Hearing the Hurricane Coming: Storytelling, Second-Line Knowledges, and the Struggle for Democracy in New Orleans

Author: Catherine C. Michna

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HEARING THE HURRICANE COMING: STORYTELLING, SECOND-LINE KNOWLEDGES, AND THE STRUGGLE FOR DEMOCRACY IN NEW ORLEANS

a dissertation

by

CATHERINE MICHNA

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

August, 2011
Abstract

**Hearing the Hurricane Coming: Storytelling, Second-Line Knowledges, and the Struggle for Democracy in New Orleans**

Catherine Michna

Dissertation Chairs: Carlo Rotella and Cynthia A. Young

From the BLKARTSOUTH literary collective in the 1970s, to public-storytelling-based education and performance forms in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, and fiction and nonfiction collections in the years since the storm, this study traces how New Orleans authors, playwrights, educators, and digital media makers concerned with social justice have mirrored the aesthetics and epistemologies of the collaborative African diasporic expressive traditions that began in the antebellum space of Congo Square and continue in the traditions of second-line parading and Mardi Gras Indian performances today. Combining literary analysis, democratic and performance theory, and critical geography with interviews and participant observation, I show how New Orleans authors, theatre makers, and teachers have drawn on "second-line" knowledges and geographies to encourage urban residents to recognize each other as "divided subjects" whose very divisions are the key to keeping our social and political systems from stabilizing and fixing borders and ethics in a way that shuts down possibilities for dissent, flux, and movement. Building on diverse scholarly arguments that make a case both for New Orleans's exceptionalism and its position, especially in recent years, as a model for neoliberal urban reform, this study also shows how the call and response aesthetics of community-based artists in New Orleans have influenced and benefited from the rise of
global democratic performance and media forms. This dual focus on local cultures of resistance and New Orleans's role in the production of national and transnational social justice movements enables me to evaluate New Orleans's enduring central role in the production of U.S. and transnational constructs of African diasporic identity and radical democratic politics and aesthetics.
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Introduction

"If we can just stick together, the day will come when we'll sweep through the dock like a mighty hurricane. . . . all our wind blowing together will move ships up on dry land and skyscrapers to the sea. . . . I can hear the hurricane coming, 'cause I can hear justice coming. I can hear freedom coming."¹ These are the final words of Joe Wilson, the hero of John O'Neal's 1973 play, *Hurricane Season*. Joe dies as a result of being beaten by the police and trampled by the crowd while leading a union rally protesting the mechanization of the New Orleans port. His deathbed prediction of a "breath-based" revolution declares that justice and democracy in the city can only emerge through the lips and bodies of its African American working-class residents as they carve up and remake the city's streets with mighty counter-histories, geographies, and radical democratic visions. Joe draws this sound- and space-based prophecy of social transformation from the collective memories and social visions that his New Orleans neighborhood's jazz funerals, second line parades, and Mardi Gras Indian performances express on a daily basis. Since New Orleans's earliest years, the African American residents who have experienced the strongest forms of dispossession and disenfranchisement have used music and performance to express a dynamic sonic and spatial vision of a city where freedom and democracy are grounded in embodied, pluralistic exchange. To hear this prophecy is to feel the echoes of the powerful blows of Buddy Bolden's cornet and the collective sound of the "mighty" aural and spatial resistance practice of the New Orleans second line.

In *Hurricane Season*, O'Neal juxtaposes Joe's public, blues-based radical democratic dreams with a darker forecast, that of "Old Man Walker," a community griot

¹ O'Neal, *Hurricane Season*, 56.
who roams the streets warning the neighborhood of the coming storm of neoliberalism. When the play opens, Walker has encountered Joe's two daughters and their friends. He cautions them in rhythmic verse:

The ships don't move on the docks when it's a hurricane coming. . . .
Better save your damself!
Hurricane will ruin you on dry land if you ain't ready
Watch out for the low land
The swamp water wait back up in the low land
Watchout for the dynamite in levees
Dynamite it'll kill you.²

They respond, "Aw, man, this ain't no hurricane season. It's almost February. It'll be carnival in another few weeks. Hurricane season passed a long time ago!"³ But Walker is not warning them about a literal storm. He is preaching about the deluge of port mechanization schemes and attacks on unions that heralded the beginning of a new era for global capitalism. Walker cannot yet name what is coming, but he can identify its essence as the latest iteration of the legacy of structural violence that has been imposed on his community since the era of slavery. For this reason, he warns the young people in his neighborhood to listen to their elders' stories and unite with them in struggle. But the young people do not pay attention. They are busy, instead, pursuing popular-media versions of "super fly" Black Power chic and "groovy" integrated social utopias. Walker's message thus remains unheard. The different generations and groups whom he encounters have lost the ability to listen and hear each other; their "breaths" are blowing

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² O'Neal, Hurricane Season, 2. Walker is referring to past instances of dynamite being used to blow up levees in New Orleans. In the 1927 Flood, for example, the city's elites contrived to convince officials to use dynamite to divert flooding away from New Orleans and into nearby St. Bernard Parish. This choice was more about saving New Orleans businesses from being perceived as vulnerable to natural storms than it was about saving the city from an actual flood. In 1965, just a few years before O'Neal wrote Hurricane Season, Hurricane Betsy devastated the Lower Ninth Ward neighborhood. Rumors naturally abounded that Ninth Ward levees had been dynamited purposely in order to prevent flooding in whiter, wealthier neighborhoods. In 1965, however, no dynamiting actually occurred. Barry, Rising Tide.

³ O'Neal, Hurricane Season, 2.
in different directions. Meanwhile, the storm that he predicted soon hits the shore, and Joe dies as a result.

Viewed from the perspective of today, the message of *Hurricane Season* seems eerily prescient. In the years just after the play was first staged, the storm of neoliberalism *did* hit New Orleans. African American communities lost access to unionized jobs.⁴ Black working-class neighborhoods were fragmented into public housing developments. The drug war and the prison industrial complex blustered in. These gales of structural racism set the city up for 2005, when a powerful natural storm arrived. Then, as Walker predicted, the swamp water "waited in the low land," and New Orleans drowned. The social revolution that Joe prophesizes could not have prevented Katrina, but it could have prevented the hegemony of global capitalism from imposing the structural violence that set New Orleans up for its fall. We learn from *Hurricane Season* that if this revolution has not yet occurred, it is because oppressed and disprivileged New Orleans residents *and* oppressed communities worldwide have not yet fully "heard" their interconnected histories across difference and worked to establish a collective aural linkage, through which they can blow freedom into being.

*Hurricane Season* locates the origin of this global social revolution in New Orleans because, as the play's depiction of blues-infused daily life there reveals, the geographies of the most marginalized residents in New Orleans have come to possess a uniquely potent resonance not only in the city, but also throughout the nation. As Katherine McKittrick shows, in every city the subjectivities and geographies that are considered to be marginalized or invisible wield a powerful influence "right in the middle of our historically present landscape."⁵ Through various place-making, discursive, and

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⁴ Gotham, "Marketing Mardi Gras."
⁵ McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, 7.
artistic tactics, the possessors of subaltern geographic and historic knowledges produce spatial modes of resistance, memorialize counter-histories in public spaces, and theorize counter-hegemonic spatial possibilities.⁶ Within the landscapes of racialized uneven geographical development in the US, acts of spatial resistance by dis-privileged people construct community identities and relationships and help determine public values. In New Orleans, however, as the famous (white) local musician Dr. John notes, “You get a feeling like da-doom, da-doom, da-doom-doom-doom” when you walk the city's streets.⁷ This feeling is the product of the African American working-class parading and performance practices, which sound, march, and dance resistant histories and geographies throughout the city on a daily basis.

Not just during Mardi Gras, but throughout the year, public, participatory African diasporic performances weave their way through New Orleans neighborhoods, interrogating and transforming the urban landscape as they go.⁸ In other American cities blues and jazz performances take place mostly within interior, private or semi-private spaces—in performance halls, music clubs, restaurants and bars, and in private homes. But in New Orleans they permeate the city’s sidewalks, neutral grounds, and interstate underpasses, a continuous and dynamic mass incarnation of blues- and jazz-based radical democratic epistemologies.⁹ Scholars such as Fred Moten, Robin D.G. Kelley, Christopher Small, and Clyde Woods have discussed how the knowledges, space-making practices, and democratic visions of these resistant performances are at the center of New

⁶ Ibid. See also de Certeau, Practice of Everyday Life and Lefebvre, Production of Space.
⁷ Quoted in Abrahams et al., Blues for New Orleans, 32. As Blues for New Orleans notes, the “second line rhythm permeates all forms of New Orleans vernacular music” (32-33).
⁸ Campanella, Geographies of New Orleans; Neville and Coats, "Urban Design and Civil Society in New Orleans"; Regis, "Blackness and the Politics of Memory in the New Orleans Second Line"; Regis and Breunlin, "Putting the Ninth Ward on the Map"; Sakakeeny, "Under the Bridge:"; Nick Spitzer, "Rebuilding the 'Land of Dreams' with Music."
⁹ In New Orleans, the term "neutral ground" signifies the grassy lawn that lies between lanes of traffic on most of the city's main thoroughfares and avenues.
Orleans's unique identity, and its irreplaceable role in creating forms of radical struggle in the United States. Always under threat by environmental, economic, and geographic concerns, if the United States lost New Orleans's public blues traditions, it would lose the mirror in which it sees its most critical and its most ideal face.

A heretofore unacknowledged key element in New Orleans African American parading and performance practices' power is their tendency to infuse and inspire every field of artistic production in the city. The participatory nature of blues and jazz cultures in New Orleans inspires, or indeed requires, New Orleans writers, theatre-makers, filmmakers, and artists to respond in unique ways to the overwhelmingly strong spatial jazz and blues "cadence" of their city's culture. This is especially true for the work of New Orleans's networks of publicly engaged artists—artists whose work consciously seeks to expand possibilities for social justice and democracy and build solidarity across social groups in the city. O'Neal's Hurricane Season is one among myriad examples of these artists' work—over the course of multiple eras—to produce plays, novels, films, poetry, and public art projects that engage with the concepts of freedom, justice, and democracy inherent in New Orleans's public blues performance traditions. Especially in the years since the Black Arts Movement, when the work of O'Neal, Tom Dent, Kalamu ya Salaam and the Free Southern Theater blossomed and forever changed New Orleans's artistic production landscapes, the city's artists have generated diverse methods for adapting and mirroring the participatory aesthetics of local African diasporic performance traditions into art forms that are traditionally defined as "bourgeois." Their attempts and successes at critically re-making and expanding the city's arts fields have made New Orleans into a

10 Kelley, Freedom Dreams; Moten, In the Break; Small, Music of the Common Tongue; Clyde Woods, Development Arrested and "Sittin' on Top of the World." I am indebted especially to Small's work in my analysis of the democratic social ideals in New Orleans jazz and blues aesthetics.

11 O'Meally, Jazz Cadence of American Culture.
city known today not only for its music, but also for its cutting-edge, participatory literary and artistic practices.

This dissertation traces the blues-based, participatory literary, theatrical, and media forms that have thrived in New Orleans for the past fifty years as a result of the interconnections between the city's public blues-culture-makers and its writers and theatre-makers. From the Free Southern Theatre and ArtSpot Productions' theatre spectacles in public space, to Students at the Center's pre- and post-Katrina work to infuse New Orleans public schools with blues-based forms of education, to the Ashé Cultural Arts Center's work to empower African American working class communities through storytelling, dance, and performance, I trace how New Orleans artists, educators, and organizers have drawn on public blues aesthetics and geographies in order to amplify the power of resistant collective memories and spatial practices in the city. By highlighting the work of New Orleans artists to spread what Clyde Woods calls "blues epistemologies" or blues intellectual traditions, I work to amend scholarly inattention to the relationship between New Orleans's jazz heritage, its neighborhood-based cultural traditions, and its other artistic fields. This project thus lays the groundwork for a broad analysis of the multi-pronged, locally grounded yet globally minded arts-based social justice movement that New Orleans artists have worked to produce over several eras. The

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12 Woods, Development Arrested, 29 and "'Sittin' on Top of the World." Woods's concept of blues epistemologies informs my approach to defining the geography-centered aesthetics of resistance that second line cultures express. He defines blues epistemologies as a "self-referential classificatory grid" that emerged from "the unique experience and position of the enslaved Black Southern working class." This "distinct and evolving complex of social explanation and social action," or "praxis," "provided support for the myriad traditions of resistance, affirmation, and confirmation" that defined African American life (Development Arrested, 29). It "dialectically emerged from the attempt to create sustainable communities and regions within a political economy built upon the non-sustainable pillars of social fragmentation, economic monopoly, and racial, and ethnic, conflict" ("'Sittin' on Top of the World,"") 73). In addition to providing a framework for my interpretation of second lines and other public blues practices, Woods's argument that interdisciplinary approaches are necessary for understanding and supporting the interrelated geographic, sonic, economic, cultural, and political elements of black working-class blues epistemologies has guided my approach to this research.
central goal of this movement has been to amplify and connect New Orleans's aural, blues-based vision for democracy and social transformation to the struggles of communities on multiple (local, regional, national, and transnational) scales. While I limit my analysis of this movement's work in the fields of literature, theatre, and pedagogy, I hope this dissertation inspires and helps generate research on participatory, blues-based film and television forms as well as music and visual art in New Orleans.

More than any other public blues practice in the city, the democratic call of the second line parade has spoken to and compelled New Orleans artists and authors to follow it, mirror its aesthetic in their own work, and critically engage with its shifting historic meanings. As Chapter One shows, second line parades are the most frequent and inclusive cultural expressions of working-class African American culture and history in New Orleans. The practice of second line parading began in the Reconstruction era when African American New Orleanians formed organizations called social aid and pleasure clubs as a way of pooling resources and celebrating each individual's right to life and to remembrance. These clubs took on the responsibility of burying their members, a practice which led to the rise of the jazz funeral tradition. Social aid and pleasure clubs have continued and expanded the jazz funeral tradition in New Orleans for the past one hundred and fifty years. In addition to funeral parades, each club also throws a yearly second line parade on a pre-established Sunday afternoon. The members pay dues that fund the band, the parading fee, and costumes.

In both annual club parades and funeral parades, there consists of a "first line" of marchers—often the social aid and pleasure club members who sponsor the parade and their hired brass band—and a "second line"—anyone and everyone who follows behind and dances, improvisationally, through the streets to the music. In funeral marches, which begin as slow, mournful processions from the church to the cemetery, the second line
does not start until the way home from the burial grounds (or, as is often the case in contemporary New Orleans, until a prearranged moment in the march before the release of the body to the motorcade that will take it to a suburban cemetery). In this moment, the music kicks up, and the parade transforms into a celebration of the deceased person's life and that of his or her whole community.

According to anthropologist Helen Regis, "through the transformative experience of the parade," second liners "become owners of the streets, at least for the duration of their performance." Indeed, social aid and pleasure club parades can be said to "produce neighborhoods" in New Orleans. This is because, according to musicologist Nick Spitzer, as second lines travel through New Orleans neighborhoods they "gather and articulate the people from within and beyond a neighborhood in the streets." Second line parades extend the spiritual communities of African American churches and Mardi Gras Indian tribes into the secular space of the public thoroughfare, expressing in urban space what is called "Nommo" in Dogon African philosophy: the spiritual life-force, or "breath of life," contained in sound that is "both a language and . . . a force for social cohesion." The parades and parade makers express and spread this breath of life in the work not only to strengthen communities, but also to celebrate the importance of individual and community life in the face of dominant US social structures that have historically denied and dismissed the lives and communities of parade participants. In the

13 Regis, "Blackness and the Politics of Memory," 756. Regis's analysis of the "political implications" and solidarities produced as a result of the "collective ownerships of the streets . . . experienced by participants in the second line" informs my argument here about the enactments of radical democratic social visions that second line parades express in each shifting historic context.
14 Ibid.. Regis adapts Arjun Appadurai's analysis of how spatial and cultural practices "produce locality" to make the case that second lines produce neighborhoods. See Appadurai, Modernity at Large.
15 Spitzer, "Rebuilding the 'Land of Dreams' with Music," 320.
17 I borrow the phrase "breath of life" from Kalamu ya Salaam's music blog of the same name, www.kalamu.com/bol. Salaam, in turn, borrows this phrase from James Baldwin's short story, "Sonny's Blues." See also: Salaam, "Digital Technology and Telling Our Story."
words of Richard Brent Turner, the second line parades that enable these public, collective and spiritual expressions are what make New Orleans "a sacred city in the African diaspora."\(^{18}\) They also make it sacred in the US national imagination.

Performance studies scholar Diana Taylor's framework for understanding the historical relationship between written histories and embodied histories in the Atlantic informs my approach to analyzing how black working-class residents' articulations of blues epistemologies throughout New Orleans's streets and neighborhoods have required the city's more socially privileged authors, theatre makers, and filmmakers to approach their crafts differently than artists in other cities. Taylor argues that despite the Western privilege of logo-centric forms of knowledge production, since the colonial "encounter" in the circum-Atlantic world, "writing and embodied performance have often worked together to layer the historical memories that constitute community."\(^{19}\) She asks scholars to question "whose memories 'disappear' if only archival [written] knowledge is valorized and granted permanence."\(^{20}\) But she also reminds scholars that just as we (since at least the post-structural era of criticism) critique written history for its always-mediated nature, we also must theorize embodied histories as mediated practices. My work here, in turn, shows that just as dominant culture makers in New Orleans produce work that is mediated by the shifting ideologies of global capitalism, the ideologies of New Orleans's public blues cultures are similarly mediated. These practices benefit from and, indeed, their structures require the critical engagement and discursive/performative debates of a broad basis of participants and supporters who collaboratively inquire into and help re-


\(^{19}\) Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 35. See also Salaam, "Words: Writing with Text, Sound, and Light."

make the histories, epistemologies, and spatial resistance tactics that second lines and other blues practices in the city pass down.

In setting out to pursue this project, I often wondered why so much has been written about the role of jazz and blues in New York or Chicago literature when no book-length studies exist on the special public space making and participatory jazz and blues "cadence" in New Orleans's literary and theatrical arts. With a few exceptions, scholarship on New Orleans's literary and theatrical heritage tends to "ghettoize" the city's literatures as either peaking in late-nineteenth-century regionalism or as "movement-based" art. Contemporary literary research has focused on works about New Orleans by non-local artists, pushing aside the local voices that participate in the city's thriving literary and theatrical spheres. An important exception is the work of Tony Bolden in Afro-Blue: Improvisations in African American Poetry and Culture. Bolden analyzes the influence of second lines and other African diasporic dance and celebration practices, especially those that thrive in New Orleans, on African American poetry throughout the US. He argues that even as blues music "exemplifies a process of

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21 See the most classic book on this topic, the two-volume anthology The Jazz Cadence of American Culture, O'Meally, ed. While articles by leading jazz and blues scholars such as Albert Murray, Robert Farris Thompson, Hazel Carby, and Nathanial Mackey analyze the "jazz cadence" in all forms of American culture (from novels to poetry to visual arts) the collection ignores cultural production in New Orleans that is not musical and tends to locate the city's significance in the production of jazz as static and historical. See also Lock and Murray, Thriving on a Riff.

22 Since its founding in 1976 by Tom Dent, Jerry Ward, and Charles Rowell, the literary journal Callaloo has been almost the sole critical voice for twentieth-century African American literature in New Orleans. Callaloo also covers a breadth of subjects relating to African American literature in general. In addition, the only collection of critical work that exists on twentieth-century New Orleans literature, Literary New Orleans in the Modern World, Richard S. Kennedy, ed., uncovers the almost "lost" voices of a few twentieth-century New Orleans authors. Also notable is that little scholarship exists on theatre in New Orleans apart from scholarship on the work of Tennessee Williams and a small amount of mostly unpublished research on the Free Southern Theater.

23 See, for instance, Eckstein, Sustaining New Orleans.

24 See also Nielsen, Black Chant. It is worth noting that both Bolden and Nielsen have close, working relationships with Salaam, whose artistic and scholarly work is also integral to my conception of second-line literatures here.
creolization that creates an omni-American form," "the artistic forms that have been shaped by the blues, as well as the styles of life reflected therein, have been consistently marginalized by the dominant institutions of this society." The unique marginalization of New Orleans's public-blues poetics and performance fields is further undergirded by national mythologized understandings of New Orleans and the local tourist industry's work to promote images of the city that sell racial desire at the expense of the city's majority African American population. In direct resistance to these images, the public/spatial blues-poetics I discover in New Orleans literature, film, and theatre not only reflects dis-privileged communities' emotional responses to the American experience, but also directly involve those communities, sometimes in a tenuous collaboration with white and/or middle-class communities, in the production of art.

By investigating the mutual mediations between textual and embodied knowledges in New Orleans, I hope to contribute to a critique of scholarship on my home city, which tends to reduce our African American history to the embodied realm. Constructing the false duality between written and embodied histories has limited our knowledge of and ability to see and hear marginalized histories, geographies, and knowledge systems. For this reason, I take on the task of analyzing and historicizing the ideological and aesthetic bridges, challenges, and road-blocks that black working-class culture makers, middle-class authors and artists, and those who move between and identify with both of these socially-constructed social spheres create as they try to see this blindness and hear this deafness in New Orleans. To attend to this task, I explore not only

the meanings and social effects of second-line literature and theatre, but also the shifting hegemonic contexts within which these spatial poetics of resistance emerge.27

I focus on how art forms, production methods, and institution-building practices in New Orleans have shifted during two distinct crisis periods in the city—the 1960s urban crisis period and the neoliberal period leading up to and just after Hurricane Katrina. Doing so allows me to evaluate the enlarged potential of art forms inspired by second lines and other public blues performance traditions in New Orleans during periods of social "pause" or transformation.28 Narrowing in on these moments of urban transformation and enlarged potential for counter-hegemonic interventions enables me to also evaluate how shifting dominant historical blocs have, in various ways, incorporated the city's blues-based artistic practices in order to further marginalize both social justice focused artists and New Orleans's low-income, non-white residents.

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27 Hegemony is the continual process of the forging of unity between the working and middle classes with the interests of dominant owner-class. Practices of education, cultural production, spatial production, and other ideology generating forces contribute to hegemony by generating modes of understanding everyday life that encourage consent to domination. For this reason, as Stuart Hall notes, “Hegemony is a state of play in the class struggle which has . . . to be continually worked on and reconstructed in order to be maintained, and which remains a contradictory conjuncture” “Race, Articulation, and Societies Structured in Dominance,” 46. The interests of the dominant class always take precedence in hegemony, but since its goal is the manufacturing of consent rather than violent coercion, hegemony is also defined by compromise and constant renegotiation between multiple classes.

28 My understanding of "conjunctures" draws on the work of Michael Denning, who uses Raymond Williams's concept of "structures of feeling" to show that with each successive hegemonic moment, or epoch, hegemony produces whole modes of being, or cultural practices, that create patterns of "loyalty and allegiance" (The Cultural Front, 63). At the heart of both dominant and resistant hegemonies is a battle over cultural forms and the ideologies they make possible. During a period of economic or social crisis, the curtains of hegemony, like the illusions of the Great Oz, come apart. According to Denning, such moments initiate "what Gramsci called a ‘crisis of hegemony’ . . . a moment when social classes became detached from their traditional parties, a ‘situation’ of conflict between ‘represented and representatives.’” (Ibid., 22). In these "conjunctural moments," social classes become forced to stop, look, and re-think their relation to each other and their inner relations in new ways. For an oppositional hegemony to seize the potential of a crisis moment, it must work on various levels to re-organize patterns of allegiance, re-articulate communities, and offer a new way of life and a new understanding of history that enables subjects to re-evaluate the present. To do all of this, the oppositional hegemony must generate and offer new cultural forms that speak to and with the experiences of the masses during the crisis period. Denning, drawing on Williams's notion of counter-hegemonic "cultural formations," argues that every cultural form is made possible by ideological or social alliances created within or between specific social groups within a specific context (26). See also Williams, Keywords and Gramsci, Prison Notebooks.
The second line-informed artists whose work I analyze do not just incorporate blues and jazz aesthetics (such as improvisation, call and response, collective counter-historical memories, and blues/jazz rhythms) into their works' content and form, but they also attempt to literally do with their work that which second lines do. That is, they struggle to find ways to gather multiple voices together in the critical sounding of African diasporic and circum-Atlantic memories and geographies of the city.29 Likewise, the makers of second-line literature and theatre struggle not just to imagine, but also to enact visions of a pluralistic, democratic urban world. They then strive to engage local communities in the collaborative re-making of public spaces and the city's and the nation's public spheres. In their multi-faceted work to achieve these complex and difficult goals, the artists, organizers, and educators this thesis follows have generated not only innovative expressive forms, but also new institutions that broaden and deepen forms of cultural resistance in the city. Each chapter in this project thus investigates artistic artifacts and the kinds of collaboration, institution building, dialogue, and community engagement that must occur for second-line literary art forms to emerge.

The makers of second-line literature and theatre tend to produce works that take the form of community ritual, wherein artists and audiences collaboratively revise and regain a sense of community in each new set of historical circumstances. By engaging the public in collaborative storytelling, singing, marching, or performance in public space, these rituals create new spaces in the city's public sphere and its material landscapes. Here diverse residents can come together to deepen their historical understandings of the unjust social systems, in which they participate, in order to then collectively strive together to enact a "storm" of sustainable social and geographic revolution and reconstruction. In order to expand the participatory possibilities of this work, second line-

29 Roach, Cities of the Dead.
inspired artists have to consistently re-think what their crafts can do with and to public space. For instance, Mondo Bizarro Production's I-Witness project (a post-Katrina digital media and public storytelling project in Central City, a working-class African American neighborhood) asks how participatory, place-based storytelling and performance can help generate new spatial practices that challenge and deconstruct the new class- and color-lines that gentrification produces. In a similar manner, the educational and writing programs Students at the Center and the Neighborhood Story Project train young people to gather and write stories about their neighborhoods' histories of resistant place-making to ensure the passing on of grassroots leadership structures in local neighborhoods and public schools. Together, these programs have also been central to creating literature forms in New Orleans that nurture and expand the collective memories of working-class African American neighborhoods in the face of the neoliberal educational reform and urban "renewal" projects that often work to silence and fragment them.

Works of second-line literature and theatre struggle to expand love and build affective, spiritual communities that emerge from critical, place-based histories, but go beyond place-based constructs of identity to connect communities in and through difference. They seek, as Martin Luther King advocated, a beloved community, but one grounded not in the idealistic realization of national US progress towards participatory democracy, but rather in the radical constructs of the discursive/performative/sonic democracy contained in the diasporic cultural and musical productions of this country's oppressed and enslaved peoples. Like second lines themselves, works of second-line literature and theatre express a performative theory of history. That is, they understand history as something that draws on collective memories but is also always produced in

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30 Jabir, "On Conjuring Mahalia."
the moment and according to the demands of the moment. Performance, as Taylor notes, drawing on the insights of Joseph Roach, "is as much about forgetting as about remembering." As participatory performance-grounded art forms, works of second-line literature and theatre are thus inherently a mobile form of cultural production. They engage directly with the unique power and significance of this call and response tradition that emerged in the unique diasporic contexts of New Orleans neighborhoods. Their form and content changes as they respond to the demands of the present. What *does not change* is their call and response interpolation of sacred and secular communities in the city.

As with any form of radical art, because it brings residents together across race and class lines to celebrate resistant subaltern cultures, such work can easily slip into or be appropriated by hegemonic forces that seek to subdue or appropriate those cultures. Thus, the stakes of making second-line literature can be high. Since the city's writers and performing artists work within the context of New Orleans's tourist-based economy, they must walk a fine line between playing a supportive role in grassroots cultural practices and appropriating those practices for personal artistic gain. My analysis follows the dialogues, collaborative struggles, and evolving artistic forms of New Orleans community-based artists in order to trace out the strategies they create for balancing on this line and maintaining their sense of grassroots solidarity within a city that notoriously markets itself and its art according to the racist demands of its tourist industry. These demands, and the stakes of second-line literature making, have grown exponentially since Hurricane Katrina.

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33 Ibid., 11. Taylor draws on Roach's *Cities of the Dead*, cited above, to make this assertion.
"Choice" vs. Story Circles in Post-Katrina New Orleans

During the Katrina crisis, New Orleans became a site of state-sponsored experimentation in top-down urban reforms that had, at their root, the goal of suppressing the city's public blues traditions and replacing their participatory, spatial epistemologies and radical democratic content with an individualistic focus on each person's freedom of access the public/private marketplace. While democratic sounding on the surface, these neoliberal reforms are emblematic of the "hurricane" that O'Neal's *Old Man Walker* predicted. They have facilitated the destruction of nearly all public housing in New Orleans, paved the way for the state-sponsored gentrification of New Orleans's most culturally significant African American neighborhoods, and accomplished the privatization of public education and public health care. These reforms have also facilitated the rise of a market-based, non-profit industrial complex that has worked with increasing success to fragment and corporatize grassroots resistance.

