

Lost Bodies/Found Objects: Storyville and the Archival Imagination

by

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy in the Department of
English in the Graduate School
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

In “Lost Bodies/Found Objects: Storyville and the Archival Imagination,” I engage the numerous collections and scattered ephemera that chronicle the famed New Orleans vice district of Storyville to show the ways in which black life is overwhelmingly criminalized, homogenized, and silenced in narratives of the district. Storyville, the city’s smallest and last vice district, existed from 1897-1917 under the protection of city ordinances. The laws attempted to confine specific vices and individuals within the geographic limits of the district to protect the sanctity of the white family and maintain private property values in the city. As a result, the district strictly managed the lives of women working in the sex trade through policing and residential segregation. While all women were subject to these restrictions, black women were often barred from the relative comforts of the district’s brothels and forced to live and work out of shared shacks called “cribs.” Similarly, though to a much lesser degree, black men who worked in and frequented the district faced their own forms of segregation and racial violence. Turning to a largely obscured set of archival objects discovered through primary research—housing records, biometric technologies such as Bertillon cards, travel literature, and *Blue Book* guides—I read how discourses of waywardness, domesticity, race, and sexuality at the turn of the twentieth century converge to illuminate the vexed social life of Storyville. I argue that when read alongside popular histories, literary interpretations of the district, and discourses on black social life at the turn of the twentieth century, the records of the district challenge the archival narratives

imposed upon them and expand historical approaches to the archives of Storyville.

Dedication

For my Mother and Father

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“Lost and Found: A Story for Storyville”

“The public institutions of New Orleans are unduly reluctant to keep such material hoping, by doing so, to obliterate a phase of social life which is of course officially not to be admired.”
-Semper Idem, *The ‘Blue Book’*¹

“But here there is little recorded history, the tales of ‘The Swamp’ and ‘Smoky Row’, both notorious communities...come down to us in fragments.”
-Michael Ondaatje, *Coming Through Slaughter*²

In January of 1897, Alderman Sidney Story proposed to the New Orleans city council a new ordinance outlining a series of vice laws that would aid in the city’s attempts to control what many politicians and established elites criticized as one of their most rampant and dangerous moral threats, prostitution. Storyville, also known as “the district,” was the smallest and last vice district in the city of New Orleans and existed from 1897 through the summer of 1917 under the protection and management of Story’s ordinance. The law designated a sixteen-square block area just above the famed French Quarter, within which all women identified as sex workers were henceforth required to work and live. Under these provisions, the district became a space within the city where women working in the sex trade would experience stricter policing, residential segregation, labor prejudices, and social stigmas. Even though the numerous boundaries

¹ Semper Idem, *The “Blue Book”: A Bibliographical Attempt to Describe the Guide....*, Priv. print., 1936, 39.

² Michael Ondaatje, *Coming Through Slaughter*, New York: Norton, 1976.

of the district ultimately proved porous for many of the women forced to work within Storyville, the district also became an important cultural and historical landmark that many still believe reflects the city's image as a perpetual bacchanal.

Storyville occupies a peculiar place in the history of New Orleans, resting at the intersection of a sordid and often conflicted past. The celebratory character of the city and its residents reproduced through countless images of Mardi Gras parades, Festival Season, and the excesses of tourists throughout the French Quarter provides a readymade narrative for the imagined excesses of Storyville.³ The stories of illicit sexuality, alcohol, drugs, jazz music, and interracial spaces within the district make it that much easier to assimilate it into the popular images of New Orleans. At the same time, the district was a place that many propertied and morally concerned citizens felt vice could be tolerated, if not also enjoyed in secret. Its formation indicated a series of shifting economic interests within the city that had been expanding since at least the federally mandated emancipation of slaves in December 1864 and the withdrawal of Federal troops stationed in the city since the Civil War in 1877.

The decades between the end of the Civil War and the beginning of World War I were a time of rapid growth for the city and the country. The city's economy was buoyed by railroad construction, the introduction of electrical grid power, the first water treatment facility, the export of cotton and import of lumber, the expansion of residential neighborhoods, and numerous other modernization efforts. For those profiting from the

³ Joseph R. Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.

city's transformation from notorious port city to cosmopolitan jewel of the South, Storyville was not so much a vestige of the old New Orleans as it was an outgrowth of the burgeoning need to separate and manage all that threatened to harm these gains. While Storyville was often promoted and remembered as a space where the sinister character and amusements of old New Orleans lived on, its place within the broader social, political, and economic shifts of the city suggests it also belongs within a broader genealogy of burgeoning techniques of social control during the period.

With these two historical contexts serving as backdrop for this project, I examine the complex and, at times, conflicting experiences of women mandated to live and work within the boundaries of Storyville. I turn to a diverse collection of archives and fictional and historical accounts of the district to explore how such factors as social attitudes around race and gender, vice and prostitution, the arrangement of public spaces, protection of the white family unit, and women's mobility coalesced in the late nineteenth century to make a space such as Storyville possible. Amidst the wealth of archival, historiographical, and fictional sources, traces of these women's lives also begin to emerge. Therefore, to tell the story of the women forced to move to the district throughout this period, it is necessary to account for their place amidst the retraction of vice and the expansions of modernization, while also giving voice to the complex and rich forms of social life that emerged and persisted from within this space of confinement.

What is a Storyville archive?

Offering a “true” account of the Storyville vice district has never been an easy undertaking. Historians such as Emily Epstein Landau, Alecia P. Long, and Al Rose note concerted efforts to expunge any official record of the district after its closure. Scholars and writers will often invoke a well-rehearsed scene in which federal troops make their return to the city on the eve of U.S. involvement in WWI and almost immediately begin dismantling the district under direct orders from the federal government.⁴ Different versions of the district’s closure describe federal troops and local police burning mountains of records in the district’s streets and outside of police precincts as women were forcibly removed from their homes in the district. While it is difficult to know the fate of these hypothetical records, it is unsurprising that attempts to tell the history of Storyville range from historical texts grounded in a paucity of archival materials to creative narratives that approach the district through a more speculative lens. The district and its residents have been the subjects of numerous texts and artistic treatments that include historical nonfiction, cultural criticism, novels, poetry, film, and musical scores. While conducting research for this project, I quickly discovered that such texts were

⁴ Within these three oft-referenced histories of the district, the three authors cite some version of this scene as a formative disjuncture between the official end of the district and the beginning of its complicated relationship to recorded history. Emily Epstein Landau, *Spectacular Wickedness: Sex, Race, and Memory in Storyville, New Orleans*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013; Alecia P. Long, *The Great Southern Babylon: Sex, Race, and Respectability in New Orleans, 1865-1920*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004; Al Rose, *Storyville, New Orleans, Being an Authentic, Illustrated Account of the Notorious Red-Light District*, University: University of Alabama Press, 1974.

often a helpful starting point for identifying names, dates, and various ephemera that could be linked back to the district and possibly discovered within the numerous archives and collections that contain traces of Storyville’s history.

Table 1: Available records concerning the Storyville vice district, New Orleans, LA, 1897-1917

Location	Institution Type	Materials
Museum of Modern Art (New York City)	Cultural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ernest J. Bellocq’s “Storyville Portraits” (Prints)
Fraenkel Gallery (San Francisco)	Cultural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ernest J. Bellocq’s “Storyville Portraits” (Prints)
Historic New Orleans Collection (New Orleans)	Cultural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Travel literature and guidebooks to Storyville Print Ephemera (Newspapers, Muckraking, etc.)
Hogan Jazz Archive (Tulane University)	University Libraries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Print and audio ephemera Collections of individual jazz musicians who played or grew up in the district
Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library (Duke University)	University Libraries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Travel literature and guidebooks to Storyville Semper Idem’s <i>The ‘Blue Book’</i>
Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library (Yale University)	University Libraries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Travel literature and guidebooks to Storyville
City Archives Division (New Orleans Public Library)	Municipal/Public Records	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Orleans Parish Police Department records (mugshots, arrest records, etc.) Vital Records Housing Records

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newspaper • Ordinances of the City Council
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As I note above, the district could not be claimed by any single narrative or historical trajectory, and as such the objects and records that tell this complex story reside in an array of archival collections and institutions. In Table 1, I offer an abbreviated list of archival collections and materials that can be found relating to Storyville and some of its residents. Unfortunately, the materials listed above are not always curated with the purpose of creating a Storyville collection, instead often noting their origins in the district as a curious bibliographic footnote. As such, this ephemera is often curated in the service of telling the story of municipal development, personal biographies, and advertising history. While working across these collections, it became necessary to reorganize such disparate materials within the context of the project so that they might better illuminate the women whose lives they document.

Within institutional records from the city of New Orleans (police, housing, vital statistics), Storyville amounts to little more than a shadow. There is no official Storyville archive. Rather, within the city’s public records, the women of Storyville appear as flashes, individually and with no clear attachment to the district. This shadow connection is instead made when a woman’s record can be dated within a given time frame (1897–1917), indicates her occupation as “prostitute,” or lists her address within the district’s sixteen-square block area. In the Orleans Parish police archives, for instance, there are thousands of mugshots and criminal records that index police surveillance of women in the district. As I show in chapter four, women identified as sex workers (notated in

records as “Prost”) emerge with a great deal of consistency in the police records between 1897 and 1917. In the absence of explicit documentation, however, the district is little more than a specter waiting to be called forth.

Culturally speaking, Storyville is a curiosity. It serves as a backdrop, a destination, a space of enclosure, or point of departure that embodies the tragedies of vice and the romance often associated with the cosmopolitan hedonism and indulgent excesses New Orleans is known for. Though Storyville had been a figure in cultural histories and creative projects in the decades after its closure, literary and filmic interest in the district was reignited by the 1970 publication of *Storyville Portraits*, a book of photographs taken in the district by the local photographer Ernest J. Bellocq.⁵ Bellocq’s photographs and the women captured within them have inspired such projects as Michael Ondaatje’s novel *Coming Through Slaughter* (1976), Louis Malle’s film *Pretty Baby* (1978), Brooke Bergan’s collection of poems *Storyville: A Hidden Mirror* (1994), and Natasha Trethewey’s book-length poem *Bellocq’s Ophelia* (2002). In each of these works, there is a blending of the factual with the speculative in order to account for what is seemingly missing from the official record. Trethewey’s poetry collection offers one example of how the literary engagement with the district absorbs this duality of tragedy/romance to imagine the fictionalized encounter between protagonist Ophelia and

⁵ These early interests in the district had mostly to do with jazz music and some of the well-known musicians that came out of New Orleans during this period, most notably “Jelly Roll” Morton and Louis Armstrong. The 1947 film *New Orleans*, discussed in the Coda, is one the best examples of these early engagements with the district.

Bellocq.⁶ Bellocq's photographs of anonymous sex workers serve as a formal invitation to explore the speculative possibilities borne out of the silences around the subjects of these photographs. Trethewey employs numerous familiar narratives and formal tropes around women's entrance into prostitution to fill the biographical gaps left by the archive: a naïve young woman leaves her rural home to make it in the city; she encounters tragedy and financial hardship shortly after arriving; she turns to prostitution to save enough money to make it back home. Trethewey's collection is just the latest in a long line of fictional engagements with the district, many of which center their work around the mysterious photographer and his portraits of women from the district.

If we are to think of a Storyville archive in its traditional sense—an acquired, processed, and publicly available set of materials—then we would properly say that no such archive exists. Rather, Storyville's ephemera occupy a space more akin to a trans-archival record that is curated as much through speculation as it is through historical evidence. Such a predicament is not unique, however. The very notion of archival recovery is premised on the “official” record's inability to account in any full or satisfying way for the marginalized subjects of history. An engagement with the archive by scholars in fields such as History, Cultural Studies, Black Studies, Gender and Sexuality Studies, Post-Colonial Studies, Literary Studies, and Performance Studies, to name a few, has largely been responsible for what some in the academy refer to as the

⁶ Natasha D. Trethewey, *Bellocq's Ophelia: Poems*, Saint Paul, Minn.: Graywolf Press, 2002.

“archival turn.”⁷ Similarly, artists and writers have made use of the archive to generate work that offers alternative ways of accessing submerged histories.⁸ Therefore, if such an entity is to be spoken of, the Storyville archive is a constellation of half-told stories and partial traces of lives largely forgotten. Telling the story of Storyville, historians, authors, poets, filmmakers, and musicians blend the historical narratives that exist with a speculative elaboration that animates and illuminates the historical blind spots and archival lacunae. As the women of Storyville are often considered anonymous or lost to history, the seduction of this archival constellation is seen within a myriad of contexts that I attempt to account for across this project’s four chapters.

In the first chapter, “Three Encounters with the Veil: Storyville and the Question of Home,” I examine the creation of Storyville and the segregation of domestic and commercial spaces within the district through the imagined threat of the “wayward woman.” She appears in the work of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Sociology, Criminology, and popular literature as the embodiment of the failures of morality, familial dysfunction, and political subjectivity. To track her emergence, I

⁷ The “archival turn” is not merely a renewed interest in the archive as a location for research, but also an attempt to rethink the structures and uses of the archive. Jacques Derrida, *A Freudian Impression: A Freudian Impression*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998; Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2003; Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2003; Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” *Small Axe* 26 (2008): 1–14; Anjali R. Arondekar, *For the Record: On Sexuality and the Colonial Archive in India*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2009; Christina Elizabeth Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.

⁸ In this instance, we might think of Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* or the work of artists Renee Green and David Hammons.

deploy the interpretive framework offered by W.E.B. Du Bois's theorization of the veil to show how the figure of the "wayward woman" in the postbellum United States is subject to processes of segregation and alienation from society that mimic those perpetually endured by black men and women after emancipation. In the case of New Orleans and Storyville, the threat of waywardness necessitated vice's geographical segregation and structurally transformed sex work into a regulated economy. Furthermore, by engaging the work of scholars such as Du Bois, Hazel Carby, Saidiya Hartman, and Joanne Meyerowitz, I examine how the distinction between racially segregated spaces such as high-end mansions (white) and low-end cribs (predominately black) enact another form of veiling in the district and challenge understandings of women's relationships to the district. Through these examples, I focus on how characterizations of waywardness are fundamentally approximate to contemporaneous racial discourses around black familial and social life and enable complex and repetitive modes of segregation within the district.

In chapter two, "Erotic Amusements: *Blue Book* Guides and the Production of Social Space," I focus on archival materials from the district known as *Blue Books*. Published nearly every year for two decades by local businessmen such as Tom Anderson, *Blue Books* served as guidebooks for district patrons to the brothels and sex workers of Storyville. Organized by racial categories (*White*, *Octoroon*, and *Colored*) and containing the names and physical addresses of women in the district, these guides produced the image of perpetually available women fixed within the geography of Storyville. These forms of representation also worked to cultivate fantasies of interracial

sexual encounters that transgressed the sexual norms of the period. At the same time, the geographies charted by *Blue Book* guides detailed spaces that black men could not enter, entrenching fears around miscegenation into the very landscape of Storyville. By examining these guides and other tourist literature in relation to changing understandings of space in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America, I show how the *Blue Books* produce an economic and geographic landscape that caters to the fantasies of district patrons.

The third chapter, “Literary Optics: Ernest J. Bellocq and the Archival Gaze,” focuses on the imagined relationships among the photographer Bellocq, his anonymous sitters, and the photographic form within literary and filmic engagements with the district. Films such as Malle’s *Pretty Baby* regard Bellocq’s photographs as artistic interpretations and celebrations of prostitution, engendering a speculative mode of historical narrative that imagines the photographer/photographed relationship as inherently expressive of the former’s sexual desires. Departing from this approach, I turn to Ondaatje’s *Coming Through Slaughter* and Trethewey’s *Bellocq’s Ophelia*. While Bellocq’s photographs figure prominently in both texts, he is characterized as an archivist figure through whom both authors recreate the lives of historical black figures (jazz musician Charles “Buddy” Bolden and the fictional sex worker Ophelia, respectively). Ondaatje and Trethewey turn to archival objects to imagine a different mode of historical narrative that accounts for the vexed and complicated ways black subjects are made legible within the history of Storyville. In reading these works both as narratives and as experiments in archival practice, I explore how fiction uses

photography to reimagine and expand our approaches to narrating the lives of the district's residents.

The final chapter, "The Flesh and the Archive: Storyville and the Criminal Photograph," turns to the New Orleans police department's archive of mugshot and Bertillon cards to examine techniques of policing and surveillance crucial to the maintenance of Storyville. The mugshot cards contain detailed information about the arrestee's home, work, and criminal background. Named after French biometricist Alphonse Bertillon, Bertillon cards offer a wealth of physical information through a system of detailed bodily measurements. In this chapter, I situate these objects found in the Orleans Parish police department archives within photography's emergence as a crucial technology of policing in the latter half of the nineteenth century to detail how they center both geography and the body within visual economies of criminality. I read these criminal records as vital to imagining and policing the internal structure of Storyville as one of surveillance and geographic containment. At the same time, I argue that the criminal information acts as a caption for the photographs, offering a context to reread these visual documents in a manner that exceeds the historical impositions of the archive.

Throughout this project, I have tried to consider the ethical demands of accounting for women whose legibility is often overdetermined by narratives of waywardness, criminality, family, and respectability, to name just a few. The women found within these archives and narratives of the district are often already presumed included or excluded from specific categories of historical legibility, recalling Hortense

Spillers' crucial warning that "there is no easy way for the agents buried beneath them to come clean."⁹ Engagements with such disparate and diverse archives does not always generate reparative or alternative readings that are immediately apparent. In such instances, when the archive has proven, quoting Hartman, "to be a death sentence," I have attempted to account for and think through the limits of the archive in telling the stories of the marginalized and silenced women in this history.

Lost Bodies/Found Objects, a Reading of the Archive

The title "Lost Bodies/Found Objects" characterizes an overarching engagement with and conceptualization of the constellation of archives and ephemera examined throughout this project. At the same time, it describes a more general relationship between archival construction and use in the production of knowledge, writing histories, or recovering what has been considered lost or obscured. In drawing upon these two concepts, I invoke the concern for *lost bodies* central to the history of trans-Atlantic slavery and the impulse toward *found objects* (*objet trouvés*) in certain art practices and archival hermeneutics. As has been the imperative of many scholars in the field of black studies—M. NourbeSe Philip, Hartman, and Christina Sharpe, to name a few—the incalculable and, often, unaccounted men, women, and children brought across the Atlantic are sought throughout the documents and histories of Western modernity. At the same time, the *found object* of aesthetic and art historical practices describes, in part, a way to consider the potentiality of objects whose utility is imagined to be singular (i.e.

⁹ Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17 (1987): 65.

Marcel Duchamp's *Urinal*, 1917). By thinking these two concepts alongside one another, I am interested in the moments when the consideration of found objects may illuminate the potentiality of what has been considered lost and where their traces might reemerge.

For this project, the notion of *lost bodies* emerges as an archival problematic most influentially between two essays published within a year of one another in 1986 and 1987, respectively. The first, Allan Sekula's "The Body and the Archive," traces photographic portraiture's transformation from an expression of bourgeois sentiment to its technological institutionalization by the police across Western Europe and the United States. Photography's proliferation as an information technology to identify criminals and track recidivism results in what Sekula describes as the advent of the "criminal body" within the larger "social body," relying on photography's evidentiary realism to silence the criminal who would claim innocence in the face of their imprisonment.¹⁰ In this moment of technological development and institutionalization, the individual bodies identified as criminal are socially undifferentiated and absorbed into a sort of Hobbesian Leviathan, described by Sekula as the "shadow archive."¹¹ In the second of the two

¹⁰ Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," *October* 39 (1986): 6-7.

¹¹ Sekula offers this comparison in footnote 8 of the text when he states: "The theoretical ground for the construction of a specifically bourgeois subject can be found in Hobbes's *Leviathan*. . . . Furthermore, the frontispiece to *Leviathan* took the form of an allegorical portrait. The commonwealth or state, is literally embodied in the figure of the sovereign, an 'artificial man,' whose body itself is composed of a multitude of bodies, all of whom have ceded a portion of their individual power to the commonwealth in order to prevent civil war that would inevitably result from their unchecked pursuit of 'natural' appetites. Thus, the 'body' of the Leviathan is a kind of pressure vessel, containing explosive natural forces. The image is perhaps the first attempt to diagram the social field visually.

essays, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” Hortense Spillers moves a segment of her formidable analysis through historiographies of slavery that center around the brutalization of the enslaved body to show how such narratives overemphasize the black male body under the most severe conditions of torture and violence. In this section of the essay, Spillers uses the term “pornotroping” to characterize the “violent reduction of body to flesh” experienced by the enslaved aboard the slave ship and continuously on the plantation.¹²

The term *lost bodies* in Sekula’s and Spillers’s work describes a structural and theoretical problematic in the relationship between “bodies” and “archives.” Bodies in this relationship are the raw, fungible, and quantifiable material of data collection in slave economies, capitalism, the social and human sciences, and what we come to know throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first as biometric data. The body as an object of study had to be rethought, recalculated, and, necessarily, seen in the aggregate to appease the logic and efficiency of these systems of knowledge. As such, both Sekula and Spillers describe a process of absencing that occurs to the body—for Spillers it is a violence enabled by an originary theft and for Sekula it is a “silencing” in the face of visual evidence—upon entry into the archive—that amounts to a moment of epistemological certainty as property, cargo, slave, criminal, or abnormal. I argue that

As such, it has a definite, if usually indirect, resonance in nineteenth-century attempts to construct visual metaphors for the conceptual models of the new social sciences” (7-8). I will return to this passage in greater detail in chapter four.

¹² Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe.”

their work describes a historical continuity between the archives of slavery and those of policing (or those that index similar forms of management). The district itself emerges as a spatial expression of the confinement and management of human life that we come to see in the archive, reproducing a necessity to rethink the status of the body when undertaking archival research.

The term *found objects* first emerged in the research for this project while I was reading Susan Sontag's 1996 introduction to *Bellocq: Photographs from Storyville, the Red-Light District of New Orleans*, the second edition of the Museum of Modern Art exhibit catalog that accompanied his original 1970 exhibition at the museum in New York city. Sontag notes of Bellocq's photographs, "So much about these pictures affirms current taste: the low-life material; the near mythic provenance (Storyville); the informal, anti-art look, which accords with the virtual anonymity of his sitters; their status as *objet trouvés*, and a gift from the past."¹³ In the third chapter, I argue that Bellocq's photographs act in a manner similar to traditional understandings of found objects in twentieth-century art insofar as they inspire and shape a range of new aesthetic objects (i.e. literary and filmic texts). Following Sontag and the specific examples discussed throughout the third chapter, I am also interested in how the concept of *found objects* works in relationship to a range of other archival materials engaged throughout this project.

¹³ E. J. Bellocq, *Bellocq: Photographs from Storyville, the Red-Light District of New Orleans*, eds. Lee Friedlander, Susan Sontag and John Szarkowski, New York: Random House, 1996, 7.

The theoretical and material concerns for *found objects* in relation to Storyville come from my belief that, even amidst the limits or violence of the archive, a trace emerges that speaks beyond the limits of its own historical encumbrances. In this regard, I attempt to follow the theoretical frameworks offered by contemporary scholars and artists who have returned to the archive to consider how that which appear as limits within the documents and archives might actually engender new modes of recovery.

Chapter 1

“Three Encounters with the Veil: Storyville and the Question of Home”

“It is thus, in this domiciliation, in this house arrest, that archives take place. The dwelling, this place where they dwell permanently, marks this institutional passage from the private to the public, which does not always mean from the secret to the nonsecret.”

Jacques Derrida, “Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression”¹

“My discussions are underwritten by transatlantic slavery because this history heightens the meanings of traditional arrangements, which rest on a crucial geographic paradigm, human captivity.”

Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*²

“The trouble with paternalists is that they want to make impossibly profound changes, and they choose impossibly superficial means for doing so.”

Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*³

“It may not have been a community, but it was a place.”

Toni Morrison, *Sula*⁴

W.E.B. Du Bois, in an 1897 article for the *Atlantic Monthly*, distilled into a single question the burden of being black in white America: “How does it feel to be a problem?”⁵ The question and the worldly distinction it illuminated—that of white and black worlds—became the foundation of Du Bois’s most well-known contribution to the

¹ Jacques Derrida, “Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression,” *Diacritics*, 25, no. 2, (Summer, 1995): 10.

² Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006, Print.

³ Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, New York: Vintage, 1992 [1961], Print, 271.

⁴ Toni Morrison, *Sula*, New York: Vintage, 1974, 166.

⁵ W.E.B Du Bois, “Strivings of the Negro People,” *W.E.B. Du Bois and The Sociological Imagination: A Reader, 1897-1914*, ed. Robert A. Wortham, Waco: Baylor University Press, 2009, 71-78.

fields of Sociology, African American History, and, what would come to be known sixty years later as, Black Studies: the color line. In the wake of emancipation, Du Bois argues, the visible chains of chattel were quickly replaced by a host of widely experienced yet increasingly invisible impediments to the “toiling, sweating black man.”⁶ In this 1897 article, and again six years later as the opening essay in *The Souls of Black Folk*, the color line and its complimentary metaphor of “the veil” represent a major shift in post-reconstruction thought.⁷ The articulation of the color line insists on the discrepancy between the claims of emancipation and the lived experience of black Americans, providing a nuanced account of how race informs structures and experiences of inequality. As such, the conceptual framework has been taken up by countless scholars to trace its numerous manifestations in the post-emancipation United States.

Fittingly, the notion of the color line has been a foundational formulation for recent historiographical work on Storyville, with historians such as Alecia P. Long and Emily Epstein Landau pointing to the legal establishment of the color line through the 1897 supreme court case of *Plessy v Ferguson*.⁸ Long explains, “I use the expression ‘sex across the color line’ to remind readers that in late-nineteenth-century New Orleans race was being constructed in even the most intimate details of people’s lives.”⁹ Throughout the text, Long invokes the racial ambiguities regularly referenced around the light-skinned Mr. Plessy’s failed attempt to achieve legal integration, and brings these

⁶ Ibid., 78.

⁷ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, New York: Penguin, 1996 [1903].

⁸ Suspiciously, neither Long nor Landau quotes Du Bois when discussing the color line in New Orleans and Storyville.

⁹ Long, *Great Southern Babylon*, 6-7.

uncertainties to Storyville’s sexual economy. Conversely, Landau makes use of the term “sex across the color line” to describe early attempts by moral reformers to close the district. “While they were unsuccessful, we may see in their efforts an elaboration of white supremacist ideology: they associated immorality with unruly people of color and sex across the color line—even within the red-light district—and so inscribed race in ‘reform.’”¹⁰ Though both Long and Landau make space in their work to note the roots of sex across the color line in enslavement, Landau’s use of the term positions the notion of the color line within a longer genealogy around white fears of miscegenation. In the context of the district, both scholars engage the idea of the color line and its intimate manifestations to paint a complex portrait of the way understandings of race and sexual commerce shaped the New Orleans vice district. At the same time, as I show throughout the chapter, “sex across the color line,” even when deployed as a potentially resistant formulation to fixed racial categories and white supremacy coded as reform, often results in little more than a method to illuminate the privileges accorded to white men within the social choreographies of zones of interracial intimacy. In other words, the color line is refigured as an erotic zone of encounter, but only insofar as it reaffirms white patriarchal mobility against women’s confinement to both the home and Storyville. Following the theoretical openings provided by Long’s and Landau’s uses of the color line, I am interested in returning to Du Bois’s original formulation to consider how race comes to shape aspects of Storyville beyond its sexual practices.

¹⁰ Landau, *Spectacular Wickedness*, 160.

Du Bois's insights offer a useful vocabulary for thinking beyond traditional attempts to frame Storyville through a reductive sexualizing of the color line. While Du Bois's work offers an entryway to thinking about the complex interactions of race, class, and gender in the district, in this chapter I hope to extend this line of thinking through the example of Storyville and the women who worked and lived within its boundaries. To this end, I use Du Bois's understanding of the color line and the veil to frame a historiographical approach to both the creation of Storyville and the organization of commercial and domestic life within it. By situating the emergence of the district within New Orleans's broader economic expansion and offering a close reading of the racialized language of Sidney Story's vice ordinances, I show how the color line offers a generative framework to consider how vice is positioned as equivalent to blackness and framed as a threat to whiteness and its privileges. In the latter half of the chapter, I turn to the two main spaces in which prostitution was offered in the district—high-end “mansions” and low-rent “cribs”—to consider how the structures of home are repurposed in various Storyville establishments to create both commercial and historical legibility. The distinction between mansions and cribs in the district reproduces a material and historical manifestation of the veil from within which we may position Storyville's cribs and the population of (predominantly black) women forced to work in these spaces. By situating the crib and the figure of the prostitute—a figure Du Bois treats with contempt—within Du Bois's sociological and historical thinking, I argue that in the anti-domestic structure of the crib we find a theory of life within the veil that

engenders modes of historical and narrative recovery that do not rely on the restitution of the family or father.

Lewd & Abandoned, or The Cartographies of Confinement

Encounter I: In Al Rose's description of Storyville's layout and the unfolding of its history, he steps back from the text to pause over a hypothetical tourist:

Perhaps we should now draw a veil of modesty around the movements of our perambulating tourist. He might well continue along Basin Street toward the plush mansions described in the Blue Book—the Arlington, Mahogany Hall, and others “down the line.” Or he might turn to his left down Iberville Street and its cribs. Let him continue on his sybaritic way unaccompanied, as we resume our own more sober tour in search of not pleasure but a better understanding of what Storyville was and what it would become.¹¹

Sidney Story submitted his original vice ordinance, Ordinance No. 13, 032, C.S., to the New Orleans city council on January 29th, 1897. Story's now infamous law proposed the drastic reduction and containment of legal prostitution in the city, constituting what the city record referred to as the “restricted district.” With the ordinance, Story outlined for the city council what the new vice district meant to both the law and the citizens of New Orleans. To this end, the ordinance addressed who would be subject to the new laws regarding prostitution, geographic and residential

¹¹ Rose, *Storyville, New Orleans*, 74-5.

restrictions, zoning requirements for the types of buildings and domiciles allowed in the district, expanded powers of eviction for both landlords and the mayor, limited public movement by women in the district, and the terms of fines and imprisonment for those failing to act in accordance with the new laws. In this regard, the provisions of the ordinance were largely generic and did not stray radically from populist views around the protection of the family unit, private property, or legal management of public space. Despite the resistance of moral reformers and some property owners, Storyville came into being through the nineteenth-century logic of public and private spheres and the threats posed by the sins of vice to both.

By the end of the nineteenth-century, largely white populations in the United States found themselves contending with (at minimum) three population-based panics: racial integration, disease, and sexuality. Well-documented concerns around recently emancipated black men and women entering the social and economic realms led to forms of control and regulation that had previously been assumed under slavery. With the burgeoning crisis of prostitution and “white slavery,” Long argues that the proximity of African Americans allowed these fears to coalesce seamlessly. She notes, “Prostitutes, like African Americans as a class, were considered by many to be coterminous with the presence of disease, particularly venereal disease.”¹² Thus, forms of sex and sexuality, both intimately tied to familial and moral concerns, distinguished between what needed to be guarded (white women’s virtue), reproductive duties (white male), and the vilified (sex workers and persons of color). These concerns around race and sexuality offered

¹² Long, *Great Southern Babylon*, 114.

both a body and set of behaviors responsible for the spread of disease in urban areas. While these three were by no means the only areas that produced anxiety for many propertied whites at the time, they manifest specifically in the emerging concerns around prostitution and vice districts.

As noted especially in the work of early sociologists, the rapidly changing social terrain of urban spaces in the U.S. challenged familiar values and conventions. As Priscilla Wald points out, many of the panics were concerned with the maintenance of the white, hetero-normative family structure.¹³ This unit was often placed—implicitly and explicitly—in opposition to figures seen as embodying such threats. Wayward women were one such population pitted against the family unit.¹⁴ As Wald notes, “Historians of the period have documented a preoccupation with female sexuality, which they attribute to generalized anxiety about rapid social change...Prostitution certainly existed in the city, but it was not a new threat, and urgent denunciations of the oldest profession responded more to the perceived dangers of a new social organization than to

¹³ Priscilla Wald, *Contagious: Cultures, Carriers, and the Outbreak Narrative*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2008, Print. Wald’s work, in its entirety, offers an extremely useful framing for the complex political and social situation that Storyville simultaneously comes into and emerges from. While her work does not directly engage the district, I find her study of contagion narratives to be an indispensable framework through which to consider the spatial and political logics of the New Orleans vice district.

¹⁴ Wald goes on to argue about the risk of venereal disease to the family specifically: “From the pages of medical journals, health professionals decried the threats of extramarital sexuality posed to the family, the institution of marriage, and the nation. They medicalized the threats by casting them in the terms of venereal disease, which interfered with the reproduction of white-middle class citizens.” *Ibid.*, 86.

an upsurge in the trade.”¹⁵ One such solution to the “problem” of mobility was the emergence of carefully delineated vice districts.

Vice districts in the United States and across Europe offered legal solutions to containing and managing the fears around deregulated interracial spaces, miscegenation, immorality, disease, and sexual deviance. Segregating and confining individuals and behaviors to these neighborhoods protected *white civil-society* from integration and perversion (even as these spaces were often kept for their entertainment).¹⁶ Long notes, “[P]hysical segregation was a popular solution to a range of social problems at the turn of the century, including the spread of disease, race relations, and prostitution.”¹⁷ Storyville, however, as one such district, reveled in the temptations of this segregation. Jessica Adams goes one step further when she argues “The development of Storyville took place within a national context of sometimes unsuccessful attempts to regulate the geographies of both race and prostitution and, relatedly, of a shift in attitudes toward leisure,” where “leisure” indexes the constitution of economies aimed at men seeking pleasure outside of the home.²² The district offered customers the opportunity to escape

¹⁵ Ibid., 85.

¹⁶ Frank Wilderson, *Red, White and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2010. My use of Wilderson’s notion of “white civil-society” is meant to describe the arrangement of political and social life around the privileges and presumed supremacies of whiteness. Similarly, embedded in this term is Wilderson’s use of the term the “afterlife of slavery” (via Saidiya Hartman). While my analysis and use of this term departs from Wilderson in several key ways, Wilderson’s use of the term draws a through line from slavery to postbellum social orders that is particularly helpful in conceptualizing my own work.

¹⁷ Long, *Great Southern Babylon*, 103.

²² Jessica Adams, *Wounds of Returning: Race, Memory, and Property on the Postslavery Plantation*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007, 42.

into a space of taboo with all the anonymity that deviance desires. Storyville thus operated as both a site of sexual excess and one of containment, resulting in the creation of both new geographies and legal subjects.

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Story's ordinance maximized the economic potential of vice, while managing its geography so as not to negatively impact other sources of capital for the city's elite. The twinned imperative of Story's vice ordinance understood the management and regulation of women's bodies as a crucial component to such an enterprise. Story wrote in Section 1 of the ordinance: "Be it ordained by the common Council of the City of New Orleans, That from the first of October, 1897 it shall be unlawful for any public prostitute or woman notoriously abandoned to lewdness to occupy, inhabit, live or sleep in any house, room or closet."¹⁸ The language of the ordinance identified individuals colloquially known throughout the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century as *wayward women*, offering segregation as the operative mechanism to partition the moral improprieties of vice from the respectability of the home and valuation of private property.¹⁹ The scope of Story's January 1897 ordinance, in identifying the "public prostitute or woman notoriously abandoned to lewdness," targeted women of all races, but offered little direction for spatial arrangements within the district.

¹⁸ Ordinance No. 13, 032, C.S.

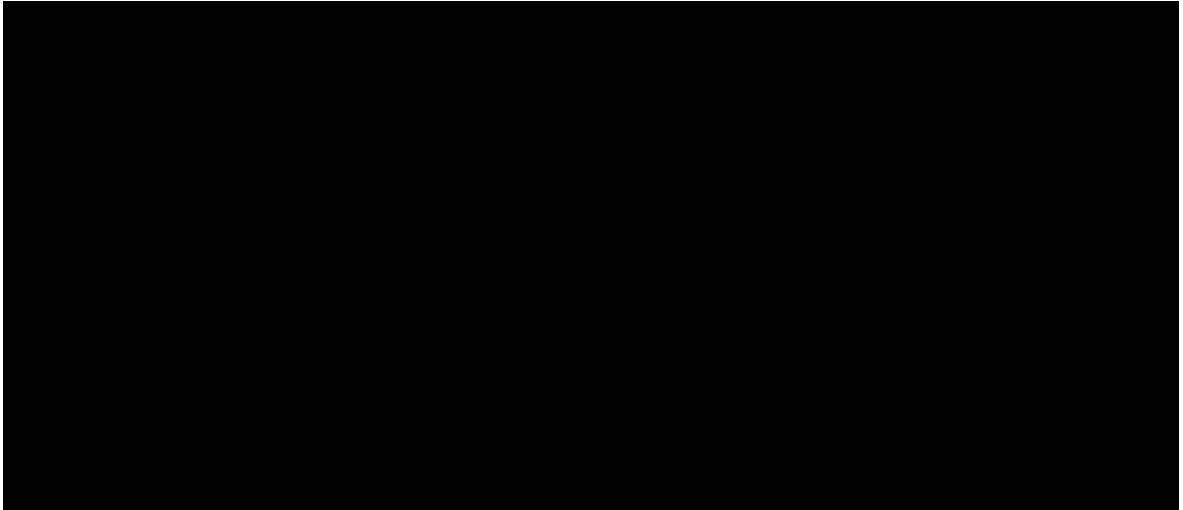
¹⁹ Barbara Antoniazzi, *The Wayward Woman: Progressivism, Prostitution, and Performance in the United States, 1888-1917*, New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2014.

