attendees were reported to have danced around with turkey legs and wings waving above their heads in celebration.67 This was a celebration of the coming transformation of the Dryades neighborhood and a beckoning of good fortune for local entrepreneurs.

As anticipated, the construction of the market ignited population growth, and the market’s presence gave new residents a place to convene on a daily basis for commercial and non-commercial activities. Whereas the Second Ward was still a burgeoning community through much of the 1840s, the neighborhood boomed in the early 1850s. The residents of this ward demanded the enlargement of the Dryades Market to meet the needs of their growing population. Their requests were brought in front of the City Council and construction began only a few weeks later. As noted in the local paper, it was “the enterprise of the population” that brought about the second building, noting the power of communities to organize and acquire the municipal resources they needed.68 The council met the population’s needs by constructing a second market of the same size and appearance as the original one on the opposite side.

67 “City Intelligence,” Times-Picayune, January 10, 1849, pg. 2.
68 Neighborhood residents were often behind the construction of new markets and their subsequent renovations, demonstrating the power of grassroots activism in sustaining New Orleans' municipal market system. “Rear of the First District,” Times-Picayune, December 28, 1852, pg. 2.
of the Melpomene Canal, one square up at the intersection of Dryades and Terpsichore Street.  

Whereas the Dryades neighborhood had previously been a community defined by its scattered residences and dearth of public amenities, the construction of the Dryades Market marked a turning-point in the neighborhood’s economic role in the city. In acknowledged these upcoming developments, the local newspaper noted that the market, as a public amenity, provided a much-needed space for commercial activity while also increasing property values of the surrounding streets.  

That uptick attracted other businesses to the area. As was the case with Dryades Street, it was common for banks to open up along streets on which a public market recently opened.  

These bank branches, many of which still stand today, often bore the name of the market with which they were associated. The Canal Commercial Trust & Savings Bank, for example, had a Dryades Market branch. These bank branches provided the necessary financial assistance and infrastructure for other private enterprises to open up near the

69 The Dryades Market would, from that day forward, consist of two structures on opposite sides of Melpomene Street. “Rear of the First District,” Times-Picayune, December 28, 1852, pg. 2.  
70 “City Intelligence,” Times-Picayune, January 11, 1849, pg. 2.  
71 In 1907, for example, the Commercial-Germania Trust & Savings Banks had branches “Near All the Principle Markets and Business Centers,” which included locations at the Dryades, Poydras, Magazine, Treme, and French Markets among other commercial districts. Times-Picayune, December 12, 1907, pg. 11. See, also, Alvin P. Howard’s study of branch banking in New Orleans in which he argues that like Europe, New Orleans’ commercial centers were neighborhood-based economies, in which neighborhoods were loosely grouped around the food market. Alvin P. Howard, “Branch Banking in New Orleans,” The Bankers Magazine 102 (1921), 762.  
commercial core of the market. These other entities were diverse and included grocery stores, bakeries, restaurants, coffee houses, taverns, saloons, drug stores, specialty shops, and eventually, department stores. In sum, municipal markets like the Dryades Market acted as catalysts for economic growth across antebellum New Orleans.

The commercial corridor that grew up around the Dryades Market created a village life for those living within close proximity to the market, constantly reinforcing connections among community members. That village life concentrated the movement of neighborhood residents who no longer had to venture to the city center for necessities. Nearly everything that neighborhood residents needed was within a few city blocks of their residences. They could, for example, buy food, deposit money, or get fitted for a dress all within minutes of home. Schools, too, were built in relation to the market. After the Dryades market’s construction, the city built the Jefferson and Webster schools to accommodate the growing number of children in the Dryades neighborhood.

The impact of the neighborhood market’s gravitation pull was significant in that it enabled neighborhoods to become fairly insular, independent communities. That insularity stood in stark contrast to the dynamics of the French Market, which

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73 Note that coffee houses had many functions. Often, they served alcohol in addition to coffee. For further discussion on the history of bars in America see: Christine Sismondo, *America Walks Into a Bar: A Spirited History of Taverns and Saloons, Speakeasies, and Grog Shops* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

74 The Jefferson School was for boys and the Webster School was for girls. “A School Jubilee. Jefferson and Webster Half a Century Old Soon,” *Times-Picayune*, November 14, 1904, pg. 4.
comparatively fostered a more inclusive, open environment; it did so by virtue of its position as the central market for the entire city, catering to its diverse population for generations. As the city’s auxiliary market system grew, the city became more fractured, breaking off into fairly distinct enclaves.

One of the mitigating forces of that insularity was the army of itinerant vendors who, as discussed in the previous chapter, transgressed invisible boundaries between neighborhoods and transported both material goods and ideas throughout the city. The multi-layered local economy, one that consisted of both landed and itinerant businesses, kept avenues open for cultural fusion to continue to occur between distinct neighborhoods. Thus, German and Irish migrants living and working in the Dryades neighborhood, for example, came across Atlantic World ingredients, cultural practices, and ideas that circulated throughout New Orleans.

It was not uncommon for entrepreneurs in New Orleans’ neighborhoods to adapt their food businesses to meet the evolving taste preferences of New Orleans’ population. In 1896, for example, one of New Orleans’ most famous bakeries, Leidenheimer Baking Co., opened its doors on Dryades Street. George Leidenheimer, an immigrant from Bavaria, owned and operated the bakery. Although an example from the latter part of the nineteenth century, Leidenheimer’s business decisions reflect

The bakery, which originally opened on Dryades Street, eventually moved to a location three blocks down Melpomene Street. The bakery still operates in that location as of August 2017.
longstanding trends in New Orleans’ food economy and culture. At first, he baked breads native to Bavaria—denser, dark breads. He had a consumer base for said breads because of other Bavarian immigrants who moved to New Orleans, many of whom lived and worked in the Dryades neighborhood. Eventually, though, the bakery adapted its offerings to appeal to the city’s preference for New Orleans-style French bread—a lighter, white bread with a paper thin, crispy crust and a hallmark of the famous po’boy sandwich of New Orleans. This bread was in turn distributed to the various city markets by horse-drawn carts, which contributed to the cyclical movement of goods and ideas between distributors, purveyors, and consumers throughout the city.76

From its conception, the Dryades commercial corridor was designed to be an important community space for neighborhood residents and also for those who lived in other parts of the city. That intention served to lessen the isolating forces at play within the neighborhood’s food culture and economy. Patrick Irwin, the developer of the Dryades neighborhood, for example, strategically invested not only in the construction and expansion of the market, but also neighboring properties and a transportation service that would bring customers from outside the Dryades neighborhood to the hub of this commercial center—the Dryades Market.77 Irwin established an omnibus line—horse or mule drawn carriages that operated along major throughways—along Rampart

77 Patrick Irwin built a stand where patrons could purchase tickets and where the mules were stabled at the corner of Melpomene and Dryades Streets. “Old Time Bus-Lines and Street Cars in New Orleans,” *Times-Picayune*, July 30, 1911, pg. 13.
Street (then called Hercules Street) from Julia Street to the Dryades Market. This line ran for 15 years and acted as a key connector between downtown New Orleans and the Second Ward commercial district. Eventually, these omnibus lines were superseded by railroad lines, in which Irwin also invested and amassed most of his fortune.

The omnibus lines promoted accessibility for New Orleanians living and working outside of the Dryades neighborhood. Increased mobility and its accompanying access to the Dryades Market corridor grew the commercial neighborhood’s customer base, which in turn attracted more people to settle in the surrounding area. The growth of the consumer base ultimately led to the growth of the residential base, encouraging new families and individuals to settle in the community, diversifying its population.

The growth of the residential base supported the commercial activity of the Dryades Market corridor, grounding the commercial district in the local community. Thus, the

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78 “Death of Patrick Irwin,” *Times-Picayune*, April 26, 1878, pg. 2; “Old Time Bus-Lines and Street Cars in New Orleans,” *Times-Picayune*, July 30, 1911, pg. 13. Note: It appears that the Dryades omnibus line was discontinued on July 8, 1862 under Union General Benjamin Butler’s martial law. It is unclear if and when the line re-opened. *Daily Delta*, January 1, 1863, pg. 1.

79 Irwin’s involvement with the Dryades Market weaves together a story of immigration, entrepreneurship, and adaptation in one of America’s largest port cities. Irwin was born in County Cork, Ireland in 1810. He emigrated from Cork when he was 19 years old. He moved to New Orleans in 1832 and invested in the construction of the Dryades Market over a decade later. After establishing the Dryades Market, two omnibus lines along Rampart and Carondelet Street, and the spread of railroad lines in the city, Irwin turned to local politics. He became an alderman in 1854, a member of the Legislature in 1854, and president of the Hibernia Bank in 1870 and later the president of the Hibernia Insurance Company. His personal history indicated the financial and political leverage that the public market system could afford investors in the public market system. “Death of Patrick Irwin,” *Times-Picayune*, April 26, 1878, pg. 2.


81 As noted in one of the local newspapers just after the construction of the Keller Market in 1867, “As market places in the city soon become centres [sic] of business and retail trade, it will not be long before the immediate neighborhood of the market will be built up.” “The Keller Market,” *New Orleans Times*, April 5, 1867, p. 10
local population served as the core of the Dryades corridor’s patronage, which was then supplemented by a broader base of customers from throughout New Orleans.

The commercial districts that grew up around the city’s neighborhood markets wove together the residential and commercial sides of the community, inextricably binding those two entities to the market itself. Vendors in the market typically lived within a few hundred feet or a few city blocks of the structure. Charles Palermo, a fish vendor, lived at 1332 Saratoga Street, just two blocks from the Dryades Market.\footnote{“Dryades Market District Continued,” \textit{Daily States}, January 10, 1904, pg. 19; \textit{Soards’ New Orleans City Directory for 1903}, vol. xxx (New Orleans: Soards Directory Co., 1903).}

Similarly, John H. Hunsinger, a poultry vendor, lived just three blocks down Melpomene Street.\footnote{“Dryades Market Continued,” \textit{Daily States}, November 1, 1903, pg. 7; \textit{Soards’ New Orleans City Directory for 1903}, vol. xxx (New Orleans: Soards Directory Co., 1903).} The families of those vendors, too, shopped at the market, and patronized their family’s business and their neighbors’ businesses as well.\footnote{Note: Not all vendors necessarily lived close to the market. Some vendors at the Dryades Market came in from other parts of town or from the outskirts of the city, as was the case with two vegetable sellers who were victims of a highway robbery in 1866. On the same day, “a woman driving a pony attached to a little two-wheeled cart, in which she carries cream cheese to the Dryades Market for sale, was stopped” by the same criminals. “Attempted Highway Robberies,” \textit{New Orleans Times}, July 26, 1866, pg. 7.} Patrons, mainly women and their children, walked to the market on a daily basis to procure fresh produce, meats, fishes, and various grocery items.\footnote{For example, Jean Marie Du Freichou was a butcher at the Dryades Market. His wife regularly shopped at the market. Often, she sent her children in her stead, sending them on the five- to six-block walk to the market to “get the supply of meat for home purses […]” “Alleged Mysterious Disappearance,” \textit{Times-Picayune}, March 11, 1875, pg. 2.}

The physical act of buying food in the market served to build up and break down relationships between customers and their local vendors. Thus, something as mundane
as picking out a good cut of meat or a ripe piece of fruit solidified bonds between community members and reinforced belonging through economic transactions.

Customers came to rely on their senses to evaluate the quality of foods for sale, too shrewd to ever completely trust market vendors. Shoppers smelled meat and carefully examined fish eyes and gills to determine freshness; they used sensitive fingertips to test for firmness of summer vegetables; they employed a deft thwack of their knuckles against smooth watermelon rind to test for hollowness, a sign of ripeness.86 After examining these foods, they negotiated monetary value with the vendor, a process influenced by a patron’s longstanding relationship with the seller. Leon Soniat Jr., for example, recalls his trips to the French Market with his grandmother in the early twentieth century. He noted that when shopping for ingredients to make sausage, his grandmother indicated to the butcher what piece of pork she wanted to inspect to confirm that it was not slimy and that it had good color and a fresh sent. After determining the quality of the meat, she would tell the butcher exactly how she wanted that particular piece to be cut to suit her needs.87 Soniat’s grandmother was just as scrupulous when picking her vegetables at the market. His vivid description of his grandmother captures her tenacity and astute marketing abilities, which included

maintaining strong relationships with vendors. These were relationships in which customers held their vendors accountable for their products, and if a bad sale was made, the reputation of that vendor and the success of their business could crumble upon the negative review of a well-connected customer. In New Orleans’ markets, reputation mattered within the community, and reputation could make or break a vendor’s acceptance within their community.

Vendors, the individuals who carefully placed the lettuce, celery, peppers, and okra of which Soniat’s grandmother was so discriminating, were not enigmatic. Rather, these entrepreneurs were a centerpiece of the city’s local food economy and culture. Market patrons knew their vendors because they interacted with each other as well as with other customers every day. They did so not only to procure food, but also to catch up with each other as neighbors. Angelina Christina, for example, operated a fruit stand at the Dryades Market for 25 years and when she passed, her obituary named her a “pioneer,” and foundational figure of the Dryades market. Further, the paper noted that “[e]very child and every woman who marketed at the Dryades Market knew her for her polite and generous way.” Christina was more than the face of a commercial venture;

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88 According to Soniat, “A vegetable had to be demonstrably fresh, otherwise she eschewed it like the plague. Even slightly wilted lettuce, celery, or peppers were not for her. When the gumbo of the day was okra, the okra was severely tested. They were culled from the bin one by one, and before she bagged them she would hold one in her hand with the pointed end up. With her thumbs she would bend the okra at the tip. If the tip popped off, she knew it was fresh and tender. If the tip bent over limply there was no okra gumbo that day.” Leon Soniat Jr., La Bouche Creole (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, 1981), 134.
she was also an important community member who maintained personal relationships with her patrons. She was one of hundreds of vendors who were a part of New Orleans’ nourishing networks—networks that connected community members together through food provisioning.

Patrons of the market also connected with each other, building community through daily interactions in the market. As women sorted through heaping baskets of onions and celery root, they exchanged gossip, inquired about family members, and celebrated important milestones with each other. Upon hearing about the marriage of Sebastian Traath and Miss Pauline Gelton, for example, the *Times-Picayune* described community members as having “gossiped all yesterday morning around the Dryades market and in the neighborhood of Jackson and Saratoga streets.”90 The talkative market-goers came to the conclusion that the couple eloped because of the nature of the “quiet” wedding.91 Although these conversations may seem somewhat inconsequential, they cemented crucial community bonds. So much so, that when community members encountered personal tragedy, their neighbors supported them. For example, the people who frequented the Dryades Market collected and donated money to a mother who lost two of her four newborns. When the third child showed signs of illness, the Dryades community came together to raise money at the market.92 Similar to church parishes, the

92 *Times-Picayune*, January 30, 1893, pg. 2.
market served as an organizing force for benevolent community-based activities. In sum, the markets were catalysts for the development of a complex social network that relied on more than just provisioning.

The market was a community space whose organizing influence stretched far beyond the walls of the market structure itself. Vendors, for example, reinforced a sense of community by joining organizations such as the Butchers’ Benevolent Association and the New Orleans Abattoir Association. Many food vendors in the market were volunteer firemen for their district and belonged to the community-oriented groups like the Fireman’s Charitable Association. Jean Marie Du Freichou, a butcher at the Dryades Market, for example, was a member of the Washington Fire Company No. 20. George A. Trauth, a coffee stand owner and operator in the Dryades Market, was a member of the same brigade and a delegate to the aforementioned Firemen’s Charitable Association. Vendors also solidified social bonds through play. Butchers, in particular, bonded through the great American past time of baseball. There even existed an intense and lasting rivalry among teams of butchers, so much so, that the results of these games were reported in the local newspapers. For example, in 1908, the *Times-Picayune* reported on the exciting news that the butchers of the Dryades Market, the Cassagne
Veal Sluggers, “put away their aprons and played great baseball yesterday at Ferran’s Park” and finally defeated the Senac Beef Sluggers 8 to 7.93

Community activities both within and outside of the market fostered a sense of loyalty to local vendors and a sense of obligation to support fellow community members. Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century, Dryades businesses attempted to appeal to community sentiment in a local newspaper, The Daily States. Vendors lobbied for greater support from their own neighborhoods and the broader New Orleans community. Each week, the local businesses of the Dryades Market released a multi-page spread profiling vendors in the markets as well as neighboring businesses.94 Even though published from 1903-1904, this source provides insights into a traditional model of provisioning and local commerce in New Orleans—a system based on the neighborhood model developed in the antebellum period.95

The Dryades Market was the first to run a section in the newspaper to build a local customer base, but others soon followed. For example, entrepreneurs from the Ninth Street Market contacted the newspaper asking that they too have representation

93 “Butchers Play Great Ball,” Times-Picayune, July 10, 1908, pg. 10.
94 As noted in the October 25, 1903 issue: “For the next few weeks the States has arranged to assist the business men of the Dryades street market and vicinity in an effort to bring prominently before the public of New Orleans the advantages to be derived by trading in this locality.” “Dryades St. and Market - The Daily States Publishes a Page for the Benefit of the Market and Street Every Sunday. - Warmly Supported by Businessmen - Readers Invited to Peruse the Announcements and Visit the Advertisers All Lines of Trace Represented Here,” Daily States, October 25, 1903, pg. 6.
95 I pair the Daily States profiles with city directories to understand where vendors lived, therefore determining their proximity to the markets.
in the Sunday paper. By mid-November, they also had a spread in the *Daily States*. The Poydras Market first appeared on December 13, 1903 and the French Market appeared in a grand spread just a few days before Christmas on December 20, 1903; and throughout 1904 several more neighborhoods markets appeared in the Sunday *Daily States.*96 Key to the markets’ reputations was cultivating the idea that these spaces continued to be the heart of the local economy as they had been in the antebellum period and throughout the nineteenth century. As noted in the first issue that featured the Ninth Street Market: “This page is the outcome, and it is a most creditable exposition of the importance of the neighborhood as a commercial center.”97

The newspaper spreads were diverse, but focused on the personal lives of vendors, thus reinforcing the idea that these retails spaces were community spaces. They included an introductory essay and an image of the market as well as advertisements specific to the commerce of that particular neighborhood, giving us insights into what individual vendors sold at the neighborhood markets. In an attempt to supplement advertisements with a more personal story, the *Daily States* proposed to publish a portrait and short profile detailing the life, character, and business practices of one or

96 Featured market spreads include the Dryades Market, Ninth Street Market, Poydras Market, French Market, Treme Market, Suburban Market, Zengel Market, and Jefferson Market.
more of its advertisers each week. The profiles were designed to function as character references. They assured readers that the men and women who ran businesses in or around the Dryades Market were trustworthy and deserving of their patronage. Aside from assurances, the content was diverse and often included vendors’ place of birth and family connections in the city; where they received their education; how they got their start in their respective industry; the benevolent societies or social clubs to which they belonged; the name of their spouse and the number of children they had; and their home address.

The retailers who advertised in the Daily States defined community in terms of the entire commercial district that grew up around the market. This gesture of inclusivity indicates that community relationships were not bounded within the walls of the market, but rather stretched from door to door along the Dryades neighborhood’s main commercial corridor. In addition to the vendors selling fresh foods, meat, and game in the markets, the Dryades Market commercial district was also home to several dry goods stores, saloons, coffee stands, grocery stores, clothing and shoe stores, furniture stores, a cookery store, and a book store. The area also had a jeweler, tinsmith, undertaker, and a baker. The district stretched several blocks—a behemoth presence in an otherwise residential neighborhood. Admiring the breadth of the neighborhood

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98 This newspaper holds an incredible amount of information on the day-to-day operations of the public markets—a subject I would like to pursue further as I revisit the dissertation project.
economy, an introductory essay in the *Daily States* paints a vivid scene: “Lined along both sides of the Dryades street, from Clio to Philip streets, is a succession of stores were every article of necessary or luxury may be found in great profusion: indeed no part of the city offers a wider opportunity for the supply of every desire.” The entrepreneurs who ran these businesses bolstered the already tight-knit community created by the Dryades Market.

The proximity between these entrepreneurs’ homes and businesses helped to create an environment in which commercial and residential life was almost inseparable. For many, in fact, their place of residence was the same as their business. M.M. Bradburn, who lived and worked at 1901 Jackson Avenue, at the corner of Dryades Street, was a druggist for the Dryades Market neighborhood. George H. Leidenheimer, a Bavarian baker, also lived and worked at the same address at 1835 Melpomene. Others lived in close proximity to their businesses, but not in the same building. Charles A. Kaufman, for example, lived just three blocks from the Kaufman’s Department Store of which he was president. New Orleans was set up in such a way that wealthier entrepreneurs like Kaufman could live on grand throughways like St. Charles Avenue.

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102 Given the success of Kaufman’s business, it is not surprising that he lived at 1707 St. Charles Avenue, one of the wealthier streets in New Orleans. “Dryades Market Continued,” *Daily States*, November 8, 1903, pg. 7; *Soards’ New Orleans City Directory for 1903*, vol. xxx (New Orleans: Soards Directory Co., 1903).
and still be in close proximity to one of the neighborhood commercial corridors. This trend is indicative of the socio-economic diversity of neighborhoods like Dryades in which everyone from street peddlers to department store moguls lived within a few blocks of one another.

Commercial and residential activity were further entangled because family members regularly lived together and worked in the same industry. Nathan and Morris Dreyfus owned and operated a dry goods store on Dryades Street called Dreyfus Brothers. They resided together at 1629 Erato Street as did William Dreyfus who was a clerk at the store. The importance of family networks in these local commercial corridors is also evident in the story of Lawrence Flettrich who owned and operated a coffee stand at the Poydras Market with his brother John Flettrich. John also owned a saloon on Dryades Street. Eventually, Lawrence took over operations of the Lalla’s coffee stand in the Dryades Market, expanding his Poydras Market business into the

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103 As noted by cultural geographer, Richard Campanella, “In pre-industrial cities, prosperous members of charter groups usually resided in the inner city, with domestic servants and slaves living in adjacent quarters, and middle- and working-class families residing in a ring of adjacent neighborhoods.” Richard Campanella, Bienville’s Dilemma: A Historical Geography of New Orleans (Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, The University of Louisiana at Lafayette, 2008), 170.

104 Jacob Brenner owned a clothing store on Dryades Street and lived at 1401 Baronne Street. His relation, Philip Brener is listed in the city directory as living at the same residence and having the occupation of a peddler. The Brenner residence is about a 7-minute walk from Kaufman’s grand home on St. Charles Avenue. Soards’ New Orleans City Directory for 1903, vol. xxx (New Orleans: Soards Directory Co., 1903).


commercial corridor where his brother, John, already had a food and beverage-related business established.\textsuperscript{107}

Familial business networks solidified community relations, yet even within those communities, there were also tensions that created in groups and out groups among entrepreneurs. Within the \textit{Daily States}, one sees these tensions play out in regard to immigrant communities. In 1900, New Orleans had one of the largest Sicilian immigrant populations in the world, and many of those migrants integrated into the local economy and community through the street food vending and public markets. Although strong fraternal relationships developed within the Italian community, there were also tensions between “native” New Orleanians of diverse backgrounds and new Italian migrants. Those tensions appear in the \textit{Daily States} as the entrepreneurs of the Dryades Market district appealed to their neighbors and patrons to support what they identified as “local” and “native born” businessmen. Vendor profiles in the \textit{Daily States}, for example, demonstrate a strong sense of loyalty to New Orleans and tie that localism to the progressive, liberal ideas purported in the newspaper. For example, J.J. Guinle’s profile in the Poydras Market spread mentions his birth in New Orleans and his education in the city’s public schools.\textsuperscript{108} A. Dobard’s profile also notes that he was born in New Orleans and further mentioned that he came from an “old and well-known family of this

section.”109 John H. Hunsinger’s profile delves deeper and states that the Dryades Market vendor was born in the Dryades neighborhood and has childhood memories of the market.110 Dozens of vendor profiles tout these kinds of credentials—ones that allude to a birthright claim to the city’s culture. Their repetitive mention across the different market spreads suggests a strong commitment to local entrepreneurs, which is unsurprising considering the widespread xenophobia characteristic of New Orleans at that time.

Although the Daily States and its readers supported native vendors, they were willing to support immigrant vendors as well; their profiles, however, often emphasized the immigrant vendor’s long-term residence and commitment to their adopted city. H.B. Guinle, for example, was born in France and immigrated to the United States in 1865 where he began a family and opened a meat stall in the Poydras Market. His profile notes that he was a “patriotic citizen,” emphasizing his political and personal ties to the city.111 To further emphasize the roots he put down in New Orleans, the Daily States published his profile alongside that of his son, the aforementioned J.J. Guinle. Paul St. Philip, a vendor in the French Market, was born in Italy. His profile carefully notes, though, that he was brought to the city as a boy and that he attended the public

110 “Progressive and Popular Merchants of Dryades St.,” Daily States, December 27, 1903, pg. 18.
111 “Poydras Market Continued,” Daily States, January 10, 1904, pg. 28.

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schools. Similarly, the *Daily States* reports that Henry J. Schenck was born in Alsace, but was “brought to America at the early age of three, and reared in New Orleans” where he received a “liberal education, primarily in the public schools.” These profiles stress that, although these men were immigrants, they were raised and educated in the city and were thus privy to the city’s local culture and worthy of the city’s support and patronage. Combined, their social and economic activity gave rise to their belonging.

It was around the time that H.B. Guinle immigrated to New Orleans in 1865, that the city’s public market system deviated from that of other major American cities in both its architectural style and its geographic footprint. It was at this time that other major American cities adopted the “modern” market hall, a larger, enclosed space for purveying foods. New Orleans, by contrast, continued to build smaller pavilion-style markets for individual neighborhoods. The city’s focus remained on the hyper-local rather than a broader system of provisioning that relied on fewer markets.

After the Civil War, the city lost control of its public markets, including the Dryades Market. During Reconstruction, the state legislature of Louisiana was granted control of them. Although market construction came to a halt during the Civil War, several more markets were erected during Reconstruction, including the Le Breton Market (c. 1867), Keller Market (c. 1867), St. John Market (c. 1872), Second Street Market

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(c. 1873), and St. Roch Market (c. 1875). These markets were built in developing suburbs, spreading the radius of public markets further out beyond the city’s center. Through 1875, the city had approved the construction of nineteen public markets. The markets were not returned to the city until 1878. At that time, the city did not have the funds to sustain the public markets, so they contracted them out to private firms. It appears that many of these contracts were for a twenty-year period, expiring around the turn of the twentieth century.

During the period in which the public markets were privatized and for ten years after they had been returned to the city, fifteen more markets were constructed in New Orleans. As a result, the market system nearly doubled in size at a time when most American cities had one or two public markets. In fact, other cities had embraced a free market economy, enabling private green grocers to operate alongside public markets. Instead of following broader trends, city officials entrenched New Orleans in a traditional food system that appeared to defy all logic of what modern provisioning looked like in the United States. The city’s neighborhoods continued to emerge and orient themselves around the dozens of municipal markets in the city. Urban residents continued to anchor their sense of self and sense of belonging in those market structures and the diverse activities that took place within them. But unlike the city government, urban residents were well aware of the trends and technology informing national consumption. As had been their tradition, many of them organized and petitioned the
city government. They sought a hybrid system that would bring a more modern mode of provisioning into the city. They sought a local food system that embraced a free market economy, enabling customers to shop at private grocery stores. The tensions that played out between local officials, vendors, and customers over traditional and modern provisioning would pepper the pages of local newspaper through the twentieth century.

Although the local officials heard the complaints of customers and vendors, they were reluctant to abandon a public market system that was designed to fill the coffers of the city’s general fund. Thus, New Orleans’ market system remained comparatively traditional or “antiquated” in comparison to those in other American cities. At the same time, the city continued to rely heavily on street food vendors, who drew upon deep traditions of itinerant vending grounded in the city’s colonial period. The local provisioning traditions of New Orleans did not go unnoticed by Americans who were witness to industrialization and the privatization of food purveying across the country. Visitors to New Orleans in the postbellum period, as Emily Clark has demonstrated, were already inclined to see New Orleans as a foreign place as they had done for generations. Yet after the Civil War and Reconstruction, that foreignness took on new meaning when paired with a growing nostalgia for the antebellum South. Visitors came

to see New Orleans as “backward”—a relic of the American antebellum period—even though the city’s fusions food culture and economy were as dynamic as ever given the new waves of Atlantic World migrants that continued to arrive in the city. Appealing to these sentiments, new narratives emerged about New Orleans’ mythic “American” past that depicted the city as simultaneously foreign/exotic and antiquated through its local food culture and economy. These fictionalized depictions of New Orleans’ public culture served to marginalize the city in the American imagination, naming it simultaneously as “American” and “other.”
5. Cultures of Imagination

The rise of New Orleans’ modern tourist industry is the story of how Americans came to define themselves in the post-Civil War period.¹ As New Orleans’ tourist industry grew, its culture was recorded and shared at an unprecedented level for mass consumption in promotional pamphlets, city guides, novels, short stories, newspaper articles, children’s books, and cookbooks, among other print media.² These descriptive writings were accompanied by an even more diverse set of ephemera and material objects: postcards, broadsides, sheet music, dolls, and figurines, among others. Together, these writings and objects created a powerful lens through which Americans viewed New Orleans, not as the city was, but as they wanted it to be: a living embodiment of a


² Both at the time of the World’s Fair and in the decades leading up to it, there came to the forefront numerous authors whose works of history and literature were particularly potent in shaping Americans’ understandings of New Orleans. Most of them were men, but not solely so. For example, Historical Sketchbook and Guide to New Orleans and Environs makes note of the following authors: “Hon. Charles Gayarré, Judge Alexander Walker, Charles E. Whitney, Mrs. Field (‘Catherine Cole’), Alexander and his sons, John and Charles Dimitry, Lafcadio Hearn, Marion A. Baker, Norman Walker, and a number of other long since under the sod.” See also the writings of George Washington Cable, William H. Coleman, and Grace King. Introduction to Historical Sketchbook and Guide to New Orleans and Environs (New York: Will H. Coleman, 1885).
multicultural, antebellum past.3 This diverse body of sources, broadly construed, is
categorized as ethnographic or regional literature.4 Although not a new genre of the late
nineteenth century, this kind of work—which used observation to capture and,
sometimes, “preserve” local cultures—was a popular tool used primarily by Northern-
based writers, publishers, and the tourist industry to cast the South as an ideal tourist
destination.5 Many of the people involved in that industry were white men. Thus, it was
not New Orleanians who controlled the dissemination of knowledge about their culture,
but a cohort of white men with strong ties to the publishing industry, many of whom
were largely unfamiliar with the city and its history and culture.6 As a result, they
crafted a new version of New Orleans’ public culture that grafted nostalgic stereotypes

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3 When I refer to Americans, I refer to those people living outside of New Orleans, but within U.S. borders: men, women, and children from different socio-economic backgrounds who came to New Orleans either through the city’s tourist industry or through the writings and images of New Orleans that reached people across the country in the postbellum period. I acknowledge that many of those writings and images were produced for white audiences and that many of the people who held control of their dissemination were white men working in the Northeast.