However, post-Katrina New Orleans has also become a site of powerful resistance these neoliberal policies. Rising forms of resistance in New Orleans today draw on second-line knowledges and geographies to convey a framework for a radical democracy-to-come grounded in embodied constructs of freedom. In recent years, this framework has increasingly relied on practices of public storytelling. From oral history projects, to story circle-based performances and public memorials, to collaborative ethnographies, to story-based racial healing projects, practices of public storytelling have swept over New Orleans like a new discursive parade seeking to transform racialized geographies in the


36 Flaherty, *Floodlines*, 113-132.
city and enlarge the city's public sphere.\(^{37}\) Insisting that one's story has meaning only in relation to other stories, public storytelling practices in post-Katrina New Orleans seek to re-construct collective-minded public values in the face of hegemonic ideologies that proclaim individual "choice" as the "bottom-line" of democracy. Building on the way Katrina "pulled off the scab" of the realities of structural racism in the city, and drawing on the second-line construct of sounding and performing subaltern histories in the streets, these practices also function to build anti-racist and cross-class solidarity by bringing together diverse sectors of the urban public to re-learn history and re-construct their cognitive maps of home and community with the stories and memories of communities from which they are normally alienated.

New Orleans artists', teachers', and social justice organizers' contemporary emphasis on oral storytelling as a tactic of resistance and racial healing stems from several additional sources. First, it draws on the prevalent cultural practice of call and response exchanges in public space and the forms of literature and performance that local artists have created in reply to this aesthetic. It is also a response to the widely held cultural belief in the US and contemporary Western nations that when people unburden themselves of their traumatic stories, healing will follow.\(^{38}\) Finally, public storytelling

\(^{37}\) Although it would be impossible to list the many oral history and public storytelling projects that arose in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, a few examples include the Neighborhood Story Project (which I discuss in Chapter Four); Mondo Bizarro Production's I-Witness Project (which I discuss in Chapter Five); the national program, Story Corps, which has visited New Orleans on several occasions; \textit{Alive in Truth}, an Austin-based oral history and digital storytelling project headed by New Orleans native, Abe (Elizabeth) Young; The Historic New Orleans Collection's Oral History project, headed by archivist Mark Cave, which chronicles the stories of emergency workers during and after Katrina; the Katrina-Rita Oral history project, focusing on the narratives of those made homeless by the storm; the Hurricane Digital Memory Bank's "Narrating Katrina Through Oral History"; and The Katrina Narrative Project at the University of New Orleans (see also their published collection of oral storm stories, \textit{Voices Rising: Stories From the Katrina Narrative Project}, Rebecca Antoine, ed.). See also Stein and Preuss. "Oral History, Folklore, and Katrina."

\(^{38}\) This thesis will contest and complicate this contemporary cultural idea as I explore how an emphasis on storytelling as a path towards community healing can also sometimes become a tool to cover over structural racism. Cohen-Cruz, \textit{Engaged Performance}; Gregory, \textit{Shaped By Stories}; Polletta, \textit{It Was Like a Fever};
initiatives in post-Katrina New Orleans arose as part of rising national urban policy and planning debates (or in many cases, the lack of debates) about whose stories matter in decisions about how to rebuild the city.\textsuperscript{39}

My understanding of the importance of public storytelling practices in the post-Katrina city began in a 2007 conversation with veteran teacher Jim Randels and writer, educator, and filmmaker, Kalamu ya Salaam, the co-directors of Students at the Center (SAC), a writing and digital media program in the New Orleans Public Schools. While sitting around a table at Café Rose Nicaud on Frenchman Street, I asked Randels and Salaam what they thought of the urban planning meetings that were then being held by the United New Orleans Planning (UNOP) team, a city-wide post-Katrina planning initiative that reached out to local residents who had returned home, as well as those who were still displaced, in the attempt to structure public dialogues about how to rebuild the city.\textsuperscript{40} Salaam asserted that the planning meetings, while democratic on the surface, were designed to co-opt opposition to the system of planning and social reconstruction being put in place in the city. Many of those who participated in these meetings would, if not invited to contribute, have been oppositional to this system. I contrasted the structure of UNOP meetings where all New Orleans residents, including those who were still displaced, were invited to participate as long as they did so within the pre-set parameters of those in charge, with the participatory structure of SAC high school classes.

\textsuperscript{39} Solinger et al., \textit{Telling Stories to Change the World}; Felman and Laub, \textit{Testimony: Crises of Witnessing}; and Thompson, \textit{Performance Affects.}
\textsuperscript{40} UNOP meetings were held in New Orleans and in Baton Rouge, Houston, and Atlanta in 2006 and 2007 and garnered nearly 4000 participants. They were facilitated by America Speaks, the same facilitation organization that planned and directed meetings for New Yorkers after September 11, 2011 on the issue of how to rebuild "Ground Zero." For summary reports of the data collected by the UNOP team see the UNOP website, http://unifiedneworleansplan.com/home3/section/136/city-wide-plan. Also see Lukensmeyer, "Large-Scale Citizen Engagement and the Rebuilding of New Orleans."
SAC uses a technique called the "story circle discussion method" as their basic method of pedagogy. John O'Neal developed this method during a long-term collaboration in the 1980s and '90s between his current company, Junebug Productions, and Roadside Productions, a community-based, anti-racist theatre located in the Appalachian Mountains of Tennessee. In a story circle, a small group of people sit together in a circle and tell stories aloud about a chosen topic. In a manner reminiscent of jazz improvisation, story circle participants are asked not to plan their stories in advance. Unlike the goal of UNOP meetings—which seemed to give residents a feeling that they were all "being heard" rather than to truly work through their divergent visions and opinions to produce a vision for the rebuilt city—the goal of story circles is to produce and explore ways to maintain harmony in and through difference. As story circle participants listen to the oral narratives of others, they discover not only new information about the lives of their fellow storytellers, but also new modes of communication and new shapes for the telling of stories. Within the space of the story circle, listening is the most important thing. According to O'Neal, "the listening is what gives definition to the story." This is because "hearing itself is a creative act."

For the past fifteen years in New Orleans, story circles have been a prevalent method by which teachers, activists, artists, and community organizations build solidarity among diverse communities in the city and create collaborative artistic works. Perhaps the central practice of second-line literature making in New Orleans, story circles operate under the radical democratic and blues-based ideal that deep listening across difference and collective struggle to invert hegemonic power dynamics in society can only occur.

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41 O'Neal, Interview by the author, 2009; O'Neal, “Do You Smell Something Stinky?: Notes from Conversations about Making Art While Working for Peace”; Cohen-Cruz, Engaging Performance.
42 O'Neal, Interview by the author, 2009.
43 Ibid.
when people move beyond arguments towards narrative and personal memory. Exploring one's own stories and memories through the eyes of others encourages one to revise one's cognitive maps of the city and one's understanding of history and identity. Throughout this dissertation, I argue that the practice of story circles and related second-line artistic practices in New Orleans provide an arts-based path towards the realization of radical democratic ideals within the contemporary neoliberal hegemony for communities in the US and around the globe. As I outline below, my conception of radical democracy synthesizes blues histories and libratory pedagogical and theatre practices with scholarship on democracy in the urban studies and political science fields.

"Agonistic" Storytelling in the City

Debates abound in contemporary democratic theory and urban policy and planning circles about the role that storytelling can play in democracy-building and urban sustainability. But, despite the many theoretical explorations of this topic, there does not yet exist a workable model upon which theory and praxis can converge. Exploring the impact of public blues cultural and artistic practices on New Orleans is my contribution towards establishing such a model.

I build on the work of urban studies scholar Robert Beauregard, who argues that sustainable cities can only be emerge if they are designed and governed in a way that encourages broad-based public storytelling and active listening on the part of diverse

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residents whose interests may seem, on the surface, to be oppositional.\textsuperscript{45} This kind of "discursive democracy" would encourage people to interact across entrenched social boundaries in order to tell stories, listen to the stories of others, and "reflect on what they have said and heard, and search for common ground."\textsuperscript{46} In a related argument, democratic theorist Iris Marion Young emphasizes that listening across material and discursive social boundaries may not be possible unless the public sphere is re-designed to include public spaces and discursive practices that valorize the multivalent communicative practices, rhetoric, and greeting styles of the non-dominant classes. In Young's ideal democracy, democratic practice would be conceived as an ongoing, discursive "struggle" wherein "through listening across difference each position can come to understand something about the ways proposals and claims affect others differently situated."\textsuperscript{47} Whereas within traditional processes of democratic deliberation, while "white middle-class people . . . often act as though they have a right to speak and that their words carry authority," members of other social groups "often feel intimidated by the argument requirements and the formality and rules of parliamentary procedure, so they do not speak, or speak only in a way that those in charge find 'disruptive.'"\textsuperscript{48} By contrast, in Young's proposal for communicative democracies, public storytelling practices and greeting practices would encourage people to feel welcome, heard, and acknowledged within discursive democratic spaces, conceived broadly.

The democratization of media has played a central role in making Young's and other constructs of deliberative, discursive, or communicative democracies popular. But perhaps the stronger influence on their development has been the gentrification of US

\textsuperscript{45} Beauregard, "Democracy, Storytelling, and the Sustainable City." Also see Michna, "A New New Urbanism for a New New Orleans."
\textsuperscript{46} Beauregard, "Democracy, Storytelling, and the Sustainable City," 75.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{48} Young, "Communication and the Other."
cities. Once considered to be enclaves for the demonized urban "underclass" that had to be policed, muted, and ghettoized, urban public spheres and public spaces today are increasingly becoming re-imagined as sites that the privileged classes can use in order to acquire still greater amounts of political, social, and cultural capital, while also purporting to embrace and desire a pluralistic society founded on inclusiveness. Radical democratic theorist Chantal Mouffe's deconstruction of deliberative democracies informs my argument that public storytelling initiatives in US cities today can often become tied to gentrification and, as such, are often paradoxically used to silence organized dissent. Mouffe insists that the goal of democratic structures should not be to generate the kind of public sphere wherein clashes of ethical and experiential perspectives will be narrated, smoothed over, and debated into consensus.49 Rather, well-designed public spheres and public spaces, including the spaces of public institutions such as schools, can enable societies to manage the inevitable conflicts that arise in a pluralistic political system and limit their tendency to become violent.

Drawing on the work of post-structuralist literary analysts such as Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, Mouffe's argument resembles the post-modern critical philosophies inherent in the blues aesthetic.50 She argues that in modern pluralist societies, each social objectivity is grounded in a relationship of difference. The nature of these relationships at any one time and in any one place constitutes hegemony. Thus, power ought not to be conceived of "as an external relation taking place between two pre-constituted identities, but rather as constituting the identities themselves in a precarious

49 Mouffe, The Democratic Paradox. Also see Mouffe, "Democracy, Power, and the 'Political," and Mouffe and LaClau, Hegemony and Socialist Strategy.
50 Moten, In the Break.
and always vulnerable terrain." Put simply, in democratic societies, it is the *practice* of democracy that constitutes our dynamic social identities.\(^{52}\)

I agree with Mouffe's assertion that antagonism or adversarial positions are integral to the functioning of liberal democratic ideals. Further, Mouffe notes that since modern liberal democracy combines two distinct political traditions—that of democracy, which values popular sovereignty and equality, and that of liberalism, which values "the rule of law, the defense of human rights and the respect of individual *liberty*"—it is constructed upon a paradox.\(^{53}\) Mouffe rightly sees liberal democracies' paradoxical and dynamic movement between these two poles as the key to liberal democracy's radical potentiality. In modern liberal democracies "both perfect liberty and perfect equality become impossible."\(^{54}\) Thus, the task of democratic struggle should be to create a system that would not reduce this *undecidability* between freedom and equality that is inherent in liberal democracy. Mouffe advocates, instead, seeking to construct democratic practices and institutions capable of fostering pluralistic ethical paradigms and managing dissent in a way that enables the ethical to always interrogate the realm of the political, rather than the other way around. Put differently, she asks how we can construct democratic practices and institutions that encourage us to recognize each other as "divided subjects" whose very divisions are the key to keeping our political systems from stabilizing—from


\(^{52}\) Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri make a similar argument in their discussion of rising frameworks for global radical democratic struggle in *Commonwealth*. In contrast to Hardt and Negri's theoretical manifesto, Mouffe's argument expresses more consciousness of the gap between theory and practice. Mouffe also defers from trying to mend that gap with heightened rhetoric. For this reason, I find her work more useful for this project's analysis of the ways in which radical democratic ideas "filter up" from the grassroots into the realm of the academic industrial complex, rather than the other way around.

\(^{53}\) Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 3.

\(^{54}\) Ibid., 10.
fixing borders and ethics in a way that shuts down possibilities for dissent, flux, and movement.55

In contrast to "agonistic" democratic systems such as the one Mouffe and Ernesto LaClau theorize, consensus-based democratic ideals necessitate the silencing of perspectives and histories in the "name" of rational agreement. As Mouffe explains, this desire for rational agreement is in reality a political design that reduces pluralism to the realm of the private, and, by doing so, attempts to "preclude the possibility of contestation."56 As this dissertation shows, post-racial and neo-liberal policies that privilege individual "choice" have consensus-based democratic ideals at their heart. These policies purport to value every citizen and every citizen's "story" equally. But the paradigm of "choice" reduces each subject's story to the realm of the individual and the private without acknowledging all subjects' interdependence. In this neoliberal political universe, what matters is that I have a choice, that I have access to and power within the ever-expanding public/private marketplace. My story matters only insofar as it locates me as a subject with the right to this choice. Privileging individual "choice" reduces the discursive democratic sphere to a space where everyone has the freedom to tell their story but few are required to actually listen. This public sphere looks a lot like the one Old Man Walker protests in Hurricane Season.

Caught up in the deluge of neoliberal "choice-based" reform that has re-shaped New Orleans since Hurricane Katrina, the second-line literature makers, performance makers, and story gatherers whose work I analyze struggle, in various ways, to seize the potential of this current democratic moment in order to shape the city's social realms into structures that highlight subjects' interdependence and move through conflict rather than

55 See also Zizek, The Idea of Communism and First As Tragedy, Then As Farce.
56 Mouffe, The Democratic Paradox, 92.
silencing it or exiling it from the political realm. Their work is inherently difficult because it requires the production of artistic forms and practices wherein subjects actively engage in the acts of expressing themselves in and through difference, moving through conflicts not to consensus but towards the balance between freedom and equity. As I will show, the unique aesthetic tools and epistemologies of New Orleans's public blues culture enables them to meet this challenge.

The Spirit Family of Second-Line Literature Makers

Each chapter in this dissertation traces the evolving, interconnected work of different members of the diverse, ever-evolving "family" of second-line literature and theatre makers in New Orleans. Chapter One outlines the epistemologies and histories of New Orleans's public blues traditions that inform their collective work. This synthesizes a range of locally-grounded, academic and grassroots analyses and descriptions of second lines, Mardi Gras Indian performances, and related practices in New Orleans through the lenses of critical geography and democratic theory. Using first-hand reflections and grounded performance histories, I argue for the national significance and profound influence of the democratic dreams and blues histories that have been expressed in dynamic ways in the public spaces of New Orleans since the era of Congo Square.

Chapter Two explores the unique encounter in New Orleans between the city's working-class African American cultural traditions and the national Black Arts Movement. I argue that poet and activist Tom Dent's deep interest in black working-class cultural traditions in New Orleans allowed him to use his three-year directorship of the Free Southern Theater to produce new and lasting interconnections between African

57 Salaam, "The Spirit Family of the New Orleans Streets."
American street performances and African American theatre and literature in the city. During a key period of crisis and transition in the city, Dent's collaborative work with Salaam, O'Neal, and others led to the foundation of a network of literature and theatre makers who participated in what Salaam and Dent call the "jazz paradigm for artistic development." This paradigm has worked in the past sixty years to nurture artists' developments within the context of collective (community and organizational) development in New Orleans.

**Chapter Three** outlines how Students at the Center has adapted second-line epistemologies and the jazz paradigm for artistic development into public school classrooms in the neoliberal era. The end-products of SAC's work are not only the books, plays, and films that their students produce, but also the social and political communities that their classrooms generate. SAC embodies what I conceive of as the highest measure of "success" in second-line literature making practices. Before Katrina, their artistic products had begun to facilitate the re-making of a key public space in the city—public schools—as places that facilitated collective, broad-based public engagement in the production of embodied and narrative-based counter-histories, in the sounding of blues epistemologies, and in the collective fashioning of new democratic visions. However, their story contains a dire warning. As Chapter Three shows, the neoliberal privatization of public schools in post-Katrina New Orleans has threatened not only liberatory education there, but also the very existence of public blues cultures that gave birth to and sustain New Orleans's radical democratic dreams.

**Chapters Four and Five** reflect on how the jazz paradigm for artistic development has produced, in the years since Katrina, a network of writers, teachers, and performing artists in New Orleans whose interests converge around their shared desire to

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58 Salaam, "Enriching the Paper Trail."
critically engage with, participate in, and expand second-line epistemologies. I focus on
the artistic products that emerged from this network in the months and years just after the
flood because it was during that period of crisis that artists in New Orleans engaged most
critically with the role that these epistemologies play in sustaining the city's unique
identity—sounding its subaltern histories and maintaining its democratic promise.

**Chapter Four** shows how middle-class authors during the Katrina crisis have sought to
manipulate mass market publication methods in order to critically reflect on, advocate
for, and spread second-line epistemologies. I investigate how the fiction of Tom Piazza
and Mike Molina, the creative non-fiction work of Dan Baum, and the grassroots
publication organization the Neighborhood Story Project have helped generate a
nationally-influential local literature modeled after second line parading practices. I ask
how these authors' divergent interrogations of the novel and non-fiction book genres with
the form of the parade enables them to question, with varying degrees of success, the role
of white patriarchy on shaping prevailing media and literary forms for imagining and
narrating the city. By interrogating the challenges that the second-line aesthetic and
second-line knowledges present to single-authored narratives, I also underscore the ways
in which the impulse to democratize literature can paradoxically work to strengthen
contemporary, oppressive "choice"-based social and economic frameworks.

**Chapter Five** analyzes how New Orleans's community-based theatre makers
drew on the lessons and methods developed during the Black Arts Movement and on
emerging constructs of "performative" and discursive democracy to build a public-
storytelling-based anti-racist theatre movement in the post-Katrina city. Unable and
unwilling to continue to "do" theatre in privatized sites removed from the realities and the
daily spatial practices of local residents, a loose network of community-based theatre
makers, visual artists, dancers, and musicians working with Ashé Cultural Arts Center,
Junebug Productions, Mondo Bizarro Productions, ArtSpot Productions, and the *Home: New Orleans?* project have worked since 2005 to create new performance forms rooted in practices of collaborative storytelling. Their work has made theatre the most central force in New Orleans today for anti-racist/cross-city and grassroots neighborhood organizing. It is also beginning to make New Orleans's theatre community into a central site for trans-national scholar and practitioner dialogues about the relationship of theatre to the construction of just and sustainable democracies.

Throughout this project, I draw largely on the interviews that I did with the artists, organizers, and educators whose work I studied. The meanings that I make from their texts and performances are also interdependent with what I have learned from participating in various university/arts partnerships through Imagining America, Boston College, and Students at the Center. My work with community-based theatrical productions in New Orleans especially underscores why I shaped my research in this engaged way. As an audience member in multiple, participatory post-Katrina works of theatre, I was forced out of my neutral ethnographer stance. Being in the audience of these plays required me to tell *my* story to those about whom I was writing and to become a participant in making the meanings of the performances I was studying. These performances hailed me as a member of the communities they were critiquing and working to re-construct. They brought me to the conclusion that my academic analysis of this work had to be grounded in collaborative praxis. As a result, this thesis does not pretend to be written by an objective outsider. I am an active member of the geographical and artistic communities about which I think.

I wrote this thesis to be a tool that New Orleans-based as well as New Orleans-curious artists can use as they go forward in their work to help heal the environments where they live and work. Inspired by Fred Moten's argument that to be a member of the
"intellectual cohort of the US ruling class" means participating, in some way, in striving to solve the crisis of democracy that constitutes our national identity,\(^{59}\) my goal in writing this dissertation has been to investigate the kinds of exchange that can emerge when counter-hegemonic culture bearers, artists, and academics work together to generate and manage solidarity in and through difference in New Orleans or any city. This thesis is thus its own kind of second-line artifact. My work here is "my story and my song,"\(^{60}\) even as it is also the product of an ongoing, collaborative exchange.

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\(^{59}\) Moten, "Democracy," 76.

\(^{60}\) Salaam, "My Story, My Song."
Chapter One: Second-Line Knowledges and the Re-Spatialization of Resistance in New Orleans

we made music that absorbed all that
music that floated on the wings of memory on the wings of tomorrow's
travail through the muggy Saturday night
from the shacks behind the tracks.
we, doomed to hulldom, attained elegance in ragged attire.

--Tom Dent, "Return to English Turn"61

In his analysis of second-line soundscapes, Matt Sakakeeny notes that, "Instead of discursive forms found at marches with an explicit political program (signs, banners, and speeches), parade participants in New Orleans 'speak' through practices linked to black expressive culture: bodily engagement, crowd participation, musical call and response, improvisation, and rhythmic syncopation and repetition."62 To most North Americans these kind of embodied, collaborative "speech" acts in public space are hard to imagine. For instance, when my neighbors in New England think of parades, they picture something like the Macy's parade, or perhaps a boisterous St. Patrick's day parade in Boston, where the lines demarking marchers and onlookers remain undisturbed despite rowdy crowds. Typically conceived as annual events, these parades temporarily intervene in cities' routine spatial practices to ritually express the social ideals and collective memories of the parades' sponsors. The watching crowds encounter and observe the marchers and the floats and assert a response—enthusiasm, glee, reverence, or perhaps boredom. Both the marchers and the crowd understand the parade to be largely a pre-designed and predetermined performance whose meaning can be amusingly unpredictable in moments, yet still lies largely in the hands of the parade-makers. White Mardi Gras parades in New Orleans follow this framework. Since they began in the

61 Dent, "Return to English Turn," in Magnolia Street, 29.
62 Sakakeeny, "Instruments of Power," 41.
1880s, high-rise floats have separated the parade's "krewe" members from the motley crowd. 63 New Orleans's only African American Mardi Gras parade, Zulu, follows suit. While Zulu mocks the pretensions to royalty and social dominance that white parades often enact, today its set route and exclusive membership veers far from the second line tradition in which it finds its roots. 64

An important exception to Zulu's mainstream routine came, however, in 2006, during the first Mardi Gras after Hurricane Katrina. That year, Zulu riders chose to descend from their floats at the Superdome, the site that resonates for so many New Orleanians as a modern-day "hull" that began a new, local black diaspora. After paying reverence to this site, Zulu krewe members then walked through the nearby backstreet neighborhoods where Buddy Bolden and Louis Armstrong learned their crafts. Finally, they came to the I-10 under-pass on North Claiborne Avenue. I was lucky to be among the crowd that greeted them when they arrived at this, the climax of their march.

The 2006 parade was my first time "catching" Zulu at the end of its route in the Sixth Ward across Claiborne Avenue. In past years and as a child, I always caught the parade Uptown on St. Charles Avenue near its beginning. But that year, my sister, Elizabeth Jeffers, a teacher at a local public high school, was leading me. Moving through the crowd of African American New Orleanians, overhearing conversations about how and when people were returning home, or not returning, and standing under the concrete sky of the I-10 overpass as Zulu's members (Big Shot, the Mayor, the King and Queen, and a troupe of real Zulu dancers visiting from Africa) paraded through, I felt for the first time the sanctity and the overwhelming power of this place. For Zulu members, second liners, Mardi Gras Indians, and most residents of New Orleans's black-

63 Gill, Lords of Misrule; Roach, Cities of the Dead; Souther, New Orleans on Parade.
64 Osborn, All on a Mardi Gras Day.
working class neighborhoods the downtown side of Claiborne Avenue beneath the I-10 overpass, or "bridge," is a re-incarnated Congo Square. As Sakakeeny explains, this space is the center of New Orleans's alternate "sound-scape."\(^{65}\) When local parades travel "under the bridge," their sounds amplify and the crowd's energy expands, possessed by the command of the sounds and collective memories that converge there.\(^{66}\) As Zulu crossed this spiritual and historic site, the city's pre-Katrina life was laid to rest and a new era began. I was proud, yet overwhelmed, to witness it. I felt, as I am sure others did, like I was standing deep inside history. In a way, I was.

Running through the Sixth, Seventh, Eighth, and Ninth Wards, North Claiborne's history can be understood as a synecdoche for the history of African American communities and cultures in New Orleans. Before the construction of the I-10 overpass in the 1960s, Claiborne Avenue's two lanes were divided by a wide, grassy neutral ground that boasted a long stretch of some of the oldest oak trees in the nation. These trees stood like majestic, wrinkled baobabs, containers for the sounds and the soul of the multi-cultural African American communities that they had sheltered for generations. During the Jim Crow era, businesses, markets, social aid and pleasure club headquarters, restaurants, bars, churches, and union halls lined both sides of the street. On Sundays families would come to the neutral ground for picnics. According to cultural activist and civil rights leader Jerome Smith, Claiborne Avenue was, at the time, "an extension of every house in the neighborhood, for all kinds of celebration and participation and rites of passage."\(^{67}\) Poet Tom Dent describes Claiborne in the 1940s and '50s as "everyone's front

\(^{65}\) Sakakeeny, "Under the Bridge."
\(^{66}\) This amplification is experienced by anyone who has participated in a second line parade in downtown New Orleans. It is also crucial to Sakakeeny's claim in "Under the Bridge" that the amplification that occurs here in this sacred spot allows second lines to draw on historic memories to generate dynamic soundscapes of resistance that reshape spatial practices and the experience of space and place in the city.
\(^{67}\) Smith, interview by Burns, *Keeping the Beat on the Street*, 125. Also see note 70, below.
yard. On Mardi Gras Day, people would stake a place on the grass, fill it with picnic blankets and grills, and spend the day watching the Mardi Gras Indians, skeleton and baby doll masking groups, and the Zulu Parade. It was also here that the year-round traditions of jazz funerals and second line parades converged. These parades inspired a year-round “groundswell of participation.” They served to extend and connect all the houses in the neighborhood as one community.

North Claiborne was thus a site in which African American people from a wide variety of class, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds came together to construct and perform a collective politics of place rooted in African diasporic memories. These memories are not often contained in the era’s history books or in tourist narratives about city. They were not present in the textbooks that African American children read in the city’s segregated schools. But in the sounds and movement that filled North Claiborne and its surrounding neighborhoods on a regular basis, a people’s history of New Orleans abounded and educated the public in a subaltern geography of resistance.

Sadly, in 1966, Claiborne Avenue’s “majestic oaks” and its green, shady neutral ground were replaced with heady concrete pylons. As occurred in black neighborhoods in many US cities, the destruction of New Orleans's African American main street was the combined result of federal policies and the local dominant class's valuations of place. Drawing on federal funding and federal policies outlined in the 1956 Interstate Highway Act, the city justified its decision to construct a raised highway on North Claiborne by arguing that the highway was necessary to facilitate the movement of middle-class residents from downtown jobs to new neighborhoods in the suburbs. The specific

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69 Royce, All on a Mardi Gras Day.
70 Smith, interview by Burns, Keeping the Beat on the Street, 126
decision to build the highway on North Claiborne came as a result of a long campaign by a group of preservationists in the French Quarter who banded together to prevent the highway from being built through the French Quarter.\footnote{Kelman, "Epilogue: The Simple Needs of Automobiles," \textit{A River and Its City}, 197-222.} Ironically, these preservationists called themselves "freeway fighters," an ironic riff on the well-known civil rights "freedom fighters" who risked their lives to integrate interstate buses in the South.\footnote{Ibid., 200. The contrast between these white, historic preservationist activists and the "freedom fighters" is stark. Whereas the historic preservationists used the violence of white hegemony to "preserve" both the French Quarter and dominant white historical narratives about the city, the freedom fighters came together across race and class boundaries to fight for social equity and civil rights. The actions of the freedom fighters resonated powerfully with Tremé residents because Smith and several other Freedom Fighters and Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) activists lived and worked in the neighborhood. The next phase of Smith's work led him to directly confront the negative impact that the I-10 and urban disinvestment had on his community. He founded a Freedom School for Tremé children, which he called Tambourine and Fan (after the tambourines used in Mardi Gras Indian Performances and the fans used in second lines) and opened and directed the Tremé Community Center. In his five decades of activism in and around the neighborhoods surrounding North Claiborne, Smith gained the nickname "Big Duck" as a result of his beloved status among young people in the neighborhood, who often follow him, like "little ducks," around the neighborhood as he works. Johnson "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington"; Pierre, "Down the the River of Dryades and Claiborne Avenues (Jerome Smith)"; Rogers, \textit{Righteous Lives}; Germany, \textit{New Orleans After the Promises}; and Fairclough, \textit{Race and Democracy}.} 

The dark overhang of the new I-10 affected not just the space of Claiborne Avenue, but also the “mentality” of the surrounding neighborhoods. Under the shadows of the expressway, and due to other urban renewal projects that pushed more working-class African American residents into public housing projects at the far edge of the city, traditional public celebrations of deaths, birthdays, celebrations, and community traditions attracted fewer participants. Jerome Smith, a \textit{Freedom} Fighter and leading cultural activist in the Tremé for the past five decades, explains:

I think it was basically racist, ’cause people were helpless. I mean we did not know that was going to happen. It was like, you would go to sleep at night, and when you wake up the next morning, the trees are gone, that kind of thing. Because there was an absence of power on this side, this black side, this neighborhood. Plus no respect for it . . . you have to have
the rituals of community for this kind of music. Once the rituals are threatened, then it affects the music.\textsuperscript{74}

The destruction of Claiborne Avenue underscores how dominant historic narratives, collective memory, and the shape and texture of the material city mutually construct each other in New Orleans or any city. Evaluating the renaissance in parading forms that emerged slowly but surely after the destruction of Claiborne's oak trees underscores, in turn, how black cultural resistance in New Orleans has used sound, movement, and performance since the city's beginnings to \textit{re-spatialize} the geographic structures of oppression constructed by capitalism.