Al Rose opens his widely read, yet much maligned study of the district: “[I]t was not simply a ‘house’ or two or an area of the city within which prostitution and associated vice flourished [...] It was an area, carefully defined by law, outside of which prostitutes and other lewd and abandoned women were not permitted to live or work.”²⁰ The pronounced presence of Storyville shows it was not merely an out of the way neighborhood, but rather a district which found itself at the center of a diverse and growing economy. Historical and fictional accounts of the district all depict a neighborhood whose economic expansion was versatile and complex. Nestled between opium dens and the French Quarter, Storyville housed residents and a laboring class that constituted a rare community in a country still mired in the uncertainty and ambivalence of emancipation. In her book *For Business & Pleasure: Red-Light Districts and the Regulation of Vice, 1890-1933*, Mara L. Keire describes the heterogeneous residential and social geography of the district in which “Blacks and whites lived next to Asians; immigrants worked side-by-side with native prostitutes. The diversity did not indicate either equality or integration. Segregation by reputability was color blind, but color was integral to calculating district hierarchies.”²¹ The Southern, urban port boasted a cosmopolitan atmosphere at the turn of the century that has since been picked apart to

²⁰ Storyville, New Orleans, 1. There is a sense in which Rose’s study, the first dedicated entirely to Storyville, embodies both the problems with historiographical studies of the district and the meticulous attention to detail that such a study requires. In this sense, I engage Rose’s text as one might engage an encyclopedia. I respect and value the content as a point of reference, but I also try to reflect on the types of cultural and historical narratives his work engenders through its claim to tell the “truth” of the district.

²¹ Mara L. Keire, *For Business & Pleasure: Red-Light Districts and the Regulation of Vice in the United States, 1890-1933*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010, 53.

construct other historical narratives.²² Containing a mix of white southern elites, immigrant laborers, black men and women, and numerous others, stories of segregated brothels and black displacement are often washed over in favor of the more comfortable accounts of the district's role in New Orleans's public history, invoking the attitude of *laissez les bons temps rouler*.



**Image 1: Map showing the shrinking vice district in New Orleans.
(Excerpted from Alecia P. Long's *Great Southern Babylon*.)**

In existence for only twenty years, Storyville was the last and smallest iteration of New Orleans' vice districts. Contrary to popular accounts of rampant lasciviousness throughout the city, it had long reacted conservatively to these fears and used numerous legal measures to shrink the spaces of legal vice over nearly 75 years. As Long shows in the above triptych (Image 1), between roughly 1857 and 1897, the vice district of New Orleans underwent two drastic reductions. Panel A represents the space of legalized sex work from approximately 1850-90, while Panel B shows the seven years leading up to

²² Ned Sublette, *The World That Made New Orleans: From Spanish Silver to Congo Square*, Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2008, Print.

the passing of the Storyville Ordinances, with the final depicting Storyville. Long notes of Story's strategy, "Concerns about residential property values and the city's broad economic development played crucial roles in generating the Storyville Ordinances."²³ The hope of economic expansion at the end of the nineteenth century was met squarely with the growing concerns around racial integration, disease, and sexuality. This posed even more of a problem for a city such as New Orleans, whose identity and draw had largely been built around the disregard for normative social concerns.

The sixteen-square block area that would become the Storyville vice district had been a low-rent neighborhood comprised almost entirely of African American families. The redistricting of vice in the city quickly emerged as a boon for slum lords in the area. Long recalls the reversal of fortunes for property owner Bernardo Galvez Carbajal, "Before passage of the Story Ordinances, both of Carbajal's Bienville Street doubles had been rented to African American working men who lived in the houses with their families. Their tenants paid him sixteen dollars per month. By the time [*L'Hote v the City of New Orleans*] actually went to trial, some of those tenants had been replaced by prostitutes paying substantially higher rents."²⁴ Landlords such as Carbajal, some of whose profits "more than doubled," made way for the influx of new residents through the displacement of African American families and others living in this low-rent district of town. The spatial reorganization necessitated by the district's formation presents a complicated and vexed image of communal and domestic space after the passage of the

²³ Long, *Great Southern Babylon*, 109.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 119-20.

1897 ordinance. In this sense, little is known about the day-to-day lives of women in the district. Historians of the district have recently intervened by pointing to the intersections of capital and social life, alluding to the ubiquity of *du jour* segregation that enabled the protection of the former, while shaping the contours of the latter.

The debates over the city's direction often centered on economic ventures and the potential effects of brothels and other sites of vice on surrounding sites of potential capital. In a manner that attempted to combine these concerns, Story's proposed ordinance called upon his largely superficial knowledge of both vice districts in major European cities and the political landscape of New Orleans at the dawn of the twentieth century.²⁵ Following earlier vice ordinances, the district was composed of several features that made it distinct at the time: first, the district was subject to taxation; second, there were no requirements for medical tests, differing greatly from most European models, but confinement to the district was nevertheless insisted upon because of fears around the spread of disease. Finally, residential restrictions for sex workers made it illegal for them to reside not only in domiciles outside of the district, but also in certain areas within the district (i.e. first floor of buildings, non-segregated houses,

²⁵ Historians such as Long have cast doubt on the claims that Story was inspired by vice districts and their legal crafting. Long seems to be searching for clarity and accuracy in this statement, but I am inclined to reference Story's relationship to European vice districts because they serve as an important counter-point to the emergence of vice districts in the U.S. (This includes Storyville and those in major cities such as San Francisco, New York, and Chicago.) *Ibid.*, 111-2.

etc.).²⁶ Storyville's spatial arrangement thus solved two problems: the protection of property and the necessary management of bodies.

Segregation and confinement offered the technique through which the "problem" could be isolated, but still enjoyed and profited from when necessary. Long elaborates on this relationship of isolation and profit, "The Storyville solution combined ideas about the protection of private property, and the protection of respectable white women, with ideas about the imperatives and privileges of male sexuality, especially for white men, and grafted them onto the city's geographic grid."²⁷ The cartography of Storyville thus indexed much more than a mere neighborhood. Instead, it produced a cartography of racial and sexual capital premised on a relationship to private property in which confinement was paramount. Even as all women, regardless of race, working in the sex trade—in addition to other persons of color—were subject to the same legal restrictions, the concept of vice was inextricably linked to racial and sexual taboos.

While there may have been a bustling and diverse social system, constantly changing legal codes restricting Storyville forced the district to constantly refine the laws to enhance the district's effectiveness in operating as a site of containment for women working in the district. Any woman known to work in the district would be arrested if discovered living outside of Storyville's boundaries. To be a sex-worker under these legal conditions meant that one's bodily movements were still of interest to the law, even as previously condemned actions were technically legal. Similarly, the city

²⁶ Ibid., 111-13.

²⁷ Ibid., 115.

of New Orleans was constantly trying to parse how they could simultaneously confine *all* women to the district, while also ensuring protection against the inevitable emergence of interracial spaces.

Despite noting earlier in the chapter the ways in which the rise of racial segregation within the district emerged quite naturally, historians of the district argue that the diverse workings of race and segregation were not merely ad hoc arrangements. Politicians and moral reformers of the city often pushed for stricter enforcement of segregation, both inside and outside of the district. Insofar as the business side of vice districts was concerned with the attraction of customers through its illicit offerings, the social and moral aspects were often what concerned the city's most influential citizens.

Story's original ordinance was scrutinized and reworked after its initial proposal and ratification in early 1897. What would only officially be recognized by the city in legal terms as a secondary district was originally conceived as an amendment in the months after the bill's original passage. This first concrete expression of these fears was enacted through revisions of Ordinance No. 13, 485 on July 6, 1897:

BE IT ORDAINED by the Common Council of the City of New Orleans, That Section 1, of Ordinance 13,032 C.S., Be and the same is *hereby amended as follows*: From and after the first of October, 1897, it shall be unlawful for any prostitute or woman notoriously abandoned to lewdness, to occupy, inhabit, live or sleep in any house, room or closet, situated without the following limits, viz:...^{2nd}: --*And from the upper side of Perdido Street to the lower side of Gravier Street, and from the river side of Franklin Street to the lower or wood side of Locust Street*, provided that nothing herein shall be so construed as to authorize any lewd woman to occupy a house, room or closet in any portion of the city. [Italics mine]

The latter revision to the Story ordinance was implemented with the understanding that the secondary, “Uptown District,” would be used to enact racial segregation within the city’s vice district. This later amendment to the vice ordinance created what has been referred to as “Black Storyville,” though as Rose notes in the appendices of *Storyville, New Orleans*, the enactment of this provision “was held in abeyance until passage of Ordinance 4118 in 1917.”²⁸

However, even this district was called into question following the court case *L’Hote v City of New Orleans* (1897). George L’Hote, a businessman and New Orleans resident, protested the city’s new vice boundaries arguing that the proximity of the new district to both his home on North Liberty Street and his adjacent lumber yard would be disproportionately affected by the new residents and their clientele.²⁹ L’Hote, like many other New Orleanians, had been expressly in favor of redrawing the boundaries of vice and prostitution—until, that is, the new vice district butted up against his home and business, prompting him to echo the moralistic and racialized rhetoric of the time. The plaintiff’s argument in court centered around the threats of unregulated interracial spaces, the damage the district’s presence could do to property values (outside of the district), and the harm caused to adjacent neighborhoods that had been traditionally zoned for schools and residential buildings occupied almost entirely by families. L’Hote eventually lost his legal case, but the intent was not lost on the city’s politicians and

²⁸ Rose, *Storyville, New Orleans*, 193.

²⁹ Long, *Great Southern Babylon*, 121-28.

police forces. The “Uptown District” never rooted itself in the way that Storyville did, and was largely a non-entity until the gesture to actualize racial segregation in the city’s vice laws was officially enacted in 1917.

In the final days of Storyville, the New Orleans city council made one final attempt to save the district from closure. The council believed that the legal codification of racial segregation would quiet the ardent condemnation of moral reformers and stave off the inevitable intervention of the federal government. With these factors in mind, on February 7, 1917 the city council voted to pass Ordinance No. 4118, C.S. and made the final amendment to the original 1897 ordinance:

Section 1. From and after the 1st day of March, 1917, it shall be unlawful for any prostitute or woman notoriously abandoned to lewdness, *of the colored or black race*, to occupy, inhabit, live or sleep in any house, room or closet, situated outside of the following limits, viz: from the upper side of Perdido Street to the lower side of Gravier Street, and from the river side of Franklin Street to the lower or wood side of Locust Street. [*Italics mine*]

The council’s amendment to the original ordinance officially created two vice districts in the city from March of 1917 until officers from the city’s recently established Naval base forcibly dispersed residents from both areas in July of that same year. The intent of the ordinance was seemingly two-fold, to both police the women thought to be working inside the district, yet living outside of its defined boundaries, and to separate

“colored or black women” from their white counterparts.³⁰ While the former was nothing new as those concerned with the district’s borders were constantly seeking new measures to police the women of Storyville, this move followed the intensifying views around race and the role of gendered segregation that underwrote alderman Story’s original reforms. Responses to the latency of racial segregation within the laws governing Storyville and its discernable manifestations have often fallen victim to the linearity of historical time. Or to put it another way, racial segregation is often imagined through the legal archives as only affecting the district within the final four months of its existence.

At the same time, the constantly shifting requirements and codes governing Storyville and its satellite district (the extent of whose operation is difficult to discern) often say less about the district itself than the world that created it. As Jessica Adams argues, “The Story ordinance was intended to simultaneously protect white private property and white female virtue from contamination by ‘vice.’ The geography it specified spoke not only to the lack of political influence within the community of color it occupied but also to the prevailing attitude among whites that blackness was a signifier of sexual depravity. To be a prostitute of color was to fulfill stereotypes of black sexuality; to be a white prostitute was to be, on some level, black.”³¹ Adams points out that the Story ordinance’s constantly changing legal reach indicates a much broader

³⁰ I choose to quote Ordinance No. 4118, C.S. when invoking the role or presence of “colored or black women” throughout this chapter, because of the complicated ways in which categories of race and gender are produced both legally and socially. I address these intersections in greater detail in the second chapter of the dissertation.

³¹ Adams, *Wounds of Returning*, 38.

contempt and concern for an unmanaged and uncontained blackness. In this sense, despite the chronology of these juridical instances of segregation—the initial segregation of vice and wayward women to the district, then the segregation of “colored or black women” from white women—the latent enactment of the latter belies the extent to which racialization shaped the very language and spatial arrangement of the district from its earliest days.

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Story’s original ordinance, while in part consumed with the organization of space and protection of private property, necessarily generated a series of legal categories through which *known* women could now be interpolated by the law.³² The legal and social categories of *wayward*, *lewd*, *abandoned*, and *prostitute* all projected a sense of impropriety that could be detected in a woman’s behaviors, habits, or outward appearance, from the clothes she wore to the color of her skin. For women who were forced to occupy such derided positions in New Orleans and beyond, the law became one avenue through which such violent appellations could remove the particular in favor of the universal. To put it another way, narratives of waywardness did not ever question the epistemological groundings of their own categorical definitions. Sections 1 and 3, respectively, of the Story ordinance demonstrate this veritable *en masse* identification and partition of the particular subjects before the law.

³² See: Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes toward an Investigation,” *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001, Print, 85-126; and Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, New York: Routledge, Print, 1993.

Section 1. Be it ordained by the common Council of the City of New Orleans, That from the first of October, 1897 it shall be unlawful for any public prostitute or woman notoriously abandoned to lewdness to occupy, inhabit, live or sleep in any house, room or closet situated without the following limits: South side of Customhouse street from Basin to Robertson street, east side of Robertson street from Customhouse to Saint Louis street, from Robertson to Basin street.

Provided that no lewd women shall be permitted to occupy a house, room or closet on St. Louis street. Provided further, That nothing herein shall be so construed as to authorize any lewd women to occupy a house, room or closet in any portion of the city...

Section 3. That public prostitutes or notoriously lewd and abandoned women are forbidden to stand upon the sidewalks in front of or near the premises they may occupy, or at the alleyway, door or gate of such premises or to occupy the steps thereof, or to accost, call or stop any person passing by or to walk up and down the side walks, or to stroll about the city streets indecently attired, or in other respects so as to behave in public as to occasion scandal, or disturb and offend the peace and good morals of the people.

In the language of Story's original 1897 bill, Ordinance 13, 032, C.S., the new laws regarding prostitution targeted women through the language of morality and sexual excess. The restrictions on domestic spaces and geography, as well as bodily movements, echoed the logics of contagion and containment (as described earlier via Wald). At the same time, we see in the language and structure of these laws the implicit attempts to naturalize narratives that presuppose the aforementioned legal categories.

Etymologically speaking, to be *abandoned* is to either perpetrate or experience the act of being "forsaken, deserted; or cast off," while also being considered "reckless,

uninhibited; devoted to something evil or immoral.”³³ The double gesture of the term suggests an inability and unwillingness to be a part of civil society and its sanctioned units (i.e. the family), perhaps imagined through such identifying categories as criminal or immoral. *Lewdness*, on the other hand, has a much clearer connection to sexual immorality, specifically, and sex work, generally. The term finds its origins in both labor and sexuality. An early usage of the word describes an individual who is “worthless,” “good for nothing,” “unprincipled,” and “ill conditioned.” In a latter parlance, concerning its specifically sexual connotations, it describes one who is both “lascivious” and “unchaste.” In the eyes of the law, the women who embodied these characteristics had to be both contained and managed because, while their identification as partaking in the sex trade showed their immorality and unfitness for society, the narratives offered by the law itself defined these individuals as fundamentally flawed persons prior to their *fall* to prostitution.

Prostitution and vice were undoubtedly major concerns for cities throughout the United States and much of Western Europe in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries. Yet, influential political figures and private citizens did not consider these immoral behaviors as the sole threats to such tightly held privileges as whiteness, respectability, and purity. Story’s ordinance reproduced the fears and desires for managing what Sarah Jane Cervenak calls the “wandering” of gendered, raced, and

³³ Oxford English Dictionary

sexualized subjects.³⁴ The paternalist character of Story's modes of corporeal management are best described by Cervenak when she notes, "[W]andering was criminalized precisely because of its performative figuration as injurious and disorderly."³⁵ Story's rearticulation of broader social concerns around the unchecked movements, or "wandering," of specific individuals emerged in both the idea of the district and the juridical categorizations he employed throughout.

The fears of mobility expressed in this period and Story's vice ordinances are organized around questions of both morality and women's labor. Such a view point is not isolated to the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century, but rather as feminist legal scholar Vicki Schultz asserts, "[C]ourts have assumed women's work interests and identities are shaped exclusively in private realms of life that are independent of and prior to the workworld. This 'pre-labor' market view separates the 'public' world of wage work from the 'private' non-work realms and relegates the formation of gender to the private side. Women develop stable aspirations for traditional or nontraditional employment before they ever begin working or searching for work."³⁶ While Schultz's study of women's labor conditions in the twentieth century is not referencing sex work per se, the idea of a woman "searching for work" outside the home might subtly invoke the narrative of the wandering (fallen) woman. In particular, Schultz's formulation offers

³⁴ Sarah Jane Cervenak, *Wandering: Philosophical Performances of Racial and Sexual Freedom*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2014.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁶ Vicki Schultz, "Women 'Before' the Law: Judicial Stories about Women, Work, and Sex Segregation of the Job," *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott, New York: Routledge, 1992, 299.

us insight into the ways in which the epistemological circumscriptions that enclose women in narratives of immorality and sexual deviance are always already imagined as existing before their institutional articulation. A subject “before” the law is a double articulation in this sense. To be before is to mark both a temporal (prior to) and positional (in front of) relation to the law. While the latter is a question of subjecthood, the former retroactively, even paradoxically, remarks on the individual’s status prior to subjectivization. In other words, to assert that before entering the public sphere governed largely by the law women are always already perpetrating what the law arrives to articulate on their behalf (for example, criminal, deviant, lewd, orphan). In the absence of a home, the space from which one has been “cast off,” such concepts as choice or need can only be imagined as immoral, lewd, or, in some cases, coerced.

Story’s ordinance found both its footing and support by invoking the lewd and abandoned figure of the wayward woman. While the ordinance and its language attempted to cast as wide a net as possible in imagining the women who could fall within such immoral categories, following Adams above, there is also a way the figure who is at once both lewd and abandoned is fundamentally and irreducibly racialized. Saidiya Hartman illustrates this dynamic in her study of black life during slavery and after the event of emancipation. In *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*, she writes:

[W]ith the sequestering and segregating control of black bodies as a species body, permitted under the guise of social rights and facilitated by the regulatory power of the state, resulted in the paradoxical construction of the freed both as self-determining and enormously burdened individuals and as a member of a population whose productivity,

procreation, and sexual practices were fiercely regulated and policed in the interests of an expanding capitalist economy and the preservation of a racial order on which the white republic was founded.³⁷

Hartman articulates the vexed and paternalist nature of the relationship through which the state regarded black life. The conclusion of slavery in New Orleans and across the South presented the receding planter class and burgeoning business class with a fundamental, if not paradoxical, problem: *How to recover from the massive loss of enslaved humans as property, while protecting what remained of their property from the threats of devaluation imposed by the mere presence of unchecked emancipated black men, women, and children.* Hartman shows how slavery's paternalists argued that the violent institution offered a nurturing structure that both disciplined and provided an appropriate place for black men and women within society. During the reconstruction period, however, when the state assumed the paternalist role, the newly emancipated and their descendants were characterized by many as a class of individuals that were "idle" and "indebted [to society]" without ties to home, morality, or purpose.³⁸ The state's constant attempts to manage, contain, and condition freed black men and women mimicked and subsumed the very same relationships experienced under slavery, all the while attempting to espouse the virtues of the familial structure and domestic sphere. In light of such a juxtaposition, it becomes fair to ask, in what other manner does the law regard black life after emancipation if not always already lewd, abandoned, and in need

³⁷ Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*, New York: Oxford UP, 1997, 117.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 125-63.

of regulation? To put it another way, the construction of blackness framed as “How does it feel to be a problem?” is refigured in Hartman’s work as the burdened individuality of freedom.

In opposition to this construction of blackness, Hartman notes the simultaneous valuation of whiteness in both the private and public spheres. “Whiteness was a valuable and exclusive property essential to the integrity of the citizen-subject and the exemplary self-possession of the liberal individual.”³⁹ Whiteness is here constructed as possessing a *positive* social value, as opposed to the *negative* valuation of blackness. Put another way, in the case of both emancipation and Storyville, we come to see how individuals and groups are imagined to equate to “toxic assets” of the paternal state, a term that will not appear in the language of finance until it becomes a common description high-risk debt in the late twentieth century. Within the paternal state’s attempts to construct a definition of whiteness, the notion of toxic or, perhaps more precisely, parasitic subject is combated and kept apart from the properties of whiteness through techniques of corporeal and social management. Therefore, when Hartman refers to freed black men and women in the above excerpt as “a population whose productivity, procreation, and sexual practices were fiercely regulated and policed in the interests of an expanding capitalist economy,” we might also extend the reach of these interventions in the productive and reproductive lives of individuals to account for all subjects produced in opposition to propertied whiteness.

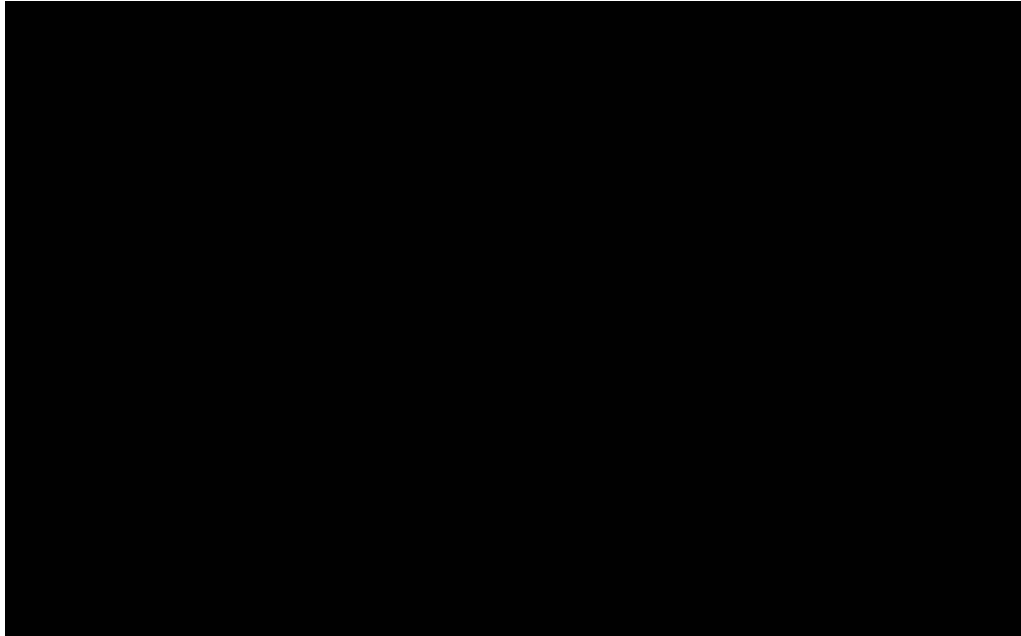
³⁹ Ibid., 119.

The continuity between patriarchal mechanisms of social control from slavery to emancipation also appear in the conceptualization of Story's vice ordinances. If the color line in both Du Bois and Hartman exposes the production of a burdened individualism interdicting a black claim to liberal subjecthood, this formulation reemerges in Story's attempts to maintain the distinctions between the social meanings of blackness and whiteness across racial and class categories for women in the district. Whereas the drawing of vice boundaries shrouded the district in a veil of modesty, the internal organization of the district found yet another instantiation of this partition when it came to the organization of commercial and domestic spaces. While the definitions of and attempts to control vice found their justification in the racialized threats of immorality, lewdness, and unchecked mobility by improper subjects, the district's commercial and domestic organization quickly adopted traditional structures of home to create its own social and commercial hierarchies.

Mansions and the Fantasy of Home

Encounter II: In Alan Lomax's biography of jazz great Jelly Roll Morton, Mister Jelly Roll: The Fortunes of Jelly Roll Morton, New Orleans Creole and "Inventor of Jazz," the jazz pioneer and New Orleans-native describes his early playing days in the brothel mansions of Storyville:

*A screen was put up between me and the trick they were doing for the guests, but I cut a slit in the screen. I had become a sport now, myself, and wanted to see what everyone else was seeing.*⁴⁰



**Image 2: Basin Street “Down the Line” Post Card
(Photographer Unknown).**

As I suggest in the introduction to this chapter, the enclosure of the vice district and its new residents in 1897 did not portend the total abandonment of traditional domestic and social arrangements. As Joanne Meyerowitz has shown in her study of women’s mobility and labor in turn-of-the century Chicago, contrary to fears about women’s complete alienation from the domestic sphere upon entering the public sphere of wage labor, ad hoc domestic arrangements often emerged in place of the traditional family unit:

⁴⁰ Alan Lomax, *Mister Jelly Roll: The Fortunes of Mister Jelly Roll, New Orleans Creole and “Inventor of Jazz,”* New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1950, Print, 127.

Other women who lived apart from family also found themselves in institutions that substituted regulation for family supervision and provided them with food and shelter. In the antebellum South, slave women, sometimes separated from family, had no choice but to live restricted lives in the quarters provided by their owners. And in the North, young women textile workers boarded in company-owned houses under the watchful eyes of company-hired housekeepers. Even some prostitutes stayed sequestered in houses of prostitution. The world of work, like the family economy, limited the independence and public mobility of women.⁴¹

Meyerowitz goes on to argue later in the book that these domestic arrangements offered the “encouragement of peer subcultures” and alternative social arrangements.⁴²

Meyerowitz’s claims about the structures of home and women’s immobility, when she notes “The world of work, like the family economy, limited the independence and public mobility of women,” echoes Hazel Carby’s warning regarding the gendered nature of the veil and its corresponding patriarchal logic. And while these “peer subcultures” assuredly emerged in Storyville’s various commercial and domestic arrangements, I turn now to the high-class mansions for which the district was known to show how they assimilated and repurposed the structures of home and their racial and class logics for financial gain. The discussion of these mansions demonstrates how the adaptation of these structures were largely for the enjoyment of a white male clientele and relied heavily on the equivalence of women’s availability with their immobility.

⁴¹ Joanne J. Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1930*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2-3.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 112.

Storyville's veritable array of attractions were enhanced by their claims of exorbitance and excess. The popular images of Storyville featured a luxurious collection of brothel mansions. The big houses that lined the trolley tracks along Basin Street stood at the foreground of Storyville's unofficial entrance (see Image 2). The district's mansions projected an air of class and respectability, while always managing to hold out the promise of forbidden pleasures. Relying on the name recognition of the owner, operator or madam to serve the role of patriarch or matriarch, the row of houses "Down the Line" contained some of the most well-known brothels and saloons in the district's history. Operated by the likes of Tom Anderson (a local business man-turned-politician and publisher of the infamous *Blue Book*), Lulu White (the famous "Octoroon Madam"), and Josie Arlington (operator of The Arlington), these houses of ill-repute became hallmarks of the district. Figureheads such as Anderson, Arlington, and White were common among noted Storyville establishments. These larger-than-life characters were as much a part of the narrative of their establishments as the goods they pedaled. Anderson was unofficially known as the Mayor of Storyville, even leading some to dub the district "Anderson County."⁴³ Even as Anderson garnered his share of notoriety, the most memorable residents of the district were often the madams with their own elaborate back story or nightly performance. White, for example, would descend an ornate staircase in the main parlor of her Mahogany Hall adorned in diamonds. Performances such as White's catered to the legions of customers seeking entertainment and excitement. Storyville's high-end establishments offered its white clientele access to

⁴³ Rose, *Storyville, New Orleans*.

prostitution and vice with familiarity and panache, while insulating them from the dangers and impurities that necessitated confinement within the district.

At the corner, in the foreground of the “Down the Line” postcard, Anderson’s Annex sits prominently (though he had venues throughout the district). On the left page of the image below (Image 3), an advertisement for Anderson’s Annex was published in a guide to the district known as the *Blue Book*.⁴⁴ Anderson was one of the first publishers of these district guides, and publicity for his establishments were placed prominently throughout. In this ad, Anderson’s Annex was highlighted as unrivaled in modern convenience and entertainment. Anderson’s served as a first stop for all who ventured toward the district via train or on foot up from the French Quarter. The Annex never closed, and even offered “Private dining rooms for the fair sex.” Complete with a “Traditional Darky Orchestra,” the Annex’s promise of an evening (or anytime of the day) of leisure remained in proximity to white male desire. White male customers visiting the Annex could experience all the taboos the district offered. At the same time, the fulfillment of such desire was largely affirmed through the centering of white homosocial spaces of pleasure within the broader expanse of the establishment’s offerings. As Landau notes, white men were largely the intended audience for such advertisements and they would have been drawn to the promise of a women’s dining room and “darky” performers—whether they were white performers corked-up or actual black musicians was unclear—because it signaled a carefully managed space that

⁴⁴ *Blue Book* were small guides for district visitors. They included a number of advertisements, as well as the names and addresses of hundreds of women who lived and worked in the district. I explore them at length in the second chapter of the project.

maintained the appropriate social roles for white women and black men.⁴⁵ Mimicking the grander logic of Storyville, Anderson's café offered anything his patron could desire, but always in its proper place.

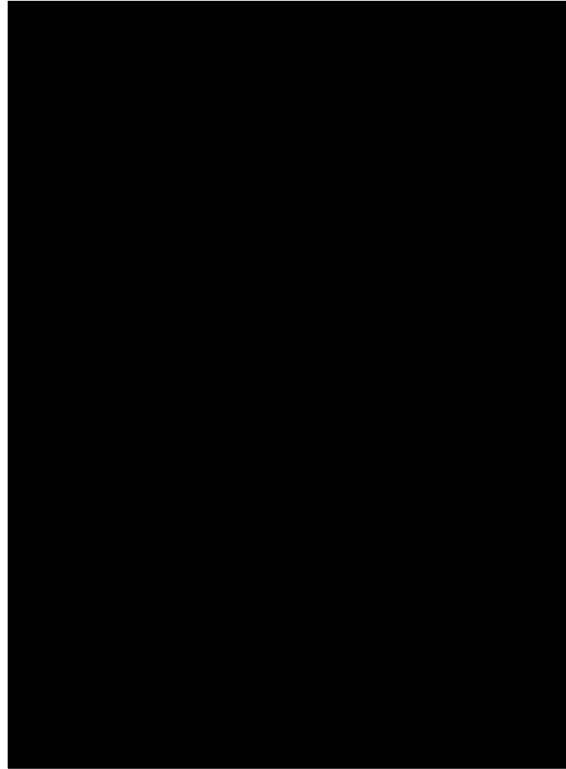


Image 3: Advertisement from *Blue Book* ca. 1912, (Courtesy of Duke University's David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Durham, NC)

⁴⁵ Emily Epstein Landau, "Introduction" in *Guidebooks to Sin: The Blue Books of Storyville, New Orleans*, Pamela D. Arceneaux, New Orleans: The Historic New Orleans Collection, 2017.

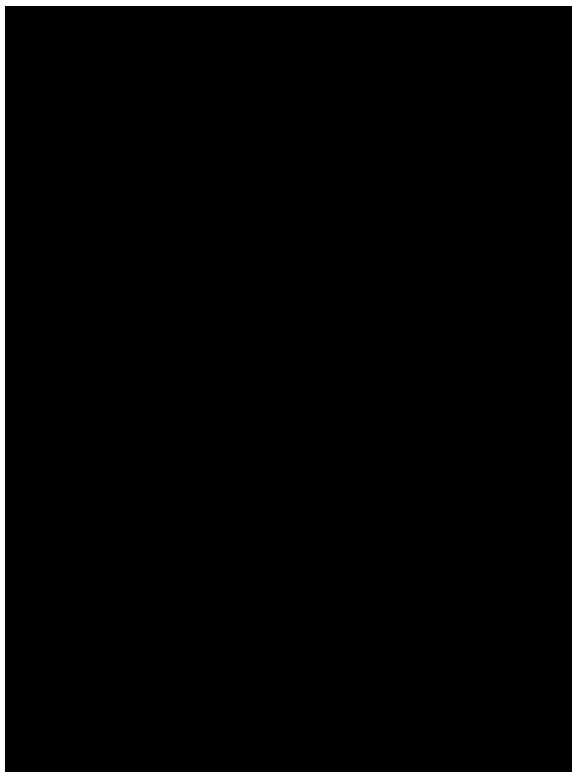


Image 4: Advertisement for The Arlington from *Blue Book* ca. 1912, (Courtesy of Duke University's David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Durham, NC).

While Anderson offered the promise of a controlled space for his patrons the mansions of Storyville all appealed to the comforts and privacies of home, though still attempting to distinguish themselves from their competitors through exaggerated advertisements and appeals to fantasies of opulence. In the narrative descriptions of mansions in *Blue Book* advertisements, like the description of the Arlington displayed above (Image 4), madams would generally highlight the unique and excessive luxuries of their establishment. The Arlington was well-known for its ornate interiors and extravagant design. Like other madams of high-end mansions, Arlington relied on the language of exorbitance and excess to lure her potential customers. Rose described the

Arlington in his description of the Basin Street establishments as follows: “Four stories high, topped with a neo-byzantine cupola, its madam, Josie Arlington...took true pride in its ostentatious splendor.” He continues, “It featured a Turkish Parlor, a Hall of Mirrors, a Japanese Parlor, a Vienna Parlor, an American Parlor, and seemingly countless luxury ‘dens’ and ‘boudoirs,’ in times when luxury was equated with quantities of wall hangings, chandeliers, drapes, rococo furniture, [etc].”⁴⁶ While the only photographs of the Arlington’s exterior were taken after the district’s closure and neglect had wreaked havoc on the façade, the description offered by Rose seems true to the illustration in the above advertisement. As beguiling to the imagination as such a description might be, the architectural and interior design hodgepodge shows that Arlington clearly ascribed to the theory that variety is the spice of life.

Arlington distills the variety of features relayed by Rose in the language of her advertisement:

The Arlington

Nowhere in this country will you find a more complete and thorough sporting house than the ARLINGTON.

Absolutely and unquestionably the most decorative and costly fitted out sporting palace ever placed before the American public...

The Arlington, after suffering a loss of many thousand dollars through a fire, was refurnished and remodeled at an enormous expense, and the mansion is now *a palace fit for a king* [emphasis mine].

The language of the advertisement mimics Anderson’s insofar as it assures its clients of its reputation beyond New Orleans, and even across the country. However, rather than

⁴⁶ Rose, *Storyville, New Orleans*, 80.

center on the assurance of white homosocial spaces as the main offering of her establishment, as is the case in Anderson's, Arlington emphasizes the individual man's place in her mansion through the figure of the monarch. The parlors of brothels such as Arlington's were communal; it is the emphasis on the individual experience of the male guest that subtly shifts from Anderson's emphasis on the segregation of public space to the comforts of private spaces within the brothel.

As noted above, Lulu White often became part of the performance of the mansion herself, catering to the legions of customers seeking entertainment and excitement. In addition to the mixed-race madam's explicit willingness to become part of the nightly performance, White's Mahogany Hall was one of the two most famous "Octoroon mansions" in the district, the other belonging to Willie V. Piazza.⁴⁷

Mahogany Hall, reminiscent of its neighbor the Arlington, was an ornate multi-story residential mansion that offered beautiful interiors and a comfortable décor. In a photograph of Mahogany Hall reputedly taken by Ernest J. Bellocq (Image 5), the beautiful, architectural details of the main parlor can clearly be seen. The inviting entrance could be from any respectable home in New Orleans. At the same time, it was not merely the cozy and luxurious interiors that attracted white customers. Black women with lighter skin who could pass as Octoroon often had their racial identities commoditized by madams like White and Piazza.

⁴⁷ Like the *Blue Book* referenced above, White and Piazza are two of the main figures in the second chapter of the dissertation. I will address both White and Piazza in much greater detail and specificity. They are mentioned here as examples of the way discursive and visual performances produce certain fantasies within the district.

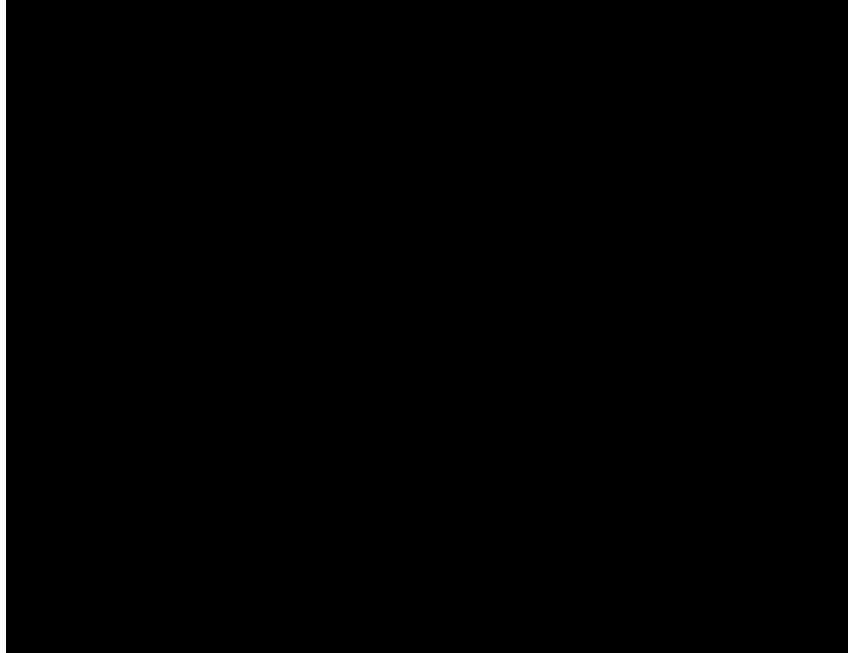


Image 5: “Interior of Lulu White’s Mahogany Hall,” by Ernest J. Bellocq (supposedly), date unknown.