5 Karen L. Cox argues that it was Northern publishers and Northern and Midwestern writers who defined Southern cities like New Orleans in the broader American imagination. She places her analysis in the early twentieth century when the rise of mass consumerism enticed Americans to look southward for examples of “authentic” American culture—ones intimately tied to rural landscapes, which were viewed as unaffected by industrialization and its homogenizing effects. She identifies the fact that the region was defined by people who were not Southern as one of the great ironies of the history of the American South. Karen L. Cox, Dreaming of Dixie: How the South Was Created in American Popular Culture (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 108.

6 The works of these white male authors are works of appropriation. These authors also wanted to capture New Orleans’ food culture on paper in order to share the city’s culture with broader audiences. The process of doing so demanded careful observation of an unfamiliar culture, one that manifested in multiple languages. These authors took the time to work with the multifaceted culture of New Orleans and thus we can approach these sources, albeit with caution, in an attempt to read them for their accuracy and realism.
onto the city’s existing food culture and economy, making New Orleans’ dynamic public culture appear static when it was, in fact, quite the opposite.

Whereas scholars have portrayed the development of modern American culture through the rise of the white middle class and the advent of mass consumerism, this chapter tells that story from a different angle—from the pieces of American culture that were marginalized in that overarching narrative by ethnographic authors. Memory of the Civil War and the cultural fissures that erupted in the years leading up to secession weighed upon authors living outside of the South, influencing their perceptions of New Orleans in the postbellum period. Consequently, they not only associated the city with its national French and Spanish colonial past, as they were primed to do, but also with its regional Southern antebellum past. In the second half of the nineteenth century, authors outside New Orleans tended to conflate those two elements. It was a powerful mixture. New Orleans became doubly marginalized in their writings as foreign/exotic

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and antiquated/static—attributes ascribed to its colonial and antebellum histories, respectively.

Food’s pervasiveness made it a powerful literary and visual tool through which authors crafted a reputation of the city as antiquated and foreign and, therefore, as fundamentally different from other American cities. Everyone ate regardless of demographic categories of age, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or socio-economic status; thus, the city’s food scene became a case study of New Orleans culture and a means to examine, dissect, and analyze all aspects of urban life. In addition to its universality, food was a compelling subject to depict because it appeared “authentic” and “unique” to the city—a way to get at the heart of New Orleans’ culture, to the essence of the city’s captivating folkways.

The city’s food culture captured the international character of New Orleans. This cosmopolitanism was not only of haute cuisine and other representations of fine arts, but also of vernacular cultures—the culinary arts of the everyday: home cooking and street food culture. In this way, New Orleans was an ideal host for the 1884 World’s Fair because the city itself was a microcosm of the cultural fusion and conflict that gave rise to the modern era—cultural fusion and conflict forged within the Atlantic slave trade, the rise of capitalism and industrialization, and the growth of global consciousness. Because New Orleans was associated with both “high” and “low” culture, it was a place in which Americans and visitors from around the world could witness and
simultaneously partake in those seemingly disparate veins. That engagement afforded a
certain kind of introspection and one that solidified in many Americans’ minds that their
lived experiences were different from those who lived in the “enigma” that was New
Orleans. Tourists, adventurers, and writers therefore fixated on the city’s culinary
culture. As a result of this attention, the food culture of New Orleans became defined
and known across the globe as “Creole cuisine.”

After the Civil War, Southern regional tourism became a popular industry. It
catered to Americans seeking refuge primarily from the industrial Northeast and
Midwest. That tourism focused on the rural South. Eager tourists crisscrossed the region
on rail visiting major battlefields and plantations. Postcards captured the
romanticization of the Civil War and slave society, featuring palatial plantation homes
flanked by craggy oak trees hung with Spanish moss. These images represent a
particular vision of the American South as a region in stasis defined by an unchanged
agrarian society—one not torn apart by the Civil War. As recent work has shown, that

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9 A cuisine is a set of culinary practices shared among a group of people typically living in the same city,
region, or country. Cuisines are commonly associated with nation states and the construction of national
identity. Take, for example, Japanese cuisine or French cuisine. The codification of a cuisine does not have to
have an overt nationalist agenda nor does it have to be confined by national borders. A cuisine can also
describe the food cultures of cities, regions, and other culturally unified places—ones defined not by
political borders, but equally impressionable ones erected in the minds of community members, and in
some cases, outsiders.

10 Key for many Americans at this time was reconciliation between the North and the South. There was an
urge among some Americans to see the Civil War as something that had not decimated Southern culture—
and that the South’s culture was, in fact, still intact. Yet there was still an assumption that the South would
idea appealed to Americans anxious about the rapid industrialization of cities in the Northeast and Midwest where change marked so many aspects of life.\textsuperscript{11} Thus, they found the South’s apparent resistance to change an appealing story of resilience and endurance—a sharp contrast to the rapidly evolving culture of industrialization.

Since New Orleans was a major Southern city, the development of its modern tourist industry occurred within this paradigm of Southern stasis. However, the city’s role in the American and global economy, as a major port with a diverse population, complicated its position within Southern regional tourism. Unlike the rural South, which people cast as isolated, New Orleans was embedded in a complex economic network that connected it to populations throughout the country and across the globe. Similar to Savannah, Charleston, and St. Augustine, Americans associated New Orleans with a strange kind of cosmopolitanism that was at once modern and rooted in the past. As described in one tourist pamphlet, “It is a most cosmopolitan city; and its ways partake largely of the traditional habits of both Spanish and French towns. It is gay, yet sad; sparkling as champagne, yet sedate as Quakerdom. Its people are fond of idleness, yet

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play a subordinate role to the larger Union and that its cultural staples would stay contained within the South and not trespass beyond Southern regional borders.\end{flushleft}

build up and sustain a great commerce. It is an enigma.” New Orleans’ cosmopolitanism did not prevent Americans from imagining the city as an antebellum relic, but they were also forced to acknowledge the city’s interconnectivity and fusion culture born of the Atlantic World. Thus, New Orleans was simultaneously a part of the larger Southern regional tourism complex, but also distinct within that model. No more apparent were these complicated and seemingly incongruent depictions than in the period leading up to and following the 1884 World’s Fair.

The 1884 World’s Fair played an important role in kick-starting New Orleans’ modern tourist industry by placing the city at the forefront of the American

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13 Within the context of the contemporary moment surrounding the World’s Fair, one promotional pamphlet recognized the paramount role that the city’s status as an Atlantic port played in sustaining its economy: “Its present assured prosperity is largely due to the successful deepening of the South Pass by Capt. Jas. B. Eads’ famous jetties, by which the largest vessels afloat can now come direct to the wharves of the city.” Our Great All Around Tour (New York: Leve & Alden Printing Company, 1884), 23. Fairs & Festival World’s Fair (1884), 11. Folder 1, Louisiana Research Collection, Tulane University, New Orleans, La.
14 Emily Clark argues that the hyper-sexualized image of the quadroon and that figure’s association with New Orleans turned the city “into a perpetual colonial space in the national imagination.” Perceptions of New Orleans as a “colonial space” marginalized New Orleans in the U.S., marking it something simultaneously within U.S. borders and outside of its predominant culture. Building on Clark’s work, I seek to examine the legacy of the city’s reputation as a colonial space in the postbellum period. Although I do not use the language of “colonial space,” I am interested in how people, particularly ethnographic authors, imagined New Orleans as a “unique” place that was at once an exotic and antiquated urban community in America. Just as “the quadroon has played a central role in sustaining the city’s reputation as an alien place improbably situated within American borders[,]” so too has the city’s food culture and economy. Whereas Clark is interested in the sex trade in New Orleans, I am interested in the food trade and how the city’s markets and street food culture played a central role in shaping perceptions of the city in the post-Civil War era. Emily Clark, The Strange History of the American Quadroon: Free Women of Color in the Revolutionary Atlantic World (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 9, 193.
imagination. As the host city, New Orleans found itself and its local food economy and culture in the national limelight. For the first time in World’s Fair history, railroads, hotels, and other tourism-based industries endorsed the event, which gave birth to new strategies to promote regional tourism in America. These companies created marketing campaigns that fueled the South’s burgeoning tourist industry, while stirring up

15 The 1884 World’s Fair, officially known as the World’s Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition, celebrated American unity and progress in the postbellum period. Many visitors viewed the World’s Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition as a failure. Poor planning, limited time, and funding issues led to an event that left many visitors disappointed. There are historians, however, who argue that the World’s Exposition deserves more attention than it has previously received from American historians. Joy Jackson, for example, argues that it was a critical event that marked New Orleans’ reemergence as a competitive, noteworthy city in the late nineteenth century. Building upon Jackson’s work, Samuel Shepherd suggests that the exposition’s importance stretched beyond rebuilding the city’s reputation. He argues that it provided American tourists and Louisianans alike, “a glimmer of hope for the future.” The World’s Exposition and the city of New Orleans became symbolic of the New South—a region that was unearthing itself from debris of the Civil War and Reconstruction by promoting both commercial and industrial development. Recently, Miki Pfeffer has explored the first Woman’s Department at a world’s fair. She argues that the 1884 Exposition served as a crucial stage upon which women voiced their political concerns in the postbellum period, thereby advancing the women’s suffrage movement in the South. Joy Jackson, New Orleans in the Gilded Age: Politics and Urban Progress, 1880-1896 (Baton Rouge, LA, 1969), 204-206; Samuel Shepherd, “A Glimmer of Hope: The World’s Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition, New Orleans, 1884-1885,” in Louisiana History, vol. 26, no. 3 (Summer, 1985), 271-290; Miki Pfeffer, Southern Ladies and Suffragists: Julia Ward Howe and Women’s Rights at the 1884 New Orleans World’s Fair (Jackson: The University Press of Mississippi, 2014).

16 Philadelphia had been the last American city to host the World’s Fair in 1876, celebrating the centennial of the Declaration of Independence and the birth of America. That event reinforced in the American imagination that Philadelphia was a city that lies at the heart of how Americans understood themselves as citizens and patriots. Americans undoubtedly compared New Orleans, the subsequent host of a World’s Fair in America, to Philadelphia, not only juxtaposing the two cities in how they relate to American history, but also in their success in hosting the Fair. As stated in a promotional pamphlet, “Those who visited Philadelphia in 1876, will need no words to recall the rich and varied treasures of the Government Department, but remarkable as that exhibit was, it is thrown into the shadow by that of 1884.” Later, the pamphlet states, “It was said that had the visitors to the Centennial of 1876 conscientiously given but five minutes of time to each object of interest, he would have spent 265 years in the task. In some particulars, the Centennial of 1884 is more rich and varied than its predecessor.” Yet as previously noted, the 1884 World’s Fair was largely seen as a failure, not living up to the great expectations that fairgoers held of it, thus further entrenching New Orleans in a narrative of anti-progress and anti-modernization. The promotional pamphlets for the 1884 World’s Fair, then, had to work to reverse expectations of the South already solidified in the minds of many Americans. Lydia Strawn, compiler, Illinois Central World’s Exposition Messenger (c. 1884), 11-3. Fairs & Festival World’s Fair (1884), Folder 1, Louisiana Research Collection, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.
excitement about the World’s Fair.\textsuperscript{17} They also aimed to transform New Orleans into an ideal urban destination.\textsuperscript{18}

To generate interest among tourists, companies distributed flyers and advertisements painted with idyllic images of the fairgrounds and vivid descriptions of New Orleans’ urban culture.\textsuperscript{19} Promotional literature depicted the city as a balm for the anxieties of the hard-working American living in the Northeast or Midwest. One such pamphlet implored American tourists “to turn [their] back[s] resolutely on the plow, the desk, the office and the quiet home, and seek in the New South and her Exposition grounds an invigorated frame, and a mind enriched and broadened as it could be in no other way.”\textsuperscript{20} The pamphlet cast New Orleans as an adult playground of sorts, akin to modern Las Vegas, where tourists could forget the pressures of their daily work and get

\textsuperscript{17} Kevin Fox Gotham, \textit{Authentic New Orleans: Tourism, Culture, and Race in the Big Easy} (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 46.

\textsuperscript{18} As noted by Anthony Stanonis, New Orleans and other American cities had poor reputations in the nineteenth century. Americans saw these urban centers as dangerous and dirty. One such visitor, David P. Harmon, described New Orleans in a letter to his wife as follows: “This is the gayest most disipated [sic] and licentious city in the Union—But my dear you may rest assured that I shall keep clear of its disipation [sic] and pollution.” During the late nineteenth century, however, Americans slowly changed their perceptions of American cities and began to see their cultural worth. Letter, David P. Harmon to his wife, January 24, 1837, Section A, Box 59, Small Manuscript Collections, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; Anthony Stanonis, \textit{Creating the Big Easy: New Orleans and the Emergence of Modern Tourism, 1918-1945} (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2006), 4. See also: Karen L. Cox, \textit{Dreaming of Dixie: How the South Was Created in American Popular Culture} (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 109.

\textsuperscript{19} For examples of promotional pamphlets see: Lydia Strawn, compiler, \textit{Illinois Central World’s Exposition Messenger} (c. 1884); \textit{Our Great All Around Tour} (New York: Leve & Alden Printing Company, 1884); \textit{Visitors’ Guide to The World’s Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition} (Louisville, KY: Courier-Journal Printing Co., 1884). Fairs & Festival World’s Fair (1884), Folder 1, Louisiana Research Collection, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

\textsuperscript{20} Lydia Strawn, compiler, \textit{Illinois Central World’s Exposition Messenger} (c. 1884). Fairs & Festival World’s Fair (1884), Folder 1, Louisiana Research Collection, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.
lost in a city commonly referred to as “the Paris of America”—one whose foreignness enabled them to escape the mundane and the difficult.21

American authors and publishers sought to take advantage of the growing interest in New Orleans and its culture, which only escalated as news of the World’s Fair hit newspapers nationwide. Americans’ fascination with Creole culture spread so rapidly that one of the most popular literary works in 1885 was George Washington Cable’s *The Creoles of Louisiana* (1844).22 There was a clear market for Creole-based literature, and savvy entrepreneurs were taking advantage of that by reprinting classic works about New Orleans’ culture, particularly those that featured the city’s antebellum period. At the same time, authors were writing new works to capture the imaginations of eager American readers.

Cookbooks were some of the more influential works published in tandem with the World’s Fair.23 They helped define New Orleans’ food culture and shape how readers understood and related to the city, its people, and its public culture.24 Their

21 New Orleans City Worthies,” *Times-Picayune*, March 26, 1837, 2.
23 For an overview on how to interpret historic cookbooks and for diverse lenses through which to examine their meaning and the communities they represent, see: Janet Theophano, *Eat My Words: Reading Women’s Lives Through the Cookbooks They Wrote* (New York: Palgrave, 2002). Note: For an example of a New Orleans-based manuscript cookbook compiled of newspaper clippings and handwritten recipes, see: Household notebook, 1843-1854, Folder 1, Collection M-103, Louisiana Research Collection, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.
24 Food cultures are intimately tied to community building and identity formation because food is used to communicate ideas of belonging and un-belonging. A cuisine is a prime example of Benedict Anderson’s concept of an “imagined” community. Those people who partake in a cuisine—in some combination of its
pages identified certain dishes like gumbo and jambalaya as the bedrock of New Orleans’ local food culture, while omitting other dishes found in New Orleans that did not align with their particular vision of Creole cuisine.\textsuperscript{25} They provided recipes and key regional ingredients for those dishes, tying them to a vast Atlantic network of culinary traditions as well as a close-knit local food economy.\textsuperscript{26} They were also the first published cookbooks to narrate the origins and influences that created Creole cuisine for a national audience—origin stories that, as we have seen, regularly emphasized the culinary traditions of European countries over those of West Africa, the Caribbean, Latin America, and North America. The culinary history that fixated on French and Spanish culinary influences proved convincing and appealing to white middle class readers, in particular.

\textsuperscript{25}In the cookbooks and other literature describing national cuisines, it is common to see language that identifies ingredients, preparation techniques, and dishes as distinctive (in the sense that they are specifically tied to that cuisine). Elements identified as a part of one nation’s cuisine are also implicitly (and at times explicitly) not a part of the culinary traditions of other peoples and places. David Shields emphasizes the importance of ingredients as a distinctive marker of cuisine, arguing that a cuisine lays in the raw foods themselves and the dishes of which those distinctive flavors give rise. David Shields, \textit{Southern Provisions: The Creation & Revival of a Cuisine} (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2015).

\textsuperscript{26}Most cooks in New Orleans did not work from written recipes. Instead, they relied on both formal and informal apprenticeships to acquire fundamental culinary skills and years of personal experience working in kitchens to produce quintessential Creole dishes. Some house managers and cooks attempted to codify Creole cooking traditions in recipe form, but those recipes were limited to personal diaries and household manuals kept primarily by white New Orleanian women.
Creole cuisine was the tool by which white authors marginalized some of the most visible and influential food entrepreneurs and culinary experts in the city—women, people of color, and recent migrants from the Atlantic World. These are the people who worked as farmers, vendors, and cooks and whose hands touched nearly every piece of fresh food circulating throughout the city. For some authors and their readership, the creation of Creole cuisine became a political act that sought to unify citizens, primarily white middle and upper class individuals, through a singular food culture. The codification of Creole cuisine was therefore an act ripe with power; those who had the power to create the cuisine also had the power to influence the identities of the people who imagined themselves in relation to it—these authors and their readership were Americans, some of them were New Orleanians, and many of them lived outside of the city.

Some of the most famous Creole cookbooks, and arguably most influential, were not written or compiled by the people who worked in Louisiana farms, markets, and kitchens. Nor were they even Louisianans. They were white men who came to New Orleans, made observations of its culture and food traditions, and shared that vision through cookbooks.²⁷ When these authors codified the city’s food culture into a cuisine, they were appropriating an essential part of the city’s culture for the entertainment of

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²⁷ They were influential because they were still intimate objects, brought into the home, pored over by friends and family across the United States. Their messages, therefore, spread through both public and private spheres, impacting the perceptions and worldviews of men and women alike throughout the U.S.
white American audiences, which reinforced whites’ claims to Creole cuisine. Those claims were not uncontested. Many groups of people living in and around New Orleans made claims on its cuisine through their vernacular food practices, yet those same people did not have access to the printers and publishers that privileged white citizens, largely male, did. It was therefore difficult for minority groups to make public claims on Creole cuisine through print, although they certainly continued to make bold claims through their everyday labor around and consumption of food.

_La Cuisine Creole_ (1885), which is considered one of, if not the first, compendium of New Orleans-based recipes published for mass consumption, was written by a white male connected to publishers in the North and not a native of New Orleans.\textsuperscript{28} Prior to the publication of _La Cuisine Creole_, the city’s local food culture had not been named or defined in a published cookbook, nor had it been identified as a distinct cuisine.\textsuperscript{29} _La

\textsuperscript{28} The full title of the cookbook is _La Cuisine Creole: a collection of culinary recipes from leading chefs and noted Creole housewives, who have made New Orleans famous for its cuisine_. Note: The other work published in 1885 was the Christian Woman’s Exchange’s _Creole Cookery Book_. The Christian Woman’s Exchange, _Creole Cookery Book_ (New Orleans: T.H. Thompson, 1885).

\textsuperscript{29} At the time Hearn released _La Cuisine Creole_, there were dozens of American-based cookbooks. In fact, cookbooks had been released in America since the colonial period, although at first they were largely reprints or adaptations of British cookbooks, and some French ones. In 1796, Amelia Simmons was the first American to write an American cookbook for publication: _American Cookery_. This was an important publication in the canon of cookbooks available to Americans; it alluded to America as a new nation through the metaphor of Simmons as an orphan, impressing upon readers the independent and resilient nature of the new nation. In the nineteenth century, it became more common for American authors to write cookbooks about American food cultures. Notable ones include: _The Frugal Housewife_ (1830), _The Virginia Housewife_ (1838), and _Miss Beecher’s Domestic Receipt Book_ (1846). Amelia Simmons, _American Cookery_ (Hartford, CT: Hudson & Goodwin, 1796); Lydia Maria Francis Child, _The Frugal Housewife_ (Boston: Carter and Hendee, 1830); Mary Randolph, _The Virginia Housewife_ (Baltimore: Plaskitt, Fite, 1838); Catherine Esther Beecher, _Miss Beecher’s Domestic Receipt Book: Designed as a Supplement to her Treatise on Domestic Cookery_ (New York: Harper, 1846).
Cuisine Creole was a departure from cookbooks published in America, which tended to be based on state and national food cultures, and so its significance extends far beyond its codification of Creole culture; it represents one of the first attempts in America to define an urban food culture as a cohesive, distinct, and identifiable phenomenon. To this day, it remains one of the only, if not the only, urban-based cuisine in America.

Lafcadio Hearn wrote La Cuisine Creole after William H. Coleman encouraged him to do so. The Northeast-based publisher, making note of Americans’ renewed interest in the South, saw an opportunity to capitalize on a longstanding fascination with New Orleans’ food culture by publishing for the World’s Fair audience. In 1885, in tandem with the World’s Fair, Hearn published the book anonymously. He may have chosen to do so in order to create a stronger sense of authenticity and credibility for his work. Although he had lived in New Orleans for nearly eight years, was an avid home cook, and had opened his own restaurant, the fact remained that he was not from New Orleans. He had no birthright claim to the city and its local food culture and economy. He had not been raised eating red beans and rice on Mondays or saving up spare change, or a picayune, to purchase pralines in the French Quarter. Ultimately, the shield

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of anonymity enabled him, a white male who immigrated to New Orleans, to define New Orleans’ food culture without question or protest.\footnote{Hearn was an immigrant in the United States. He was born in Greece, orphaned in Ireland, and eventually immigrated to Cincinnati, Ohio where he made his career as a writer. Eventually, he came to write for the Cincinnati Daily Enquirer and then the Cincinnati Commercial. At age 23, Hearn married an African-American woman named Alethea Foley. He divorced Foley. Increasingly fatigued by Cincinnati and the rapid industrialization of the city, Hearn moved to New Orleans. Initially, he continued to write for the Commercial. Once in New Orleans, Hearn began writing for local newspapers including the Daily City Item starting in 1878 and later the Times Democrat. Hearn also published for national news outlets such as Harper’s Weekly and Scribner’s Magazine. Hodding Carter, introduction to Lafcadio Hearn’s Creole Cook Book (Gretna: Pelican Publishing Company, 1990); S. Frederick Starr, ed., Inventing New Orleans: Writings of Lafcadio Hearn (Jackson: The University Press of Mississippi, 2001).}

In the introduction to \textit{La Cuisine Creole}, Hearn described Creole cuisine as a fusion food culture, which served to mark New Orleans’ culture as distinct from broader American culture. He states,

“La Cuisine Creole” (Creole cookery) partakes of the nature of its birthplace—New Orleans—which is cosmopolitan in its nature, blending the characteristics of the American, French, Spanish, Italian, West Indian and Mexican.\footnote{Lafcadio Hearn, introduction to \textit{La Cuisine Creole}. Second Edition. (New Orleans: F.F. Hansel & Bro., Ltd, 1885).}

His depiction of Creole cuisine’s influences is fairly egalitarian—gesturing towards often-overlooked contributions from American, Italian, West Indian, and Mexican cultures—and does not identify European contributions as more important than other Atlantic World influences as was common at that time. Hearn, however, was likely not trying to fabricate a Euro-centric vision of Creole culture. Rather, he saw himself as an ethnographer, someone who attempted to capture the true essence of Creole culture through as accurate a depiction of its cuisine as possible. It appears as though he
decided not to engage in growing racial and ethnic tensions in the United States that resulted in the continued exclusion of immigrant groups, African-Americans, and people of color in narratives around American cultural formation. For Hearn, telling a more inclusive story was not necessarily a reflection of his political values; it was a reflection of American readers’ understanding of New Orleans as distinct from the rest of the United States. For those readers, New Orleans was a place where a more egalitarian food culture could exist, thrive, and be celebrated because it would not necessarily threaten racial or ethnic hierarchies in what they saw as the true cultural heart of America, the Northeast.\(^\text{33}\)

According to Hearn, the fusion foods found in the streets and in the homes of New Orleans captivated American readers. The unfamiliarity of local dishes appealed to readers looking to discover something about Creole culture through food. These dishes were a metaphor for the city itself, which was also unknown to many Americans. The introduction of *La Cuisine Creole* identifies several key dishes, many of which would have been unfamiliar to readers: “Gombo file, Bouille-abaisse, Courtbouillon, Jambolaya, Salade a la Russe, Bisque of Cray-fish a la Creole, Pusse Café, Café brule,

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\(^{33}\) Emily Clark notes that the myth of American culture is grounded in the Northeast in cities like Boston and Philadelphia. However, she argues that just as Americans understood themselves through iconic events like the Boston Massacre or places like Independence Hall, they also understood themselves in opposition to places like New Orleans. Clark states that “[i]f Boston and Philadelphia can be imagined as the cradles of American identity and culture, it is partly because New Orleans has relieved them of the burden of embracing pasts as deeply entangled as it’s own in the Atlantic world dynamics of slavery, sex across the color line, and black revolution.” Emily Clark, *The Strange History of the American Quadroon: Free Women of Color in the Revolutionary Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 194.
[and] Brulot.” By etymology alone, dishes like “Bouille-abaisse” and “Courtbouillon” would have been associated with the French language and thus French culinary culture. Yet the influences from other parts of the Atlantic World were associated with words like “Gombo file” and “Jambolaya,” which, for American readers, would have seemed exotic and mysterious because of their lingual influence from West African and Native American cultures. La Cuisine Creole, therefore, reinforced notions of the city’s foreignness in the American imagination through the names of dishes alone.

In order to capture the attention of readers, Hearn tried to cast his cookbook as an object as unique as the cuisine it defined. The introduction to the cookbook notes that, “[t]his volume will be found quite different from the average cook-book in its treatment of recipes, and is the only one in print containing dishes peculiar to ‘la Cuisine Créole.’” Hearn did not write the recipes himself. He collected many of them while a

35 Bouillabaisse is French Provençal fish stew that has origins in Marseille. French-style court bouillon is a “short stock” or one prepared in less time than a more complex stock. It is typically used to poach and flavor seafood.
36 Gumbo is largely believed to be a derivation of the word for okra in some West African regions. As explained by Jessica Harris, “Okra is native to Africa, and its origins are trumpeted by its name in a number of languages throughout the world. The American okra comes from the twi of Ghana, while the French opt for gombo, which harks back to the Bantu languages of the southern segment of the continent.” Jessica Harris, Beyond Gumbo: Creole Fusion Food from the Atlantic Rim (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 46.
37 The introductions of many cookbooks make a claim of significance by claiming that the work is the first to record a particular culinary tradition or the first to include particular dishes for American consumption—common marketing tactics that may or may not have been true.
38 Lafcadio Hearn, introduction to La Cuisine Creole. Second Edition. (New Orleans: F.F. Hansel & Bro., Ltd, 1885). Note: In the nineteenth century, there was a common practice of filling a cookbook with generic recipes that were not necessarily unique to a particular state, region, or city. Food historian Rien Fertel has
houseguest of several New Orleans families, drawing upon their familial traditions and, likely, the un-acknowledged labor and expertise of their African-American cooks. It is not clear, however, specifically from whom Hearn acquired his recipes and whether or not they were willingly given, making it difficult to address questions of cultural appropriation. What we do know is that Hearn pieced together a vision of Creole cuisine that exoticized New Orleans’ food culture, casting dishes ranging from bouillabaisse to gumbo as foreign-influenced delights that could be enjoyed in America.

Published in the same year, with the same purpose of taking advantage of Creole culture’s rise in popularity because of the World’s Fair, the Christian Women’s Exchange also released a Creole cookbook—one that focused on the city’s connections to places outside of U.S. borders. Those comparisons served to emphasize the city’s cultural connections to Europe and thus impressed upon readers New Orleans’ foreignness, rather than its commonality with other American cities. In order to emphasize the culinary excellence of the city, the authors reference a famous and well-known quote from William Makepeace Thackeray that compares New Orleans directly to France.

identified several recipes within the pages of La Cuisine Creole that are also present in other popular cookbooks that did not claim to be Creole cookbooks.

He stayed with Major William M. Robinson, editor of the New Orleans Republican for a time, and may have first been introduced to New Orleans’ home cooking in the Robinson household. He later befriended Page Baker, editor of the Times-Democrat, and likely acquired many of his recipes from the Baker family, whom he frequently visited. Hodding Carter, introduction to Lafcadio Hearn’s Creole Cook Book (Gretna: Pelican Publishing Company, 1990).

Thackeray was an Englishmen and novelist who, among his many subjects, wrote about New Orleans.
Quoting him, the preface states, that in “New Orleans, ‘you can eat the most and suffer the least, where claret is as good as it is at Bordeaux, and where a bouillabaisse can be had, than which a better was not eaten at Marseilles.’” Further, the preface closes with the claim that *The Creole Cookery Book* will serve as a new *Almanach des Gourmands*, one of the most famous French works of culinary literature. The authors of this cookbook sold it to audiences by giving New Orleans prestige through association with the most renowned culinary country in the world: France.

Just as the authors attempted to associate the local food culture of New Orleans with Europe, they simultaneously grounded those recipes in the U.S. South by making note of the contributions of African-American women. In the South, generally, the labor of African-American women went unacknowledged in many cookbooks. If authors referenced black cooks, they did so fleetingly. In New Orleans literature, it was common to identify black women’s abilities to cook as “magical” and “innate.”

This recasting worked in tandem with derogatory texts and images to conceal black women’s culinary

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abilities, which were often honed through a rigorous study of both formal and informal apprenticeship with other cooks. In *Mandy’s Favorite Louisiana Recipes* (1929), for example, Natalie V. Scott recounts folktales in Louisiana that speak of the magical abilities of black cooks: “It is said that the witch doctors of North Africa have a mastery of mental telepathy. These Mandy’s, too, have some such subtle sense […] They have culinary tentacles of the spirit always aquiver to appropriate each good new idea.”