This chapter historizes those re-spatializations in order to outline the unique local and diasporic blues knowledges and geographies that inform the shaping of second-line literature, theatre, and film in New Orleans. Although I came of age within the sounds and movement of New Orleans parades, my analysis here is not drawn from extensive first-hand involvement with New Orleans's public blues cultures. Rather, I base my understanding of the local and global meanings of these cultures on the writings of musician/parade makers such as Louis Armstrong, Sidney Bechet, Danny Barker, Jerome Smith, and Ronald W. Lewis, as well the scholarship of organic intellectuals such as Kalamu ya Salaam and publicly-engaged anthropologists Helen Regis, Rachel Breunlin, and Matt Sakakeeny.\textsuperscript{75} I synthesize these diverse, grounded analyses of New Orleans public blues performances' with recent findings in musicology, critical geographic studies, and democratic theory.

\textsuperscript{74} Smith, Interview by Burns, \textit{Keeping the Beat on the Street}, 126.

\textsuperscript{75} In addition to, or interconnected to her anthropological research, Breunlin is also the co-director of the grassroots publication organization, The Neighborhood Story Project, which I discuss in Chapter Four. See \url{http://www.neighborhoodstoryproject.org/}. 
Second-Line Geographies and the Subaltern Fleur De Lis

My emphasis on public blues cultures' work to re-spatialize capitalist geographies stems from Katherine McKittrick's assertion (drawing on the work of Paul Gilroy), in *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*, that "Black Atlantic populations . . . inhabit place in a unique way, which is, in part, upheld by geographic yearnings and movements that demonstrate 'various struggles toward emancipation, autonomy, and citizenship' and a reexamination of 'the problems of nationality, location, identity, and historical memory.'"\(^76\) McKittrick argues that these struggles "offer a different entry point into human geography" than the one provided by Western capitalism, "one that recognizes the alterability of humanness, space, and place, and one that imparts the understanding that this alterability is a pathway into new geographic practices."\(^77\) McKittrick's interpretation of Black Atlantic re-imaginings and re-spatializations of capitalist geographies challenges prevailing scholarly views on the process by which space is produced. These views tend to build from Henri LeFebvre's foundational Marxist analysis of spatial resistance in his 1974 text, *The Production of Space*. Arguing that space cannot be lived abstractly but can only be experienced through a semiotics of signs, symbols, and spatial practices (routes, routines, networks, and realities), Lefebvre rightly theorizes space as the central terrain of social struggle.\(^78\) He also asserts (in a structuralist fashion) that it is as impossible to exit spatial sign systems as it is to exit discursive ones. LeFebvre traces, instead, how revolutions and social justice campaigns, especially in the dense space of cities, struggle to "appropriate" physical space in order to question the symbols and intervene in the spatial practices that

\(^{76}\) McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, xx. McKittrick is quoting the argument of Paul Gilroy in *The Black Atlantic*.

\(^{77}\) McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, 146.

\(^{78}\) LeFebvre, *The Production of Space*, 39. See also Gilmore, "Fatal Couplings of Power and Difference: Notes on Racism and Geography."
generate representational space. Following Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau's equally influential critical geographic analysis defines spatial "tactics of resistance" as practices that exist on the borders between totalizing systems. 79 Without a base or a territory proper to them, tactics "insinuate" themselves "into the other's place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance." 80 For de Certeau, tactics are always temporary and always "depend on time"; they are "always on the watch for opportunities that must be 'seized on the wing.'" 81

Building on LeFebvre and de Certeau's frameworks, the well-known second line researcher Helen Regis argues, reflecting on Pierre Nora's construct of "lieux de memoire" (spaces transformed by public action into sites where counter-histories can be celebrated and remembered), that second lines are spatial "tactics of memory" whereby participants collaboratively re-construct urban space to memorialize individual lives, neighborhood histories, and the suppressed histories of slavery, Jim Crow, and the circum-Atlantic world. 82 According to this logic, and in the Marxist sense, second lines are an articulation or aural and spatial joining-up of counter-histories, epistemologies, and social networks that confront and help people survive oppressive realities, while also sounding out a refusal to forget and enacting a vision for a better world. However, if we use McKittrick's concept of Black Atlantic re-spatializations, we discover that second lines go even further.

Not only do second lines (and, to some extent, Mardi Gras Indian performances) simultaneously connect the past to the present in ways that help people celebrate and connect with each other as they challenge contemporary forms of oppression and

79 De Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life, xix.
80 Ibid.
81 Ibid.
82 Regis, "Blackness and the Politics of Memory," 762-763.
envision a more just form of democracy, but these practices also generate a "poetics of landscape" that re-imagines and re-organizes how urban space is lived.\(^{83}\) This poetics of landscape uses and exceeds "tactics of memory" to rupture the very idea of spatial representation or spatial knowledge. Second-line geographies proclaim instead that urban space is a *temporal* product of what geographer Doreen Massey calls multiple, diverse and divergent "stories so far."\(^{84}\) Like LeFebvre, New Orleans's public blues performance makers understand geography as the central terrain of political struggle itself. However, their concepts of the political and social realms are not of subjects co-existing and resisting in a structure of oppression, but of a system whereby subjectivities and power are constructed by social relations and interdependence.\(^{85}\)

Drawing on the radical blues aesthetic, second lines and other public blues performances organize space as a "product of interrelations; as constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny."\(^{86}\) Resistance and social transformation in this framework hinge on finding a way to collaboratively sound, narrate, or perform these interrelations and, by doing so, to create a structure for communicative, agonistic democracy.

Massey's analysis of circum-Atlantic spaces of encounter and exchange enables my geographic approach to understand this radical aesthetic. Massey underscores the way in which dominant Western concepts of space view it (*wrongly*) as a "surface on which we are placed."\(^{87}\) Drawing on post-modern theorists and radical democratic philosophers (such as Mouffé) as well as on indigenous South American geographies, she argues instead that we ought to view space as "the sphere of the possibility of the existence of

\(^{83}\) McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, xix.

\(^{84}\) Massey, *For Space*, 12.

\(^{85}\) Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 100.


\(^{87}\) Ibid., 7.
multiplicity in the sense of contemporaneous plurality.\textsuperscript{88} I argue, complementarily, that viewing space through time is an extension of the blues understanding of subjectivity as the product of exchange and interrelations on multiple scales. Second line blues geographies understand and enact space as constructed by contemporaneous, divergent experiences of history. My analysis in the pages that follow of the development of second line parades and other public blues traditions in New Orleans since the era of Congo Square shows how these practices have historically drawn together diverse members of the African diaspora to sound and dance these contemporaneous experiences and memories as geography. These African diasporic articulations of geography as space-in-time become linked through the history and the journey of the slave ship, or hull, which generated the national racial regime.

The second line's embodied and musical collaborative speech acts in public space express a kind of subaltern "fleur de lis" in New Orleans's creolized social and cultural landscapes. New Orleans's most prominent symbol for its identity is the French fleur de lis, which is paradoxically the pre-revolutionary French emblem for monarchy, imperialism, and the holy Christian trinity. The fleur de lis, which was the symbol that early French settlers—my own family included—stamped on their slaves, organized the city's Creole cultures according to a tri-partite racial hierarchy that valorized the imagined European past. In contrast, the radical tri-partite organizational nature of the city's black working-class parades expresses a social and artistic organizational structure that enables a mode of democratic freedom that is unimaginable within dominant constructs of democracy, which link social equity to the capitalist free market. First, this tri-partite social and aesthetic structure enables embodied expressions of African diasporic and African American memories and spiritual practices into the streets—acts that remake the

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., 9.
public knowledges and local collective memories each time they occur. Second, it expresses a conception of public space as a shared, dynamically constructed commons that runs counter to dominant notions about public space as a static, own-able entity. Finally, New Orleans's public blues performance traditions build on the call and response ethic of Congo Square and blues, jazz, and gospel music to theorize and model a form of freedom and democracy rooted in the embodied interdependence of all subjects.

The remainder of this chapter traces the history of the development of New Orleans's public blues cultures in order to distinguish the interrelated development of these three aesthetic and philosophical principles. I begin with an overview of the rise of African diasporic performances in public space in the antebellum city and go on to trace the ways in which these practices have shaped community identities and artistic practices in contemporary eras.

**The Promise of a Better World: From Congo Square to Central City**

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Congo Square, or Place Congo, was a site in New Orleans where enslaved laborers, free people of color, and, later, Afro-Creole Haitian immigrants would converge on Sundays to play music, dance, and celebrate myriad spiritual traditions. In multiple "adjacent circles," African, African American, Afro-French, and Afro-Caribbean musicians, dancers, and spiritual leaders would meet at Congo Square. In simultaneous and interconnected ritualized music and dance performances, these diverse members of the African diaspora would express pluralistic memories and sound a concept of freedom and equity rooted in embodied social interconnectedness. While performances at Congo Square ended long before the official advent of jazz, the social relationships and ideals that were enacted there

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89 Wagner, *Disturbing the Peace*, 100.
exerted a central influence not only on the city's evolving music and parading forms, but also on the affective and place-based African American communities that were taking shape in the city. In no other major Southern US city were slaves allowed to congregate on a regular basis to engage in spiritual practices and artistic expression in a central public space within the urban grid. Combined with the song and dance traditions in the semi-public spaces of African American churches, the public nature of spiritual performances at Congo Square were integral to the rise of jazz in New Orleans and to the city's diverse, lasting traditions of call and response marching, dancing, singing, and instrument playing in public. These practices were also central to structuring the material and imaginative textures and shapes of New Orleans's segregated African American residential and commercial neighborhoods as they developed in the latter nineteenth centuries (and as they continue to develop, even in the suburbs).

It is important to distinguish, however, between the mythology surrounding Congo Square and its actual, local and spatial legacy. As Bryan Wagner argues, the mythology surrounding Congo Square (especially the myths that arose as a result of George Washington Cable's characterization of the folk slave maroon character, Bras Coupé in his 1880 novel, *The Grandissimes*) led to the creation of popular and scholarly jazz history narratives that appropriated Congo Square and through it the entire jazz tradition as symbols for the nation's purported "progress" towards racial equality. Wagner explains that the white observers who chronicled Congo Square performances, as well as those who, like Cable, elaborated on those records to construct influential fictive narratives about black performers' histories and experiences, were only able to do so because police presence declared the square to be a site of white surveillance. But

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90 Wagner, *Disturbing the Peace*, 114.
91 Ibid., 97.
because they almost never address this police presence, prevailing histories of Congo Square tend to reify the visual regime of racism that renders black bodies as inherently non-modern and as a threat to the nation-state. Therefore, even as they claim to "validate" the contribution black musical cultures make to American culture, such narratives reinforce the ethic of racial violence at the center of the nation's historic and contemporary social order. This is partly because jazz history narratives tend to focus on individual performance "stars" at the expense of theorizing the group dynamic and collective expression that was central to Congo Square performances. Doing so reduces the history of jazz origins to a story of (passive) black "fathers" and (active) white ethnographic discoverers who became responsible for spreading their music to the wider world. At its root, this racist patriarchal story has a search for the mythical lost "wholeness" of African cultures in America that neglects to attend to the way in which blackness as a social and cultural construct was created by the ideologies undergirding slavery and by the global history of the Black Atlantic.92

Wagner's assertion that we ought not to imagine Congo Square as the (or the only) site of origin for the jazz tradition is apt and important. But since he does not address the ways in which Congo Square was the site of origin for something more specific within the jazz tradition (the practice of collaborative, African diasporic music and dance performances in public space) Wagner, too, elides Congo Square's true legacy.93 Congo Square's communal traditions of aural and embodied expressions of counter-hegemonic

92 Ibid., 3.
93 For Wagner, as for Moten, defining African American culture and the black radical currents in jazz and blues traditions requires confronting the structures of state-sponsored violence that mediated their evolution from the beginning of the Black Atlantic. But because neither of these critics sufficiently theorize geography and the politics of place- and space-making, they often overlook the less archived and more embodied and collective ways in which New Orleans blues and jazz aesthetics and epistemologies (like African diasporic and creolized aesthetics, knowledges, and memories in general) generated spatial communities as they, in Joseph Roach's terms, "synthesized" and "mutated" to address the changing needs and social context of each historic and spatial era. Roach, Cities of the Dead, 30.
African diasporic knowledges and geographies have survived and transformed in African American neighborhoods in New Orleans in each era since the performances at the square diminished.

In the words of Salaam, the social ideals and epistemological vision expressed at Congo Square made a "circle out of a square."\(^94\) They constructed a circular social ideal rooted in freedom, interdependence, and equity within the angular, alienating "corners" of a capitalistic society that are rooted in the objectification and violation of black bodies.

Jack Buerkle and Danny Barker describe these traditions' space- and knowledge-making practices as a slow building fervor that swept over the city throughout the afternoon:

> Badoum! Badoum! Badoum! The drummers' signal went flying over the low roofs of the Vieux Carré from the clearing on the edge of town. The place—Congo Square. It was 1835, a Sunday afternoon. They came in groups of two and three at first, but within half an hour the field was a patchwork of color and sound.\(^95\)

Women's voices and a range of instruments improvisationally melded African beats from multiple tribes and nations, adding French intonations and Jewish harp sounds. Hundreds and sometimes thousands of dancers swayed to the Bamboula, the Congo, the Calinda, and to the spiritual call of the Vodou loa.\(^96\) Freddi Williams Evans, whose work has recently been influential in causing the city to officially re-name this historic space as Congo Square (rather than its twentieth century official name, General P.G.T. Bureaugard Square, after a Confederate general), notes that women at Congo Square in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries sang mostly in Creole or Patois. Their circles often opened and closed with a Calinda dance to the song "Quand mo te jeune (Bal fini)" (When I was Young (The End of the Ball):

\(^94\) Salaam, "Congo Square."
\(^95\) Barker and Buerkle, *Bourbon Street Black*, 11.
\(^96\) Evans, *Congo Square*, 34.
Quand mo-té jeum'
Mo-té jonglé Michieu;
A c'their ma-pé vini vieux
Mo-pé vini vieux
Mo-pé jonglé bon Dieu.
(When I was young/Merry was I, dear Sirs./And now when I am old/I still will merry be).  

In a manner similar to the other dances at the square—and in a style that is still adapted in second lines today—the Calinda called for the women to move only their lower bodies, while keeping their feet touching the ground and waving a handkerchief while her male partner completes complex footwork, with leaps and turns around her body.  

Through this choreographed, physical movement and its accompanying music, black geographies, histories, and knowledges re-shaped all residents' experiences of the city on its weekly day of "rest." When dancers, drummers, and flute players overtook the square, whites looked on from a distance. Others heard the sounds of the square or observed people heading there from streets far in the distance. At the same time as music was being created in Congo Square, enslaved people trapped in New Orleans's notorious slave pens were often constructing sonic spiritual communities and landscapes of resistance that inflected the city's market in human flesh, constructing the actions and subjectivities not just of their fellow slaves but of the white people who profited from their commodification.  

I imagine the memory making and space making practices of spirituals in the slave pens combining in sonic unity with the drums at Congo Square, covering the city in counter-hegemonic geographies that slaves and free people of color carried with them on their routes through, out of, and into the city and into the swamps, where maroons and maroon cultures thrived.    

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97 Evans, *Congo Square*, 83-84.
98 Evans, *Congo Square*, 98-100.
99 McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*; Johnson, *Soul by Soul*.
100 As McKittrick notes, quoting Neil Smith, scale is "the technology according to which events and people are, quite literally, 'contained in space.'" A "singular scale or geographic totality" (such as the scale of the
The music and dancing in Congo Square functioned as the center of a subaltern public sphere in urban space that articulated diverse enslaved and free members of the African diaspora in New Orleans as a political community and enabled them to (in Salaam's words) "beat, be, remember."¹⁰¹ The multiplicity of sounds and rhythms there were "a kind of promise, even then" that a better world could be constructed.¹⁰² As Robin D. G. Kelley reminds us, even if present-day realities make the construction of better or ideal worlds impossible, the ability to imagine social transformation and to enact it poetically or musically in cooperation with others is the most "potent weapon" in the struggle for freedom.¹⁰³ David Harvey, likewise, notes that spatial utopias grounded in the artistic imaginary have the ability to "stabilize and control the processes that must be mobilized to build them."¹⁰⁴ No other better world is possible unless we dream it, and the more collective and cohesive our dreams are, the better we are able to organize and mobilize to achieve them. Thus, the "promise" that Congo Square musicians, singers, and dancers sounded and expressed through movement in New Orleans's dense, urban space enabled the city's African diasporic community to temporarily and repetitively transform the "ugliness" of New Orleans's slave-based geography into a city, or a part of a city, wherein the embodied nature of freedom was recognized and valued. In this way, Congo Square practices generated a kind of counter-urban-development in the city that led, as we will see, to the construction of affective communities and place-making practices that challenged and remade the geographies of white power in subsequent eras.

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¹⁰¹ Salaam, "Congo Square."
¹⁰² Kelley, Freedom Dreams, 10.
¹⁰³ Ibid., 10.
¹⁰⁴ Harvey, Spaces of Hope, 173.
Salaam argues that the spiritual and social promise expressed in Congo Square has, in the years since emancipation, enabled working-class African American residents to create a "spirit family" in and of the city's streets. This spirit family is grounded in an allegiance to community and to a village mindset that is oppositional to individualist constructs of the "American dream." Rather, it sounds and enacts a radically different American dream wherein the interconnected histories and knowledge-making structures of slave spirituals, gospel music, the blues, and jazz are acknowledged to be at the center of US culture and the embodiment of its highest social ideals. As with any family, the spirit family of the New Orleans streets is shaped by the way in which hegemonic power structures hail individuals in relation to socially constructed class and racial groups, but it also functions as a powerful force that enables subjects to critique and resist such interpellations. The spirit family is not unitary or static in format. It is, instead, the product of constant articulations that the musicians and dancers in the parade knit over changing systems of oppression and across different meldings of languages and ethnicities in the city. It thus enacts, in New Orleans's residential and commercial public spaces, a blues-based concept of subjectivity that is dynamically dependent on both individual performance and social/ensemblic exchange.

If this early-modern, Black Atlantic concept of subjectivity seems inherently post-modern, it is because blues epistemologies have, since the onset of the global slave trade, functioned in a manner similar to post-modern ways of knowing the world. As Moten notes, blues performances, such as those of the second line, sound a critique of Enlightenment-based notions of subjectivity as whole or transcendent. They work to "break down the distinction between what is intrinsic and what is given by or of the

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105 Salaam, "Spirit Family of the Streets."
106 Moten, In the Break, 14.
outside.\textsuperscript{107} In the Western imperial global domination project, freedom has become associated with a mythological universal selfhood that supposedly stands outside of the marketplace, but is, in reality, a product of it. In response and resistance to this domination project, black blues performances sound forth a new theory of human value and human freedom as something that is both singular (inherent) and social (exchangeable). Moten argues that when slaves expressed aural resistance in song or shout to this discursive regime, they were performing that which the Enlightenment system deemed impossible—they were speaking commodities.\textsuperscript{108}

As speaking, singing, shouting commodities, slaves expressed the exchange system that was at the center of all Western identity projects, radically discrediting any notion of a transcendent Western subjectivity independent from the exchange structure of the capitalist marketplace. Spirituals, gospel music, and the blues cultures that emerged out of them carried within them and spread aural and embodied methods for the construction of counter-histories and collective memories that the dominant, logo-centric order wanted to erase or destroy. These aural and embodied forms of resistance imagine and enact a concept of freedom and social equity that is grounded in subjects' embodied realizations of their interdependence. New Orleans's public blues traditions go further—they parade this resistance into and out of the city's public spaces, reorganizing spatial practices and residents' cognitive maps as they do so.

Radically democratic and pluralistic in form, second line parades sound and dance into being a blues elimination of the us/them boundary that has, for so long, shored up patriarchal American hegemonies.\textsuperscript{109} As Mouffe notes, the elimination of this boundary does not mean the elimination of social conflict and antagonism. Rather, it reorganizes

\textsuperscript{107} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., 252.
conflict and antagonism into a structured, yet flexible, and ritualized, yet improvisational, framework where every participant's actions, history, and perspective matter. American participatory democracy continuously fails to achieve this agonistic pluralism because it pivots around the us/Them boundary. Shifting the boundary to include more civic participants is not the issue. Eliminating the boundary is.

Hortense Spillers argues that removing the us/them distinction from American culture would require a reinvention of the basic "grammar" of American patriarchal society. This racist "grammar" hinges on the construction of black women's subjectivities as implicitly "other" to American social ideals and of their histories and geographies as non-existent. According to Spillers, the patriarchal logic or "grammar" of American racism originated during slavery, when African American fathers were removed "not so much from sight, as from mimetic view as a partner in the prevailing social fiction of . . . the Father's law."\(^{110}\) In Lacanian terms, despite and in the face of their lack of legal rights to their children, enslaved women passed onto their children a law of the mother that was intrinsically different, or opposed to, the law of the patriarchal white father. Gil Hochberg, reflecting on Spillers's work, notes, "With the absence of the symbolic patriarchal figure . . . the 'monstrosity' of a strong maternal figure ('with the capacity to name') offers a radical identity position for (African American) women and an alternative narrative of female empowerment, based on the specific (destruction of) the African American family during slavery."\(^{111}\) This identity position stemmed from great

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\(^{110}\) Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe." Spillers also notes, "Even though we are not even talking about any of the matriarchal features of social production/reproduction—matrifocality, matrilinearity, matriarchy—when we speak of the enslaved person, we perceive that the dominant culture, in a fatal misunderstanding, assigns a matriarchist value where it does not belong: actually misnames the power of the female regarding the enslaved community. Such naming is false because the female could not, in fact, claim her child, and false, once again, because 'motherhood' is not perceived in the prevailing social climate as a legitimate procedure of cultural inheritance" (Ibid., 80).

\(^{111}\) Hochberg, "Mother, Memory, History," 2.
oppression but led to radical resistance.\textsuperscript{112} As Hochberg explains, "Mother, while she appears to be slavery's ultimate victim, also functions as a medium for the transcription of an alternative [historical] narrative"\textsuperscript{113} memory and, Clyde Woods might add, an alternative epistemological system—the blues—that together directly confront and resist history.\textsuperscript{114} This alternative memory-based herstorical way of knowing and conveying history threatens white patriarchy because it remembers the ways in which alienated, modern, Western subjectivities are linked to the exclusion, objectification, and commodification of others.

The American racist grammar is the way of thinking and knowing the world that blues epistemologies seek to un-do.\textsuperscript{115} By adding the element of geography and space-making to the blues, New Orleans's public blues cultures practice a spatial intervention in this racist logic that re-imagines and re-makes the city according to the law of the mother. Whether born into the culture or newly joining it, second line performers publicly enact this woman-centered, memory-based system of knowledge-making and urban place-making and claim it to be at the center of America's democratic promise.

\textbf{Diaspora and Diversity in New Orleans's Jim Crow Counter-Public Spheres}

During the Jim Crow era, African Americans' crafting of space and counter-geographies extended from the realm of the aural to the realm of tactile, visual and architectural space, both out of doors and indoors. Beginning during slavery and increasing after Reconstruction, New Orleans musicians often worked as carpenters, plasterers, bricklayers, or skilled iron workers. As Spitzer notes, the building trades

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\textsuperscript{112} Moten, \textit{In the Break.}
\textsuperscript{113} Hochberg, "Mother, Memory, History," 2.
\textsuperscript{114} Woods, \textit{Development Arrested.}
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid.
facilitated African American musicians' relationships and partnerships with each other, resulting in partnership structures that mutually sustained black musician/craftsmen in their day jobs and in their nighttime vocations. As musician/laborers honed both of their crafts in public spaces, the ornate originality of the city's public spaces and its private homes became intertwined with elaborate musicality of its cultural life.

Afro-Creole musicians were especially likely to hold these skilled trade positions, just as they were also more likely to possess more formal training in musical performance. These musicians were descended from Free People of Color. During the era of slavery, Free People of Color, or gens de couleur libre, existed as a class apart from both slaves and whites. They possessed more rights than slaves, but they were still excluded from full legal and social citizenship. They were also often educated in France and returned home with a perspective on democracy that voiced the ideals of the French and Haitian revolutions. Gens de couleur libre in antebellum New Orleans acquired a great deal of economic and social capital from the careers in skilled trades that they were allowed to follow. Their power continued to grow during Reconstruction, when they served in political and media leadership roles throughout the state. With the rise of Jim Crow, New Orleans's Afro-Creole residents were relegated to the status of second-rate citizens with all other African Americans. But because they were well-educated and often relatively well-off, their political ideas and their close family connections to white

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116 Spitzer, Raised to the Trade.
117 Bell and Logsdon, “The Americanization of Black New Orleans.” This essay makes a strong argument for reconsidering the radical politics of Afro-Creole residents in post-Reconstruction New Orleans. Previous to the work of this collection and Caryn Cossé Bell’s monograph, Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana, 1718-1868, historians considered Afro-Creole New Orleanians during the Jim Crow era to have been more interested in promoting their own interests as a separate racial caste in the city than in attaining citizenship rights for all African Americans. By contrast, Bell and Logsdon situate Afro-Creoles’ understanding of the implications of the “one-drop rule” as a point of view that provided a radical critique and deconstruction of the black/white racial divide within dominant American ideology.
families in the city made them a force with which white power structures feared to reckon.

The most dangerous thing for the white power structure in New Orleans in the post-Reconstruction era would have been the successful collaboration of Afro-Creoles and the growing population of freed men and women who were coming to the city in increasing numbers to seek employment. These migrants tended to live across Canal Street, uptown (or upriver) from Creoles' downtown neighborhoods (like the Tremé). As Joseph Logsdon and Caryn Cossé Bell argue, white Reconstruction and post-Reconstruction politicians consistently worked to prevent Afro-Creoles from allying themselves politically with the Anglophone African Americans. In fact, as Stephen Hahn has noted, despite their tradition of writing and speaking out against white supremacist ideologies, Afro-Creoles were often resistant to political allegiances with English speaking African Americans who were working to develop their own forms of protest and resistance in different neighborhoods throughout the city. However, as the city’s white public became increasingly violent towards African Americans of all shades and classes, Afro-Creole residents began to seek allegiances with new African American migrants in order to pursue shared political and social empowerment projects. These allegiances gained their first stronghold in the city's musical communities.

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119 Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet*, 261. Hahn’s analysis of Reconstruction politics in Louisiana notes, “The sensibilities of freeborn mulattoes clearly resonated with the rhythms and relations of urban public life and with petit bourgeois notions of respectability” (Ibid.). However, he also notes that Afro-Creoles, like other black middle class groups throughout the South during this era, soon realized that they had to ally themselves with the rural and urban laboring classes if they wanted to gain political “leverage” to “enact laws in the face of the ignorance, indifference, or hostility of their white Republican colleagues” (Ibid).
120 A different, more text-based example of such a coming together is the assemblage of Afro-Creoles, ex-slaves, and white immigrants who collaborated to found the first African American daily newspaper in the nation, *The Tribune*, in 1864. *The Tribune* was known for its radical critique of racism and segregation. However, as a result of the rise of Jim Crow laws, the practice of lynching, as well as a series of violent race riots in New Orleans and nearby parishes in 1866 and 1868, *The Tribune* soon closed its doors. Houzeau, *My Passage at the New Orleans Tribune* and Logsdon and Elie, *Faubourg Tremé*.
As Brothers and Hersch and many other jazz scholars show, partnerships between less formally educated and less well-off Anglo-African Americans uptown (such as Buddy Bolden and Louis Armstrong) and classically trained Afro-Creole musicians became more and more common during this period. Afro-Creole musicians sometimes acted as "professors" and gave formal lessons to up-and-coming musicians from Uptown. At the same time, mutual aid societies were becoming popular both uptown and downtown. These societies changed the employment and training landscape for emerging musicians by providing constant opportunities for parade gigs—a development that would lead to multiple partnerships and competitions among and between Uptown and Downtown blues and jazz musicians.

Members of African American mutual aid societies and clubs would pay dues in return for sick benefits, funeral expenses, and social events. By the 1860s, over two hundred such clubs had already formed in the city. Thirty years later, four-fifths of African American families belonged to one or more mutual aid society. Most clubs sponsored multiple music-based and parading activities—yearly marches and jazz funerals for their members, as well as picnics and parties. The rise of mutual aid (or what came to be called "social aid and pleasure") club parades and funerals was thus a crucial cultural development that enabled deep, working and aesthetic connections to emerge between Creole and Anglo musicians, even though the social and spatial divide between these two groups continued to exist. The more parades there were, the more employment there was for bands. And the more bands there were, the more likely it became for different kinds of musicians to partner together to find employment. These local, social circumstances gave birth to the unique sounds and dances of New Orleans jazz. I see this evolution both as a geographic and an aesthetic development.