For historians of the district, Octoroon mansions such as White’s became the ultimate examples of “sex across the color line.” In a chapter focusing on the role of Octoroon mansions and their madams, Long argues, “From the beginning, ideas about race, prostitution, and segregation had been critical in the creation and passage of the Story Ordinances. City leaders had hoped [this would] deal with the related problems of prostitution and sex across the color line.”⁴⁸ Long continues, the emergence of the Octoroon brothels responded to a desire on behalf of white male clientele. The commercial and erotic distinction between fairer black women and those with darker skin created a physical barrier between black women in the district that resulted in the types of establishments they could work in, where they could live, and who their

⁴⁸ Long, *Great Southern Babylon*, 191.

clientele would be. In the context of such a forced schism, the notion of “sex across the color line” becomes more than a mere zone of interracial erotic encounters. Instead, following the paternalist genealogy offered through Hartman in the above section, it also serves as a reminder of the disruptive and violent presence of white male desire in the structuring of domestic spaces.

Every mansion and saloon in the district offered something different, even if just a variation of their neighbor’s main attraction. The high-end mansions and saloons of Storyville were usually where the internal segregation of the district were exercised most acutely. Keire argues that the presumptions of racial hierarchies often slid seamlessly into the high-end establishments of Storyville. “Despite the nuances in calculating status in the district, from the perspective of white visitors, people of color were there to serve them, whether they worked as proprietors, musicians, waiters, or prostitutes. White men resented the intermittent insistence by male residents of color that not only do they belong, as customers, in the saloons, whorehouses, and pool halls of the district, but that their rights, as residents, superseded those of the white visitors.”⁴⁹ With the exception of musicians, service staff, and, of course, the light-skinned black women working in establishments like White’s Mahogany Hall, the mansions of Storyville were there to serve white patrons only. Long echoes this sentiment, and Keire above, in her description of the prominent Storyville mansions, “Many of the Basin Street brothels, including the octoroon houses, run by women like Piazza, actually guaranteed racial segregation as a marketing device to attract a white male clientele. Jazz musician Johnny

⁴⁹ Keire, *For Business & Pleasure*, 53.

St. Cyr recalled that there were rules, spoken and unspoken, designed to keep African American men out of the upscale brothels frequented by white men.”⁵⁰ White fears around miscegenation, lewd behavior, the association between black men and women with disease, and a host of other racially entrenched logics of social space often overrode the general proximity whites held to African American women and men daily throughout the district. The character of segregation here is one of the many practices in the district which were common under slavery. As has been noted about the distinction between public and private spheres, racial and vice segregation are not as much about maintaining separation as solidifying access through containment. By partitioning groups and individuals, the illusion of separation ultimately facilitated acts of white male transgression. Transgression, rather than an act of subversion, exemplified a privileged freedom of movement which accompanied the propertied, white males.

The image of Storyville’s mansions, unlike its lesser establishments, was premised on both a visual and sensual allure. Mansions were undoubtedly the jewels of a district that transited in the promise of luxury and excess. At the same time, even as the high-end mansions of Storyville offered certain pleasures that required men (and women) to leave the home, it is important to understand that these mansions were successful in part because they reproduced some of the ethos of the private sphere in a public setting. The space of the mansion, or in Anderson’s case the café, mimicked and subsumed the affective registers of the home, exemplified in Arlington’s language of “a palace fit for a king.” Sporting clubs and mansions such as the Arlington tailored spaces

⁵⁰ Long, *Great Southern Babylon*, 196.

and fantasies that authorized all that could be desired through the privileges of whiteness, paternalism, and property. For better or worse, high-end proprietors in Storyville commercialized and monetized for their white male clientele the ultimate exaggeration of the spaces from which they had just departed. Such a reorganization of comfort and leisure recalls Gaston Bachelard's understanding of the "house" in both psychological and phenomenological terms: "A house constitutes a body of images that gives mankind proofs or illusions of stability. We are constantly re-imagining its reality."⁵¹

Bachelard goes on to argue that our conception of the house is organized in relationship to the spatialized metaphors: *verticality* and *centrality*. Bachelard is quick to acknowledge that the spatial arrangement within the image of the house is riddled with hierarchies. The vertical imagination of the house, literally and figuratively, rests upon the cellar. While it provides a utility, the cellar is "first and foremost the *dark entity* of the house, the one that partakes of subterranean forces."⁵² In tandem with *verticality*, *centrality* reinstates the house, or homes, as the central point from which one departs, sets boundaries, and differentiates between the inside and outside. In the case of Storyville, the verticality and centrality that Bachelard describes are manifest through the mansion and its imagined powers to both reproduce racial and gender hierarchies and dictate boundaries within the district.

⁵¹ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Space*, New York: Beacon Press, 1958, 17.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 18.

The mansions became the enduring image of Storyville, with many of the structures standing until World War II. Even as the mansions discussed here were understood as houses of ill-repute, where the sanctity of the family and home were unimaginable, they emerged from this period with a historical prominence that is often accorded to great families and houses. If the image of the fallen woman and the vice districts disrupted the presumed centrality of familial lineage and reproduction to the concept of social life, the mansions of Storyville furnished the reproduction of a form of social life organized entirely around white homosocial pleasures. The subtle distinction between home as “the place where one lives or was brought up, with reference to the feelings of belonging, comfort, etc., associated with it” and the public house as “a place for public entertainment, or brothel” is exemplified in Arlington’s claim that her house was “a palace fit for a king.” These three examples invoke a specific sense of the domestic sphere and white pleasure alongside the erotics of sexual commerce. It is in these moments that we see the nineteenth-century fantasy of the home and domestic as exactly that, a fantasy. The sense of the home is here reproduced insofar as whiteness and its attendant desires move seamlessly between the home and the mansion. At the same time, in the revelation of this movement, it is worth remembering Bachelard’s invocation of Baudelaire when he quips, “in a palace, ‘there is no place for intimacy.’”⁵³

Criminality and Home: Notes on Social Life and History

Encounter III: Through the veiled partition she could hear the hushed voices and discreet movements. She rose and exited her “room” at the back of the crib. As she

⁵³ Ibid., 29.

walked down the long hallway she ran her fingers along the bed sheets which hung from the ceiling, creating the illusion of privacy. She offers a knowing smile to those she meets on the long walk outside.

Whispers between partitions, jokes & stories exchanged in hallways and on porches, tips for safety and knowledge of the trade, and, of course, their inevitable departure to wherever it is they called home.⁵⁴

In the postcard “Down the Line,” Anderson’s Annex sits at the intersection of Basin and Iberville. Up Iberville, almost completely until you hit the cemetery on top of N. Robertson Street, were buildings known as cribs.⁵⁵ Unlike the mansions around the corner, though, cribs were scattered throughout the district and easily outnumbered high-end mansions, and there was nothing ornate or luxurious about cribs. For black women who could not pass in the Octoroon brothels of White and Piazza and the few white women that would serve black men, these buildings became the only places they were allowed to work. “A single-story building that today would be considered a ‘double’ (two-family house) could be partitioned into as many as two dozen cribs. These were rented by the night only, at an average of three dollars a night.”⁵⁶ As we can see in the photograph (below) while similar in appearance to what we now know as shot-gun

⁵⁴ There are no firsthand accounts of day-to-day work within the cribs of Storyville. All descriptions usually depict an empty structure or women outside the building calling out to men walking by. This final “encounter” with the veil is entirely speculative.

⁵⁵ Rose, *Storyville, New Orleans*, 85.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 96.

duplexes that are common throughout the city today, cribs were structures that had a singular purpose during Storyville's existence.

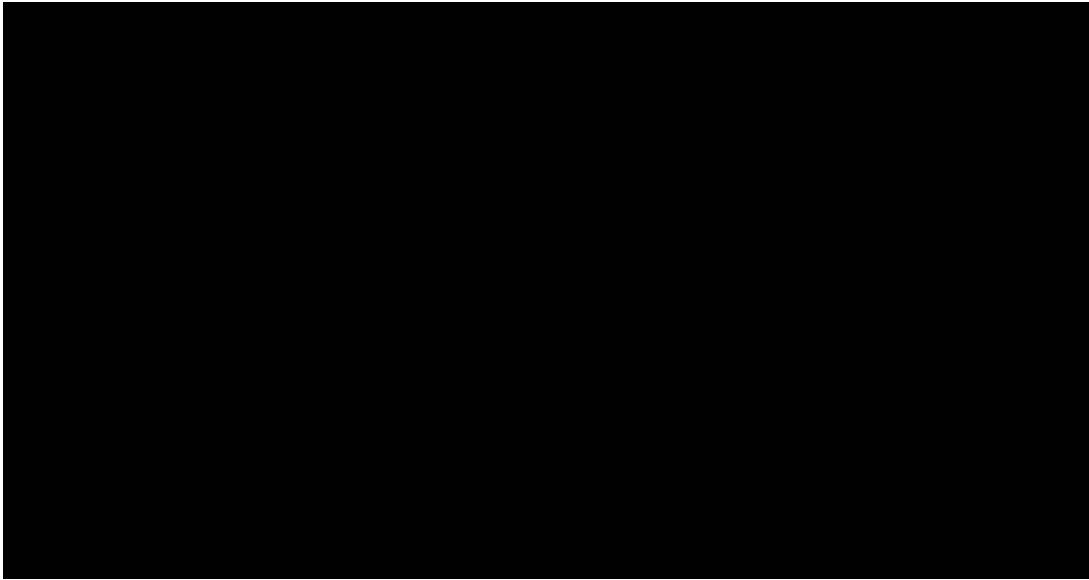


Image 6: Photograph of a row of condemned cribs on Robertson Street, Photograph by John W. “Knocky” Parker, Date Unknown

On the inside of the crib, what could normally be used as a single-family living space is partitioned by curtains, moveable walls, or any other object that gives the illusion of privacy. Such rooms are usually furnished with a single mattress and a wash basin in the corner. Unlike their counterparts in the mansions of Arlington and White, the women who worked out of cribs neither had advertisements in *Blue Book* nor did they live in these buildings. Instead, as Rose suggests, they were rented for a few hours at a time, and women would often attract customers inside while standing on their front porch or just outside the entryway. If the Basin Street mansions were emblematic of all that Storyville's businessmen and women had hoped to cultivate, then cribs and their

inhabitants represented all that vice ordinances hoped to enclose and suppress within the city.

Given the relative paucity of information and total absence of first-hand accounts of cribs from the women who worked within them, rather than attempting to give a *true* account of these women and their experiences, I would turn back to the question of history and historical legibility as it emerges in Du Bois's work. In the work and research that surrounds Du Bois's theorization of what he calls "life within the veil," we see how the concept is materialized and mobilized in his attempts to characterize the intersections of history, race, and inequality. In these instances of Du Bois's thinking we are offered the occasion to consider further how the example of the crib and the women who worked within them shape the contours of his thinking.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the effects of criminality and the figure of the criminal are not of concern solely to white society. The image of the criminal emerges as fundamental to the ills facing the numerous black communities across the country. For Du Bois, crime and the criminal occupy a crucial place in his attempts to understand and articulate a future and blueprint for African American social, political, and economic life. Beginning with *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899), Du Bois undertakes what many characterize as his most intense period of sociological inquiry, ending roughly in 1914 with *Morals and Manners Among Negro Americans*.⁵⁷ Across these two

⁵⁷ After 1914, Du Bois turns his work towards a more global understanding of race in the context of anti-colonial movements and Marxist politics. Assessments of this period in Du Bois's life may be found in W.E.B Du Bois, *The Autobiography of W. E. B. Du Bois: A Soliloquy on Viewing My Life from the Last Decade of Its First Century*, New York:

decades, Du Bois devotes himself to developing an understanding of the pressing needs and largest obstacles facing African Americans after emancipation and at the dawn of the twentieth century. While 1897 marks the moment of his now canonical articulation of the color line, his expansive study of Philadelphia's seventh ward marks a crucial site for understanding the articulation of black social and communal life as a sustainable endeavor in the wake of emancipation.

Du Bois's inexhaustible analysis develops a field around what he deems the most urgent social ills shaped by racial and class inequality in the United States. Speaking of distinct ethnic and racial groups, he argues in the second chapter of *The Philadelphia Negro*, "[I]n the case of the Negroes the segregation is more conspicuous, more patent to the eye, and so intertwined with a long historic evolution, with peculiarly pressing social problems of poverty, ignorance, crime and labor, that the Negro problem far surpasses in scientific interest and social gravity most of the other race or class questions."⁵⁸ This "long historic evolution" signals the centrality of the residues of slavery in modern black life, and in so doing exposes the realities and potentialities of black subjecthood. Du Bois's work takes up these residues in both descriptive and prescriptive terms wherein the criminal, as one particular figure, poses a problem that the institution of the patriarchal family would correct. This solution promises the reproduction of a social

International Publishers, 1968, Print; and Eric Porter, *The Problem of the Future World: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Race Concept at Mid-Century*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2010, Print.

⁵⁸ W.E.B Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996 [1899], 5.

infrastructure to the black community, and an end to the corrosive aspects that reproduce criminal behavior.

In *W.E.B. Du Bois and the Sociological Imagination*, editor Robert A. Wortham argues “Crime was linked to such factors as slavery [and] the current demand for prison labor...Du Bois appears to be one of the earliest sociologists to note the association between crime and poverty and other forms of structured inequality.”⁵⁹ Du Bois describes black criminality in the wake of emancipation and migration to urban centers as a problem of shiftlessness and labor, noting, “scores of loafers, idlers and prostitutes who crowd the sidewalks here night and day remind [the average Philadelphian] of a problem of work.”⁶⁰ He asserts that these members of the black community are in fact plagued by crime and criminality, presenting an image to all residents of the city that reflects on the community as a whole. He is quick to identify this criminal “class” within the race, but works tirelessly toward understanding the conditions of their submersion within the social order. Rather than succumbing to scientific understandings of intraracial hierarchies, Du Bois constantly juxtaposes groups to demonstrate potentiality through achieved actuality (“Talented Tenth” and “Submerged Tenth,” “Family” and “Broken Kinship,”). Ultimately, he describes the problem of criminality as one to be undone, a social ill emanating out of several historical trajectories: “[C]rime is a difficult subject to study, more difficult to analyze into its sociological elements, and most

⁵⁹ *W.E.B. Du Bois and The Sociological Imagination*, 16.

⁶⁰ Du Bois, *Philadelphia Negro*, 6.

difficult to cure or suppress. It is a phenomenon that stands not alone, but rather as a symptom of countless harmful social conditions.”⁶¹

Du Bois devotes several chapters and extensive sections elsewhere in *The Philadelphia Negro* to the question of criminality. He identifies unmarried black men and women, generally between the ages of 15 and 29, as most susceptible to criminal activity.⁶² As mentioned above, this group represents a class of shiftless individuals to Du Bois with little understanding of the path to respectability or a productive life. Such a lack of understanding is rooted in what he describes as the foundations of black family life:

[I]t must be remembered that the Negro home and the stable marriage state is for the mass of the colored people of the country and for a large per cent of those of Philadelphia, a new social institution. The strictly guarded savage home life of Africa, which with all its shortcomings protected womanhood, was broken up completely by the slave ship, and the promiscuous herding of the West Indian plantation put in its stead.⁶³

Du Bois thus positions labor and hetero-patriarchal family structures as fundamental correctives to the production and persistence of criminality and a general looseness of morals. Within a decade in “The Negro American Family and Sexual Morals,” discussing the sexual morals of the black male, Du Bois offers the following: “It does mean that he is more primitive, less civilized, in this respect than his surroundings demand, and that thus his family life is less efficient for its onerous social

⁶¹ Ibid., 241-2.

⁶² Ibid., 66-72.

⁶³ Ibid., 71.

duties, *his womanhood* less protected, his children more poorly trained...disintegrating the ancient Negro home and putting but a poor substitute in its place (*italics mine*).”⁶⁴. Among all that slavery took and imposed, the object of his sociological inquiry remained consistently the family. For numerous reasons—legal, communal, and otherwise—the concern for the infrastructure of living in communities after emancipation attends to one of the most recognizable features of the violence of slavery. At the same time, the consistent reference back to the home and phrases like “his womanhood” alert us to what Hazel Carby calls the “gendered structures of thought” in Du Bois’s work.⁶⁵ Du Bois’s assertion that the removal of the structures of home presents the current conditions of black communities through which the “[white] sociologists gleefully count his bastards and his prostitutes” is one of the rare references to prostitution in his work.⁶⁶ If this is the sociological and historical calculus that Du Bois hopes to disrupt in his work, it is worth asking—following Spillers’s insights once again—if the bastard has no female equivalent, does the prostitute actually represent the criminal’s?⁶⁷

Cynthia M. Blair notes in her study of black women and prostitution in Chicago that despite Du Bois’s prominence as the champion of black communities at the turn-of-the-twentieth-century, prostitutes are a class of individuals he largely neglects.⁶⁸

Following Blair, we see that Du Bois’s engagement with black women working in the

⁶⁴ Ibid., 172.

⁶⁵ Carby, “Souls of Black Men,” 237.

⁶⁶ Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk*, 9.

⁶⁷ Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe.”

⁶⁸ Cynthia M. Blair, *I’ve Got to Make My Livin’: Black Women’s Sex Work in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.

sex trade emerges often as fodder for data or examples of how a litany of historical and social ills manifest in the form of a general criminality. In the numerous scenes depicting this behavior, such as the example excerpted above “scores of loafers, idlers and prostitutes who crowd the sidewalks here night and day,” Du Bois refuses to acknowledge this as a mode of social life and in so doing collapses the distinction between those who occupy such spaces. Furthermore, this lack of distinction creates the conditions of a generalizable historical narrative and an acutely specific resolution to the violence that such a history perpetually constitutes.

Borrowing and slightly reformulating the insights of Nahum Dimitri Chandler, we might say the problem of the prostitute emerges as a problem of the unthought in Du Bois’s sociological work.⁶⁹ At the same time, as Wilderson and Hartman have shown, to be in the position of the unthought is not equivalent to being absent from thought.⁷⁰ Given the dearth of records and firsthand accounts from women who worked in Storyville’s cribs, the only biographical insights we have into their lives are scenes reminiscent of those Du Bois offers as illustrative of which aspects of life within the veil need correction. The legibility offered to these spaces and individuals is meant to be impermanent and ultimately corrected through a specific progress narrative. While the crib is one among many of the untenable and unbearable spaces of labor and subjection through which women must move in Storyville, the transient and impermanent nature of

⁶⁹ Nahum Dimitri Chandler, *X-- the Problem of the Negro as a Problem for Thought*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2014.

⁷⁰ Saidiya V. Hartman and Frank B. Wilderson, “The Position of the Unthought,” *Qui Parle* 13.2 (2003): 183–201.

the crib and the modes of social life that occur both inside and outside of its structure should not be written off.

Recalling Harriet Jacobs's description of the garret in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* as one articulation of sociality from a position of partitioned constraint, both the garret and the crib are intermediary spaces that disrupt notions of time in relationship to social space.⁷¹ Whereas for Jacobs, the garret was a space of endurance in retreat from the repetitive brutalities of enslavement and offered the possibility of proximity to her children, cribs were impermanent spaces that exposed women to a different sort of proximity to those with whom they may have shared some connection. To put it another way, while the crib is not a "loophole of retreat," à la Jacobs, the isolation incurred within both the garret and crib might suggest an individual whose severed ties from familial or domestic connections are only remedied by their future departures, both instances disrupt the temporal partitioning of these woman's physical enclosure and their capacity to partake in meaningful forms of social life.

Toward a Storyville Archive

If prostitution signals a certain impossibility of "home"—the familial, domestic, virtuous—the mansions of Storyville did everything they could to reproduce the fantasy of patriarchal dominance outside of the domestic sphere. In contrast, cribs redoubled the image of lewdness and abandonment that emphasized such an impossibility. If the veil operates as a theory of history and one that is applicable in these instances, we must also

⁷¹ Harriet A. Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself*, Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2010.

consider the place of and capacities for meaning making granted to a concept such as “home.” For someone like Story, the (white) home becomes a space to be protected and partitioned off from the dangers and corruption of the world on the other side of the front door. For Du Bois, the (black) home is similarly a foundational social structure in need of protection, but one that is perpetually under in the interest of building and protecting the white domestic (and public) sphere. For both men, the home emerges as a space to assert notions of historical progress and legibility. As I have shown, such a term is fraught when considering the historical place of women in Storyville.

In this chapter, I have sought to problematize and expand the ways in which assumptions about the intersections of race, gender, prostitution, and home come to inform our understandings of Storyville. At the same time, I have laid out what I understand as the connection between “history” and “home” as I move to the subject of archives in the remaining three chapters of this project. The connection, I argue, is described in one of the epigraphs to this chapter by Jacques Derrida. In his essay “Archive Fever: a Freudian Impression,” Derrida makes explicit how a concept of home infects the very structure of the archive and, in turn, archival thinking:

It is thus, in this domiciliation, in this house arrest, that archives take place. The dwelling, this place where they dwell permanently, marks this institutional passage from the private to the public, which does not always mean from the secret to the nonsecret.⁷²

Derrida’s figuration of the archive as absorbing the structure of domiciliation becomes a crucial formulation in this project and its relationship to archives because of the very

⁷² Derrida, “Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression,” 10.

instability of the notion of home as it emerges in Storyville. Furthermore, Derrida's description of the archive as constituting a form of "house arrest," suggests that neither biographical nor resistant narratives of women's lives are likely to emerge clearly from Storyville's archives. Instead, by illuminating the ways black and white women encounter the veil's various modes of enclosure and the alternative considerations of how social life becomes legible in the district, I have suggested provide a mode of reading that resists reproducing narrow and reductive modes of engaging these women and their lives.

Chapter 2

Erotic Amusements: *Blue Book Guides and the Production of Social Space*

“Napoleon did not discover this world; but we know that he set out to organize it; and wished to arrange around him a mechanism of power that would enable him to see the smallest event that occurred in the state he governed.”

-Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*¹

“[T]he business community sought to show that New Orleans was not stymied or mired in the past, but was, rather, ready to soar to new heights of technological progress and market expansion. It wanted only the opportunity—and the money. How to present

New Orleans as simultaneously frozen in time and rapidly developing along a progressive trajectory was the question.”

-Emily Epstein Landau, *Spectacular Wickedness*²

“One of course realizes immediately the difficulty in collecting such books.

Those who had them because they made practical use of the contents undoubtedly kept them...if someone here and there kept one and casually came across such an item in later years, it was, undoubtedly, hastily destroyed as an unwelcome reminder of a naughtiness with which one must not be associated in public.”

-Semper Idem, *The ‘Blue Book’*³

By the time Storyville opened for business in 1897, opportunities to create revenue through the district were quickly expanding beyond property rentals and vice entertainment. To attend to the inevitable needs that accompany a vice economy, solicitors, taxi companies, restaurants, and pharmacies began to pop up around the edges of the district. Perhaps most famously of all, however, the district’s guidebooks offer one

¹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, New York: Vintage, 1975, Print, 140.

² Landau, *Spectacular Wickedness*, 90.

³ Idem, “*Blue Book*,” 39.

of the most enduring examples of this outgrowth. First emerging roughly between the late 1890s and 1900, guidebooks are a well-known relic of the district that directed visitors to the district's various locales, offered a space for businesses to advertise, and, of course, provided the names and addresses of the district's women. The Storyville mainstays combine the commercial interests of tourist guidebooks and the practicality of municipal housing directories. Storyville visitors became accustomed to seeing numerous versions of district guides with varying names, designs, and degrees of quality, though the most common versions were known simply by the title *Blue Book*. Despite these proprietary variances, district visitors making use of the books could expect to find some combination of front material, advertisements, descriptions of high-end brothels, and a directory of names and addresses that at times included up to 600 women. These advertising materials and guidebooks were crucial to the ways Storyville institutions both gained notoriety and navigated visitors through the district. Because advertising for the district was limited—neither newspapers nor designated public spaces for advertisements would carry the ads of Storyville establishments—*Blue Book* guides offered the rare space for peddlers of vice to lure potential customers.

While the district's commercial expansion brought about the need for ephemera such as the guidebooks, guides and tourist literature were fundamental to the city's expansion long before the 1897 enactment of Sidney Story's ordinance. Landau notes in her study of the district, *Spectacular Wickedness: Sex, Race, and Memory in Storyville, New Orleans*, that the practice of using guidebooks and advertising literature in New Orleans was common since at least the mid-nineteenth century. As business owners used

the guides to profit from Storyville, the city's elites had previously used guides to direct visitors and offer insight into New Orleans's various destinations and offerings. Landau describes these earlier guides as follows:

New Orleans promoted its own combination of characteristics or qualities: its romance, cosmopolitanism, European aesthetics (most obviously through its architecture), and also those 'peculiar habits' of the inhabitants, the insouciant Creoles and its "negro" population, shopping at the French Market, hawking pralines, practicing voodoo, dancing in Congo Square. Ceremonies which threatened the antebellum American regime in their pregnant promise of alliance and rebellion now were reconceived as entertainment. The success of this marketing scheme relied not only upon the literal cleaning up of New Orleans's waste—and prostitute—infested streets, but also upon the subordination of the population of color and the suppression of their civil rights claims—the erasure, in a sense, of their centuries-long agitation for public recognition and equal citizenship. In Storyville, the octoroon, always a *woman* and literally a *prostitute*, served both of these purposes at once.⁴

As Landau shows, the continuity of the form is consistent even as the economies differ greatly. The desire of the elites of New Orleans to transform the city from its image as a salacious, unkempt slave port to a modern city was communicated in part through this new tourist literature. At the same time, the use of racial and ethnic identities within the "new" New Orleans was as peculiar as it was seemingly fraught. As Landau notes, people of color were crucial figures to the attempted makeover of the city. However, foreshadowing the warning found in later *Blue Book* guides, the distinction between

⁴ Landau, *Spectacular Wickedness*, 91.

people of color as “entertainment” and as threat was crucial to assuring any potential tourist that the city’s streets were both safe and enjoyable.

As the city of New Orleans began moving toward an image of respectability, the passage of the Story ordinance both reflected and complicated the intentions of such efforts. While Storyville’s legal boundaries reflect the attempts to manage criminality and vice through containment, its reputation for openly encouraging the disregard for certain social mores belied the city’s desired reinvention of itself. In this chapter, I examine the surviving volumes of the district guide entitled *Blue Book*, printed between 1900 and 1915. *Blue Book* guides were integral to the efforts of Storyville’s business class to construct a world of fantasy and amusement for potential customers. At the same time, even as the guides presented the district and its residents in a manner that was both exotic and hypersexualized, they presented Storyville as space that was managed for its clientele. In the first section, I offer a comparative analysis of the *Blue Book* guides to show how changes in descriptions of the district and organization of women’s information reflect the district’s growth as a space of amusement in the city. In the second section, I examine how the commoditization of light-skinned black women known in the district as “octoroons” reflects understandings of race and sexuality in Storyville and in American society more broadly. I argue that Storyville business owners used the guidebooks to lure the majority-white patrons to the district by depicting it as a space of excess and deviance, while simultaneously ensuring the presence of appropriate boundaries within the district to protect clientele from the physical and symbolic dangers of vice.

Guidebooks to Sin

As areas of tolerated vice became more organized and restricted at the end of the nineteenth century, they often served as destinations for men and women alike. Offering more than mere sexual commerce, vice districts such as Storyville offered an entire range of attractions to potential patrons. Indeed, despite Story's mandate of residential segregation, the commercial appeal of vice districts seemed to present less rigid boundaries for pleasure seekers. In her study of vice districts during this period, Mara L. Keire compares Storyville's draw to that of the Steeplechase amusement park on Brooklyn's Coney Island:

In a delightful historical coincidence, George Tilyou built Steeplechase on Coney Island in 1897, the same year that New Orleans's city council established Storyville. This synchronicity did not herald the end of one type of commercial recreation and the rise of another, but rather the concurrent growth of both...Geographically bounded spaces, Storyville and Coney Island drew customers from the outside into their environs. People came to see Mahogany Hall and the Arlington in Storyville...These forgotten places physically linked the white-light and red-light districts of turn-of-the century urban America.⁵

The draw of Storyville could partially be attributed to its appeal to those unimpeded by its immoral character in their quest for more deviant forms of entertainment. The taboos of interracial spaces, music, liquor, cocaine, and burlesque performance were all a draw to the sporting crowd. However, Storyville became a destination by giving these acts of

⁵ Keire, *For Business & Pleasure*, 24-25.

deviance a home that could be managed and enjoyed to give visitors the pleasures and excitement they sought.

As Keire shows, the similarities between the numerous amusement parks establishing themselves during this period and Storyville lend themselves to comparable understandings of public space and enjoyment. Storyville, much like amusement parks located within or just on the outskirts of cities, was a place apart from New Orleans. Even though the district was in the heart of the city's downtown, its carefully defined borders offered a sense that one could both experience and escape the excesses of the district with similar ease. In addition, Storyville's success could also be attributed to the fact that it contained within its boundaries people and sights that were unique to the district. Storyville's similarities to the spatial logic of amusement parks allowed visitors to imagine the occupants and venues inside the district in a manner similar to the attractions of a place like Coney Island. While the district shared these structural and imaginative similarities, the stigma attached to the district meant it could not discuss or advertise itself in the same ways as spaces that offered more innocent amusements. Insofar as the *Blue Book* and other guides "played up elements of Storyville that...created a fantasy world and invited their readers to enter it," they became integral documents to the marketing and creation of Storyville as a destination.⁶

The early adoption of guides allowed Storyville proprietors to craft their own narratives of the district and their establishments, while also have the rare opportunity to

⁶ Pamela D. Arceneaux, *Guidebooks to Sin: The Blue Books of Storyville, New Orleans*, New Orleans: The Historic New Orleans Collection, 2017, 18.

reach potential customers in spaces outside of the district. Pamela D. Arceneaux, senior librarian at the Historic New Orleans Collection, notes of the books:

Guidebooks to the houses and their “jolly good fellows,” a Victorian euphemism for easy women or prostitutes, were published in Storyville for a time and made available to visitors as they left the train at the Southern Depot at Basin and Canal streets. Also distributed at bars, at barber shops, and by newsboys, these guides were appreciated by sports exploring New Orleans's *playground of vice* who knew the value of the adage, “You can't tell your players without a program.”⁷ [emphasis mine].

Arceneaux's description of the guides shows both their ubiquity and the recreational tone they attempted to communicate to readers. At the same time, the passage also reveals the crucial information function of these documents. While on the one hand they served as advertising materials, the guides also offered insights into the mysterious and seemingly dangerous world of Storyville.

⁷ Pamela D. Arceneaux, “Guidebooks to Sin: The Blue Books of Storyville,” *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 28.4 (1987): 397, Print.

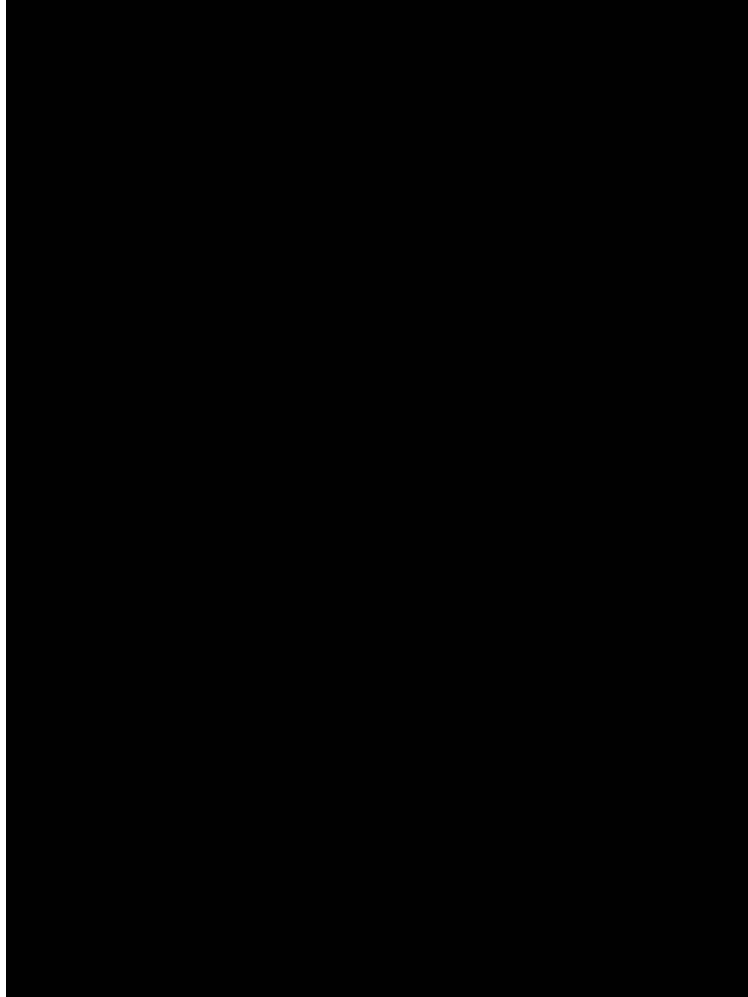


Image 7: Introduction from *Blue Book*, 1900.

From their earliest versions, the guidebooks of Storyville sold the idea of the district as much as they sold the venues and goods advertised within their pages. As illustrated in the example above, the language of *Blue Book* guides offers the appearance of authority and insider knowledge in its directives (Image 7). The front matter of the booklet is relatively small, consisting of a one-page introduction (or preface in later editions) and a separate warning regarding Comstock laws restricting the transmission of obscene materials through the mail. In the first known edition of *Blue Book*, the “Introduction” in the front matter suggested to the reader that they were about to enter a

world that was drastically different from the one they were leaving, but also filled with untold enjoyments. In the opening lines of the “Introduction,” author Billy News proclaims, “What is the good of living if you can’t have a good time, or as the proverb goes. Live while you have a chance. You will be dead a long time.”⁸ The early introductions to the guidebooks emphasized the virtues of having a good time and indulging oneself in the district. The appeal to individual appetites and pleasures introduced the district through a personal and recognizable register to potential visitors, assuring them that the district and the guide had exactly what they sought. The author goes on, “Don’t be misguided by touts or gold brick mansions, but look for whatever you desire in this book.” Like the opening lines of the page, the guide catered to the general fantasies of the reader while also claiming its authority in guiding the visitor through the relatively new space of vice.

Given the fact that Storyville was relatively new by the time of the guide’s publication in 1900, the author took care to clearly mention the boundaries of the district, stating “Now to know you are in Storyville, we will give you the boundary.” He continues by offering the street names at the perimeter of the district, even referencing the old tenderloin known as “Anderson County” as a point of reference for those unacquainted with the new district. The clarity offered by this “Introduction” to the reader suggests, perhaps, a general attempt to familiarize individuals with the district at this stage of its infancy. This practice of introducing the reader to the district would continue in the next two editions of *Blue Book* guides, published in 1901 and 1903,

⁸ “Billy News” was most likely local bar manager and police reporter Billy Struve.

respectively. Similarly, while there was only one other guide known to be published during this period, it followed the standards set in *Blue Book* of describing for the reader the limits of the district in plain language.

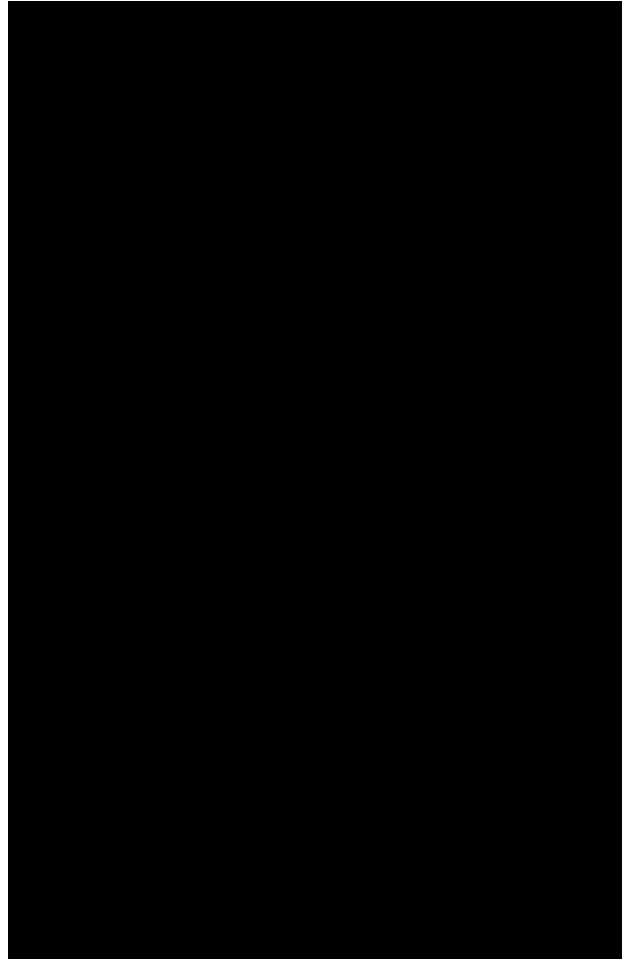


Image 8: Preface from *Blue Book*, 1905.

Publication of updated editions of the guides continued to come out on a nearly annual basis, and with these updates came subtle changes in the language and emphasis of the opening text. By 1905, *Blue Book* guides began to deemphasize the individual visitor and instead rely on the reputation of both the district and the book (Image 8). The author opens the “Preface” with the following: “The author of this Directory and Guide

of the Tenderloin District has been before the people on many occasions as to his authority on what is doing in the “Queer Zone”—Tenderloin.” Contrary to earlier editions where the customer and his “good time” are positioned as the opening concern of the guide, such as the example shown in Image 7, the author and his reputation are now placed at the forefront. The reason for this switch is not clear. It is possible that the publication of the guide’s first competitor, *Red Book* (1901), ultimately led to this shift and the necessity to signal both the text and author as second to none. However, without written record of such editorial decisions such a claim cannot be made with any certainty.

Although discovering the motives behind these editorial decisions may ultimately prove the work of speculation, the changes occurring in the 1905 edition mark a noticeable shift in the way the district is conceptualized in *Blue Book* guides. As Arceneaux notes of the place of the author and text in her examination of this edition’s “Preface”⁹:

Under the phrase “A word to the wise” is a statement touting the author’s authority on the subject. Along with these introductory remarks, Billy News gives two reasons “Why New Orleans Should Have This Directory,” namely that Storyville was “the only district of its kind in the United States” and that *Blue Book* “puts the stranger on a proper grade or path as to where to go and be secure.” This justification suggests to the visitor that all names and houses listed within which are reputable establishments, implying that other women and houses in the District should be avoided. This warning was not likely to have been true, but not everyone in the District was listed in *Blue Book*.¹⁰

⁹ The 1905 edition is the first to use a “Preface” rather than an “Introduction.”