*The Creole Cookery Book,* however, stands apart from typical depictions of African-American women; it acknowledges the role of black cooks, yet does so in a way that shrouds their knowledge in secrecy, stating that the “occult science of gumbo” is the “hereditary lore of our negro mammies.” The key terms are “science” and “lore.” The authors of this work openly recognize the culinary aptitude of black cooks—an aptitude

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43 In this work of cultural appropriation, Mandy’s “voice” is the first thing that readers encounter on the page. Her voice is written in an affected accent that serves to create a class and racial divide between presumable educated white women and the “uneducated” black women: “My madam say she writin’ mah cookin’ down. Lawdy, put me frontin’ a cookin’ stove, an’ I don’t needs no prescription.” The opening sentence, although fictionalized, speaks to the tense power relationship that existed between white and black women in the domestic kitchen. In creating cookbooks and trying to make claims upon New Orleans’ culinary culture, white women take on the role of ethnographic researchers, seeking to capture on the page the largely unrecorded knowledge of black cooks. White women had to assume this role because they did not necessarily know how to prepare these dishes, though as consumers they certainly made strong claims upon the foods created in their homes. Black women, by contrast, had masterful skills and became the subjects of whites’ analysis and record keeping. Black women’s cooking knowledge pushed against white women’s assumed authority and superiority. One of the ways in which white women dealt with this conflict was through casting black women cooks as harmless and not acknowledging their culinary acumen as an earned skill, but as something innate or magical. Scott, reminiscing about the black cook who worked in her home, patronizingly states, “Bless her earnest face, and her soft voice, and her good brown eyes,—and bless particularly that vital sixth culinary sense, which created delectable miracles of food without ‘no prescription.’” Natalie V. Scott, introduction to *Mandy’s Favorite Louisiana Recipes.* First Pelican Edition (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, 1978).

that had been passed down from one generation to the next through familial and professional apprenticeship. The authors could recognize that ingenuity without giving up their privileged positions as white women. Ultimately, they were connected to male-owned and -operated publishing and printing companies, and so these women had control over the dissemination of Creole cuisine in print. The power to influence a broader readership, largely unfamiliar with Creole cooking, rested in their hands, not the hands of the women who perfected those dishes over generations. Fully embracing their role as disseminators of knowledge, the authors of *The Creole Cookery Book* state that their cookbook is placing Creole cuisine in “its proper place in the gastronomical world.”

Secrecy bred a strong curiosity for the origins of Creole cuisine among American readers, thus encouraging them to think of Creole cuisine as something with a deep, unknowable past. That past drew readers’ minds away from the modern moment of New Orleans, discouraging them from seeing the urban growth and renewal around them, and instead fixating on things that were seemingly unchanging. According to *The Picayune’s Creole Cook Book*, for example, the “secret ingredient” to the success of this emulsion of culinary traditions was the contribution of African-American cooks, figures regularly associated with the city’s antebellum past. The anonymous author states that black women expertly mastered European culinary techniques and added their own flair.

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and ingenuity to the dishes.\textsuperscript{46} Even when African-American women were not directly referenced, the theme of secrecy gestures to longstanding tensions between black and white women over who had claim to the city’s culinary culture—after all, it was a shared culture upon which whites and black, among other ethnic and racial groups, made claims every day.\textsuperscript{47} Those notions of secrecy were intimately tied to the figure of the African-American cook, one whose presence in cookbooks and other literature represented the city’s colonial and antebellum pasts—a past that, for many readers, alienated New Orleans from mainstream America.

Cookbook authors and publishers not only evoked an antebellum and foreign past through the written word; they also reinforced feelings of nostalgia, remembrance, loss, and spectacle through carefully placed imagery of African-American women, creating a romanticized vision of New Orleans. Often, that imagery played upon stereotypes of the black mammy figure, a notably powerful image of romanticized antebellum culture.\textsuperscript{48} As scholars have noted, the black cook became conflated with the


\textsuperscript{47} Another work that frames New Orleans’ cuisine in terms of secrecy is \textit{A Book of Famous Old New Orleans Recipes Used in the South for More than 200 Years}, which states that the volume contains “hundreds of secret recipes that helped this historic city establish its fame.” \textit{A Book of Famous Old New Orleans Recipes Used in the South for More than 200 Years} (New Orleans: Peerless Printing Co.) Note: The book did not have a publication date. Presumably, since the city was founded in 1718, the book was published in the early twentieth century.

\textsuperscript{48} As described by ethnographic writer Lyle Saxon, the “black mammy” was a figure in the lives of Southern, rural aristocracy. “In the plantation,” he goes on to say, “she was considered part of the household. Occupying a lower status, she was included in the family circle.” She acted as a caregiver to children and to
black mammy in postbellum literature. Depictions of the black cook as the black mammy portray her primarily as a caregiver, and secondarily as a skilled laborer. Text and image regularly fixated on black women’s bodies, depicting them as cartoonish, older, and physically larger than white women—building on the existing debasing and limiting perception of these women as asexual.

The representations of black bodies by white artists reflect whites’ understandings of black bodies as something they could manipulate to suit their desires. As Tanya Sheehan notes in her study of black bodies and facial expression, a prominent perception of the black body at the turn of the twentieth century was that “as a commodity it is indefinitely adaptable to the needs and desire of white consumers.”

Given this attitude, it is not surprising that white authors transformed black cooks so

them she represented the ideal “of all that constituted true womanhood.” According to Saxon, the black mammy figure had close ties to culinary culture. In Saxon’s rendering, the black mammy is a skilled baker, making cookies and cakes for the children. The children she cared for held her in high esteem when she provided these sweet treats. “She was a Madonna. She was beautiful.” “Black Mammy,” 14-15. Folder 5: Plantations and Planters of Louisiana, undated, Box 13, Lyle Saxon Papers, Louisiana Research Collection, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana. For more works that critically examine black mammy figures and their roles in influencing American perceptions of the South see: Kenneth W. Goings, Mammy and Uncle Mose: Black Collectibles and American Stereotyping (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994); Micki McElya, Clinging to Mammy: The Faithful Slave in Twentieth-Century America (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2007); Jo-Ann Morgan, “Mammy the Huckster: Selling the Old South for the New Century,” American Arts 9, no. 1(Spring, 1995): 87-109; Kyla Wazana Tompkins, Racial Indigestion: Eating Bodies in the 19th Century (New York: New York University Press, 2012).

49 Rebecca Sharpless, Cooking in Other Women’s Kitchens: Domestic Workers in the South, 1865-1960 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), xxiv.


easily into mammy figures. There was a need in the American imagination for a figure that stood for the unchanging South, one that was resilient, kind, and caring. Ethnographic writers and major publishers were more than happy to help fulfill that need.

Examples of the conflation between black mammys and black cooks pepper the pages of Creole literature, and cookbooks specifically, reinforcing a sense of nostalgia for the antebellum past. *The Picayune’s Creole Cook Book* features a striking example of iconic black mammy imagery in its opening pages. In the image, an African-American woman is dressed in a simple white frock with her hair kept away from her face by a tied checkered cloth, also known as a bandana *tignon*. She is leaning back slightly in order to support the weight of a fine china soup tureen, which she holds out in front of her. Presumably, the vessel is brimming with an iconic dish like gumbo. She has a round, “motherly” figure which suggests the essence of caregiving. This iconic black mammy imagery implies certain sentimentality for a romanticized understanding of black women’s labor as one rooted in love for white families.

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In some Creole cookbooks, black mammy imagery ties cooks directly to child rearing, further cementing the association between Creole cooking and romanticized
antebellum life. In Célestine Eustis’ *Cooking in old Créole Days: La Cuisine Créole à l’Usage des Petits Menages*, an African-American woman, identified as Nurse Mérance, spoon-feeds a white infant. Her clothing, similar to the dress of the African-American cook in *The Picayune’s Creole Cook Book*, is reflective of the clothing in which black mammies were typically placed. Nurse Mérance is wearing a simple white frock, with a checkered bandana covering her hair. She is shown nestling the child against her bosom, bringing the child into direct contact with her body—an intimacy regularly afforded to white children in popular depictions of black mammies. The infant’s clothing is draped across the woman’s abdomen, exaggerating her plump figure.

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Figure 4: Nurse Mérance. Source: The Library of Congress. Célestine Eustice, Cooking in the Old Créole Days: La Cuisine Créole à l’Usage des Petits Menages (New York, R. H. Russell, 1903).
This melding of their clothing at the woman’s abdomen (which draws the viewer’s eye to her womb) further suggests a maternal connection between the woman and child. This printed image is paired with a song titled “Chanson De Mérance.” It is likely that this woman was imagined to be singing to the child as she fed him, tying the maternal allure of the black mammy figure to black women’s voices. Overall, mammy-infant imagery like the one seen in this cookbook plays an essential role in solidifying and reinforcing idealized popular memory of the enslaved woman’s role in the white Creole household.

Often, black cooks in Creole cookbooks also reminded readers of New Orleans’ connections to French culture, thus casting New Orleans as an inherently foreign place within the United States. Nurse Mérance’s presence, her French name, and her inclusion in a bi-lingual cookbook serve to tie New Orleans’ culinary culture to the legacy of French colonialism. Another example of associating black cooks with French culture is the first chapter of *The Picayune’s Creole Cookbook*. In this chapter, titled “Creole Coffee,” the author depicts Creole life with a highly descriptive story of an African-American

\[\text{As noted above, in addition to images, songs were also included in the cookbook. These songs were printed on semi-transparent paper on top of a printed image. The image and song of Nurse Mérance were printed between pages 32 and 33 of the cookbook.}

\[\text{Note: The song is one of the only occasions in which the voice of an African-American woman is transcribed into writing and incorporated into an early Creole cookbook. My translation of the lyrics: “What are you doing in this world that you were not near the priests? Cursed child, go to the eternal fire, go to the eternal fire.”}\]
cook preparing coffee “in a typical Creole kitchen.” The descriptions of her are multilingual, drawing upon lingual traditions of the French Atlantic World, including West Africa and the Caribbean. The woman, identified as both an “old Créole Négresse” and “Tante Zoé,” is dressed in a “quaint, guinea-blue dress and bandana ‘tignon.’” It would be easy for a reader to see this description of Tante Zoé and tie it back to the image of an African-American woman in the opening pages of the cookbook, thus associating the black mammy figure with French culture.

Black cooks in the domestic sphere were not the only figures conflated with black mammy imagery, nor were they the only figures that influenced Americans’ understanding of New Orleans as an unchanging and exotic place. Historians have focused on the influence of the domestic sphere, black mammy imagery, and home cooking on Americans’ understandings of the South. Yet in New Orleans, the public sphere, black mammy imagery, and street food culture were also a crucial means through which Americans conceptualized the city. Some vendors were even identified as mammy-like figures by name. One postcard featuring an African-American praline vendor reads: “One of the quaintest characters of old New Orleans is the Praline Mammy.” Another postcard featuring “Tante Clementine” states, “The praline vendor,

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57 My emphasis added. Praline vendor postcard, item number: 959.2.349, Postcards Book 08: Markets & Agriculture, Postcard Archive.
now almost a figure of the past, although one may find an old Mammy sitting at the gates of the Place d’Armes, now Jackson Square, or by the front of the ‘Patio Royal’”

Creole cookbooks, themselves objects that circulated in the public sphere, regularly made references to New Orleans’ street food vendors. As is the case in A Book of Famous Old New Orleans Recipes Used in the South for More than 200 Years, image and text work together to associate black women vendors with the seemingly timeless magnetism of New Orleans—permanently marrying these street vendors to a romanticized antebellum past:

The praline vendor remains a fixture in New Orleans street-life. On Canal Street, one still sees them, very old sometimes, and bent almost double, sitting by a basket of pecans and coconut pralines. In the old quarter, too, they sit in friendly doorways and call, “Praline!” all day. By evening the basket is empty, and they hobble home to cook another basketful for the next day.

One of the strongest links between these laborers and the antebellum past was their age. One postcard describes a very old praline vendor: “Praline Vender, age 109, sitting in her ‘Place in the Sun’ in the court yard [sic] of the Green Shutter, 633 Royal Street, in the French Quarter at New Orleans, LA.”

Many of these women, therefore, were old

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Vendors French Market, the Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana.

58 My emphasis added. Praline vendor postcard, item number: 1983.10, Postcards Book 08: Markets & Vendors French Market, the Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana. This image on this postcard is also featured in A Book of Famous Old New Orleans Recipes Used in the South for More than 200 Years (New Orleans: Peerless Printing Co.)

59 A Book of Famous Old New Orleans Recipes Used in the South for more than 200 Years (New Orleans: Peerless Printing Co.)

60 Praline vendor postcard, item number: 959.2.349, Postcards Book 08: Markets & Vendors French Market, New Orleans, Louisiana.
enough to have actually lived in the antebellum era, New Orleans’ alleged golden age, and so they seemed like living relics, people whose lived experiences were “real.” Perceiving them as figures of an “authentic” New Orleans, Americans fixated on street food vendors, seeking them out so as to experience the past in the present moment.

In addition to providing authenticity, age connected vendors to the antebellum past, which served to separate the city from those in the Northeast and Midwest. Locals and tourists alike saw their aging as a sign of loss, a metaphor for the decline of the Old South whose traditions had been lost or forgotten or had become untenable after the Civil War and Reconstruction. In 1894, an article in the Springfield Republican of Massachusetts draws attention to the praline vendor, “the old shrunken figure seated before a little old table, on which are spread out dainty pink and white pralines.” In this article, the praline vendor represents New Orleans, a city that many people saw as a shadow of its former self. Whereas the black mammy figure so readily associated with the antebellum South is depicted as robust and full of life, the praline vendor is withered. According to the article, the passerby looks at the woman with “half pity, half amusement”—a fitting metaphor for how fairgoers and tourists interacted with the city.

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61 Many of the details in this article are drawn from a previously printed article in the Times-Picayune, suggesting that the author may have never traveled to New Orleans nor observed or interacted with a praline vendor. Instead, we might read this article as a representation of Americans’ fantasies about New Orleans’ relationship to the Old South and a romanticized antebellum past—one completely fabricated in the imagination. “Toto the Creole Praline Woman,” Springfield Republican, August 20, 1894.
during the 1884 World’s Fair.\textsuperscript{62} It was a potent combination too. American tourists could feel empowered by comparison, seeing New Orleans as lacking, yet deriving a satisfaction from that malnourishment, from the lack of forward progress that other parts of America were experiencing. Yet New Orleans, in their minds, did not suffer from the corruption of industrialization and so that quiet stasis held a sense of reprieve. The city too, with its “quaint” and “bizarre” culture, also proved amusing to them by the sheer fact of its queerness.

Like the secrets of the black cooks, the praline vendor in the \textit{Springfield Republican} article also withholds; in this case, she keeps close to her chest information about her own harrowing tale, rather than a recipe. The author goes on to state that “There is something in the old woman’s face which tells its own tale of heroism and suffering and unswerving fidelity, and thinking to make her talk about herself you purchase some more of her pralines.”\textsuperscript{63} Like New Orleans, the praline vendor is mysterious to the American visitor, seemingly unknowable and somewhat closed off. The visitor is compelled not to abandon the interaction, but to draw closer, just as tourists want to draw closer to New Orleans and expose themselves to the local culture in order to discover the city’s true essence. But the praline vendor “resolutely resists all attempts to be drawn into conversation, answering you always, ‘You want for buy some more?’”

\textsuperscript{62} “Toto the Creole Praline Woman,” \textit{Springfield Republican}, August 20, 1894.
\textsuperscript{63} “Toto the Creole Praline Woman,” \textit{Springfield Republican}, August 20, 1894.
just as New Orleans, at times, refuses to divulge its secrets, instead only enticing visitors
to participate more in its burgeoning tourist industry.  

The praline vendor’s personal story was “[a] history with a soft, mournful beauty that seems like a romantic tradition in these prosaic days.” For readers, her story was the story of New Orleans.

As we have just seen, references to street food vendors, and African-American women in particular, stretched far beyond references in Creole cookbooks. They were present in many of the diverse materials created for the 1884 World’s Fair and the years following. Street food vendors were particularly potent characters because they were easily connected to the city’s antebellum and foreign past. In addition, unlike domestic cooks, they were highly visible characters, turning their livelihoods and selling practices into attractions for visitors to observe. This interest in street vendors coincided with the rising popularity of “people watching” in the late nineteenth century. Seeking to partake in this activity, visitors to New Orleans were eager to spot the iconic set of vendors working the streets of the city. Street food vendors, then, had an integral role to play in drawing tourists’ attention away from the exposition and its message of

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64 “Toto the Creole Praline Woman,” *Springfield Republican*, August 20, 1894.
67 Fascination with street food vendors was not a new phenomenon. For centuries, Europeans had recorded the images, voices, and culinary traditions of itinerant vendors on the page. Compendiums of street cries and accompanying images and prose text were also popular. Some of the compendiums include William Marshal Craig’s *The Itinerant Traders of London* (1804); Thomas Rowlandson’s *Characteristic Sketches of the Lower Orders* (1820); *Les Cris de Paris* (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1887); *The Cries of London* (London: J. Innes, 1800); and a number of books were written specifically for children such as Sam Syntax’s *Descriptions of the Cries of London* (1821) and *Scenes And Cries of London* (1861).
American unity and progress, and towards Creole food culture and its association with an exoticized, antebellum past and with a place simultaneously apart from and within the United States.

The rise of people watching would not have been possible without the participation of the men and women who actually produced and distributed Creole cuisine. They were well aware of their position in the limelight and assumed a double role as both food purveyors and performers. Street vendors, for example, carefully crafted their behavior and appearance to embody the Creole culture that tourists sought to encounter. In doing so, street vendors demonstrated incredible business savvy by adapting the stereotypes of a racist economic system to their advantage. They were able to attract a larger customer base and corner the market, so to speak, on traditional foods such as calas and pralines.

Praline vendors, for example, strategically dressed in antebellum-era costumes to appeal to tourists’ romanticized perceptions of slave society and culture. Their dresses of “deep guinea or purple,” which were “cut in just the far-away fashion” that was popular before the Civil War, encouraged tourists to associate these black women vendors with antebellum New Orleans. Vendors continued to wear these antebellum uniforms well

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69 Calas are sugary rice fritters typically sold in the streets of New Orleans by African-American women.
into the twentieth century, at a time when the outfits were clearly antiquated by nearly a century. The decision to dress in them is akin to a twenty-first century candy salesman wearing a red-striped shirt and straw hat. It provides a certain air of authenticity and romanticism that can potentially attract more customers than if they were dressed in clothes contemporary to that particular moment in time. The decision to wear antiquated clothing also sheds light on the preferences of the customers: presumably tourists wanted to interact with the antebellum past, or, at least, it is what they expected to interact with when they traveled to New Orleans.

Although often depicted as static, many street food vendors were in near constant motion, expertly navigating the city’s complex social and economic terrain in order to make sales. That movement stood in sharp contrast to the shifting economic model in the American Northeast and Midwest, which was moving steadily towards favoring stationary grocery stores over neighborhood-markets and street food vendors. That mobility was therefore a captivating quirk for visitors who sought to share the city’s street food culture with family through tourist trinkets and ephemera.

Interestingly, many of the images of mobile food vendors were captured on some of the more mobile of tourist ephemera: postcards.

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Postcards featuring the American South typically portray Civil War battlefields, plantations, and other structurally significant places. In New Orleans, by contrast, an urban space, it was not the place of agricultural production, but the food distributors themselves and the streets of New Orleans that were regularly featured on postcards. People rather than landmarks defined the city, indicating that the vendors of New Orleans were such a presence in the city and so guaranteed to be encountered that they could appear on postcards and be recognizable outside of New Orleans. In the eyes of American tourists, vendors were fixtures of daily life.

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See, for example, Postcard of Greenwood Plantation, Box: Louisiana, U.S. Postcards, Postcard Collection, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Some postcards from Charleston feature the city’s food market. Some of them feature the building’s exterior and are fairly barren images. They focus primarily on the neo-colonial architecture of the market’s main entrance. Another postcard, however, features the interior of the market and customers and vendors within it. The postcard features the tagline: “Charleston, S.C. – Section Old Market” and on the back of the card explains, “SECTION OLD MARKET—This is the Vegetable Section where the old ‘Maumas’ Presided in their stall and dispensed their wares to merchants and professional men who, accompanied by their servants, were accustomed to make their own purchases in the old days.” The card references the prominent role that African-American women played as food vendors. The image on the front of the card depicts a similar dynamic in which the vendors are African-American and their customers are white men and women. The card is inscribed with a message dated from November 18, 1904: “This is the inside view of the market picture you have. I walked here & saw it. H.” The food market was not the only market to capture the attention of visitors to Charleston. The slave market, too, appeared on postcards. Postcard of Charleston market and Postcard of Charleston slave market, Box: South Carolina, U.S. Postcards, Postcard Collection, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.
The postcards, like cookbooks and other literature and ephemera, worked to reinforce ideas that the city was both antiquated and foreign. The postcards did so by featuring the city’s diverse body of vendors, hailing from distant segments of the Atlantic Rim. Many of the depicted vendors are African American or recent migrants from Europe, most are women. New Orleans’ postcards categorize vendors by trade, a tradition that dates back to the early modern period in Europe. That tradition was also

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24 In France, among other European countries, there existed a long tradition of depicted itinerant vendors both in text and image. I have conducted research at the National Library of France, examining representations of food vendors in their print collection. Just as is the case with the American South, food vendors and their street cries fascinated customers. These seemingly benign depictions are embedded with commentary on class, gender, and ethnicity. I came across, for example, several derogatory depictions of what appear to be immigrant women vendors in Paris. Their faces are covered in warts, their noses are large, and their bodies are cartoonish. I have also worked with collections of street vendor cry prints and
a common occurrence in colonial America and the United States. Vendors appeared on postcards, trade cards, and other visual media. Those vendors are regularly associated with singular foods or goods: the praline vendor, the milk vendor, the blackberry vendor, etc. Some of those ingredients are seen in depictions of vendors in the American Northeast and in Europe as well.\textsuperscript{75} Others, however, are particular to New Orleans, including the praline vendor and the calas vendor. Some vendors are identified by their ethnicity, as is the case with the Spanish oysterman or the Italian market vendor. Many of the images on the postcards can also be found in Creole, Cajun, and Louisiana cookbooks, indicating the close connection between the city’s food-based tourism and cookbooks as a product of that tourism.\textsuperscript{76} Further, the presence of these particular images on both postcards and in cookbooks indicates their fairly wide circulation. These images, like the vendors they depicted, moved across space. They implanted images of

books at the American Antiquarian Society that touch upon vendor cultures in London, British Colonial America, and the Early Republic. In London and the American Northeast, most vendors are white, which stands in stark contrasts to depictions of vendors in the American South. Les collections d’estampes Richard Library, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris; American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.\textsuperscript{77} Vendors include strawberry vendors and oyster vendors—whose wares are common throughout many places along the Atlantic Rim.

\textsuperscript{76} Cajun cuisine like that of the city of New Orleans, or Creole cuisine, is not easily defined. The cuisine is most often associated with Francophone communities living in Southwest Louisiana—descendants of Acadians who migrated to the area from the maritime provinces of colonial French Canada. As a regional food culture of Southern Louisiana, Cajun cuisine draws upon local flora and fauna in similar ways to Creole cuisine. Deer, ducks, shrimp, and crawfish, among other ingredients, are popularly used. Green peppers, onions, garlic, celery, and tomatoes are also common. Like in New Orleans, many Cajun dishes begin with a roux base and are cooked “low and slow” to emulsify flavors in the absence of strong spices.
New Orleans’ vendors in the minds of people living hundreds if not thousands of miles away.

It was not only the people but also the spaces in which they vended foods that built an image of New Orleans in the American imagination. By virtue of their association with vendors, New Orleans’ streets were regularly featured as sites of economic exchange on these postcards. Often placed within the French Quarter, the background of many of these postcards feature the city’s Spanish-influenced architecture, or tropical plants and other flora, serving to build on the city’s sense of exoticism. The streets were the unfamiliar backdrops that emphasized the differences between the temperate climates of the American Northeast and Midwest from the semi-tropical climates of the Gulf South.

New Orleans, although known as the Paris of America, was not easily compared to a single city because of its fusion culture. The inability to easily categorize it fostered a sense of mysteriousness, which appealed to visitors. In one of his first writings on the city, Lafcadio Hearn struggled to categorize the city and instead decided to describe it as an amalgam. In an early writing, for example, Hearn notes that New Orleans “resembles no other city upon the face of the earth, yet it recalls vague memories of a hundred

77 See, for example: Postcard of the Stairway in the Old Absinthe House in New Orleans, Box: South Carolina, U.S. Postcards, Postcard Collection, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

78 “New Orleans City Worthies,” Times-Picayune, March 26, 1837, 2.
cities.”

For Hearn, New Orleans’ uniqueness lay in its kaleidoscopic culture—one that seemed to be made up of innumerable traditions from communities throughout the Atlantic World, yet was a distinct unit within that world. Perhaps therein lies its appeal to Americans. The city’s fusion landscape enabled one to liken it to innumerable overseas destinations to which the average middle class American would likely never travel. Yet by visiting New Orleans, and by engaging its multivalent culture, one could feel as though they had traveled the world.

Hearn’s opinion reflects writings about the city published across America and in diverse media including newspapers. The New York Commercial Adviser, for example, claimed that New Orleans resembled “a town in the South of Europe rather than anything American,” and by “American” they meant other cities in the Northeast and Midwest. A succinct explanation for New Orleans’ separation from broader American culture, and one that reflects popular understandings, is provided in a guidebook created for the 1884 World’s Fair:

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New Orleans—by its cosmopolitan character, and having been so far removed in its early history from the rest of the colonies, and during its occupancy by the Spanish and French—took to itself usages, customs and even patois of its own, the story of which has furnished material for romances equaled by few other cities in this country.\textsuperscript{82}

The distinction between Northern culture and Southern culture manifested in the city itself, particularly in understandings of the cultural differences between the French Quarter, which spread downriver from the city’s central commercial district on Canal Street, and the American Sector, which spread upriver from Canal. For Lafcadio Hearn, the American Sector—where the World’s Fair grounds were located—was a modern neighborhood that therefore suffered from the afflictions of modernization. This was a part of the city that was constantly growing, expanding, and bustling with commercial activity. Conversely, Hearn saw the French Quarter as more stable and resilient with a slower pace of life that soothed anxieties brought on by rapid industrialization. He characterized this neighborhood as a bastion of quietude in an otherwise bustling American city: whereas the “American city is still alive – a blaze of gas and a whirl of pleasure,” the French Quarter is “asleep the streets deserted.”\textsuperscript{83}

\textsuperscript{82} Introduction to \textit{Historical Sketchbook and Guide to New Orleans and Environs} (New York: Will H. Coleman, 1885).
\textsuperscript{83} Lafcadio Hearn, “A Creole Type,” \textit{The Selected Writings of Lafcadio Hearn}, edited by Henry Goodman (New York: The Citadel Press, 1971), 260. Other Southern port towns were described as “sleepy.” See, for example, descriptions of Charleston in Harriette Kershaw Leiding, \textit{Street Cries of an Old Southern City} (Charleston: The Daggett Printing Co., 1910). Note also: When writers described the American Sector, they regularly fixated on Canal Street, which abuts the French Quarter. This was the city’s main shopping district and thus had the most recently updated amenities like electricity and public transportation. Postcards that feature Canal Street in the first half of the twentieth century, for example, show the street lined with electric lights and the towering buildings flanking it ablaze with light bulbs. Postcard of Canal Street by Night, Box: Louisiana,
This dichotomy, however, breaks down when Hearn comes to describe the street food culture of New Orleans, and in particular, when he speaks of the sounds of the city’s markets. The French Market and its surrounding streets were rarely quiet. The “musical announcements” of food vendors harmonized with the thwack of meat cleavers and the hum of pleasure seekers gossiping over steaming cups of chicory coffee in the market halls. “Noisiness,” though, was an acceptable trait of the French Market because it was associated not with industrialization, but with antebellum New Orleans—a period reimagined to be more akin to the ideal of the rural picturesque than Northern industry. Even so, the emphasis on sound in an otherwise muted neighborhood signals that the French Market was different; it was in this place where people of different races, ethnicities, and nationalities came together on a daily basis to conduct business. People accepted that cosmopolitanism as well as the noisy economic exchange of goods taking place in the market. In the French Market, race, gender, and ethnic identity operated differently and the line that divided the American and Creole parts of the city—the new-

U.S. Postcards, Postcard Collection, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

Note also the influence of the American Sector on the French Quarter. The boundaries are perhaps not so rigid as one might believe. As observed by George Augustus Sala in 1882, “Occasionally in the French quarter, you are forcibly reminded of the all-dominating influence of the Anglo-Saxon language, institutions, and characters...Still, square after square, block after block, and street after street are French, and Old French.” George Augustus Sala, “The French Quarter,” in *Louisiana Sojourns: Travelers’ Tales and Literary Journeys*, eds. John James Audubon, F.A. De Caro, and R. A. Jordan (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998), 86.

age industrialism from the romanticized antebellum past—blurred amidst the economic activity of a diverse crew of vendors and customers from across America and the Atlantic World. This cultural mingling was easily captured and represented by transcribing the street cries of the men and women who sold food in the city streets.

Indicative of the bi-partite urban food culture of New Orleans, the city’s markets, and in particular the French Market, were also regularly featured on postcards. The French Market’s diverse vendor and customer base provided Americans with a snapshot of the city’s ethnic and racial makeup, emphasizing New Orleans’ lasting connections to places along the Atlantic Rim. As depicted on postcards, however, the vendors at the French Market were not as racially diverse as the city’s itinerant vendors. This relative lack of diversity indicates the stronghold that white men had over the vendor stalls in the central market in the second half of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century. In addition to featuring vendors, the postcards evoke strong sensory experiences, ones influenced heavily by sound.

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85 Interestingly, these post cards, by virtue of their focus on the French Market, would have us believe that that was the only major space of food distribution in the city, but the city’s vibrant neighborhood market scene flourished outside of the 3x5 postcard edges. In fact, at the time that many of these postcards were circulated, in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, New Orleans’ market system reached its peak at 34 markets.

86 One postcard, “Interior—French Market—New Orleans, LA. 36,” does not feature any people of color. In another postcard, “Vestibule French Market, New Orleans, LA,” an African-American vendor sits on a crate in the foreground of the image. In “Famous Old French Market, New Orleans, La.—11” an African-American man engages a woman vendor in front of the French Market. The market itself, however, appears to be frequented by whites, suggesting that the vendors within the French Market were predominantly white in the postbellum period, a shift from the colonial and ante bellum periods. Box: Louisiana U.S.
The diverse languages and distinct voices of New Orleans’ population solidified the city’s reputation as foreign. The taglines of most postcards featuring the French Market do not speak of the foods on display as one might think; instead, they repeatedly remark on this multilingual marketplace. As indicated on a postcard from 1906, “This the most remarkable and characteristic spot in New Orleans has under its roof every language is spoken.”87 Another postcard provides further details of those languages: “Under its roof every language is spoken. The Gascon [sic] butchers, Moors, Italians, and German vegetable women, Chinese, Hindus, Jews, Teutons, French and Creoles, Spanish and Malays, Irish and English, all uniting in a ceaseless babel of tongues that is simply bewildering.”88 The incredible diversity of languages, however, might be misleading—an exaggeration in order to entice tourists’ imaginations. Although called the French Market, by the late nineteenth century a majority of the vendors in the market were not African-American women or even French Creoles, but Italian immigrants. One postcard of the market notes this demographic shift, stating that one can hear the “the speech of many lands, although Italians have almost superseded the old French Market Folk.”89

Postcards, Postcard Collection, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.
87 French Market postcard, 1906, item number: 74.25.41.148, Postcards Book 08: Markets & Vendors French Market, the Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana.
88 French Market postcard, item number: 1986.87.12, Postcards Book 08: Markets & Vendors French Market, the Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana.
89 French Market postcard, item number: 1982.159.1, Postcards Book 08: Markets & Vendors French Market, the Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana.
The import of language as a means of communicating the city’s distinctiveness stretches far beyond the Romanesque columns of the French Market. The soundscape of New Orleans’ city streets played a particularly powerful role in shaping Americans’ understandings of the city’s food culture, and thus the city itself and its place in American life and culture. Ethnographic writers fixated on the vocal advertisements, or street cries, of food vendors and sought to share them with broader audiences through diverse media. More so than in most Southern cities, the street cries of New Orleans regularly appeared in the pages of culinary literature and general literature about the city.