121 Malone, Steppin' on the Blues, 180.
In jazz funerals, the Afro-Creole and French traditions of military marching bands merged with the African American traditions of syncopation and improvisational musical composition in order to sound the diasporic memories, critical geographies, and political desires of both groups. As this city-wide parading tradition emerged, it articulated Creole and Anglo African American communities in different areas of the city as members of one African diasporic collective that was shaped by difference and even by conflict. Within this dynamic "agonistic" collective, the lives and histories of each individual—of each part of the whole—became honored, expressed, and historicized through ritual and improvisational, public participatory practices of memorialization. The most crucial and far-reaching form of black organizational protest in New Orleans that historians sometimes overlook as organized and as protest was thus the formation of these parade practices that simultaneously honored African Americans' lives, articulated diasporic communities in and through diversity, and performed black dignity and citizenship in the streets. They did so in the face of rising structures of racial violence that sought to make being black in public into a crime.122

In addition to music and organizational practices, bodily movement through space was and is integral to parades' spatial linking of diasporic memories and identities in the city.123 The hired band would play a dirge. As the sound of the funeral traveled through

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123 These practices were often carried over or adapted from African or Afro-Caribbean practices. As Barker and Buerkle note, "Four centuries ago the Dahomeans and the Yoruba of Western Africa were laying the foundation for one of today's most novel social practices on the North American continent—the jazz funeral. Their secret societies assured individual members of a proper burial at the time of their death. Many of the associations had the features of a cooperative where through pooled resources individuals were able to accomplish what they couldn't by themselves. When black men were brought to America either direct or via the West Indies, one of the things many retained from their past was this belief in secret societies and their benefits. As time passed, some of the basic ideas were applied to lodges and other fraternal organizations, and the burial insurance idea was retained. . . . having music during funeral proceedings was added to the basic African pattern. The tradition of music at funerals has some of its roots in the French martial music played in funeral processions. Throughout the early history of the Crescent
the neighborhood, onlookers (some strangers, some friends) would join in the march. Their steps were not those of a regimented march. Rather, through exaggerated slow, side-stepping, shuffling footwork funeral participants expressed a delicate reverence for the earth from which life comes and to which it returns at death. At the cemetery, the band would wait until the proper moment and then break into an up-tempo song to "bring the body down" with a joyous, exuberant explosion. On the return route, a larger crowd would usually join in, including (especially) local youth and aspiring musicians, such as the young Louis Armstrong, whose fondest childhood memories revolve around funeral parades and the opportunities he had to hear and sometimes hold the horn of his hero, Joe "King" Oliver. In his creative autobiography, Treat It Gentle, Sidney Bechet writes, similarly, that when a jazz funeral second line passed through his neighborhood he would stop everything and run out. He describes how people—children like him and others who were not part of the mourning group or the band—would "take off shouting, singing, following along the sidewalk, going off on side streets when they was told they had no business being on the sidewalks or along the curbs like that, or maybe when the police would try to break them up. Then they'd go off one way and join the parade away up and start all over again."

People were drawn to the parades as much for their sounds as for their visual performances. As Bechet notes, club members' "first line" performances, especially that of the Grand Marshal, would draw a surrounding crowd of onlookers: "the best strutter in the club, he'd be the Grand Marshal. He'd be a man who could prance when he walked, a man that could really fool and surprise you . . . him stepping and twisting and having you

City, both Creoles of Color and blacks had ample opportunity to see such funeral parades, "Bourbon Street Black," 188.

125 Bechet, Treat it Gentle, 62.
guessing all along. The way he could move, that was doing something for you. He led it.\footnote{Ibid., 66.}

Jerome Smith notes that the "protocols" of leading and following a parade followed a "certain kind of dignity" that shaped the parades' sounds and dances.\footnote{Smith, Interview by Burns, \textit{Keeping the Beat on the Street}, 126. My itals.} This performance of dignity created a tight affective link between participants and the neighborhood at large to global histories of resistance in the African diaspora. It also linked them to each other in an ethic of collective-minded survival within impossibly oppressive circumstances. As Smith explains, "What kept the old \[Jim Crow\] order stable wasn't just having jobs but \textit{having} each other. . . . one thing about the city being called the Big Easy: it was almost impossible, in the time I'm talking about, for anyone to go hungry."\footnote{Ibid., 126.} The dignity and personal linkage that Smith describes were both visual, or embodied in movement, and musical. They became expressed and expanded through the conversation that the parade created between the parade makers, the musicians, and the crowd. As dance scholar Jacque Malone argues, "second liners who follow the parades do the same thing with their \textit{bodies} that musicians do with their instruments. Just as the musicians enjoy a kind of call and response with each other, they also converse with the second liners."\footnote{Malone, \textit{Steppin' on the Blues}, 182. My emphasis.} This "conversation" inheres in embodied speech-acts that twist and jerk the body in strange and incredible, crowd-drawing ways. As Salaam describes:

When people dance to second line music, they look like a contraction. . . . The rhythms aren't there just to frame out the melodies and harmonies. In a way, the rhythms are the whole thing. The rhythm does what it wants. The sudden twists and shifts of the music cause the dancers to do sudden twists and shifts of their own. The best dancers have a way of merging jerking with gliding.\footnote{Salaam, qtd. in Lewis and Breunlin, \"Putting the Ninth Ward on the Map,\" 155.}
You see this today at any second line or jazz funeral, where it is not rare to observe elderly women in formal dresses and high heels, or children on their front porches, or teenagers on the hoods of cars, shaking and twisting rhythmically in the attempt to get the attention of the band and sway the music to their movements. Such performances would blow the mind of observers in any other US city, but in New Orleans they are the norm.

In the early years, as now, when parades and parade bands encounter each other, the musicians and crowd doubly jerk and glide. It is at these moments that the crowd's response becomes even more crucial. Bechet, remembering the feeling of being in the crowd when two bands converged, notes:

Then came the beauty of it. That was the part that really took something right out of you. You'd hear mostly one band, so clear, so good, making you happier, sadder, whatever way it wanted you to feel. It would come out of the bucking and it would still be playing all together. None of the musicianers would be confused, none of them would have mixed up the music, they would all be in time. And that other band, getting scared, knowing it couldn't go on any further, it was finished. . . . And the people, they just let that band be. They didn't care to hear it. They'd all be gone after the other band, crowding around it, cheering the musicians, wanting to give them drinks and food . . . And being able to play in that kind of band, it was more than a learning kind of thing . . . The band that [just] played what it knew, it didn't have enough . . . And the people, they could tell.\(^{131}\)

Bechet's analysis of the dynamic between the band, the crowd, and different kinds of institutionalized and non-institutionalized "knowledge" that go into second line performances frames the parades as spiritual, communal expressions that are also "speech acts" without words.\(^{132}\) The collaborative geographic "story" that each parade tells produces a feeling of freedom and equality in the production of knowledge and space that

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\(^{131}\) Bechet, *Treat it Gentle*, 68. See also White, "New Orleans's African American Musical Traditions," 91.

\(^{132}\) Sakakeeny, "Instruments of Power," 301, note 1.
all participants share. As clarinetist and scholar, Michael White describes, in the second line:

You're doing what you want to do, you're feeling free, you're expressing your whole life—the good part, the bad part, the hard part, what the white folks are doing to you, what your own folks are doing to you, your happiness, your celebration, and it's your time and your chance to attain true freedom... This freedom... it transcends everything. It transcends your social condition, whether you think you're a Creole or a Negro or whatever you want to call yourself; whether you come from educated, uneducated, literate, illiterate, or what have you. You're all on an equal plane and you have your time to express yourself and you have your time to create and say what you want to say.

These experiences of freedom and equality in the parade inevitably translate and spread into residents' ways of seeing and experiencing the city in their daily routines and identities outside the parade. They are also strengthened and expanded by worship traditions in African American churches in New Orleans. In fact, in many ways, the early Jim Crow era jazz funerals and second lines can be said to have functioned to expand "counter public spheres" that African American churches had already begun to generate in the city.

In black churches during this period, a better world could be enacted and imagined away from the eyes of whites. Even though music and dance constituted African American worship styles in all churches, even Catholic ones, Baptist Church practices were especially known for their musicality and close relationship to West

133 Michael White, quoted in Malone, Steppin' on the Blues, 184. This quote is originally taken from an interview White did with St. Claire Bourne and is originally quoted in Bourne, New Orleans Brass.
134 Hersch, Subversive Sounds, 26. During this era, black churches were expanding all over the South. Brothers explains, "of all the promises implied by emancipation, one was kept and exploited fully. That was the opportunity to establish independent churches. To be free of white religion, while taking from it whatever fit, whatever was useful and adaptable—that was the great uncompromised blessing of the troubled last decades of the nineteenth century" (Louis Armstrong's New Orleans 36).
African religious practices. In Baptist churches, "everyone was expected to participate; the whole congregation constituted the choir, making a formal body of singers unnecessary." Shouted improvisational call and response exchanges, "ring dancing," and being possessed by the spirit were common parts of Baptist worship and enhanced the overall musicality and full-body spiritual experiences of the services. All believers were held to have direct access to God and the Holy Spirit. They expressed this connection through song and movement. As in parades, the "synchronization of sound with moving bodies" in the church "made unity visible." This unity meant that Black Baptist churches "rejected a firm boundary between minister and congregation." They also rejected the strict gendering of religious roles. Women played important roles as "church mothers," a tradition that Hersch notes may have descended from "women in African secret societies who guided young men through rites of passage." In New Orleans's African American spiritualist churches, women had even more power. They led services and served as leaders of the music and dance practices that were at the center of worship experiences.

Johari Jabir's analysis of the legacy of democratic, woman-centered worship aesthetic of New Orleans's gospel-blues churches argues that black churches "swung" into being a "matrix of history, memory, democracy, reflection, vision, and spirituality" that rendered African American worship practices as collective "spiritual striving[s]' toward a more democratic [social] ideal." As M. Shawn Copeland explains,

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136 Brothers notes that in New Orleans alone the number of Baptist churches grew exponentially during this era, from twenty in 1885 to nearly fifty by 1900 (Louis Armstrong's New Orleans, 37).
137 Hersch, Subversive Sounds, 28.
138 Brothers, Louis Armstrong's New Orleans, 40.
139 Hersch, Subversive Sounds, 28-29.
140 Turner, Jazz Religion, the Second Line, and Black New Orleans, 104.
142 Ibid., 656.
this social/spiritual ideal countered modern Western capitalism's groundedness in the commodification of black bodies by acknowledging and celebrating freedom's embodied nature.143 Or, in the words of foundational African American religion scholar Albert Raboteau, "In a society chronically split between body and spirit, African American [church] ritual exemplifie[d] embodied spirit and inspirted body in gesture, dance, song, and performed word."144

These spaces of democratic vision making and expressions of embodied freedom starkly contrasted with the oppressive realities of public life in Jim Crow New Orleans where African Americans' political rights were eroding, where they were routinely imprisoned for the smallest of offenses, and where public lynching was condoned and popular. Brothers argues that it was precisely this contrast between the city's oppressive realities and its multiple, interconnected counter-public spheres and counter-geographies that produced jazz. He gives an example of the space making power of black music in New Orleans during the early jazz era that is worth dwelling on for a moment because it underscores my argument that, during this period, public blues traditions in New Orleans generated a method for carrying counter-hegemonic collective memories and democratic visions into the streets that has shaped the city's local material, cultural, and literary/theatrical landscapes and its identity in the nation ever since.

As Brothers explains, in the first years of the twentieth-century in New Orleans, the extraordinary cornet "shout" of Buddy Bolden forcefully intervened in New Orleanians' spatial practices and collective memories. On weekends at Lincoln Park near Lake Ponchartrain, three miles from the city's inner core, Bolden would improvise in the solo "break" of songs with an exaggerated cornet blow that "covered" the city with the

144 Raboteau, A Fire in the Bones, 190. See also Raboteau, Slave Religion.
sound of a male black subjectivity. Bolden's cornet calls summoned diverse black audiences together in public spaces around the city at the precise moment when New Orleans's white population was seizing new ways to make being black and male in public into an implicitly criminal act.145 Brothers traces the genealogy of this "shout" to Bolden's close relationships with local, working-class musicians and relatives who passed rural blues and church music traditions on to him. Bolden combined what he learned from his teachers with his own experiences of the racially violent and racially oppressive city. His resulting cornet tone constructed a sonic landscape in New Orleans that reverberated with the memories and geographies of African American laborers working on the docks, or in other racially prescribed labor fields of heavy labor, servitude, or skilled craftsmanship. These urban blues inspired the construction of new black working-class musician communities and audiences in the city who would lead the making of second-line geographies in New Orleans for generations to come.

In 1900, one member of the communities to whom Bolden's cornet called, a recent migrant named Robert Charles, committed an act of spatial resistance that single handedly inspired a region-wide riot of white vigilante violence. Bolden's music, Robert Charles's actions, and the race riot that resulted from them combined to transform New Orleans's cultural and spatial landscapes with an aesthetic of dangerous remembering that counteracted the geographic and ideological strategies of white power during the Jim Crow era.146 Charles, a worker at the Pelican Sawmill Company and an activist in the black emigration movement, refused arrest when two white police officers challenged his right to sit on a neighbor's front steps.147 After shooting one of the officers, Charles

146 Ibid.; see also Wells, "Mob Rule in New Orleans" in *On Lynchings*; Hair, *Carnival of Fury*; and Wagner, *Disturbing the Peace*.
escaped. A chase emerged in which white police officers and a raging mob sought him out. Outwitting them for three days, Charles shot and killed several of his pursuers. Hundreds of white New Orleanians rose up in a yet angrier mob to attain revenge for his bold actions. According to anti-lynching activist Ida B. Wells's analysis of newspaper reports about the riot, this mob spread into every neighborhood of New Orleans. The white throng brutally killed and mutilated the bodies of at least a dozen African American residents (men and women) in a collective rage. Finally, three days later, the police discovered Charles in a Central City house. Police officers managed to shoot and kill Charles, but not before he shot two more policemen. Once they attained Charles's dead body, the police allowed the mob to disfigure it before they placed it, only half-secure and with the head hanging out, into a cart that they paraded through the streets to the city jail.

The "Robert Charles" riot set the stage for future forms of social control (racial profiling, anti-loitering, and anti-parading laws) that would reinforce the idea that to be black in public space in New Orleans was, implicitly, a criminal act. This parade of carnage moved through the city to construct its geography according to racist ideologies that made it illegal for African American residents to perform their identities in public. Like white Mardi Gras parades during this period, the mob did not follow a set route, but rather carved the white racist gaze and brutal white power geographical visions,

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148 Wells, "Mob Rule," 161-170. Wells cites numerous accounts of the mob violence that two local newspapers, The Times Democrat and The Picayune used to alternately or paradoxically publicize and help provoke the riot and condemn it. Later these two papers merged into the Times Picayune, the daily paper in New Orleans that today continues to alternately feature and ignore the murder and brutalization of African American men by the police, prime examples being the immediate post-Katrina murder of Henry Glover by the New Orleans police and the Danziger Bridge incident, two well-known incidents of police violence that were not researched or covered extensively by the Times Picayune until almost five years after they occurred. See Flaherty, "Serve and Protect: Criminalizing the Survivors," in Floodlines, 157-182; Solnit, A Paradise Built in Hell; Shankman, "Post-Katrina Shootings by Police: Where Things Stand."


150 Wagner, Disturbing the Peace.
improvisationally, into every corner of the city—from the river marketplace, to the French Quarter, to Storyville (the prostitution district), to Canal Street, to Uptown, and even in rural areas across the region. The mob's actions constructed a temporal and spatial conjuncture wherein the desires of white power could be fantastically fulfilled. Its roving center etched a spatial memory of violence into the minds of black and white residents, internalizing for the entire city a geography of vigilante justice and racial oppression. This geography sought to deal the final blow to the black radical geographies and discursive currents that had, since the Reconstruction era, generated productive cross-class, cross-ethnic, and even cross-racial movements for African American civil rights. These movements had lost inertia and changed course after the 1896 failure of the Plessy Case. But, as Brothers explains, they became reformulated when African American intellectuals, artists, and culture-bearers pulled back from the city's dominant public sphere and began to work, instead, to strengthen its counter-hegemonic one.151

After the riot, emerging African American music and performance forms in New Orleans exploded with exponential force throughout the city's honky-tonks and its Afro-Creole and "back of town" neighborhoods. Charles became a mythological figure akin to Bras Coupé or John Henry. A song about him traveled through the city. The narrative and sonic "stories" that circulated about his acts of self-defense and his mythologized escape became metaphoric containers for the "freedom drive" of the blues that could not be caught, imprisoned, or enslaved.152 Thus, in the same neighborhoods as black residents "witnessed the brutal annihilation of a single insurgent and the subsequent, random release of blood revenge throughout their neighborhoods," they also "followed the call of Bolden's powerful cornet."153 Bolden's musical performance invoked the power of

151 Logsdon and Elie, *Faubourg Tremé*.
152 Moten, *In the Break*, 7.
spiritual possession to re-claim Charles's stoop—the central public, neighborhood space of surveillance, dialogue, storytelling, and network building—from which so many other black men and women had been expunged. Inspired by the aural command of Bolden's cornet call, scores of young African American musicians soon rose up, including the young Louis Armstrong, and led the jazz funeral and second line tradition to new heights. Meanwhile, uptown and downtown, the Mardi Gras Indian tradition was also growing and linking African diasporic memories and resistance practices to the armed geographical resistance of Native Americans.

**Mardi Gras Indian Performances: Re-spatializing National Geographies**

Whereas second lines re-spatialize local, specifically urban geographies through diasporic knowledges and articulations, Mardi Gras Indian performances address the relationship of local imagined and lived geographies to regional and national ones. As Breunlin notes, the history of the Mardi Gras Indians is "deeply tied to the history of southern Louisiana, a region of the 'New World' that was formed through the violent yet formative cultural exchanges among European, African, and indigenous peoples." The intercultural exchange that Mardi Gras Indians perform and celebrate most often is the relationship between slave maroons and Native Americans. Slave maroons in Louisiana were involved in lasting cultural and economic exchanges with Native American tribes. "Masking Indian" in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries enabled African American men to import the figure of the notorious swamp maroon into the city's dense public spaces, where their performances combined with the image of Native

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Americans' refusals to "concede" their land and their ways of life.\textsuperscript{156} These performances called into being constructs of community identity in African American neighborhoods that prefigured Black Power-era notions of internal colonies.

Salaam argues that Mardi Gras Indians' non-institutionalized "folk artist" performances and masking practices "have been studied but never definitively defined, documented but never successfully duplicated."\textsuperscript{157} This inability to be fully "captured" by words, photograph, or film is at the center of the Indians' adaptive aesthetic. Stories about the Indians' exact origins vary, as do stories about the meaning of their chants and costume traditions. For instance, the beaded patches on Indians' costumes can be traced both to the Plains Indians and to the Yoruba peoples of Nigeria.\textsuperscript{158} Furthermore, each neighborhood in New Orleans's black working class blues geographical network has its own stories about the tradition and its own Indian tribe or "gang." Until recent years, the gangs would only appear early in the morning of Mardi Gras Day and march through the city's "back streets," captivating the attention and sometimes inspiring a healthy dose of fear into the minds of African American children. Through these performances, Indians turned their backs to the performances of white supremacy (with their bold metaphorical ties to race riots) that white high society parades carved into the city's main thoroughfares on Mardi Gras Day.\textsuperscript{159} Indians would also appear on the night of the Italian holiday, St. Joseph's Day, a practice that signified their multi-cultural vision for a nation of de-colonized identities. Today, thanks to the organizing work of Jerome Smith and his Tambourine and Fan organization, Mardi Gras Indians also appear publicly at Super

\textsuperscript{156} Breunlin, "Introduction: Mardi Gras Indians," 65.
\textsuperscript{157} Salaam, "Introduction," \textit{He's the Prettiest}, 11-12.
\textsuperscript{158} Bill Fagaly, quoted in Breunlin, "Introduction: Mardi Gras Indians," 67. Fagaly was the curator of the 2005 \textit{He's the Prettiest} exhibit at the New Orleans Museum of Art.
\textsuperscript{159} Roach, \textit{Cities of the Dead}, 256.
Sunday—a festival, educational program, and parade in the Tremé neighborhood and on North Claiborne.  

Each Indian's costume has always been made especially for one year only, a tradition that signifies how the tribes' design their annual ritual reenactments to address history from the perspective the present moment demands. The tribes use song and language to both remember and amend the ways in which African diasporic histories have become both fragmented and creolized as a result of slavery, white cultural hegemonies, and assimilation and cultural mixing processes in the city. As Turner notes, "the use of re-created bits and pieces of the Creole language in the early Mardi Gras Indian oral tradition was a way of maintaining the memories of Congo Square's nineteenth-century heyday, when most black New Orleanians and Haitian immigrants . . . spoke the language." The tone of Indian songs and chants invokes the violent rupture at the center of these histories and processes and expresses a refusal to "bow down" even under the most pressing of circumstances.

Hierarchies within Indian tribes reinforce this refusal by creating alternate, ritualized structures of public authority. These structures give members of the tribe flexible roles that encourage improvisation, yet enable the tribes to tightly organize their group expressions. Tribal roles are also implicitly spatial. As Allison "Tootie" Montana, former Big Chief of the Yellow Pocahontas tribe in the Tremé neighborhood notes:

You've got first chief, which is Big Chief; First Queen; you've got Second Chief and Second Queen; Third Chief and Third Queen. First, Second, and Third chiefs are supposed to have a queen with them. That's just tradition.

160 In recent years, a Super Sunday on the West Bank—a suburban district that is increasingly constituted by working-class African American neighborhoods—also takes place. Less populated by the "third line" of photographers, tourists, and academics, West Bank Super Sunday is an important new incarnation of Congo Square, located across the river and far from the gentrification that is over-taking New Orleans's historic urban center.

161 Turner, *Jazz Religion, the Second Line, and Black New Orleans*, 64.
. . . Your fourth chief is not called fourth chief, he's the Trail Chief. . . . You also have your Spy Boy, your Flag Boy and your Wild Man. Your Spy Boy is way out front, three blocks in front the chief. The Flag Boy is one block in front so he can see the Spy Boy up ahead and he can wave his flag to let the chief know what is going on . . . The Wild Man wearing the horns is there to keep the crowd open and to keep it clear. He's between the Flag Boy and the Chief.  

Each Mardi Gras morning or St. Joseph's night the tribes wander the back-streets of the city, improvisationally searching for encounters with other tribes. These encounters were once marked by violence and territoriality that was perhaps a ritual reenactment of the violence that often constituted cross-cultural encounters in the Black Atlantic. Since the 1950s, however, due to the influence of Montana, the focus of Indian competitions and encounters has been centered on "Who's the prettiest?" As Salaam notes, "Montana's great uncle, 'B.K.' (sometimes called "Becate") Batiste, was the legendary founding Big Chief of the Creole Wild West, widely celebrated as the first Mardi Gras Indian tribe." Montana brought the art of Mardi Gras Indian costume sewing to new heights as a way to stop the violence that had begun to divide tribes and neighborhoods during the mid-twentieth century. His inspirational costumes took thousands of hours to sew and required (or inspired) the help of his wife, Joyce, as well as many of their friends and relatives. Montana's costume aesthetic—with brightly dyed feathers, ornate and heavy crowns, and full-bodied, three-dimensional wings with intricate symbolic beadwork—inspired other innovations in the tradition, including a tradition Uptown of using beadwork to tell metaphoric or personal stories.

Today, the sewing of Indians' elaborate costumes sometimes takes a form that resembles a 'guild,' with some sewers participating out of love and care for the tradition, and others expecting to be paid for

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163 Salaam, "Introduction," He's the Prettiest.
164 Lewis and Breunlin, House of Dance and Feathers, 86.
their work.\textsuperscript{165} (Chapter Four of this thesis outlines the Montana family's contributions to Mardi Gras Indian traditions in more detail).

Salaam writes, "If you talk to the Mardi Gras Indians they will tell you, when they mask Indian, they become something else. Masking can be a conscious effort to transform the self, to contact the spirit world, to serve as a vessel for outside forces to manifest themselves. Masking can then transform . . . the wearer both physically and psychically."\textsuperscript{166} Indian acts of masking also function to mask or transform the physical and psychic properties of their communities. When tribes wander through New Orleans streets in the liminal early morning or late night hours, with crowds of onlookers pursuing, filming, and admiring them, they transform their embattled neighborhoods into spiritual spaces where Congo Square has become the national capital and white culture has "retreated into the peripheries."\textsuperscript{167} The tribes' performances publically proclaim New Orleans's streets to be shaped by African diasporic geographies on multiple scales, from the level of national and transnational identifications and articulations to the level of the neighborhood and the body. Each generation redefines their tribe's transformative masking practices in call and response exchanges with other tribes and in tune with the needs and shifting histories of their neighborhoods. As Ronald W. Lewis, creator of the House of Dance and Feathers, a Mardi Gras Indian and social aid and pleasure club museum in the Ninth Ward, explains, "each generation of Mardi Gras Indians forms their own identity."\textsuperscript{168} As the members of different tribes move or change their affiliations, the traditions change too. But what remains the same, and what seems to matter most, is the Indians' commitment to a politics of place. Additionally, the way in which their practices

\textsuperscript{165} Breunlin, "Introduction: Mardi Gras Indians," 69.
\textsuperscript{166} Salaam, "I Know You Mardi Gras."
\textsuperscript{167} Roach, \textit{Cities of the Dead}, 207.
\textsuperscript{168} Lewis and Breunlin, \textit{House of Dance and Feathers}, 118.
balance between ritual and the passing on of collective memories, while also being adaptive and dynamic, meet the challenges that face their neighborhoods in each new era.\textsuperscript{169} The tradition's oral memories and its embodied nature ensure this balance in a way that a written history never could.\textsuperscript{170}

Today Mardi Gras Indian appearances and performances are often surrounded by a crowd of amateur and professional photographers who are drawn to the tradition for various reasons. As Michael Smith, a Mardi Gras Indian photographer whose work "has been the source of a great deal of recognition and controversy" notes,\textsuperscript{171} "A cherished activity, essentially a religious activity, pursued in private spaces and isolated neighborhoods for more than a century, has been thrown into a strange new public marketplace."\textsuperscript{172} The presence of the media and photographers around this tradition (what Smith calls the "third line" in parade performances) raises the question of who can represent, "own," or participate in New Orleans's public blues performance traditions?\textsuperscript{173} Furthermore, how does the meaning of these traditions shift when outsiders to the culture are profiting and building careers out of representing them? Mardi Gras Indian organizations, second line clubs, and the city's network of second-line literature, film, and theatre makers have, in the past sixty years, worked together to address this question. As the next section shows, the problem of the commodification of and representation of public blues traditions in New Orleans continues to grow in importance in the post-Katrina era, as African American communities are becoming increasingly fragmented and New Orleans is transformed into a playground for white racial desire.

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{169} Breunlin, "Introduction: Mardi Gras Indians," 69. As Sublette notes, "the Mardi Gras Indians provide a unique window into how a culture that is African in form but local in content grows, adapts, and serves the needs of its community," \textit{The World That Made New Orleans}, 295.
\item \textsuperscript{170} Roach, \textit{Cities of the Dead}.
\item \textsuperscript{171} Breunlin, in Lewis and Breunlin, \textit{House of Dance and Feathers}, 6.
\item \textsuperscript{172} Smith, quoted in Lewis and Breunlin, \textit{House of Dance and Feathers}, 6.
\item \textsuperscript{173} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
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Second Lines, Second-Line Literature, and the Neoliberal City

Today participants in second line parades and audiences at Mardi Gras Indian performances have become cross-racial, but these practices still take place in primarily working-class African American neighborhoods and are organized by residents of those neighborhoods. They thus continue to carve into New Orleans's public spaces an understanding of geography that "hears" the history of the hull and "sounds" space as the product of interrelations, memories, and stories that cry out and tear at the edges of the oppressive system. As Joel Dinerstein, a historian who is also a white resident of New Orleans, explains, second lines are a "mobile public square" that voices African diasporic public memories and constructs of community that the city's white residents often do not want to or know how to access.\footnote{Dinerstein, "Second Lining Post-Katrina," 624.} The second line's set route through residential and commercial black neighborhoods tells "a story" to its participants about their community, their history, and their selves.\footnote{Spitzer, "Rebuilding the 'Land of Dreams' with Music," 321.} Joining the parade requires, to some extent, a willingness and an ability to "hear" and \textit{participate} in making both the story the parade tells and the constructs of freedom and democracy it articulates. Today, as in past eras, in each instance of the parade, this highly ritualized but adaptive story carries the "promise" of Congo Square to the struggles of new participants and to new contexts, but it could not exist without the "guardians of the flame"—the neighborhoods and the people whose history the parade tells and who have been responsible for passing it on.\footnote{Roach, \textit{Cities of the Dead}, 25; Salaam, "Guarding the Flame of Life"; see also Big Chief Brian Harrison Nelson and Big Queen Cherice Harrison-Nelson, \textit{Guardians of The Flame Blog}, http://guardiansoftheflame.posterous.com/, a site that contains links to numerous articles, lectures, and forthcoming films about the Mardi Gras Indians.}

Second line parades today may be a mass memorial for a deceased elder or a young person victimized by the city's systems of social violence.\footnote{Regis, "Blackness and the Politics of Memory"; Salaam, "Guarding the Flame of Life."} They may be well
attended or they may be small. While the parades always maintain their characteristic 3-3-2 syncopated African-based beat, today their tempos may be traditional and slow or they may contain fast "Bounce" or hip-hop innovations.\textsuperscript{178} They may be the annual celebrations of social organizations and aid societies, or they may be explicit political marches with a specific goal and message. They may even be thrown purely for the benefit of tourists. In the post-Katrina era, second lines became a way for New Orleans residents of all backgrounds to say "we are home, we are coming home to stay," and to claim a "right to the city" in the face of neoliberal urban recovery and "reform" forces that violently impinged on that right.\textsuperscript{179} Second line parades that imaginatively and discursively link New Orleans to cities in the Katrina diaspora such as Houston, New York, and Atlanta also occur today. In New Orleans, and sometimes in these other cities, second lines are used to commemorate each anniversary of Katrina. Parade commemoration marches have also become sites for public gathering and discussion of the ongoing forms of institutional racism that have shaped the city's recovery. This new overtly politicized innovation in the second lining tradition rose up from the grassroots efforts of multiple social aid and pleasure clubs and local and regional political organizations such as the now-defunct People's Hurricane Relief Fund, the Hip Hop Caucus, and the New Orleans Katrina Commemoration Organization.