¹⁰ Arceneaux, *Guidebooks to Sin*, 78-79.

Although Arceneaux does not comment on the substitution of the “Introduction” that emphasizes the visitor with the “Preface” that foregrounds the author and text in *Guidebooks to Sin*, her comments on the 1905 edition illuminate a shift in the discursive and imaginative structure of the district. While the guide maintains the authority it claimed in earlier editions, the addition of such sections as “A word to the wise” indicate a space that has been explored and detailed, one with its own defined characteristics. With the district, no longer in its infancy, as it was when the first edition was printed in 1900, the tone of the guide shifts from a general introduction for readers to the description of an established space.

Through the remainder of their existence, *Blue Book* guides will further the understanding that Storyville is an established space, one that can be known, detailed, and explained. As shown in Image 9, the preface to the 1913-15 edition—which is a slight variation to the preface to the 1905 edition and the exact same as all editions from 1906 through the final edition in 1915—the author writes of the guide’s comparative supremacy, “THIS [*sic*] Directory and Guide of the Sporting District has been before the people on many occasions, and has proven its authority, as to what is doing in the ‘Queer Zone.’” In this version, compared to the 1905 preface quoted above, the author’s place is omitted from the preface, yet the authority of the book remains. At the same time, the repeated description of the district as the “Queer Zone” and concerns around criminality used to argue for the book’s necessity also emerge in these editions. While the movement in emphasis from reader to author may suggest a revised approach to

reinforce authority, the changing descriptions of the district also connote an increased focus on the identity of Storyville as a space and those who inhabit it.

The guide's naming of Storyville as the "Queer Zone," for instance, casts the district as a space set apart from the rest of society, while also reflecting the cultural and social attitudes toward the district and vice more broadly.¹¹ The appellation of "queer" similarly suggests the antinormative meeting ground of the social and sexual practices of those individuals who either live within or frequent the district. As one instance of othering, offering up Storyville as a "queer zone" highlights the ways in which the mysterious and exotic portrayals of hyper-sexualized and racialized women were harnessed and commoditized as figures of enjoyment. Historically, the naming of someone or something as "queer" could be understood as denoting the condemnation of any person falling on the spectrum from the strange and misunderstood to the supposedly perverse and deviant. Insofar as the legal boundaries sought to physically enclose vice and "notoriously lewd" women, the naming of Storyville as a "queer zone" parlayed the physical realities of confinement into a simultaneously distinct and mysterious space.

¹¹ Here I am thinking about the term "queer" in multiple valences, but specifically the literary (William S. Burroughs's novel *Queer* (1985)) and theoretical (Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Epistemologies of the Closet* (1990)) uses of the term to denote a broad range of antinormative practices, spaces, and identities. Even in claiming a "broad range," I do acknowledge not all individuals and communities move across this range in the same way. For definitional purposes, however, I hope this may serve as a useful, if not also sufficient, explanation of the guide's use of the term.



Image 9: Preface from the *Blue Book*, circa 1911/12. (Courtesy of the Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University)

In addition to connoting the unfamiliar, queerness takes on the value and signification of an erotic fascination that is necessarily indulged in outside of the home. Alecia P. Long observes how discourses on sexuality in the nineteenth century undergird such imaginaries when she writes, “The dominant sexual ideology of that century assumed a virulent, voracious, and dangerous male sexuality, which had to be controlled around wives and other respectable women and was best and properly indulged with

prostitutes.”¹² Following Long, I do not wish to collapse queerness with a violent, white male sexuality, but rather point to the spatializing of queerness as where such violent sexual expressions were deemed possible, if not entirely permissible. In this sense, queerness was always already outside of the home, but through *Blue Book* guides it became ordered, accessible, and, most of all, something that could be left behind.

Storyville’s emergence constituted a world of the unknown for many members of *respectable* society. Insofar as the “queer zone” was understood as the outside of both home and whiteness, it was also a zone of illegibility and discomfort.¹³ Though many citizens might presume they could identify a low-class or immoral person by their mannerisms, skin color, or home, the task of navigating a space populated by what Storyville outsiders would have considered society’s dregs was not without its obvious challenges. In attempting to mitigate these potential fears and dangers upfront, *Blue Book* guides offered a sense of purpose and direction for visitors that also solidified their value. To this end, in the latter portion of the preference, the guide tempers such erotic fascinations with the practical warning of vice’s inherent duality. Just as the queer zone is a space of potential sexual exploits, Storyville’s streets were also believed to be saturated by criminality.

¹² Long, *The Great Southern Babylon*, 205.

¹³ Continuing my thought in footnote 11, I am interested in expanding beyond the guide’s use of the term *queer* to consider how the idea of a “queer zone” might also signal an affective tension between “normative” and “non-normative” social spaces. For instance, is there a way to consider such affective responses as discomfort, disgust, or arousal as potentially productions of social encounters in the district?

As a “playground,” echoed in the works of Keire, Landau, and others, Storyville had its share of attractions.¹⁴ The dispersal of entertainment venues, restaurants, brothels, and cribs may have often left visitors drawn in by the promise of one attraction only to be quickly overwhelmed by the bevy of options before them. *Blue Book* guides were certainly designed to aid the visitor in taking account of and sorting his or her options, but similarly navigating the potential dangers of wandering through the district was equally a function of the book. Such duality as pleasure/danger recalls the social and political logics that undergirded the vice district from its very inception.¹⁵ While the guidebooks may have emerged as directions for visitors, they also offered a directive in how their users should relate to the district’s women, who required containment. This nominative mark—as other, deviant, beleaguered—is coupled with the book’s assurance of safe passage through the district’s streets. Throughout the booklet, there never emerges any “practical” advice for avoiding the hidden dangers or “hold-ups” alluded to above. Instead, the *Blue Book* offered a “safe path” through its directory of reputable “performers” and establishment. While the district is frequently referred to as queer, deviant, criminal, and perverse, *Blue Book* offered visitors the knowledge to discern, among those who embodied deviance, who might bring them harm and who would bring them pleasure.

¹⁴ Arceneaux, “Guidebooks to Sin,” 397; Keire, *For Business & Pleasure*; Landau, *Spectacular Wickedness*.

¹⁵ Here, I am intentionally borrowing the language of pleasure and danger from the 1982 Barnard Conference on Sexuality and the edited collection that followed. Carole S Vance, *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, Boston: Routledge & K. Paul, 1984.



Image 10: Sample from directory in *Blue Book*, 1903.

The absence of a specific map or set of directions to the district’s “safe spots” is immediately sublimated by the directory of women’s names and addresses. A consistent feature of all Storyville guides, the directory offered an organized and curated list of brothels and individual women within the district. In this feature of the guidebooks, the emphasis shifts from the district as a space of erotic fantasy to individual women known to fulfill such fantasies. In this shift, the guide removes the element of exploration for the reader and instead, recalling Arceneaux’s insights above, “[A]ll names and houses listed within which are reputable establishments, implying that other women and houses in the

District should be avoided. This warning was not likely to have been true, but not everyone in the District was listed in *Blue Book*.”¹⁶

The arrangement of directories in *Blue Book* guides changes between editions, often relying on different pieces of information (such as name or address) to organize the lists of women’s names. In earlier editions, such as the 1903 *Blue Book* shown above (Image 10), the directory prioritizes physical location. Beginning with Basin Street, the unofficial entrance of Storyville, the directory lists all establishments by house number in ascending order. Under each address the landlady or madam appears first in all caps, followed by the women living and working in her establishment. In the left-hand column entitled “color,” there is a notation revealing the race or ethnicity of the women listed. Though these racial and ethnic categories did not necessarily contribute directly to the organization of early directories, they nevertheless conveyed significant symbolic meaning to the reader.

Arceneaux notes the annotation and meanings of racial or ethnic identity took numerous forms. She mentions a varied system of annotation in early editions, “Listings of women follow, arranged either alphabetically by last name or sometimes by street address. The madams appear in capital letters or boldface print, and everyone is identified as either ‘w,’ white, ‘c,’ colored, or ‘oct.,’ octoroon. Jewish prostitutes are designated with a ‘J,’ and an asterisk indicates Frenchwomen in the Blue Book marked ‘Seventh Edition’ inside and dated 1906 on its cover.”¹⁷ For visitors to the district, each

¹⁶ Arceneaux, *Guidebooks to Sin*, 78-79.

¹⁷ Arceneaux, “Guidebooks to Sin,” 402.

of these annotations indicated a specific racialized fantasy or noted a “class” of women. For instance, white women were often presumed to be the most respectable and more-often-than not worked in reputable establishments. Conversely, women listed as “colored” were often seen as connoting a low-class, more affordable establishment that would cater to black men or white men who were “slumming.” While *Blue Book* guides and business owners adopted racist logics to articulate and commoditize women’s sexuality to highlight or compliment the “specialization” of a given establishment, racial identity soon became the dominant characteristic for organizing the guide’s directory.

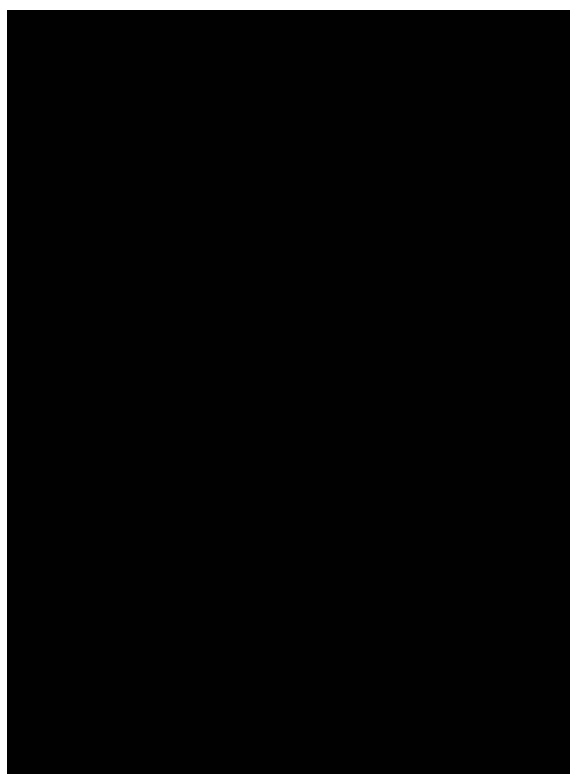


Image 11: “White” section from the *Blue Book*, circa 1911/12. (Courtesy of the Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University)

By 1909, editions of the directory primarily grouped women together by racial category—which I discuss in greater detail in the following section. No longer noting

“Jewish” or “French,” women are grouped under one of three racial categories—“white,” “octoroon,” or “colored”—before being organized under last name and address. As seen in Image 11, the address supersedes the last name in this final stage of ordering. The organizational logic of the addresses is not entirely clear, although Anderson’s Annex (at the intersection of Basin and Iberville Streets) seems to be the zero degree of this imaginary map. Those closest to his establishment are placed at the top of each list. Similarly, in prioritizing Basin Street establishments, the guide reaffirmed the street as the district’s unofficial entrance and destination for high-class entertainment.

Storyville proprietors were hardly alone in their desires to conquer and manage the spatial arrangements of public spaces. As designated spaces of outdoor amusement and destinations increasingly became an aspect of people’s social lives in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, so too did the incentive to organize and manage such spaces for maximum efficiency and enjoyment. In 1866, Frederick Law Olmsted, the landscape architect most famous for designing New York’s Central Park, wrote of his desire to maximize the general park visitor’s experience and pleasure:

Then it was found that people took pleasure in them without regard to the attractions of the chase, or of conversation, and this pleasure was perceived to be, in some degree, related to their scenery, and in some degree to the peculiar manner of association which occurred in them...Hence, after a time, parks began to be regarded and to be maintained with reference, more than anything else, to the convenient accommodation of numbers of people, desirous of moving for recreation among scenes that should be gratifying to their taste or imagination.¹⁸

¹⁸ Frederick Law Olmsted, *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977, 86.

This passage, excerpted from a report on the planning of Brooklyn's Prospect Park, shows how Olmsted, one of the preeminent planners of public recreation in North America, conceptualized the absorption of pleasure and amusement into the arrangement of public space. In the case of Olmsted's most renowned projects, New York's Central Park, Brooklyn's Prospect Park, San Francisco's Golden Gate Park, and Montreal's Parc du Mont Royal, the intended experience of nature amid the chaos of overdeveloped cosmopolitan space is achieved primarily through Olmsted's ability to guide the park visitor in a manner that replicates a sensual experience that one might associate with nature. The walkways that traverse and circumscribe the designated park spaces of open greens, bodies of water, attractions, and facilities routed pedestrians in a manner that sought to remove obstructions that might otherwise remind visitors of the space's artificial characters. In this sense, the park emerged as a curated space, perhaps foreshadowing Henri Lefebvre's famous commentary on modern space, "Nature is lost to thought."¹⁹

The notion that entertainment might reorganize conceptions of public space is intimately tied to attempts made through the *Blue Book* to guide visitors through Storyville. Storyville and the *Blue Book* guides' divergences from Olmsted's vision of public recreation and enjoyment is of course most apparent in their relationship to the specific planning and the manner of enjoyment in question. In one sense, Storyville may

¹⁹ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1991.

be imagined as borne out of a set of plans insofar as the district's boundaries are imposed within the context of legal, political, and municipal concerns for its relationship to the larger metropolitan area. However, whereas large public park projects and other attempts to construct spaces of recreation in this period often had the advantage of planning routes and passages when considering the placement of its interior structures, Storyville was largely laid over a residential and commercial urban space that necessitated a reimagining of how to best organize and traverse what was already in place. This took place in the construction of the mansions along Basin Street, the segregation of establishments, and, of course, guidebooks that enabled its user to construct a route that, to quote Olmsted, "should be gratifying to their taste or imagination." However, the imagination that drew the potential visitor to the park would not be the same as what drew them to the vice district. To this end, just as the production of recreational space varied between these two examples, so too did the way Olmsted and Storyville proprietors account for the inhabitants of their respective spaces.

This section has shown the ways in which the space of Storyville and its various establishments came to garner both attention and certain reputations by presenting a world of fantasy and mystery to potential visitors. *A Blue Book* offered what we might think of as a series of "safe houses" for those visitors ignorant or naïve of the district. At the same time, it increasingly relied on racialized fantasies of women's sexuality to commoditize individuals and establishments within the district. Arceneaux details this direct appeal to white patrons:

Targeting a white audience, Storyville guides offered access to sexually taboo attractions, most-visibly the promise of sex with mixed-race women, or “octoroons.” This desire was rooted in the fantasy of Southern antebellum planter aristocracy, when sexual power over light-complexioned black women—whether they were enslaved women purchased through the “fancy trade” or the relatively small number of free women of color who became contracted mistresses—was considered a status symbol.²⁰

As Arceneaux notes, the presence of mixed-race women in the district signaled more to patrons than a type of establishment or opportunity to indulge a racialized sexual preference. Rather, white men were offered the opportunity to revel in the historical fantasies of white supremacy. The success and commoditization of octoroon women and establishments in the district, however, also led to an implicit hierarchizing between black women. In this final section, I will examine how the production of racial categories satisfy both the sexual and social desires of a largely white male clientele.

Storyville as Open Secret

The author and essayist Alice Dunbar-Nelson once wrote of racial identity in Louisiana, “The title of a possible discussion of the Negro in Louisiana presents difficulties, for there is no such word as Negro permissible in speaking of this State. The history of the State is filled with attempts to define, sometimes at the point of the sword, oftenest in civil or criminal courts, the meaning of the word Negro.”²¹ Scholars such as Long and Landau have taken up this notion of racial ambiguity in their accounts of race

²⁰ Arceneaux, *Guidebooks to Sin*, 37.

²¹ Alice Dunbar-Nelson, “People of Color in Louisiana: Part I,” *The Journal of Negro History* 1.4 (1916): 361.

and racism in Storyville by situating the district within the broader social and political context of a post-*Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) U.S. South.²² The landmark Supreme Court case established the doctrine of “separate but equal,” and became the legal precedent that would undergird white supremacist enforcement of Jim Crow segregation for the better part of the twentieth century.²³ As such, while racial categories were solidifying legally and socially for much of white society, women who identified themselves as octoroon were seen as occupying a space between notions of who was “white” and “black” that was marketed to be understood as rare and desirable.²⁴

²² Long and Landau are two authors who attempt to tackle the complicated ways race played a role in Storyville and New Orleans more broadly. Their focus, however, tends to emphasize the relationships between white men and mixed-race women of color.

²³ Brook Thomas, *Plessy v. Ferguson: A Brief History with Documents*, Boston: Bedford Books, 1997.

²⁴ Long, *Great Southern Babylon*, 203.

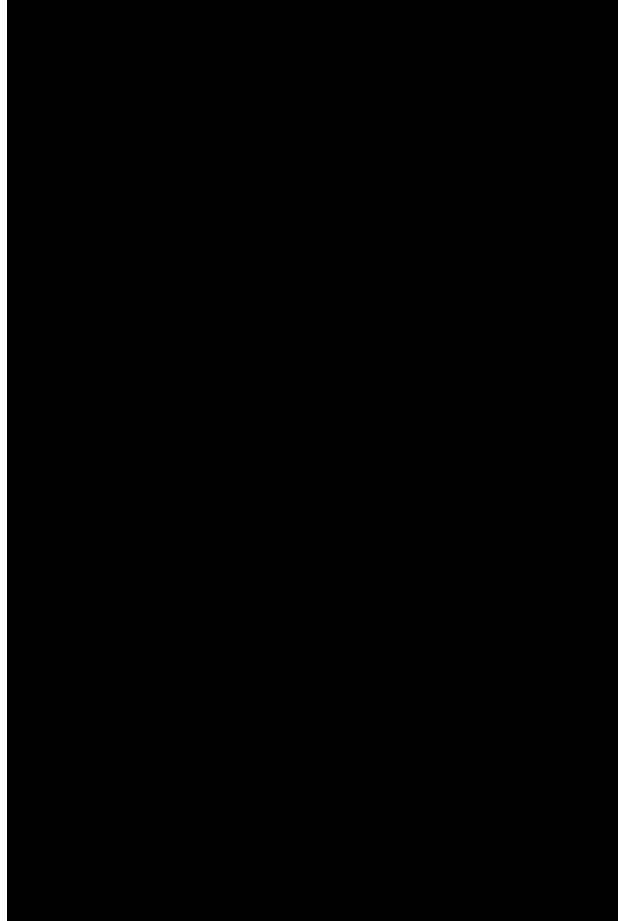


Image 11: “Octoroon” section from the *Blue Book*, circa 1912. (Courtesy of the Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University.)

In Storyville, the doctrine of racial segregation met the erotics of race in a myriad of encounters that displaced the ambiguities around the sanguine character of racial identity with the purported visual evidence of racial typologies. Long notes the power of narratives of sexual excess in the case of women identifying as octoroon in the district:

Eroticized octoroons in turn-of-the-century New Orleans, like their antebellum quadroon counterparts, were as much myth as reality, but there were real women behind those myths...In the imprecise erotic milieu of Storyville, *if a woman looked and acted as an octoroon was supposed to, she could claim and promote that identity and capitalize upon the power of the myth, no matter what her actual ancestry...*

However, in the same way that term quadroon became a feminized and eroticized descriptor in antebellum New Orleans, the term octoroon was less a designation of exact “blood” proportions and more an identification predicated upon appearance, skin color, and the myth of light-skinned, mixed-race women as erotic types.²⁵ [emphasis mine]

The ambiguities of myth that Long addresses in this description point to the ways visual evidence of racial identity could exceed skin color, instead turning to narratives of sexual excess that marked women as both hyper-sexual and hyper-racialized. Long offers the following “technical definition” in her discussion of octoroon women in the district, “[A]n octoroon was a person one-eighth black, or the offspring of a quadroon and a white person.”²⁶ As prominent figures in the U.S. South throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, mixed-race women were as well-known as they were exoticized by the white men who desired them. The appeal, as Long and Landau suggest, is part of a longer preoccupation on the part of white men with sex across the color-line. As Long notes, this preoccupation has a much deeper “institutionalized history” beginning with slavery, and continuing long after its demise.²⁷ Seizing upon these well-established desires, madams used the guidebooks as one space to distinguish and exceptionalize the place of mixed-race women in the district.

As demonstrated in the previous section, the ambiguities around the confirmation of women’s racial identity did not keep publishers of guidebooks from identifying and

²⁵ Ibid., 205.

²⁶ Ibid., 205.

²⁷ Ibid., 203.

organizing women into racial categories. The image displayed above (Image 12) represents the total presence of octoroon women in the book (there were greater numbers of women categorized as “colored,” but their brothels did not often have full-page ads). The full-page directory section consisting of only nine names shown in this later version reinforces the commercial desire for uniqueness that madams hoped to convey to potential customers. In comparison to other directory pages shown above (see Images 10 and 11), the section dedicated to women labeled as octoroons was the most liberal with its use of space on the page, even more so than their white counterparts. This emphasis made by this physical presentation and the relatively low number of names provided echoes Long’s assertion that the “significance of octoroon prostitutes far exceeded their numbers, which were always relatively small in comparison to the majority of women.”²⁸ Similar to the directories, advertisements for octoroon brothels further underscored the distinctive characteristics of mixed-race women for the enjoyment of a prospective white-male clientele.

²⁸ Ibid., 193.

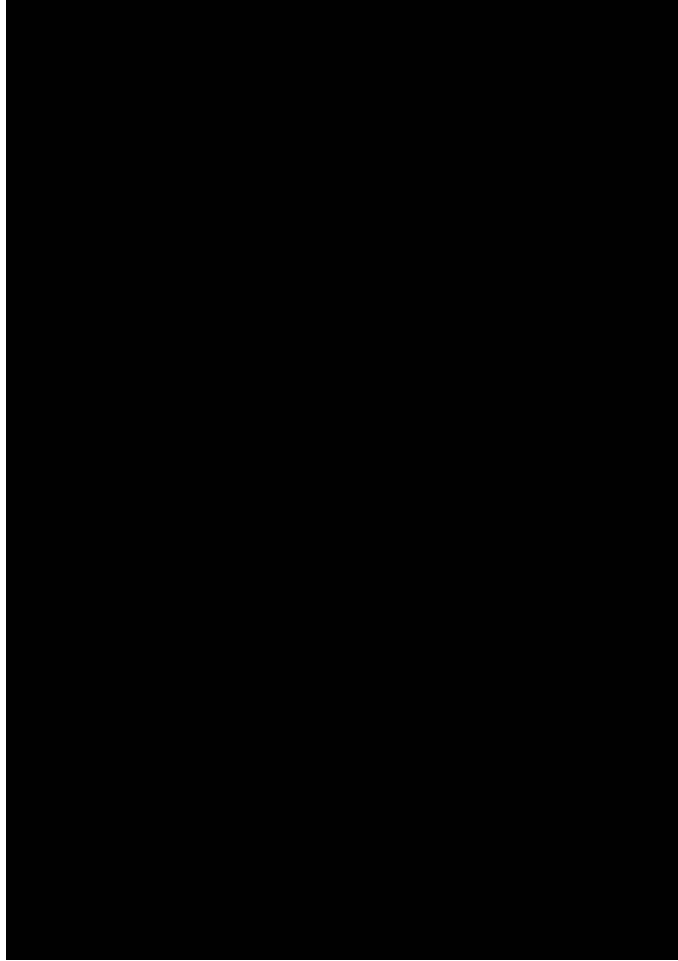


Image 13: Advertisement for Miss Antonia P. Gonzales, 1906.

The establishment belonging to a Miss Antonia P. Gonzales appears in one of the earliest advertisements for an octoroon brothel, in the 1906 edition of *Blue Book* (see Image 13). Gonzales's ad extols the virtues of her venue, describing a trio of offerings, "first-class octoroons," her own skills as a "classical Singer [*sic*]," and dancing to ragtime music. The entertainment offered by Gonzales is a delicate balance of respectable and deviant. The offering of ragtime most likely implied the presence of a band comprised partially, if not entirely, of black musicians. Though octoroon brothels in the district were interracial because of the women who worked in these establishments

and the white men who frequented them, the presence of black men—as either clientele or staff—was often construed as a negative feature by whites. In noting the madam’s own classical training and, of course, the high-class octoroons working in the brothel, the ad strikes a delicate balance to assure the presumptive white patrons that Gonzales’s establishment could mediate their encounters with vice in an interracial space, while also maintaining an air of respectability. Such subtle maneuvering by octoroon madams in print ads allowed them to promote themselves and their girls as “simultaneously white and ‘colored’ ...the best of both worlds.”²⁹ Though ads for Gonzales’s brothel do not appear again after 1906, other advertisements for octoroon brothels eventually fill the space left by her absence.

Countess Willie Piazza was one of the more renowned octoroon madams and quickly emerged in the district as a prominent figure. A self-described octoroon, Piazza, much like her counterpart Lulu White, found success and notoriety through the nightly spectacles at her brothel that she herself also participated in. The description of Piazza’s brothel relays a performance of race bound to a notion of respectability: “If you have the ‘blues,’ the Countess and her girls can cure them. She has, without doubt, the most handsome and intelligent octoroons in the United States. You should see them; they are all entertainers.” This description of the women working in Piazza’s brothel lightly traffics in a racialized vernacular, invoking the “blues” as a type of ailment that black women are particularly adept in curing. Unlike other advertisements in the 1912 edition of *Blue Book*, exoticism is not something overtly offered by the description. Rather, as

²⁹ Ibid., 206.

historians such as Landau note, the social and cultural understanding of these tabooed performances encompassed an expansive range of desires and perversions to such an extent that they did not need to be expressed explicitly at every turn.³⁰ Instead, the knowledge and transactions which often followed were carried out in an almost perfunctory manner.

Despite their scant representation, Landau points to the centrality of mixed-race women to the identity and draw of Storyville, which “blatantly promoted sex across the color line, advertising ‘octoroons’ as the district’s special draw. Interracial sex, especially with light-skinned, mixed-race women had been an indelible aspect of New Orleans’s unique antebellum culture; it was given new life as marketed miscegenation amid the racial hatred and violence at the dawn of the Jim Crow era.”³¹ Landau notes that the “special draw” of the district catered to racialized desires, and in doing so “New Orleans publicized transgressions that the rest of the South repressed.”³² We can see how guides, when considered in the context of Storyville, target the visitor’s potential erotic associations (or dissociations) with racial identities, reinforcing the mythos of racial-sexual epistemologies. By highlighting the racial distinctions between women in the directory’s organization, as well as the illicit racialized language of criminality discussed above, the *Blue Book* capitalizes on both the anxieties and desires of racial identity during this period. To this end, early attempts by writers to engage these documents as

³⁰ Landau, *Spectacular Wickedness*.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 50.

³² *Ibid.*, 56.

artifacts of the district prove instructive in charting similarities between the *Blue Book* guide's reflection of developing social attitudes toward race and sexuality.

In 1936, writing under the nom de plume “Semper Idem,” a book collector by the name of Charles Frederick Heartman published a short monograph examining the guides in what appears to be the first study of the Storyville vice district.³³ Heartman reads the archive and its documents within a broader discourse on sexual practices and the place of *Blue Book* guides within a genealogy of rampant and illicit sexuality in New Orleans. In the first half of *The “Blue Book,”* Heartman offers a short narrative account of prostitution in New Orleans from the earliest French colonies through the few years following the district's closure in 1917. The section both provides an overview of the history and urges the reader to understand the profound relevance of sex work to current studies of sexuality. In the latter half of the text, the author compiles an annotated bibliography of thirteen separate examples of guidebooks published and used in the district. The guidebooks examined in the text came exclusively from the private collection of the New Orleans businessman and private collector Simon James Shwartz (1867-1936), although the author notes the collection was dismantled shortly after Shwartz's death. While Heartman's text did not enjoy a large circulation or readership—it was privately published with a limited printing—the author's belief in the importance of both his study and the guidebooks to scientific and historical research is evident from

³³ The phrase “semper idem” is Latin for “always the same.”

the opening pages.³⁴ In the introduction to the text, Heartman claims, “I think it is of the utmost importance that a series of monographs, dealing with the historical and statistical sexual science in this country, be started as soon as possible.”³⁵ Distilling the larger sentiments of the text, the author asks the reader to consider this collection of documents as a potential archive and building block of the necessary and urgent science of sexuality:

That inter-mixing [of whites] with Negroes and Indians took place as a matter of necessity is well known, and only adds to the hereditary influences. Laxity in sexual irregularities was an inevitable outcome. This took rather a curious aspect. While every male of consequence would at the drop of a hat protect with his life the so-called honour of any white woman, wife, sister, or near acquaintance, five minutes later that same individual with the greatest nonchalance would perhaps enter the house of his octoroon mistress, or amuse himself in one of the many places where women could be had, women who had long since ceased to have defenders.

Imagine then our horror when after leaving this church, right next door we were solicited by two Negro girls who said, ‘Now after you got salvation, we will show you Heaven. For two bits we will Frenchy you.’ And so it goes. That a city which is so easy going should at the same time be the haven of homosexuals, lesbians, perverts, in fact all the varieties of the irregular sexual strata which in New Orleans are covered by the simple word, ‘queer,’ should not cause any surprise.³⁶

³⁴ The small number of copies in circulation makes it difficult to find any information on the text or the author. The Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Duke University has one copy in its collection. I read and examined the text in its entirety in their facility.

³⁵ Idem, “*Blue Book*”, 12.

³⁶ Ibid., 14; 31-32.

Heartman's engagement with understandings of race, gender, and sexuality through the figure of the sex worker extends and elaborates the epistemes produced both in the guidebooks and the district. Heartman's attitude toward non-white women and communities was far from unique for either the period, generally, or New Orleans, specifically. The first anecdote describes the South's other (antebellum) open secret "as a matter of necessity." This need is never specified, but one can only assume that Heartman is referring to the economic and violent sexual dimensions of the master/slave—and to a lesser degree the settler/indigenous—relationship. Echoing the guide's description of how white male sexual practices traverse spaces designated as normative (home) and queer (Storyville), Heartman grounds these hereditary claims under the infallible purview of the white patriarch.

Heartman makes no effort to conceal his obvious contempt and disgust for those women engaged in the sexual economies of New Orleans, and black and immigrant communities more specifically. When discussing the history of prostitution in New Orleans, he proclaims, "The first shiploads to arrive at the port of New Orleans were the scum of the French jails and the diseased harlots of the hospitals."³⁷ While it should perhaps come as no surprise that the study of sexuality Heartman advocates is rooted in the pathology of sexual deviance, it is important to note how even in distinguishing between octoroons and other black women he reproduces a social hierarchy between the two. In this sense, Heartman's dealings with race in the text reflect Dunbar-Nelson's assessment of the person of color within the broader social order. Dunbar-Nelson writes,

³⁷ Ibid., 13.

“The person of color was now, in Louisiana, a part of its social system, a creature to be legislated for and against, a person lending his dark shade to temper the inartistic complexion of his white master.”³⁸ Following Dunbar-Nelson, the way the individual becomes a figure through which racialized and sexualized forms of knowledge are evidenced is by their positioning within a social order. The social order defined through the guidebooks communicates a racialized landscape. Ultimately, this separation and categorization of women under racial identities reproduced the very same logics that justified the confinement of vice from the rest of the city.

Opaque Topographies

New Orleans’s rapid economic growth and infrastructure expansion at the end of the nineteenth century necessitated that the city rethink its approach to how it managed its diverse population and its various public spaces. As I have shown throughout this chapter, the city’s businessmen and landowners were perpetually attempting to balance the potential for new economic growth with the city’s reputation for excess and criminality. Landau explains this tension around the desire for progress: “[T]he business community sought to show that New Orleans was not stymied or mired in the past, but was, rather, ready to soar to new heights of technological progress and market expansion. It wanted only the opportunity—and the money.”³⁹ At the same time, contrary to the desire of the city’s elites, much of the draw to the Crescent City was precisely its reputation of excess and lax mores. Landau poses this particular problem as

³⁸ Dunbar-Nelson, “People of Color in Louisiana: Part I,” 363-4.

³⁹ Landau, *Spectacular Wickedness*, 90.

follows: “How to present New Orleans as simultaneously frozen in time and rapidly developing along a progressive trajectory was the question.”⁴⁰ Within the district, this question emerges somewhat differently.

From the perspective of this project, one is inclined to note that the actual women who populate these verified establishments have a precarious relationship to the directory’s objectives as discussed above. If, as I have suggested, the organization of space in Storyville finds a commercial topography within *Blue Book* guides, then the correlation of enjoyment and amusement with specific locales complicates the guides’ reliance on the information of individuals. The guidebooks, unlike Olmsted’s account of his park’s inanimate objects, could not consistently or reliably account for the residents of Storyville, making their presence in the guides almost entirely symbolic. As Landau notes in her introduction to Arceneaux’s recent study:

Thus, as Arceneaux reminds us, the blue books do not tell us very much at all about women’s lives. They tell a particular kind of story. The books, while presuming to cater to the reader’s desire, in fact may have played a role in creating and inflaming that desire.⁴¹

Following Landau, we see that in tracing the contours of the district’s physical and imaginative boundaries, we are often left with accounts that immure us to the specificity and diversity of women’s experiences in the district. Given the opaque and elusive presence of Storyville’s women, and in particular black women, I turn in the second half of this project to consider how visual records of women in the district might open up

⁴⁰ Ibid., 90.

⁴¹ Landau, “Introduction” in *Guidebooks to Sin*, 18.

new possibilities for locating and narrating lives often obscured within attempts to legislate Storyville as a whole.

Chapter 3

Literary Optics: Ernest J. Bellocq and the Archival Gaze

“During the first century of his existence, the professional photographer performed a role similar to that of the ancient scribe, who put in writing such messages and documents as the illiterate commoner and his often semiliterate ruler required.”¹

-John Szarkowski, *Mirrors and Windows: American Photography since 1960*

“I wanted to keep [Bellocq] a very ambiguous, mysterious character—the way he was in real life and the way he appeared to us. It was very difficult to define his motivations. Why was this man so completely obsessed with photographing prostitutes when, obviously, he was not so interested in sex? Was it a sort of personal hang-up or just an artistic pursuit? Was he pursuing a dream?”²

-Louis Malle, Interview with Dan Yakir

On a trip to New Orleans in the early 1960s, photographer Lee Friedlander discovered and purchased the only remaining glass-plate negatives (eighty-nine in total) from the collection of New Orleans-based photographer Ernest J. Bellocq (1873-1949).³ The photographs, believed to be taken in 1912, depict numerous unnamed women whose biographic information was limited to their occupation and home: prostitute in the Storyville district. Since their discovery, the photographs have enjoyed a modest amount of circulation in the art world, and have been featured—along with Bellocq—in numerous fictional accounts of the district. The photographs, initially exhibited in 1970 by Friedlander and the Museum of Modern Art’s (MoMA) director of photography John Szarkowski, now take up permanent residence at the museum in New York City. With

¹ John Szarkowski, *Mirrors and Windows: American Photography since 1960*, Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1978.

² Dan Yakir, “Louis Malle’s *Pretty Baby*,” *Film Comment*; *New York* 14.3 (1978): 64.

³ Bellocq, *Bellocq*.

this recovery, the photographic became a prominent source of documentation amidst the district's scattered and varied ephemeral history, while also transforming the relatively obscure Bellocq into one of its most prominent chroniclers.

While accounts of the district have adopted the mysterious photographer to provide both details and legitimacy, Bellocq's glass plates are also lauded as a great coup for the history of photography more generally. Their emergence met a world of art photography clamoring for the new and unique, alongside a budding critical interest in the medium.⁴ In a 1996 introduction to the second and final commercial publication of Bellocq's photographs, feminist art critic Susan Sontag proclaims: "So much about these pictures affirms current taste: the low-life material; the near mythic provenance (Storyville); the informal, anti-art look, which accords with the virtual anonymity of his sitters; their status as *object trouvés*, and a gift from the past."⁵ Bellocq's photographs blend together numerous stylistic and visual forms, but his catalog may best be described when loosely split into three formal categories: staged vernacular, boudoir, and portraiture. Their exhibition at the MoMA in the early 1970s exposed to the art world a Pictorial style with a peculiarity that could be both appreciated by and assimilated into the contemporary dominance of photographic modernism.

⁴ While photography as a medium had entered the critical lexicon long before the 1970s (notably: Walter Benjamin's "A Short History of Photography"), the following decade saw two of the seminal texts on photography's interconnectedness to the experience of everyday life: Susan Sontag's *On Photography* (1977) and the English translation of Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida* (1980).

⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

In this chapter, I am interested in examining the relationship between Bellocq the figure, his photographs, and his anonymous subjects when this archive is engaged in fictional narratives of the district. Each section of the chapter is organized around one text and its engagement with the relationships among these three figures/objects (Bellocq, the photograph, and the anonymous female subject). Louis Malle's 1978 film *Pretty Baby* uses the photographs to imagine an intimate relationship between Bellocq and his models. In the film's attempt to make Bellocq's desires an integral component to the narrative legibility of the photographs and the anonymous women captured within them, we see the historical and aesthetic limits of the photograph. Michael Ondaatje's experimental novel *Coming Through Slaughter* (1976) chronicles the life of jazz pioneer Buddy Bolden and his relationship to the eccentric Bellocq. Through this relationship, the novel considers how the materiality of the photographic object lends insight into questions of ephemerality, history, and corporeality. Finally, Natasha Trethewey's poetry collection *Bellocq's Ophelia* (2002) chronicles the life of the fictional Octoroon prostitute Ophelia and how she came to model for Bellocq. The collection engages the question of the male gaze and whiteness to transform the black female body from object to authorizing subject, enacting what Jennifer Nash has called "black feminist recovery work."⁶ In turning to the literary and filmic, I am interested in how each of the three texts produces vastly different readings of the photographs in question, and, in so doing, generates new modes of reading the relationships among photographer, photograph, and

⁶ Jennifer C. Nash, *The Black Body in Ecstasy: Reading Race, Reading Pornography*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2014.

photographed. I argue that these texts reveal the complicated entanglements between the figure of Bellocq and his photographs, and show how the blurring of the two obscures the women captured in his images and complicates the forms of narrative recovery made available to his anonymous subjects.