The voices were a commanding presence and were indicative of the hand that food distributors had in the making of Creole cultures. The voices of vendors, so often silent in mainstream representations of American culture, dominated the soundscape of New Orleans. Vendor cries, which often combined numerous languages and regional phrases, represented the cultural fusion taking place around food culture in New Orleans and also reinforced the city’s connections to places outside of the United States,

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90 It must be noted, though, that some ethnographic writers likely modified existing street cries or invented their own to fit the vision of New Orleans that they sought to create in their works. These sources must be treated with care because they have the ability to both distort and preserve the city’s historic soundscape. This duality affords us an opportunity to hypothesize about the lived experiences of New Orleans’ residents while also scrutinizing the ways in which writers modified those experiences to further their own literary agendas. Conversely, one must keep in mind that many of the ethnographic writers who came to New Orleans sought to capture reality on the page. Their transcriptions of street cries, then, cannot be completely fabricated; rather, it is likely that they are representative of the diverse array of vendor calls that marked the soundscape of the city.

thus underpinning the city’s “foreign” feel. Ethnographic writers like Lafcadio Hearn often specified the ethnic and racial identity of a vendor and sought to capture that identity in their voice. For example, Hearn draws attention to the strong Italian accent of an immigrant vendor selling odds and ends in the street. This vendor adopted the common New Orleanian expression, *lagniappe*, to describe his miscellany of wares.

Hearn was fascinated by the cultural hybridity embodied in this vendor’s “war-cry,” in which he pronounces lagniappe, a word belonging to New Orleans’ culture, “Italianwise.” By adopting this phrase, the Italian vendor integrated himself into New Orleans’ preexisting culture, which, in turn, was shaped by his presence within that cultural system. His hybrid street cry became a metaphor of the city’s culture and reinforced New Orleans’ reputation as an international city that drew deeply upon its antebellum roots.

Seeking to capitalize on the potent association of African-American women with the antebellum South and places outside of U.S. borders, writers featured sellers of pralines and calas in their works. These vendors stood in sharp contrast to Italian vendors who had made their major mark on New Orleans’ local food culture in the second half of the nineteenth century. Instead of Italian, their calls were typically sung out in French, Creole patois, or heavily accented English, all of which associate these vendors with distant places and foreign cultures, particularly that of West Africa and the
Caribbean, in addition to their association with the antebellum past. Calas vendors have one of the most consistent cries in ethnographic writings, often a variation of the following: “Bons petits calas! Tout chauds! Tout chauds!” or “Beautiful little calas! Very hot! Very hot!”

The cries that Hearn recorded continued to echo throughout the city in the twenty-first century, suggesting the large sonic presence of African-American women vendors and the enduring impressions that these women were symbolic of New Orleans’ stasis and commitment to antebellum traditions. Gumbo Ya-Ya: Folk Tales of Louisiana describes a particular African-American vendor named Clementine, who dressed in a “bright tignon, fichu of white lawn, tied with a large breast pin, a starched blue gingham skirt and stiff snowy white apron.” Her cry, a hybrid of both French and Creole, built on the tradition of this particular fusion food as a product of the French Atlantic World and also gave authenticity to her product:

Beeeeeelles calas—Beeeeeelles calas—Aaaaaa!
Madame, mo gaignin calas,
Madame, mo gaignin calas,
Tou cho, tou cho, tou cho.
Beeeeeelles calas—Belles calas
À madame mo gaignin calas,

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Mo guaranti vous ye bons!95

Younger generations adapted the calas trade to fit their particular market. Richard Gabriel, identified as one of the last professional calas vendors in the city, incorporated humor into the calas cry.96 Whereas his ancestors’ cries were seen as traditional or antiquated, Gabriel’s hybrid cry was seen as “modern.” It drew upon the heritage of his ancestors, yet combined new elements in English and made claims that his product was the source of the start of a good day:

We sell it to the rich, we sell it to the poor,
We give it to the sweet brownskin, peepin’ out the door.
_Tout chaud, Madame, tout chaud!
Git ‘em while they’re hot! Hot calas!

One cup of coffee, fifteen cents _calas_,
Make you smile the livelong day.
_Calas, tout chauds, Madame, Tout chauds!
Git ‘em while they’re hot! Hot calas!97

In attempting to capture and preserve a street cry like the ones above, ethnographic writers took something that was at its core part of a larger, sonic whole and separated it into a distinct unit—decontextualizing the sound bite and imposing order on the sonic landscape. They are archived on the page as well-ordered snippets of sound, which, in many ways, was misleading to readers because numerous street

vendors would have vocalized their cries at the same time, thus braiding their calls together. In their new literary form, these street cries often look and read like standalone poems or song lyrics. Thus, by separating those sounds and making them palatable on the page, ethnographic writers were symbolically controlling the voices and bodies of vendors who were notoriously difficult to regulate and control.

Through transcribed vendor cries, we can see an attempt on behalf of the writers to share a largely Afro-Caribbean sonic culture with Americans who would likely be unfamiliar with it. Their attempts to do so were often creative, albeit likely lacking in accuracy. Primitive sound recording technology at that time made it difficult to share street cries. Thus, writers had to improvise. They often used hyphens, capital letters, italics, and the repetition of syllables to indicate inflection and phrasing. For example, in a newspaper article titled “Voices of Dawn,” Lafcadio Hearn describes the cries and

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98 The sonic traditions of enslaved people had long been recorded in ethnographic literature of Euro-Americans, but also in the journals and daily writings of the men and women who observed those traditions. I would like to draw a comparison between the songs sung by gangs of field slaves and those sung by street vendors—they were both songs that were tied to African-American labor and were a means through which to communicate with other people while also building a sense of community among singer and listener. The street vendor cry is somewhat different in that the listeners are not necessarily other laborers, but customers. And so, the tradition of “call and response” that is so characteristic of gang songs is largely absent in the street cry tradition. However, it should be noted that some street criers, particularly African-American youths, worked in tandem with one another, adapting the call and response model to their street cries. *Gumbo Ya-Ya: Folk Tales of Louisiana*, eds. Edward Dreyer, Lyle Saxon, and Robert Tallant (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1945), 29. For works that discuss African and Caribbean musical and sonic traditions in slave societies see: Anne C. Bailey, *African Voices of the Atlantic Slave Trade: Beyond the Silence and the Shame* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005); Amiri Baraka, *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980); Ronald Radano, “Black Music Labor and the Animated Properties of Slave Sound,” *Boundary 2* 43 no. 1 (2016): 173-208; Shane White, *The Sounds of Slavery: Discovering African American History through Songs, Sermons, and Speech* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005). For an example of a work that focuses on Latin America, see: Peter Fryer, “The ‘Angola Warble’: Street Cries and Worksongs,” in *Rhythms of Resistance: African Musical Heritage in Brazil* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2000).
selling strategies of “Italians, negroes, Frenchmen, and Spaniards.” In this scene, Hearn notes that “[t]he peddlers of ‘Ap-PULLS!’ of ‘Straw-BARE-eries!’ and ‘Black-Brees!’—all own sonorous voices”99 The focus on individual vendors’ inflection and phrasing suggests that these qualities mattered to their recital, making street cries more distinctive and memorable.

Further, the qualities of a vendor’s voice also influenced how listeners perceived them and the products that they were hawking. Praline vendors, for example, were depicted as having melodic street cries—ones that almost have the sound of a children’s lullaby. One such example is Adelaide Van Wey’s adaptation of a New Orleans praline vendor cry on the folkways album, Street Cries and Creole Songs of New Orleans (1956). This work, like the written ones that came before it, sought to portray New Orleans and its sonic culture accurately. Although, Van Wey certainly could have exercised artistic license in how she performed the vendor’s cry. Yet if we read this source as one that is a true sonic representation, the song of the praline vendor is one that might have sounded familiar to children’s ears—a primary customer of the praline vendor.

99 Lafcadio Hearn, “Voices of Dawn,” The Selected Writings of Lafcadio Hearn, edited by Henry Goodman (New York: The Citadel Press, 1971), 266-8. There also appear to be certain continuities in how the street vendor cries are recorded over time suggesting that these sonic calls were tied to a certain kind of tradition. For example, the street vendor in Lafcadio Hearn’s work cried out, “Black-Breees!” and exaggerated the last syllable. So too does the vendor whose cry was recorded in Gumbo Ya-Ya, “Blacker—reeees!” Gumbo Ya-Ya: Folk Tales of Louisiana, eds. Edward Dreyer, Lyle Saxon, and Robert Tallant (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1945), 28.
Street cries as poems and song also rendered a raucous, in-your-face action into something less threatening, more controllable and portable, and thus easier for American audiences to consume; the transcribed street cry also made it easier for them to develop impressions of the city through that consumption. In essence, their transposition was a means of making “the other” more palatable to white Americans.

The transposition of street cries was not merely textual, it was also musical, and thus made the vendor’s cry consumable along with the food they sold. Some authors transposed street vendor cries onto sheet music. This gave a sense of greater accuracy. Instead of using hyphens, italics, and creative punctuation, they used notes and keys. Cooking in the Old Créole Days, for example, contains several songs. The sheet music provides information that would allow one to sing in a particular key, to understand the rhythm and emphasis of certain syllables, in addition to the melody of the song. One featured street cry is that of the French mustard seller. The song, though, was not merely about accurately transcribing the musical qualities of the voice. It was also about

100 Thank you to Pete Moore and the poets and critics who attended “In Others’ Words” — a Lute & Drum event held on May 3, 2016. Together, they offered enlightening suggestions as to how to understand street cries as something more than their performance on the streets, but as a kind of poetry and also as a kind of performance that morphed and changed into a new cultural form when placed on the page by white authors.


102 The image of the French mustard seller can be found between pages 124 and 125. Note also that this work was published in New York. The language of text found within the cookbook suggests that the target audience was indeed a national one as indicated by the sentence: “The strength of the Nation is in the hands of the cook. Feed a man well, he will work well, he will fight well.” Célestine Eustice, Cooking in the Old Créole Days: La Cuisine Créole à l’Usage des Petits Menages (New York, R. H. Russell, 1903), 2.
reducing the threat of black voices, and in this instance, because of his association with a
predominantly black cast of characters, the French mustard seller, too, is seen as a black
figure. It is not his skin tone that determines his blackness, but his position as a street
food vendor—an occupation popularly depicted as one of the lowest forms of labor. To
cement his position as subservient, the song he sings is one of business failure. He sings
that he no longer has customers. He is a sad figure, one that the reader might take pity
on. His lack of success, his inability to succeed, and his inability to contribute to
American progress further associated him with the derogatory understandings that
some whites held of black Americans.
Figure 7: Old French Chef’s Street Cry. Source: The Library of Congress. Célestine Eustice, *Cooking in the Old Créole Days: La Cuisine Créole à l’Usage des Petits Menages* (New York, R. H. Russell, 1903).

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The other featured figures consist of a cartoon frog and several African Americans.\textsuperscript{103}

One of these figures is identified as the “young calas girl,” an unsurprising presence considering the prevalence of this particular vendor type in other kinds of media.\textsuperscript{104}

\textsuperscript{103} The other figures depicted and referenced in the songs include “mam zelle zi-zi,” several African-American children, Nurse Mérance, and a cartoon frog.

\textsuperscript{104} The image of the young calas girl can be found between pages 101 and 102. Célestine Eustice, \textit{Cooking in the Old Créole Days: La Cuisine Créole à l’Usage des Petits Menages} (New York, R. H. Russell, 1903).
These transcriptions, assuming that the authors attempted to capture the cries as accurately as possible, indicate that street cries could be, in fact, quite musical. Vendors
did not simply shout out the name of produce; rather, they sang phrases akin to the jingles that we find so catchy in modern advertising. And that singing proved a useful tool through which to convince listeners that what they were selling was delicious or appealing, including the idea that New Orleans was an exotic antebellum city. Time, once again, played a crucial role in making New Orleans feel foreign, and vendors’ voices reinforced that connection to the romanticized antebellum past.

Transposed street vendors cries were also a means through which white Americans could act out the culture of African Americans and attempt to experience their physicality and emotions—characteristics that were, of course, stereotypes. This “racialized play” enabled white Americans to reduce the threat that black people posed to white supremacy by making a mockery of black traditions and business practices.

At a time when white Americans continued to police their behaviors and limit emotional expression and physical intimacy, the street vendor’s imagined experience as expressive and primitive manifested as the antithesis of the white middle class experience. And therein lies the appeal of the transposed street vendor cries in *Cooking in the Old Créole Days*. For the length of a street cry, anywhere from a few seconds to a minute, a white

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person could, as Tanya Sheehan so succinctly states, “safely indulged in the so-called primitive nature of the black.” 108 The performance was a form of entertainment, like black minstrelsy, that served to erase the historical reality of slavery—a reality that gave rise to the black food vendors of New Orleans in the first place. The gay song that poured out of whites’ mouths sought not to acknowledge the labor, business acumen, or resiliency of black vendors, but evoke the exotic and antiquated vision of New Orleans in the listeners’ imagination. Through song, New Orleans’ culture was no longer out of reach to Americans living outside of the city. Ultimately, the transposed street cry, like a recipe for a dish, transformed something ephemeral and mysterious into something indelible and accessible, and therefore controllable.

New Orleans was not the only locale in which writers used the transcription of street vendors cries to render working-class vendors, typically African American, less threatening to white Americans. Transposed street cries enabled visitors of Charleston, South Carolina, for example, to partake in the racialized reenactment of street vendor cries, thus symbolically diminishing vendors’ cultural and economic influence over the city’s urban street food culture. 109 Whereas Cooking in the Old Créole Days gave

109 Street vendor cries not only appeared in music and literature for adults, but for children too, suggesting the extent through which the trope of the African-American street food vendor penetrated American society. These children’s books also worked to diminish the ingenuity and business acumen of African-American vendors, rendering them less threatening to white audiences. One such book that featured Baltimore’s street vendors featured African-American women vendors who sold a variety of fruits and vegetables as well as fresh seafood. The caricatures of African-American vendors that accompanied the
indications of the key, rhythm, and melody of street cries, Street Cries of an Old Southern City goes one step further, adding in crescendos and decrescendos to indicate a more nuanced understanding of the street vendors’ performance.\footnote{10} This concern for sonic accuracy suggests that the reader/performer and listeners craved a realistic experience. The shrimp vendor’s cry in Street Cries of an Old Southern City builds with each repetition of the word “raw” in his cry about raw shrimp. The third and final raw is held for a period of time determined by the performer, indicated by a fermata. The shrimp vendor’s cry is juxtaposed with that of a young vendor’s, described by the author as “a little lark” whose voice reminded one “of the freshness of dawn across dewy fields.”\footnote{11} His cry is livelier and lighter; its vocal range much higher—all aspects that gesture towards this rare glimpse of a youth selling food on the streets. Yet even this gaiety is marked by a general sadness in the author’s mind. She notes that “the street cries have an echo of sadness in their closing cadence,” perhaps gesturing to the hard labor of street vendors, street cries are extremely cartoonish with no gesture towards the realism that one sees in the ethnographic works of writer-artists like Hearn. Illustrators of this work did not target realism, indicating that that was not necessarily a concern for juvenile readers. Francis P. Wightman, Jingle Jangle jumbly Lays in de Good old Cottony Days (New York: Isaac H. Blanchard Co., 1899). See also: Francis P. Wightman, Little Leather Breeches, and Other Southern Rhymes (New York: J.F. Taylor Co., 1899)

\footnote{10} As is the case with writings of New Orleans, this work identifies Charleston as a “sleepy” city whose mornings are pierced by the musical cries of street vendors. The work also notes that to locals, the street cries are not necessarily admired, but instead thought of as a sonic disturbance. Their charm, it seems, lies in the eyes of the visitor. Harriette Kershaw Leiding, Street Cries of an Old Southern City (Charleston: The Daggett Printing Co., 1910).

\footnote{11} Harriette Kershaw Leiding, Street Cries of an Old Southern City (Charleston: The Daggett Printing Co., 1910).
or perhaps playing upon tourists’ desires to see the South as an antiquated, and therefore, sad place.\textsuperscript{112} Always underlying these street cries, often hidden by romanticized descriptions written by ethnographic writers, is the labor and livelihoods of the working poor and the history of enslavement.\textsuperscript{113}

Street cries were not merely depicted in souvenirs whose circulation and movement is largely untraceable. They were also incorporated into popular culture through professional musical performances as in George Gershwin’s hit Broadway musical, \textit{Porgy and Bess} (1934).\textsuperscript{114} In that show, street vendor cries ring in the background, exposing Americans in New York City to Southern street crying traditions.

\textsuperscript{112} Harriette Kershaw Leiding, \textit{Street Cries of an Old Southern City} (Charleston: The Daggett Printing Co., 1910).

\textsuperscript{113} As indicated in \textit{Street Cries of an Old Southern City}, many of the vendors hawking wares in Charleston were not urban residents. In fact, when the author asked the vendors where they came from, most indicated that they traveled to get to the city center to reach the best markets: “[T]hese hucksters tell you that they come ‘From up de road’ or ‘Across from Jeems Island, Mam,’ and some from ‘ober de new bridge’ and still others again are town negroes who secure their wares ‘Down at Cantini Wharf and Tradd Street Breakwater, my misses.’” Harriette Kershaw Leiding, \textit{Street Cries of an Old Southern City} (Charleston: The Daggett Printing Co., 1910).

\textsuperscript{114} Music featuring street vendors cries and lyrics about street vendors made their appearances not only on Broadway, but also through more general music channels. The David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library has sheet music featuring the work of the Rag Man, another popularly featured street vendor. The lyrics speak of his enduring presence throughout the day, from sunrise to sunset. Once again, his cry is a prominent feature: “He wakes up the neighborhood for miles around, He’s a reglar [sic] alarm clock, always wound.” The sheet music goes on to speak about the invasive qualities of the vendor’s cry: “He gets beneath your window when you try to get to sleep, And yells in a voice so loud and deep, Any rags? Rags? Any rags, any bones, any bottles today, There’s a big black rag picker coming this way, Any rags? Rags? Any rags?, any bottles today, It’s the same old story, in the same old way.” E.P. Severin, \textit{Peanuts Frolic: Characteristic March-Two Step} (Moline, IL: E.P. Severin, 1902), David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Note: The “Rag man” was also a common vendor in New Orleans, as noted in \textit{Gumbo Ya-Ya}. According to Saxon, that cry usually included lyrics similar to the ones featured in Severin’s song: “Any bottles, any bones, any rags today?/Any old bottles/Any old bones today?” \textit{Gumbo Ya-Ya: Folk Tales of Louisiana}, eds. Edward Dreyer, Lyle Saxon, and Robert Tallant (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1945), 42.
Specifically, the show features cries of a strawberry, honey, and crab vendor.\textsuperscript{115} It is not that New York City did not have street cries; in fact, street cries rang out across New York as early as the colonial period. Most American cities had a lively street food culture and the musical tradition that came along with it. Yet Americans did not see the Atlantic World-influenced street cry tradition as part of the fundamental fabric of American culture.\textsuperscript{116} And so the African-, Caribbean-, and Latin American-influenced cries of the South may have sounded novel to the listeners of New York, adding to that sense that the South was an exotic, unfamiliar place.\textsuperscript{117}

In sum, writers employed street vendor cries to include typically marginalized people, and African-American women in particular, in their vision of New Orleans. They did so in order to paint New Orleans as an exotic and antiquated place, which enabled them to marginalize the city within the national narrative. Writers also used their access to publishers to marginalize or ignore other groups who did not fit this particular vision of New Orleans. One of those groups included new migrants from Europe who came to the city in the late nineteenth century and therefore did not “fit”

\textsuperscript{115} The song is popularly referred to as “Vendors’ trio.” Note also: In juxtaposition to the highly stylized cries featured in \textit{Porgy and Bess}, ethnographers also recorded street cries from states throughout America. See, for example: Herbert Halpert 1939 Southern States Recording Expedition (AFC 1939/005) Archive of Folk Culture, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; Herbert Halpert New York City Collection (AFC 1938/002), Archive of Folk Culture, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Recordings of street cries are available online. One can also hear street cries particular to New Orleans in Adelaide Van Wey’s adaptation of the city’s urban food culture. \textit{Street Cries and Creole Songs of New Orleans}, Adelaide Van, Wey Folkways Records, 1956, CD.

\textsuperscript{116} See, for example, Frances Sargent Osgood, \textit{The Cries of New-York} (New York: John Doggett, Jr., 1846).

\textsuperscript{117} Harriette Kershaw Leiding, \textit{Street Cries of an Old Southern City} (Charleston: The Daggett Printing Co., 1910).
into the narrative of the city as an unchanging antebellum space. They were regularly cast in a negative light in order to disassociate them with the vision of Creole culture that white authors were weaving at that time. Often those new migrants worked in the city’s urban food economy, and so their role as food vendors came under scrutiny not only in ethnographic literature, but also in local reports and circulated articles of the time.

Although it was common for ethnographic writers to romanticize street cries by describing them as melodic or symphonic, some writers described vendors’ voices more critically.\textsuperscript{118} In the \textit{New Orleans City Guide}, for example, the author describes a chimney sweep’s voice as “blood-curdling,” gesturing towards the more grating qualities of early morning street vending.\textsuperscript{119} Again, in \textit{Gumbo Ya-Ya}, the authors makes note of a shift in the sonic quality of street cries during blackberry season: “Particularly discordant screams rend the mornings when it is blackberry season.”\textsuperscript{120} It was not only in New Orleans where whites described black voices negatively. In Charleston, too, they were described as breeding “contempt” among city residents.\textsuperscript{121} These writings reveal an often-overlooked side of New Orleans’ local food culture—a food culture that was not

\textsuperscript{118} Allison McCracken’s research shows how different kinds of vocalizing impact listeners’ perceptions of a singer. Similar to her study of professional singers, one can examine the ways in which listeners characterized street vendors’ cries in different ways—as melodic, pleasant, loud, and annoying. Allison McCracken, \textit{Real Men Don’t Sing: Crooning in American Culture} (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).


\textsuperscript{121} Harriette Kershaw Leiding, \textit{Street Cries of an Old Southern City} (Charleston: The Daggett Printing Co., 1910).
without its conflicts. Tensions born of racial, ethnic, class, and gender prejudices had long existed between white customers and vendors. Those tensions were born out of the power dynamics between whites and persons of color in the city, the latter of which had historically possessed a strong hold over the city’s urban food distribution economy. This tension, one that existed in the public sphere, reflects the previously discussed tensions between white and black women in the domestic kitchen. Whites coped with those domestic tensions by casting black cooks as mammy figures defined by their affability and willingness to meet the needs of the families for which they worked; along the same vein, they cast African-American women vendors as mammy figures who were similarly benign. Yet there was another cohort of vendors who were not so easily controlled through black mammy imagery. Those vendors were cast in an overtly negative light, particularly through their street cries, which urban residents perceived as loud.

One such group that writers regularly ignored or described negatively were Italian immigrants. It is within the depictions of Italian immigrant vendors that we see a different vision of New Orleans’ culinary scene, one ripe with ethnic, racial, class, and gender conflicts. This friction was regularly described through the vocal interactions between vendor and consumer, suggesting that sound was a primary means through which locals built impressions of vendors. Lafcadio Hearn, for example, hints at the invasive qualities of street hawking in which Italian vendors not only projected their
voices, but were also perceived to thrust their bodies into the homes of potential
customers. In “Voices of Dawn,” for example, Hearn notes that “[t]he vendor of fowls
[sic] pokes in his head at every open window with cries of ‘Chick-EN, Madamma,

Hearn delves more deeply into the problems of New Orleans’ local food system
that he only hints at in “Voices of Dawn.”\footnote{These writings were published in local newspapers and other locally circulated writings. His audience, therefore, was primarily based in New Orleans and perhaps more amenable to commiserating about the underbelly of New Orleans’ urban food culture—the one rarely referenced in publications created for tourists.} For example, Hearn writes about vendors selling poor quality food to customers. In an article titled “Dead Sea Fruit,” Hearn illustrates one such fruit vendor, an Italian immigrant, who tricks patrons into buying damaged apples by turning the damaged side of the fruit facedown.\footnote{“The small fruit vendor usually buys only damaged fruit at a nominal price, and sells it for good fruit at an imperial price. He turns all the apples with the holey side down and the sound side up, so that nobody can see […] the worms […] until the abomination is paid for. And once paid for, you needn’t imagine \textit{the Italian} will ever give you back your money or change the fruit for sound fruit.” My emphasis added. The New Orleans of Lafcadio Hearn: Illustrated Sketches from the Daily City Item, ed. Delia LaBarre (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 81.} The pages of the \textit{Times-Picayune} newspaper are also peppered with articles reporting the disagreeable selling practices of Italian vendors, verifying the premise of Hearn’s article. In the spring of 1889, for example, the \textit{Times-Picayune} published an article noting the aggressive selling strategies of itinerant fishmongers, primarily Italian. The article notes that these vendors, who go door to door,
“are generally sensible enough to speak politely when there are any males about
the house, but if not they are just the contrary. They ring at door bells [sic] and if
not promptly answered, jerk the wire as though they would pull the ball from its
fastenings. A simple refusal to purchase incenses them, and they thrust their
offensive-smelling fish in the face of the person, and if they are still refused
frequently give vent to curses and abuse of those whom they seek to impose
on.”

The title of the article, “Peddling Pests,” speaks to the concerns that community
members had about Italian vendors, whom they stereotype as aggressive and as a group
that they did not want in their city. Further, some New Orleanians criticized them for
conducting business in the city illegally. The Italian male vendor, as was the case with
the French mustard seller, worked in the streets, a profession that associated him with
prominent sectors of business culture frequented by African Americans in New Orleans.
When thinking of the Italian male vendor as a figure whose racial identity was not
necessarily white, we see similarities in the ways in which whites wrote about black men
and Italian vendors. In the late nineteenth century, scholars have documented whites’
fears that black men might intimately or violently interact with white women. As a

126 City newspapers claimed that hundreds of vendors, many of them Italian immigrants, operated without
127 For works that examine the fear that some whites held of black men and the means by which they
attempted to control black bodies see: Crystal Nicole Feimster, *Southern Horrors: Women and the Politics of
Rape and Lynching* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2009); Danielle L. McGuire, *At the Dark End
of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance: A New History of the Civil Rights Movement, from Rosa Parks to
the Rise of Black Power* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010); Hannah Rosén, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom:
Citizenship, Sexual Violence, and the Meaning of Race in the Postemancipation South* (Chapel Hill: The University
and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995); Glenda Gilmore,
result, white authors regularly depicted black men as aggressive and intrusive. When we read the above article with this comparison in mind, we see that Italian vendors are cast in a similar way to black men. The white housekeeper, as a foil, is cast as the helpless victim in an economic exchange. However, as we have seen in this dissertation, women possessed certain skillsets that enabled them to navigate the urban food culture and make informed purchasing decisions. Those skillsets still existed in the late nineteenth century. As indicated in *Gumbo Ya-Ya*, “When strawberries appear, preceding the blackberry season, peddlers, both white and colored, both male and female, appear all over the city […] The housewives emerge, peer into the small boxes of berries, inspecting carefully, always raising the top layer of fruit to see the ones beneath.”\(^{128}\) Acknowledging the learned skills of women shoppers, Lyle Saxon notes that “[t]here is a little trade trick of putting the reddest and biggest berries on top, green, dry or small ones—the culls—underneath to which all Louisiana housekeepers are wise.”\(^{129}\) Women who possessed these skills, then, were not helpless nor ill-equipped to interact with vendors. The reality of many women’s marketing expertise reinforces the idea that authors cast Italians vendors as aggressive businessmen so as to marginalize them


within narratives about what New Orleans’ urban food culture “should” look like—a vision of the city that was based on the city’s alleged uniqueness.

Humor was another means through which to obscure the skills of people, both vendors and customers, integral to New Orleans’ local food economy. Ethnographic writers wielded humor to target food vendors, pushing them further into the margins of Americans’ understanding of the city’s local food economy. Comedy and laughers, as Kyla Wazana Tompkins argues, are associated with “the politically devalued and thus often hyperembodied populations that appear with food and food spaces.”\(^\text{130}\) Whereas Tompkins points out that the cook, in particular, fell under this category, I am interested in the ways in which street vendors were often the subjects of humor and how it was used to reduce the threat of black voices and black contributions and control over parts of the local food economy. Lafcadio Hearn notes, for example, that some cries were incomprehensible—a strange critique considering the utility of a street cry lies in its ability to communicate to listeners what items are for sale:

There are also two peddlers, the precise meaning of whose cries we have never been able to determine. One shouts, or seems to shout, “A-a-a-a-ah! SHE got.” Just what “SHE got” we have not yet been able to determine; but we fancy it might be disagreeable, as the crier’s rival always shouts—“I-I-I!—I want nothing!” with a tremendous emphasis on I.\(^\text{131}\)


In addition to incomprehensible cries, Hearn transcribed misunderstood or mistaken cries: “There is also the fig-seller, who crieth in such a manner that his ‘Fresh figs!’ seem to be ‘Ice crags!’ And the fan-sellers, who intend to call, ‘Cheap fans!’ but who really seem to yell ‘Jap-ans!’ and ‘Chapped hand!’” He wrote in such a way as to incite laughter and commiseration in his reader.

Hearn did not see his writings as doing social and political work through humor; rather, he saw his humorous depictions of street vendors as a form of entertainment for white readers. Hearn’s last line in “Voices of Dawn” drives home the point that, in his opinion, listening to street cries was entertaining: “If any one [sic] has a little leisure and a little turn for amusement, he can certainly have plenty of fun while listening to the voices of peddlers entering his room together with the first liquid gold of sunrise.”

And so derogatory text lay beneath the romanticized veneer of New Orleans that Hearn helped to create.

In sum, messages and imagery in the ethnographic writings and ephemera produced around the 1884 World’s Fair were by no means unified. They were as diverse as the people who rendered them. Yet underlying that variation was a common vision of

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133 By contrast, in Street Cries of an Old Southern City, humor works as a way to ease the harsh realities of the difficult labors of street food vendors and the sad-tinged nostalgia that tourists carried for the American South. The work consoles the readers stating, “All is not sadness, for here and there a quaint bit of human nature of glint of humor, shows.” Harriette Kershaw Leiding, Street Cries of an Old Southern City (Charleston: The Daggett Printing Co., 1910).