In response to the Katrina diaspora and the broad destruction of public housing and public institutions within black working class neighborhoods in the city, second line parading has increasingly become overtly politicized as a form of public speech. One

\textsuperscript{178} Sakakeeny, "Instruments of Power," 200.
\textsuperscript{179} Mitchell, \textit{The Right to the City}; Breunlin and Regis, "Putting the Ninth Ward on the Map." As Regis and Breunlin note, "second-line organizations' public performances [in the post-Katrina city] claim a space in public discourse for alternative notions of value, land, and dwelling together in place in the restructuring city. What is more, club members have been generating alternative ways of thinking and being in the city—the subaltern mainstream of the second line—that are now being deployed by exiled New Orleanians reconsidering their relationship to the city" (146).
result of re-framing parades as legal, public speech occurred in the spring of 2006, when the ACLU and the New Orleans Social Aid and Pleasure Club Task force (a group of members of second lining clubs from around the city) came together to sue the city for doubling parade permit fees. They based their suit on the constitutional right to free speech. And, they won. As Regis notes, "The city was forced to settle with the clubs when a federal court judge agreed with their case: Parading is constitutionally protected speech." By proclaiming constitutionally protected speech to include embodied forms of expression (what Diana Taylor calls the "repertoire" of cultural memory and history), the Social Aid and Pleasure Club Task Force wrote into law a structure of protection for not only New Orleans's second-line knowledges, but also for related forms of subjugated, oral, aural, and embodied forms of cultural resistance and political expression throughout the nation.

With their new legal status as well as their increasingly diverse participants and growing presence in the local and national public spheres, second lines today have more potential than ever before to transform dominant national understandings of black people as "un-geographic" (as not having, or having forever lost, their geographic stories, and not making geographic knowledges). Yet, as Salaam notes, "From the beginning in

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181 Sakakeeny, "Instruments of Power," 39-40. For instance, as I learned from a recent American Studies Association event in San Antonio, in 2010 a group of Chicana women from San Antonio who had been prevented from holding marches for women's and immigrant rights in Texas traveled to New Orleans to protest a similar parading as free speech action in the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals. They built their case on the precedent of the 2006 Social Aid and Pleasure Task force case.
182 My assertion that dominant US understandings of space proclaim black geographies to be non-existent comes from McKittrick's Demonic Grounds. As McKittrick explains, “Black geographies are often unimaginable because we assume they do not really have any valuable material referents, that they are words rather than places, or that their materiality is always already fraught with discourses of dispossession. So, what happens if these places, spaces, words, and experiences are imaginable and complex geographies, which have always existed before our very eyes? Can they lead to a different spatialized politics? . . . Finding and recognizing black geographies is difficult, not only because
Congo Square on down to the jazz funeral of today, there have always been two kinds of audiences: those of the culture who came to make ritual, to affirm and renew; and those who came to witness (a few to gawk) and be entertained. Both audiences understood something powerful was going on, which is why they both are here."  

Today, as in past eras, these two kinds of audiences and the "third line" of the media engage in a somewhat paradoxical battle for the right to experience and interpret New Orleans's public blues performance traditions. The paradoxical nature of this battle inheres in the fact that these traditions' expressions of radical democratic social ideals are only possible through their expression of working-class African American counter-histories and geographies. To join the parades without possessing a critical understanding of the latter of these two facts is to endanger both the performances' meaning and their power.

Since Hurricane Katrina, television has become a central player in this battle. HBO series such as Spike Lee's *When the Levees Broke* and David Simon and Eric Overmyer's *Tremé* frame second lines and the local brass bands that lead them as quintessential images of New Orleans's exceptional culture. Combined with the tourist industry, which has a long history of using parades to commodify the exoticized consumption of blackness, the increasingly popular filmed and soundtracked image of sociospatial denial, objectification, and capitalist value systems render them invisible, but also because the places and spaces of blackness are adversely shaped by the basic rules of traditional geographies” (9).

183 Salaam, "Guarding the Flame of Life."

184 Film director Spike Lee's *When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts* (2006) featured and staged a second line for Hurricane Katrina in its final episode; the HBO series *Tremé* and Fox series *K-Ville* both feature second lines repeatedly as short-hand symbols for African American culture in the city; nearly every scholarly article about New Orleans mentions or discusses jazz funerals and second lines in some way; second lines have become a central method of public, political protest and memorial in the post-Katrina city, garnering hundreds of newspaper articles in local and national papers about them; at least two fiction books have been named after second lines (Mike Molina's *The Second Line* and Poppy Z. Brite's *Second Line*).

185 Thomas, "'Roots Run Deep Here'”; Sakakeeny, "Instruments of Power," 31-32.
the second line has become a tool by which capitalist forces paint a rosy, post-racial picture of recovery and renewal in New Orleans's African American (or formerly African American) neighborhoods.\textsuperscript{186} This tourism-driven narrative covers over the racial violence of gentrification. Further, it appropriates second lines as a symbol for how anyone—especially "voluntourists" and the city's growing young professional (and mostly white) creative class—can "jump in and have fun" inside the renewed city's parade and, by doing so, can attain authenticity as someone whose subjectivity and geographical imagination have moved beyond racism.\textsuperscript{187}

Whether because they grew up with second-line knowledges or turned to them as a result of experiencing the transformative moment of the parade, a growing community of local writers and artists have felt compelled to step inside and critically engage with the rising symbolic discourses around the parade and to work to counteract them by strengthening and expanding second-line knowledges and geographies. The remaining chapters in this thesis chronicle these artists' efforts, placing a special emphasis on the challenges they face when working to import second-line methodologies and epistemologies into the realm of the textual or the staged performance, while also working to strengthen and expand the critical knowledges and geographies of second-line cultures on the ground.

Dealing in bourgeois genres that traditionally work to reinforce concept of the transcendent or unitary subject presents a difficulty that many artists and intellectuals in New Orleans have valiantly tried but failed to overcome. It is not easy to make poetry out of the blues. It can be frustratingly difficult to generate re-encounters of space through simultaneous stories-so-far within the confines of the staged or scripted play. Living in a

\textsuperscript{186} Thomas, "Roots Run Deep Here," 758.
\textsuperscript{187} These quotes are from the theme song of HBO's \textit{Tremé} series, "Tremé Song," written and performed by John Boutté,
society structured by institutional violence complicates these efforts. For the artists I study, the first step towards accomplishing the goal of creating second-line literature or theatre often hinges on their abilities to confront and move through issues of race and racial privilege. Radical artists around the globe have struggled with similar goals during their efforts to invoke and enact concepts of radical democracy, justice, and freedom in their works. But in New Orleans, I contend, artists, educators, and organizers are able to pick up uniquely powerful tools and methods. Their struggles and achievements model, in turn, potential methods from which artists around the nation and even the globe might learn a great deal.
Chapter Two: "We Are Black Mind Jockeys": Tom Dent, The Free Southern Theater, and the Search for a Second-Line Literary Aesthetic

We may have been romantic about what could happen. I think in my mind we were on a mission to see theater, and to some extent literature and journalism, develop in New Orleans, never equal to, but like, our music. I say “never equal to” because the music here is so advanced, hyper-developed, that it produces geniuses. It’s like comparing gardens. You have this one garden with a lot of weeds and just a few flowers, which is literature. And you have this extensive, varied, and rich garden of music. I felt we were trying to find a way to make theater work so that it would be considered useful to the Black community, similar to the way we regard our music. –Tom Dent

The practice of second-line literature making did not begin with Tom Dent, but it was largely through his thirty-three year writing, theatre making, and mentoring career in the city that poets and writers in New Orleans first came to generate literary and theatrical innovations that critically engaged with and supported the embodied histories, geographies, and radical democratic visions of New Orleans's public blues traditions. Born in 1932, Dent spent his childhood in New Orleans at his parents' home on the Dillard University campus, where his father, Albert Dent, was president. Although Dent's parents were not native New Orleanians and did not identify as Creole, he grew up within New Orleans's middle-class African American Creole community in the Seventh Ward. There, he attended private schools and enjoyed a life of frequent contact with the early civil rights movement leaders who were his parents' friends. Albert Dent trained his son to want to escape the violence, segregation, and limited opportunities of the South and seek his education elsewhere, as a way of contributing to uplifting the race.

189 Rogers, Righteous Lives, 120-21. As Rogers notes, Dent's father's mother, a working-class women with little formal education but great intelligence, was Dent's full time caretaker for much of his childhood.
moved away to attend a private boarding school when he was fifteen. He did not return to live in New Orleans until fifteen years later.

When Dent arrived in New Orleans in the summer of 1965, he envisioned his return home as a temporary move. He had been living in New York City for six years. There he had helped to found the New York "Society of Umbra," the famed Lower East Side writing workshop and magazine that helped give birth to the Black Arts Movement. He had also worked as the national press director for the NAACP and held a post as a writer for the Harlem newspaper, the *New York Age*. In New Orleans, Dent planned to start a writing group like Umbra and then return to his friends and the burgeoning Black Arts Movement scene in New York. But once he began to reacquaint himself with his hometown, its African diasporic history, its music, and its cultural traditions captivated him and inspired him to re-think his understanding of his self and his understanding of the social roles that writers and theatre makers could play in the city. Dent would never move away again.

A key force that inspired Dent's return was the Free Southern Theater (FST): the civil rights movement touring theater had moved to New Orleans from its former base in Mississippi just before Dent arrived home. John O'Neal, Gil Moses, and Doris Derby had founded the FST two years earlier while they were working as organizers with the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee in Mississippi. O'Neal, Derby, and Moses had each come to the South from Northern colleges. When they discovered that they shared a common background in theatre, they grew to be close friends. During one intense all-night conversation, they decided to create a "free" Southern Theater as a "new area of protest" for the movement. They hoped their theater would become an organizing

Dent's value for his grandmother's history and her critical consciousness largely influenced his future immersement in and care for New Orleans's public blues cultures.

vehicle that permitted "the development of playwrights and actors," and "the growth and self-knowledge of a Negro audience." By the summer of 1964, the FST's integrated troupe of professional actors was traveling with SNCC on voter drives, performing in small rural communities and at traditional black colleges around the Black Belt South, and receiving widespread national attention. The FST decided to move to New Orleans in order to establish a fundraising home base. As the FST prepared to establish an urban theater as a new, central aspect of their work, O'Neal pursued Dent as a potential, locally rooted new member.

Dent "fell in love with the FST people immediately." Although he had never worked in theatre before, he saw the FST as a potential "instrument" for the creation of new cultural networks and institutions that would provide support for African American writers and artists in New Orleans and around the Deep South. For Dent, the FST also represented a potential community of friends and fellow outcasts from his parents' world of propriety and upward mobility. This community would enable him to establish an independent, activist/artist identity within New Orleans's village-like urban atmosphere. Unbeknownst to Dent, however, he was entering the theater a time when its purpose and audience were uncertain. It soon became Dent's task to lead the FST to establish its local identity and purpose.

In New Orleans, the FST encountered a city in crisis where local constructs of racial community were charged with the political resonances of multiple rising national ideologies about racial integration, the "urban crisis," and Black Power. Settling in this space likewise produced a crisis for the FST. If the Black Power movement was taking

191 Dent and Moses, The Free Southern Theater: A Documentary of the South's Radical Black Theater, with Journals, Letters, Poetry Essays and a Play Written By Those Who Built It, 4. From this point forward, I refer to this book by its common (although unconventional) short title: The FST by the FST.
192 Salaam, "Enriching the Paper Trail," 333-34.
193 Ibid., 334.
center stage from the civil rights movement, were they to become a Black Power movement theater? How would doing so change their audience and their aesthetic? Previously, their audience had been rural and working-class. Now, in the midst of a city with a large and expanding black middle-class, how would they situate themselves? Could theatre be a tool with which to gather together diverse black audiences and generate new forms of struggle and new social visions? The FST's answers to these questions would determine their ability to survive in the city during the rapid transformations that were occurring as a result of urban restructuring during this period.

This chapter analyzes Tom Dent's brief stint as the artistic director of the FST during its first years in New Orleans, which were also the peak years of the urban crisis, 1966-1969. I argue that Dent—a native son and long-term expatriate of New Orleans—was the crucial figure who enabled the FST to successfully maneuver through this crisis period and create an identity for itself as both a national, movement-based and a local, community-based institution. As I will show, Dent's increasing involvement as a cultural historian, writer, and artistic producer in New Orleans showed him the transgressive power and knowledge repository that the city's music and parading traditions possessed. He discovered that working-class African American cultures in New Orleans expressed a rigorous account of the Black Atlantic and US slavery and apartheid on a daily basis in the city's public spaces. Dent soon came to understand his task as a writer to be concerned primarily with generating literature and theatre forms modeled on the knowledges and geographies of these public blues performance traditions.

Dent modeled his new career in New Orleans as a writer, activist, and cultural producer on that of musicians and music historians, such as Danny Barker, who devoted their lives to listening to the sounds the city's musicians made as they learned and
innovated within the city's blues and jazz traditions.\textsuperscript{194} Like Barker, or later, Jerome Smith, Dent took scores of younger poets, playwrights, and performers from around New Orleans under his wing (including the young Val Ferdinand, later known as Kalamu ya Salaam). With these young poets and playwrights, Dent worked to generate what Salaam calls a "jazz paradigm for artistic development" that, like a second line parade, sought to generate individual artistic development within a collective context.\textsuperscript{195} As I will show, Dent's construct of this "jazz paradigm for artistic development" evolved slowly as a result of his collaborations with young New Orleans writers and musicians. Dent's jazz-and second-line-based grassroots/participatory approach to theatre caused a series of rifts in the FST that eventually resulted in Dent's departure from the theater. However, during his tenure with the theater, the FST generated new artistic forms (oral-history-based performances, collaborative and public poetry shows, theatre performances in community spaces that centered on audience interaction, African diasporic-based public arts festivals, and regional grassroots publication practices) and organizational initiatives that, even today, continue to generate public arts institutions and inclusive, collaborative artistic practices that link progressive and radical avant-garde artists in mutually sustaining relationships with the city's working-class African American communities.

Throughout the late 1960s, Dent, O'Neal, and Moses debated about the role that the New Orleans community should play in their work and about methods for generating audience interaction. I analyze Dent's role in these debates in order to show how his emphasis on the interdependence of African American artists and African American communities enabled him to help the FST resolve, in important and lasting ways, the conflicting relationships between audiences and artists that troubled Black Arts

\textsuperscript{194} Barker, \textit{Buddy Bolden and the Last Days of Storyville} and Barker and Buerkle, \textit{Bourbon Street Black}.
\textsuperscript{195} Salaam, "Enriching the Paper Trail," 327.
Movement artistic productions around the nation. In addition to being grounded in a direct confrontation with how the national urban crisis was playing out in New Orleans during this time, the jazz and second line inspired art forms that Dent and his colleagues developed articulated a critique of capitalism and capitalist geographies that linked black working class New Orleans residents' geographical imaginations and histories with the resistant geographies and histories of oppressed populations in other US cities and across the globe. At crux of this critique was Dent's research into the role that the Mississippi River and the New Orleans Port played in generating critical global knowledges within the city's working-class black communities. Dent admonished the young artists he mentored to heed the cosmopolitan and diasporic wisdom of their older, less formally educated audiences and to take care to establish a dynamic, mutually productive relationship with them. Doing so required these young artists to generate methods for active listening in their work and to, sometimes, step back from their desire to take a leadership role in the production of art in the city in order to focus on the work of gathering voices into the collective they were trying to build.

To investigate the challenges and the possibilities that the democratic, collaborative "jazz paradigm for artistic development" produced for Dent and other Black Arts Movement intellectuals in New Orleans, I trace how Dent's personal biography (his upper middle-class background, his history in the Umbra writing collective, his personal search for a feeling of "homeness" within working-class black cultures, and his close friendship with Salaam) as well as his honest confrontation with the theater's financial struggles led him to generate a system of workshops that transformed the FST from its

initial, pedantic role in black working-class Southern communities into a community-engaged theatre that produced a new canon of literature by and about black Southerners, especially New Orleanians. I then investigate how Dent and Salaam's literary magazine, *Nkombo*, expanded the FST's artist-base as well as its audience and deepened its local and regional impact. I conclude by analyzing how O'Neal, Salaam, Dent, and others extended and adapted this framework for individual and communal artistic development into a series of artistic institutions that shaped future decades of cultural production in New Orleans.

I begin, though, by tracing Dent's entrance into New Orleans in 1965. How was New Orleans and what it meant to live there transforming when Dent arrived? How were national discourses about the "urban crisis" and the Black Power and Black Arts Movements' discourses about internal colonies and the search for the Black aesthetic changing not just the fabric of US cities, but possibilities for writing about them? Why did listening to the fabric of urban life in New Orleans so captivate Dent's poetic imagination? And why did he find it so difficult, at first, to turn other young, politically engaged, African American writers' ears to the sounds and the stories of the city neighborhoods where they lived? To answer these questions, I have to take you into the space of 1960s New Orleans. I have to show you what it meant to be African American and live in urban America, especially "Black New O," during this era.

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198 Salaam, "Enriching the Paper Trail," 327. While this chapter focuses primarily on tracing Dent's evolution as an artist, my analysis is in debt to the model provided to me by Mary Ellison in her article "Kalamu ya Salaam and the Black Blues Subversive Self." In a manner similar to the work of Bolden and Neilsen, Allison traces the relationship between the blues and Salaam's poetry, noting, especially, the integral role of music and blues rhythms in his poetry performances.

199 Rotella, *October Cities*.

200 This was the FST's term for African American communities in New Orleans in their writing.
Black Arts Movement Discourse and the Rhetoric of Urban Crisis: A Scenario for Literary Revolution

Both Dent and the FST arrived in New Orleans at a moment when what it meant to live in New Orleans and what it meant to be a New Orleanian was rapidly changing. As Kevin Gotham has shown, during the 1960s New Orleans’s “tripartite base . . . of the chemical and petroleum industry, the port industry and the tourism industry” transformed to a reliance on tourism as its “major source of jobs.”\(^{201}\) The expansion of tourism in New Orleans coincided with the expansion of Mardi Gras and the commodification of the city as a site where (mostly) white tourists could experience cathartic, carnivalesque release from their daily lives.\(^{202}\) The city moved away from embracing tourism as one, among several industries to espousing the tourist economy, centered around Mardi Gras, as its sole major industry. As I noted in Chapter One, during the Jim Crow era, African American laborers held unionized jobs in the city’s port-based industries. But in the 1960s, these jobs were disappearing. Weakened unions meant less political power for African Americans. Black workers increasingly had few options but to become employed as paid participants in the commercialized white carnival atmosphere, and it became clear that only a select few African American residents would benefit from civil rights movement gains. The city endorsed and buoyed these shifts in the city’s political economy that, despite talk of integration, required more and more black workers to put on the uniforms of a servant class. Vast new public housing developments were built to house the city's growing African American service industry workforce. Meanwhile the I-10 highway carried working-class and middle-class whites to new, de-facto segregated homes and schools in the suburbs.

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\(^{201}\) For instance, whereas there were only ten Mardi Gras Parad es in 1950, there were twenty-five in 1965, and fifty by 1975. Gotham, “Marketing Mardi Gras.”

The transformations in New Orleans's social and spatial landscapes mirrored those occurring in cities around the nation. This period of swift transformation from industrialized to de-industrialized urban cores was accompanied by shifts in the production of race- and place-based identities throughout urban and suburban regions in the US. It was a period that the popular media of the time as well as the nation's intellectuals imagined to be an "urban crisis" for the nation. Urban crisis discourse enabled the concentrated urban poverty, the police violence, and the constant threat of mass uprisings that resulted from widespread urban disinvestment to become understood according to the black/white binary that dominated discussions about race relations in the US.\(^{203}\) Race, an evolving social construct, became the glue that "bound" together all the perceived problems of the declining cities.\(^{204}\) In fact, Robert Beauregard argues that the term "urban crisis" was a "euphemism for race."\(^{205}\)

As Carlo Rotella explains, viewing the city as a place implicitly constituted by a racialized and racially-specific (black) violence made it easy for the nation's dominant (white) class to simplify the "complex and many-faceted postwar transformation of American cities as a simplified, divided landscape in which distinct 'white' and 'black' urbanisms produced violent sparks wherever they met."\(^{206}\) Whites, watching urban rebellions from Harlem to Watts to Detroit arise with increasing frequency, feared that "centuries of racism and inequality would finally culminate in insurrection."\(^{207}\) Even more than mass rebellions, African American activism and intellectual discourse about cities fed these fears. The rise of new, broadly articulated African American urbanisms

\(^{204}\) Beauregard, *Voices of Decline*, 151.
\(^{205}\) Ibid.
\(^{206}\) Rotella, *October Cities*, 217.
\(^{207}\) Beauregard, *Voices of Decline*, 131.
and black-dominated urban spatial and political structures challenged the ways in which white intellectuals and residents imagined cities. To change how a person sees their world is to change how they understand themselves, their place in the world, and their place in history. Ideological changes can be frightening and threatening, especially if they arrive with more concrete changes in the material world. Whites turned to the language of urban "crisis" as a way fleeing from the threats that African American urbanisms represented. At the same time, the language of "crisis" helped to justify the ruling white historical bloc's abandonment of urban cores.208

Urban literature, film, and theatre helped to construct and feed dominant urban crisis discourses. For instance, when white domination came under threat in New Orleans, as in other cities, many white authors revolted by generating new literary forms that theorized a new "black underclass" that would, if allowed, destroy "civilization" in the city and the suburbs.209 For whites, writing about cities during this period often meant imagining the city as a world apart constituted by a blackness that often seemed unfamiliar and threatening.210 White authors made sense of the city by drawing on rising social science discourse about the urban "underclass" that argued that poor, black

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208 Rotella, October Cities, 216.
209 I am thinking here of explicitly racist novels such as Edgar Rice Burroughs's Tarzan of the Apes, which, as Catherine Jurca has explained, uses a colonial setting to express anxiety over the threat that racial integration posed to white suburbia. See Jurca, White Diaspora. But I am also thinking of novels by white authors without an explicitly racialized agenda, such as Nelson Algren (in Chicago) or Jack Demprey (in Philadelphia), whose work Rotella analyzes in October Cities. These authors tried to more honestly and introspectively reckon with whites' "loss of control" over the city. By contrast, white-authored novels about New Orleans during this period often depict the city's new black majority with trepidation, dismissal, or via the lens of minstrelsy. See, for instance, Shirley Ann Grau's The Keepers of the House (1964), John Kennedy Toole's A Confederacy of Dunces (1969), and Walker Percy's Love in the Ruins (1971). According to Madhu Dubey, black authors, in return, sought to resist romanticizing black urban residents as either the "worst victims" or the "redeemptive agents" of the post-modern urban world (Signs and Cities 35). Doing so, argues Dubey, would have fetishized black culture as "sheer" otherness within the contemporary social world and would result in the mystification of "the realities of material suffering" (9). See Chapter Four of this thesis for further discussion of Dubey's argument.
210 Rotella, October Cities, 208-209.
residents of US cities were pathologically inclined to self-destruction.\textsuperscript{211} As we will see, these mythological narratives constructed in the 1960s have continued to influence dominant US perspectives and policies on urban African American residents in the twenty-first century and largely shaped the national and governmental response to Hurricane Katrina.

In contrast to white urbanisms in crisis, the Black Power and Black Arts Movements worked together during the late 1960s to develop a "distinctly" African American and African diasporic urban culture that "stood in opposition to white culture or cultures."\textsuperscript{212} These interrelated movements put the transformation of urban spatial practices and geographical imaginations at the heart of their goals and ideals.\textsuperscript{213} Through political, cultural, and social actions, they appropriated and re-constructed public space to generate a new urban public sphere that linked together and strengthened the diverse experiences, histories, and cultural forms of black Americans.\textsuperscript{214} For instance, the geographies of resistance that the Black Panther Party (BPP) conceptualized hinged on an understanding of ghettoized, racialized inner-city cores as "internal colonies" that needed to be economically, spatially, and ideologically liberated from white-dominated capitalist

\textsuperscript{211} Percy's sci-fi racist novel, \textit{Love in the Ruins}, perfectly expresses this imaginative perspective. \textit{Love in the Ruins} is a dystopian prediction of New Orleans's "swampy" future that cynically reflects on post-war transformations in urban landscapes that had occurred as a result of civil rights gains, white flight, "urban renewal," and re-segregation through ghettoization and suburbanization. In the novel, New Orleans and all urban "civilized" societies in the US have been lost to "guerilla/orilla" chaos. Black urbanisms, the novel implies, will create a world constituted by violence and atavism.

\textsuperscript{212} Smethurst, \textit{The Black Arts Movement}, 15.

\textsuperscript{213} The BPP noted that segregated spaces were actually integrated spaces because blacks were supposed to participate in the economy and make profits for white people. The de-segregation movement did not aim to change this system and give blacks control of their own resources. The resources would still remain in the hands of the dominant class (whites). As James Tyner notes, the BPP and other black radical groups, on the other hand, advocated urban revolution "because they believed that fundamental transformations of racism were not possible within the existing capitalist system" ("Urban Revolutions and the Spaces of Black Radicalism," 226). See also Tyner, \textit{Geographies of Malcolm X}.

society.\textsuperscript{215} To make this argument, the BPP and the radical groups that they worked with and inspired attuned their work to the anti-colonial revolutions occurring during this period in Africa and other regions.\textsuperscript{216} They began to build collaborative networks with other radicals of color in the US and abroad. This work led radical organizations of people of color around the US to analyze the differences and gaps that existed among diverse oppressed US communities and between low-income urban residents in the US and Third World subjects.\textsuperscript{217} The cultural and artistic products that US radicals of color went on to create in this era helped to close these gaps by theorizing modes of political, class-based unity that could be composed by difference.\textsuperscript{218}

Historians commonly think of the Black Arts Movement (BAM) as an adjunct, "cultural wing" to the Black Power and "Third World Left" movements.\textsuperscript{219} But in his recent, comprehensive analysis of BAM, James Smethurst shows that "one could just as easily say that Black Power was the political wing of the Black Arts Movement."\textsuperscript{220} The cultural forms that BAM constructed enacted the emerging forms of class-based unity that sought to attune to difference by reaching out to and bringing together the diverse members of the African diaspora residing in US urban communities. BAM's cultural productions and institutions also captivated hearts and minds in ways that the Black Power Movement, with its focus on political rhetoric, grassroots organizing, and education could not. Some critics argue that BAM sought to achieve a romanticized

\textsuperscript{215} Self, \textit{American Babylon}. My spatial reading of the BPP is inspired by Self’s analysis of their work to transform ideologies and geographies in the Bay Area, particularly by Self's argument that “people’s cognitive spatial maps of place” influence “how they conceive of political interest and ideology” (Ibid., 17).

\textsuperscript{216} Young, \textit{Soul Power}; Singh, \textit{Black is a Country}. Also see Laura Pulido's discussion of the relationship of 1960s radical organizations' ideological relationships to the system interrelated racializations in the US in \textit{Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles}.

\textsuperscript{217} Young, \textit{Soul Power}, 5.

\textsuperscript{218} Ibid. See also Ongiri, \textit{Spectacular Blackness}.

\textsuperscript{219} Ongiri, \textit{Spectacular Blackness}, 3.

\textsuperscript{220} Smethurst, \textit{The Black Arts Movement}, 14.
"return" to a moment when black artists were integrated, not separated, from working-class black communities. The successes and failures of the movement are often measured according to the extent to which it achieved this goal. But I prefer to think of the movement as an attempt to theorize a "we"—a black collectivity—that was grounded in diasporic memories and contemporary diasporic networks and had a goal that was not concerned with uplift, but instead was centered on hearing and understanding the blues.