Intimate Impressions

Little is known of Ernest Bellocq. Born and raised in New Orleans to a well-to-do French Creole family, he spent his entire life in the Crescent City. A frequent visitor to the vice district—presumably also before the final redistricting in 1897—he left scant evidence of his activities beyond these artistic endeavors and the presumptive sexual encounters that ensued. To sustain himself and his hobbies, Bellocq ran a small studio specializing in both portraiture and industrial photography (specifically large passenger and cargo ships on behalf of manufacturers). After the discovery and subsequent exhibition of his work at the MoMA, everything from local lore to speculation about the eccentric photographer grew as part of the now larger-than-life story of Bellocq. For instance, there were numerous rumors about Bellocq’s appearance. As artist Nan Goldin writes, “Much has been made throughout the years of Bellocq’s supposed identity and its relationship to the women he photographed. Until recently, photographic history described him as a ‘hydrocephalic semi-dwarf,’ largely based on an imaginary discussion, patched together from letters and excerpts from recorded conversations.”⁷ Such stories and half-truths, littered amidst the few historical “facts,” constitute the record of Bellocq’s life that authors and filmmakers find so compelling and generative.

⁷ Nan Goldin, “Bellocq Epoque,” *Artforum International* 1997: 88.

These encounters with Bellocq and the various biographical lacunas are generally addressed through a speculative reimagining of both the photographer and his work that revel in the fantasies of prostitution and its cultural meanings.

Malle's *Pretty Baby* was one of the earliest engagements with Bellocq and his photographs after the 1970 exhibit. The film tells the story of Hattie (Susan Sarandon), a prostitute in Storyville and her twelve-year-old daughter Violet (Brooke Shields) as they each attempt to negotiate life in a brothel and find stability in the face of the district's uncertain future leading up to its sudden closure in the summer of 1917.⁸ Hattie eventually moves to St. Louis with her newborn son after accepting an engagement offer from one of her wealthy clients. Violet, on the other hand, opts to stay in New Orleans to continue her life in the brothel until she is kicked out and left homeless. Throughout the film, Hattie and Violet develop a relationship with the character of Bellocq (Keith Carradine). Both work as his models, but after Violet is left without a home she marries and moves in with Bellocq in his Garden District home.

The film and director received criticism for the illicit portrayal of Violet, specifically several scenes showing the then-thirteen-year-old Shields fully nude and the fictionalized sexual relationship between her character and Bellocq. Despite this backlash, critics praised the film for its intimate portrayal and honest treatment of such difficult subject matter. Roger Ebert, dismissing claims that the film was "child porn," praised Malle's depiction of Storyville as "an extraordinarily well-realized world" and the film's rich visuals for showing an "infinite attention to detail, [that] looks and feels

⁸ *Pretty Baby*, Paramount, 1978.

accurate: We get to know the brothel so well, with its curving staircases and baroque furnishings, we almost feel we live there too. And we get to know the people, too.”⁹ Ebert’s praise of the film was not unique. Indeed, the film critics often marveled at how a story driven by the mystery and intrigue surrounding Bellocq’s photographs could seemingly tell the viewer so much about the anonymous women and their photographer.

In an interview with film critic Dan Yakir, Malle discussed how Bellocq’s photographs were the initial inspiration for his lauded depiction of Storyville in *Pretty Baby*. Malle recalls, “[A] friend of mine sent me a book of photographs by E.J. Bellocq, the New Orleans photographer who left plates of prostitutes in Storyville in 1910 [sic]...Then, I was sent the Al Rose book, *Storyville, New Orleans*, which had a few things about Bellocq...I started putting it all together.”¹⁰ The film takes much of its visual inspiration from Bellocq’s photographs, with “[as] many as five of the Bellocq pictures reprinted by Rose [serving] as models for tableaux embedded in the [film’s] texture.”¹¹ Using Bellocq’s photographic depictions of women in the district as his inspiration, Malle juxtaposes scenes of ornate and decadent brothels filled by patrons with more subdued renderings of day-to-day life to paint a vivid image of life of in the district.

In an early scene of Bellocq at work in the district, the film draws from a photograph of a young woman posing outside in front of a makeshift backdrop. The

⁹ Roger Ebert, “Pretty Baby,” 1 June 1978, Web.

¹⁰ Yakir, “Louis Malle’s *Pretty Baby*,” 62.

¹¹ Neil D. Isaacs, “Malle’s Eye for Rose’s Storyville,” *Literature Film Quarterly* 24.2 (1996): 223.

original photograph, Image 14, is an intimate and beautiful portrait. The young woman is seated as if she were in a professional studio. She holds her breasts as the dress she wears rests just below her shoulders. The tone of the photograph is gentle and warm, accentuating the model's soft features and skin. Behind her is a white curtain stabilized by a dowel running horizontally across the top to create the necessary backdrop. The photograph captures a beautiful scene, even if this version developed by Friedlander did not reflect the cropping Bellocq may have made.

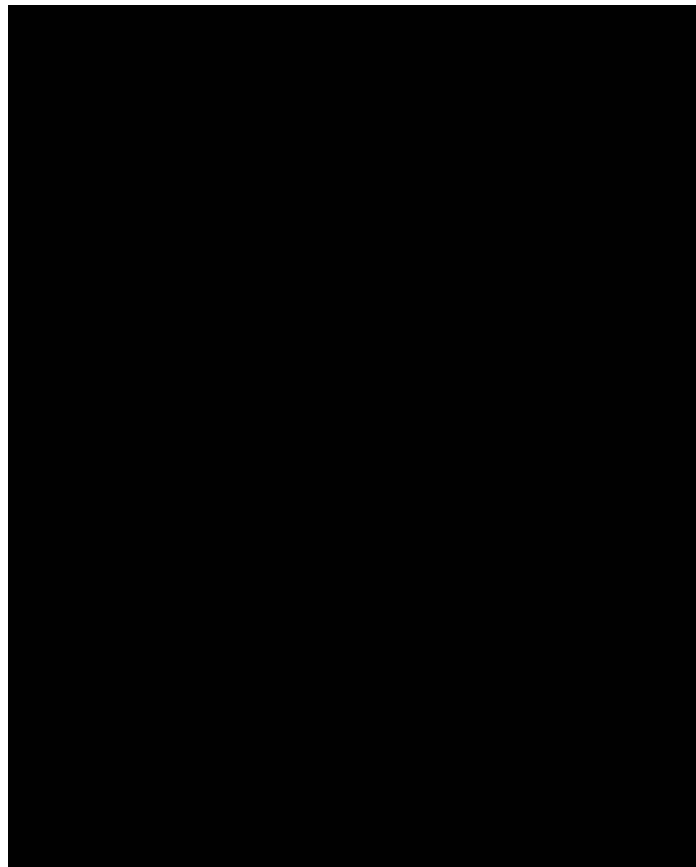


Image 12: Untitled photograph by Ernest J. Bellocq, ca. 1912 (Courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art, New York).

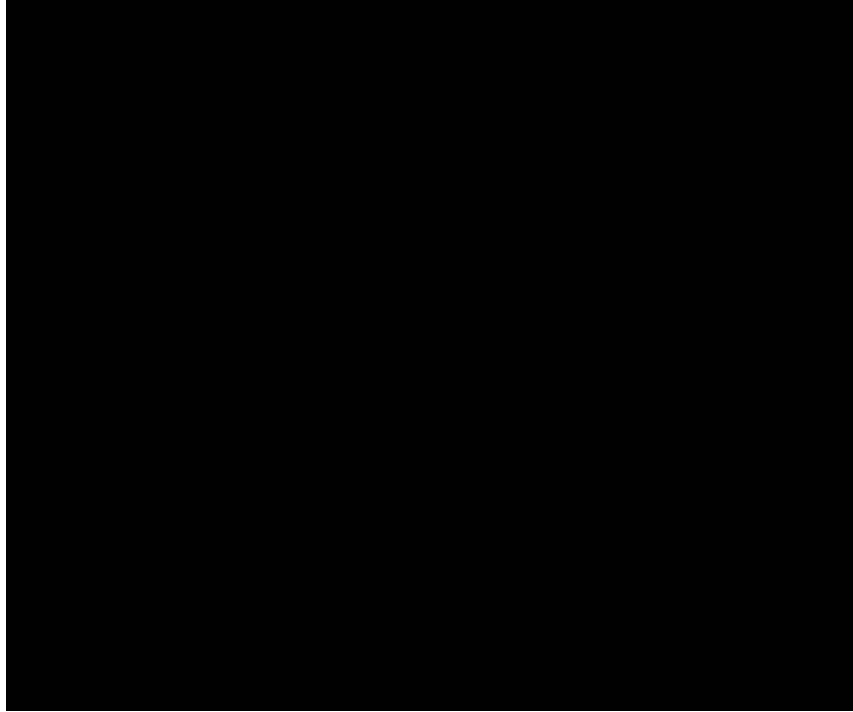


Image 13: Still from the film *Pretty Baby* (1978, dir. Louis Malle) showing Hattie (Susan Sarandon) seated while Ernest J. Bellocq (Keith Carradine) sets his backdrop. (Courtesy Paramount Pictures)

The film's recreation of this photograph shows Hattie impatiently waiting for a fussy Bellocq to set his surroundings. Hattie is similarly shown seated outside. She is clothed in a simple white dress, shoulders exposed. While the scene is not a perfect reproduction of the original photograph—the backdrop is an afghan on a drooping clothes line, Hattie's hair is down—the staging of the shot derives many of its visual cues from the photograph. While we see in the juxtaposition of these two images how the Bellocq photographs are woven into the very fabric of the story, the film's recreation of the image shows the peripheral visual cues to be as much a part of the photograph's story as Bellocq and the anonymous subject. Following the interpretations offered by Isaacs and Ebert, the richness and mystery that surround Bellocq's photographs offer an

account of the district, while also playing with the limits of the photograph as material and narrative object.

In the two images displayed above (Images 14 and 15), we see how the film creates a mimetic relationship with Bellocq's photographs. At the same time, the film tries to craft a narrative of the photographer that draws upon his imagined relationship to his sitters, especially Violet. In his interview with Yakir, Malle recalls the process of developing his version of Bellocq for the film:

I wanted to keep [Bellocq] a very ambiguous, mysterious character—the way he was in real life and the way he appeared to us. It was very difficult to define his motivations. Why was this man so completely obsessed with photographing prostitutes when, obviously, he was not so interested in sex? Was it a sort of personal hang-up or just an artistic pursuit? Was he pursuing a dream?¹²

While the film and its director received a great deal of praise for the vivid portrayal of Storyville and its residents, the character of Bellocq seems to have been intentionally left more opaque. The mystery around the photographer, unlike the easily reproducible images, generates a much more speculative story.

Unlike the interactions Bellocq has with models like Hattie, all of whom are adult-age, his interactions with Violet throughout the film create a different image of the photographer. The still below (Image 16), depicts one of the numerous scenes of Bellocq at work in the district. To the left of the photographer stands his camera, and to his right a doting young Violet. While Bellocq does not begin an explicitly sexual relationship with the adolescent Violet until later in the film when she moves in with him, scenes

¹² Yakir, "Louis Malle's *Pretty Baby*," 64.

such as these extend the photographer's intimate portrayal of the district and its residents to frame his unusual and occasionally fanatical interest in the young girl. Similar to the instance in which one of Bellocq's photographs is reproduced through the character of Hattie, Violet's emergence as Bellocq's main model and love interest adopts the visual cues by the photographs.

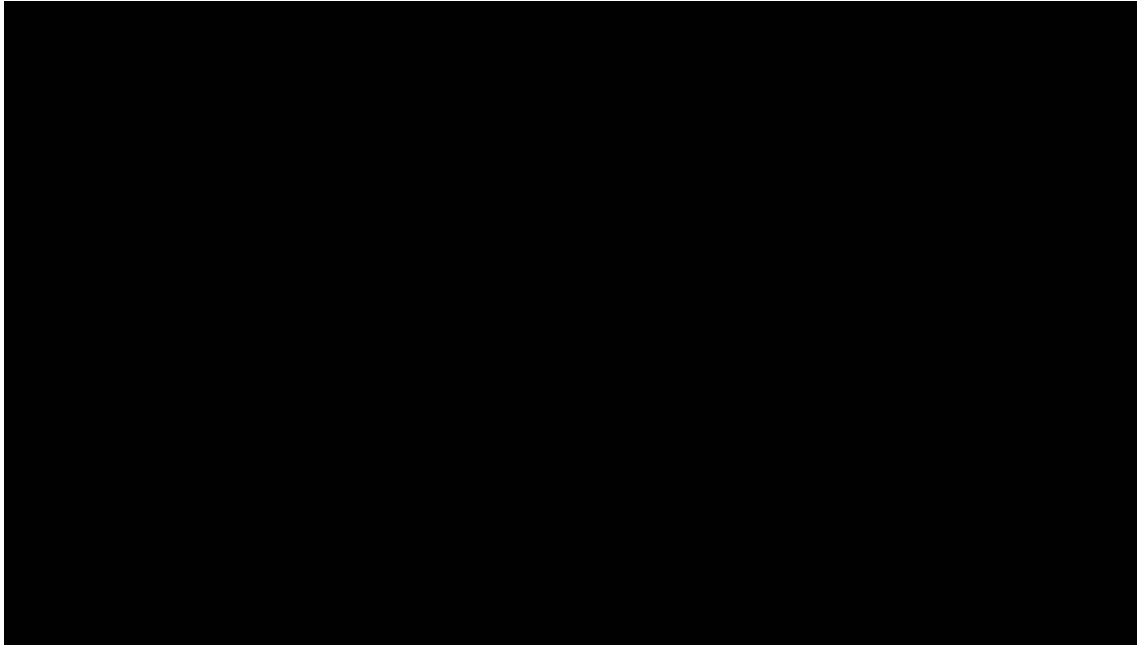


Image 14: Still from the film *Pretty Baby* (1978, dir. Louis Malle) showing 12-year-old Violet (Brooke Shields) standing next to Ernest J. Bellocq (Keith Carradine) as he photographs a model. (Courtesy Paramount Pictures)

Scenes of Bellocq and Violet engaging one another as photographer and photographed are common throughout the film.¹³ One such scene recreates Image 17

¹³ Many of these scenes depict Brooke Shields completely nude. Such moments clearly represent the film's recreation of the photographs and the erotic relationship between Bellocq and Violet. However, I have chosen to reproduce the scene shown in Image 18—which is still extremely suggestive—because I remain uneasy about Shields's role in the film and the willingness of many critics to explain her numerous nude scenes as

below. Of the entire set, this image is often pointed to as the most iconic. It is alluring, yet subtle in its staging. A beautiful young woman sits cross-legged, resting her arm on a side table with one shoulder exposed. The image has an almost commercial quality to it, as the young woman looks longingly at her glass of whiskey, the bottle's label reading "Raleigh Rye" turned outward on the table for all to see. Unlike Image 14, the photograph exposes the intimacy of the brothel's interior. In addition, whereas the photograph of the young woman outside emitted a tenderness and innocence through its emphasis on the model's angelic features, the photograph of the woman sipping whiskey is decidedly more sexual. The white garment that hangs off one shoulder is less a dress than it is a lace cover falling just short of the top of her stockings, exposing her upper thigh. If Malle's use of Image 14 served as tableau to imagine an everyday scene in the district, the director seized upon the erotic allure of the latter photograph to craft its own explicit interpretation.

existing wholly in service of the film's narrative. Even as the question of adolescent sexuality is one I do not have the space to address in this chapter, the discourse produced by male critics around the young actress's role in the film seems incredibly unaware and necessary to address. For example, New York Times film critic Vincent Canby wrote at the time of the film's release, "I've no idea whether or not Brooke Shields, the breathtakingly beautiful twelve-year-old model who plays Violet, can act in any real sense, but Mr. Malle uses her brilliantly. As Gloria Swanson said of silent stars in *Sunset Boulevard*, 'We had faces then,' and Miss Shields has a face that here transcends the need to act."

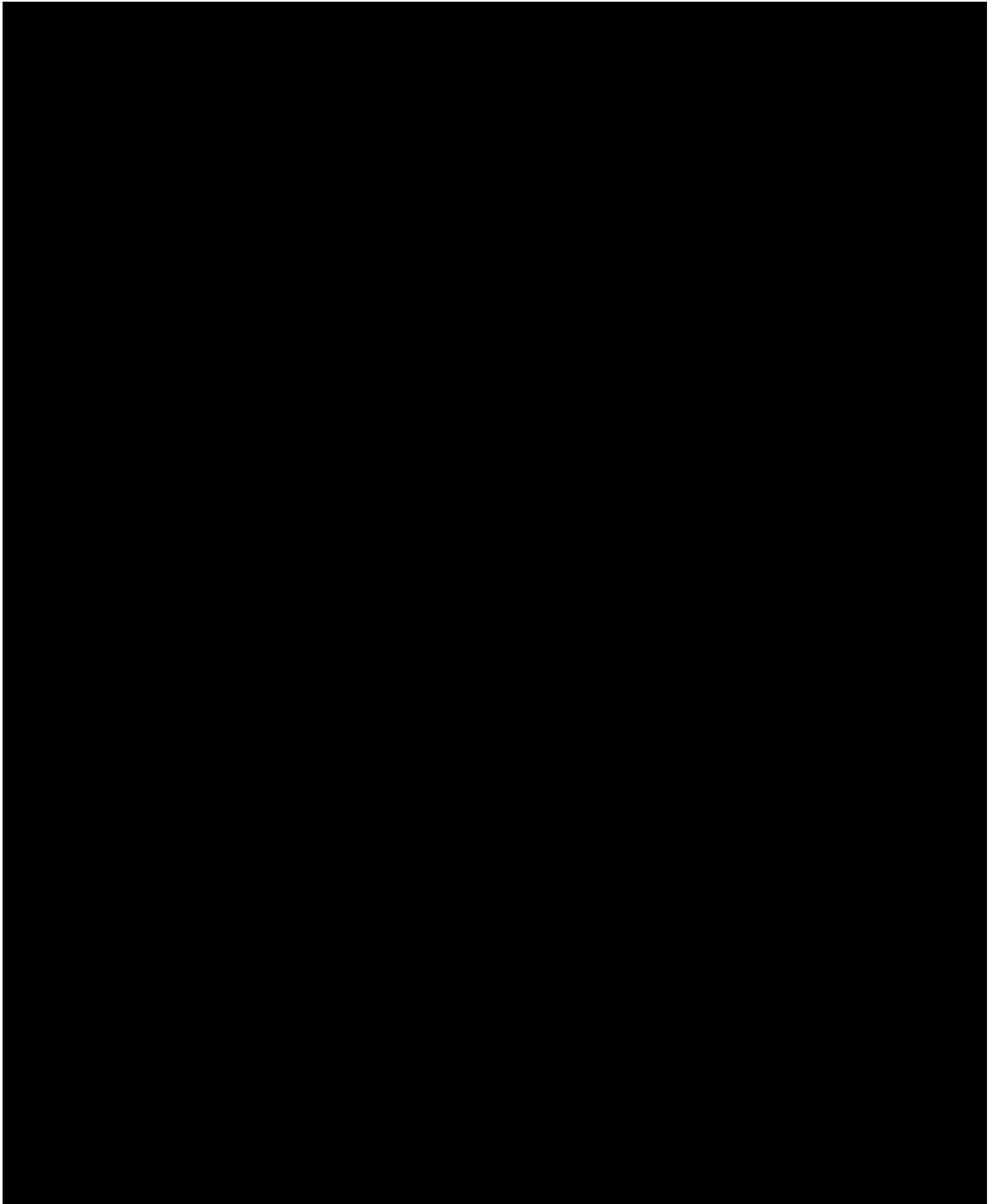


Image 15: Untitled photograph by Ernest J. Bellocq, ca. 1912 (Courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art, New York).



Image 16: Still from the film *Pretty Baby* (1978, dir. Louis Malle) showing Violet (Brooke Shields) seated posing for Ernest J. Bellocq (Keith Carradine). (Courtesy Paramount Pictures)

The scene reproduced above in Image 18 occurs in the film shortly after Violet moves in with Bellocq. While she sat for the photographer before, this is the first such

moment in which her mother is absent. The image of a young Violet sitting on the carpet in her striped stockings and underwear recalls Image 17 insofar as it contains many of the same props and is staged proportionately to the original. The furniture that surrounds her is reminiscent of a doll house, with the expressionless Violet like a doll. Contrary to its inspiration, Malle's Violet looks less like a model trying to strike a pose and more like a subject that has been posed. As such, the sexual nature of the scene has less to do with a sense of commercial appeal than with the photographer's desires to inaugurate a post-Storyville/post-brothel sexual relationship.

While the film takes liberties to fill in numerous historical lacunas, perhaps its most astonishing maneuver is to extrapolate out of Bellocq's photographs a narrative of pedophilia. The film's attempts to engage the photographs simultaneously as aesthetic objects to construct a cinematic vision and as historical documents that illuminate the untold aspects of this history produce a complicated narrative of the district. *Pretty Baby*, as one of the earliest aesthetic engagements with Bellocq and his photographs, offers an extreme example of how photography comes to be seen as a form of historical document, but one that ultimately emphasizes the photographer over all else. In this sense, Malle's film poses a question that is relevant both to Bellocq's images and to the broader study of photography during the late 1960s and 1970s.

John Szarkowski and Susan Sontag, who both have direct connections to the Bellocq photographs, take up this question of photography's nature. As a monumental figure in the history of photography, in every aspect from charting its history, shaping its critical paradigms, and overseeing its institutionalization as a form of artistic expression,

Szarkowski offers insights into the medium that prove instructive in situating Bellocq's surviving oeuvre. Sontag, on the other hand, offers a more guarded approach to what we might regard as the viewer's imaginative capacities in relationship to the photograph. While they approach the question differently, they offer helpful insights into consider the medium's capacities both to document the everyday and to produce art objects to be judged based on their aesthetic value.

Szarkowski articulates this distinction in *Windows and Mirrors: American Photography since 1960*, commenting on the state of photography in the 1960s and 1970s when Bellocq's photographs would have first been seen by the general public: "[T]here is a fundamental distinction between those who think of photography as a means of self expression and those who think of it as a mode of exploration."¹⁴ Later, Szarkowski extends this thesis by criticizing the ways discourses on photography are overdetermined by this distinction, often separating questions of style and content as reducible to the *romantic* (self-expression) and *realist* (exploration).¹⁵ Szarkowski, in a somewhat radical break from established debates around photography, pushes critical discourse to resist separating the aforementioned terms into discrete critical and aesthetic categories. Instead, he describes these categorical markers as existing along a continuous axis.¹⁶ He argues further, "No photographer's work could embody with perfect purity

¹⁴ John Szarkowski, *Mirrors and Windows: American Photography since 1960*, Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1978, 11.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

either of the two divergent motives.”¹⁷ In many ways, the question of whether photography could transcend the dominance of its everyday, vernacular style—an inevitable result both of its commercial proliferation and of its amateurism—and reach similar heights as traditional art forms such as painting and sculpture shapes the spectrum upon which we would seek to better understand Bellocq’s work. This particular history of photography raises the questions that best describe the popular response to Bellocq’s photographs, yet it is Szarkowski’s intervention into the field of photography during this period that challenges both the reception and popular application of Bellocq’s work in projects such as *Pretty Baby*.

Although *Mirrors and Windows* was published in 1978 (the same year Malle’s film was released), nearly eight years after the original Bellocq exhibit at the MoMa, Szarkowski and others involved in critical conversations around photography unburdened the medium from the epistemological binary that had characterized it nearly since its invention. While Szarkowski’s insights do not entirely remedy the impulse toward autobiographical readings of the photographs or any strict approach to their status as either aesthetic or historical documents, they nevertheless expand the field of inquiry for approaching these photographs. Similarly, Sontag’s critical work on photography emerges as another source of thinking through Bellocq’s archive. Invoking a critical lens enabled by Sontag is not without its challenges. Her vastly important work on photography, especially *On Photography* (1977), both complements and pressures her later encounter with the Bellocq portraits. At the same time, such an encounter seems

¹⁷ Ibid., 19.

necessary to draw out if one is to imagine the crucial role that photography comes to play in the literary encounters with this archive.

Sontag writes in her introduction to the 1996 catalog, “[I]t could not be detected from at least a third of the pictures that the women are inmates in a brothel...[Some of] these pictures are actually painful to look at, at least for the viewer. But then I...find nothing romantic about prostitution.”¹⁸ Sontag’s rather strong denunciation of sex work and the spectrum of availability that accompanies some of its narratives show the complicated intersection of meaning found in this collection. Sontag’s encounter with Bellocq’s photographs nearly thirty years after their initial exhibition bears the distinct marks of both the various meanings thrust onto the photographs and an understanding of Storyville’s history through a more generalized understanding of prostitution. Despite this emphasis in her specific treatment of Bellocq’s photographs, however, her earlier work on photography enables a different critical approach to this catalog.

Originally appearing as a series of stand-alone essays in *The New York Review of Books* between 1973 and 1977, *On Photography* was born out of, and helped shape, a community of critics and practitioners of photography that included the likes of Friedlander and Szarkowski. The essays meditate on the history and contemporary roles of photography in our political and intimate lives. For Sontag, the photographic represented a space of unbounded potential and peril. It was a medium capable of democratizing social and political landscapes through the proliferation of access and the ethical potential implicit in showing the real conditions of the world. At the same time,

¹⁸ Sontag, *Bellocq*, 8.

photography's danger emerged for Sontag in the imperial spirit it seemed to inspire in its viewers. As Sontag famously described in the opening essay, "In Plato's Cave": "[T]he most grandiose result of the photographic enterprise is to give us the sense that we can hold the whole world in our heads... To collect photographs is to collect the world." Later, she continues: "Photographs, which package the world, seem to invite packaging... Photographs furnish evidence. Something we hear about, but doubt, seems proven when we're shown a photograph of it."¹⁹ Sontag's claim that a para-possessive force marks the history of photography simultaneously reframes the historico-aesthetic genealogy of the medium and offers a convenient logic to describe the relationship among Bellocq, his sitters, and the photographs as potentially offering us both art and evidence.²⁰ The invitation to access enabled by the belief that the photograph might contain "the world" extends the plausibility of engagement such as Malle's by imagining the photograph to contain a set of relations that might not otherwise be imaginable.

On the other hand, "para-possession" describes how the logic and relations of possession (ownership, accumulation, capture, patriarchy) are perpetually undone by the relationships they purport to describe. In this sense, what is described as Bellocq's relationship to his subjects relies upon possession and containment that is reinforced when sexual desire is a central logic within this visual economy. However, I believe leaves open a space at the heart of her critical approach to photography to consider what

¹⁹ Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, New York: Picador, 1977, 3, 4-5.

²⁰ I am indebted to Sarah Jane Cervenak, in personal communication, for the term "para-possession." Cervenak has not published on this concept yet, but the idea originates with her and is crucial to her forthcoming work on blackness, aesthetics, and gathering.

type of work para-possession can do when the object is dislodged from a critical or creative desire for possession, whether that be material, historical, sexual, or other. In literary engagements with Bellocq the historical curiosity and artistic figure, the question of the para-possessive is crucial to reimagining the boundaries of the photograph and what their specific proximity to both author and subject do for their historical and aesthetic meanings.

A History in Fragments

The text of *Coming Through Slaughter* opens with a kaleidoscopic view of Storyville, oscillating between descriptions of the district in its heyday and present state:

A bit too stylish for the wooden houses almost falling down, the signs the porches and the steps broken through where no one sits outside now. It is further away that you find Rampart Street, then higher up Basin Street, then one block higher Franklin.

But here there is little recorded history, though tales of ‘The Swamp’ and ‘Smoky Row’, both notorious communities where about 100 black prostitutes from pre-puberty to their seventies would line the banquet to hustle, come down to us in fragments.²¹

Ondaatje’s 1976 experimental novel chronicles legendary jazz musician Charles “Buddy” Bolden’s disappearance from his home in the Storyville district, eventual return, and his subsequent descent into madness, consistently offering the reader glimpses of the trumpeter and his lines of flight throughout the novel. Set in turn-of-the-century New Orleans, *Coming Through Slaughter* weaves together historical figures and fantastic accounts to interrogate the nature of historical memory, corporeality, and

²¹ Ondaatje, *Coming Through Slaughter*, 8.

aesthetics. Using the technology of photography and the structure of jazz music to examine all three, Ondaatje's text acknowledges and embraces the elusive, impermanent nature of both technologies. Like Malle's use of the mysterious Bellocq to craft a vision of Storyville, the text plays with the relative modicum of knowledge about Bolden to imagine a world shaped around the elusive trumpeter and a single photograph taken by Bellocq.

Organized into three sections, *Coming Through Slaughter* constructs a literary mosaic of both Bolden's life and the Storyville district across aesthetic, institutional, and legal archives. Historians such as Al Rose, Alecia P. Long, Emily Epstein Landau, and Bolden biographer Donald M. Marquis take similar routes in telling their respective histories of the district, relying on the shadow that Storyville cast upon a great array of historical documents. Similarly, in this way, the telling of Bolden's life has necessitated a piecemeal approach. Marquis begins *In Search of Buddy Bolden*, the capacious and definitive Bolden biography, thus: "Buddy Bolden has always been an elusive, mysterious figure...no one knowing where reality stopped and myth began."²² The novel consistently blurs these lines, while remaining acutely aware of its own relationship to recorded history. By alluding to technologies of recorded sound, the increased role of photography in the period, and the value of oral histories, the novel imagines Bolden's elusive presence as part of his historical and narrative legibility. Partway through the novel, the character of Bolden bandmate Frank Lewis recalls: "If you never heard him

²² Donald M. Marquis, *In Search of Buddy Bolden: First Man of Jazz*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005, Print, 1.

play some place where the weather for instance could change the next series of notes— then you should never have heard him at all. He was never recorded. He stayed away while others moved into wax history, electronic history, those who said later that Bolden broke the path.”²³ Lewis’s sentiment in this passage reverberates throughout the text, constantly preventing the reader from firmly grasping Bolden. Though the ephemerality of Bolden’s musical performances remains constant throughout the novel, he is ultimately returned to the reader in the final section of the novel through hospital records from East Louisiana State Hospital for the mentally ill. This return, isolated, is ultimately unsatisfactory insofar as his death might simply signal a critical lacuna in numerous archives. However, the novel seems to reside in this uncomfortable space of recollection, exploring the recovery of lost historical figures and unsettling the desire for recovery that returns subjects to the present whole and unharmed.

In crafting a story that is both archival and experimental, Ondaatje posits Storyville residents like Bolden and Bellocq as crucial to constructing the district’s history. Both produce archival objects and, by way of their elusive and murky biographies, remain intriguing archival figures. Similarly, in assessing these two figures together, we may think about the complicated relationship between the impulse to archive and the subsequent demand to regulate that process.²⁴ In imagining the productivity of objects, *Coming Through Slaughter* offers a dynamic framework for reading the various archival documents and figures that emerge from Storyville.

²³ Ondaatje, *Coming Through Slaughter*, 37.

²⁴ Derrida, “Archive Fever.”

Bolden's music, and the symbol of his trumpet in particular, often serves as a touchstone for locating and accessing the musician. Shortly after he leaves his band while on tour and disappears, Bolden ends up at the Shell Beach home of married musicians Robin and Jaelin Brewitt. Hopelessly in love with Robin, Bolden communicates in a manner best suited for the moment: "With every sweet stylised gesture that he knew no one could see he aimed for the gentlest music he knew...He played till his body was frozen and all that was alive and warm were the few inches from where his stomach forced the air up through his chest and head into the instrument. Music for the three of them, the other two in bed, not saying a word."²⁵ Bolden's musicality takes many forms in the novel, but in moments such as these there is a sense of access to the character that reaches beyond the historical import of his music. Rather than merely marking historical time (i.e. as a jazz innovator), Bolden plays music that enacts a time and space to inhabit. The use of the imagination to gesture toward the ephemeral offers a complexity to Bolden that is often resisted in moments of his materialization throughout the novel.

²⁵ Ondaatje, *Coming Through Slaughter*, 33.

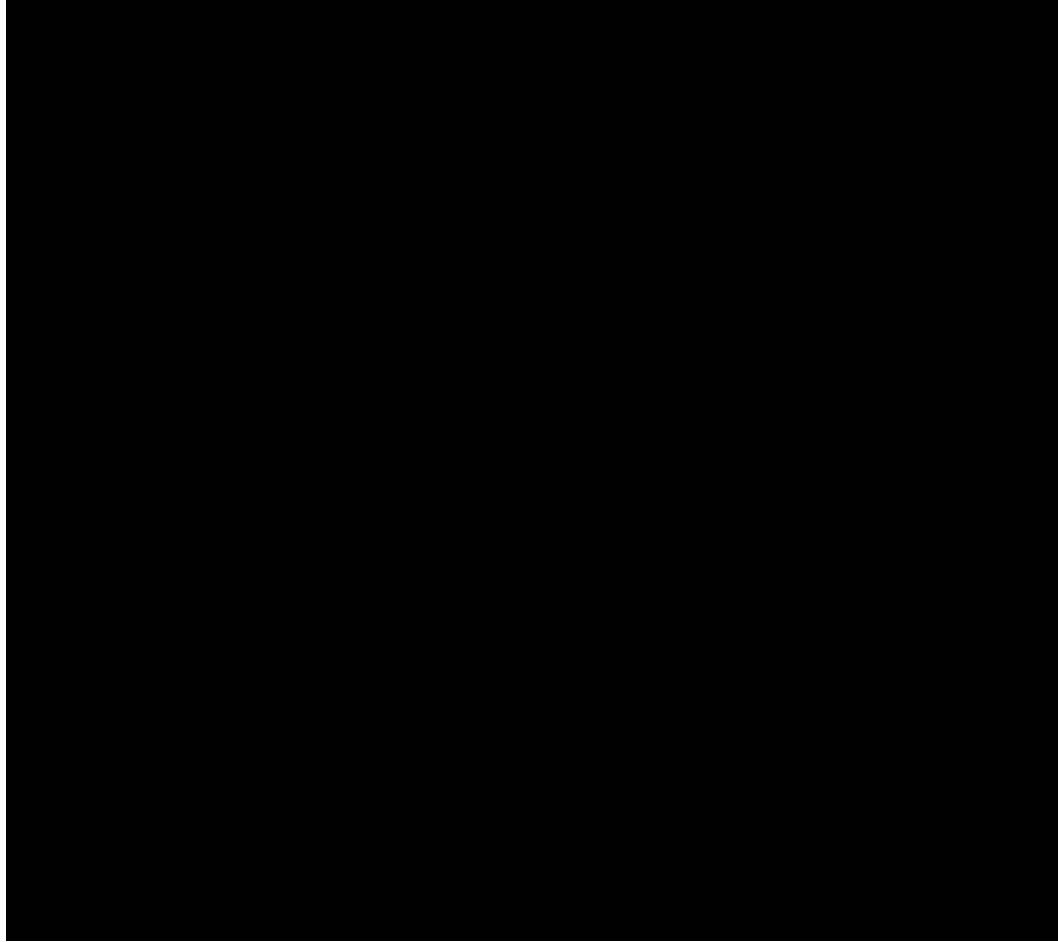


Image 17: Bolden, top row and second from the left. (Courtesy of the Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University)

Somewhat similarly to the deployment of music, Bolden's physical body and the photographic object are seen as complementary to, if not interchangeable with, one another. Focusing on the tropes of process and development, the construction and deployment of the jazz legend and the image exposes the precarity of their material conditions. While Bellocq's portraits are alluded to within the novel for contextual purposes, a singular photograph of Bolden exerts the most effect on the narrative trajectory. The photograph described in the novel is the only known image of Bolden in

existence (Image 19). Though not taken by Bellocq, the photograph has been widely circulated in historical accounts of the roots of jazz music and even adorns the cover of a later edition of the novel.²⁶

At the beginning of the novel's second section, Bolden's former roommate—now police officer—Webb breaks into the boarding-house studio of Bellocq, searching for a picture of the missing Bolden. Unsuccessful in his initial search, Webb waits for the photographer to arrive back at his residence before forcing him to immediately develop a copy of the photograph to aid in his manhunt. In the passage below, Bellocq is asked to fulfill his appointed duty of archivist and collect the record for Webb:

Ten minutes later he bent over the sink with Bellocq, watching the paper weave in the acid tray. As if the search for his friend was finally ending. In the thick red light the little man tapped the paper with his delicate fingers so it would be uniformly printed...The two of them watching the pink rectangle as it slowly began to grow black shapes, coming fast now. Then the sudden vertical lines which rose out of the pregnant white paper which were the outlines of the six men and their formally held instruments...Watching their friend float into the page smiling at them...

He made one more print of the group and shelved it and then one of just Bolden this time, taking him out of the company. Then he dropped the negative into the acid tray and watched it bleach out to grey. Goodbye. Hope he don't find you.²⁷

This moment offers the photograph as evidence of Bolden's existence and first reappearance in New Orleans. While both characters acknowledge the photo's finite temporality, the photograph of Bolden literally conjures the missing trumpeter's body to act as surrogate. "As if the search for his friend was finally ending." This moment

²⁶ Though Bellocq did not actually take the photograph, the novel credits him with doing so.

²⁷ Ondaatje, *Coming Through Slaughter*, 52-3.

ultimately foreshadows the scene later in the novel when Webb finally finds Bolden staying with the Brewitts: “Till Bolden went underwater away from the noise, opening his eyes to look up through the liquid blur at the vague figure of Webb gazing down at him gesturing.”²⁸ At the same time, the photograph enacts, somewhat paradoxically, the materialization of a person whose life has largely resisted mechanical reproduction. Bellocq himself reluctantly reproduces the picture for Webb, disrupting the image we have of the “real-life” photographer as complicit archivist.