New Orleans as a place apart from the United States—one that seemed stuck in the antebellum past. African Americans bore the brunt of that misrepresentation. American writers portrayed them through the iconography of slavery associated with the Atlantic World, even though they were free and actually American citizens. Those writers co-opted this Atlantic World narrative to serve a larger purpose: to help define what it meant to be American through opposition. To them, America was what New Orleans was not. America was unified and its culture was organized around white middle class values. Its food culture was sterile, stable, and “modern.” This juxtaposition served to marginalize New Orleans in the national narrative through its food culture, specifically. As this chapter demonstrated, food vendors, those typically marginalized in New Orleans’ society, became the literary figures through which writers marginalized the city in a national context. The next chapter focuses back on New Orleans, looking not at representations of the city’s food culture, but at how the city both fulfilled and rejected its characterizations as outdated and foreign. As before, the city’s local food culture and economy, and the public culture that developed around food distribution, were the means through which urban residents and the municipal government defined their relationship to the nation and with fellow Americans.
6. Cultures of Enclosure

The history of New Orleans’ municipal food markets is a story of urban America’s growing pains in the twentieth century—ones defined by conflicting notions of civic progress.¹ In examining modern America, most scholarly works focus on “markets” as an abstract concept of commerce: stock markets, labor markets, financial markets, commodity markets, etc. Markets, though, not only took up physical space in American cities; they also were places where people congregated to buy and sell fresh food under municipal supervision. Largely forgotten in American collective memory, the municipal food market was the bedrock of urban food economies in America before the meteoric rise of the supermarket in the mid-twentieth century. Captivated by the phenomenon of American mass consumerism marked by store-bought TV dinners and Jell-O mania, scholars have told the history of modern America through the history of the supermarket.² That history is often prefaced with an over-simplified declension narrative of the municipal markets—one that identifies them as victims of


modernization, antiquated spaces that could not meet the demands of American citizens. That narrative, however, overlooks the historic role that municipal markets played in progressive civic projects in American cities.

Municipal markets were like scientific laboratories where city officials tested out programs and technologies designed for civic advancement. They were dynamic spaces that changed to meet the needs of urban populaces, adapting to new standards of public health, popular consumer trends, and shifting understandings of what constituted ordered, civil society. Although a civic amenity with ancient roots, public markets fit twentieth-century ideas about what an ideal American city looked like and what public services it should provide its citizens ranging from transportation to policing. Public provisioning—the effort to supply urban residents, regardless of socio-economic status, with affordable, safe food—was key to that vision of modern America.

Scholars have demonstrated the paramount role of public markets in experimenting with modernization in nineteenth century America.¹ They have focused on the ways in which municipal authorities in major American cities tested public health reform in the public markets. That concern, however, did not end in 1900. The twentieth-century history of New Orleans’ public markets demonstrates that public health reform grounded in public provisioning remained a concern in America into the 1930s. The

markets, therefore, continued to be important civic spaces where urban populations built ideas of community and belonging through public provisioning, thus developing and shifting the city’s public culture. Similar to the nineteenth century, public health remained a targeted issue. Modernizing the markets, however, was not just about the sustained importance of a moral economy for the public good. In New Orleans, it was also about corrupt politics and power plays made by politically connected vendors, typically white men, trying to protect their businesses in the Jim Crow South. Public markets and their surrounding streets became battlegrounds between competing parties and the grassroots organizing among white New Orleanians led to the systematic disenfranchisement of immigrants and people of color by limiting their access to the public markets through architectural changes and local laws, which were carried out in the name of “progress.”

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4 Helen Tangires’ study of municipal markets in America focuses on the sustaining importance of moral economy throughout the nineteenth century. Her work refines a historiography that argues that a capitalist economy in America crowded out its moral economy before the mid-nineteenth century. Her research indicates the presence of a vibrant moral economy monitored at the local level—“where familiar people, in a familiar place, could see, hear, touch, taste, and smell whether government was doing its job.” Helen Tangires, Public Markets and Civic Culture in Nineteenth-Century America (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), xx.

5 My work contributes to a growing body of scholarship that studies the ways in which modernization, as expressed through the pure food movement, scientific cooking, and moral crusades, was bound up in the reestablishment of racial hierarchies. My work joins that of scholars interested in the ways food reflects modernizing projects in twentieth-century America that empowered some people, mainly white, while disempowering others, mainly people of color. Yet my study shows that it was not only race that informed these movements in New Orleans, but also ethnicity—that the two were inextricably bound in a multi-ethnic, multi-racial city and that city’s urban food culture. Psyche A. Williams-Forson, Building Houses Out of Chicken Legs: Black Women, Food, and Power (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Elizabeth S.D. Engelhardt, A Mess of Greens: Southern Gender and Southern Food (Athens: The University of
The sheer size of New Orleans’ system should have been indicative of the city government’s commitment to public provisioning, to sustaining a local food economy designed for the public good. By 1911, New Orleans had 34 municipal markets, the largest market system by number in the country. The city’s municipal markets, however, were not universally lauded for their progressivism. As we saw in the previous chapter, they were a mechanism through which American writers identified the city as antiquated and foreign in the post-Reconstruction era, the very opposite of the utopian American city outlined above. This chapter, by contrast, examines how New Orleanians defined their own place in America, drawing conclusions about their city that clashed with those stereotypes, and at times fulfilled them. It does so through an in-depth exploration of the city’s public food markets, the historic heart of the city’s social and civic life. In essence, the market was a place where the city could experiment with modernization, trying out new modes through which to achieve civic progress and foster civic pride. In turn-of-the-century New Orleans, this was a fraught process because city officials, food entrepreneurs, and their customers often had conflicting interests and differing opinions about how to manage the public markets in the name of progress—progress defined primarily by white citizens. For New Orleanians, the

Georgia Press, 2011); Angela Jill Cooley, To Live and Dine in Dixie: The Evolution of Urban Food Culture in the Jim Crow South (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 2015).
markets were not just a testing ground for civic advancement; they were also spaces through which city officials and urban residents alike sought to reverse a national narrative that had othered its people and culture.

This fundamental tension—between Americans marginalizing the city’s place in national culture, while locals centralized it—is embedded in the process by which New Orleanians fought for inclusion in the story of modern America. The experimentation within the municipal markets marks a new iteration of the city’s public culture, one that incorporated trends that were increasingly popular across the United States, but which took on a life of their own in the context of New Orleans’ local food culture and economy. A consequence of that experimentation was the elimination of the networks of exchange through which a wide variety of people interacted and through which marginalized people were able to enter into and shape public culture.

In order to understand the motivations driving the conflict in New Orleans’ municipal markets in the twentieth century, we must first contextualize them within the broader history of public provisioning in America. This exploration reveals that cities in America developed market systems unique to their circumstances and their particular vision of modern civic progress, but also ones that also shared a fundamental belief that public provisioning was necessary for cities to thrive—an essential part of civic advancement throughout the U.S.
At the turn of the twentieth century, many American cities, from New York to Los Angeles, operated public markets to provision urban populations with affordable, safe food. A major component of public provisioning in America was addressing public health concerns and insuring the quality of products for sale. By concentrating exchange in a single place, city officials were better able to monitor the quality and pricing of goods to ensure that vendors were not taking advantage of customers. Harvested foods and cured meats aged and decomposed. The very substances that nurtured the body could also harm it because of their potential to carry rot and disease. Food was dangerous; food was ever present; and fear of food was pervasive. Customers were naturally suspicious of vendors, some of whom adulterated products or sold rotten goods to turn a profit. Through the nineteenth century, it was commonly believed that food regulation was primarily the responsibility of the consumer, not the government.  

6 Historians tend to narrate the history of regulation in America as one that went from little to no regulation in the colonial and antebellum periods to large-scale state and federal regulation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, the focus of that narrative—on the state and federal level—is misleading. It suggests that there was a dearth of local regulation prior to the late nineteenth century, when in fact there was a pervasive regulatory presence at the local level, particularly in regard to food. In New Orleans, municipal governments regulated the sale and distribution of fresh foods in the city, at least on paper. Some of the earliest ordinances in the French colonial period created in New Orleans regulated the sale of meat, for example. Other early colonial laws set prices for wild game and certain crops. When the Spanish colonial government established the first municipal market in New Orleans, it was in order to centralize butchers in one space to facilitate government regulation of the sale of their products for the public good. The public markets as well as street peddlers and hawksers, therefore, have a long regulatory history with local government. The regulation of food only increased throughout the nineteenth century as the discovery of foodborne diseases encouraged new approaches to public health. Even though government employees inspected the markets and the products sold at them on a daily or weekly basis, there was an understanding that customers had to know good products from bad products. There was an entire market-related skillset that customers sought to master in order to purchase the freshest foods for reasonable prices. In sum, the last line of defense against bad food was in the hands of the consumer, not the government. For
Marketing, or shopping for fresh foods, was a learned skill that required customers, mainly women, to use their five senses to determine the freshness of food. It is not surprising that throughout the life of the public markets, cookbooks and newspaper articles provided advice for determining the freshness of meat and seafood and the ripeness of produce. The municipal government was interested in creating and monitoring spaces that would enable customers to make fair judgments. Public markets, therefore, were built for transparency. Publicly displaying wares, exposing them to passersby and city officials alike, was part of the communal and government regulatory process and the protection of public health. Open displays built trust between city officials, vendors, and customers—a trust that was fundamental to the success of public markets.

Although established to corral commercial exchange, it was not uncommon for retailing to break out beyond the imaginary bounds of the curb or pavilion market. City officials attempted to mitigate the spillover that slowed traffic and hindered the


7 Curb markets are where vendors displayed wares on a street corner or sidewalk to purvey goods to passersby. Pavilion markets are where vendors set up stations or carts under a shed, which provided some shelter from inclement weather. These sheds could be constructed in a street or on a designated plot of land, similar in size and structure to twenty-first century covered farmers’ markets. Like curb markets, vendors in pavilion markets typically sold goods directly to customers and were thus designated as retail markets. For a more comprehensive definition of curb and pavilion markets, see the chapter of this dissertation entitled “Cultures of Belonging.”
activities of entrepreneurs and residents in the surrounding area through city ordinances, fining vendors who sold wares illegally beyond market borders. Often, these ordinances were not enforced, a commitment to civic order on paper only. The need to feed the city often outweighed the need to control local economic exchange and the movement of people and goods. Populations were comparatively small through the early nineteenth century, so overcrowding was not a pressing issue. However, as populations steadily increased in the nineteenth century and public markets became more difficult to regulate because of the voluminous exchange occurring within them, city officials grew desperate for a new model that would contain exchange while also providing citizens with economical provisions.

The solution came in the form of the enclosed market house, which had gained popularity in European cities like Paris and London in the mid-nineteenth century and was considered “a vision of urban modernity” that aided rather than sabotaged an orderly society. Their architectural designs were ornate with cavernous ceilings and multiple levels of retail space. Whereas pavilion markets were typically constructed out of wood, market houses were regularly built out of brick, stone, stucco, marble, iron, and glass—materials meant to inspire and awe. Market houses, like other municipal buildings such as courthouses and museums, were constructed to impress passersby.

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and were considered symbols of civic progress.\textsuperscript{9} They were designed to eliminate sprawl, unclutter city streets, and protect sellers and buyers from the smoke, dust, and soot characteristic of rapid industrialization.

For municipal governments, renovating the public markets was a means of combatting the dark underbelly of industrialization, which had flooded American cities with rural populations, creating overcrowded and unsanitary living and working conditions. In contrast to congested curb and pavilion markets, the market house was intended as a space of enlightened economic exchange, where interactions between vendors and customers happened not in muddy streets, but on terrazzo tile, not over makeshift wooden tables, but over polished countertops.\textsuperscript{10} American cities began to shut down and raze their curb and pavilion markets and construct modern market halls

\textsuperscript{9} Rosemary Wakeman, “Fascinating Les Halles,” \textit{French Politics, Culture & Society} 25, no. 2 (Summer, 2007), 51.

\textsuperscript{10} Philadelphia’s Western Market was one of the first examples of the new market house model in America and one that city officials saw as representative of civic progress. It opened its doors on April 20, 1859. The mayor of Philadelphia delivered a speech at the event, commenting that the market was “closely associated with the progress of civilization” and that its opening was representative of the “prosperity, wealth, and refinement of the community in which it is established.” Like its counterparts in Europe, the Western Market was designed to impress, costing $100,000 to build. The market was “built of brick, ornamented with granite and brown stone, and externally presents a beautiful and tasteful appearance.” It had 280 stalls with countertops hewn from Italian marble that had been polished until you could see your reflection in them. The pathways were paved, a drastic departure from the dirt roads and mud puddles on which vendors had previously sold their wares under makeshift tents. The market was also equipped with the latest ventilation technologies to promote airflow and reduce the smell of meat, seafood, and produce. It was the first of many market houses constructed in Philadelphia and earned the city a reputation of having an exemplary food distribution system. Note that at this time, Philadelphia had privatized its public market system, contracting out the city’s markets to companies like the Western Market Company. “Local Intelligence: Open for Inspection,” \textit{Philadelphia Inquirer}, April 12, 1859, pg. 1; “The Western Market House,” \textit{The Press}, April 20, 1859, pg. 2; \textit{Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture for the year 1870} (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1871), 245; Helen Tangires, \textit{Public Markets and Civic Culture in Nineteenth-Century America} (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 112-114.
throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. Market houses became symbolic of a city’s commitment, financially and culturally, to American progress.

New Orleans’ market system shared notable similarities with those in other American cities through the mid-nineteenth century. In the 1830s, the city government began building pavilion markets in burgeoning neighborhoods to ease the pressure on the French Market, which at that time acted as both the central wholesale market and retail market for the entire city. Similar to other American cities, these neighborhood markets allowed for vendors to cater to the needs of growing communities often located some distance from the central market. In New Orleans, the city government built the first neighborhood market, St. Mary’s Market, in the American sector, several miles upriver of the Vieux Carré and the French Market—a section of the city that had been experiencing rapid growth since the Louisiana Purchase. The model of having a central wholesale-retail market with a support network of smaller, retail markets was a common model in Europe, one of the most notable examples being that of Les Halles (the central wholesale-retail market) and its subsidiary markets in Paris.

In the mid-nineteenth century, however, New Orleans’ market system greatly diverged from the ornate market model followed elsewhere. New Orleans did not adopt the market house model that became so popular in Europe and America in the second half of the nineteenth century. Instead, the municipal government continued to build small, pavilion markets in developing neighborhoods—an economical, albeit antiquated,
means of providing citizens with food distribution centers. Essentially, New Orleans
officials ignored a widely accepted and applauded model of modern public provisioning
at that time. Yet even that lauded model was not without its problems.

During this same period, the federal government took an interest in assessing
public markets in America in response to concerns about public provisioning in
America. It did so in order to determine their strengths and weaknesses and devise a set
of best practices for cities to implement. Horace Capron, the United States
Commissioner of Agriculture from 1867 to 1871, organized the first national study,
which showed that cities with populations under 100,000 had maintained public market
systems that benefitted both the producer (e.g., the farmer) and the consumer.11 In these
cities, it was common for farmers to sell directly to consumers, thereby making a
reasonable profit, while enabling the consumer to have access to the producer of their
food and to pay reasonable prices for the goods they offered. Many of these smaller
cities did not have market houses, but retained curb or pavilion markets. They were
relatively antiquated architecturally, but were achieving something that many market
houses could not: they were sustaining local agriculture and provisioning people with
good food at an affordable price.

11 In what is considered the first federal government study of public markets in America, Horace Capron,
the Commissioner of Agriculture from 1867–1871, defines large cities in America as ones with populations
over 100,000 people. Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture for the year 1870 (Washington: Government
In contrast to small and medium sized cities, Capron saw many problems in the public markets of large cities with populations over 100,000, many of which had adopted the market house model. At the time of the study, New Orleans was the ninth largest city in the U.S. with a population of nearly 200,000. Capron believed that the market systems of large cities, New Orleans among them, were no longer fulfilling their primary objective: to provision customers with quality, affordable food while also supporting farmers and the growth of America’s agricultural industry. They were backsliding rather than progressing forward.

Although city officials identified market houses as powerful symbols of civic progress, their daily functions were not as beneficial to the consumer as celebratory newspapers would have readers believe. According to Capron’s report, a major problem was that farmers rarely sold directly to consumers, a shift from colonial and antebellum distribution practices in America. Instead, hucksters served as middlemen in urban food economies, buying wholesale from farmers and then redistributing those goods at retail prices. In some cities like Charleston and Mobile, hucksters were reported to make a 100 to 200 percent profit, which Capron saw as an egregious practice. Larger cities came to rely on hucksters because they helped distribute food to sprawling populations. They sold goods at retail public markets and a growing number of privately owned grocery stores that sold fresh food (i.e., green grocers). Between 1851–1870, for example, the number of private grocers in Boston went from 330 to 739 shops, indicating the city’s
reliance on alternatives to the public markets, which were struggling to fulfill the needs of the city on their own.\textsuperscript{12}

New Orleans was no exception, though the city did not experience a similar dependence on green grocers. In fact, for most of the city’s history, New Orleanians could only legally buy fresh food from the public markets or from licensed street food vendors. After the Civil War, the local laws that policed public provisioning changed in important ways. In 1866, the city adopted an ordinance opening up its food economy to private retailers in the hopes of increasing competition and decreasing food prices for customers.\textsuperscript{13} The first legally operating private markets opened in 1868. They were small shops, simple in design. They provided shelter for purveyors who chose not to sell in the public markets. Similar to public market vendors, private market vendors created displays of fresh produce where shoppers could come and assess the quality of their products. Grocery stores that began to sell fresh produce were also legally defined as private markets. In addition to fresh food, these stores sold dry goods like coffee, tea, sugar, tobacco, liquor, and animal feed. In the second half of the nineteenth century, private markets’ numbers remained low in New Orleans because an 1874 local law prohibiting them from operating within close proximity (twelve blocks) of any public

market. Because there were so many public markets in the city, private markets were essentially illegal in the second half of the nineteenth century, which facilitated government-regulated public provisioning and also protected public markets’ consumer base. The goal of the 1868 law—to increase competition so as to decrease prices—was thwarted by the twelve-block radius rule. As a result, customers were forced to purchase food in the public markets, often at higher prices than they would have liked.

After the Civil War, there were many pressing civic projects that needed attention in New Orleans and limited funds through which to address those needs. Public provisioning was not a priority. For example, the state legislature of Louisiana, run by conservative Democrats, decided to privatize the city’s public markets, leasing them out to independent entrepreneurs. This decision enabled government officials to

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14 Private markets grew during the second half of the nineteenth century, but not to the extent that you see in Boston. “Official Journal of the House of Representatives of the State of Louisiana,” The Daily Advocate, June 16, 1900, pg. 2.

15 After the Civil War, the city government lost control of its public markets. During Reconstruction, the state legislature of Louisiana was granted control of them and decided to privatize the markets. In 1874, the state, acquiescing to lobbyists from New Orleans, also decided to create the law that prevented private markets from operating within twelve blocks of any public market, essentially making it illegal for private markets to operate in the city (Act 31). The Governor vetoed the bill, but the state legislature pushed it through. The markets were not put under the jurisdiction of the City Council until 1878. At that time, the city government continued to lease them out for contracts ranging from one month to 20 years. In 1878, for example, monthly contracts were signed for the Fruits and Vegetable Markets in the French Market Complex, The French Meat Market, and the Poydras, Pilie, Treme, Washington, Port, St. Bernard, Le Breton, St. Mary’s, Jefferson City, Sorapuru, Ninth Street, Algiers, Claiborne, and Dryades Markets. When the state put the markets back into the hands of the City Council, it agreed to reduce the twelve-block radius rule to six blocks. The reaffirmation of this restriction, even in its reduced radius, caused major upset among private entrepreneurs who were legally obligated to close their businesses because of their proximity to one of the public markets. The case went to the Louisiana Supreme Court. In April of 1879, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the six-block radius rule, noting that the New Orleans Administrator of Commerce “was required to close them [private markets in violation] up.” In 1888, the city government created a new law that retained the six-block radius rule. “Sale of the Revenues of the Public Markets For the Year 1879,”
focus energy and funds towards other projects. This decision upset members of the National Party of Louisiana who argued that leasing to the highest bidder created an indirect tax for all citizens and disproportionately impacted the poorest people in the city who struggled to purchase affordable food. In their estimation, New Orleans’ public markets no longer served the needs of the people, but served market managers’ interest in capital gain.

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16 “Address of the National Party of Louisiana to the People,” Times-Picayune, November 3, 1878, pg. 13. Note: In the 1870s, the city government also approved the construction of quasi-public markets, ones built by private entrepreneurs and contracted out to them for a 20-year period. These establishments were still subject to all public market rules and regulations. The city government, therefore, considered them public markets. “Municipal Brevities,” Times-Picayune, April 28, 1878, pg. 6.
During the contractual period, citizens felt abused by predatory vendors and market managers. Customers did not even have the benefit of shopping at a beautiful modern market hall as they did in other American cities. While under contract, the markets slowly deteriorated as the city government neglected repairs. In 1884, for example, the floors of the Dryades Market were sticky and the thick air was ripe with
the foul aroma of spoiled meat, fish, and produce. The wall paint had peeled and the wooden eaves had rotted. The market, just like the fresh food it distributed, was slowly decomposing.¹⁷ According to the *Times-Picayune*,

The condition of Dryades Market at present, from actual observation, is horrible. For the past 12 days the market has not been washed out, and the consequence is that a filthier place can souroele [sic] be imagined. The stench is intolerable, and numerous complaints are being made by the butchers, coffee and vegetable stand keepers. The facts have been reported but no attention is paid thereto.¹⁸

Residents were concerned about the health hazards associated with such unsanitary conditions. In desperation, city residents turned to private markets, many of them operating illegally because of their proximity to the public markets. Others turned to street hawkers.¹⁹ New Orleanians’ reliance on these alternative food distributors was testament to the pervasive problems within the city’s market system.

At the turn of the twentieth century, New Orleans’ markets were not progressive. If anything, they were symbolic of the city government’s abandonment of public provisioning. The markets had been the constant topic of criticism in the city’s newspapers for decades. Complaint columns documented frequent issues like roof

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¹⁸ "Inviting the Cholera," *Times-Picayune*, July 13, 1884, pg. 11.
¹⁹ Whereas in other cities grocers helped to distribute fresh foods to sprawling populations, in New Orleans, street hawkers had taken on that task, many of them women and people of color. Peddling licenses steadily increased through the late nineteenth century. In 1893, the city government issued 533 permits, by 1899 the city government had issued 685, and by 1900, it was estimated that there were up to 1,000 peddlers with permits. "An Attack on the Private Markets," *Times-Picayune*, May 24, 1900, pg. 3.
collapses, which seemed to have happened with comical frequency. So terrible were the conditions of the markets that in the late 1890s many lessees refused to renew their contracts with the government because they no longer saw the markets as a viable business model. The markets, which at their peak had drawn in $400,000, were only making “a few tens of thousands” and lessees went before the United States courts to obtain financial relief. Upon the expiration of their contracts, the markets defaulted back to the city, no longer centers of the city’s food traffic, but only marginalized, undesirable places. The markets had become a failed civic project corrupted by privatization and neglect.

Yet the city government, seemingly against all logic, was willing to resurrect them even with one foot in the grave. In the eyes of local officials, the markets were like the piece of beef that was used to flavor the New Orleans breakfast staple, bouilli, or beef soup. Largely seen as an ingredient that was better thrown away than repurposed after it had boiled all day, most Americans would have discarded the beef just as they would have discarded the neighborhood markets. Yet like the New Orleanian cooks who proudly claimed that they could convert that old piece of beef into a delicious entree, the


21 “Merchant Near Public Markets Hold Meeting Last Night and Appoint Delegations to Go to Baton Rouge,” *Times-Picayune*, June 12, 1900, pg. 8.

municipal government tried to transform the unpalatable public markets into something enticing. But why?

City officials knew that the markets had earning potential. They therefore became a key component in the city government’s plan to bring New Orleans into the new century. Counter to the systems in other American cities, New Orleans officials sought not to completely revamp the city’s market system to symbolize the city’s civic progress, but instead sought to use the markets to earn revenue that they could put towards other civic projects. Historically, the public markets had provided steady revenue for the municipal government. They were estimated to be worth $1,000,000. Revenues and rental fees were meant to be invested back into the markets’ upkeep: to pay a number of municipal employees to regulate the quality of produce, maintain the properties, and clean the markets. The municipal government of New Orleans, however, had the option, and they took it, to funnel a majority of those funds into other civic projects, while investing just enough in the markets so as not to cause a riot. With the markets back under their full control in 1900, those profit streams had the potential to increase dramatically if the city government could push vendors and customers back

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24 Although, in the second half of the nineteenth century, those profits had been slowly decreasing. The local paper cited evidence of that decline, noting that there had been a profit of $411,100 in 1860, $284,823 in 1871, $186,468 in 1879, and $185,000 in 1900. “An Attack on the Private Markets,” Times-Picayune, May 24, 1900, pg. 3.
into the markets, boosting market revenues from increased sales, and filling the coffers of the municipal government’s general fund. The local government, with the support of the state legislature, took steps ranging from legal action to public marketing campaigns to secure the financial success of the municipal markets.

City officials were careful to control narratives about their reinstated control over the public markets, knowing that the actions they were taking would likely upset private food vendors and customers who might turn to the local newspapers to present their case against the local government. Their strategy was to focus on progress narratives, publically naming the municipal markets as part of their strategic plan. Newspapers covering the city government’s actions reported stories that spoke of civic advancement and a renewed investment in the public markets. These narratives served to mask what the municipal government intended to do with market revenues: put them towards other civic projects while doing patchwork renovations on the existing markets and building inexpensive pavilion markets in new neighborhoods (to create new revenue streams for the city government at a minimal cost).

Concerned with saving the public markets’ reputations so as to ensure their future success, city officials shifted the blame for their decline. According to newspaper reports, the government’s long-term neglectfulness was not to blame. Rather, it was the predatory and, at times, illegal business practices of the public markets’ direct competitors: private markets and peddlers. In a City Council meeting convened to
discuss the renewal of the public markets, council members narrated the status of New Orleans’ local food economy as follows:

The public markets belong to the city, but for years have been leased out to private parties. The private markets are owned and operated by private persons. In addition to the private markets there are numerous hucksters and peddlers who hawk their wares from door to door. The result is that people who formerly hired stalls in the public markets and sold their products there, now operate private markets and peddle, and the result is that the public markets, which formerly were large sources of revenue to the city, now give greatly reduced returns, while little or nothing comes to the city from the private market people and the peddlers.26

City Council members then proposed a solution in the form of two ordinances.27

The first ordinance, drawing upon legal precedents, banned the establishment of private markets within nine blocks of any public market.28 The second proposed that street peddling be made illegal. The latter would force peddlers off of the streets and into the public markets where they would be easier to regulate because their movement would be restricted.29 Within the markets, they would have to pay a licensing fee in addition to

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27 The ordinances were written after two petitions had been put forth by citizens and reviewed by the legislative committee in early April. “City Hall: Matters for Legislation to be Considered Monday Night,” *Times-Picayune*, April 8, 1900, pg. 17.
28 As we have seen, throughout the city’s history, the municipal government had passed regulations banning private retailers from operating within a certain radius of public markets. The distance fluctuated over the years, and was at times removed completely, opening up local commerce to private retailers. The most recent ordinance, passed in 1898, re-established a six-block radius rule. The 1900 ordinance would extend the radius to nine blocks, forcing any vendors who had operated legally outside of the six-block radius, but illegally within the nine-block radius, to relocate or shut down. “An Attack on the Private Markets,” *Times-Picayune*, May 24, 1900, pg. 3.
monthly rent, increasing the profits that the municipal government skimmed from the markets.

Citizens of New Orleans spoke out at the meeting, voicing their opinions to the City Council, marking their support and concerns for the proposed renewal of the public markets and the city government’s particular vision of civic progress. Major supporters of the nine-block ordinance included vendors in the public markets whose businesses would benefit from the laws. Those who opposed it included private retailers who owned and operated grocery stores (an estimated 157 of them according to local newspapers) that sold fresh produce among other goods, and who would be forced to stop selling fresh food, relocate, or shut down if the law were passed. Frank Zengel, a supporter of both of the proposed laws, agreed with the City Council, arguing that “public and private markets could not exist at the same time, nor could public markets be profitable as long as peddling was permitted.” He also argued that “peddling is out of date.” Peddlers were not part of his vision of modern New Orleans. Opposed to shutting down the private markets that were critical to his livelihood, E.H. McCaleb argued that “the nine-block ordinance was built for revenue only” and was not fair to private market owners who had legally established their businesses in decades prior.

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32 He argued that the “aim of the [first] ordinance could be accomplished by raising the license of $5 to $100, or such sum as was deemed wisest.” “An Attack on the Private Markets,” Times-Picayune, May 24, 1900, pg. 3.
He claimed that it was the peddlers, not the private markets, that rendered the public markets unprofitable. The Times-Picayune did not report any speakers in opposition to the second ordinance (that would make street peddling illegal). The voices of peddlers, of which there were an estimated 700-1,000 operating on free permits, were suspiciously absent from the conversation about modernization, reflective of the fact that many of them were politically disenfranchised: women, people of color, and recent migrants.33 Their iconic voices, marked by their distinct calls, were confined to the streets, barred from government buildings by legal and structural inequalities. During that meeting, they became the scapegoat for both public and private entrepreneurs, many of them white men who had both established political networks in the city and had the privilege to voice their opinions to the City Council.

The particular vision of modernization held by city officials, public market vendors, and private food entrepreneurs, and embedded within the second ordinance, seemed to have no room for street peddlers who violated their desire for a contained local food economy for the city. Although the second ordinance was not enacted, a modified version of it eventually became law in November of that year.34 The modified ordinance banned all street peddling in New Orleans between 6:00 a.m. and noon, the traditional operating hours of the city’s public markets.35 These same hours were crucial

34 The city government passed the modified peddler ordinance on November 14, 1900.
35 Ordinance 836 N.C.S.
selling hours for street peddlers, whose iconic cries began at sunrise and who often clustered on street corners surrounding the market during their operating hours. These were the hours in which New Orleans’ residents were accustomed to purchasing their fresh ingredients for the day. They were also the coolest hours, slowing the spoilage of fresh food and enabling roaming vendors to work in more comfortable and temperate conditions. On top of the time restrictions, the new ordinance also made it illegal for peddlers to cry out about their wares and to knock on customers’ doors to initiate a sale. This law cast peddlers as urban nuisances, ones whose movements and “noise” did not align with notions of the ideal American city, a quiet place where citizens would not be confronted with salespersons.