As articulated in 1968 by Larry Neal's manifesto "The Black Arts Movement," BAM sought to achieve a "cultural revolution in art and ideas" that would express the truth of the oppressed for the ears of the oppressed, using and drawing on the cultural art forms that were the products of centuries of counter-hegemonic expression in African American communities. As BAM artists remembered and came to terms with the way in which past modes of African American literary production (such as much of the work of the Harlem Renaissance) worked to translate "folk" culture into high arts terms, they critiqued the gap that formed between black artists' subjects and their audiences. BAM artists were not interested in "marketing a black 'thing' in order to satisfy white desire for it." Neal writes:

> When we speak of a “Black aesthetic” several things are meant. First, we assume that there is already in existence the basis for such an aesthetic. Essentially, it consists of an African American cultural tradition. But this aesthetic is finally, by implication, broader than that tradition. It encompasses most of the useable elements of the Third World culture. The motive behind the Black aesthetic is the destruction of the white thing, the destruction of white ideas, and white ways of looking at the world.

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221 Ongiri also argues that a reductive critical dismissal of BAM as an essentialist, didactic, and "critically unimportant moment in African American intellectual history" (Spectacular Blackness 92) has caused the movement's accomplishments and its legacy to go unexplored. I have found this to be true even in my day-to-day interactions with contemporary artists and cultural activists in New Orleans who often draw on aesthetic forms and political praxis of BAM without knowing or acknowledging that they do so.

222 Annemarie Bean, "Free Southern Theater," 275.
The search for a black aesthetic was, then, a search for new artistic forms that would simultaneously draw on African American memories, histories, and cultural forms at the same time as it yoked them to global, "Third World" histories and cultural practices. According to Ongiri, it was a "search for the trace elements of a community," which BAM artists believed was a "necessary means to lay representational claims to that community."²²³ This search, which differed from civil rights constructs of a racially integrated national community,²²⁴ was rooted in a cynicism about American democracy and rising American imperialism that linked black subjectivities to global economic forms of oppression. Its creative destruction of "white ways of looking at the world" would produce a new way of seeing that would articulate black nationhood as a construct intrinsically connected to global structures of resistance to imperialism and racialized uneven geographical development.

BAM artists' search for and desire to "lay representational claims" to a black nationhood within the US resulted in what Smethurst explains as their "almost obsessive concern with the theorizing of the relationship of the African American artists and his or her formal practices to the black community (or nation)."²²⁵ As a result, in most BAM artistic communities, the question of artists' relationships with specific, geographically-defined audiences became crucial to the development of BAM work. As a part of their work to define their relationships to their audiences and to build reciprocal relationships with black communities, BAM artists spent an equal, if not greater, amount of time on the construction of new cultural institutions in cities as they did on the construction of artistic works. As Smethurst notes, "the Black Arts Movement frequently transformed the Black Belt nation on the land into a vision of a liberated city-state or federation of such states,

²²⁴ Ibid.
rooted in the landscape of the urban ghetto, as in Baraka's 'new neighborhood where all
the risen live.' This liberated city-state was defined by and grounded in BAM cultural
institutions—theaters, community centers, publications, and spiritual or social
organizations—which served as semi-public black spaces where the new and old cultural
forms, voices, and perspectives of diverse African Americans could be expressed and
debated. BAM institutions included Karamu House in Cleveland, Black Arts West in San
Francisco, the Ebony Showcase Inner City Repertory Company and Watts Writers
Workshop in Los Angeles, the Organization of Black American Culture in Chicago,
Sudan Arts South West in Houston, and the Free Southern Theater and BLKARTSOUTH
in New Orleans, among others. Artists working in these institutions often vacillated
between social roles as listeners and teachers within the communities they "served."
Through their institution-building and their search for a Black aesthetic, BAM artists
sought to produce new democratic artistic forms in the city that were grounded in the
production of improvisational public spaces of resistance wherein artists and audiences
became interdependent, collaborative producers of visions of a new and better world.

The BAM aesthetic theorized performance as the best method by which they
could produce work that would engage both audiences and artists in this creative,
educational, and vision-building work. BAM's participatory theatre forms drew on black
churches and cultural traditions' uses of ritual to bring together and articulate a "beloved
community" of people who possessed shared values and a shared past. By harnessing
these spiritual elements of ritual, which were also present in civil rights movement
idealism and culture-making practices, they generated a new faith that a better world

226 Ibid., 80.
227 Smethurst, The Black Arts Movement; see also Widener, Black Arts West.
could come to be. But plays such as Amiri Baraka's *Slave Ship* and Ed Bullins's *In the Wine Time* did more than simply articulate a "beloved" national community. These and other BAM plays also drew on avant-garde participatory theatre practices from around the world to produce a new kind of art that would definitively "unmake" the white commodification of art and enable black audiences to imagine and achieve new forms of diasporic "subjecthood through community."  

While they desired and struggled to erase the boundaries between themselves and their audiences, BAM artists often paradoxically saw themselves as the intellectual givers of this "subjecthood" or as the educators of their audiences. They believed their art to center around the task of narrating for the masses the significance of African American counter-histories and cultural traditions in the face of the dominant white culture, which devalued or silenced these things. Like any teachers, BAM artists had to be careful about the pedagogies they chose for generating counter-hegemonic education in black urban communities. When they imagined themselves to be the givers of knowledge rather than practitioners in a dialogic construction of collective knowledge, their work risked becoming, and often did become, pedantic.

Art alone cannot produce a better world, but it can provide us with a pathway to imagine it. It is the emotive, intangible affect of powerfully produced political art that opens this door. In order to activate new, collective counter-hegemonic social visions

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228 As leading community-based performance scholar, Jan Cohen-Cruz, notes "The ritual dimension of fusing past, present, and future signals spirituality's marshalling of strength from those with shared values who have come before and striving toward something that has yet to be. We reach toward the future when we talk of being our best selves, of being the change we want to see in the world," Cohen-Cruz, *Local Acts*, 85.

229 Bean, "Free Southern Theater," 274-75.

230 Adorno, "Commitment." As Adorno notes, politically committed art necessarily vacillates between discursively conveying the world's oppressive systems in their reality and evoking the affects of those oppressive systems in explosive and less rationally understood ways. Adorno's critique of Brecht's pedantic theater works informs my similar critique of BAM theatre, especially that of the Free Southern Theater in different iterations.
with their work, BAM artists had to re-conceive their notions of the artist's social role within communities of spectators. Their struggle to do so was related to similar struggles of radical theatres both across the United States and internationally during this revolutionary era. Throughout the 1960s and the early 1970s, radical theatres in different locales, especially in oppressed communities, began to inquire into African diasporic and indigenous North and South American cultural performance forms in order to re-conceptualize theatre as a form of social and communal action and a tool for the expression of marginalized histories and marginalized forms of knowledge-making. Theaters such as The Living Theater in New York City, El Teatro Campesino in the US Southwest, and Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed in Brazil drew on oral cultures, improvisation, ritual, and on the Western avant garde performance theories of Bertolt Brecht and Antonin Artaud in order to generate theatre forms wherein audiences and artists could "cultivate indigenous knowledge systems," envision new communities aligned in struggle, and enact radical democratic social ideals. But, as Jacques Rancière's recent analysis of these and other twentieth-century avant-garde and radical theatre making trends shows, radical theatre makers desires to deconstruct hierarchies between audiences and actors in the space/time of performances did not always account for the ways in which audiences always already produce the meanings of any performances merely by observing them. Knowledge, like power, is not produced from the top down: people are always producing knowledge out of their own experiences. Theatrical performances do not make the audience or hail them as a newly articulated community. Rather, performances produce knowledge in dissent and in difference. In order to draw out the diverse, resistant knowledges that people make in the encounter

231 Broyles-González, "El Teatro Campesio from a Twenty-First Century Perspective." See also Cohen-Cruz, Radical Street Performance.
232 Rancière, The Emancipated Spectator.
space of the theatre, artists must create a structure that enables people to come forth with these knowledges and to publicly hear and engage critically with the knowledges of others.

Rancière's construct of performance-based democracy aligns in many ways with BAM artists' desires to create aesthetic forms that positioned spectators or audience members as producers of performances' meanings. BAM artists acquired this impulse from the radical democratic epistemologies of the blues. The jazz-and-blues-based aesthetic understood audiences not as passive witnesses but as active participants making meaning of performances and texts. Like great jazz musicians, BAM artists sought to emulate the participatory and collaborative nature of jazz and blues aesthetics in their work. But to fully embrace blues epistemologies, BAM artists would have to be willing to make their individual artistic careers second priority to the collective work to gather and sound the multiple knowledges-in-difference that their productions enabled. BAM artists' work soon became constituted by a paradoxical dual struggle. First, they wanted to use their artistic productions to structure audiences' articulations of these knowledges. Second, they wanted to generate new canons of black artistic work that transformed counter-hegemonic public spheres by powerfully evoking, even if not actually enacting, the diasporic constructs of community and radical democratic philosophies contained within African American musical forms.

Imagine the arrival of the Black Arts Movement's radical performances and institution-building practices in New Orleans. Given what I have already established about New Orleans's role in giving birth to and sustaining the participatory, blues-based nature of jazz, and given the wealth of black cultural institutions, space-making practices,

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233 Boal, _Theatre of the Oppressed_; Salaam, Interview by the author, October 6, 2009; Bolden, _Afro-Blue_. See also Salaam, "Amiri Baraka analyzes how he writes."
and social organizations in New Orleans, what role could new BAM artists play in this saturated organizational and blues-aesthetic-generating environment? Given the extent to which these organizations and practices already involved the city's diverse African American populations and already possessed strategies that could successfully link black subjectivities and communities across and in difference, were BAM artists even needed?

As I will show, because of the rapid destructive and divisive impact of urban renewal on working-class African American communities in New Orleans, those communities had an enormous need for BAM institutions when the FST arrived in 1965. But to take hold in the "Big Easy," BAM institutions in New Orleans had to be constructed in a way that exhibited fluency in and drew on the political and cultural organizing power of prior-existing public blues institutions in the city, strengthening them and radicalizing them when hopes for racial equity and social justice in the city were at their most vulnerable. If they could manage to do so, the second-line knowledges of Black New Orleans would tutor these artists in production methods for participatory, radical democratic art forms and philosophies that would strengthen both African American communities in the city and the national Black Arts Movement.

**Tom Dent: BAM Ambassador to the City in Crisis**

As Smethurst explains, Tom Dent's role in the FST was to act as a kind of ambassador for BAM in New Orleans. Dent also worked as an ambassador from New Orleans to the national movement, using his social and artistic networks as well as FST's tours and BLKARTSOUTH's publications to communicate to nation-wide communities of African American writers and theatre-makers that they could benefit from critical engagement with the exceptional history and aesthetics of black New Orleans.²³⁴ Dent's

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networking relationships among both BAM artists and African American writers from older generations were extensive. Dent had spent his formative years as a writer (1959-1965) living in New York—first in Harlem and then in the Lower East Side. In Harlem, Langston Hughes had been his mentor. When Dent moved downtown, he worked with David Henderson and Calvin Hernton to Umbra. A crucial forbearer of the Black Arts Movement in New York City, Umbra was largely inspired by Hughes's blues-based poetics and by the urban environment of the Lower East Side. Umbra writers' immersement in that neighborhood's multi-ethnic environment caused them to acquire cynicism toward possibilities for racial justice in America that was "particularly Northern and urban." They positioned themselves as outsiders within integration-focused intellectual discourses within the civil rights movement. During their collective's short lifespan, Umbra writers' growing pessimism about white America also caused them to think of themselves and their art as "a separate world" apart from the white literary world, a world that "propel[led] itself on the cultural integrity of black people in America." Their work to protect and advocate the distinctiveness of black writing led Umbra writers to soon turn outward and begin developing a black audience for their work. Finding this audience required them to, after a few short years, abandon the Lower East Side in favor

236 In addition to the poets mentioned above, whose reputations soon grew to a national level, lesser known poets such as Alvin Simon, Art Berger, Albert Haynes, Joe Johnson, Tom Feelings, Norman Wilkerson, Oliver Pitcher, George Hayes, Rolland Snellings (Askia Mohammad Touré), Jane Logan, Mildred Hernton, Lennox Raphael, Maryanne Raphael, Lorenzo Thomas, Ann Guilfoyle, Asaman Byron, Rashid d'Phrepaulezz, Charles Underdue, and Brenda Walcott were part of the group. Within a year, the Umbra poets were publishing a magazine and had built a reputation for themselves that extended across Manhattan and throughout the New York region. I borrow this list from Nielsen's Black Chant, the best critical analysis of Umbra on record not written by a member of the Umbra group. Nielsen offers an excellent analysis of the Umbra Aesthetic as well as insightful close readings of many of the group's lesser-known members' work. Both Lorenzo Thomas and Dent also wrote extensively about Umbra. See, for example, Dent "Umbra Days" and Thomas, "The Shadow World: New York's Umbra Workshop."
of establishing themselves in places where they would be able to dig deeply into the African American working-class cultures with which they most closely identified, or wanted to identify. Dent, a leader of this movement, went home to New Orleans in an attempt to fulfill these goals.

Dent's experience with Umbra uniquely prepared him to see and hear the rich "garden" of black music when he arrived in the city of his childhood. It also enabled him to see working-class black New Orleans neighborhoods not as "disadvantaged," but as possessing a culture and social ideals that were "separate" and unique from the rest of the nation.239 After living in Manhattan and taking part in New York's vibrant jazz scene, he was surprised to see, or perhaps remember, that in New Orleans jazz and blues bands were "more than entertainment."240 He realized they were a part of the city's heritage of social and cultural resistance and counter-hegemonic knowledge production and that black residents practiced them on a daily basis in the streets. "Blk New O," wrote Dent, "is a town... where music plays an integral, almost necessary part in our lives, and where music is still closely related to dance."241 He came to understand that "The second line is everybody's thing together and everybody's thing for themselves."242 For those that knew how to listen, "The beat, the jump, the swift movement of rhythm, the entire crowd" carry one "away into unity of motion, singleness of purpose, individuality of motion."243 Dent's critical engagement with second-line knowledges, geographies, and democratic social ideals soon inspired him to re-envision the FST as an institutional and artistic tool that could listen to, learn from, participate in, adapt and expand the power of the parades to

239 Dent Journal #3 1966, Box 97, Tom Dent Collection, Amistad Research Center.
241 Ibid.
243 Ibid.
include African American artists and urban communities around the New Orleans region, the deep South, and even the nation.

Dent arrived in New Orleans, however, at a moment when its parading traditions were highly threatened. As I noted in Chapter One, throughout the 1960s in New Orleans, urban renewal projects had been tearing down the city's black working-class neighborhoods and replacing them with public housing developments at the edge of town. The simultaneous re-organization of residential neighborhoods, employment patterns, and public spaces meant that fewer participants were able to attend or were aware of second lines and other public celebrations of deaths, birthdays, and community traditions. Furthermore, as schools were integrated (before they become de-facto segregated again), full-time music programs were eliminated. These music programs were what had kept traditions going in the city's black music- and space-making practices because they created an institutional space for the careful and long-term passing down of aesthetic and cultural traditions from one generation to the next.244

The ugly climax of urban renewal came in 1966 when the green, shady neutral ground of North Claiborne Avenue became abruptly replaced by the ubiquitous sign and symbol of national urban renewal: heavy concrete pylons holding up a raised expressway to the suburbs. Whereas in Northern industrial cities, urban renewal, or what some called "negro removal," transformed black geographies and place-based politics because it solidified poverty in racial ghettos where, in the past, black residents at least had the hope that they would find a path towards upward mobility in the city. In New Orleans, urban renewal had an additional effect. Music, collective memory, organized resistance, and counter-hegemonic geographies were interdependent in African American neighborhoods in New Orleans. Change one and you change them all. The destruction of Claiborne

244 See Devore and Logsdon, Crescent City Schools and Kennedy, Chord Changes on the Chalkboard.
Avenue threatened musical and parading traditions in black working-class neighborhoods, and it also threatened those neighborhoods' abilities to sustain strong and adaptable modes of organized resistance.

The raised highway on Claiborne Avenue also symbolized the changing nature of inter-racial relations in African American communities in the city during this era. A rising class of black professionals suddenly had new opportunities to join white commuters on the highway that led to new, segregated suburbs in New Orleans East and to place their children in the city's expanding private religious schools (that remained segregated by race). Meanwhile, on the city's newly modernized bus system, black workers clad in the uniforms of the hotel and restaurant servant class traveled with increasing frequency from the city's public housing projects to its sanitized and expanding downtown tourist center. The Free Southern Theater and Tom Dent, newcomers and newly home, wanted to create new forms of artistic expression that would directly address these changing relationships and help transform them into new modes of struggle. During Dent's tenure the FST came to identify its mission as centering around the production of a radical democratic politics of place in New Orleans that acknowledged, re-made, and broadened the African diasporic performances in public space, a practice that had shaped the city's subaltern geographies and histories since its earliest years. But in order to become a useful engine for producing participatory aesthetic forms and radical democratic geographies in the city, the FST had to first move through a crisis of its own identity.

As Orissa Arend notes, New Orleans's new public housing developments became containers that held the city's new servant class and kept it at bay from the newly renovated tourist center. Arend, Showdown in Desire, 4.
Home: New Orleans?: The FST and the Search for a New Orleans Base

The FST is said to have died at least three times. The theater's struggle over their relationship to New Orleans audiences caused each of these deaths and inspired each of the theater's revivals. In this section, I analyze the debates and rifts between FST artists that led to Dent's rise as the theater's temporary leader during the peak years of the US urban crisis. While Dent's contributions to the theater were temporary and cannot account for its long record of accomplishments under O'Neal's subsequent twelve-year artistic directorship, were it not for Dent's attunement to national BAM discourses and New Orleans-based participatory music and performance aesthetics, the FST might not have survived to enjoy a second and a third life in the eras of rapid urban disinvestment.

Ellen Louise Tripp's comprehensive history of the FST divides the theater's life into three, distinct phases, each of which addressed different contexts and included different members.246 "FST 1" consisted of the years 1963-1965, before the theater moved to New Orleans. The Free Southern Theater by the Free Southern Theater, a compilation of journals, letters, reflections, and articles by FST members during the years 1964-1967, describes how during this period of the theater's life, FST members frequently debated over whether their role was to bring avant garde, "high" art to the culturally "dis-privileged" masses or to produce theater from the experiences and world views of their black working-class audiences. They asked, as well, if they should they seek to perform in integrated theater spaces in cities, or if they should focus only on performing in non-traditional spaces in rural, predominately African American counties where no theaters currently existed. To answer the above questions FST members—especially its founders, O'Neal, Moses, and Derby (who would leave the theater before it moved to New Orleans)—had to establish a clear definition of the role they wanted their

246 Tripp, "Free Southern Theater: Always a Message."
work to play in the communities with whom they sought to identify. They also had to come to terms with their own roles as outsiders in these communities. Would they frame themselves as ambassadors from the more "developed" cultures of the urban North and, by doing so, choose the route of cultural uplift as their path? Or would they rather position themselves, like Freedom School educators, as the facilitators of democratic and participatory artistic expressions by the members of each community where they traveled? 247

In their early years in Mississippi, FST members had already begun to think of themselves as the latter. During a performance of Martin Duberman's *In White America*, O'Neal opened by telling the audience, "You are the actors." 248 This statement expressed the FST's most idealistic goal: to create a democratic theater form akin to the discursive political practices of SNCC. 249 But neither FST artists nor their audiences knew exactly how to achieve this goal. They were interested, more than anything, in creating theatre forms that promoted audience discussion and involvement in the making of the meanings of each production they staged. But the early FST members were also, in many ways, traditional theatre makers. They relied on imported professional actors for the ensembles. Their desire to function as a cultural element of SNCC's broad movement-building initiatives drove them to perform before as many of the communities where SNCC was working as was possible. For this purpose, they designed rapid touring schedules that tended to privilege the staged performance over the community-workshop elements. Also, rather than embark on the time-consuming process of building performances out of the stories and cultural traditions of the communities they visited, the early FST relied on the written texts of plays as the basis for their performances. Since rural black

248 Sutherland, "Theater of the Meaningful."
249 O'Neal, interview by the author, 2009.
Southerners did not have a tendency to express themselves via the bourgeois artistic form of formal theatre, FST artists chose to produce plays by avant-garde and Marxist black and white authors such as Samuel Beckett, Bertolt Brecht, and Ossie Davis. 250

While audience discussions after the plays were central to the early FST's aesthetic philosophies, the ensemble and directors argued about the best ways to generate these discussions. The FST's rural audiences tended to react improvisationally, in the blues and African American protestant church traditions, to staged performances. 251 FST artists debated about whether they should build productions that would respond to these instances of audience interaction in the moment, or if they should privilege the kinds of debate and discussion that occurred in post-show "talk-backs." They also debated whether they should remain in communities for extended periods in order to develop a workshop aspect to their work. How should they combine the educational elements of their productions with the artistic elements, especially given the fact that FST staff were primarily artists not teachers? In its early years, the theater experimented with multiple approaches to these questions—sometimes deciding to remain in towns to produce plays that they developed around local issues. 252 In most instances, however, they arrived and

250 The theater members' various debates over these play choices are chronicled by Dent and Schechner in *FST by the FST.*

251 *FST by the FST* notes multiple examples of audience interaction in performances. In 1964, for instance, Sutherland's article in *The Nation* notes, "During the performance of In White America at Greenville [MS], a man in the audience came up on the stage as a pre-Civil War scene between a white master and a slave was about to begin. He had obviously believed O'Neal's opening words: 'You are the actors.' But then he stood there, frozen, until Gil Moses finally whispered to him to leave. Afterward the man explained, 'There was so much I wanted to say and I had it all figured out. But when I got up there in all that light, I just couldn't'" (29). The next year in Greenville, such interactions continued. According to FST Program Notes from November 28, 1964, "Kids threw spitballs during the second act of *Godot,*" and in Ruleville, MS, a lady in the audience told Gogo that Pozzo wanted another bone (53). O'Neal felt strongly that "a way must be found to incorporate such people into the action" of the plays (qtd in Sutherland, "Theater of the Meaningful," 29).

252 For example, in 1965 the FST remained in Bogalusa, Louisiana, to create a play about local instances of racial violence. This play was called "The Bogalusa Story." Due to heightened racial violence in this parish, the FST members were escorted and protected throughout their stay by the Deacons for Defense (Bob Costley, "Big Daddy's Journal," in Dent and Schechner, *FST by the FST,* 88-89).
left towns within the space of one or two days. The FST did not arrive at a clear answer to define their relationship to their audiences. Hence, the theater's mission was often unclear.

Looking back in 1967 on the theater's 1964 decision to move from Mississippi to New Orleans, Moses wrote that the "relocation of FST headquarters from Jackson to New Orleans…was regarded in the back of our minds as a cop-out." Being in New Orleans took the FST away from direct contact with the rural heart of the civil rights movement. However, locating there did have its benefits. Being in the city, especially in the artistic French Quarter where most FST members chose to live, allowed them to live in a racially-integrated way that had been a struggle in Mississippi. It also gave them more room and more time to concentrate on their craft. Yet, FST members' choice to live in the French Quarter rather than one of the neighborhoods where they worked, their Northern-educated backgrounds, their internal debates about the theater's mission, and their affiliation with lily-white Tulane University hindered their ability to immediately connect with black working-class New Orleanians.

FST members partially chose to live in the French Quarter and affiliate themselves with Tulane because, like all movement organizations in the South, they were (at least, initially) concerned with spreading a message of integration. In their private lives, they pursued integration ideals. Their plays, likewise, enacted these ideals by drawing white and black performers together on stage. This part of their mission, however, sometimes got in the way of the FST's primary mission of creating a theater for

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253 The FST was also inundated with white actors' applications to join the theater. As Dent noted in a private 1967 FST journal, "the FST advertised in the actors trade journals in New York for applicants who would like to be considered for the . . . season. Almost 200 white applicants mailed in their resumes and photographs." Notebook #7, Box 97, Tom Dent Collection, Amistad Research Center. Bean argues that Dent's "ascendance" in the FST was "the direct result" of debates about problems like this in the theater and about the relevance of integration to black cultural development in the South, "The Free Southern Theater," 281.
and with its black working-class audiences. When discourses about black self-determination began to rise as a dominant priority within civil rights movement goals, the FST had to position its relationship to these debates. Would it, like SNCC and CORE, move in the direction of black self-determination that was heralding the rise of the Black Power movement? Or would it continue to focus on racial integration and cooperation in the arts? FST members took different stances with regard to these questions. O'Neal, whose focus was on class-based alliances, believed that as long as theatre artists were committed to this goal their individual racial identities did not matter. Dent and Moses felt differently.

FST debates about integration vs. black self-determination came to a head in FST members' discussions about what plays to perform. Their first two seasons had consisted of performances of plays by white authors such as Duberman's In White America, Brecht's Rifles of Senora Carrar, and Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot. Of these plays, Godot seemed to have the most impact. As Annemarie Bean notes, "the absurdity of Beckett allowed a transformative space for the audience, one in which they could construct their own mythologies." But for Dent and Moses, who embraced the Black Power Movement's struggle for black self-determination, these interactions were not satisfactory. They wanted to produce work that would both re-tell American history via the lens of African American perspectives and encourage black

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254 Bean, "The Free Southern Theater," 274.
255 In New Orleans, Godot has continued to be used as a symbolic play for expressing the struggles of black working-class communities. See my analysis in Chapter Five of Creative Time and the Classical Theater of Harlem's post-Katrina production of Godot in two New Orleans neighborhoods. The differences between the FST's Godot and Creative Time's production are notable. In the Creative Time "post-racial" production in the race-divided post-Flood city, the question of racism was never directly addressed and audience interaction and post-show debates did not exist.
artistic development by privileging the performance of plays by and about their working-class audiences.

The FST became an all-black company in 1967, but this did not solve the above problem. The fact was that in the mid-1960s, few plays existed that narrated the lives of working-class African Americans, especially Southerners. FST members' debates about how to go about finding or making new works of theatre that spoke about the experiences and histories of their audiences led the theater to become an even more fractious organization. Company infighting was heightened by the theater's lack of financial resources. During these years, Dent, Moses, and several other FST members including Denise Nicholas, Moses's partner, wanted to generate a workshop element to the theater that would facilitate the creation of original works that spoke to the issues that people in their audience communities were facing. O'Neal, however, at first wanted to focus more specifically on developing the craft of performance. He looked to fundraising to solve the dilemma of finding works and artists capable of producing art that would speak to and exert an impact on the theater's audiences. A surprising turn in O'Neal's role in the theater in late 1966 forestalled the completion of these debates about the FST's philosophical and practical approach to theater building. This unfortunate surprise also ultimately transformed O'Neal's approach to theatre making.

In the fall of 1966, the Federal government required O'Neal to take a two-year leave of absence from his artistic directorship of the FST in order to complete a two-year sentence as a conscientious objector. O'Neal moved to New York City to complete this term. Despite his differences with Moses, he expected and indeed encouraged Moses to take his place as director of the theater on his departure. However, almost as soon as O'Neal departed, Moses left the FST to pursue a career in New York. Dent, the staff

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256 O'Neal, Interview by the author, 2010.
member with the least theatrical experience, found himself to be at the helm of the FST, holding the theater's future in his hands.

According to Tripp, Dent's leadership of the FST during the years 1966-1969 constitutes the FST's second identity, what she calls "FST 2." During this period, which is the focus of the remainder of this chapter, Dent and Bob Costley expanded the FST's workshop programs and began to create a wide variety of dramatic, poetic, and journalistic work that addressed rising national discourses about the Black Power Movement, the Black Arts Movement, and the urban crisis. In addition, in 1968 Dent and Salaam created the BLKARTSOUTH writing collective, a group of young performing poets from New Orleans who, for the years 1967 and 1968, took the place of the FST's professional touring ensemble, and whose work continued to shape radical black poetic practices in New Orleans for many years after the collective's departure from the theater.

Looking back on the FST's seventeen-year life, Bean, Smethurst, and Tripp both identify the "FST 2" years as the FST's climax, the moment in which it underwent the most changes and, as a result, successfully and "consciously marked out a particular ideological and aesthetic space for itself within the context of the larger [Black Arts] movement." I do not dispute this claim. I argue, further, that discourses about the urban crisis and the material urban transformations that were taking place in New Orleans and other US cities during this period produced the feeling of social and cultural uncertainty and transition that enabled Dent, with the help of Salaam and Costley, to transform the FST into a locally-rooted yet nationally influential cultural force. The brief period of the

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257 Smethurst, The Black Arts Movement, 356; Bean, "Free Southern Theater"; Tripp, "Free Southern Theater: Always a Message." Bean also argues that Dent "literally bridged the gap between the South and the North, the civil rights movement and the Black Arts Movement, in that his past was in the South and his artistic and political present was in the North . . . . His time as a producer for the Free Southern Theater (1966-1970) was the transition period for the company, and given his multiple affinities, it might not have happened without him," 281.
urban crisis and the civil rights movement produced both a fruitful pause in cultural hegemonies that opened doors to new artistic forms and radical democratic social visions.\footnote{Denning, \textit{The Cultural Front}.} This crisis period also produced funding structures for communitarian art that waned as new social and economic structures solidified in the 1970s city. Dent drew on this hegemonic opening and these funding structures to help to transform the FST into a multi-disciplinary community-based arts institution that brought together artists and audiences to critically engage with and expand the space and democracy making power of second line parades in New Orleans. The artistic and radical democratic networks that emerged during this period laid the groundwork for the next renaissance of second-line literature making in the neoliberal city before and after Hurricane Katrina.