This scene is the only interaction between Webb and Bellocq. Webb, as an extension of the law, represents the institutional archives that offer the most somber recollections of Bolden’s life (police reports, records from East Louisiana State Hospital that close the novel, and others) and his encounters with carceral institutions. In “Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression,” Jacques Derrida describes this particular encounter before the archive: “At the intersection of the topological and the nomological, of the place and the law, of the substrate and the authority, a scene of domiciliation becomes at once visible and invisible.”²⁹ Following Derrida, we might think more closely about the manner in which Bellocq is offered as an intermediary between Webb and Bolden, or, more specifically, between Webb and Bolden’s photograph. While Bellocq assumes the specific role of archon in this scene, he is not merely an intermediary and, thus, auxiliary character. Instead, his boarding room signifies a sanctuary, at best, or, at least, a stagnant space in which the photographed are

²⁸ Ondaatje, *Coming Through Slaughter*, 83.

²⁹ Derrida, “Archive Fever,” 10.

shielded from the official record. Even as Webb's mission emanates from seemingly personal reasons (his friendship with Bolden), his search echoes the ethos of surveillance that is both prevalent in guarding the district's boundaries and the novel's search for its missing trumpeter.

Coming Through Slaughter pressures any assumption that would posit the binary of presence/absence as fundamental to an archival historiography, instead offering the photograph-as-evidence—or perhaps more specifically photography qua body—to bear on the tripartite relationship among archive, corporeality, and document.³⁰ In the case of *Coming Through Slaughter*, Webb and other characters in the novel read Bolden's disappearance as a function of madness and his wanderlust, and they are desperate to bring him home. It is only Bellocq—who later destroys the image in a tray of acid—who seems to regard Bolden's disappearance as choice. (And, as we see later, Bolden's return ushers in his final psychotic break.) Therefore, while the photo indicates the persistent precarity of black life under the threat of surveillance, it also demonstrates the insistent force of improvised modes of sociality that disrupt the materiality of institutional archives.

In order to think of the photograph and Bolden as performing in tandem throughout the narrative, we may consider their place somewhere between *surrogacy*

³⁰ Here, I am thinking of Peggy Phelan's work on disappearance. While Phelan's work comes at a very specific moment for women's performance, the assumptions that undergird her argumentative framework echo those Ondaatje is implicitly writing against 25 years earlier. Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, New York: Routledge, 1993, Print. Also see: Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography: Reflections on Photography*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1981, Print; Sekula, "The Body and the Archive."

and *haunting*.³¹ In this instance, I follow Joseph Roach and Avery Gordon, respectively, as their works offer a helpful framework for this context. For Roach, surrogacy, or surrogation, operates as follows: “In the life of a community, the process of surrogation does not begin or end but continues as actual or perceived vacancies occur in the networks of relations that constitute the social fabric.”³² Roach’s performative gesture of surrogation attends to absences felt by a particular community, whether through death or the violent intervention of institutions (i.e. slavery, the prison-industrial complex). In the context of *Coming Through Slaughter*, surrogacy performs what I call the archival relationship between lost bodies and found objects. In the absence of a material body, the photograph as found object is called upon to fill Bolden’s place in Storyville. However, as Gordon’s notion of haunting allows us to see, surrogacy is not merely a material substitution.

Haunting illuminates the conditions that necessitate the act of surrogation between Bolden and the photograph. For Gordon, “What’s distinctive about haunting is that it is an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known, sometimes very directly, sometimes more obliquely.”³³ In other words, Gordon’s notion of haunting remains aware of a subject’s or object’s proximity and enmeshment within a diverse and polymorphous history of violence. While the photograph as found object emerges as Bolden’s surrogate, it is consistently negotiating

³¹ Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997; Roach, *Cities of the Dead*.

³² Roach, *Cities of the Dead*, 2.

³³ Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, xvi.

the violence of his disappearance. The photograph continually stands in for Bolden during his absence from Storyville—as do numerous other forms of documentation in the novel—acting as a surrogate within the community responsible for his historical in/visibility. At the same time, the myriad attempts to index and represent his disappearance, madness, and brilliance elucidate the relationship between racial violence’s vanishing effect and enduring forms of sociality that haunt each and every return to the archive.

This passage is particularly provocative insofar as Bolden’s conjuring into being, or presence, offers a generative mode of thinking through the space of historical lacunas, through the photographic object. Bolden’s return outlines and keeps open a relationship between photography and the body that forces us to put pressure on any simple archival recovery. At the same time, while *Coming Through Slaughter* undoes many of the commonly held assumptions around Bellocq’s relationship to Storyville’s historical record, little is done directly with the questions of gender in the novel. While Bolden’s blackness undoubtedly marks him within the historical archive, *Coming Through Slaughter* belies the complications of thinking about the relationship of photography to non-male bodies.

Throughout the novel, Bolden and Bellocq are rarely in the same scenes; instead, they usually engaged one another through stories told to a third party. In the opening pages of section three, after Bolden returns to New Orleans at the behest of Webb, one of the rare moments in which Bolden and Bellocq are depicted in the same physical space and time occurs in a fictionalized flashback. The excerpted passages below narrate

the occasion upon which Bolden introduces Bellocq to his first sitters, including Bolden's wife, Nora Bass:³⁴

Walking with him to introduce him to whores...

He pulled Bellocq up the steps, the camera strapped across his back like a bow. He had seen it so often on his friend that whenever he thought of him his body took an outline which included the camera and the tripod. It was part of his bone structure. A metal animal grown into his back...

Let me go in and talk to her first. Her? I thought I was going to meet them all. Yeah yeah but I just want to talk to Nora first ok...

Listen Nora you have to do this for me. Let him take some pictures of you. Just this once to show the others it's ok, I promise you it'll be ok.³⁵

In this scene, we are offered very different versions of Bolden and Bellocq from the ones the novel has offered up to this point. Bolden is no longer the elusive, charismatic jazzman. Instead, he is a charitable and kind figure attempting to bridge two vastly different areas of his life. At the same time, whereas Bolden's body had been subject to interchange with the photograph, Bellocq's body now becomes one with the camera. Those two occurrences in the passage alert us to a set of very specific foundational assumptions about Bellocq and Bolden's relationship and the structure of social life in Storyville. First, the portrayal of the camera as an extension of Bellocq firmly entrenches his authorial capacity within the space of his body. Second, this moment of compassion

³⁴ According to the collected papers of Donald Marquis, housed at the Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University, Nora Bass never worked as a prostitute. She came from a middle-class black family in the city. Her role as a prostitute was imagined solely for the novel.

³⁵ Ondaatje, *Coming Through Slaughter*, 123-24.

and friendship between Bolden and Bellocq is one premised on exchange, or what Gayle Rubin might call the “traffic in women.”³⁶

Often accompanying anecdotes about Bellocq are descriptions of his body being differently abled (though these descriptions are not generally as attentive to language). Ondaatje and those interviewed by Szarkowski for the exhibition catalog describe a man whose body was crippled as an effect of his dwarfism. His body is often supplemented, though not replaced à la Bolden, by his camera. In the boarding room scene excerpted above, Webb describes the dual function of the camera’s tripod as a crutch. Similarly, in imagining the camera grafted onto Bellocq’s body—“It was part of his bone structure. A metal animal growing out of his back”—the device functions as a physical and psychological prosthesis. By becoming an extension of his body, the camera facilitates the character Bellocq’s desire to “enter the photographs” and “leave his trace on their bodies.”³⁷ The intonation and skepticism of this desire on the part of Nora and others is what ultimately necessitates Bolden as Bellocq’s liaison.

The friendship between Bolden and Bellocq is one instance in which homosocial relationships and spaces largely structure the action of the novel, with characters like Nora and Robin acting as intermediaries between men and as Bolden’s sexual partners. Whether in the barbershop where Bolden worked, his band, the room Bolden shared with Webb, the Storyville brothels, or the fictionalized origins of

³⁶ Gayle Rubin, “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex,” *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, Ed. Rayna R. Reiter, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975, 157–210.

³⁷ Ondaatje, *Coming Through Slaughter*, 55.

Bellocq's portraits, the women depicted in the novel are largely positioned as adjuncts to their male counterparts. In the passage above, the crucial relationship between Bolden and Bellocq is formed or solidified by this informal transaction. Bolden, using his relationship with Nora (who is not his wife at this point in the chronology of the story), and the other women working as prostitutes, presumed to be able to offer access for Bellocq that he would not otherwise have had. In this imagining of an origin story for Bellocq's famed Storyville portraits, the female characters are ultimately flattened with their reactions regarded solely as transactional.

Bolden successfully assuages the fears of Nora and, presumably, the other women in the brothel. There is an impulse to understand this moment in the novel as one of filiation and compassion on the part of Bolden. Such readings undoubtedly arise from Bellocq's status as a sympathetic, misunderstood character throughout the novel. In this sense, both Bolden and Bellocq are pathologized, and their friendship represents one that is as important as it is unlikely. However, when situating this fictional representation enabled by the visual history of Bellocq and Storyville, the condition of possibility for such a social bond resides in the novel's willingness to position its female characters as part of a set of fungible objects upon which such a bond is articulated.

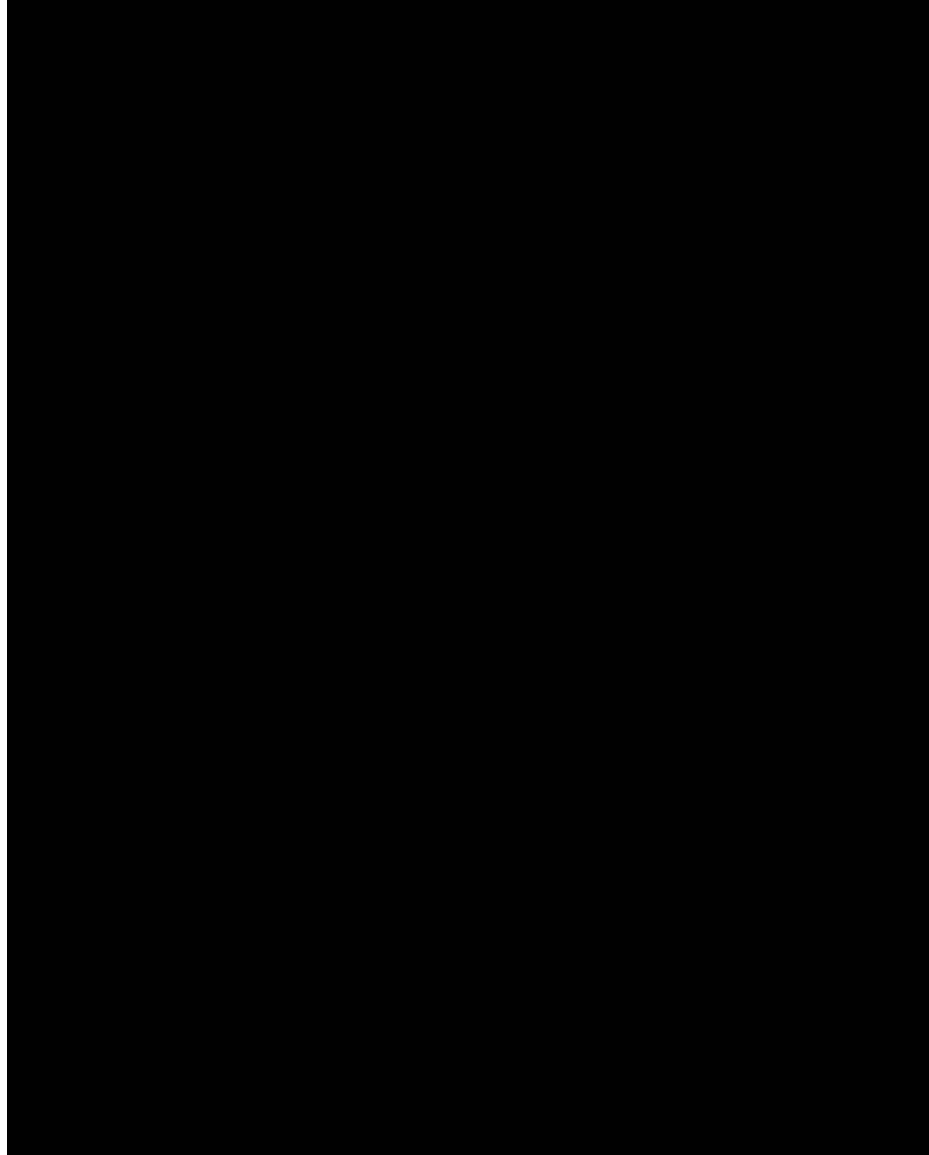


Image 18: Photographs by Ernest J. Bellocq, ca. 1912 (Courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art, New York)

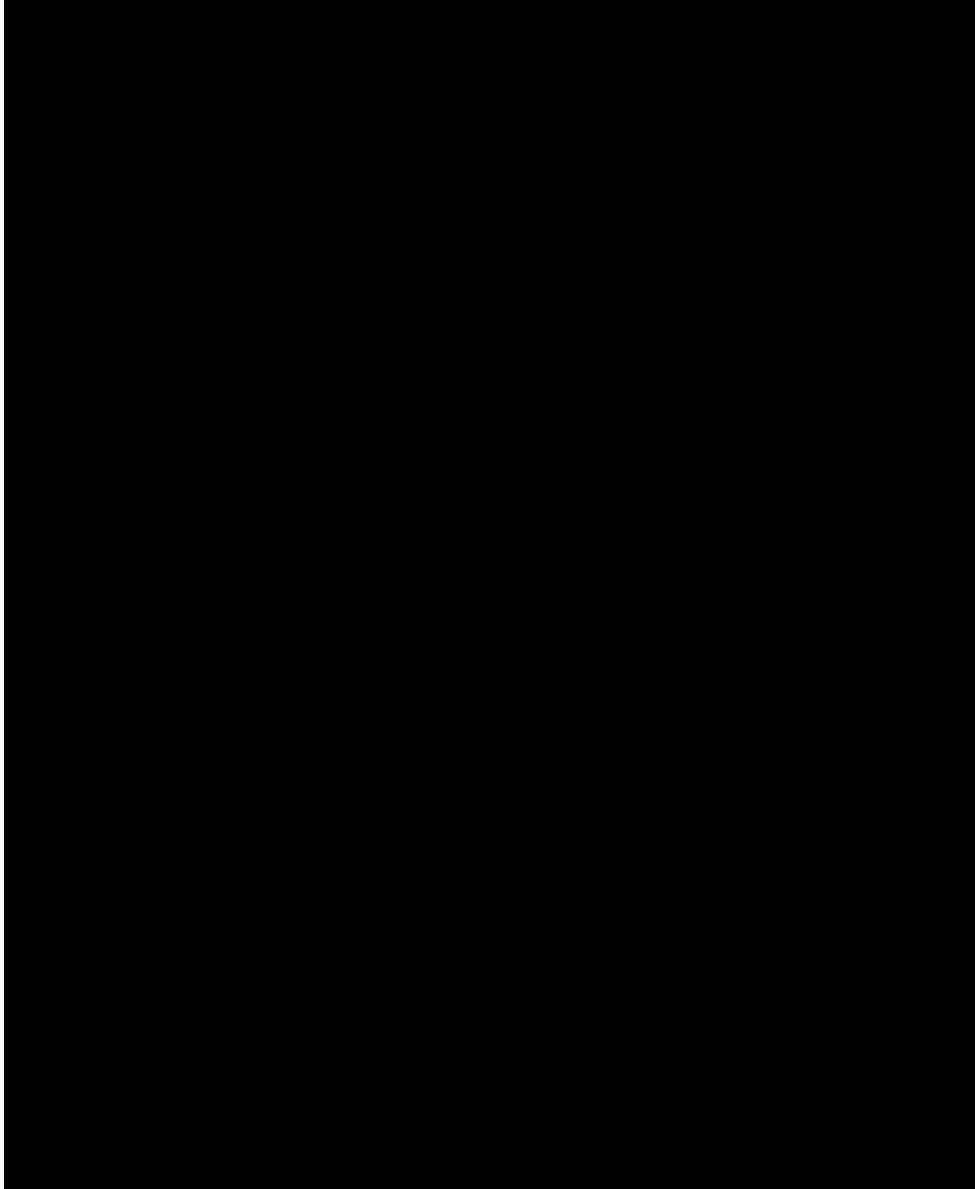


Image 19: Photographs by Ernest J. Bellocq, ca. 1912 (Courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art, New York)

In light of this bond forming, however, the women who sit for Bellocq are abandoned in the narrative. Unlike Bolden, whose body and presence haunt the narrative through his surrogates, the photographs of female subjects are considered documents of Bellocq's sexual desires. Ondaatje imagines Bellocq's relationship to this set of

photographs manifesting in a sexual, palimpsestic cut. “Some of the pictures have knife slashes...[t]he cuts add a three-dimensional quality to each work. Not just physically, though you can almost see the depth of the knife slashes, but also because you think of Bellocq wanting to enter these photographs, to leave his trace on the bodies.”³⁸ While a particular trace is always already sedimented in the photographer’s relationship to his subjects and images, whether manifest through a visual or haptic field, this repeated impulse to cast this relationship explicitly through a sexual economy both obfuscates the myriad of possible conditions under which such photos might have been created and imagines the archival subject that might withstand such a recovery. As Shawn Michelle Smith reminds us in her meditation on Barthes and the temporality of visibility, “The photograph transports the photographed into the time and space of the viewer.”³⁹ In the case of these images, we might include the photographer in that formulation.

Similarly, in reading the presence of the mask in these photographs, we might turn to Barthes’ theory of the mask.⁴⁰ For Barthes, the mask operates as both a mode of concealment for the photographic object and the moment in which meaning is brought to it. He remarks in *Camera Lucida*, “Since every photograph is contingent (and thereby outside of meaning), Photography cannot signify (aim at a generality) except by assuming a mask.”⁴¹ For Barthes, photographs are never the origin of meaning, but rather the postscript to a historical moment whose significance is generally understood

³⁸ Ibid., 55.

³⁹ Shawn Michelle Smith, *At the Edge of Sight: Photography and the Unseen*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2013, 36.

⁴⁰ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*.

⁴¹ Ibid., 34.

through social meaning. In the instance of Storyville, the meaning that is surmised is the systematic abjection of women through prostitution. Put another way, Smith states of the mask, “The photograph enters meaning as its specific subject is transformed into cultural object.”⁴² Following these formulations of this archive’s relationship to meaning, it is of interest to this project to discern the manner in which the photographer’s body and desire are read onto these images and women’s bodies through an all-consuming gaze.

Coming Through Slaughter engages the mythos around Bellocq and his photographs to interrogate the medium’s capacity to act as both evidence of and surrogate for the absent Bolden. In so doing, the novel creates a social network in Storyville of which Bolden is the center. At the same time, just as Violet becomes the object of Bellocq’s desires in *Pretty Baby*, the novel mobilizes Bellocq’s imagined desires to make the women of Storyville legible within the narrative. Although the fictionalizing of Bellocq’s desires takes various forms—the introduction of Bellocq to Nora by Bolden and the scratches on the images, for example—the anonymous female subjects in these fictional renderings of the district are always articulated in relationship to their male counterparts.

Poetics of the Gaze

By contrast, Natasha Trethewey’s 2005 collection of poetry *Bellocq’s Ophelia* brings the collision between history and poetics, the narrative depth of the photograph, and the white male gaze to bear on the complicated place of black women in particular in the history of Storyville. Focusing on Bellocq’s photographic series, Trethewey

⁴² Smith, *At the Edge of Sight*, 28.

imagines the journey of the fictional octoroon prostitute Ophelia from country home to brothel to Bellocq model. Divided into two major sections—epistolary and diary—the collection lends voice to a series of photographs largely shrouded in mystery and perpetually recast amidst the phantasmagoria of historical memory. Ophelia arrives, by way of Trethewey’s collection, to partially fill the lacuna left by the critical propensity to address these photographs and their “discovery” through the lens of authorial biography. Whereas Bellocq becomes the primary figure through which these photographs come to gain meaning, Trethewey’s collection animates the photographic subject in order to account for what has been lost and what remains; the visible and invisible; told and untold; captured and elusive to rethink the roles of race, gender, and desire in the visual economy of Storyville.

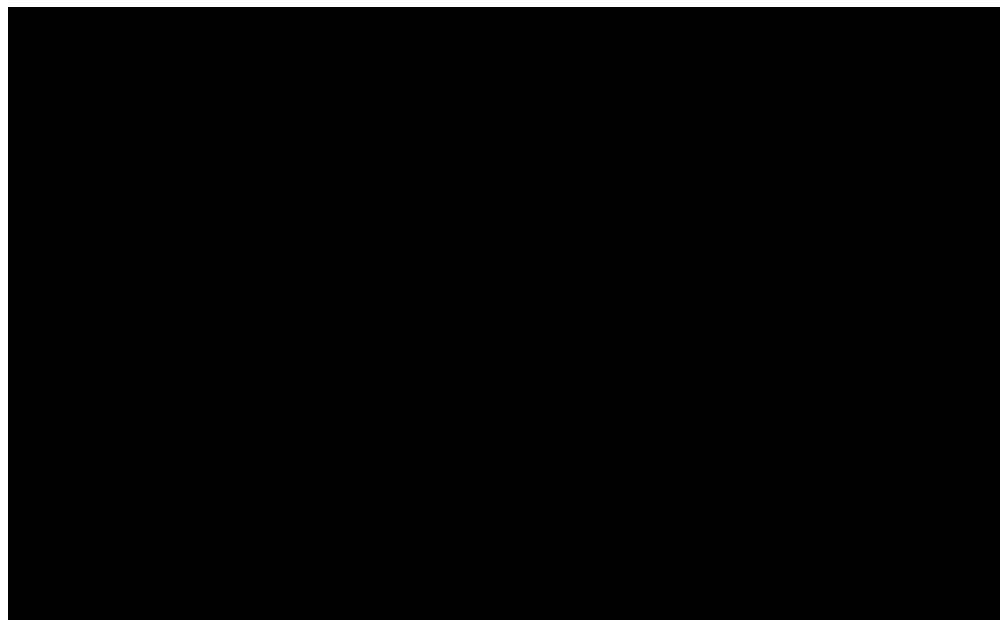


Image 20: *Ophelia* by John Everett Millais, 1852 (Courtesy of the Tate Gallery).

Opening with a poem titled “Bellocq’s Ophelia,” Trethewey situates Bellocq within an expanded, and coincidentally classical, genealogy of art history. As the titular poem suggests, Trethewey invokes the pre-Raphaelite masterpiece *Ophelia* (1852) by John Everett Millais (Image 22) to interrogate the model/artist relationship central to the poems that follow:

In Millais’s painting, Ophelia dies faceup,
eyes and mouth open as if caught in the gasp
of her last word or breath, flowers and reeds
growing out of the pond, floating on the surface
around her. The young woman who posed
lay in a bath for hours, shivering,
catching cold, perhaps imagining fish
tangling in her hair or nibbling a dark mole
raised upon her white skin. Ophelia’s final gaze
aims skyward, her palms curling open
as if she’s just said, *Take me*.

I think of her when I see Bellocq’s photograph—
a woman posed on a wicker divan, her hair
spilling over. Around her, flowers—
on a pillow, on a thick carpet
...Her body limp as dead Ophelia’s,
her lips poised to open, to speak.⁴³

The two images described in the poem (Images 22 and 23), when juxtaposed, offer a startling depiction of vulnerability on the part of the female model and an obsessive fixation on the part of the male artist. The description of Millais’s model, Elizabeth Siddal, is cold and painful. The poem extracts Siddal from her role as Ophelia in the beautiful death scene and places her in a bathtub of cold water, laid out before

⁴³ Natasha Trethewey, *Bellocq’s Ophelia*, Minneapolis: Graywolf, 2002, 3.

Millais. The reality of Siddal's experience frames Bellocq's photograph, simultaneously reminding the reader of the material conditions of these women's lives and imagining what forms of agency might be afforded through speech ("her lips poised to open") or sight. By placing Bellocq's photograph within a broader art-historical context as the first poem in the collection, Trethewey calls attention to the place of female models within the tradition of portraiture, but also the presumed place of whiteness.

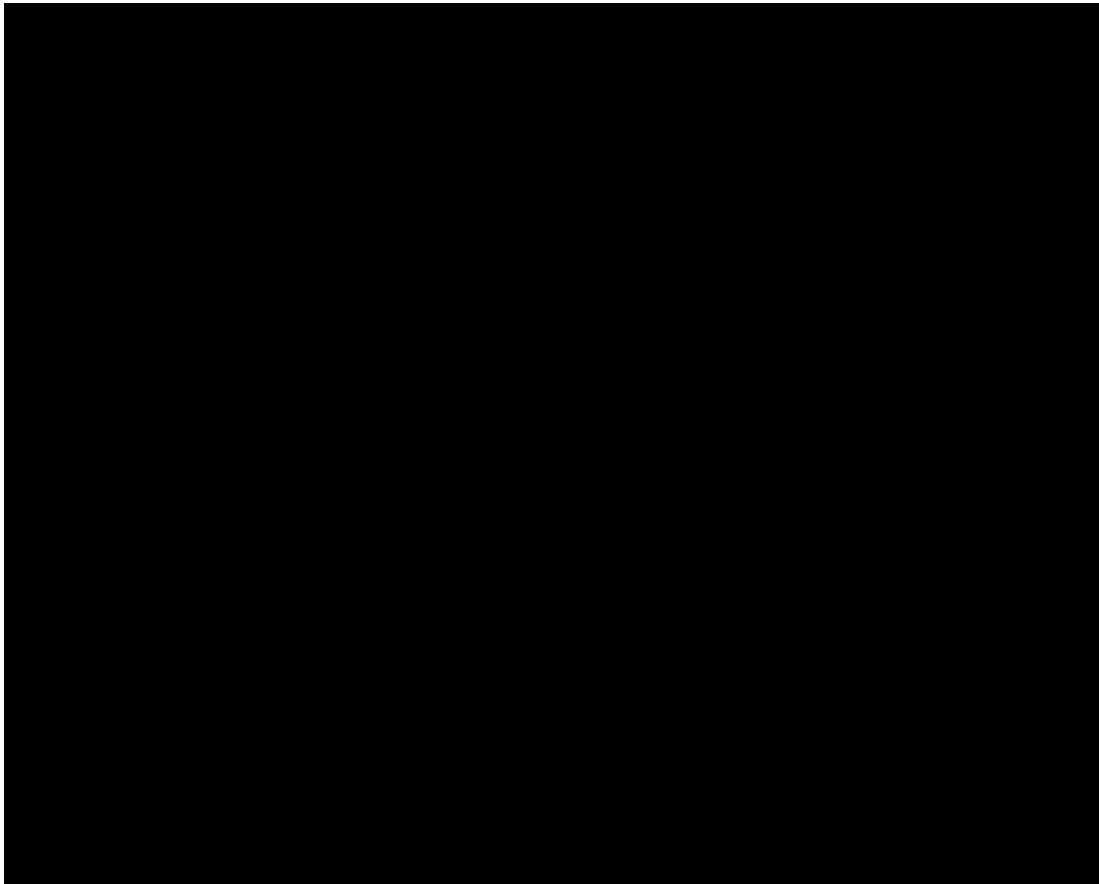


Image 21: Untitled by Ernest J. Bellocq, ca. 1912 (Courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art, New York).

In *Cities of the Dead*, Joseph Roach examines Bellocq's work within the context of circum-Atlantic performance. A later section of Roach's book explores the

continuities between the slave markets and the stage performances of prostitutes in Storyville. Roach juxtaposes Bellocq's portrait of the young reclining woman with Edouard Manet's *Olympia* (1863). His description of the photograph bears significantly on Trethewey's contextualization of the photograph: "Bellocq's portrait of a reclining, nude young girl (the scene restaged with Brooke Shields by Louis Malle in the film *Pretty Baby*) evokes the imagery of vulnerability and availability that also characterized depictions of the tragic octoroon."⁴⁴ This crucial pivot in Roach's work both brings attention to the racialized sentiments of these images, which Trethewey engages rigorously through her poetry, and bridges the complicated double-bind of assimilation through racial passing.⁴⁵ Playing with the commonly held assumption that Bellocq's models were white, Trethewey deploys this discrepancy to respond to the many historical and aesthetic impositions placed on these images.

As narrator, Ophelia details for a friend back home and in her own series of personal reflections her life in New Orleans. After initially failing to "make it" in her new home as respectable, passing young woman, she finds herself working within the

⁴⁴ Roach, *Cities of the Dead*, 227. Another source that is profoundly instructive for its insights into the place of the reclining nude figure in Western art and its relationship to understanding of blackness is Fred Moten's "Taste Dissonance Flavor Escape." Fred Moten, "Taste Dissonance Flavor Escape: Preface for a Solo by Miles Davis." *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory* 17.2 (2007): 217–246.

⁴⁵ In the poem "Blue Book," Ophelia reproduces the texts accompanying her photograph in an advertisement:

"Violet," a fair-skinned beauty, recites
poetry and soliloquies; nightly
she performs her tableau vivant, becomes
a living statue, an object of art—
and I fade again into someone I'm not (40).

walls of Willie Piazza's brothel for Octoroon women. In the first stanza excerpted below, taken from "Willie Piazza's Advice for New Girls," the infamous madam details for her girls the proper manner of relating to a john. In her instruction, Piazza gestures toward the crushing visibility of a sexualized and racialized gaze and the demure response required to survive such an encounter.

Don't pretend you don't know what I mean.
Become what you must. Let him see whatever
he needs. Train yourself not to look back.⁴⁶

The nature of transformation in this stanza plays with the chameleon trope often applied to sex work, figuring a central aspect of such labor to be one's capacity to inhabit the desire of another in a way that seems both natural and unforced. In such a moment, it would seem that the prostitute is alienated from her own desires. This service is initially redoubled in the relationship Ophelia is imagined to have with Bellocq as both photographic and sexual subject. The weight of this gaze and its facilitation by photographic technology translates literally to the level of the body that is posed and manipulated by the artist. However, even as Ophelia's initial encounter with her new life as a prostitute suggests entrance into a violent world, she develops an oppositional stance as the collection proceeds.

In the poem entitled "September 1911," Ophelia describes how, by possessing a camera, she comes to see the world anew and even assumes the role of apprentice to Bellocq:

⁴⁶ Trethewey, *Bellocq's Ophelia*, 11.

This past week I splurged, spent a little
of my savings on a Kodak, and at once/
I became both model and apprentice—
posing first, then going with Bellocq/
to his other work—photographing
the shipyard with its myriad lines,
angles I've just begun to notice. I see,
too, the way the camera can dissect/
the body, render it reflecting light
or gathering darkness—surfaces/
gray as stone or steel, lifeless, flat.
Still, it can also make flesh glow/
as if the soul's been caught
shimmering just beneath the skin...⁴⁷

While the camera offers a manner through which to dissect and atomize the body in order to produce a stillness accentuating modularity, it also instills a sense of agency in Ophelia when placed in her own hands. Such an analytical and poetic move balances the violence of dissection with the potential for mobility. Trethewey's invocation of light and dark plays with the registers and instability of meaning on the body. In advancing such a formulation of the body, the collection imagines a photographic subject that may be momentarily closed off to certain possibilities, but saved through a capacity to authorize her own subjectivity. Trethewey's collection, which ultimately rests on an imbalance between the facts of injury and the potential to discover the traces of agency, constructs a narrative in order to enact these speculative potentials.

Chronologically, *Bellocq's Ophelia* is the last text in this chapter to engage Bellocq and his photography. In the wake of the reissuing of the exhibition catalog and

⁴⁷ Ibid., 27.

Sontag's myopic and monochromatic historicization, Trethewey performs something akin to a black feminist reading of Bellocq's photographs. In addressing one of the least attended to areas of Storyville lore, Trethewey not only imagines the life of a young black woman in the district; she also challenges Sontag's claim that these women necessarily be considered "inmates." Instead, Ophelia's position as authorizing subject inverts the optics of the male gaze, and resists the crushing objecthood of being party to a transaction in which you have no standing.⁴⁸ Such a gesture invests in the speculative possibilities of a black feminist poetics, or what Jennifer Nash calls the "recovery work" at the heart of a black feminist archive.⁴⁹

When such a hermeneutic or creative approach demands of its objects a narrative that is in excess of and ultimately detrimental to that which has been *made visible*, the violence of such an inscription would appear only to reproduce the conditions that gesture would seek to avoid. For Trethewey, the production of a fictional body makes visible original, violent claims that the black female body has neither the capacity nor the willfulness to endure the archive's temporality, while enacting in the space of speculation alternative modes of concealment and looking. It is here that I believe the crucial work of Trethewey's poetics emerges, and she enacts a black feminist poetics.

⁴⁸ Here I am borrowing Brian Wagner's formulation of blackness in the modern world as being "exchanged without being party to that exchange." While Wagner's critical formulation takes somewhat of a scorched earth approach, it is never the less helpful in describing the work Trethewey's poetry does in relation to the role of women in *Coming Through Slaughter*. Bryan Wagner, *Disturbing the Peace: Black Culture and the Police Power after Slavery*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009.

⁴⁹ Nash, *Black Body in Ecstasy*.

Nash's work on black feminist archives and the importance of "recovery work" in *The Black Body in Ecstasy* proves particularly instructive:

If the black feminist theoretical archive has been preoccupied with tracing how representation produces injury, it has also celebrated the flip side of woundedness: recovery work. By *recovery work*, I refer to black feminist representation that attempts to salvage the black female body from the violence of the visual field...this countergenre is deeply invested in drawing upon visual conventions, particularly the use of self-portraiture, referencing and sometimes embodying historical trauma, and performing blackness in ways that expose the constructedness of race and evidence a belief that the visual can be the register for redressing and healing representation's fleshy wounds.⁵⁰

Nash, whose work explores the complexity of black women's pleasure in pornographic film, offers a script for a form of recovery and aestheticization that attends to the violence of history on the black female body. Similarly, Nash's work notes the constructedness of the racialized body within the archive, extending the formulations alluded to in Roach's work and at the center of Trethewey's.

For Nash and others, the importance of projects engaged in *recovery work* demands more than merely a desire for such an outcome. In the instance of Bellocq's relatively small collection of surviving photographs, this work takes on a form that must describe a social field that simultaneously organizes bodies and creates meaning for them. The critical and creative work on Storyville has sought to interpret this organization in a way that is both interesting and historical. However, as is often the case, the archival presence of black women has been presented in a manner that requires

⁵⁰ Nash, *Black Body in Ecstasy*, 47.

translation. Whether it is through racialized descriptions, a historical account of their place in the sexual transgressions of the color-line, or an inconspicuous absence amidst visual representations of the district, black women are not necessarily privy to the recollection of historical bodies that other Storyville residents have been accorded.

Rethinking Photographic Capture

In her introduction to the 1996 catalog, Sontag describes Bellocq's photographs as possessing an aesthetic value that complicates what she reads as their status as "inmates" of both the brothel and the photograph. As relics of the past, the photographs, for Sontag, straddle the line of evidence and art, charting a trajectory of escape for Bellocq's models that demonstrates the "what has been" and preserves the beauty of the photographed subject. These photographs do a great deal for what reads as Sontag's desire to liberate Bellocq's subjects from the "imprisonment" of prostitution, both imaginatively and historically.⁵¹ By invoking the familiar tropes that accompany sex workers—waywardness, the fallen woman, daughters without fathers, and victims of "white slavery"—the photographs invite viewers to bask in the erotics of anonymity all over again, while still holding out hope for these subjects. Even as this archive offers an important glimpse into an intriguing past, its privileging reinforces the complicated entanglements between constructions of race, gender, and visibility at the dawn of the twentieth century.

⁵¹ Sontag in *Bellocq*, 7. In the introduction to *Bellocq*, Sontag describes the women depicted in Bellocq's photographs as "imprisoned in brothels."

As I have shown through Trethewey, these images often only work to reaffirm the transcendent and eternal qualities of whiteness in art, while positing blackness as that which holds no import and interdicts the promise of aesthetics. Sontag's error in confronting these photographs is the belief that these "gift[s] from the past"⁵² consolidate and perform a sense of allure, bearing great similarity to the aesthetic tradition of equating frailty and white womanhood. This is not merely the celebration of white skin and the denigration of black skin, though that has certainly been a part of it. Rather, Sontag posits blackness (as incarceration, degradation, and loss of purity) as the condition of Bellocq's subjects' confinement within the brothel. This formulation poses a particular historical problem for a site whose majority population is systematically excluded from gestures of recovery premised on the visual. In such a gesture, Sontag and others have extracted these images and their subjects from their historical genesis, instead opting for an understanding of sexual labor that is ahistorical and that obscures the ways in which race structures such an economy.

⁵² Ibid., 7.