Although the modified law did not technically ban street peddling, the restrictions on time, movement, and verbal advertising made it difficult for itinerant vendors to operate successful businesses. In a rare instance in which peddlers’ voices were reported in the *Times-Picayune*, one spoke about his grievances as follows:

I have a wife, five children and a horse to feed. If my sales are cut down by half [because of the time restrictions] and my profits, small as they are, are 50 per cent less, how can I get along? We poor people ask that the good and just mayor, whom we all admire and respect, will take an interest in us and help us to make a fair living.36

Further, the price for a peddling license was raised from $5 to $40, making it difficult or impossible for peddlers, many already impoverished, to purchase one.\textsuperscript{37} The new ordinance and licensing fees hurt both the peddlers and their clients who needed to buy the less expensive second-tier quality produce.

Corner grocery stores were also not a part of the city government’s particular vision of civic progress in 1900, demonstrating that competing ideas of modernization not only existed between different segments of the population in New Orleans, but also between New Orleans and other American cities.\textsuperscript{38} As a result, private entrepreneurs selling fresh foods in grocery stores and other retail businesses suffered losses. The first ordinance discussed at the City Council meeting in May of 1900 became law and the municipal government began enforcing it in January of 1901.\textsuperscript{39} Of the approximately 200 private grocers in the city selling fresh food, only 38 went unaffected by the law because their businesses were positioned outside of the nine-block radius rule.\textsuperscript{40} After all was said and done, 207 private grocers operating within the nine-block radius were forced to

\textsuperscript{37} "The Market Question Plainly Set Forth," \textit{Times-Picayune}, January 8, 1901, pg. 9.
\textsuperscript{39} Ordinance 312 N.C.S was passed on October 24, 1900. Note: When private entrepreneurs claimed that the ordinance was not legal, the case went to the Louisiana Supreme Court and eventually the U.S. Supreme Court, where its legality was upheld upon the reasoning that the city and state governments had the right to regulate the markets as they saw fit and that the nine-block radius rule did not violate any clause of the U.S. constitution. “The Market Question Plainly Set Forth,” \textit{Times-Picayune}, January 8, 1901, pg. 9.
\textsuperscript{40} “The Market Ordinance,” Times-Picayune, January 8, 1901, pg. 4; “The Market Question Plainly Set Forth,” January 8, 1901, pg. 9.
discontinue their sale of fresh foods, relocate, or close. The city government defended their actions by clarifying that of the 207 private markets, “there is no single one of this number that cannot, by removal beyond the nine-square limit, be located in the same neighborhood and in a populous district of the city.” This was an unusual attack on private markets without precedent in the United States, where most other cities believed that public and private markets could co-exist, provisioning urban populations through a symbiotic relationship that benefited the local government, purveyors, and customers.

The new ordinances did not go unquestioned by some city residents who approached the city government’s plan for civic progress with great skepticism. Rumors spread like wildfire through the city, inciting consumer anxiety and fueling suspicion of the local government, the public markets, and the vendors who worked within them. Some people claimed that the municipal government was creating a monopoly over the city’s food economy. Others insisted that vendors were colluding to raise prices that would make it nearly impossible for the laboring classes to afford fresh food. As reported in the *Times-Picayune*, many New Orleanians were unhappy with the

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41 Fifty of those markets had been operating illegally within the old six-block radius established in 1888 and replaced in 1900 by Ordinance 312 N.C.S. “The Market Question Plainly Set Forth,” *Times-Picayune*, January 8, 1901, pg. 9.
consequences of the public market ordinance, while others were misinformed about the legal extent of the peddling ordinance:

It is loudly contended that this act has already operated greatly to raise the price of provisions in the markets; that it inflicts additional taxes upon the people; that it has broken up all the private markets in the city; that the provisions to be found in the public markets are not only higher in price, but are inferior in quality to what was kept in the private markets, and that, finally, under the law, all peddling and huckstering of fruit, vegetables and other articles being wholly prohibited, the people who lived by such huckstering and peddling of food are driven from business, while the people who depend on them are deprived except at great cost of expense and exertion, of the necessary supplies to which they are accustomed.  

That same day, the Times-Picayune released another article recapping two meetings with Mayor Paul Capdevielle that clarified aspects of the two new ordinances. In the first, the mayor described the legal history of the city’s private markets, clarified that the peddling ordinance did not prohibit peddling all together, and noted that the city government passed these ordinances for the benefit of the public’s health. As was always the case with public provisioning, it was easier for city officials to regulate the sale of food when it was concentrated in one place, he explained. In the second interview where the mayor met with merchants opposed to the nine-block radius rule, Capdevielle stated that he believed the ordinance was good for the city’s

businesses, that “[t]he city is improving” and that “[w]e are not only on the eve of great prosperity, but we are already prosperous.”48

Although city officials thought that New Orleans was on the cusp of greatness in 1900, and that the public markets had an integral role to play in financing changes that would ensure its success, the markets were still in relatively poor condition from the previous decades of negligence and the city government was not willing to put forth a significant amount of money to change those conditions. Concerns of public health, therefore, would mar the history of the public markets for the next three decades as the city officials made conservative, economical improvements to the public markets. In the opening decades of the twentieth century, however, the conflicting visions of modernization in New Orleans would slowly coalesce and shift more towards national standards of urban provisioning and public health, eventually abandoning the plan laid out by city officials in 1900.

Those shifts were indicative of the New Orleans’ commitment, from city official to housekeeper, to embracing a widely accepted model of an urban food economy in America—one that would help the city shed stereotypes that had othered it and its people for generations. Even with those shifting priorities, issues related to sanitation, disease, and the adulteration of fresh foods in the public markets would remain a major

issue in public provisioning, casting a negative haze over the progressive changes that
city and citizens alike tried to implement in the twentieth century.

After securing their hold over the local food economy, thereby securing a steady
stream of profits for the city government’s general fund, the municipal government
began to make improvements to the market structures, backing up their legal action
with necessary repairs to address public health concerns, which had grown acute with
the increased proliferation of germ theory. 49 It should be noted that remodeling was
done only in a few key markets. Alexander Pujol, the Commissioner of the Police and
Public Buildings Committee, headed the renovations. He began with the Dryades
Market because of its popularity, size, and historical significance. In 1903, the Dryades
Market was fitted for electricity and more renovations followed. 50 He then turned his

49 In the late nineteenth century, women reformers focused on bringing knowledge of germ theory to more
Americans. Specifically, they targeted American housewives. Reformers believed that women could
significantly improve sanitation in their homes. Leaders of the Domestic Science Movement argued that
seemingly mundane tasks like sweeping or wiping down counters were crucial to the improved sanitation
of living and eating spaces. These beliefs stretched beyond the domestic sphere and into the public sphere
when women went to market to purchase fresh foods. In order to ensure cleanliness of their homes, they
had to ensure that the food they brought into their homes was of good quality as well. These beliefs
compelled customers, primarily women, to organize and petition the local government to improve sanitary

50 Other improvements were made to the Dryades Market over the next few years. In 1905, Pujol resolved to
repair and rebuild the sidewalks around the market; it was not until 1907, however, that it appears he was
able to implement those improvements. In that year, the sidewalks were paved in artificial stone by the city
engineer. In 1906, Pujol refitted the electric lights in the market. Later that same year, after the commissioner
had finished repairing the Dryades Market, he moved on to the Claiborne and Treme Markets, seeking to
bring those public amenities up to par with the recently renovated ones. The New Orleans community saw
Pujol as a reputable public servant. The Times-Picayune described his strategies as follows: “When the
Commissioner goes into any market with his force everything old and worn has to come out and new paint
must show everywhere.” “Keep Off the Sidewalks,” Times-Picayune, September 2, 1905, pg. 5; “Mayor’s
attention to the other neighborhood markets, making calculated improvements with a limited budget. And so the city government’s plan to turn the markets into profitable institutions was well on its way and public market vendors were on board.

With the local laws and structural improvements now working for them, public market vendors sought to win back the loyalties of customers who had grown distrustful and critical of them during the contractual period when the conditions of the markets deteriorated rapidly, causing major public health concerns.51 Although public market vendors saw themselves as central to New Orleans’ food economy, customers did not necessarily share that same vision and needed convincing to support the markets’ continuation. Vendors at the Dryades Market made their case in the *Daily States*, a politically progressive local newspaper. In October of 1903, after initial market renovations were complete, they began running a two-page spread in the Sunday paper, as previously referenced in the dissertation. The pages advertised Dryades Market’s stalls and surrounding vibrant business community. The ad was a microcosm of the neighborhood’s economy—one that developed out of the regular business brought by the public market.52 Revitalizing the market was more than fixing dilapidated buildings

52 “Progressive and Popular Merchants of Dryades St.,” *Daily States*, October 25, 1903, pg. 6.

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and market stalls; it was a project about revitalizing an entire shopping district and its reputation.

Acutely aware of customers’ fears of unsanitary markets, vendors made efforts to speak to the cleanliness of their particular businesses in the *Daily States*. They understood that cleanliness was directly tied to the successful renewal of the markets. Proving their commitment to cleanliness in the local paper was also a step towards redemption, towards saving their reputations and their businesses. Vendors from the Ninth Street Market, for example, advertised that their market was “the cleanest and best conducted in the city and that the quality of goods is not surpassed anywhere.”

Individual entrepreneurs also placed advertisements that spoke to the good conditions of their particular businesses. At the Dryades Market, for example, Bernard Trapp of the Union Coffee stand claimed that he “offers everything in the line served up in clean and prompt style.” Similarly, John Flettrich at the Poydras Market, noted that “everything is neat and clean” at Lawrence’s Coffee Stand. In addition to addressing sanitation concerns, vendors also made references to their commitment to modern business practices so as to reassure customers that the public markets were the best place to

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55 My emphases added. Flettrich’s efforts to maintain his stand paid off. Lawrence’s Coffee Stand reportedly served 1,000 customers a day. Flettrich’s success eventually enabled him to expand his business. In January of 1904, he took over operations of Lalla’s Coffee Stand in the Dryades Market. “The Leading Merchants of Poydras Market,” *Daily States*, December 20, 1903, pg. 18.
purchase fresh food in the city. Although vendors had made some inroads through the *Daily States*, the markets continued to be the subject of much debate around public health concerns in the years leading up to World War I.

New Orleanians’ dissatisfaction with the conditions of the markets and urban provisioning, in general, were not unique to the city, but indicative of issues with urban food economies throughout the United States. Regardless of how modern and up-to-date facilities were, fresh food, once harvested or slaughtered was in a constant state of decay. It invited insects, vermin, germs, and disease even when kept under ice or placed in refrigeration storage. In addition to the natural state of deterioration, preparing and selling fresh food produced waste, and when not managed properly, that waste contributed to public health issues by contaminating waterways and blocking sewerage systems, among other issues. On top of these problems, there were also widespread issues with the adulteration of both fresh and preserved foods like canned goods.

Although it had been customary for the customer to take on a major role in regulating food distribution, views on this responsibility began to change with the industrialization of food production and the all-too-common adulteration of packaged foods mentioned above.⁵⁶

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Nationwide, customers began to push for federal regulation of food production and distribution and insisted upon greater transparency in those processes. That movement, known as the Pure Food Movement, had roots in the late nineteenth century. The efforts of this decades-long movement led the federal government to take action in food regulation, which had historically been under the jurisdiction of the state and policed at the local level. The centralization of food regulation brought on by the federal government’s intervention in local and interstate food distribution impacted New Orleans’ market culture in subtle, but important ways, demonstrating the increasingly powerful presence of a nationally-recognized vision of modern provisioning that prioritized public health. In 1906, the federal government passed the U.S. Pure Food and Drug Act, which argued that the adulteration of food was dangerous and fraudulent. The act itself did not dramatically change the day-to-day activities taking place in businesses that sold canned goods, mainly grocery stores. The

59 Reports in the Times-Picayune were less than supportive of the Senate’s approval of the Pure Food and Drug Act in February 1906. Although in agreement that the quality of food should be regulated, an article in the paper reveals a sentiment of some people in Louisiana, influenced by Southern Democrats, who believed the regulation/monitoring of the sale of adulterated food and drugs was not the responsibility of the federal government, but that of the state governments. “The Pure Food Bill,” Times-Picayune, February 26, 1906, pg. 6.
60 As described in the Times-Picayune, “The effects of the law will not, in all probability, be very prominent on the shelves of grocery stores, and the layman might not know from the looks of the goods he was buying
act did change the goings-on at the city’s public food markets and in much more dramatic and public ways. In fact, it spurred on a kind of “war on bad meat”—a campaign fueled by militaristic language and marked by “raids” conducted by city police. This campaign was tied to the Federal Meat Inspection Act, part of the Pure Food and Drug Act, which sought to prevent the adulteration of meat and ensure the quality of meat products sold in fresh food markets, both public and private. The city government embraced the law with great fervor in order to rebuild the public markets’ reputations, which city officials believed would lead to greater market revenues.

Beginning in 1906, the local government’s vision of modern New Orleans came to encompass a long-term campaign against the adulteration of food, a vision that mirrored those in cities across the United States. Dr. E.A. White, Chief of the Food Department of the City Board of Health, was a major player in policing meat vendors in New Orleans. As part of a pure food campaign, White organized random health inspections of the markets, or raids. On November 20, 1906, for example, White “swooped down on several of the local markets unexpectedly.”61 During his inspection, he found 35 pounds of decomposed meat in the icebox of George Bohm, a butcher at the

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that there had been any change at all; but it is said that the law will result in a much better quality of food, drinks and condiments being sold, and that the people will get what they pay for, and not something else that looks like it.” “Enforcing the Pure Food Law,” *Times-Picayune*, July 4, 1906, pg. 1.

Dryades Market. Bohm had started turning that bad meat into sausage, deceptively selling it as a high-quality product. Customers were upset, yet not shocked by the news. White noted that the city government would “‘fight the thing [adulterated meat] until every one of them [vendors] is forced to comply with the law. The sale of inferior meats in New Orleans must stop.’” City officials were willing to provide support to public food vendors, but only when vendors’ notions of civic progress aligned with the city government’s larger goals. When those vendors posited a different version of modernization promoting the success of their individual business over the public good, the municipal government penalized them with large fines and public condemnation in the local papers. The war on bad meat, though, benefited vendors who sold quality products. It demonstrated that the city government was committed to sanitary public provisioning and vigilant regulation; that commitment, in turn, improved the reputations of the public markets, at least in theory. City officials were not able to identify all cases of food adulteration. Customers, therefore, retained a healthy suspicion of food vendors.

The influence of national trends in public provisioning became even more apparent in 1910 when the city officials agreed to rebuild the Dryades Market as an enclosed market house, a major departure from the city government’s commitment to

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63 “Will Prosecute Meat Dealers,” Times-Picayune, August 3, 1907, pg. 5.
building pavilion markets. This departure signaled changes in the local government’s plans for bringing New Orleans into the modern era, demonstrating that visions of modernization were constantly in flux as they responded to external pressures, in this case national standards for public health and public provisioning. Public market vendors, and in particular, butchers, were key in inciting this landmark change in New Orleans’ public market system. In July 1910, the butchers of the Dryades Market, who regularly came under the scrutiny of White during meat inspections, petitioned the local government to make major repairs to the market, arguing that updating retail spaces with the latest amenities would enable them to sell fresher and safer products. Their efforts proved successful. A month later, the mayor, after hearing a poor assessment of the market’s condition, decided against renovating the building and instead approved the construction of a new Dryades Market, a major boon for the public market vendors.

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65 The market was renovated in sections. Stall keepers occupied a temporary shed nearby as they worked on the markets. “New Dryades Market,” Times-Picayune, September 8, 1911, pg. 4.
66 “I.C. Ordinances are at Rest for a Year,” Times-Picayune, July 27, 1910, pg. 4.
67 Alex Pujol, the commissioner, assessed the conditions of the Dryades Market after the Committee of Police and Public Buildings agreed to make the renovations. He determined that the market was beyond repairs and that the city government needed to invest in the construction of an entirely new facility. Captain Hardee, the city engineer, came to the same conclusion after he found the market in disarray. Mayor Behrman agreed with these officials and took steps towards planning the reconstruction of the market, including having the office architect, Mr. Christy, draw up plans that would be included in a special request to the council from the mayor to demolish and rebuild the market. The City Engineer’s Office was charged with estimating the expenses, and the Budget Committee would hear their estimates and make a decision about the feasibility of financing the construction of a new market. The City Engineer’s Office submitted a budget in September of that year. Plans were being drawn up by the summer of 1911. “New Dryades Market to be Built Soon,” Times-Picayune, August 28, 1910, pg. 5; “Modern Model Public Markets: Dryades to Be First Rebuilt,” Times-Picayune, July 31, 1910, pg. 4; “About Dr. Dowling’s Report,” Times-Picayune, August 18, 1911, pg. 11; “Budget Committee Meeting,” Times-Picayune, September 3, 1910, pg. 5; “City Hall Comment,” Times-Picayune, July 9, 1911, pg. 6.
The Dryades neighborhood largely supported the mayor’s decision to erect a new market; however, they also felt compelled to memorialize the old structures. City residents had a complex, often negative relationship with the market. Although the market was a source of major complaint, it was also the heart of the neighborhood and residents had developed an emotional attachment to it. Upon hearing the news that the market would be razed, they proposed that “a tablet [be] placed to commemorate them.”68 As they prepared to say goodbye to the historic Dryades Market, they eagerly looked forward to the construction of the new one. Doing so meant that they would finally have access to modern amenities enjoyed by Americans in other large cities. For the first time in decades, the city government’s vision of modernization aligned with that of customers who had been discontent for generations.

For city officials, the markets were tools through which to rewrite America’s perceptions of New Orleans while also providing an important amenity to city residents, a significant departure from the reasoning behind the city government’s revitalization of the markets in 1900. They planned for the Dryades Market to be the first of several major market overhauls. City officials discussed these key renovations as New Orleans’ market system peaked by sheer numbers in 1911, by which time the city government had constructed, or had entered contracts to construct 34 public markets. The mayor and William J. Hardee, the city engineer, saw the overhaul of the markets as a means to

improve the overall reputation of the city, to shed any traits that tied the markets, and thus New Orleans, to antiquated stereotypes. Hardee argued that the city government should invest in its markets in the same way it had recently invested in the construction of new schools, which the public had commended and supported. For him, the markets held influence over how people perceived the city. He understood that the markets were a popular place for tourists to visit and a crucial spot where people formed impressions of the city. He therefore argued that the new markets needed to be “ornamental and up-to-date such that they may be admired by the many visitors who go to see them.”

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70 The city government also focused on technological improvements in public campaigning for the market, noting that the new Dryades Market would be screened and would have a system of exhaust fans to keep air flowing through the building. “Modern Model Public Markets: Dryades to Be First Rebuilt,” *Times-Picayune*, July 31, 1910, pg. 4.
Figure 11: Market House. West Side Market, Cleveland, 1919. Source: The Library of Congress, Illus. in HF5472.U6 A5 1918 [General Collections].
The city government promoted the Dryades Market’s renovation as exemplary of the modern American moment, rather than as a preservation of an historic tradition unique to New Orleans. City officials wanted “to make the new market one of the finest in the country,” contextualizing its significance not on a local, but on a national scale.71 The Dryades Market was to become a symbol of New Orleans’ commitment to national standards of public health and public provisioning. In order to fulfill those commitments, the city government planned to furnish the Dryades Market with the latest technologies, including updated lighting, ventilation, and refrigeration systems.72 Commitment to technologies that would improve public health mirrored the commitments of city officials in other American cities. For example, when the West Side Market opened in Cleveland, Ohio in November of 1912, the newspaper articles detailing the market’s opening also focused on public health. One article starts off with, 

71 “Modern Model Public Markets: Dryades to Be First Rebuilt,” Times-Picayune, July 31, 1910, pg. 4.
72 When City Architect Christy announced that the market would be screened and would contain a large refrigeration plant, he estimated the cost at $40,000. The path to renovations was not without its hiccups, and there was uncertainty as to whether the project would actually happen. However, the city government was able to push plans along. Comptroller Kennedy opened bids in early September for a contractor to build the market at that price. Eventually, City Engineer William J. Hardee was credited with creating the plans for the new market. As the market was renovated, estimated expenses skyrocketed. One source reported that the cost was $78,000 by 1912. “Modern Model Public Markets: Dryades to Be First Rebuilt,” Times-Picayune, July 31, 1910, pg. 4; “Budget Committee Matters,” Times-Picayune, November 12, 1910, pg. 5; “New Dryades Market,” Times-Picayune, September 8, 1911, pg. 4; “New Dryades Market,” Times-Picayune, September 8, 1911, pg. 4; “Mayor Behrman Urges Acceptance of Delgado Trade School Bequest. Dryades Market Refrigerator,” Times-Picayune, March 27, 1912, pg. 5; Notes from State Board of Health 1912, Box 1, Folder 985-1-1, 985 City Federation of Clubs Records, Louisiana Research Collection, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University; Beth A. Jacob, “Seated at the Table: The Southern Food and Beverage Museum’s New Home on Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard,” Preservation in Print 41, no. 8 (November, 2014): 22-23.
“Sanitation. That is going to be the watchword at the new West Side market house.”73

The aesthetic design of the market reflects the symbolic and functional importance of cleanliness. “The building is lined with white tile from the gleaming white counters to the lofty roof.”74 The market is reminiscent of a hospital: white, sparse, and clinical. As noted in the article, “Everything has been eliminated which would tend to breed noxious germs.”75 The modern amenities and aesthetic designs of the West Side Market and the Dryades Market not only strove to achieve national standards of public health through architectural design, but also became exemplary of them.

73 “Views of New Market House That Was Opened Yesterday,” Plain Dealer, November 5, 1912, pg. 5.
74 “Views of New Market House That Was Opened Yesterday,” Plain Dealer, November 5, 1912, pg. 5.
75 “Views of New Market House That Was Opened Yesterday,” Plain Dealer, November 5, 1912, pg. 5.
Although the city government was willing to make strategic renovations as a symbolic gesture towards its commitment to American civic progress, it did not have and did not allot for the funds to overhaul the entire market system—a widespread renovation of which city residents were in desperate need. Behind the celebrations of the Dryades Market renovations, pervasive public health issues continued to threaten the sustainability of the public markets, and made cleaner and more modern private markets an increasingly appealing option for city residents. In 1911, just as city architects
were drawing up plans for the new Dryades Market, the city faced a particularly alarming infestation of flies. With swarms abounding, public markets once again became the target of public criticism. They were seen as a source of the fly problem because the fresh products vendors sold attracted them. Their pavilion-style design exacerbated the problem. With no screens or walls, flies could easily swarm over the ornate and fragrant displays of fruits, vegetables, meat, and seafood. The small army of mule-drawn carts that clustered around the public markets made conditions worse. Steaming piles of manure emitted noxious, sweet gases that also attracted flies, raising health concerns. Customers were disgusted and fearful of the fly-ridden markets now that advances in germ theory had identified flies as carriers of disease. Flies were no longer a benign nuisance. Their infestation of the public markets was contributing to the spread of salmonella through the city’s food supply. Now, more than ever, the public

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77 Private markets, too, came under criticism (especially those that were unscreened). There were private markets, however, that had modern amenities that ameliorated the fly problem and were thus seen as better options than the public markets.


79 In the twentieth century, salmonella was a major cause of food poisoning not only in the United States, but also worldwide. In *Salmonella Infections, Networks of Knowledge, and Public Health in Britain, 1880-1975*, Anne Hardy examines the origins of how scientists came to identify flies as part of the food poisoning problem. She studies public health campaigns that set out to educate the public about flies and how those creatures were not merely a nuisance, but also hazardous to one’s health. In the 1910s, scientists were all too aware that common flies, which hatched in manure, easily found food in the public markets where foods were placed on display, often without covering. And so, they flitted from a pile of dung to a barrel of apples, carrying bacteria on their bodies, and thus spreading disease. Although her work concentrates on Great Britain, it serves as a case study for the scientific and cultural awareness of germ theory and specifically how it impacted cultures of consumption at the turn of the twentieth century. Anne Hardy, *Salmonella Infections, Networks of Knowledge, and Public Health in Britain, 1880-1975* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 69-71.
markets were dramatically and directly tied to the spread of disease. As a result, more and more customers turned to other, more modern purveyors (many of them private grocery stores operating outside of the nine-block radius).

Seeing customers slip through their fingers, public market vendors began to voice their skeptical opinions about the public markets. Their vision of a modern New Orleans was starting to diverge from the city’s traditional public provisioning system, favoring instead the idea that private markets were a better option for them. Vendors publically expressed frustration over the terrible conditions and criticized the laws that obligated them to vend fresh foods within the public markets. Several of them spoke out against the entire system, stating that they felt trapped and argued that they could provide better services, higher quality products, and safer conditions in their own stores if municipals laws were not biased against private markets. City councilmen were not deaf to the concerns of vendors. According to the Times-Picayune, at a public forum held in March of 1911, city councilmen had

been considerably moved by the argument of the market people that the city forces them into the markets at a high rental when they might, if left to themselves, get fine shops with modern improvements outside, and as it is they are obliged to charge the public high and give inefficient service because they are up against high rents and poor facilities.80

As privately owned markets seemed like an increasingly better option than the public markets, city officials rushed to make improvements to ease public concern,

80 “Fly Ordinance Again,” Times-Picayune, March 21, 1911, pg. 10.
afraid that if they lost public markets vendors’ support, the entire system would collapse. They screened some markets to keep insects at bay. However, the city government only made renovations to a few markets, leaving most of them unscreened and exposed. Again, they did *just enough* to temporarily calm unrest.

As the city government moved forward with its plans to renovate the Dryades Market in 1912, unrest continued to brew among the city’s populace, much of it a carryover from the debates over the fly infestation and market screening debacle of 1911. Although generally supportive of the Dryades Market renovation, customers wanted to see a renovation of the *entire* system. The State Board of Health was called in to conduct an inspection of all of the markets so as to assess the current viability of the market system. The results were abysmal.81 At a State Board of Health meeting in September of 1912, a concerned citizen, Raymond de Lord, argued that a city that could not take care of its markets should not have them.82 De Lord’s opinion reflected an increasingly popular sentiment in the city: the public markets should be shut down or privatized. Concerned citizens realized that shutting down the public market system in the 1910s was a long shot. The markets were too entrenched in the politics of the city, too critical

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81 The Poydras and Prytania Markets had dirty refrigerators. The Ninth Street Market had a rat infestation. The Treme Market had dysfunctional iceboxes. These cases were exemplary of the entire system. Citizens were angry and frustrated. Notes from State Board of Health 1912, Box 1, Folder 985-1-1, 985 City Federation of Clubs Records, Louisiana Research Collection, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

82 Notes from State Board of Health 1912, Box 1, Folder 985-1-1, 985 City Federation of Clubs Records, Louisiana Research Collection, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.
to the city government’s general fund. Citizens, though, had other strategies in mind to ameliorate issues in the local food system. For inspiration, they looked to other American cities where modern market halls and grocery stores co-existed. Both public and private markets were fitted with electricity and refrigeration—necessary amenities for safe provisioning. In the eyes of New Orleanians, people in those other cities had choices. New Orleanians did not. So, they began organizing to petition the local government to give them more options. Options were key to their vision of what a modern New Orleans looked like and those options could be made possible by lifting the nine-block radius rule and allowing a free economy to develop in the city.

Women, who had historically been the largest base of customers for the public markets, conducted some of the most effective grassroots campaigns against them in the 1910s. Their voices rang out alongside the voices of city officials, public market vendors, and private market operators and vendors, almost all men, whose involvement in the public markets had been reported publically in the newspapers. Women consumer-activists formed organizations that were key players in market reform in the 1910s, creating leverage and shaping narratives about the markets that influenced policy about public provisioning. One such group was the Market Committee formed by the Housewives’ League Division of the City Federation Clubs.83 The committee’s efforts

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83 Report of the Market Committee, Housewives’ League Division, City Federation of Clubs, March 24, 1914, Box 1, Folder 985-1-2, 985 City Federation of Clubs Records, Louisiana Research Collection, Howard-Tilton
demonstrate how important grassroots organizing and local communities were in shaping the market culture at a time when the federal government was becoming increasingly involved in the regulation of food in America.\textsuperscript{84}

The Market Committee members’ ideal vision of New Orleans’ local food economy was one based on an American model of a free market economy, not New Orleans’ traditional vision based on the public markets’ virtual monopoly over local food distribution. They believed that the free market economy would enable more sanitary and modern private markets to open in the city. These markets, direct competitors of the public markets, would encourage the city government to renovate the city’s public markets to stay competitive. In order to make their vision a reality, they needed to convince public officials that private markets were essential to the city’s success and that they were necessary to the survival of New Orleans. One of the ways the committee members sought to gain officials’ favor was to demonstrate the poor conditions of the public markets by conducting inspections that listed public health infractions, which they reported to the city government. They also collected data from

heating, lighting, ventilation, and refrigeration experts about best practices in market facilities across America, comparing and contrasting the conditions in New Orleans with those in other U.S. cities. 85

In the spring of 1914, their efforts paid off when three new ordinances were passed, a major victory for the committee, bringing it one step closer to its vision of a modern New Orleans. Of special importance to the committee was the lifting of the nine-block radius rule in some sections of the city, mainly where the most recent public markets had been constructed and in the largest commercial district in New Orleans (the historic neighborhood markets were still protected by the nine-block radius rule). 86 Celebrating their contributions to these major changes, the committee noted that “in framing the three ordinances, the suggestions made by our committee members were freely used […] and in almost every case the specifications suggested were inserted.” 87 It


86 Enabling private markets to vend fresh foods was not a new concept for New Orleanians. In 1866, the city government adopted an ordinance, with almost the same exact wording, opening up the city’s food economy to private retailers. At this time, the city government lost revenues from the public markets, but there was also a belief that opening up the economic market would decrease prices for customers. Henry J. Leovy and C.H. Luzenburg, The Laws and General Ordinances of the City of New Orleans (New Orleans, 1870), Ordinance 5884, March 22, 1866; “Improved Market System,” Daily True Delta, March 22, 1866; Robert A. Sauder, “The Origin and Spread of the Public Market System in New Orleans,” Louisiana History 122, no. 3 (Summer, 1981): 286.

was the efforts of concerned citizens that made one of the most significant changes in the city’s food economy in decades.

Soon after these new ordinances passed, the Market Committee met with Commissioner E.E. Lafaye of the Department of Public Property to make a strategic plan for the future. During this meeting, he noted that these three ordinances were the first step in completely revolutionizing New Orleans’ local food economy. Lafaye stated, “I confidently hope that these changes will bring new blood into our market business, and that both local and Northern capital will open retail green groceries [i.e., ones that sell fresh food] here similar to those in other cities.” He went on to elaborate next steps, suggesting that new laws be passed to enable markets to vend foods all day (as long as their facilities were equipped with functioning refrigerators and their meat was covered). Stretching market hours would change laws that had been in place since the colonial period. Officials like Lafaye and the members of the Market Committee saw these laws as antiquated ones that did not fit the needs of modern citizens nor the city government’s vision of an updated local food economy. Their proposed changes could uproot embedded traditions in New Orleans’ food culture in which the markets had

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89 Committee, Housewives’ League Division, City Federation of Clubs, March 24, 1914, Box 1, Folder 985-1-2, 985 City Federation of Clubs Records, Louisiana Research Collection, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana. Note: The committee quoted this ordinance from the Daily States, Home Edition, March 10, 1914.
historically opened at sunrise and closed at noon every day. This schedule dictated the rhythm of food distribution and preparation in local food culture—a rhythm that was also conducive to community building and cultural exchange because it brought people together in a single space during concentrated hours.