\textbf{FST 2: From Imported Theatre to Community-Based Performance}

To position themselves as mediators and supporters of blues epistemologies in New Orleans and the rural South, FST members had to stop thinking of themselves as the artistic leaders at the helm of the city's cultural "parade." Instead, they had to come to critically engage with and support the histories, aesthetics, and knowledges of the audiences they wanted to serve. They had to produce a theater out of those histories, those aesthetics, and those knowledges. Rather than seeking to take on a role as educators in the communities they served, they had to become willing to be educated by those communities and to support the artistic discourses those communities were already producing. For Dent, the key to re-situating the FST to be able to accomplish these tasks inhered in taking strategic advantage of the urban development programs that emerged as a result of national discourses on the urban crisis. As I will show, Dent and the FST worked in collaboration with other local New Orleans activists within rising "War on
Poverty" (WOP) initiatives in order to accomplish their own critical objectives that often were at odds with the "War's" intended aims. More than anything, the FST under Dent's leadership used the financial resources of WOP initiatives to construct collaborative artistic projects and community institutions that would re-value and re-claim the values of New Orleans's working-class public blues cultures in order to build cross-class African American resistance to dominant racist urban crisis discourses.

Johnson's WOP programs generated an approach to the elimination of poverty that hinged on a view, shared by many, that if the poor had access to middle-class values and space-making practices (an individualized work-ethic, suburban or suburban-esque housing, the idolization of the nuclear family, etc.), they would embrace the "social consciousness" of the middle class and make the dream of a "Great Society" real.259 This point of view pushed the 1964 Economic Opportunity Act to Congress just as major civil rights protests were unfolding around the nation. Congress designed this act in response to the increasing power of national black leaders. It outlined an economic restructuring "war" that would be "carried out not for the community, but rather by the community—with external financial assistance."260 War on Poverty initiatives brought funding into poor urban neighborhoods and sought maximum community involvement in those neighborhoods' redevelopment.261

The War on Poverty arrived in New Orleans during a brief interval when the city's schools were becoming integrated, white flight was rising but had not yet climaxed, and a large population of new, young African American community leaders (veterans of the civil rights movement) was developing. Its central organ, the Community Action Program, proved to be especially important in ushering these rising African American

259 Germany, *New Orleans After the Promises*, 43.
260 Ibid., 47.
261 Ibid., 41.
leaders to permanent positions of political power in the city. Community Action "sidestepped existing city and state governments," which were ripe with racial glass ceilings and outright hostility towards struggles for racial equity, and "funneled money to newly created non-profit organizations" that, unlike many non-profit organizations today, were specifically set up to be grassroots-based and run by local residents.\textsuperscript{262} Kent Germany argues that without the Kennedy and Johnson administrations' War on Poverty, the Black Power/Black Arts focus on black self-determination and nationhood would not have been able to rise to prominence in the way it did.\textsuperscript{263} This was certainly true in New Orleans.\textsuperscript{264} The War on Poverty brought activists like Dent to New Orleans and sustained their lives there throughout the period of the urban crisis. Dent, along with young civil Rights organizers in New Orleans—such as Richard Haley, Oretha Castle (soon to be Haley), Lolis Elie (Sr.), and Jerome Smith—attained new jobs in the "War" as community organizers.\textsuperscript{265} Not surprisingly, Dent, as well as his fellow organizers, used these roles to subvert Federal WOP constructs of the "Great Society." As they moved intellectually and politically with the developing Black Power and Black Arts Movements, these activists, like African American organizers in cities across the nation, began to use WOP initiatives to increase black self-determination. This work was radically at odds with dominant notions of urban reform, which saw the production of art

\textsuperscript{262} This is Germany's central claim throughout \textit{New Orleans After the Promises}, and it is a major contribution to understanding the rise of black political power in New Orleans and other cities during this era. As my future chapters will show, neoliberal approaches to urban reform in post-Katrina New Orleans were almost inverse to WOP approaches. Whereas WOP initiatives strengthened New Orleans and other cities' grassroots organizing "base," neoliberal urban reform has gone a long way towards fragmenting that base in favor of an individualistic, market-based approach to urban "renewal." Both sets of policies, however, have at their core the paradoxical goal of imposing middle-class values and aspirations on lower-income non-white communities without working to create many middle-class jobs or job security in general for those communities.

\textsuperscript{263} Germany, \textit{New Orleans After the Promises}, 41.

\textsuperscript{265} Ibid., 76. Specifically, Dent worked for the Social Welfare Planning Council, a subsidiary of TCA.
and community organizations in urban "ghettos" as a means for propagating ideologies that blamed the victims of geographical dispossession and political disenfranchisement schemes.

When Dent began his work with TCA after Hurricane Betsy, the Ninth Ward, where the Desire projects were located, had already emerged as the "most tightly organized area of the city." Activists working in partnership with residents and community leaders to rebuild the Ninth Ward used federal WOP funds to develop new social and cultural institutions. They hoped that these institutions, in addition to already existing churches and traditional social aid and pleasure clubs, would more explicitly develop constructs of black self-determination in the neighborhood. The FST's choice in 1965 to establish a home-base in the Ninth Ward's Desire Housing projects identified the theater in the minds of New Orleans's middle-class residents as just another War on Poverty initiative.

For FST members this Ninth Ward location presented both opportunities and challenges. By locating in the Ninth Ward, the FST's art was seen as charity work. They thus attracted some financial support from the city's expanding black middle class. On the other hand, locating in this part of the city caused the black middle class to dismiss the FST's serious artistic goals. As the Reverend Milton Upton, one of the FST's first New Orleans supporters and board members, notes in his essay in *The Free Southern Theater by the Free Southern Theater*, the city's black middle class thought that if the FST "had a building that was located in what is considered the 'right' location, not where we are now, down in that filthy Ninth Ward, that slum area, that ghetto area, that poor area down there, but in the central city with bright lights and so forth, with some semblance of Broadway," then they would come see the plays. But, adds Upton, "they don't want to

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266 Ibid., 69.
come into our building, they don't want to come into our area, they complain that they are afraid of this and that."\textsuperscript{267} Art in the Desire Projects, "just didn't exist" where the black middle-class community was concerned.\textsuperscript{268} Future FST producer and playwright Chakula Cha-Jua (McNeal Cayette) tells a story that explains this widely held point of view. When Cha Jua returned home from a tour of duty in the air force in 1967, he had heard about the FST as the first black-run theater in the South. He said to himself:

I'm going to have to go home and join this Free Southern Theater, this is just something I've got to do. . . . I wanted to \textit{PERFORM}. I wanted to be an \textit{Actor}. But the problem was they were \textit{so radical}. And they were located in the Lower Ninth Ward on Louisa Street. And, me being young and \textit{innocent} as I was, I was afraid to go down there by myself.\textsuperscript{269}

Cha Jua decided to get a friend of his to join the FST drama workshop with him because he was "scared to go down there" by himself. He soon became involved in performing with the FST and remained active with the theater well into the 1970s. Yet, Cha Jua's initial trepidation about entering the FST reflects a broader feeling among educated artists in New Orleans during this period: they did not know how to "place" the FST within their understanding of literary and theatrical arts. Thus, they had a hard time, at first, supporting the theater and embracing its sometimes unclear mission.

If it was difficult for the FST to attract black middle-class artists and residents to their new location, it was even more difficult for FST members, who had college educations and most of whom came from middle-class backgrounds, to identify their relationship to their audiences, most of whom initially came from the Desire Projects. These difficulties became expressed in the theater's contentious 1966 debates about their

\textsuperscript{268} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{269} Cha Jua, Interview by the author.
mission in New Orleans. While in New Orleans (during their limited off-touring season) were they to be a theater? Or were they to be a community arts program? Could they be both? And how could they generate their theater as a radical democratic space if the roles between artists and audience members were so unclear? For Dent, this latter question was the most crucial.

Before the FST could realize O'Neal's earlier, important claim that the audience was the FST's actors, Dent believed that the FST needed establish a clear identity for itself as a new artistic entity in the city—a black-authored, black-directed theater. As this identity rose, the FST's reputation would, like the call of a second line trombone, gather and engage new communities of audiences in the city in the collaborative production of new African diasporic, counter-hegemonic, participatory art forms in the city-in-crisis. When Dent assumed directorship over the theater, his goal was to use his connections and experience to help get the theater started on the work to establish its audience. He planned to lead the theater through its 1966 summer season and then depart to focus on his own writing. 270 Ironically, the production that was both Dent's inspiration to stay and was the FST's first step towards achieving a direct and lasting connection with New Orleans audiences was not a traditional theatrical production. It was a poetry show called "The Ghetto of Desire."

"The Ghetto of Desire" was a poetry program and interactive audience discussion that was broadcast as part of the CBS news network's "Look Up and Live" series' documentary on six regional theaters. Clarissa Myrick, an FST critic writing in the 1980s, calls the show "a poignant montage of sketches about the Desire housing project." She adds, the show's "realistic, albeit poetic, depiction of black life….ignited a degree of activism among blacks and whites in New Orleans" that centered around conditions in the

270 Dent, Letter to John O'Neal, June 18, 1966, in Dent and Schechner, FST by the FST, 119-120.
Desire Project.\textsuperscript{271} This program was broadcast in cities around the US, but it was not shown in New Orleans. At the urging of the local housing authority, the local CBS station chose to black-out the network during this time rather than feature a show that would reveal the conditions in Desire and the expanding impact of counter-hegemonic cultural organizing that the FST was doing there.\textsuperscript{272} In a letter to Dent, Allen Dowling, a Tenant Relations Advisor from the Housing Authority of New Orleans, explains, the "Ghetto of Desire" script identifies the project as "a concentration camp 'dreamed up by a city planner at Auschwitz.'"\textsuperscript{273} Dowling argues that through this depiction and through imagery that explicitly compared Desire to Watts in Los Angeles, the show was "calculated to engender racial disharmony." By "predicting" an explosion, Dowling argues, the show was ensuring that such an explosion would indeed happen. But, as I noted in my introduction, this explosion did not happen. Instead, for both audiences and artists, the FST's "Ghetto of Desire" program opened up a new public space—the space of the theater—as a new public, democratic space in the city that encouraged and structured dis-privileged, dis-possessed residents' soundings of their stories and histories.

Dent writes that the public controversy over "The Ghetto of Desire" suddenly "unified" FST members who, until this moment, had debated whether they had a future in the city. It brought them "tightly together" because it showed them the power that their

\textsuperscript{271} Myrick, "Mirror of the Movement," 117.
\textsuperscript{272} Upton notes that the Housing Authority tried to attain support from local clergy leaders in their work to convince the national CBS network to not release the show. Only two out of twelve of the all white group of church officials that the Housing Authority contacted had ever visited the Desire Project. They refused to condemn the show because they said they "could not pass judgment on something they had not seen" ("New Orleans: Blacks, Whites, and the Ninth Ward," 228). This disconnect between local clergy and the projects in the Ninth Ward exemplifies the geographical, social, and spiritual gap that existed between the city's new public housing developments, at the edge of town, and its public sphere. Soon after the meeting between the housing authority and these ministers, Rev. Upton invited the church officials to visit the Desire project with him. During this visit, they saw that the realities in Desire matched those depicted by the program.
\textsuperscript{273} Dowling, Letter to Dent, July 1, 1966, in Dent and Schechner, \textit{FST by the FST}, 125.
performances had to democratize the city's public sphere and to generate new public spaces where marginalized and privileged residents could dialogue about the kind of future they wanted for their city and neighborhoods.\textsuperscript{274}

Inspired by the dialogues that "The Ghetto in Desire" produced among audience members, artists, policy-makers, and media-makers in the city, in the fall of 1967 Dent took charge of the FST writer's workshops. Denise Nicholas and Roscoe Orman also, conveniently, left their positions at this time. Nicholas had grown tired of what she saw as the community/missionary work of the workshops.\textsuperscript{275} Dent, on the other hand, had his experience in Umbra to draw on as well as his long-nurtured hope that he might re-create an Umbra-like community among writers in New Orleans. He went into his new job as the FST's writing workshop leader with this hope in his hands. Dent's new interest in the workshops emerged with other FST leaders' new shared feeling of commitment to "community organization and racial consciousness" in New Orleans, a city, Dent adds, "where black people had never thought of themselves as black," but rather as Creolized members of the African diaspora.\textsuperscript{276} Costley, who was then working as a radio news broadcaster, joined Dent and became the FST's drama workshop director. Dwight Ott continued on in his role directing the journalism workshop. As 1967 evolved, these three facets of the FST's workshop program would merge into one central program that would, step-by-step, remake the FST's social role in New Orleans.\textsuperscript{277}

\textsuperscript{274} Dent Journals, 1966, Notebook 7, Box 97, Tom Dent Collection, Amistad Research Center.
\textsuperscript{275} It is important to note that just a year before he took charge of the workshops, Dent had "chastised" Nicholas for prioritizing community work over the work to build the theater's reputation for production. Dent's evolution from a top-down to a bottom-up artistic development aesthetic resembles the transformation that O'Neal underwent when he returned to New Orleans and began working with young people there after his period of forced displacement in New York. Myrick, \textit{Mirror of the Movement}, 95-96.
\textsuperscript{276} Dent, letter to David Henderson, April 17, 1967, Box 24, Tom Dent Collection, Amistad Research Center.
\textsuperscript{277} Dent calls this merger between the writing and drama workshops "one of the best accidents that ever happened." Salaam, "Enriching the Paper Trail," 336.
The FST Writers Workshop and the Jazz Paradigm for Artistic Production

Dent's first task as leader of the writer's workshop was to re-organize it into a collaborative writing group rather than a writing instruction course. Bob Costley took a similar approach in the FST's drama workshop. During the 1967 season, these two workshops made it their mission to deepen and expand the theater's relationship to the Ninth Ward. As if to signify these new goals, the touring poetry show for this season was directly inspired by New Orleans cultural traditions even if it was not, yet, directly engaged with them. This show, which was aptly titled "Uncle Tom's Secondline Funeral," exemplifies the learning process that Dent and Costley were undergoing as they struggled to create new artistic identities for themselves within both New Orleans's blues cultures and rising national Black Arts networks.

"Uncle Tom's Secondline Funeral" was a multi-voiced poetry show about an escaped slave's journey that captured the interplay between the historic specificity of individual black experiences and the shared consciousness of African diasporic identities. Structurally based around Robert Hayden's poem, "Runagate, Runagate," the show included shorter poems by workshop members and Dent. Dent and Murray, however, recruited three professional ensemble actors to perform it. The show was never printed and the script for the whole performance does not exist in the archives. But, we do know that the show included a list-poem by Dent that shares the show's title. Dent's drafts of the poem are in one of his 1967 journals.

Dent's "Uncle Tom's Secondline Funeral" poem is a kind of manifesto that imagines a series of second line parades for "race traitors" whose death and disappearance will finally make freedom and democracy possible. One section reads, for

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279 Dent, FST Notebook 14, 1967, Box 97, Tom Dent Collection, Amistad Research Center.
instance, "for the black public official who believes we have made enough progress….we
bequeath lifted hats, three deep bows, a long, long memorial service replete with history
of Harriet Tubman through Malcolm X." We "lay him to rest—then jump with
jubilation that he is dead and gone." Its conclusion proclaims that "For all those Black
intellectuals who believe that Otis Redding is not a genius, or Ray Charles, or Thelonious
Monk," there must be "six slow bows, umbrella dance—a memorial service of thirty-nine
Try a little tenderness and sixty-four straight no closers—jump on all the way, proper
funeral from beginning to end." With these lines, Dent captures the structure and social
role of the second line: its memorializing of elders and community leaders with proven
commitments (aesthetic or political) to the black working class, and its simultaneous
capacity to mock or dance to the ground modes of individualized upward mobility that
serve to fragment black communities.

The poem, however, does not manage to capture the second line's most important
essence—its reliance on participatory meaning making and space making tactics. Within
the performance space, the poem could have called on audience members and artists to
improvise or dance together. By doing so, it might have begun to achieve the FST's stated
goal of drawing on the audience's knowledges in the production of meaning in the theater
space. Such a transgression would have caused the artists to move outside their self-
designated role as the vanguard of the new cultural "parade" they were trying to start in
the city. It would have required them to perform in reciprocity with the audience's
reactions.

But neither Dent nor the other FST members were quite ready to let their
performance go in this way. Instead, the poem claims for the writer and for professional

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280 Ibid.
281 Ibid.
282 Ibid.
actors the role of interpreter, or *prophet*, of the subversive power of grassroots traditions. In the poem's performance Dent and, through him, the other FST members, praised the transformative potential of the second line at the same time as they worked to distance themselves from it.

After the "Uncle Tom's Secondline" production, Dent complained in his journal, "Our poems, even if militant and well done, are still too formal, too much like recitation pieces to command instantaneous audience response . . .. [W]e need to arrive at a form loose enough to allow the performers to groove with whatever the audience feels."283 Dent sensed that if the FST wanted their audiences to actively respond to their work, the group would ultimately have to become more willing to listen to what their audiences had to teach them. But the FST in its current manifestation—its professional ensemble and its dual New Orleans/New York bases—did not have much programmatic room for deep community participation. Providentially, and ironically, the theater ran out of money at the exact same time as Dent had these realizations.

In August of 1967, the FST had to call an early end to the professional tour due to lack of funding. For the next full year and a half, the FST could not afford a professional ensemble tour at all. In contrast to the touring ensemble, workshops were cheap to run.284 Thus, whereas the theater's touring future always seemed to be up in the air during this period, its workshop programs continued to grow. In February 1968, there were seventy-five workshop participants enrolled in the FST program. There was no money during this period to pay the workshop directors or their apprentices. Yet, despite the odds, workshop productions continued to grow. The "Golden Agers" began performing regularly, as did

the young writers in the drama and writing workshop. This latter group named themselves the "Blk Mind Jockeys."  

The young Blk Mind Jockeys chose to write poetry more than any other genre. This was partly because poetry provided the opportunity for "immediate feedback." New poetry could be read or performed in the FST workshops and in their weekly public readings, where fellow writers and audience members would discuss and criticize the work. In the summer of 1968, when there was still no money for a professional (Northern) touring ensemble, this group of amateur New Orleanians toured with Dent, their mentor, around the South. Richard Schechner remembers joining Dent, Moses, and the Black Mind Jockeys on a trip to Bogalusa. He writes:

It was fun, and exciting. The Deacons for Defense and Justice gave us an armed escort in and out of town. We played pool. We performed. But the kids in the car with us—I could talk to them less well than to Gil. Gil had been to college, and he was an intellectual. If race separated us, education and class brought us together. But these young writers were out of my range. I was actually, at times, afraid of them—the old, racial fears compounded by class suspicion and the lack of an intellectual vocabulary on their part and a street vocabulary on mine. This vocabulary gap is not one of words, but of concepts—of handling thoughts, images, patterns. It is at the root of the breakdown in communication between large groups of people in this country. And I felt this gap acutely.

The "gap" to which Schechner refers is, as he explains, not merely a gap of language. It is a breach between different kinds of social and cultural performance, within which different epistemologies and different histories are expressed. The goal of the FST from the outset had been to generate performances on stage that drew on and spoke directly to

286 Salaam, Art for Life. My references are to the copy of this long essay/book that Salaam emailed to me in September 2009.
287 This is describing the FST's 1967, not 1965, trip to Bogalusa.
288 Schechner, "The FST and Me," in Dent and Schechner, FST by the FST, 224.
both African American history archives and the diverse "repertoire" of embodied histories, geographies, and epistemologies that inhere in black working-class social and cultural practices. Early FST plays drew heavily on this written archive, but they had difficulty producing work that accessed or mirrored the improvisatory and embodied, participatory nature of blues epistemologies. These new FST members, by contrast, talked and walked and lived the blues, not necessarily because they were from particularly impoverished backgrounds (many of them were in college or college-bound and came from middle-income families) but because they lived in New Orleans. They had come of age during and amid the violence of school desegregation. They had spent Mardi Gras after Mardi Gras on North Claiborne Avenue. They had spent Sunday after Sunday in the city's full gospel Baptist or full gospel Catholic churches (only in New Orleans is there such a thing). As such, they moved fluently between the city's blues cultures and its more staid, suburb-bound black middle class. The art they created strove to close the growing gap between these classes. It sought to generate a unity that would celebrate New Orleans as the most African city in the US and transform the city's public sphere, finally, into a democratic space. It was, in other words, art in the tradition of the New Orleans second line.

Led by Dent, the Blk Mind Jockeys looked at the FST's central dilemmas from a different direction—rather than asking how the theater could transform and empower audiences, they asked how audiences could transform the theater. As Myrick explains, "Most of these young people knew nothing of the political battles in the FST's history. And they only knew Dent as the primary leader of the theater. They had no expectations and little desire for grants from foundations and government agencies. They worked for

free. To their mind, they were the FST." By 1968, Dent saw them as the FST too. He began advocating explicitly with O'Neal for prioritizing workshop concerns over fundraising activities. He believed that the Blk Mind Jockeys were the FST that the FST had always been waiting for. If only they could move past and "replace" the FST's "first draft."

By September of 1968, workshop numbers had declined. But the group that remained was focused and committed. Dent and Costley, who were members of and leaders of the workshops, wanted them to begin producing work that could be performed. For this reason, the drama and writing workshops decided to combine forces. That summer, also, a new arrival joined the workshop who would catapult the group into a new, heightened state of development. His name was Val Ferdinand.

Ferdinand (Salaam) was twenty-one years old when he joined the FST workshop. He was from the Ninth Ward, and he had just returned from a three-year stint in the army. He was, at the time, a freshman at the Southern University of New Orleans. This young New Orleanian's approach to writing and performing poetry was the perfect partner to Dent's desire to push FST writers to look outward to the city—to its cultural forms and blues aesthetics—for the answers they were seeking in their work to create new cultural spaces where New Orleans artists and audiences could work together to define a democratic, locally-rooted but globally-informed black aesthetic.

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290 Myrick, "Mirror of the Movement," 122.
291 Dent, Outgoing Correspondence, 1968-69, especially letters to Bobbi Jones (FST administrator and Dent's future wife), Box 24, Tom Dent Collection. Amistad Research Center.
293 Tripp, "Free Southern Theater: Always a Message," 83.
294 At SUNO, Salaam enrolled in an English course only to become disillusioned with the traditional way poetry was being taught there. He went on to lead a campus rebellion later that year that demanded that the administration begin a Black Studies program.
Salaam will be the first to tell you that in his early years as a writer he was not interested in writing directly about the city. However, while the content of his work tended to focus on national black identities and African diasporic communities in a global sense, Salaam's aesthetic was rooted in the city's performative jazz, blues, and gospel cultures. As a young man, he had wanted to be a musician, but his parents and grandparents reared him to become a preacher. He chose writing as a career instead, but his poems from the beginning reflect the aurality of Church traditions and New Orleans music traditions. In *Art for Life*, his artistic autobiography, Salaam explains that his early work was inspired by the African American Baptist Church's spiritual practice of witnessing. As a child, he "identified with that collective emotional experience" that took place in Baptist churches, but at first he did not know that poetry could achieve such an effect. Like Dent, in his youth he looked to Langston Hughes's blues poetry and his multi-genre publications as a model. But Salaam was equally influenced by the blues he heard pumping through windows of Ninth Ward houses and by the jazz musicians he heard marching through the streets of New Orleans throughout his childhood.

Dent noticed Salaam's talents immediately. In the fall of 1968, he wrote Moses and O'Neal to let them know about Salaam's rising abilities. Dent and Salaam would soon become co-leaders of the FST workshop group, which, in 1969, morphed into a separate organization within the FST that they named BLKARTSOUTH. For Salaam,

295 On November 26, 1968, Dent also wrote Murray Levy, a former member of the FST, that “Bob and I now have a combined writing-acting workshop which is an absolute groover; the best group we have had and with one extremely talented writer: Val Ferdinand. We’ll shortly get out a poetry mag on the order of *Umbra* and beginning to do readings around town of poems written in the workshop and some short one-act skits, very short, and produced with a minimum of rehearsal and fanfare,” Outgoing Correspondence, Box 24, Tom Dent Collection, Amistad Research Center.

296 BLKARTSOUTH did not become formally incorporated until after it separated from the FST, in October 1970. Likewise, the partnership between Dent and Ferdinand was formally established in Nov. 1970. Press Release, March 15, 1971, “Nkombo Magazine resumes publishing under new auspices,” Outgoing Correspondance, Box 24, Folder 8, Tom Dent Collection, Amistad Research Center.
who did not consider himself a Southern poet and whose interests tended towards theorizing and expressing constructs of a broader, diasporic community, Dent represented a link to the national Black Arts Movement. Salaam recognized Dent's potential as a mentor and leader who could connect young black poets such as himself to the growing global pan-African network. According to Salaam, soon Dent also began to "transmit" him and the other young FST writers an appreciation of New Orleans and Black Southern culture that many of them "would not have gotten . . . at that early age." For Dent, all these young poets, but especially Salaam, represented a link to home, to Southern cultures, and to the FST's Ninth Ward audiences that their struggling artistic community desperately needed. Together, these partners, who could have almost been father and son, led FST workshop writers to generate thirty poetry shows and dramatic scripts during the next three years. They produced nine issues of Nkombo, FST/BLKARTSOUTH's literary journal. They also led the FST's ongoing journalistic work to chronicle the conditions of life and political concerns in dis-privileged African American neighborhoods in New Orleans in a monthly newspaper, The Plain Truth.

Like all FST authors, Salaam wanted his writing to be "mass oriented." But unlike Dent, O'Neal, Moses, and other FST leaders, achieving this goal seemed to come easily to Salaam. His musical and church experiences led him to understand that for the working-class African American community in New Orleans, "it was not enough for . . . poetry to exist as text. Our poetry needed to be oral." Once Salaam joined the FST workshop, New Orleans music became, almost unconsciously, "more and more integral to both the structure and the performance" of his poetry. His Ninth Ward upbringing was seeping into his verse. For instance, one of his first major pieces was a 1969 poem

298 Salaam, Art for Life, 25.
299 Ibid. See also Ellison, "Kalamu ya Salaam and the Black Blues Subversive Self."
called "All in the Street." This poem "spoke in poetic tones about the tidal wave of us
dancing in the street with brass bands. The poem had the closing line which suggested,
just like we took the streets, 'the cities are next.'"\textsuperscript{300}

Salaam used internal rhyme in his poems as a kind of rhythm that drew
metaphorical connections from one line to another. He also used a great deal of irony,
which, he says, is a "hallmark of African American humor."\textsuperscript{301} In \textit{Art For Life}, Salaam
gives the example of a chorepoem called "Leader" that he developed for the FST
workshop ensemble. This poem, which was meant to be performed partially as a dance,
highlights the methods Salaam developed for getting the audience and the cast members
off their chairs and into physical interaction and communication with each other.
"Leader" begins with Salaam "clapping and improvising a funky dance while
encouraging the audience to clap along," which, he writes, "didn't usually take much
encouragement." At the height of the dance, he would stop, stand directly before the
audience, and recite the poem "with a cocky air."\textsuperscript{302} Here is the poem:

\begin{quote}
\textbf{Leader}

i saw a Negro at a dance
last nite who called himself
my leader & that nigger
couldn't dance to save his life
so how he gon lead me?\textsuperscript{303}
\end{quote}

After reciting the poem, Salaam would return to dancing. Dance, here, becomes a
metaphor for the embodied blues-based collective forms of expression that were central
to the survival and resistance of African American subjectivities and communities since
the era of slavery. Salaam's poem enacts these forms of expression at the same time as it

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{300} Ibid.  \\
\textsuperscript{301} Ibid.  \\
\textsuperscript{302} Ibid.  \\
\textsuperscript{303} Ibid., 26.
\end{flushright}
refers textually to them. The crowd may not have realized it in the beginning, but by the
end of his short recitation they had become conscious participants in the poem's
argument. As in a second line parade, their acts of dancing, or watching others dance, or
watching or responding to Salaam became part of the performance's meaning. They
became the actors in the performance space, sharing the stage with Salaam and, by
interacting with him and hearing him, transforming the performance from its text into a
richer, less predictable embodied exchange of collective and individual expression. The
system of interaction between artist and audience that it generates also show the poem's
idea to be true: that an African American leader whose daily practices of life have
become so distanced from his community that he no longer values or practices that
community's blues-modes of knowledge and spatial production is not fit to be a leader of
that community. This poem also reflects directly back on Salaam's mentor's poem from
the summer before. Its simple participatory basis underscores that despite the fact that the
language and content of Dent's "Uncle Tom's Secondline Funeral" derived from New
Orleans's working-class African American musical traditions, the poem did not connect
directly with its audience because, literal dance skills aside, neither the poem nor the poet
knew how to draw on the embodied knowledges, participatory aesthetics, and radical,
space-making democratic "grooves" of black cultural production in New Orleans.