Chapter 4
The Archive and the Flesh:
Storyville and the Criminal Photograph

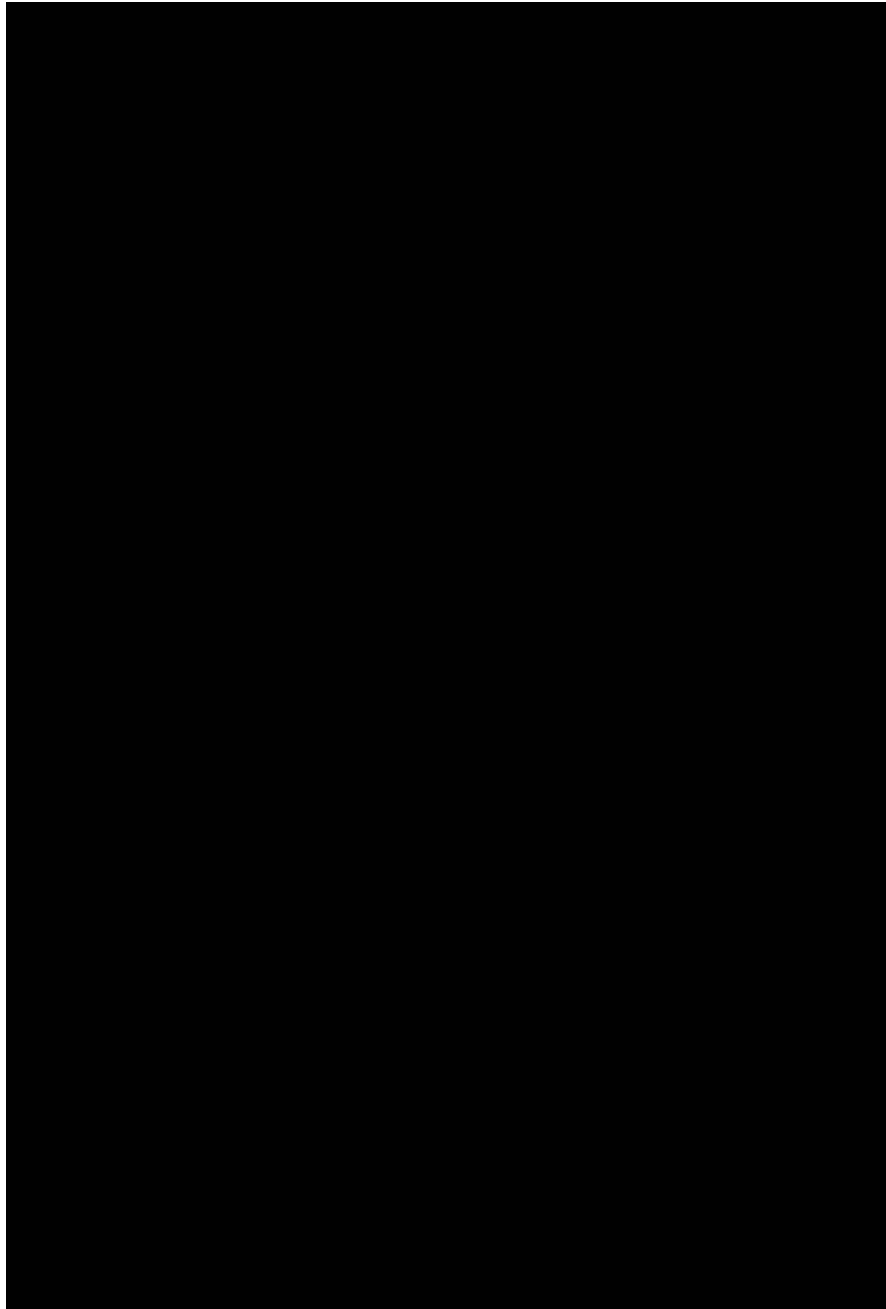


Image 22: Front of mugshot card of Florestine Breaud (alt. Breaux) from the Orleans Parish Police Department, 1920. (Courtesy of the New Orleans Public Library).

“All that lives, increases, or decreases, oscillates between a *maximum* and a *minimum*, between which are grouped the multitude of intermediate forms, growing so much the more numerous as they approach the mean and so much the rarer as they recede from it.”

-Alphonse Bertillon, *The Bertillon System of Identification*¹

“The extraordinary is in the ordinary like freedom is in unfreedom as the trace of the resistance that constitutes constraint.”

-Fred Moten, “Uplift and Criminality”²

“An archive circumscribes and delimits the meanings of the photographs that comprise it, investing images with import calculated to confirm a particular discourse. Even as it purports simply to supply evidence, or to document historical occurrences, the archive maps the cultural terrain it claims to describe. In other words, the archive constructs the knowledge it would seem only to register or make evident. Thus archives are ideological; they are conceived with political intent, to make specific claims on cultural meaning.”

-Shawn Michelle Smith, *Photography on the Color Line*³

The Orleans Parish police department’s arrest records from the mid-1890s through the mid-1920s encompass all of Storyville’s existence, and scattered throughout are the records of women that lived and worked in the district. The objects found in the archive—ledgers, undeveloped glass-plate negatives, and photographs fixed to various types of criminal identification cards—detail a wide range of individuals arrested in the

¹ Alphonse Bertillon, *The Bertillon System of Identification: Signalitic Instructions Including the Theory and Practice of Anthropometrical Identification*. Chicago, New York: Werner Company, 1896.

² Fred Moten, “Uplift and Criminality,” *Next to the Color Line: Gender, Sexuality, and W.E.B. Du Bois*, Eds. Susan Kay Gillman and Alys Eve Weinbaum, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007: 317-349.

³ Shawn Michelle Smith, *Photography on the Color Line: W.E.B. Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.

famously transient port city. The photographs attached to mug-shot and Bertillon cards were used to surveil Storyville residents and construct a record of their lives as criminal figures both sexually corrupt and generally prone to waywardness. While the thousands of images show a diverse mix of raced and gendered individuals detained for a variety of reasons, they importantly contain the most comprehensive record of black women who worked as prostitutes during the years of Storyville's existence. However, unlike the Bellocq photographs discussed in the previous chapter, little to no attention has been given to these visual records of black women currently housed in the New Orleans Public Library's city archives division.

In contrast to the manner in which Bellocq's photographs were regarded as unique and remarkable by the likes of Susan Sontag, John Szarkowski, and Lee Friedlander, mugshots of black women would seem to tell a familiar story within the history of photography. As Deborah Willis and Carla Williams describe in the Preface to *The Black Female Body: A Photographic History*, there are three genres of representation that haunt black women's presence across Western art and visual mediums such as photography more broadly:⁴

The naked black female: The first category identifies the modes of representation the authors describe as the "National Geographic" or "Jezebel" aesthetic. Photographs that fall under this heading most clearly index the visual epistemologies of coloniality and enslavement, while also reproducing the attendant desires of both the scientific and white male gaze. Black women, whether photographed individually or as a group, are depicted in the nude for the purposes of either scientific knowledge or eroticism. The line between the two is

⁴ Deborah Willis and Carla Williams, *The Black Female Body: A Photographic History*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002.

often indistinguishable in examples such as Louis Agassiz and Joseph T. Zealy's infamous 1850 photographs of seven slaves (Alfred, Fassena, Renty, Jem, Jack, Delia, and Drana) from plantations near Columbia, South Carolina.⁵

The neutered black female: The depiction of black women as “neutered” echoes the image of the Mammy figure. This caricature replaces the visual imposition of explicit sexual desires with images of domestic labor. Often seen accompanying a white family or in countless other scenes of labor, black women depicted in this manner are described by Willis and Williams as “adjuncts” to visual productions of whiteness. Édouard Manet's *Olympia* (1863) serves as one such example in his depiction of the white, nude Olympia and an enslaved woman attending to her.

The noble black female: The final category, a permutation of the “noble savage,” often consists of images of black women depicted through the lens of respectability. Much like its categorical antecedent, this form of visual representation often relies on black women's adornment in cultural and social signifiers of superiority vis a vis clothing, family, achievement, beauty, or any other visual marker that she is a *credit to her race*. W.E.B. Du Bois's photographic exhibition, “The American Negro,” at the 1903 Paris Exposition is one of the earliest twentieth century examples of this form.

Insofar as visual economies are invested with the capacity to produce knowledge, these three categories of representation for black women draw upon and inform a range of social and cultural narratives. The visual distills, within these three examples, the racialized and gendered epistemologies produced through coloniality, slavery, and their respective afterlives, which as I have shown in previous chapters, includes Storyville. At the same time, violence perpetrated under these three headings is not totalizing. Willis and Williams go on to argue that photography has offered numerous opportunities for black women to subvert these modes of representation, pointing to contemporary artists

⁵ I will expand on this example further in the next section.

such as Carrie Mae Weems, Renée Cox, and Adrian Piper, whose explorations of photography push at the medium's boundaries of representation.

The Storyville police archive certainly traffics in these categories, producing forms of legibility for black women that are as violent as they are familiar. In the previous chapter, I conclude by arguing that while Bellocq's photographs can engender critical reading practices that challenge the erasure of their anonymous subjects, the visual economy from which they emerge is largely figured through the privileged space of whiteness within the district. In this chapter, I want to consider how photographic records of black women emerging from the criminal archive fit into and challenge the visual history of Storyville presumed through the Bellocq photographs. I begin by examining how the adoption of photographic and database technologies by municipal police departments in the latter half of the nineteenth century led to the creation of what Allan Sekula has called the "criminal body" amidst a much larger "social body."⁶ I situate the Orleans Parish police department archives within these expanding technologies and concerns around criminality to show how the various examples of photo-centric technologies such as mugshot cards and Bertillon cards are used in attempts to manage the place of black women's bodies within Storyville. I argue that while the police records were meant to surveil their locations and bodily movements, the photographs of black women and the accompanying administrative information show how these records challenge the boundaries of both Storyville and the archive.

⁶ Sekula, "Body and the Archive."

Policing the Archive

Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, municipal police departments throughout much of Western Europe and the United States underwent a technological revolution that forever changed the role of policing in society. Such technological advancements as the arming of police forces with guns and the systemization of criminal identification with photography were symptomatic of a growing social concern over the presence of crime and criminality during this period. Used in asylums, prisons, and, though less frequently, by municipal police departments, photography first emerged as a technology for identifying and classifying criminals in the 1850s.⁷ The practice of photographing individuals within these institutions was part of a larger effort to furnish such scientific fields as Anthropology, Biology, Eugenics, and Physiognomy with a greater quantity of visual evidence so that they might better define and identify criminal behavior.⁸ Anne Maxwell notes of the relationship between the field of Eugenics and prison photography, “By providing an accurate visual record of the heads and faces of those who had fallen foul of the law, prison photography furnished eugenicists with an invaluable resource for identifying those believed to be carrying the genes for

⁷ Anne Maxwell, *Picture Perfect: Photography and Eugenics 1870-1940*, Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2008.

⁸ The scientific community has been quick to retroactively point with scorn to fields such as Eugenics and Physiognomy as pseudo-sciences. I am not in any disagreement with claims by individuals inside and outside of the scientific community that the premise of such endeavors in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was largely founded on or perpetuated racial, gender, and class biases. However, I am reluctant to attach the prefix of “pseudo” when historicizing these fields, as it inherently gestures toward a true practice of Science innocent from the practice of creating narratives in the interest of defining its objects of study.

delinquency and crime.”⁹ Scientific attempts to classify and define different human “types” and “characteristics” in the nineteenth century emerged in relation to numerous social concerns around health, population, and racial purity, to name a few. These forms of knowledge would quickly get routed into the delineation of social and racial classes, ultimately further entrenching beliefs in a natural social order in need of management.

The photographic procedures initially adopted by police departments were, coincidentally, largely informed by the same scientific fields they were supplying visual data to as early as the 1850s. In particular, it was widely believed that the categorization of different human “types” could identify inherent traits of criminality and deviance. In these early attempts to categorize criminal types, scientists often found their earliest physical and visual evidence through the bodies of non-white subjects. These assertions, emerging in part out of “evidence” witnessed through interactions structured by enslavement and colonialism, assumed Anglo-European supremacy among the world’s races. One of the earliest attempts to produce photographic case studies to put forth a theory of Anglo-European superiority was in 1850 under the direction of noted French Biologist and proponent of polygenesis Louis Agassiz.

Agassiz’s belief in polygenesis—that individuals could be divided into general categories to explain their different evolutionary origins—led him to a plantation outside of Columbia, South Carolina, where he would collect portraits of seven slaves and produce fifteen photographs in total. Through his photographic evidence, Agassiz claimed he had produced definitive proof of different evolutionary origins between

⁹ Maxwell, *Picture Perfect*, 48.

seven men and women from the plantation, some of whom had been born in West Africa and others on the plantation, and his Anglo-European subjects. While both polygenesis and Agassiz were eventually discredited—though the scientist retained a position at Harvard University, where the Daguerreotype prints from this study were discovered in 1976 in a storage cabinet—the connections between visual evidence provided by photography and scientific knowledge he attempted to make quickly took hold.

Numerous scientists and fields would follow this emerging trend of seeking visual evidence with the assistance of photographic technology. In addition, other early pioneers employing photography, such as Henry Herrings and Hugh Diamond, followed Agassiz in another manner. Agassiz conducted his research on the Columbia county plantation for at least two reasons. First, the plantation of enslaved black men, women, and children satisfied the “type” he sought to document and define. Second, with the assurances of the plantation owner Robert R. Gibbes, Agassiz believed he would have compliant subjects. This pair of “ideal” conditions for research can be seen to have emerged relatively quickly, if not simultaneously, with Agassiz during the 1850s in the United States and Western Europe (specifically England and France). Most notably, Herrings produced photographic portraits of patients at Bethlem Royal Hospital in London between 1855 and 1860, and Diamond amassed a collection of patient photographs at the Surrey County Asylum throughout the 1850s and 60s (see Image 25). It was widely believed there would be no better examples to furnish the expanding fields of knowledge around criminality, mental health, and human behavior than those individuals who most obviously embodied a deviation from presumptively normative

features and behaviors. Therefore, the availability of such large quantities of potential subjects offered by plantations, asylums, and prisons proved a crucial component in the emergence of this practice. Indeed, the very origins of the practice depended as much on containment as it did on knowledge of deviance, criminality, and generalized inferiority. The subjects captured in these photographs were offered to furnish evidence for the claims of these emerging sciences seeking to define criminal and mental health categories through subjects that largely fell outside the standard range of deviation calibrated to the white male subject.

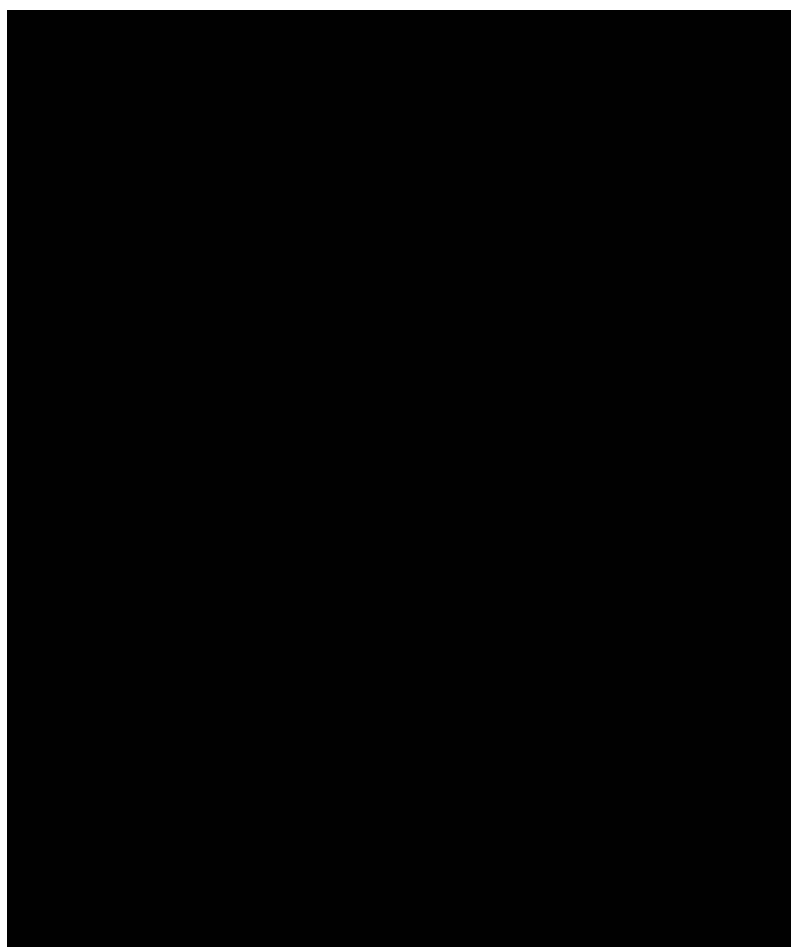


Image 23: Photograph by Dr. Hugh Welch Diamond of an anonymous patient at Surrey County Asylum, ca 1855.

While the emergence of photography within these fields contributed greatly to the production of scientific knowledge during this period, early results did not always fulfill the promise of a perfect visual replica.¹⁰ The early attempts by doctors and guards in asylums and prisons to capture photographs of inmates were often inconsistent. As can be seen in the photograph above, excerpted from Diamond's photographic album (Image 25), the young female patient at the Surrey County Asylum is neatly dressed and bundled for what appears to be from the faded photograph a portrait taken outside. Despite the photograph's grainy quality and overexposed sepia tone, possibly an effect of the natural lighting, the anonymous woman is hardly visible underneath her bonnet and heavy wool blanket. The photograph recalls an intimate portrait more so than it does any scientific evidence of her mental health. Maxwell describes these early difficulties when she notes, "The first photographs of prisoners and asylum patients were created using techniques belonging to bourgeois portraiture, and they reveal the awkward, rather ad hoc way in which the early artistic and scientific forms of photography evolved and frequently overlapped."¹¹ While they may have produced "awkward" images of inmates, the lack of uniformity created issues in a system of identification that relied heavily on continuity to see a variety of facial traits and distinguish individuals from one another.

By the 1880s, approximately twenty years after the practice of photographing prisoners became more commonplace, photography began to more formally shape views

¹⁰ For more information on the use of photography in asylums, see Ulrich Baer, *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002.

¹¹ Maxwell, *Picture Imperfect*, 50.

on criminals and criminal behavior within police departments themselves.¹² As John Tagg asserts, an increased recognition by scientific communities and the larger public that photography finally offered the most faithful reproduction of the “real” led to the inevitable use of the medium in the tracking and identification of criminals.¹³ As the number of police precincts adopting photography grew, so too did the need to standardize the formal qualities of the mugshot and the appropriate procedures for collecting an individual’s information. While early pioneers such as Agassiz, Diamond, and Herrings loom large over this history, few have had as lasting an impact on the development of policing technologies as French police officer and biometricist Alphonse Bertillon. Often considered the father of modern biometrics, Bertillon standardized the two-panel police photographs still used today (see Image 26) and developed the first uniform system of criminal record-keeping known as Bertillonage.

In 1888, Bertillon formalized the procedure for recording and processing criminal photographs and bodily measurements. In an early example from 1892, Bertillon can be seen standing in to model the appropriate position of the arrested individual and general form the photograph should take. The rigid posture of the arrestee's body is paramount so that the individual's features such as jawline, the slope of

¹² In many regards, the adoption of photography by municipal police departments signals the dawn of modern biometrics. Even as we understand biometrics in the present as a science premised on highly specialized procedures of identifying biological makeup, its origins as a tool of surveillance and tracking the bodily movements of criminals are indelibly linked to visual technologies. See Simone Browne, *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2015.

¹³ John Tagg, *The Disciplinary Frame: Photographic Truths and the Capture of Meaning*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009.

the head, size of ears, and general proportions of the face and upper torso could be used to visually identify recidivists. At the same time, to enhance the photograph's effectiveness, Bertillon developed the thick card with a number of bodily measurements that could be filled out to further catalog the arrestee's unique bodily characteristics, a process colloquially known as Bertillonage. The formalization and development of Bertillonage transformed both policing and record keeping during this period, not only fixing issues of standardization but also revolutionizing the way criminal records would come to be used.

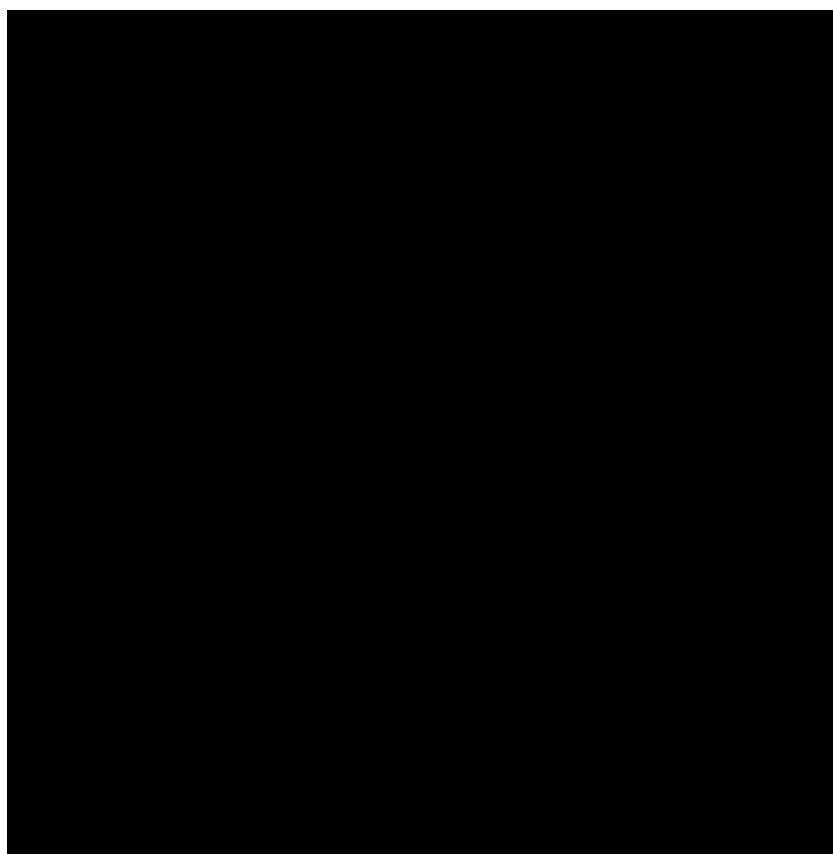


Image 24: Sample Bertillon card of Alphonse Bertillon, 1892.

In a 1909 address delivered at the Franklin Institute of Pennsylvania's "Popular Science" series, biometricist Persifor Frazer extolled the virtues of Bertillon's new

system of measurement protocols aimed at organizing and tracking criminal records. Bertillon cards gained popularity because of their compact yet descriptive capacities, whose retrieval mechanisms were organized around an 11-measurement system. As Frazer notes in his explanation of the system's organizational logic,

The function of the anthropometric service is to obtain from the prisoners brought to it a certain number of osseous measurements, using the figures thus obtained as a basis to classify the photographs of individuals, after the manner of a classification of flora, etc., to enable one ultimately to find, in a collection destined to contain several hundred thousand specimens, the portrait of an old offender who has concealed his identity under a false name and a disguise.¹⁴

The explosion of photographic documentation over the previous fifty years and the lack of uniformity had complicated the medium's appropriation for the development of policing technologies. Police precincts found themselves inundated with mugshots and few manners through which to organize and track arrest records, let alone the emerging social class of criminals.

Developed to take advantage of both photographic and physiognomic technologies of the time, this system of cataloging served several purposes: first, confirming the initial demand of the technology, it offered an archive of "known" criminals whose status could be verified through irrefutable photographic and measured evidence. Second, it worked in concert with the claims of physiognomy, producing data sets of "criminal types" with its measurement protocols. Finally, the surveillance functions of these cards, from their use as a growing database to their ability to record

¹⁴ Persifor Frazer, "Identification of Human Beings by the System of Alphonse Bertillon," *Journal of the Franklin Institute* 167.4 (1909): 321-22.

address information, produce a detailed cartography of criminalized individuals. As such, these cards fulfilled the burgeoning desire to consolidate and order the ever-expanding objects and systems of information. For Frazer, the Bertillon system's standardized form of data collection promised to revolutionize the maintenance and development of criminal records, while it also furthered the grander scientific project of ordering the living world.¹⁵

As the first effective system of criminal identification and record keeping, Bertillon's method addressed the very practical day-to-day needs of metropolitan police.¹⁶ Following Frazer, Sekula describes Bertillonage as a "bipartite system, positioning the 'microscopic' individual record within a 'macroscopic' aggregate."¹⁷ The Orleans Parish police department's implementation of the system greatly aided the formidable task of policing the massive port city. The collection of photographs encompasses a range of arrested individuals, both from the city and those merely passing through. In a city that was at once a tourist destination and hub of maritime commerce, the ability to track individuals through purportedly infallible means such as bodily measurements aided in combating the transitory character of the city.

¹⁵ Ibid., 357-58. In his closing remarks, Frazer makes explicit connections between Napoleon, Newton, and Bertillon's young technology. This invocation of Napoleon and Newton recalls Michel Foucault's quote from *Discipline and Punish*, which served as the epigraph to the second chapter: "Napoleon did not discover this world; but we know that he set out to organize it; and wished to arrange around him a mechanism of power that would enable him to see the smallest event that occurred in the state he governed." Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 140.

¹⁶ Sekula, "Body and the Archive," 18.

¹⁷ Ibid., 18.

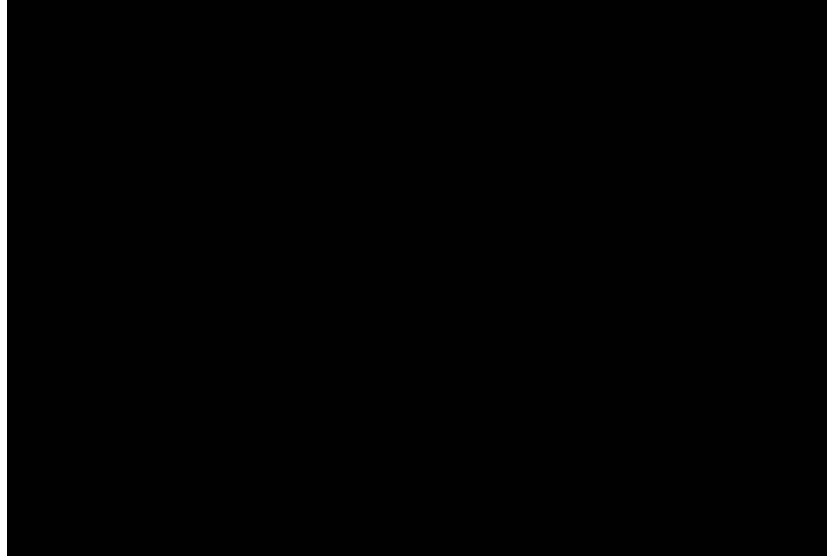


Image 25: Mugshot of Thomas Gibbons, ca. 1909 from the Orleans Parish Police Department archives. (Courtesy of the New Orleans Public Library).

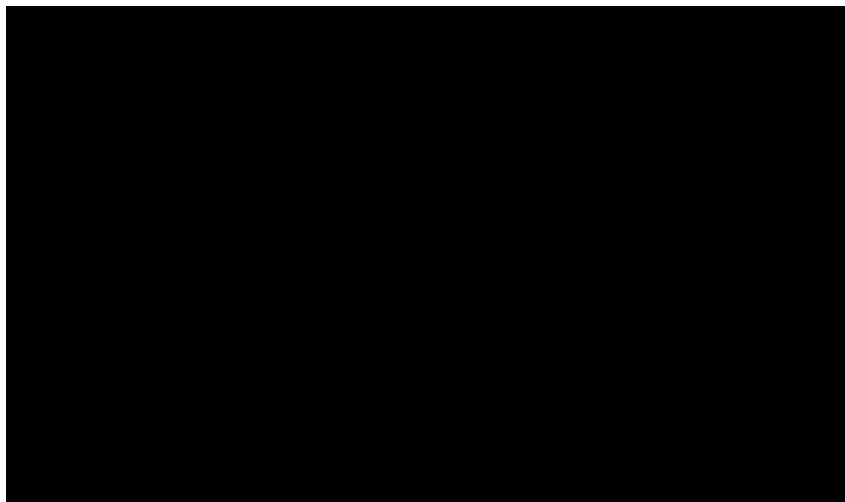


Image 26: Mugshot of Lotte Reed, ca. 1919 from the Orleans Parish Police Department archives. (Courtesy of the New Orleans Public Library).

When the district first came into being in 1897, the need to balance the rampant threats of criminal activity with the desire for economic growth necessitated a thorough plan to produce and manage its internal order. As Sekula explains, “The institution of the

photographic archive received its most thorough early articulation in precise conjunction with an increasingly professionalized and technological mode of police work and an emerging social science of criminology.”¹⁸ As an outgrowth of these technological developments, Sekula notes, the necessary transformation of the photographic archive in response to the proliferation of the medium. He elaborates on such transformations and their broader impacts through the concept of the “shadow archive.” He defines the concept as “a generalized, inclusive archive, a *shadow archive* that encompasses an entire social terrain while positioning individuals within that terrain.”¹⁹ The shadow archive, for Sekula, is an effect of photography’s rapid growth across all sectors of society in the nineteenth century. However, unlike other forms of photography, specifically family portraiture, police photography inaugurated an archive that could identify and place “the poor, the diseased, the insane, the criminal, nonwhite, the female, and all other embodiments of the unworthy” in relation to their respectable counterparts. Such an organization and characterization produced within a larger “social body” what would eventually be recognizable as the “criminal body.”²⁰

Sekula masterfully shows the ways in which the typologies of bodies are created and endowed with ontological meaning through the archival process. To this end, Sekula offers the following:

¹⁸ Ibid., 17.

¹⁹ Ibid., 10.

²⁰ Ibid.

Both Talbot and the author of the comic homage to Daguerre recognized a new instrumental potential in photography: a silence that silences. The protean oral "texts" of the criminal and pauper yield to a "mute testimony" that "takes down" (that diminishes in credibility, that transcribes) and unmasks the disguises, the alibis, the excuses and multiple biographies of those who find or place themselves on the wrong side of the law. This battle between the presumed denotative univocality of the legal image and the multiplicity and presumed duplicity of the criminal voice is played out during the remainder of the nineteenth century. In the course of this battle a new object is defined—the criminal body—and, as a result, a more extensive "social body" is invented.²¹

He elaborates this point of distinction between the “criminal body” and more

“respectable” bourgeois subjects further in his footnotes:

The theoretical ground for the construction of a specifically *bourgeois* subject can be found in Hobbes’s *Leviathan*. . . . Furthermore, the frontispiece to *Leviathan* to the form of an allegorical portrait. The commonwealth or state is literally embodied in the figure of the sovereign, an “artificial man,” whose body itself is composed of a multitude of bodies, all of whom have ceded a portion of their individual power to the commonwealth in order to prevent civil war that would inevitably result from their unchecked pursuit of ‘natural’ appetites. Thus, the ‘body’ of the Leviathan is a kind of pressure vessel, containing explosive natural forces. The image is perhaps the first attempt to diagram the social field visually. As such, it has a definite, if usually indirect, resonance in nineteenth century attempts to construct visual metaphors for the conceptual models of the new social sciences.²²

His study of late Victorian England and the co-emergence of human sciences and policing tactics offers a dynamic manner through which we may further think about the construction of criminal bodies within the archive. On the one hand, the emergence of

²¹ Ibid., 6.

²² Ibid., 7-8.

photographic technology inaugurates a new medium upon which the claims of bourgeois knowledge production may rest. For Sekula, bourgeois knowledge of the self and body is created through the visual indexicality of such mediums as portraiture, as opposed to the strict procedural forms of the criminal photograph. As Sekula shows, this logic produces bodies for the archive within a system of knowledge tasked with the determination of social typologies. Thus, the “social body” also serves as the condition under which the body—criminal or other—is socialized in relationship to other bodies. Placed within this field of visibility, the body thus comes to possess meaning and legibility through normalized referents (white, good citizen, heterosexual, for example). While the photograph demonstrates its technological capacity to produce meaning within such a network, Sekula also notes its relationship to archival construction.

Just as the photograph aids in constituting the body, it also constitutes the relationship between meaning and the archive. The succumbing of corporeal forms to typological ordering conditions the object’s entrance into the archive and creates the “shadow archive.” The shadow archive, while responsible for the logic of an entire social order, contains systems of thought that are neither natural nor stable. Premised on bodies imagined as static in their legibility, these categories should be understood within their particular limits. In turning to the photograph, Sekula destabilizes the document’s presumed evidential capacity and relationship to meaning-making. Insofar as the shadow archive and the criminal body work in tandem to produce a narrative that attempts to locate the production of criminality in excess of the individual body, we might say that the criminalized body of the sex worker in Storyville is imagined in a state of suspended

animation.

The prominence of mugshot and Bertillon cards in the Orleans Parish police archive demonstrates a history of the city's investment in cutting-edge policing technologies.²³ However, while Sekula's work offers a helpful starting point, the confinement implicit in the construction of Storyville requires a slight reworking of his insights to bring to them to bear on the Orleans Parish archive. Sekula's work is instructive insofar as the shadow archive and the criminal body work in tandem to produce a narrative that attempts to locate the production of criminality in excess of the individual body. At the same time, rather than extending his inquiry to the simultaneity of production from both the inside and outside of this new social terrain, the productive capacity of bourgeois society and technologies of policing are deemed so dominant that nothing is imagined emerging from within the shadow. In following this opening in Sekula's work, I want to think about the police archives less in terms of the relationship between the "criminal body" and the larger "social body" and more in terms of what he refers to as the "pressure vessel" and its "explosive natural forces" in the example of Hobbes's Leviathan.

In the latter portion of the text quoted above, Sekula describes Hobbes's image of the Leviathan as one of the first attempts to visually diagram a social field. While Sekula discusses the formation and image of this larger social body, he also notes a peculiar interaction within its imagined boundaries when he states, "the 'body' of the Leviathan

²³ Slave patrols in and around New Orleans were transitioned into police forces soon after emancipation. The New Orleans police were also one of the first armed police forces in the United States. See Wagner, *Disturbing the Peace*.

is a kind of pressure vessel, containing explosive natural forces." In Sekula's example, the "pressure vessel" stands in for the imagined or prescribed enclosure of a population, while also tempering what Hobbes refers to as "natural appetites." In the context of the shadow archive, the general collection of the visual field encloses an active social body. The "explosive natural forces," man's innate desires per Hobbes, are the behaviors, movements, and lives that push against a suppression put in place for the good of the greater social body.

In the context of Storyville and the Orleans Parish police archives, rather than considering Storyville as a space designed to alleviate and satisfy the desires of white liberal subjects, I read the photographs and records of these women as indexing the expression and embodiment of a "natural" force that containment is meant to manage. Such forces, though not necessarily "natural" in the way Hobbes might define them, emerge in a myriad of ways, from direct defiance of the law to more quotidian expressions of personhood that defy the demands of liberal or bourgeois subjecthood.²⁴ In the remainder of this chapter, I will engage this alternative framework drawn out of Sekula's work to show how the visual and textual depictions of black women on

²⁴ I list both "bourgeois" and "liberal" subjecthood because this connection is crucial for Sekula in explaining the expression of the "social body" through the visual field. In bringing this framework to Storyville, it is crucial to think about both terms for reasons I outline in the first chapter. Following Saidiya Hartman's explanation of the relationship between liberal subjectivity and black men and women in the Reconstruction period, the methods of management expressed in the Story Ordinances must also necessarily be thought in terms of specific liberal ideals during the period. Furthermore, the notion of the bourgeois subject is also, at times, taken up in conversations around the Bellocq portraits. The records in the archives should be thought of between these two expressions of subjectivity.

mugshot cards index attempts to challenge the imagined boundaries of the “criminal body” and “social body.”

Suspicious Movements

By the time the city proposed its most drastic attempt to contain commercial vice and sex workers, as I detail in the first chapter, a growing concern around the spatial organization of its residents had already begun to emerge.²⁵ Within the district, the women who lived and worked there were often located through such mechanisms as housing segregation and the district guides known as *Blue Books*. While these largely informal technologies were deployed on behalf of Storyville’s patrons, the visual records kept by the city’s police departments were one of the few ways local law enforcement were able to police the boundaries of the district. To this end, we see the mugshot card’s emergence during the period as an effect of the citywide practice to aid in systematizing the burgeoning emphasis on the relationship between the criminal and the cartographic.

²⁵ It is unclear when the New Orleans police department began its use of photography, though from records in the archive it began no later than 1895. The earliest mugshot card I found was of a 14-year-old boy named Tom King. He was arrested in 1895 for theft.

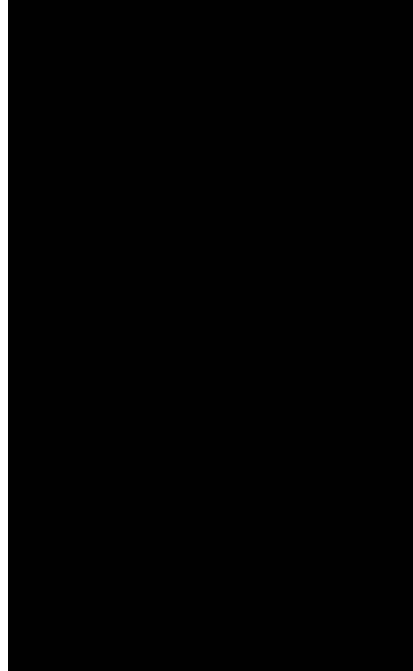


Image 27

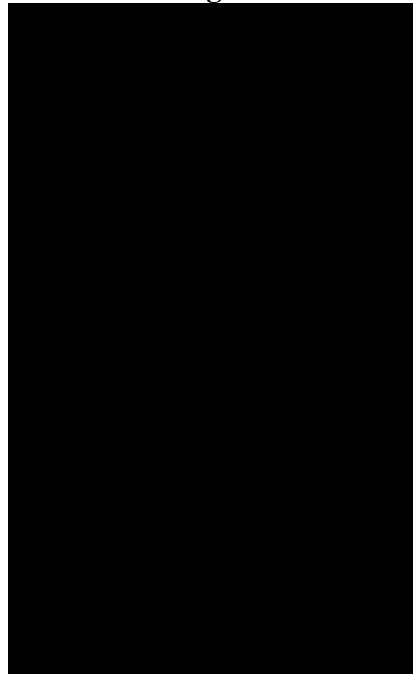


Image 28

Images 29 and 30: Mugshot card (front and back) of Clara Oliver from the Orleans Parish Police Department, both 1912. (Courtesy of the New Orleans Public Library).

On the backs of each card there is detailed information collected by the police. In *The Black Female Body*, Willis and Williams opine in a brief discussion of the mugshot cards of black women from this archive, “[T]he carte-de-viste format was probably used so that the images could be distributed as a kind of pocket-sized wanted poster.”²⁶ This portability offered to police in search of individuals a visual record that could be compared in real time when working the beat or when in search of someone in particular. As such, the mugshot cards in the archive present complex and multitudinous cartographies that served efforts to produce systematic records of women in Storyville.