Suggesting these new laws opened up opportunities that could have transformed the tempo of local food cultures in significant ways by making foodstuff available at all hours. Local food cultures could become oriented more towards convenience shopping. By stretching market hours, the density of customers, and their interactions and cultural exchange with each other and with vendors, would decrease and so there would be fewer opportunities for spontaneous cultural fusions to occur. Those exchanges—the happenstance exchange of gossip, recipes, techniques, and ingredients—had been the crux of the development of the city’s fusion cuisine. Noted New Orleans chef, Leon Soniat Jr., speaks of his grandmother’s interactions with neighbors en route to the market in the early twentieth century: When his grandmother planned a meal, she never used a recipe, “[b]ut she talked about food to anyone who listened, and, of course, this led to a great deal of information being exchanged.”90 She regularly consulted neighbors, many of them immigrants, and “had gleaned so many wonderful Italian family recipes that we enjoyed at our table.”91 These were the happenstance occurrences, ones that

transpired because of the traditional rhythms of shopping at the markets that shaped the city’s ever-evolving cuisine. Convenience over tradition, however, eventually won. Market hours expanded, spreading out quotidian interactions and making informal exchange more difficult around activities of public provisioning.

The 1914 ordinances made inroads for modern private markets, enabling them to embed themselves into the changing food culture of the city, one that was beginning to look more like other American cities. New Orleans’ suburbs were growing, stretching out towards Lake Pontchartrain, and these new residential communities provided opportunities for private markets to legally operate outside of the nine-block radius concentrated in the heart of the city. Able to tailor their business practices to the needs and the desires of their customers, private retailers invested in refrigeration technologies, allowing them to keep longer operating hours and improve the quality and shelf life of their products. These were first steps in transforming small-scale private markets into supermarkets, ones that would develop on the outskirts of New Orleans proper as suburban populations grew. Prioritizing efficiency in their business models, private markets were also able to sell fresh produce and canned goods at lower prices than the public markets. New Orleanians had access to this growing body of private markets because of advances in public transportation and the increasing popularity of automobiles. The center of the city’s modern provisioning, ironically, developed on the outskirts of the city itself.
At the center of the city, the public markets continued to face public health problems throughout the 1920s and into the early 1930s because of the city government’s decision to place market profits into its general fund rather than into market upkeep.92 The issues laid to bare in the city newspapers were eerily similar to those of the two preceding decades due in large part to the municipal government’s refusal to invest in overhauling the entire market system. In 1920, for example, the State Board of Health issued an injunction against several of New Orleans’ public markets, most of which were unscreened and therefore open to insects, vermin, and dangerous forms of nature.93 They were also condemned for their poor sanitary conditions because refuse and food debris were not washed out of the markets.94 In 1930, Dr. Dowling, the former president of the State Board of Health, described the conditions of the market as “unspeakably filthy.” He noted that he had condemned the public markets in 1911 and that conditions had improved, “but not much,” over the last 20 years.95 New Orleans’

public provisioning was stuck, unchanging, for the most part, as new technologies and improvements thrived on the periphery in private grocery stores.

In addition to public health concerns, people viewed the public markets in a negative light because food costs were so high. The high rent that vendors had to pay to sell wares in the public markets continued to pose a problem as it did in previous decades. Those rents forced vendors to sell wares at higher prices in order to make a profit to pay those fees and also put food on their own tables. There were also suggestions that price fixing may have taken place in the markets, which was likely considering the desperate position in which the public markets vendors found themselves. City officials, however, did not pin the high cost of food on the stall rental fees they charged. Instead, they reported that that phenomenon was the fault of supermarkets. Theodore Grunewald, hired by the city government to fix the public markets, argued that “Public markets are the only solution to the problem of high costs of food and are the only means of preventing a Wall Street controlled monopoly on food supplies through the chain stores.” To put it plainly, the municipal government was not going to give up control of the public markets. In 1930, city officials rejected a proposal to lease out the city markets, instead seeking to find a solution on their own

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97 This paragraph draws upon the research and analysis presented in Robert A. Sauder, “The Origin and Spread of the Public Market System in New Orleans,” Louisiana History 122, no. 3 (Summer, 1981): 289.

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and voting in favor of a $1,000,000 bond to rebuild the markets. As reported in the *Times-Picayune*, “the death knell of the public market has by no means been sounded.”

In similar condition to the public markets in 1900, and in a similar state of financial duress, city officials, once again, made a dramatic decision to invest in the public markets in the early 1930s. This time, though, they were willing to overhaul the entire system, providing citizens with the amenities that they had so desperately needed for generations. City officials believed that with the market overhaul, they had the potential to see three-fold profits. Yet conditions were slightly different in the 1930s from what they had been 30 years earlier. Stronger external pressures from the federal government likely weighed on city officials in New Orleans who had shown a commitment (albeit, a wavering one) to meeting national standards. In 1913, when the municipal government had invested in the construction of the Dryades market house, the first modern market in the city, the U.S. Department of Agriculture had just established the Office of Markets whose purpose was to identify model market systems and create standards for their construction and management. The federal

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100 “Markets Bureau is Recommended for City System,” *Times-Picayune*, December 7, 1930, pg. 20.
government continued to envision the ideal American city as one that operated modern market halls for the benefit of the people.\textsuperscript{103}

The federal government’s focus on public markets so far into the twentieth century runs counter to popular historical narratives that depict the twentieth century as one dominated by the rise of the supermarket and the industrialization of the American food system.\textsuperscript{104} By shifting one’s focus away from the supermarket, one sees that city officials venerated public markets and that a substantial portion of the American population, both rural and urban, continued to rely on them well into the supermarket’s heyday.

So important were public markets to the federal government’s vision of modernization that the Office of Markets became the Bureau of Markets in 1917.\textsuperscript{105} The Bureau was testament to the federal government’s belief that modern cities needed modern market halls. Across the country, city governments heeded the call and re-invested in their historic market halls, many of which had been constructed in the

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\item<sup>103</sup> This vision was tied into the City Beautiful Movement, an urban architectural movement that took hold in major American cities in the opening decades of the twentieth century. It posited that civic order and virtue could be fostered through monumental architecture, like that of the most celebrated modern market halls in the U.S.
\item<sup>105</sup> The Bureau of Markets released an important report on public markets in America as part of the 1918 census. Their research indicated that in 128 cities with populations over 30,000, there were 237 markets that ranged from curb, to pavilion, to market houses.
\item Note: As quickly as the bureau was supported, it quickly lost support by 1922 and was abolished in 1953. Beth A. Jacob, “New Orleans’ Historic Public Markets: Reviving Neighborhood Landmarks Through Adaptive Reuse” (master’s thesis, Tulane University, 2012), 43-44.
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nineteenth century. The New Orleans local government took note of other municipal governments’ renewed interest in their markets and the reasons why those city governments invested in their renewal. Confident in its plan to reboot the city’s market system, the New Orleans local government took steps to assess “The Markets of the Past” so as to determine the best path forward for the markets of the future.

The markets underwent assessment to test the viability of the city government’s plans. The assessment results recommended the remodeling or the razing and reconstruction of many of the market structures. The local real estate board cautioned the municipal government against that action, arguing that a significant number of the public markets sat at the heart of neighborhoods that had drastically waning populations. Even if the markets were remodeled, the board argued, they would not generate enough income to justify the mass expenditure of city funds to rebuild them. City officials, however, did not listen to that warning. Instead they went ahead with their plans to resuscitate the public markets and they consolidated their management

106 The reasons being, “1-The vital role a modern, comprehensive, well-operated marketing system can be made to play in the development of the city commercially and the development of the country surrounding the centers in which these marketing facilities are available. 2-The ability of a public market properly equipped and administered not only to make money for the municipality, but to serve a very material purpose in controlling food prices to the consumer and in giving the small independent an opportunity to compete.” “Markets Bureau is Recommended for City System,” Times-Picayune, December 7, 1930, pg. 20.
and regulation under one department, the Department of Public Markets, with Theodore Grunewald as the director.¹⁰⁹

Prior to the creation of the Department of Public Markets, Grunewald was charged with the task of updating the city’s public market system, which introduced him to the most up-to-date practices in managing public markets in the U.S. He visited Washington D.C., Detroit, Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, and Chicago to observe their systems and devise a plan to bring New Orleans’ system up to date.¹¹⁰ He also spent several weeks working with market experts in the U.S. Department of Agriculture, learning the federal government’s views of what a well operating public market system looked like.¹¹¹ Grunewald found that, “An enclosed retail market operating in conjunction with an open farmer’s market is the most successful type.”¹¹² He went on to explain that this type “consists of an adequate modern building in which a great variety of foodstuff and other commodities are sold while adjoining the structure is an open or shed-covered lot on which farmers’ products are sold from trucks or stands.”¹¹³ After conducting his fieldwork, Grunewald created a plan that would consolidate New Orleans’ public market system to mirror those in other cities. In December of 1930, at a

¹⁰⁹ Other key officials involved in this process were Mayor T. Semmes Walmsley and Finance Commissioner A. Miles Pratt. Pratt was the Chairman of the Market Rehabilitation Committee. "Business Starts Today at City’s Six New Markets," Times-Picayune, June 27, 1932, pg. 13.
community meeting at the Orleans Club, he recommended that instead of operating its 23 markets, the city government focus on operating three major facilities: a central wholesale-retail market and two retail markets (one located above Canal Street and one below). He suggested that the French Market be completely remodeled so as to continue to serve as the central wholesale-retail market. He even suggested that the French Market be relocated and that the two new retail markets be constructed to supplement it. All other public markets, in his opinion, should be leased or sold and turned into private markets. Essentially, he suggested that the city government completely abandon its traditional market system comprised of small, neighborhood markets.

In addition to his suggestions for the overhaul of the market system, Grunewald also plainly pointed out the city government’s detrimental financial interests in the markets. He explained that the local government’s use of the markets as a source of revenues for the general fund impaired their success. As reported in the Times-Picayune, he stated, “The public markets have been political stepchildren. The revenue collected by the city government from the public markets does not go for the rehabilitation or upkeep of the markets. It goes into the general fund and is diverted to other uses.” Grunewald wanted to de-politicize the markets. His report, as one might imagine,

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incited major outcries not only from city residents, but from government officials as well. The next morning, the *Times-Picayune* reported that city officials opposed many of Grunewald’s recommendations. City officials noted that those recommendations “would not be taken seriously.”

Grunewald’s proposed plan involved implementing the best national standards in New Orleans. Those national standards, however, conflicted with New Orleanians’ commitment to local cultures. That conflict demonstrated the staying power of local custom in a period marked by the popularization of national standards and mass consumer culture. Outspoken New Orleanians, many of them food entrepreneurs, were not willing to give up the culturally significant neighborhood markets that were pivotal to their livelihoods and sense of community. In a public letter published in the *Times-Picayune*, city resident Sam Blum argued that the public markets “are essential in the neighborhood which they are located” and should not be converted into private markets. Common public sentiment was that all of the public markets should be renovated, as previously agreed to by the City Council when they formed the Municipal Markets Commission in the spring of 1930. Otherwise, too many citizens would lose jobs, citizens argued. Secretary of the New Orleans Live Stock Exchange, Major John S. South, argued that “The people of New Orleans are different from people of the cities

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Mr. Grunewald visited in making his market study. “Acknowledging those sentiments, and agreeing with citizens who spoke out against Grunewald’s plan, City Councilman Miles A. Pratt, head of the Municipal Markets Commission, noted that “the council’s intention [is] to preserve the public markets system for the public.”

Ignoring Grunewald’s recommendations, the City Council adopted a hybrid plan, one that preserved elements from New Orleans’ historic market system while adopting modern amenities and architectural design from national standards of excellence. The council wanted to keep open as many public markets as possible. An initial bond of $1,000,000 from the city government helped initiate the market renovations. The Works Progress Administration further funded the public market renewal project, demonstrating the ever-increasing involvement of the federal government in local affairs. It was through projects like the revitalization of the

121 “Grunewald Again Urged to Speed Markets Report,” Times-Picayune, January 7, 1931, pg. 10.
122 In 1935, the city government submitted a grant application to the WPA seeking assistance to renovate seven of their “old style” public markets. Vendors at those markets were concerned that their workplaces would be razed and that they would lose business. New Orleans’ Public Property Commissioner Joseph P. Skelly assured representatives from the markets that he was in favor of renovating the existing buildings, not tearing them down. The markets under review for funding and renovation included the Lautenschlaeger, St. Roch, LeBreton, Maestri, Memory, Rocheblave, and Keller Markets. The estimated cost of their renewal was $47,000 and included the following improvements: screening, painting, and installing new plumbing equipment and enclosed ceiling ventilation fans. “Market Repairs to be Discussed: Proposal to Seek WPA Funds Will Feature Conference,” Times-Picayune, October 24, 1935, pg. 4; “Market Repairs Planned by City: Skelly Says Work Depends on Assistance of WPA,” Times-Picayune, October 26, 1935, pg. 16. For key works on the role of the WPA in funding civic projects in American cities see: United States Work Projects Administration, Jobs: The WPA Way (Washington D.C.: Works Progress Administration, 1936); David A. Horowitz, “The New Deal and People’s Art: Market Planners and Radical Artists,” Oregon
markets that the federal government played a key role in unifying Americans around a common culture and shared sense of American citizenship, while still allowing for the preservation of local traditions. As demonstrated by the preservation of the city’s numerous markets, federal involvement did not necessarily come at the cost of local customs. That is, local identity was not incongruent with the embrace and adoption of national identity.

After decades of failed promises, the city government finally renovated the public markets, transforming them into the impressive, cleanly, modern structures that city residents had wanted for generations. Of the 19 that were renovated, we have detailed architectural plans for at least seven of them. These markets became some of

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While the WPA’s project heralded a sense of common national identity, other WPA projects, like the Federal Writers’ Project, produced state and city guides that celebrated the pluralism of American society and culture. In these guides, a national board of editors worked with local researchers to create what they saw as an accurate and authentic representation of life in that locale. Thus, there simultaneously existed a strong sense of American conformity and regional diversity, both of which were often defined by modes of consumption. David A. Horowitz, “The New Deal and People’s Art: Market Planners and Radical Artists,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 109, no. 2 (Summer, 2008): 319; Susan Schulten, “How to See Colorado: The Federal Writers’ Project, American Regionalism, and the ‘Old New Western History,’” *Western Historical Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (Spring, 2005): 50-51.

At the City Archives at the New Orleans Public Library and the Southeastern Architectural Archive at Tulane University, I have examined the detailed architectural plans created by the Sam Stone Jr. Company for the following seven markets: Dryades, Magazine, Suburban, Zengel, Ewing, Jefferson, and Ninth Street Markets.

Note: In 1931, there were 23 markets running in the city, not including the quasi-public ones. Throughout the 1930s, the city government, in some capacity, renovated or approved the renovation of the Dryades, Ewing, Jefferson, Keller, Lautenschlaeger, Le Breton, Magazine, Maestri, Memory, Ninth Street, Rocheblave, St. Bernard, St. Roch, Suburban, Treme, Zengel, and Treme Markets, and the French Market Complex. By 1935, there were 19 markets operating after the city government had razed the Claiborne, Second Street,
the finest examples of public markets in the country and sported functional designs. They were fitted with hot and cold water lines and electricity and were furnished with the latest refrigeration and ventilation technologies. They were also aesthetically stunning with terrazzo tile, wrought iron detailing, flowerbeds, flag stone patios, fireplaces, etc. They were smaller than the market houses in most other American cities, but that reflected their role as neighborhood-specific amenities.

For New Orleanians, the markets were representative of the city’s advent into the modern age of America. City officials promoted the new markets with great gusto, claiming that they “rival[ed] in complete detail and efficiency as well as artistic design

Guillot, and Poydras Markets. The Mehle Market was abandoned in 1939 and the land was put up for auction. It is not clear if the Mehle Market was renovated prior to its abandonment by the city government. The city government also attempted to raze the St. Roch Market, but the community protested. The city government eventually came to back the community’s needs and renovated that market along with the other chosen ones. In addition to the city-owned public markets, the Mayoralty of New Orleans continued to approve of the operation of quasi-public markets.

125 The public markets were renovated with practical considerations in mind. Vendors could rent stalls that were equipped with large counters for both food preparation and display and with large display cases to showcase their wares. Plans for the Dryades Market Building A (the Meat Market) indicate that there were 23 vendor stalls in total. Twenty were designated for the sale of meat and game and three were designated for the sale of fish. Of those 23, eight were equipped with walk-in coolers (6’x8’) for easy access to refrigerated items. Display cases were 12 ft. long in the Meat Market and 6 ft. long in the Fish Market. The Fish Market also had a separate shared preparation area for fishmongers behind the display cases. In a plan for a smaller market, the Suburban Market, there were 11 vendor spaces to vend meat, fish, and vegetables. Six of the stalls, presumably for meat, had refrigerators. The one fish stall had two fish boxes to keep seafood cold. The vegetable stalls, however, did not seem to require refrigeration. In another proposed plan, which grouped together layouts of vegetable vendors’ stalls in all six markets, one of the common features was a moveable counter at each workstation to allow spatial flexibility for the needs of vendors. Thus, the architects took into consideration the needs of vendors by equipping them not only with refrigeration and display cases, but also flexible work environments that could be changed to suit the individual needs of each vendor. Rental Plan, “Dryades Market – Bldg. A,” Sam Stone Jr. & Co. Inc. Architects, Southeastern Architectural Archive, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana; Rental Plan, “Suburban,” Sam Stone Jr. & Co. Inc. Architects, Southeastern Architectural Archive, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.
any public market in the country.” They were the opposite of the unsanitary pavilion markets that had faced a constant encroachment from Louisiana’s natural environment and the byproducts of New Orleans’ industrial sector. All evidence of debris, dust, and dank were eradicated through the designs of the architects from Sam Stone Jr. & Co., the firm hired by the city government to design the new markets. People who frequented these marginalized spaces had to interact with these newly renovated spaces and with each other in different ways. The feel of the market was different in that it moved from dilapidated to sterling, from dark to light, from dirt floors to tiled ones.


Aesthetically, the new markets’ architecture reflected styles not necessarily historically representative of New Orleans, but popular throughout the United States at that time, indicative of the city government’s embrace of national trends. Their aesthetic styles were inspired by a variety of distinctive architectural movements in the United States including Art Deco and Mission Revival. The entrance to Building A (the Meat Market) of the Dryades Market and the Zengel, Ewing, and Suburban Markets, for
example, show influence from Art Deco especially in the handles of its brass doors, which were framed by polished marble. The Zengel, Ewing, and Suburban Markets also have an ornate aluminum grille, influenced by the same style, located above the main entrance of the market. By drawing upon the Art Deco aesthetic for the entrances, the architects were also drawing upon the style’s underlying themes of opulence and faith in social progress. However, they did so in a way that was not too radical. The market designs found a middle path between high modern and traditional architectural design, reflecting the tensions reverberating in New Orleans between its past and future, between antiquation and modernization, and between local and national.\textsuperscript{127} The city was not inclined to hover towards one pole, but rather occupied an interstitial space that accommodated those co-existing tensions.

The Magazine Market, in contrast to the Dryades Market, was modeled heavily after Mission Revival architecture with its terracotta tiled roof, arched porticos, flagstone porch, and stucco exterior walls. Whereas Art Deco suggested civic progress through luxuriant metal ornamentation, the humbler Mission Revival design of this building gestured towards nostalgia for the American Southwest where Mission architecture had historic routes. By adopting Mission-style markets, New Orleans embraced an architectural style that romanticized the American Southwest. The city, therefore, contributed to the popularization of an aesthetic form that othered an American region.
New Orleans, which had historically been othered by Americans, was now participating in that process of othering. In sum, New Orleans participated in a form of urban renewal that shaped national tastes, but this time related to architecture rather than food.

Racial segregation was swept up in white citizens’ views of modernization and their visions of ordered, civil society. Public spaces were segregated and those spaces included streetcars, schools, pools, parks, and restaurants. The act of consumption, the ritual of the communal meal and the bonds formed over a single table were seen as too intimate for whites and blacks to share. In the opinions of many white citizens, consumption was too familiar, too sensual for racial integration. Of the neighborhood markets that we have detailed architectural plans for, the Dryades Market is the only one that shows evidence of spaces designed for racial segregation, specifically in Building B (the Vegetable Market), which had a lunch counter (i.e., a public eatery). The final layouts of the market drawn up by the Sam Stone Jr. & Co. architects segregated both the lunch counter and the bathrooms in that building. Because dining was

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128 In the early twentieth century, the patronage of restaurants in the American South was dictated more by class than by race. However, the major customer base was white, and mainly men. At that time, it was not customary for women to eat with men, although some establishments were defying those social conventions. Typically, though, public eateries were seen as places where white women could be exposed to what were thought to be inappropriate behaviors, “race mixing,” among them. As restaurant culture changed approaching mid-century and women dined with men on a regular basis, the popular belief that public dining should remain segregated stayed in place. Angela Jill Cooley, To Live and Dine in Dixie (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2015), 47.

129 The early plans for the Dryades Vegetable Market (or site “B”) had four bathrooms that were segregated by race: the women’s bathrooms were grouped together and the men’s rooms were grouped together. In the original plans, the white women’s and black women’s restrooms were similar sizes and were right next to each other (the same for white and black men’s restrooms). Later, however, the black men’s and black
associated with a certain physicality—consumption being considered an intimate bodily activity—the segregationist instinct was to racially segregate eateries. The building was also constructed at a time when race relations in the city were increasingly violent and local officials sought to control people’s movement and behavior through a seemingly benign medium: architecture. The design of the Vegetable Market and its impacts on social interactions and cultural formation, however, were anything but benign. Renovations of the markets were also an attempt to control black and white bodies, limiting their mobility, and barring blacks from fully accessing the market’s facilities.

The segregationist instinct, however, did not extend to the market stalls themselves, indicating that the purveying and purchasing of foods was not viewed as an intimate bodily act in the same way as eating, digesting, and defecating. Furthermore, segregating the markets would not have been feasible because the city depended too
heavily upon the exchange of food between the city’s diverse populations. Feeding the city remained a priority even as segregation laws clenched tighter around other food spaces such as restaurants. Consequently, markets—particularly the French Market—remained meeting grounds for the entire city, an occasion to interact with people outside of one’s immediate community. As discussed earlier in this dissertation, the French Market drew more diverse customers, whereas each neighborhood market was tied more closely to the ethnic, racial, and socio-economic identity of its particular neighborhood and drew a more homogenous customer base. New Orleanians had a tendency to live intimate lives, ones that functioned within the bounds of their immediate communities. Shopping at the public markets disrupted that phenomenon. For example, Millie McClellan Charles, an African-American New Orleanian who lived uptown, recalls how she rarely came downtown, “except for with my grandmother who went to the French Market every Saturday.”\textsuperscript{130} The market broke the cycle of isolation, the instinct to stay within one’s neighborhood, introducing Charles to the city’s multi-ethnic, multi-racial populace that frequented the market.

Although the interiors of the public markets were not racially segregated, the enclosure of the public markets had unintended consequences that disproportionately affected itinerant vendors and the working poor, many of whom were African

The markets were enclosed for many reasons, one of the largest being public health—to shut out dangerous insects and vermin and provide electricity, refrigeration, and other amenities to ensure the sale of quality products. The market enclosures also shut out itinerant vendors and limited the fluid interactions in and around the market that contributed to the city’s fusion food culture. Public health concerns, therefore, were laid on top of structural inequalities that forced many African Americans into peddling rather than into the public markets. Unlike the public market vendors working in brand new facilities, street peddlers worked in crowded, muddy streets littered with the refuse of city life. They hawked foods that were exposed to the smoke, dust, and gas emitted from neighboring factories. They had little to no protection from insects, vermin, and disease that ignited so many fears among public market customers. Peddlers did not benefit from the amenities of the public markets. If anything, those renovations damaged their livelihoods in that peddlers often set up near the public markets hoping to catch passersby en route to the market. By stopping the movement of people and goods in and out of the markets by erecting walls, the city government was blocking a crucial, historic connection between street food vendors and public markets. As the municipal government finally modernized the New Orleans’ local food economy, the city’s street food vendors were getting swept away by that wave of “progress.”

After the major renovation of the city’s public market system in the 1930s, the Department of Public Markets maintained the markets and policed private retailers so as
to ensure the success of the public market vendors. The department employed a team of janitors who were hired to prevent the markets from transforming back into marginalized spaces.131 The public markets finally proved to be fitting food distribution centers. Private retailers, on the other hand, still came under review by the local government. In part, this was a tactic through which to assure that public health standards were met and to encourage customers to shop at the public markets. It also brought into sharp relief the cleaner conditions of the new public markets as opposed to the comparatively run-down private ones in the city center.132

Even though the city government had made great strides towards transforming the local food economy into one that resembled and was an example for other American cities, those changes could not mitigate the effects of post-World War II migration to the suburbs and the rapid rise of the supermarket in postwar America.133 The supermarket, which draws its roots back to the private grocery stores allowed to operate outside of the

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131 Janitors cleaned a number of market amenities including: stalls, refrigerators, toilets, ceilings, walls, sidewalks, window, doors, and light fixtures. They were in charge of garbage and tackled common custodial issues with vestibule doors, fans, roof leaks, plumbing, hinges, locks, display cases, and general electricity. Department of Public Markets City of New Orleans, Reports of Custodial Worker (St. Bernard Market) c. 1948. Box 1, Folder City Board of Health Reports - Private Markets, Department of Public Markets Old Records, Department of Public Markets Miscellaneous Files ca. 1923-1949. City Archives of New Orleans.

132 As we have seen, though, not all private markets were run down. In fact, many private markets had excellent amenities, though a majority of them developed outside of the city center. Robert A. Sauder, “The Origin and Spread of the Public Market System in New Orleans,” *Louisiana History* 122, no. 3 (Summer, 1981): 289.

nine-block radius rule, encapsulated many of the desires for cleanliness and innovation that New Orleanians had craved for generations. These mid-century stores were not crowded by street traffic. They had parking lots to accommodate cars. The buildings were enclosed and not exposed to most forms of nature or industrial waste. Their environments were comparatively sterile. Overhead lighting illuminated the aisles. Products were refrigerated. Other than the hum of refrigerators, the markets would have been comparatively quiet compared to the raucous public markets or even private markets that were located in bustling neighborhoods. Shelves of groceries were conveniently organized. Prepackaged meats, canned goods, baking mixes, and frozen TV dinners were neatly displayed. In some instances, customers no longer had to interact with employees when shopping.\(^{134}\) Shoppers were independent and free from the task of outsmarting predatory vendors in the public markets and at itinerant stalls. Shoppers no longer had to ask for the assistance of a private grocer to retrieve, pack, and deliver products to them. The supermarket, in sum, was an embodiment of modern food distribution in America and representative of a utopian ideal for American life.

\(^{134}\) John G. Schwegmann, a prominent grocer in New Orleans who founded his business in 1868, incentivized shoppers to do their own shopping and take their groceries home themselves by offering a 10 percent discount to those who participated. Giving customers the option to physically pick up their own groceries was a departure from the norm, where grocers pulled items off of shelves and offered home delivery for customers. In giving shoppers the power to do their own shopping and carrying, Schwegmann reduced business expenses. His tactics influenced national grocery trends, eventually becoming the norm throughout the United States. Elizabeth M. Williams, *New Orleans: A Food Biography* (New York: Altamira Press, 2013), 89-90.
In New Orleans, Schwegmann Brothers Giant Supermarket was an iconic example of the aforementioned phenomenon. The first Schwegmann’s supermarket opened at the intersection of St. Claude and Elysian Fields in 1946—serving the Marigny community just downriver of the French Quarter.\textsuperscript{135} Although the first store opened within the bounds of the city, the brothers quickly expanded out into the suburbs. One of those suburban stores, on Old Gentilly Road, boasted the title of largest supermarket in America at 155,000 square feet.\textsuperscript{136}

Supermarkets, like Schwegmann’s, were a new shopping experience for middle-class Americans, primarily white, who had moved out of the cities. The food cultures that they perpetuated were also different from the one that had taken hold in New Orleans, with one of the more dramatic changes being the near total absence of African Americans in the processes that made up daily rituals of distribution and consumption of food, because the suburbs were spaces predominantly occupied by white America. In moving out of the city and exacerbating de facto segregation, the food economy of the greater New Orleans area was becoming a product of broader American culture defined and perpetuated by white Americans.


Although it would never be fully cleaved from the city’s fusion food culture, the advent of the supermarket in the era of White Flight marked a pivotal moment in New Orleans’ integration into mainstream American culture. In mid-century America, one could eat a can of Campbell’s gumbo in Boston and a can of Boston clam chowder in
New Orleans, and call it an American meal in both places. The distinguishing characteristic of those American meals was defined by standardized products made possible by industrialized processes and a national distribution network. Even more importantly, Americans across the country could make claims upon those standardized foods, whether the dish being served was gumbo, chowder, or some other regional favorite. In the age of mass production and mainstream culture, the distinction between regional and national identities blurred as the two identities began to fuse together. It was in this period that serving red beans and rice on Mondays became a sporadic tradition rather than a weekly ritual, and heating canned soups over an electric stove became the norm.

In the post-war period, people stopped shopping at the neighborhood markets and so their consumer base slowly eroded away, leaving behind empty shells of what was supposed to be an innovative, transformative civic project. As the markets hemorrhaged money, the city government had but one option left—one that they had been fighting off for the last 50 years. In 1946, New Orleans abandoned the markets, selling the structures off to a slew of businesses including grocers, jewelers, and clothing

137 This observation was informed by a brilliant talk given by Theresa McCulla at the American Historical Association Annual Meeting. Theresa McCulla, “Contextualizing Creole Cuisine: Gumbo Wars.” (paper presented at the annual meeting for the American Historical Association, New York, NY, January 2-5, 2015).

stores. Those once bustling and raucous market halls grew suddenly silent. On the other side of the market doors, itinerant vendors passed through neighborhoods with less frequency, a ripple of a more fluid past in which the gathering of people around the street markets created a rich environment for spontaneous cultural production around food. The nourishing networks that had proven a means for marginalized people to enter into and shape public culture had collapsed, leaving but a shadow of what had once been a robust locally-based food culture and economy.