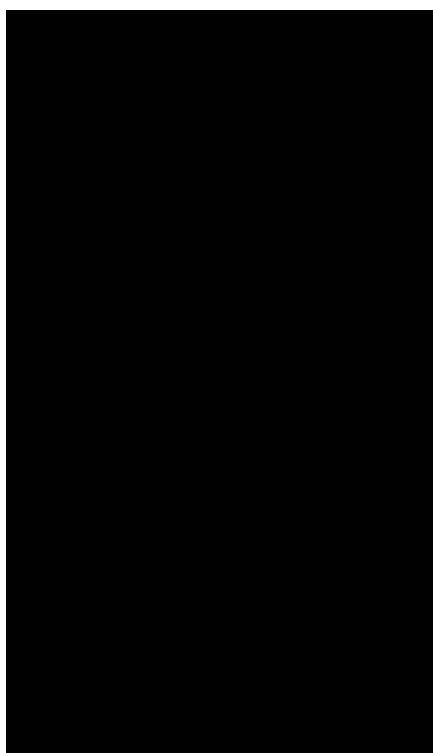


Image 29

²⁶ Willis and Williams, *Black Female Body*, 56.

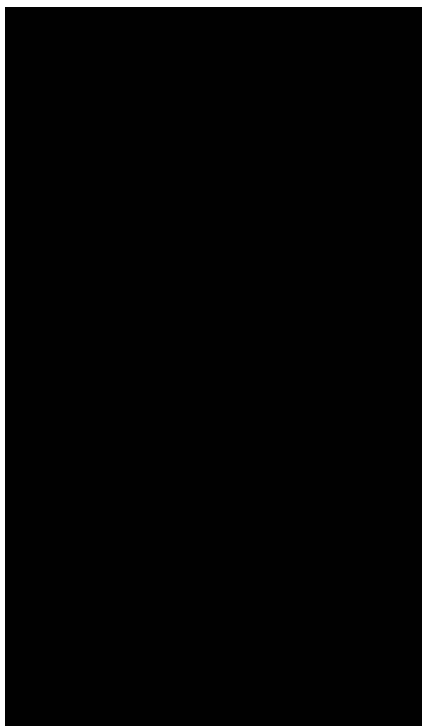


Image 30

Images 31 and 32: Josephine Woods from the Orleans Parish Police Department, 1912. (Courtesy of the New Orleans Public Library).

The two mugshot cards shown above record the arrests of Clara Oliver on June 28, 1912 (Images 29 and 30) and Josephine Woods on September 6, 1912 (Images 31 and 32), respectively. The front of each woman’s card is adorned with her photograph. Both women are seated per the specifications of the form as outlined by Bertillon. The lens is trained directly on the woman in the photograph. There is equal space around each of their bodies, as they are positioned in the center of the frame. They both wear light, white cotton dresses, understandable given the sweltering summer heat of New Orleans. Each woman’s face bears a distinct expression. Willis and Williams note a “general look” of other mugshots from the archive, “The women’s weary expressions

reveal no surprise or indignation but reflect a worldliness and resignation to their circumstances.”²⁷ Similarly, Oliver’s furrowed brow and sullen eyes reflect an understandable sadness. Deviating slightly from this characterization, Woods noticeably averts her gaze and slightly purses her lips, perhaps suggesting a lack of regard for the officer(s) instructing her and a general annoyance at the process. Both women’s looks diverge greatly from Bertillon’s purposeful and compliant stare shown here.

The information on the back of the card is quite sparse, with only fifteen pieces of information squeezed into the small 4½” by 3” card. Much of their information is similar. At 22, they are both young. Their stature and frame are both slight. At 4’11” and 79 lbs., Oliver is the size of a girl half her age.²⁸ Conforming to Bertillon’s categorical descriptions, both women’s hair (black and kinky/frizzy hair) and skin (black and yellow) denote their belonging to a racial category.²⁹ The bottom of each card is filled with arrest information and a few permanent bodily marks in the form of tattoos and scars. The information contained on the back of these cards functions to identify these women in relation both to their cards and to their status as a criminal.

On these cards, written on the trio of lines one-third of the way down the back, there is an interesting collection of information: residence, occupation, and criminal occupation. In the graph below, I reproduce the entries for both Oliver and Woods:

²⁷ Ibid., 56.

²⁸ Throughout the chapter, I remark upon the relatively small frames and sizes of the women whose cards I use as examples. I do not wish to produce a sense of frailty in remarking on their sizes, but I am interested in how *all* of the information collected on these cards might be thought of against the desire of the archive. However, I have not yet reached a satisfactory answer when it comes to this information.

²⁹ Bertillon, *Bertillon System of Identification*.

Table 2: Graphic of select information from the mugshot cards of Clara Oliver & Josephine Woods.

Name	Clara Oliver	Josephine Woods
“Residence”	1017 Perdido Street	1315 Poydras Street
“Occupation”	Prost.	Prost.
“Criminal Occupation”	Susp. Person	Susp. Person

I highlight these three rows of information because they are the most directly concerned with the spatial management of sex workers in the city and in relationship to the boundaries of the district. As I note in the first chapter within my discussion of Alderman Sidney Story's vice ordinance and its numerous revisions, during the period from 1897 to early 1917 the legal allowance of prostitution in New Orleans was designated to the sixteen-square block area of Storyville. Therefore, it is of note on the two cards above that neither Oliver nor Woods resided within the district's boundaries. Oliver, whose address is listed as Perdido Street, resides in the area of town that would come to be known as the "Uptown District," though not legally until March of 1917. Similarly, Woods, whose arrest card lists her residence as Poydras Street, lived in neither the part of town known as Storyville nor what would become the Uptown District. (A map of both districts is shown below in Image 33.) Both arrested in 1912, the arrest records of Oliver and Woods do not line up with the official legal records of the Storyville vice district. Instead, the facts of their arrests show they were both living outside of and in excess of what was considered permissible by law.

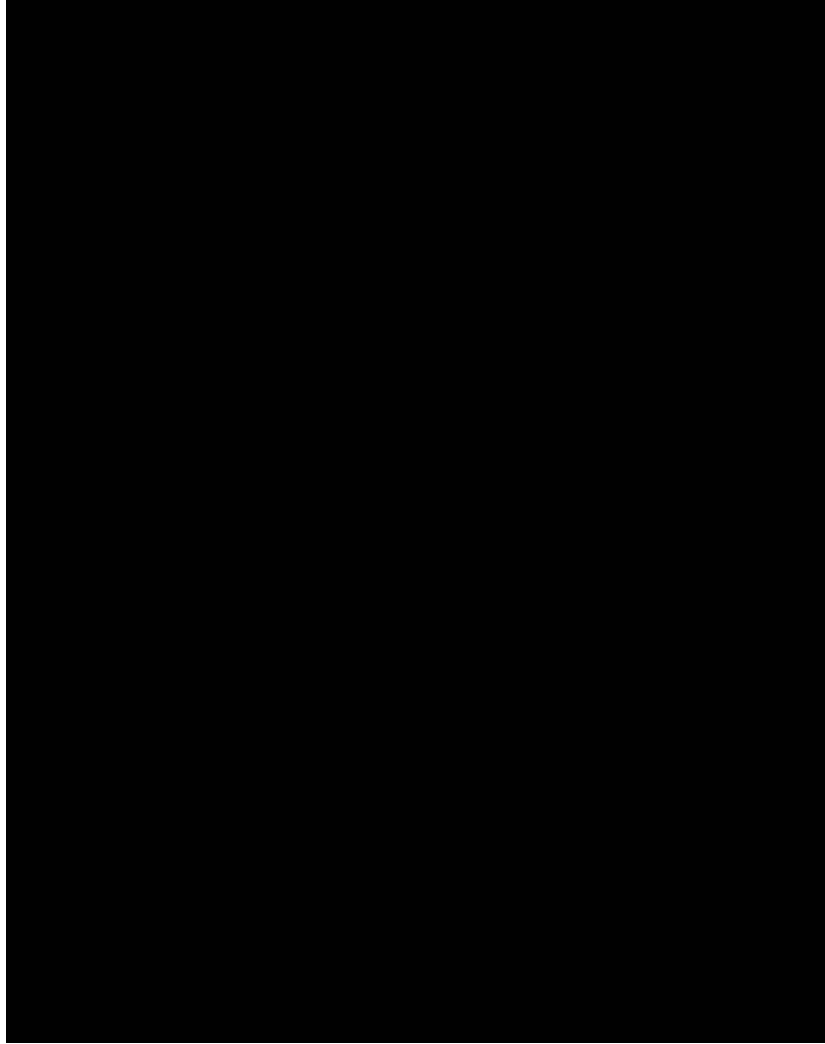


Image 31: Map depicting the “Uptown District”

The spatial boundaries for prostitution that the New Orleans city council sought to define were observed both in their laws and methods of policing. I have excerpted the following relevant passages (from longer citations produced in the first chapter) pertaining to prostitution outside of Storyville and also note that they are both arrested in 1912. The first excerpt comes from the fall of 1897, eight months after Story’s initial proposal:

BE IT ORDAINED by the Common Council of the City of New Orleans, That Section 1, of Ordinance 13,032 C.S., Be and the same is *hereby amended as follows*: From and after the first of October, 1897, it shall be unlawful for any prostitute or woman notoriously abandoned to lewdness, to occupy, inhabit, live or sleep in any house, room or closet, situated without the following limits, viz:...2nd: --*And from the upper side of Perdido Street to the lower side of Gravier Street, and from the river side of Franklin Street to the lower or wood side of Locust Street*, provided that nothing herein shall be so construed as to authorize any lewd woman to occupy a house, room or closet in any portion of the city [Emphasis mine].

Approximately twenty years later, on February 7, 1917, the city council voted to pass Ordinance No. 4118, C.S. and enacted the final amendment to the original 1897 ordinance:

Section 1. From and after the 1st day of March, 1917, it shall be unlawful for any prostitute or woman notoriously abandoned to lewdness, *of the colored or black race*, to occupy, inhabit, live or sleep in any house, room or closet, situated outside of the following limits, viz: from the upper side of Perdido Street to the lower side of Gravier Street, and from the river side of Franklin Street to the lower or wood side of Locust Street [Emphasis mine].

The revised version of Story's original ordinance essentially created two vice districts, though it would not come to be enforced as such until March of 1917. The revisions were intended to serve two purposes: to police the women thought to be transgressing the defined boundaries of the district by working inside of it but living outside of it, and to ultimately separate black women from their white counterparts. However, given that Oliver and Woods are presumed to be residing outside of the district prior to the official expansion in 1917, one is left to wonder what records such as these do to the imagined and actual arrangements of women's bodies in the district.

The fact that women lived outside of the district is not surprising or remarkable. Indeed, part of the reason the city enacted the amendment to the original vice ordinance in 1897 and made the district for black women only in 1917 was partially because of the belief that women were already disobeying the boundaries of the district. Rather, the records of Oliver and Woods index encounters with the law that are precipitated by a transgressive movement and that defy the spatial, commercial, domestic, and bodily constraints enacted through the creation of the district. Given that black women were banned from working and residing in district establishments with white women, instead often working in the rented spaces of cribs and left to find shelter elsewhere, their relationship to Storyville's spatial arrangement always differed from the majority of their white counterparts. In reconsidering the cartographies charted through these women's arrest cards, the third and final category shown in the above chart (Table 2) proves especially instructive.

The criminal occupation of being a “Suspicious Person” is as general as it is broad. Rather than pointing to a specific action, the evidence of criminality or wrongdoing belongs to the domain of a feeling (instinct or prejudice, for example) in which the observer recognizes some trace of what they believe to be a crime or criminal behavior. Suspicion, by its very nature, is imprecise. Therefore, the mugshot cards functioned as an informal and compact method of collecting records for local police of individuals brought in, processed, but not necessarily charged with any crime. As Steven Kasher cautions in his history of mugshots, *Least Wanted*, the presence of the mugshot is

not indicative of the occurrence of a crime.³⁰ In the instance of such an absence, suspicion indexes the emphasis on data collection and a rapidly expanding police archive, while at the same time reproducing the racialized forms of suspicion that maintain the presumed inextricability of criminality from blackness as outlined in the racial sciences which preceded early-twentieth century uses of police photography. Therefore, to think about suspicion is also necessarily to think about a more general mode of legibility enabled by the invention of the criminal body.

While suspicion is one manner of justifying the collection of textual and visual information about the subject, it does not exhaust the question of and needs for organization and management. In the mugshot cards, the cartographic imperative that I argue is central to policing and surveillance in this archive also provides the very conditions for organization and retrieval. The information on the back of the mugshot cards includes the documented person's address, which shows both that they were maintaining a residence within the district's boundaries and that they could be found if the need should occur. In this sense, individual's addresses literally combine to create a map of known or potential criminals. However, women such as Oliver and Woods challenge the attempted organization of individuals within the legally sanctioned space of the vice district and the presumed efficacy of cartographic and scalar thinking.

A helpful way to situate this understanding of suspicion, both in regards to Oliver and Woods specifically and the archive more generally, may be to think through a minor

³⁰ Steven Kasher, et al., *Least Wanted: A Century of American Mugshots*, 1st ed. New York: Steven Kasher Gallery; Steidl Pub., 2006, Print.

divergence and reordering of Eve Sedgwick's crucial formulation of paranoid and reparative readings, as a critique of Ricoeur's understanding of a "hermeneutics of suspicion."³¹ Rather than thinking of one taking the place of the other, this archive calls for us to understand suspicion not in the mode of a retroactive paranoia, but as both indexical and latent within the archive. So, while suspicion acts as the condition for entrance into the archive, while also revealing that to be a black woman even in spaces where the law allows sex work is to have one's movements and body perpetually considered in excess of even permissible criminality. The paradox of this formulation is that while black women can be allegedly "known" precisely because of the litany of names and behaviors spuriously cast upon them within the national imaginary, the presumption of a static subject before the law is betrayed by the inference of a reckless ambulation and a space of home outside of where it is deemed permissible.

In considering the work of suspicion in this archive, we also recognize that the logic of policing that seeks to regulate women's movements is premised on the admission of the imprecision and omnipresent necessity of suspicion. As such, we may then think of suspicion as both the unintelligibility and promise of and necessity for black women under these conditions of confinement. The movement that precipitates suspicion is the disruption of the legal, spatial, and categorical limitations placed onto black women's bodies in the district. At the same time, their movements and arrests express quotidian practices and desires that run counter to what is permissible within the

³¹ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.

confines of the district and as black women in the U.S. South. While these objects help us to think about how these women move within the larger social body, I would like to now consider how the construction of the criminal body takes place in relation to this archive through Bertillon's system.

Bertillonage, or The Archive and the Flesh

Sekula argues that the success of Bertillon's system was, at least in part, the result of its seemingly universal applicability to a more general problem. While the proliferation of the photographic archive was coming to constitute a larger social body, the need for differentiating among the respectable and criminal within this shadow archive was met with the necessary re-figuration of the individual body. Although criminal records began that process, Bertillonage provided a manner through which the organization of one class of individuals could be separated and managed internally. In this sense, Bertillon had conceived of a procedure that was premised on the perpetual dissection and reorganization of both archives and bodies in the interest of defining the boundaries of each.

The Bertillon cards in the police archive are held in clear plastic sleeves in twenty-five to thirty massive three-ring binders, while the collection of glass plate negatives are held in approximately ten or twelve large boxes. When visiting the archive today, one is immediately struck by the fact that Bertillon's system of organization has been abandoned. The Bertillon cards are separated out from their smaller *carte-de-viste* counterparts, with both sets of cards mostly organized alphabetically. Florestine Breaux's cards—her record seems to be on the larger side, comparatively speaking—

emerge quickly when scanning the collection. Upon removing her record from its protective sleeve, one quickly realizes the cardboard is dense and with little give. The card is drastically warped along the edges, following a pattern of the cards that come before and after it in the binder. In Image 35, the trace of another inmate's mug shot can faintly be seen on the back of Breaux's card.

In the middle of the card, as depicted in Image 34, Breaux offers a blank stare in the face of her incarceration. Her "false hair" removed, a prior photograph can be seen tucked behind the front and profile images necessary for the Bertillon card. Much like the front profile shots of Oliver and Woods shown above, the photographs are formal in nature. Her bodily comportment connotes a positioning demanded of her, surely the case in a process that requires repetitive precision. The two images are stunningly clear, with the light casting a glare on only the one side of her face. The other side is draped in shadow. The partially torn garment just barely exposes the left side of her clavicle. Coupled with Breaux's slight frame, her clothes invoke images of poverty and destitution. At the same time, the clothing she wears is indicative of more than merely a downtrodden state. As Mara L. Keire observes in *For Business & Pleasure*, "Prostitutes in down-market places often wore 'Mother Hubbards,' saclike dresses that went on and came off easily."³² In Keire's invocation of "down-market places," we are meant to necessarily understand this as referring to cribs. Breaux's photograph indexes a resistant orientation to the law's collapse of home and work within Storyville. Indeed, such a

³² Keire, *For Business & Pleasure*, 33.

revelation points to an elsewhere that, as for Oliver and Woods, allows us to imagine a life for Breaux outside of the district's legal boundaries.

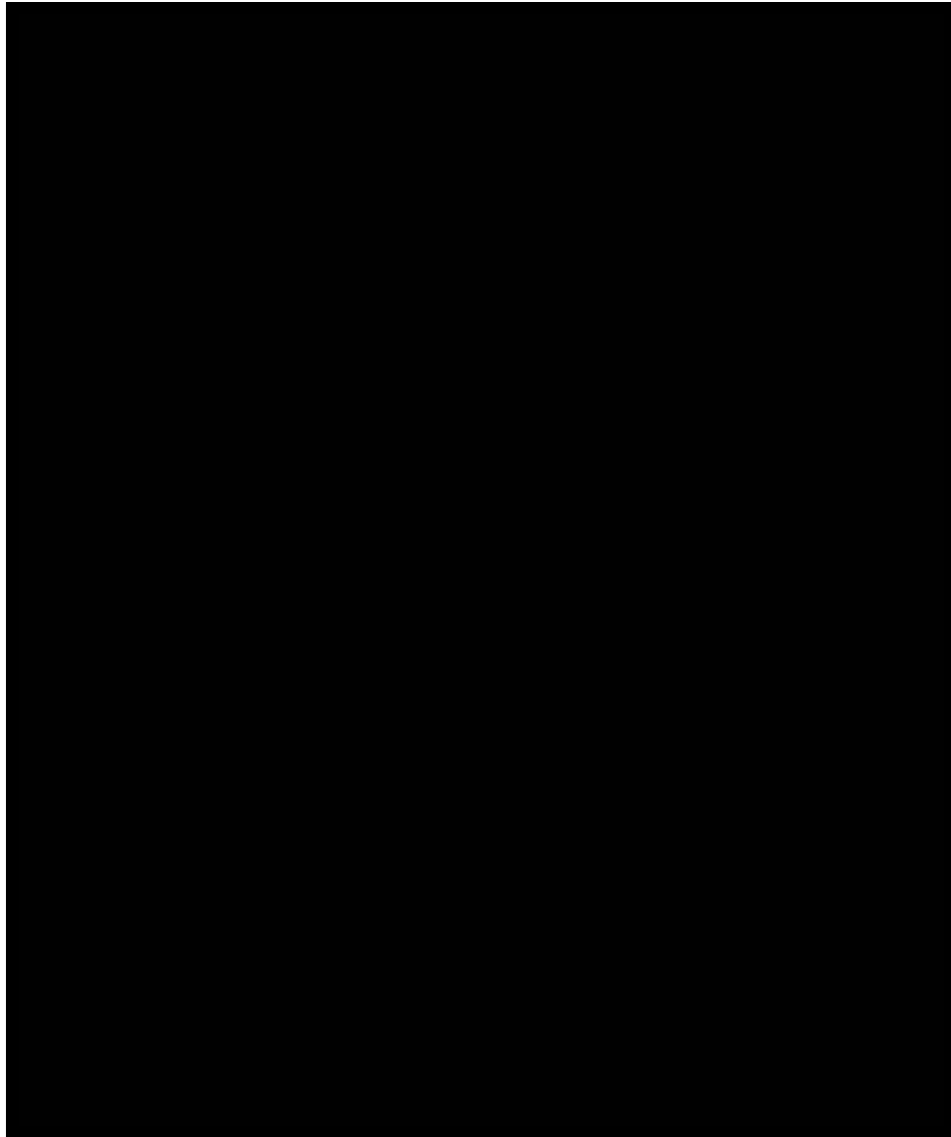


Image 32: Bertillon Card of Florestine Breaux (front) from the Orleans Parish Police Department, ca. 1912. (Courtesy of the New Orleans Public Library).



Image 33: Bertillon Card of Florestine Breaux (back) from the Orleans Parish Police Department, ca. 1912. (Courtesy of the New Orleans Public Library).

To the extent that the photographs fixed to Bertillon cards are literally marked with information, the augmentation of the photographic object for record keeping makes it difficult to even speak of the photograph without also accounting for that which surrounds it. In this regard, the photographs on the front of Breaux's card seem overdetermined by their captions. Roland Barthes describes such an interaction of text

and image as follows: “[T]he text constitutes a parasitic message designed to connote the image...the verbal message seems to share in its objectivity, the connotation of language is ‘innocented’ through the photograph’s denotation.”³³ The desire for objectivity in Bertillon’s system presents itself in the formalization of this card and its reliance on measurable data. This is only redoubled on the rear of the card, wherein Breaux's personal information is detailed in a manner like a mugshot card. The text of the card encloses the photograph in a manner that at first is deemed only legible as details of police surveillance.

Above her mugshot, Breaux’s measurements are displayed, but they are difficult to discern without Bertillon’s guide. The numbers adhere to the first section of signalment outlined by Bertillon in his text *The Bertillon System of Identification*. As Bertillon defines the signalment simply as, “the description of one whom it is desired to identify (Littré).”³⁴ Within Bertillonage, the three categories of signalment are Anthropometrical, Descriptive, and Peculiar Marks. The anthropometrical course of signalment listed above the mugshot is premised on the consistency of an individual's skeletal structure and the belief that after the age of twenty they do not change. The measurement protocols are as follows:

Measure of the body at large: Height (height of man standing)
Reach (length of the outstretched arm)
Trunk (height of a man sitting)

Measurement of the head: Length of the head
Width of the head

³³ Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1977, Print, 25-6.

³⁴ Bertillon, *Bertillon System of Identification*, 11.

Length of the right ear
Width of the right ear

Measurements of the limbs: Length of the left foot
Length of the left middle finger
Length of the left little finger
Length of the left forearm

As the primary set of measurements on the card, they were also the basis of Bertillon's retrieval system. Though first separated by gender, the system would begin with the measurements of the head and then identify whether an individual measurement placed the subject within the range of *small*, *medium*, or *large* for a given measurement. While the method of organization began with rather broad ranges, as the system went deeper further down the line the organization relied more and more on the exact measurement numbers. For this reason, Bertillon's detailed system relied on a repetitive performance of data collection between the officer and the arrested, producing what the inventor called a "rigorous exactitude."³⁵ The exact measurements were premised on the belief in an inherent symmetry between an individual's appendages as opposed to a body envisioned as a whole. Breaux's record of anthropometrical measurements is difficult to imagine and make sense of in terms of recreating a complete body. Based on Bertillon's

³⁵ Speaking of this relationship between officer and arrestee, something I have not yet been able to account for is the signature of the officer who records this data. While I was unable to bring back examples of every Bertillon card in the New Orleans public library during my research trip, I noticed amongst those I reproduced that the same signature, "J. Norris," is on every card between 1906 and 1918 (approximately eighty-five cards). Given that the process of measuring individuals under Bertillon's system is such a specific encounter, I am interested in finding out more about this individual and addressing the relationship between the police and women in the district. Alphonse Bertillon, "The Bertillon System of Identification," *Forum* (May, 1891): 332.

scale, Breaux, much like Oliver and Woods, would fall into the smaller range of sizes across the board. As such, the Bertillon card seems a poor substitute for the person, instead turning the body into its “aggregate” form.

Similarly, the section below the photographs contains the space for descriptive signalment. Like the measurements above, the details provided in the second section reduce the body to a fractured set of descriptors. Bertillon defines this set as follows, "The descriptive signalment as opposed to the anthropometrical is that which describes in words, by the aid of observation alone."³⁶ This set includes a range of physical descriptions including the ridge of the nose, the prominence of the chin, weight, and the only indication of gender coming with the crossing out of the word “beard.”

On the back of Breaux’s card is the final section of Bertillon’s three signalment categories: peculiar marks. Bertillon notes, “Every one, in fact, has some peculiar marks, often unknown to himself...But the noting of these marks...becomes really useful only when the most rigorous precision has been exercised in their *description* and the notation of their *locality*.”³⁷ The visual encounters with the body are meant to note and identify an inescapable mark. In the section titled “MARKS, SCARS, AND MOLES,” there appears a lengthy list of scars to Breaux’s forehead, jaw, and ear, in addition to reference to a tattoo, ear piercings, and her "false hair." In reading the notes in her record, one gets the sense that Breaux's hands and face are littered with scars. Her forearm is adorned with a sentimental tattoo. The officer's note reads "Tattoo 'P.D.' and heart forearm." This

³⁶ Bertillon, *Bertillon System of Identification*, 32.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 55.

note occurs again and again throughout her records. The particularity of Breaux's description is one example of how markings are crucial to the efficiency of Bertillon's system.

He notes the effectiveness of using a standardized, scientific vocabulary when recording an individual's unique corporeal features. In the opening passage of the section "Statement of Peculiar Marks," Bertillon writes: "The obligation of *describing* and *localizing* the peculiarities in a manner at once brief and accurate necessitates the use of some anatomical terms."³⁸ An ordinarily banal observation, the insistence on anatomical terms in production of records echoes Hortense Spillers's observation of one narration of a scene of torture enacted on the enslaved:

The anatomical specifications of rupture, of altered human tissue, take on the objective description of laboratory prose—eyes beaten out, arms, backs, skulls branded, a left jaw, a right ankle, punctured, teeth missing, as the calculated work of iron, whips, chains, knives, the canine patrol, the bullet.

These undecipherable markings on the captive body render a kind of hieroglyphics of the flesh whose severe disjunctions come to be hidden to the cultural seeing by skin color. We might well ask if this phenomenon of marking and branding actually "transfers" from one generation to another.³⁹

The distinction Spillers makes in the text preceding this passage between the "body" and the "flesh," as the "central [distinction] between captive and liberated subject-positions," bears on our understanding of the description of Breaux. The marking on and of the captive body—and Breaux is certainly a captive in the moment her arrest is recorded—

³⁸ Bertillon, *Bertillon System of Identification*, 212.

³⁹ Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 67.

has been subsumed and transformed under Bertillon's system, demonstrating discursive and material continuities between the two. The historical meaning of marked bodies and flesh is repurposed in the space of this card enacting the "transfers" of injury and rupture to the reproduction and consolidation of the criminal body to an aggregate form. This language, what Spillers might call a hieroglyphics, emerges for Breaux and in Storyville as the body that scientific policing pulled apart and haphazardly put back together. Or, to rephrase Sekula's titular formulation, "The Body and the Archive," we might think then of the archive and the flesh.

The combination of Breaux's measurements and the descriptive markings produce what emerges from the archive as an aggregate body, or a body legible in the archive through its aggregate form. To accomplish the necessary accumulation and ordering of such disparate data, the individual criminal body must undergo a process similar to the excerpt above that Spillers defines as "pornotroping."⁴⁰ Insofar as the body is only useful to Bertillonage as a unit of measurement, the observed, measured, and recorded flesh becomes the raw material of classification and identification in Bertillon's system. The marks, scars, and moles annotated for the archive, place the flesh at the center of the inscription of criminality. The centrality of the flesh/body distinction within Bertillonage exposes the system's structural proximity to discourses and technologies of enslavement. The numerous encounters between Breaux and other black women in the district with police and the Bertillon system demand a more complex understanding of the work done by both photography and policing.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 67.

I bring Spillers to bear on this archive not merely because of a critical proximity, but also because Spillers articulates the material continuity between the archives of transatlantic slavery and postbellum incarceration. Following this connection, we see that both are premised on and organized by economies of the flesh. This phrase "economies of the flesh," however, is not singular along a proposed material and epistemological continuum. Instead, such an archival economy that reconciles the demands of (capital) expansion with (corporeal) contraction, both of which rely on Spillers's understanding of the "flesh." Amidst these ongoing economic expansions and contractions, Tiffany Lethabo King has suggested, by way of Spillers, that this approach to flesh in the archive should also be considered as a site of possibility as much as it is one of violence. "Pliable and exchangeable, Blackness is a form of malleable potential and a state of change in the 'socio-political order' of the New World."⁴¹ Spillers and King help us to see both the archive and potentiality of those captured inside of it anew. When we turn to these photographic and textual records, individuals such as Breaux must be imagined as creating routes of escape through the scattered traces of such potentialities from the imposition of archival meaning.

For Bertillon, the tattoo is an important identifier as it denotes both a permanent bodily marking and the possibility of disguise for the criminal:

There is another species of peculiarities demanding still more caution than scars and marks of professional origins, we refer to *tattooings*.

It is an error to believe that the mention of one or two tattooings can by any

⁴¹ Tiffany Lethabo King, "The Labor of (Re)reading Plantation Landscapes Fungible(ly)," *Antipode* 48.4 (2016): 4.

means take the place of the notice of a scar; these indications are as *treacherous* in practice as they appear convincing at the first glance. When a criminal plans to disguise his personality, his first care is to surcharge his old tattooings, and to cover himself if possible with those of the comrade whose civil status he wishes to usurp. This is the A B C of the profession. For some years past, it has not been rare to meet with scars left by old tattooing more or less perfectly effaced by Dr. Variot's method. The scar may be only slightly apparent, but it always exists.⁴²

Bertillon's concerns around the changeability of tattoos and an individual's willingness to alter these markings on their body are evidence of the ink's unreliability when tracking recidivists. For Breaux, whose tattoo does not change between her first recorded arrest in 1908 and her last arrest in 1920 (Image 34), the choice to both to mark and to retain the mark on this part of her body isolated by the criminal record might gesture toward a trace of a connection that not only resists this isolation but gestures toward an elsewhere beyond the limits of Storyville and the archive.

In the Archive

As Michel Foucault notes of the seemingly and occasionally disparate nature of archival objects and subjects, “[T]hey communicate by the form of positivity of their discourse, or more exactly, this form of positivity (and the conditions of operation of the enunciative function) defines a field in which formal identities, thematic continuities, translations of concepts, and polemical interchanges may be deployed. Thus positivity plays the role of what might be called a *historical a priori*.”⁴³ While the archive in question does not contain a vast diversity of objects, the uniformity of records operates

⁴² Bertillon, *Bertillon System of Identification*, 57.

⁴³ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge & the Discourse on Language*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1972, Print, 127.

at a level of thematic continuity that in turn attempts to inscribe a discursive continuity across a diverse collection of individuals. In this sense, through the production of the criminal body, the criminal archive severs the individual from a past to satisfy its own logics, which for Foucault is the archive's positivity or *historical a priori*. Conversely, we might also say the manner in which the archive produces meaning for itself and its objects is indeterminate, unfixed, and highly unstable. Following Foucault's logic of the archive and the highly mediated visual genres offered by Willis and Williams, black women's representation in the Storyville archive belies any stable representation or reproduction. Or, following the above epigraph from Shawn Michelle Smith's crucial exploration of race and visibility, the law's attempts to circumscribe and limit representations of the women in these images to preserve the imperative that collapses the distinction between criminality and black women's bodies is challenged by such indeterminacies.⁴⁴

The photograph's centrality to an understanding of subjecthood and citizenship during this period spans the entirety of the "social body," both criminal and respectable.⁴⁵ The advent and organization of criminal archives by municipal police departments did not merely produce a spectrum of social actors awaiting categorization. They also, crucially, bear the trace of those individuals and communities whose everyday lives were routinely affected by the interventions of policing and its specific mechanisms of control. As such, these documents demand acknowledgment as both state

⁴⁴ Smith, *Photography on the Color Line*.

⁴⁵ Sekula, "Body and the Archive," 10.

records and photographic objects documenting complex social lives. In taking these two functions of the photographic record, I do not intend to disarticulate one from the other. Rather, it forces us to consider the inextricability of the myriad of intentions and desires cultivated through photographic technologies during this period.

Following Nicole R. Fleetwood's cautioning around visibility: "Visual representations of blacks are meant to substitute for the real experiences of black subjects. The visual manifestation of blackness through technological apparatus or through a material experience of locating blackness in public space equates with an ontological account of black subjects."⁴⁶ The range of meanings these photographs carry and project onto the photographed subject obfuscate the ways in which meaning is made on and through black women's bodies and everyday lives. Therefore, rather than situate this archive as contributing to the already numerous examples of the aforementioned visual forms, these images tend to such obfuscations and alert us to a "real," using Fleetwood's term, not bound up in the ocular imposition of racist and gendered narratives of blackness, but instead productive of an unraveling of discourses of the social that might differentially concern black life within the history of Storyville.

In taking up this archive, it was my intent to avoid drawing new boundaries and thus repeating historical violence by way of epistemological circumscription. Instead, my purpose was to consider the intersecting cartographies of confinement enacted by forces both inside and out. Whereas the brothel has often been considered a site of one of

⁴⁶ Nicole Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011, Print, 13.

the many profound paradoxes of white patriarchal claims on the sanctity of the family, it seems crucial not to reproduce this neighborhood as one solely of “homosocial pleasure[s].”⁴⁷ The John and his fantasy of possession necessitate the ongoing performance of broken subjects, legible only in relation to what they have been segregated from. The imposition of the fantasy of possession on black women in the district is not so much a fantasy as it is the continuity of a racialized libidinal economy amidst the discontinuity of familiar institutions, always redoubling their status as both inside this economy and outside of a home.

As I have indicated, the relative ease with which one discusses Bellocq’s photographs as works of art is not a luxury afforded to their counterparts. This chapter evidences the difficulties inherent in disarticulating the photographs from their institutional captioning, as well as seeking a “home” for them elsewhere. As Bellocq’s photographs have been elevated to the realm of fantasy and art historical treasure, the obscurity of the photographs fixed to the mugshot and Bertillon cards require a different mode of engagement. Rather, just as thinking historically and socially through the crib engendered one mode of escape for black women, so too might we see the possibilities of these photographs and records indexing impermanent and transitory readings of social life that strain against the limits of both Storyville and the archive

⁴⁷ Roach, *Cities of the Dead*, 231.

Coda

New Orleans at the dawn of the twentieth century was a city redefining its social and economic futures in response to a myriad of developments in the forms of urbanization, trade economies, governance, industrialization, and numerous other effects of modernization. Storyville, as one experiment among many designed to usher the city into the new century, remains a prominent symbol of the city's capacity for reinvention and willingness to tolerate criminality. Though memories of the district and its residents have faded over the last century, the district's material records remain crucial to narrating the histories of marginalized communities.

In 2008, the New Orleans public library staged an exhibition entitled "Hidden from History: Unknown New Orleanians." The show, curated by Emily Epstein Landau in collaboration with librarian Irene Wainwright, displayed an array of ephemera from the Orleans Parish archives examined in chapter four and other archives chronicling civic history. For "Hidden from History," Landau culled together select objects from the library's copious police records to bring to the fore those historical actors often excluded from the city's rich history. As the curator's statement describes: "The exhibit focuses on people who worked and lived in New Orleans beyond the view of business and tourist interests, who eked out an *existence on the margins* of respectability, who struggled to survive in the urban jungle."¹ The largely photographic materials Landau unearths deliver on this promise insofar as they both chronicle the city's diverse criminal

¹http://www.neworleanspubliclibrary.org/~nopl/exhibits/hidden/hiddenfromhistory_intro.htm

population and sketch out the manner in which they come to enter the archive, often devoid of familial connection or other origin stories that might better place them. In this regard, “Hidden from History” excavates a sense of the New Orleans social landscape at the turn of the twentieth century and those subjects whose contributions to it were suppressed. This gesture toward an alternate historical account of New Orleans, beyond the popular *laissez les bon temps rouler!* characterizations, confronts the viewer with the complex history of the city.

“Hidden from History,” which debuted roughly three years after Hurricane Katrina ravaged the city and displaced many of its residents, alerts us to the quotidian richness of life in New Orleans beyond the fantastic images extracted for popular consumption (i.e. Mardi Gras, Bourbon Street, and so forth). Similarly, amidst the barrage of images that depict reunited families and communities, the show subtly juxtaposes photographs that do not enjoy the same claims to connection indexed in the visual economies of post-Katrina New Orleans. The timing and subject matter of the show seem crucial to both a material and sensuous understanding of what has been lost, not merely in the aftermath of disaster, but over a century plus of tensions between residents themselves and the city. As Landau’s curatorial efforts suggest, the city of New Orleans and those who have left their mark on it share histories that persist and survive in a myriad of locales. In other words, “Hidden from History” sets out to tell a particular story about New Orleans through which the histories of slavery, commerce, policing, segregation, neighborhoods, communities and numerous other historical forces, even in their indirect invocations, shape and are shaped through these archives.

The retroactive suggestion that something has been hidden, in the most obvious of historiographical conclusions, precludes that something has also been found. In the turn to the visual, and here photographic, archives, the presumption of a “this was here,” following Roland Barthes, photographic realism often presumes that the mere act of discovery constitutes recovery.² As has been the labor of this project to show, we must understand that individuals enter the archive differently, while also conceding that such entrance is differentially understood and experienced among individuals. Insofar as we are often bound to the dichotomous nature of archival research—that is research within and of archives themselves—this project has considered the enduring relationship between lost bodies and found objects as a means of approaching the complicated relationship between the district’s most hidden residents, black women, and the violence necessary for the production of this archive.

² Barthes, *Camera Lucida*.

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