The closure of the public markets and the deterioration of the city’s street food scene marked the reconfiguration of public culture in New Orleans, which was informed largely by national trends in food distribution. Yet just because the city’s historic food distribution culture had deteriorated, that did not mean that its culinary traditions disappeared as well. In fact, the city’s historic cuisine was as present as ever. Dishes like gumbo, jambalaya, and beignets were preserved in the New Orleans’ restaurants and Creole cookbooks—ones that continue to attract American eaters and readers today for their distinct flavors. Although microwavable TV dinner became more popular, red bean and rice and other historic dishes were still served in family homes, albeit, not as frequently. New Orleans, therefore, remained at one and the same time, a part of and apart from mainstream America. The city’s identity was marked by duality and was not defined by rigid demarcations, but fluid ones where national and local cultures coalesced and pulled away from each other in a constant dance of cultural fusion. It is in
this city where one can slurp down chicory coffee and nibble on beignets at Café du Monde for breakfast, chow down on a McDonald’s hamburger for lunch, and suck meat off the bone at a Memphis-style barbecue joint for dinner. And so that spirited tension and negotiation between national and local, modern and conventional, monism and pluralism lives on, feeding off of the collective consumption of an American city situated on the coastal outskirts of America.
As New Orleans’ public culture changed in the post-World War II, the nourishing networks that had afforded minority groups a means to build businesses and strengthen communities collapsed, leaving a desert where a once vibrant local food culture and economy existed. The loss of these networks disproportionally impacted women and people of color who had relied upon them to exercise their political voices in an otherwise politically oppressive environment. In this same period, racial tensions escalated in the Jim Crow South, layering other modes of political disenfranchisement onto the loss of those critical networks.

Amidst the turmoil of the post-war period, marked by lynching and white supremacist rallies, an African-American chef named Lena Richard prepared to star on her own television program, *Lena Richard’s New Orleans Cook Book*. Her show was broadcast on New Orleans’ first television station, WDSU, placing her undeniable culinary ingenuity and expertise on thousands of televisions sets throughout New Orleans, most of them owned by wealthier whites. According to advertisements in the *Times-Picayune*, the highly popular cooking show aired twice weekly on Tuesdays and

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1 The exact start date of Richard’s show is difficult to determine. Her show likely premiered in 1949, but may have been in pre-production as early as 1948.
2 WDSU was the first television station in New Orleans, broadcasting live for the first time on December 18, 1948 from the Municipal Auditorium. In 1948, many of New Orleans’ residents had never seen a television set, but by the time Richard’s show was regularly airing in 1950, an estimated 40,000 televisions were up and running in the city. Dominic Massa, *Images of America: New Orleans Television* (Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2008), 7.
Thursdays at 5:00, featuring Richard and her assistant, Marie Matthews, also a woman of color. During the program, Richard guided television audiences, predominantly wealthy white women, through her cookbook, *New Orleans Cook Book*, published by Houghton Mifflin in 1940. Through her role as a celebrity chef, she became a household name in New Orleans, and was recognized as the leading expert on Creole cuisine.

Richard’s noteworthy start in television was symbolic of her path-breaking career as a food entrepreneur and chef in the Crescent City. Too often in the mid-twentieth century, the identities of the top chefs of New Orleans’ world-renowned restaurants remained anonymous. They were the creative genius hidden behind the swinging doors of their kitchens. Often, those men and women were African Americans. Richard, therefore, was unusual: she was a black female chef who captured public attention.

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4 Richard self-identified as a “cateress in the city of New Orleans,” and not as a “cook” or “chef.” Cateress was a popular category for highly skilled workers who prepared food in New Orleans. I choose to use the term “chef,” as a marker of Richard’s culinary schooling and in recognition of her professional career as head cook/chef of several restaurants.


6 While unusual, she was not alone. Her cooking show appeared just one year after Frieda De Knight’s cookbook, *A Date With A Dish* (1948), later renamed *The Ebony Cookbook* (1962), and was soon followed by Mary Land’s *Louisiana Cookery* (1954). Like De Knight and Land, Richard played a principal role in the black cooking scene in the late 1940s. Mary Land, *Louisiana Cookery* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1954); Freda de Knight, *A Date With a Dish* (New York: Hermitage Press, 1948).
Figure 19: Filming Lena Richard’s New Orleans Cook Book. Lena Richard (center), Marie Matthews (left), Woody Leafer (right), and Ken Muller (operating the camera). Source: The Lena Richard Collection at the Newcomb Archives and Vorhoff Library Special Collections, Newcomb College Institute, Tulane University.

She became the face of New Orleans’ Creole cuisine as racial tensions in New Orleans escalated and as white New Orleanians increasingly made claims upon Creole food culture through the publication of Creole cookbooks. During the 1940s, it was still a common practice for white New Orleanians to romanticize the antebellum South and position African-American women in subservient roles as domestic cooks. These stereotypical imaginings of black women masked their culinary ingenuity and the key
roles that they played in the making of New Orleans’ local food culture and economy. Richard was able to build her career within and navigate around those stereotypes to create an alternative representation of black women in the public sphere—one that eventually broke away from those debilitating stereotypes. Her first television set, for example, resembled an open hearth kitchen, symbolically placing her back into the antebellum South through the aesthetics of set design. Yet a year into her program, Richard was filming on a new set, a modern one that she shared with white food television personalities. Eventually, she disentangled herself from some stereotypical associations of black women’s labor in the local food economy, finding a space for her culinary merits to stand apart from those derogatory associations.

7 WDSU aired several television cooking programs in the 1950s including a show called, “What’s Cooking?” This show premiered on Friday October 6, 1950 from 4:00-4:15 p.m. with a special guest appearance by Martha Ann Brett, author of the recently released cookbook, First You Make a Roux and George Laughton, chef at the renowned Vieux Carre restaurant. Bill Seller, a WDSU personality, hosted the program. Other WDSU colleagues who also starred on culinary programs included Terry Flettrich Rohe and Merlin “Scoop” Kennedy. Times-Picayune, October 19, 1950, pg. 45; Dominic Massa, Images of America: New Orleans Television (Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2008).
Richard’s life history and celebrated culinary career speak to the major themes explored in this dissertation. Moreover, a biographical, micro-level analysis of her life enables us to see how the historical dynamics and tensions that shaped New Orleans had profound impacts on an individual level as well. Her story testifies to the significance of fusion food cultures throughout Louisiana’s history, the role of food-labor as a mode through which minority groups built community, the importance of minorities’ mobility as a means to strengthen their businesses and sense of belonging, and the stereotypes that these groups had to overcome in the postbellum period in order to sustain their community cultures in New Orleans. From her cooking school to her
television program, Richard’s work was public, contributing the public culture of New Orleans as generations of food entrepreneurs had done before her. Tracing Richard’s career highlights the predominant themes and historical tensions in New Orleans’ food history in the long nineteenth century.

Richard’s family history, for example, is deeply rooted within French colonial occupation of the Lower Mississippi Valley and the voluntary and forced migration of people into colonial Louisiana—movements that gave shape to the region’s food culture and economy. Richard was born in New Roads, Louisiana on September 11, 1892, and was baptized as Marie Aurina Paul. New Roads was a Francophile city just south of the Mississippi border whose historic population consisted of native French, French Creoles, and people from the French West Indies. Richard’s family hails from a region steeped in creole identity, both white and black, and the culinary and other cultural traditions embedded within those communities. Those communities, as discussed earlier in the dissertation, created fusion food cultures born out of necessity that afforded marginalized groups opportunities to make themselves central within the local food economy. People of color, women, and recent migrants, therefore, occupied a central

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9 To this day, New Roads celebrates its French Atlantic ancestry. The city government, through online media, encourages visitors to “step off the beaten path, and re-enter the world of 19th century Creole, Louisiana, where relaxation is the rule, and history and tradition are abundant.” “About New Roads,” City of New Roads. Accessed January 17, 2012, http://www.newroads.net/AboutUs.asp.
role in the food economy and culture of cities and towns in Louisiana, carving out a
space for themselves to make a living and build community within an overarching slave
society.

In the early twentieth century, Richard’s family moved from rural Louisiana into
the city of New Orleans. Her family, like many migrants to the city of New Orleans,
established themselves in the local community through food-related labor. Richard and
her mother worked as domestics for Alice and Nugent Vairin. Richard, like many
African-American women before her, lived and worked in close proximity to elite white
families who depended on the labor and culinary expertise of black women. As we saw
earlier in the dissertation, black women not only worked in the domestic sphere, but also
in the public sphere as vendors in the city’s public market and street food culture scene.
Within these public spaces, black vendors and other marginalized groups established
business communities that solidified their role in New Orleans’ local food economy. As
the primary customers of these food vendors, domestic laborers like Richard were
intimately tied to New Orleans’ nourishing networks—networks that were inherently
political and defined by economic and cultural connections. It was in the city’s streets

10 When Richard’s family moved to New Orleans, the local government in New Orleans or the Paul’s
Anglicized their names. For example, Richard’s parents are listed as Francoise Laurent and Jean Pierre Paul
in the Catholic Dioceses records, but are listed as Frances Laurence and John Peter Paul in New Orleans City
Directories. It was perhaps that this time that Richard became known at Lena Paul rather than Marie Aurina
Paul. Diocese of Baton Rouge: Catholic Church Records, New Orleans Public Library, New Orleans,
Louisiana.
that these communities coalesced, braiding their experiences together in the public sphere and amidst the hustle and bustle of urban life.

Yet Richard’s path quickly deviated from her contemporaries living and working as food entrepreneurs in the city. Her culinary aptitude and the support of her family and employers enabled her to seek out professional schooling and job opportunities that were not afforded to most African-American food workers. From the time she was old enough to stir a pot of gumbo, Richard demonstrated that she was adept in the kitchen, shadowing her mother as she cooked. When Richard was young, she would prop herself up on a box so that she could properly look into the pots she was watching over.11 The Vairin family took notice of Richard’s contributions and began paying her when she was fourteen; when she finished school they hired her.12 With the help of her family and Alice Vairin, Richard attended several cooking schools in New Orleans, and when those resources were exhausted, Richard attended the Fannie Farmer Cooking School in Boston.13

11 “Woman of the Week,” New York Herald Tribune, c. 1943, Box 1, Folder 4, Lena Richard Collection, Newcomb Archives and Vorhoff Library Special Collections, Newcomb College Institute, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.
13 Clementine Paddleford, “Demonstrates Scaled Fish Served at Famous Parties, Watermelon Ice Cream,” Box 1, Folder 15, Lena Richard Collection, Newcomb Archives and Vorhoff Library Special Collections, Newcomb College Institute, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

Note: Richard’s relationship to Alice Vairin does not appear to be superficial as Richard dedicated her cookbook New Orleans Cook Book (1940) to “Mrs. Nugent B. Vairin whose kindness, advice and assistance
Richard came to Boston with an arsenal of well-developed cooking skills that exceeded the expectations of her instructors and colleagues. Not only was she a skilled cook, she was also prideful one. Clementine Paddleford, esteemed New York Herald-Tribune columnist and gourmet food writer, quotes Richard speaking about her time in Boston:

“But when I got way up there,” the culinary expert explains, “I found out in a hurry they can’t teach me more than I know. I learned things about new desserts and salads. But when it comes to cooking meats, stews, soups, sauces and such dishes we Southern cooks have Northern cooks beat a mile. That’s not big talk; that’s honest truth.”

It was at the Fannie Farmer Cooking School that Richard first had the inspiration to write a cookbook. She noticed that her colleagues would intently watch her prepare dishes. She recalled, “I cooked a couple of my dishes like Creole gumbo and my chicken vol-au-vent, and they go crazy, almost, trying to copy down what I say. I think maybe I’m pretty good, so some day I’d write down myself.” Even as a student, Richard shared her culinary expertise with those around her, disseminating knowledge of Creole


13 “Woman of the Week,” New York Herald Tribune, c. 1943, Box 1, Folder 4, Lena Richard Collection, Newcomb Archives and Vorhoff Library Special Collections, Newcomb College Institute, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

14 Clementine Paddleford, “Demonstrates Scaled Fish Served at Famous Parties, Watermelon Ice Cream,” Box 1, Folder 15, Lena Richard Collection, Newcomb Archives and Vorhoff Library Special Collections, Newcomb College Institute, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

15 Clementine Paddleford, “Demonstrates Scaled Fish Served at Famous Parties, Watermelon Ice Cream,” Box 1, Folder 15, Lena Richard Collection, Newcomb Archives and Vorhoff Library Special Collections, Newcomb College Institute, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.
culinary traditions through kitchen demonstrations and other informal exchanges—just as black cooks had done for generations. In 1918, she graduated from the Fannie Farmer Cooking School and returned to New Orleans.\textsuperscript{16}

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Richard successfully operated several eateries and catering businesses, while also serving as the cook for the Orleans Club, an elite white women’s organization.\textsuperscript{17} In 1937, Richard opened a cooking school. Richard’s daughter, Marie Richard, was an integral part of the school and helped Richard teach classes three nights a week. Richard’s school targeted young black men and women. She sought to train them in the culinary sciences so as to give them a chance to make a career for themselves in a city that historically disenfranchised African Americans. Richard noted: “My purpose in opening a cooking school was to teach men and women the art of food preparation and serving in order that they would become capable of preparing and serving food for any occasion \textit{and also that they might be in a position to demand high wages}.”\textsuperscript{18}

Richard understood that food entrepreneurship was an exceptional realm within New Orleans, and that it was a space for African Americans to anchor themselves economically and culturally within the city’s public culture. Yet she also recognized that

\textsuperscript{16} “Woman of the Week,” \textit{New York Herald Tribune}, c. 1943, Box 1, Folder 4, Lena Richard Collection, Newcomb Archives and Vorhoff Library Special Collections, Newcomb College Institute, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

\textsuperscript{17} In this period, she also married Percival Richard.

whites had made claims upon certain spaces within New Orleans’ local food economy. As discussed in the dissertation chapters entitled “Cultures of Belonging” and “Cultures of Enclosure,” the auxiliary markets in New Orleans were community centers that catered to racial, ethnic, and religious enclaves in the city and thus tended to be less diverse than the city’s central market, the French Market. Over time, as city officials attempted to meet the needs of increasingly vocal white citizens while also pouring money into the city’s general fund, the neighborhood markets became exclusionary places. Eventually, the architecture of the remodeled markets reflected that transformation, physically cutting off the retailing activities in the markets from those being carried out in the city streets by people of color, women, and recent migrants. Witness to the transformations within New Orleans’ public market system and the other forms of racialized enclosure taking place within the city, Richard endeavored to create rather than close off opportunities for black youth.

In addition to teaching classes together, Richard and her daughter began working on Richard’s cookbook, *New Orleans Cook Book*. Marie took on the difficult task of transcribing Richard’s cooking into the written word, codifying her mother’s deft skills and culinary intuition into replicable recipes.19 As noted in the preface of the work,

Richard saw the cookbook as her “life’s work” in “book form.”\textsuperscript{20} Her self-published cookbook quickly captured the hearts of New Orleans’ community.\textsuperscript{21} As part of her marketing tour, she hosted several cooking demonstrations for city socialites at the Bethlehem Temple in the French Quarter. Her book tour was targeted at a specific audience: white elite women. She hosted several 3-hour long cooking classes that showcased eighteen of her famous recipes.\textsuperscript{22} The popularity of these classes suggests that white women, as they had for generations, acknowledged the integral role that black women played in the creation, preservation, and adaptation of New Orleans’ culinary culture.

Richard not only made a splash in the local community, but on a national scale as well. The popularity of her cookbook indicates that broader American audiences continued to be captivated by and interested in Creole cuisine, like they had been in the late nineteenth century when the first Creole cookbooks were released with national audiences in mind. Just as mobility historically played an integral role for black food vendors in New Orleans, so too did mobility play a key role for Richard as she grew her professional career as both a cookbook author and a trained chef.

\textsuperscript{21} The book was sold in New Orleans’ department stores including D.H. Holmes and Maison Blanche as well as smaller book and gift shops such as Dorothy Oechsner’s bookshop in the St. Charles Hotel mezzanine, Mrs. Aphra V. Morris’ lending library, and Miss Louie Mitchell’s tea room and at Richard’s home on Foucher Street. Karen Trahan Letham, exhibition guide, “Two Women and Their Cookbook: Lena Richard and Mary Land,” ed. Susan Tucker (New Orleans, 2001), 4, Newcomb Archives and Vorhoff Library Special Collections, Newcomb College Institute, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana; The Want-Ad Reporter, “Up and Down the Street,” \textit{Times-Picayune}, May 22, 1939, pg. 18.
\textsuperscript{22} “Cook Who Is Known for ‘Dream Melon’ to Teach Creole Cuisine,” \textit{Times-Picayune}, May 15, 1938, pg. 31.
Her career took her out of New Orleans to several job opportunities along the East Coast. In this way, Richard was again exceptional among black women. Her mobility enabled her to gain national recognition as a noteworthy chef outside of her immediate community in New Orleans. As noted earlier, Clementine Paddleford took a liking to Richard and wrote several articles about the Southern chef’s experiences outside of the South. Richard’s motivation to travel northward was driven by the popular response she received for her cookbook in Philadelphia, New York, and Boston. Clementine Paddleford and culinary icon James Beard played key roles in helping Richard secure a publishing contract with Houghton-Mifflin, which released Richard’s *New Orleans Cook Book* in 1940.

Richard’s collection of recipes is indicative of the fact that New Orleanians’ identities were simultaneously grounded in strong local, regional, and national culinary traditions. *New Orleans Cook Book* contains a swath of general American dishes from across the United States as well as dishes typically associated with New Orleans’ Creole cuisine. The first printing of her cookbook through Houghton-Mifflin was a great success. According to one newspaper article, Richard’s cookbook had been “acclaimed the best creole cook book ever written.” At one point, Richard planned to release an expanded edition of the cookbook under the same title, *New Orleans Cook Book*. The

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23 “Woman of the Week,” *New York Herald Tribune*, c. 1943, Box 1, Folder 4, Lena Richard Collection, Newcomb Archives and Vorhoff Library Special Collections, Newcomb College Institute, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.
second edition, had it been released, would have included dishes from the North and Virginia as well, likely reflecting her experiences as head chef in restaurants located in Garrison, New York and Williamsburg, Virginia.24

Richard’s life story is one that defies the stereotypes of Creole cuisine so often perpetuated in Creole cookbooks—stereotypes that we explored in the dissertation chapter entitled “Cultures of Imagination.” Whereas those early Creole cookbooks identified New Orleans’ food culture as something static and unchanging, Richard’s penchant for diverse culinary traditions from throughout the United States is testament to the fact that New Orleanians readily embraced and adopted new foods. Those dishes then became a part of their experiences as New Orleanians, but also as New Orleanians living in the American South and in the United States. These identities overlapped with one another as evidenced by the varied foods that many New Orleanians ate on a regular basis.

Soon after Houghton-Mifflin released her cookbook, Charles and Constance Stearn recruited Richard to take the position of head chef at the recently opened Bird and Bottle Inn in Garrison, New York, located just 50 miles north of New York City. Under Richard’s direction, the restaurant built a sound reputation in Garrison, as well as attracting gourmets from neighboring areas including New York City. Richard

24 Frances Bryson, “Lena Richard To Unveil More Cooking Secrets,” Box 1, Folder 4, Lena Richard Collection, Newcomb Archives and Vorhoff Library Special Collections, Newcomb College Institute, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.
introduced some traditional Southern and New Orleanian dishes, such as shrimp soup louisiane, to the restaurant, which gained such popularity that it was later canned by the inn and sold by mail order. Customers seeking a taste of Richard’s mouthwatering dishes could order a “sample kit” of the Bird and Bottle for $7.00, which included “two tins of the black bean soup and two of the Louisiana shrimp soup, one jar of dilled olives, a jar of Swedish preserves made of lingen [sic] berries and a box of the richest, tangiest, meltingest cheese sticks that ever fluttered away on the tongue.”

In addition to the above-mentioned dishes, the restaurant continued to add more variety to their mail order menu including curry sauce, Creole sauce, remoulade sauce, and oyster and herb stuffing. Richard helped to found the restaurant, which is still open to this day.

25 Clementine Paddleford, “Inn for Gourmets Is Accepting Mail Orders for Menu Favorites: 5-Item Trial Box Includes 2 Zestful Soups: Black Bean, Louisiana Shrimp,” Box 1, Folder 4, Lena Richard Collection, Newcomb Archives and Vorhoff Library Special Collections, Newcomb College Institute, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

26 Clementine Paddleford, “Inn for Gourmets Is Accepting Mail Orders for Menu Favorites: 5-Item Trial Box Includes 2 Zestful Soups: Black Bean, Louisiana Shrimp,” Box 1, Folder 4, Lena Richard Collection, Newcomb Archives and Vorhoff Library Special Collections, Newcomb College Institute, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

Note also: Richard would employ her experiences at the Bird and Bottle Inn to launch her own international frozen food business. In 1945, she partnered with Bordelon Fine Foods, a company that distributed her famous cooking across the country in five and ten-gallon containers. She prepared shrimp Creole, shrimp remoulade, turtle soup, gumbo file and okra gumbo, grillades, chicken fricassee, Creole beef stew, and spaghetti and meatballs with Creole sauce for shipment. She operated this business out of a freezing plant located at 530 Metairie Road in New Orleans. According to an article by Frances Bryson, all of these dishes were cooked by Lena “in huge pots over a hot stove at 530 Metairie Road,” where they were then “cooled, frozen and shipped to customers in the north and in South America – by Pan-American clipper in the latter case.” Karen Trahan Letham, exhibition guide, “Two Women and Their Cookbook: Lena Richard and Mary Land,” ed. Susan Tucker (New Orleans, 2001), 6, Newcomb Archives and Vorhoff Library Special Collections, Newcomb College Institute, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana; Frances Bryson, “Lena Richard To Unveil More Cooking Secrets,” Box 1, Folder 4, Lena Richard Collection, Newcomb Archives and Vorhoff Library Special Collections, Newcomb College Institute, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.
bringing her interpretation of Creole, Southern, and American regional dishes to Garrison.27

After acting as head chef of the Garrison Inn for over a year, Richard returned to New Orleans and opened Lena’s Eatery in November of 1941.28 Richard served New Orleanian-style plate-lunch fare such as pork chops, fried chicken, potato salad, stuffed crab, stuffed peppers, gumbo, and red beans and rice—tailoring the menu to the taste preferences of locals. The restaurant attracted both white and black patrons who ate side by side even in the midst of segregation.29 The mingling of blacks and whites at Richard’s restaurant reflects a theme discussed throughout this dissertation—the tensions between local law and the experiences of those living with and outside of that law. Although it was technically illegal for whites and blacks to dine at the same establishment in New Orleans, the desire to eat good food sometimes trumped the law. These legal transgressions, although not the norm, demonstrate the longstanding practice of whites patronizing the businesses of African Americans. In the Jim Crow South, it was far easier for whites to eat at a black-owned restaurant than for blacks to eat at a white-owned restaurant. The latter could have been a life-threatening action for blacks, demonstrating the inherent privilege of white consumers in New Orleans.

28 The restaurant was located at 2722 LaSalle Street in New Orleans.
Richard once again left New Orleans after Charles Rockefeller of the John D. Rockefeller Foundation recruited her to become chef at the Travis House, located in the foundation’s Colonial Williamsburg. Knowing that the Travis House would cater to locals, tourists, and celebrities, the Rockefeller Foundation sought to recruit a reputable chef to build up a loyal clientele. The fact that they chose Richard indicates how she had built a strong reputation for herself on a national level. She used her culinary expertise as a way to render porous barriers that kept many black women working in the homes of white families in New Orleans.

Taking her daughter with her, Richard worked in Virginia from January 1943 through March 1945. Richard had many fans in Virginia as expressed by the following letter to Richard from Mr. Kenneth Chorley:

Dear Lena, Mrs. Chorley and I want you to know how much we appreciated the beautiful dinner which you cooked for us and our guests last Tuesday evening. It just couldn’t have been better in any way. Everyone [sic] of our guests, not only at the dinner but from time to time as we have seen them since, has commented on how attractive and delicious the first course was. The chicken was superb, and I have never tasted a better dressing. Of course you are developing a state-wide reputation with your oysters. The dessert was excellent and the birthday cakes were so light and fluffy and yet so tasty that I just cannot find words to describe them. Mrs. Chorley and I do want you to know how deeply appreciative we are to you. Sincerely yours, Kenneth Chorley.30

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30 Letter to Lena Richard from Kenneth Chorley, April 30, 1943, Box 1, Folder 4, Lena Richard Collection, Newcomb Archives and Vorhoff Library Special Collections, Newcomb College Institute, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.
While at the Travis House, Richard cooked for a number of high profile guests including the British High Command in May of 1943, and Clementine and Mary Churchill (wife and daughter of Winston Churchill) later that year.31 Clementine and Mary made a special trip to the Travis House kitchen to shake Richard’s hand and exchange autographs.32 Her reputation as a chef was so renowned that the Travis House management began a take-out business to fulfill clients’ desire for Richard’s cooking.33 On busy nights, people would stand in line waiting to be served at the restaurant so as to taste Richard’s renowned fare.

After acting as the head chef of the Travis House, Richard returned to New Orleans. Perhaps inspired by her work in the white tablecloth restaurant in Virginia, Richard opened her own white tablecloth restaurant, Lena Richard’s Gumbo House in 1949. It was around this time that Richard also made her premiere as one of America’s first television chefs, and likely one of the first African Americans on television.

31 “Woman of the Week,” New York Herald Tribune, c. 1943, Box 1, Folder 4, Lena Richard Collection, Newcomb Archives and Vorhoff Library Special Collections, Newcomb College Institute, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.
32 Frances Bryson, “Lena Richard To Unveil More Cooking Secrets,” Box 1, Folder 4, Lena Richard Collection, Newcomb Archives and Vorhoff Library Special Collections, Newcomb College Institute, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.
33 Karen Trahan Letham, exhibition guide, “Two Women and Their Cookbook: Lena Richard and Mary Land,” ed. Susan Tucker (New Orleans, 2001), 5-6, Newcomb Archives and Vorhoff Library Special Collections, Newcomb College Institute, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.
Richard’s television program afforded her an opportunity to place the labor of African-American women, long exploited in white-controlled print media, front and center—a corrective measure that this dissertation, too, has sought to contribute to the broader history of New Orleans and American food economies.\textsuperscript{34} What Richard’s story
helps us to see in New Orleans’ history is that black women and other minorities have regularly found ways in which to establish themselves as key players in local food economies. They have also fostered a strong sense of belonging through those nourishing networks to build a public culture particular to their needs.

Through the 1930s, marginalized groups continued to contribute to and build up the city’s street food and public market culture. Their role in the local food economy enabled them to participate in the city’s political culture as well. Thus, food became a mode for people to exercise their voice even when denied the vote. Those alternative modes of expression mattered, especially as the Jim Crow South became an increasingly suffocating and dangerous place. In the midst of that fear and tension, food communities were a way for minority groups to define what it meant to be a New Orleanian, a Southerner, and an American through food—its ever-present production, distribution, and consumption. Therein lies the power of food as an organizing force—food was relatively constant, while political rights were not. Food communities, therefore, were

continuous in the turbulent lives of the disenfranchised, providing ample opportunities to foster belonging within New Orleans’ nourishing networks.

Yet by the time Richard’s career peaked in 1950, those networks had collapsed, eliminating the pathways through which marginalized communities shaped the public culture of New Orleans. The sights and sounds of Lena Richard’s New Orleans Cook Book and WDSU’s other television programs replaced those of the city’s street food and market vendors. New pathways, ones embedded in media, became the mode through which some food entrepreneurs could express their political voice, although even those opportunities developed slowly for women and people of color. As racial tensions escalated through the mid-twentieth century, food would retain its status as a contested battleground in which whites and blacks simultaneously made claims upon a shared food culture born of the Atlantic World. Despite the elimination of networks of exchange through which New Orleans’ diverse population had historically interacted, food remained crucial to New Orleanians’ sense of belonging, forging bonds between community members through daily acts of consumption.
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Biography

Ashley Rose Young was born on February 9, 1988 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She attended Yale College where she earned her B.A. in History in May of 2010. Her senior thesis was entitled “Cooking in the Old Creole Days: An Exploration of Late 19th and Early 20th Century Creole Culture and Society Through the Study of Creole Cookbooks.” In the spring of 2009, her junior year of college, she was a visiting scholar at Regent’s Park College at the University of Oxford. Directly after college, she began her doctoral studies in the History Department at Duke University where she earned her Ph.D. in History in December of 2017. In the final semester of her doctoral program, Young became the Historian of the American Food History Project at the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of American History. Young published several articles during her graduate career. She co-authored the following piece with Jennifer Jacqueline Stratton: “Terroir Tapestries: An Interactive Consumption Project” in Food and Museums (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016). She also authored: “The History & Revitalization of New Orleans’ Public Food Markets,” in Edible New Orleans (2016); “Lena Richard’s New Orleans Cookbook,” in Rouses Everyday (2015); “A Delicate Balance: Understanding the Four Humors,” in RL Magazine, Volume 1 (Winter, 2017); “Red Hots and the Motor City: The World of the Cubs’ 1908 Victory” in Front & Center, Volume 22, no. 1 (Spring, 2017); “First Thought Seven Things: Foodways: Culture and Cuisine exhibition at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African American History
and Culture” *Lute & Drum*, no. 9 (Fall, 2017). Additionally, Young authored several academic blog posts published through institutions like the Southern Food & Beverage Museum, the Southern Foodways Alliance, the Antiquarian Book Sellers Association, the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, the Duke University Libraries, and the Duke Center for Instructional Technology. Young, passionate about public history, curated several exhibits and exhibitions during her graduate career including: *Lena Richard: Pioneer in Food TV* at the Southern Food & Beverage Museum in New Orleans, Louisiana; *Taste Terroir Tapestries: Interactive Consumption Histories* in the Jameson Gallery at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina and at the Southern Food & Beverage Museum in New Orleans, Louisiana; *The Dryades Street Market* at the Southern Food & Beverage Museum in New Orleans, Louisiana; *A Delicate Balance: Understanding the Four Humors* in the Josiah Charles Trent History of Medicine Room at the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library in Durham, North Carolina; “*Agencies Prefer Men!*” *The Women of Madison Avenue* in the Mary Duke Biddle Room at the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library in Durham, North Carolina; *To Market, to Market!: Urban Street Food Culture Around the Globe* on the Student Wall in Perkins Library in Durham, North Carolina; and *FOOD: Transforming the American Table, 2000-2015* in the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of American History in Washington, D.C. She was also a co-director of the *Subnature and Culinary Culture Project* at Duke. Throughout her graduate career, Young received numerous scholarships and
fellowships to support her research and writing. Through Duke University, she received the Duke History Department Fellowship (2010-2015); the Reference Graduate Intern Fellowship at the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library (2015-2016); the Business History Graduate Intern Fellowship at the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library (2016-2017); the Versatile Humanists at Duke Graduate Intern Fellowship (2017); and the Bass Instructional Fellowship (2017). Young also received the GustoLab Institute Merit Scholarship (2014); the University of Maryland Humanities Intensive Learning & Teaching Scholarship (2014); the Humanities, Arts, Science, and Technology Alliance and Collaboratory (HASTAC) Scholar Fellowship (2012-2015); and the Division of Work and Industry Graduate Intern Fellowship at the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of American History (2017). Young was a member of Phi Beta Kappa.