The contrast between Dent and Salaam's work in 1968 emphasizes how much
Dent, the workshop's leader, had to learn from Salaam and the other young New Orleans
poets. It also emphasizes the extent to which Dent, non-egotistically, was willing to and
wanted to learn from them. In contrast to Salaam, Dent's struggles to create and perform a
poetry "based on oral/aural forms that was designed specifically for the sensibilities of
working-class black folk"\(^\text{304}\) were part of his struggle to tap into an African American

blues history and a selfhood that weren't inside him. As Salaam noted to me in an interview, Dent saw the workshop collective as having an access to this selfhood. They were "against all the propriety with which he was raised." By immersing himself in the work to both lead and learn from them, Dent became able to close the "gap" in language and embodied knowledges that existed between him and them.

Dent took on a fatherly role within the group. As Salaam notes, Dent's "primary aim in returning to New Orleans from New York [had been] the hope of providing a creatively nurturing environment for black youths, which he himself had missed when growing up." Taking the group on tour was his way of showing them a little bit of the world. He also worked diligently to bring prominent BAM writers and activists to New Orleans. Writer and English Professor Jerry Ward, a longtime friend of Dent's, noted to me in an interview that Dent had "a certain kind of influence...[an ability to] bring people together from a broad spectrum." He characteristically would enjoy creating diverse social mixtures to see how people from broadly different backgrounds would like each other and to observe the connections they would make. For instance, in 1969, Dent organized the Afro-American festival at Dillard and invited LeRoi Jones, Max Roach, and Abby Lincoln. That year at Mardi Gras, he brought his Umbra friends David Henderson, Calvin Hernton, and Ishmael Reed from their homes in California and New York to visit the city and do readings of their work. As time went on, Toni Morrison, Toni Cade Bambara, and Alice Walker, who were all friends of Dent's, visited him at his home and spent time talking with and working with his mentees. One of the events Dent is most famous for in New Orleans is when he brought James Baldwin to town after some

305 Salaam, Interview by the author, October 6, 2009
306 Ibid.
308 Ward, Interview by the author.
public readings Baldwin was supposed to attend in Texas were cancelled. Nearly all my interviewees mentioned Baldwin's visit to me as a significant moment for them and for Dent's post-FST writing group, the Congo Square Writers Union. Quo Vadis Gex (now Gex-Breaux) remembers eating crawfish with Baldwin "at Tom's old New Orleans shotgun house on Port Street in the Faubourg Marigny":

Anyone who has ever tried knows what messy endeavor eating crawfish is. Baldwin had a unique way of attacking the little critters that involved eating more parts than I was accustomed to seeing anyone ingest. Here was a living literary legend, crunching crawfish heads and smelling of seafood boil . . . We discussed the current issues of the day and perhaps even a little literature. But after all these long years what I remember most was the human part of sharing a messy meal. Making something like that happen was classic Tom.309

Dent thus literally imported African American intellectuals and the national Black Arts Movement into New Orleans. At the same time, he used the encounter between the Blk Mind Jockeys and these nationally renowned authors to begin new dialogues about the Black aesthetic and BAM's need to investigate New Orleans's rich and complicated African diasporic cultures more.

In a letter to Hernton, Dent describes his goals in connecting New Orleans writers with his contacts and friends working in the Black Arts Movement around the nation. "What I’m driving for now," he explains:

is a sort of Black Arts South, localized, centralized in New O . . . Which will among other things produce material for the touring company and other black companies and bring to the whole fucking black arts concept a southern orientation, a source of material coming from the South. You know that imported theater ain’t gonna be shit, even if it is black theater.310

Dent built the FST workshop as a collective within which this Southern oriented black theatre could be conceptualized and realized. Modeling the workshops on the organizational and aesthetic traditions in New Orleans of collective and individual improvisation and development, he created an arts making institution in which each artist had to develop individually for the group to develop, as well. This approach to artistic and organizational development transformed relationships within the theater by making the workshop group into the theater's artistic center rather than merely a part of its "charity" work. It also transformed the theater's relationship to New Orleans and made the city the theater's "home" instead of merely its "home base."

Thinking of the theater's development as something that was intimately connected to local black working-class communities' development led the young FST workshop artists to embrace a point of view that would have been foreign to the FST a few years before: the understanding that wherever they performed, there would always be someone in the audience who had a stronger grip on the ideas they were trying to articulate than they did themselves. As Salaam notes, because this new FST performed in public and semi-public spaces around New Orleans (churches, bars, storefronts, schools), they began, finally, to attract a widely diverse audience that reflected the city's cosmopolitan identity. Children who watched them rehearse would attend performances and shout out the lines with the ensemble. Dockworkers with broad global knowledges might attend their show at a local bar one night, but the next night the group could be performing in a church or school for an audience of grandmothers or students. Cha Jua remembers, "If you were bad, somebody would tell you 'Oh, you're horrible! Oh, you're too loud! Sit down!' . . . and it was the same thing when you did something good. People would come up to you and say, 'Hey, this thing really hits home, this comes closer to dealing with the
subject than anything." In order to always "work to the audience," Salaam admonished the group that they should never go out onstage without reminding themselves that there was someone in the audience who "was more hip" to the ideas and social critiques that they were presenting than they were themselves. The group listened to this advice and took it seriously. Doing so led the group to be characteristically open to discovering what they had to learn from their audiences.

In 1968 and 1969, the group produced a series of poetry "sets" and short plays, many of which combined dramatic scripts with poetry or readings of historical works (such David Walker's "Appeal" and Frederick Douglass's speeches). Quo Vadis Gex, one of the youngest members of the FST workshop group, calls the 1968-1969 seasons years "the yelling years." She adds, "Most of our performance pieces required raising our voice in one way or another and railing against one system or another... [yet] there was also a concerted effort to talk about the beauty of being member of a [black] community." But, as their audiences would show them, discussions about black community were always complicated in New Orleans.

The group's determination to define a black community by investigating the city's Black Atlantic histories and its current state of urban transformation and re-ghettoization led Dent and the FST workshop collective to reject any one theory of a Black Arts aesthetic. This had to do with the multiculturalism of New Orleans—its intersecting, and inter-defined diasporic communities ranging from French- and Haitian-identifying Afro-Creoles to Black American Baptists to Afro-Latinos and Latinas. This multiculturalism was visual and audible every time the group met. The group was composed of individuals

311 Cha Jua, Interview by the author.
312 Salaam, Interview by the author, October 6, 2009.
313 Gex-Breaux, Interview by the author.
314 Ibid.
with vastly different Creole ethnicities, skin tones, and religions. Some, like Gex and Cicely St. Julien were Catholic; others, like Salaam, had been reared in the Black Southern Baptist tradition but had gone to Catholic high schools. For Dent, multi-hued, multi-cultural constructions of blackness were nothing new—this had been a core part of Umbra as well, given its location in the Lower East Side and its participants' diverse backgrounds. But there was a difference between multicultural blackness in New Orleans and multicultural blackness in New York.

As Smethurst notes, New York-based Black Arts formations such as the MFY program directed by Woodie King Jr. brought together diverse groups of artists from a "fundamental African-centered cultural (and historical) commonality between African American, African Caribbean (English-, French- Kreyol- and Spanish-speaking) and African cultures." But the diasporic alliances these artistic groups created "for the most part remain[ed] distinct even as they [were] in close cultural and geographical proximity to each other in the South Bronx, Harlem, Central Brooklyn, and so on." In the Bay Area, other Third World Left subcultures became connected to BAM as well. These formations were "informed by a notion of Third World solidarity and common cause that was not basically diasporic in orientation—or if it was diasporic, then it was a comparative or relative diasporicism." But in New Orleans, black multiculturalism is a product of the city's long history of cultural mixing, intermarriage, and creolization. Distinct and interrelated diasporic identities cannot always be easily parsed from this "gumbo" of cultures in the city. Diasporic cultures in New Orleans are more easily acknowledged and known to be political products of subjects' choices about which communities and histories to claim and perform as their own. As Chapter One showed,

316 Ibid.
317 Ibid., 359.
these subjective choices and performances are what produced the city's unique systems of class and race oppression that privileged lighter-skinned or French-identifying African American residents over darker-skinned or English-language identifying residents, resulting in a black middle class in New Orleans that was troubled by a unique "triple consciousness."

As the FST workshoppers began, through Dent, to consider themselves a part of a national Third World Left cultural movement, they struggled with how to generate a radical Black Arts aesthetic in New Orleans that valued the multicultural and multi-class realities of black life in the city without embracing the city's long-troubled heritage of using performances of class, ethnicity, and diasporic identity to divide and weaken sectors of the city's black community. They strove to create performances and literary productions that would gather together the city's diverse and overlapping black identities in an aesthetic and expressive structure that would strengthen residents' understandings of their social and cultural interdependence while also enabling the conflicts between groups and individuals to be sounded and debated. This young artistic group discovered that a key to generating this kind of work lay in studying the city's second-line aesthetic. For this reason, as Salaam notes, the group insisted on continuing to perform in non-traditional theater spaces that were open to and inviting to a broad public. They also "intuitively . . . moved to the jazz band as a metaphor and model" for their poetry performances.318

Just as Dent had to relinquish some of his artistic ego in allowing the workshoppers to move to the front and center of his theater's artistic productions, the group's embrace of the second-line aesthetic in their performances required some relinquishing of their artistic egos for the sake of the group and for sake of their

318 Salaam, Art for Life, 32.
audiences. This was not a difficult task for Dent's group of young artists. They had, after all, grown up in New Orleans. They were accustomed to the construct of the artist as a member *within* and not a soloist outside of the community parade. As Salaam notes, "Growing up here in New Orleans and seeing the folk culture, like the Mardi Gras Indians, which is one distinctive phenomenon . . . within the subculture everyone had his or her own distinctive suit, and you even had two very different styles of making suits. This culture taught us to value individuality, and at the same time there was a collective spirit about it. You had the collectivity without the rigid uniformity."³¹⁹ For this reason, he explains, "As far as [the Black Mind Jockeys] were concerned, just as most people didn't know the names of all the members in a big band, they didn’t need to know our names individually. The band was more important than the soloist, in fact, it was the band that provided the platform for the soloists to blow and develop—even the most novice poet could be accommodated and given room to recite at least one poem."³²⁰

The group used their jazz- and public space-based performance aesthetic to play with class and culture differences in a way that was provocative to local and regional audiences. Gex, whose youth and light skin tone rendered her from the point of view of the audience as a stereotyped Catholic Creole school girl, recalls that Dent and Salaam "got a real kick out of sending [her] out front and center with a big cussing poem."³²¹ She remembers how this outraged certain members of every audience, especially her family, if they were there. But in the background, within the dynamics of the group, the group did not judge Gex based on her background. Dent and then Salaam, as he emerged as a leader in the group, were protective of her and respected her seriousness about her writing.

³²⁰ Ibid.
³²¹ Gex-Breaux, Interview by the author.
Ironically, in the Blk Mind Jockeys' early performances, Dent stuck out like a sore thumb. Gex argues that his "staid" class background prevented Dent, at first, from becoming a fluid part of the group's evolving ensemble aesthetic. Cha Jua remarks similarly, "I thought Tom Dent was the deadest poet in all the world . . . . Tom would get up and read his poetry and he was just so dead pan. I said, 'Oh Lord, we have to suffer through this again!'" Eventually, however, with a lot of help and goading by his young mentees, Dent got the hang of it. Cha Jua, in turn, came to love Dent's poetry most of all. He would go on to produce several ensemble shows with O'Neal in the 1970s using Dent's poems.

The group's jazz ensemble form allowed them to "groove" with whatever the audience "happened" to feel during their performances. Sometimes the audience and the performing group become so linked that the audience could no longer distinguish between themselves and the performers. Salaam gives an example from a poetry/dramatic "set" (the group's term for a short piece—containing a script interspersed with poetry with no fully developed characters—that they intended to achieve a pointed commentary) that he wrote called The Destruction of the American Stage. The main character in this "set" is named GoDevil (a combination of God and Evil). The play begins with a chorus singing and mingling through the audience saying, "Asante . . . our play is you, begins with you, ends with you . . . without you we have nothing." Cast members then ask the audience if someone can lead them in prayer, "Any prayer." The cast leader adds, "We come from many peoples. Surely there are many gods present in spirit among us."

By appealing to the audience to participate and by linking the performance explicitly to

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322 Cha Jua, Interview by the author.
323 This was not an FST workshop production but a BLKARTSOUTH Production from 1972. It is similar to but perhaps more fully developed than earlier productions, but since scripts from those productions are not available, it is one of the few examples to which I have access.
324 My interpretation of this play owes much to Tripp's analysis, in her dissertation cited previously.
religious or spiritual communities, the "set" articulates the audience and the performers as a spiritual community. It posits that within the liminal space of the performance both audience and cast members will look in the mirror and acknowledge their simultaneous interdependence with and difference from others in this temporary community articulation. According to Salaam, the performance met these intended goals, at least in the play's University of New Orleans production. The UNO audience became so involved in the performance that they lost a sense of differentiation between themselves and the performers. Salaam remembers:

In the middle of the play, a tape comes on playing the national anthem—Jimi Hendrix’s version . . .. At the moment when the tape came on, a lady walked in wearing a red, white, and blue shirt. She was just coming to the performance . . .. The audience turned to look at her, and they thought she was one of the cast members. And then she sat down. And in that moment, you could not convince anyone in the audience that she wasn’t part of the play. And we were just saying, oh wow.325

As in a New Orleans second line, to walk into this performance was to take part in the performance. Every spectator who entered became a "spectactor."326 Every spectator who entered changed the meaning and context of the performance.

Salaam compares the group's efforts to establish a sense of reciprocity and audience participation in their poetry performances to the feeling of togetherness and communal art or praise making that emerges in black churches. He writes:

325 Salaam, Interview by the author, October 6, 2009.
326 Boal, Theater of the Oppressed. Working in the climate of the global anti-colonial movements and the rise of the Third World Left, Boal sought to use theatre to achieve exactly the opposite effect. He generated forms of theatre that, rather than render audience members into passive spectators whose psyches the performance works on, renders audience members into active "spect-actors" who become involved in and help shape performances. The influence of Boal's methods has been manifold. His work exerted a broad influence on South American theatre groups such as Peru's Grupo Cultural Yuyachkani Teatro and theaters in conflict zones throughout the globe. Boal's Center for the Theatre of the Paris hosts international workshops today. Much community-based performance in the US stems from Boal's Games for Actors and Non-Actors. Also see Cohen-Cruz, Playing Boal and Cohen et al., Acting Together on the World Stage.
Given our community's 'church' and 'street corner' orientation, each of which places a high value on oratorical abilities, the preference for spoken over written text is natural, i.e. grows organically out of our environment . . .. When you experience a good Black poetry performance, the audience becomes a 'congregation' joining in a quasi-religious experience.\textsuperscript{327}

The group, most of whom had grown up in the church, wanted to create their poetry ensemble as a community institution that, like local congregations, would create in their audiences a feeling of "total spiritual/physical identification" that they would then pair with pan-African ideologies, thereby linking audiences' spiritual and place-based structures of identification to a global geography of black nationhood.\textsuperscript{328}

Tripp notes that as the group moved from poetry performances to playwriting, both Salaam and Dent's plays proved uniquely able to achieve these goals.\textsuperscript{329} Unlike other, more pedantic FST and Black Arts Movement plays, their plays were about people and not character types. Their plays were also, quite explicitly, about urban lives, urban concerns, and possibilities for a distinctly urban cultural revolution. Dent and Salaam's plays consistently take place in interior, domestic urban environments that resemble if not directly reflect conditions in working-class African American New Orleans households. Salaam's 1969 play, \textit{Mama}, is a good example. In \textit{Mama} the main character is an older woman trying to hold her household together. She has two sons—one a “good boy” and one who’s a hustler or a pimp or somewhere in between. In the final scene, after a fight between the sister and the hustler brother, the mother comes back in the room and sees a beer bottle. She wants to know— who has been drinking, messing around? She thinks it couldn’t be the “good” brother, and she wants to blame the daughter’s boyfriend, who is a Black Muslim activist. The mother and daughter fight and the mother slaps the daughter. The daughter abruptly and emotionally shouts that her mother is nothing but an

\textsuperscript{327} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{328} Salaam, qtd. in Tripp, "Free Southern Theater: Always a Message," 238-39.
\textsuperscript{329} Tripp, "Free Southern Theater: Always a Message," 253.
“old nigger woman.” The mother responds, "I guess I been knowing it since I was a little girl. I done always knew what I was. So I tried to raise you without having to tell you like my mama told me." She notes that after this moment, she saw herself in a new way—as "nothing but a nigger." She had been tough on her daughter because some part of her believed that "we would always be niggers," and she knew that as a black woman, her daughter would have to be stronger than her sons. The daughter apologizes over and over again, telling her mother, "Don't say that mama. Its not true; you're not a nigger, mama." But the mother leaves the room. Then the play ends.

*Mama's* depiction of a working-class black family living in urban, "ghettoized" conditions articulates a black community in which differences—between generations and among members of a generation—can be explored and valued by the use of common reverence and love. As Salaam explains, "We built our drama around these issues that arose up in families. Our theater was different than the normal Black Arts theater at the time—we had major parts for older women. You didn’t see that. So this is why our audience was so broad." The play's ending—its refusal to provide the audience with a denouement—insists that the audience must do the work to find ways to express, value, and love the differences between and among generations. Salaam remembers the emotion in the room when the Black Mind Jockeys performed this play at sites with multi-generational audiences. By speaking simultaneously to an older audience and to a young one, the play articulates both generations as one community. The figure of the mother—universally revered and loved—bonds the audience to each other in common identification. The play flips urban crisis rhetoric about the pathologies of black

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331 *Mama*, Act 1.
332 Ibid.
333 Salaam, Interview by the author, October 6, 2009.
households on its head, revealing how this rhetoric shapes internal relations within black families. It then asks its audiences to think critically about the way this rhetoric encourages them to turn to stereotypes, silencing, and blaming rather than engaging in real, critical discourse about oppression. Ultimately, Mama links these stereotypes and dominant discourse about cities to slavery, showing how historical racism and the devaluing of black women's bodies continues to shape both black and white minds. By leaving the audience without catharsis, the play leaves them in the post-show discussion to reflect on these ideas and to take steps, across the boundaries of the aisles, to close the generation gap.

The Blk Mind Jockeys' assumption that they were playing to an audience that always contained people who understood what they were trying to say better than they did themselves encouraged them to construct their plays almost in the form of a question, so that whatever they performed onstage would provide questions, not answers, that the artists and audience could work to answer both through the performances and afterwards in discussions. As with Mama, such plays often refuse catharsis. As Boal explains, the moment of catharsis encourages audiences to purge themselves of the feelings of guilt and fear that come from identifying with the characters.334 Dent and Salaam's plays use audience interaction methods and abrupt endings in order to inspire audiences to hold onto their identifications, fear, and guilt until the post-play discussion. Via post-performance discussions, storytelling, and improvisational response, the audience members would then come to further identify with the characters, with the cast, and with each other.

The FST had prioritized audience feedback since their beginnings, but imagine the difference between a play written directly for local audiences and one written by

334 Boal, Theatre of the Oppressed, 32.
Brecht or Beckett for audiences around the globe? FST records show that their audiences reacted strongly and vocally to both types of plays. Yet, somehow, the plays that spoke more directly to local or regional audiences tended to draw bigger crowds and inspire more empowering discussions. The reasons for this are straightforward: with the Blk Mind Jockeys' work, audiences came to understand FST plays and poetry shows as a unique theater space wherein they would view performances that related directly to their lives, wherein their opinions about those productions mattered to the artists, and wherein they could take part in constructing the performances as they occurred. New Orleans audiences were primed to participate in this kind of theater because it drew from local cultural traditions that were also democratic and participatory in nature.

As Dent marveled on his young group's accomplishments he began to wonder how they should share these accomplishments with the broader Black Arts world. He naturally arrived at a conclusion that drew from his past accomplishments: he decided to work with the group to produce a nationally distributed literary journal that showcased their work. Dent partnered with Salaam in this endeavor. They named their journal *Nkombo*. They also created a new name for their group that gave them a separate identity from the FST within the national Black Arts Movement. They named themselves BLKARTSOUTH, a name which expressed their dual identity as both representatives of the national Black Arts Movement in the South and representatives of the South in that national movement.335

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335 BLKARTSOUTH and *Nkombo* were funded in 1970 by a small grant from the Council of Literary Magazines. Press Release, March 15, 1971, “Nkombo Magazine resumes publishing under new auspices,” Outgoing Correspondance, Box 24, Folder 8, Tom Dent Collection, Amistad Research Center.
"What We Can't Get on the Page Speaks Just as Strong": Nkombo's Second-Line Publication Philosophies

Salaam argues that even though performance was at the essence of BAM aesthetics and political ideologies, BAM publications (small press poetry books, magazines, and journals) became "the main ways in which BAM information was circulated."\textsuperscript{336} BAM publications linked the movement's different regional nodes and helped BAM artists to articulate themselves as a national community of artists with like goals and philosophies. Furthermore, as Smethurst notes, BAM publications enabled there to be a "continual, bidirectional interplay between the national and the local in which the national inspired the local, even as the local confirmed and deepened a sense of covering the United States in the ideological sense of engaging the entire black nation."\textsuperscript{337} However, many BAM organizations found it difficult to balance what they believed was a necessary focus on both performance \textit{and} publication. Writing for publications meant that BAM artists had to necessarily produce work that spoke both to a national network of artists and intellectuals and work that spoke to the histories and struggles of local, particular communities. This was a particular struggle for FST poets and playwrights. Not only did Northern Black Arts communities tend to be unaware or uninterested in the work they were doing in the deep South, but also the group's focus on publishing—as a way of gathering and articulating a broad spectrum of experienced and in-experienced writers together in dialogue on the page—made national recognition hard to come by. Luckily, this did not bother the BLKARTSOUTH poets because they were simply \textit{not that interested} in "sending [their] work around for others to publish."\textsuperscript{338} As

\textsuperscript{336} Salaam, \textit{The Magic of JuJu}, 12.
\textsuperscript{337} Smethurst, \textit{The Black Arts Movement}, 69.
\textsuperscript{338} Salaam, \textit{Art for Life}, 42.
Salaam notes, "We . . . knew who our audience was and how to reach them, and beyond our immediate audience we also knew how to publish ourselves."\(^3\)\(^{339}\)

The BLKARTSOUTH writing collective aimed to generate publication practices and forms of writing that mirrored and adapted multiple aspects of the second-line aesthetic to the written page. The journal intended to call forth emerging and established, local and regional black writers and black readerships into an alternate public sphere. Therein multicultural black voices would call and respond to each other in song and poetics in order to sound forth collective memories and politics of place rooted in difference to construct, together, a vision for a just urban future. They expressed this aim to their readers by choosing to title the first edition of their journal, *Echoes from the Gumbo*. As Dent and Salaam explain in their introductions to this edition, this title signified their search for a name and an identity for their group that encapsulated both their groundedness in New Orleans and their interconnections to the global African diaspora. The journal's eventual one word name *Nkombo* encapsulates this goal more explicitly. *Nkombo* is the Swahili word for gumbo, New Orleans's famous, African-based food.

Reflecting on *Echoes*, Ward argues that "it is remarkable that [Dent and Salaam]…chose not to follow models of black nationalist magazines (*Black Dialogue*, *Journal of Black Poetry*, *Soulbook*, *Umbra*) but adapted the genre of cookbook. Remarkable but not strange."\(^3\)\(^{340}\) Playing with the cookbook genre allowed the editors to use the magazine as a means of publicizing their jazz- and New Orleans-based mode of artistic development and artistic production to a national network of BAM artists and intellectuals. For instance, Dent and Salaam organized the magazine in a way that

\(^{339}\) Ibend.

emulates the "gumbo-like" nature of the workshop group's performances. The magazine intentionally "obscured" the individual personalities of the writers in favor of presenting the flavor of the group. The authors' full names can only be found on the journal's first page, separate from their poems and stories. The poems and stories themselves do not list the authors' names on the page. The table of contents only contains the authors' last names and first initials. Disassociating authors' names from the poems and ordering the poems to highlight the ways in which they complement and challenge each other requires readers to absorb the individual pieces within the "taste" and aromas of the whole gumbo mix.

*Echoes*, and then *Nkombo*, became BLKARTSOUTH's medium for expressing and sharing the discoveries of the whole group in a way that related those discoveries to the group's distinct, New Orleans context. As in the second line, which is adaptable to each audience and each set of historical and geographical circumstances, *Echoes* positions each text not as an individual work but as a part of a dynamic conversation about identity, aesthetics, and revolution that must be ongoing. The act of publication (and Dent and Salaam's conscious efforts to send the publication out to local, regional, and national BAM networks) places this artistic melding and conversation in the counter-hegemonic public sphere. The publication of each individual piece of *Echoes* gains meaning, depth, and power only as it relates to and responds to the whole.

By sounding counter-histories and counter-geographies, the journal also creates a structure for collective meditation on new social ideals and revolutionary visions. In fact,

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342 Many of Salaam's subsequent anthology publications use this same organizational method. As Chapter Three shows, even his most recent work with the Students at the Center program uses the *Nkombo* model of obscuring authors' names from individual works, placing them only at the end or beginning of the collective text. This method allows readers to experience the anthologies as conversational, ensemblic texts rather than as mass repositories for individual poetic productions.
the poems in the magazine's early issues are mostly in the vein of "revolutionary poetry." They invoke revolution and work to define it. Raymond Washington's "Revolution No. 1" in *Echoes* is a good example. Washington's poem presents, a series of dark, hyperbolized images of life in New Orleans and argues that daily actions of weekend life in "the ghetto"—celebrating the weekly paycheck, drowning frustrations in alcohol or drugs, materialism, and sex—continually work to postpone the revolution that needs to occur. Other pieces, such as Adam Weber's "Creoles," a manifesto against Creole hypocrisy and Dent's "The Death of Martin Luther King Jr.," a juxtaposition of civil rights movement protest forms in New Orleans and Mississippi, articulate a diasporic identity that is rooted in the local as much as the global and that inheres in contradiction and contrast. The form of the journal gathers together these paradoxes and contrasts (of vision, content, form, memory, identity) and places them in the "gumbo" of the journal as a whole, thereby generating "agonistic" dialogues about social transformation and collective struggle that voice conflicting viewpoints and perspectives within the Black Nation rather than silencing them.

In addition to being a forum for their aesthetic and philosophical claims, Salaam and Dent understood their publication to be a way to grow black voices. To refer again to the metaphor of the parade, *Nkombo*'s publication philosophy enacted a democratic mode of artistic production wherein the meanings of the works of those in the literary "first line" (famous authors such as Amiri Baraka and Dent himself) would become dependent on the works produced by grassroots writers and by audience reactions. This philosophy centered on enabling connections between black people to grow. Publication for them

344 Washington, "Revolution No. 1," 17. All quotes from *Nkombo* editions are taken from Tulane University's Amistad Research Center's *Nkombo* collection. Full citations, including issue number, year, and page number are cited in bibliography, with the exception of Dent and Salaam's introductory essays, which retained the same titles in each issue and are cited here according to date and issue number.
was, then, not a means with which a producing class of "successful" black intellectuals would judge black writers' work as "good" or "bad." Their philosophy was: "We will publish our workshop writers period." In that sense, Dent and Salaam's conception of publication was not all that different than their performance aesthetic: they created Nkombo, like they created their performances, as a means to help gather together and articulate African American communities in a way that sought to work through difference without subsuming class, geographical, and ethnic conflicts in black communities.

Dent's introduction to the 1969 summer issue of Nkombo proves that they did at least achieve some success with their goal to grow a diverse local community of poets as well as a broad local audience. Here he introduces, in an almost fatherly way, the young poets who are the most committed to the group and who will soon be publishing their own books: Gex, Ferdinand, Barbara Malcolm, Raymond Washington, Renaldo Fernandez, and Sharon Stockard. The table of contents list several more poets who were producing work with the group: Adam Weber, Woody Marcelin, Lois Tillman, Dara Ebun Ola, Barbara Malcolm, Akinshi Ju Ola (Edd Johnson), Mary Francis Clark, Judy Richardson, and Mary Francis Clark. Dent reminds readers here, again, that the work they read here was originally written to be performed in interactive shows. And he explains that just as readers can expect more issues, they should also keep their eyes open for more Black Mind Jockey performances. Salaam's introduction, "Food For Thought," complements Dent's by claiming and naming the Black Mind Jockeys' shared aesthetic and history. Salaam articulates the group as urban guerilla poets whose poetry emerges from their forthright confrontation with the realities in black neighborhoods: "our lives have exploded . . . the cities fall down & the black artist stands with his people

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345 Salaam, Art for Life, 45. My itals.
and somehow thru [sic] it all the writer tries to remain cool." He describes how constructs of authorial distance disappear in the moment when the black artist confronts these spaces. Salaam conceptualizes the Black Mind Jockeys' poems as "battle tactics" that aim to inspire black readers to look at what "you/we/us" are, and be a mirror through which black readers can recognize themselves and their histories. It sounds like he is talking about poetry that is polemic and pedantic. But what if we consider it, instead, as poetry emerging from a crisis situation?

As Salaam's introduction indicates, an era of hope in New Orleans and all US cities had, by 1969, been replaced by massive, environmentally toxic housing projects. In New Orleans, opportunities for de-segregation had been crushed by concrete pylons that squashed Black New Orleans's main street and transformed its public garden into a concrete landscape, haunted by the sounds above of the city's black and white middle class slamming the door on their way out of the city and into the suburbs. Salaam calls for a poetry that will cry out so loudly and boldly that it will call every man, woman, and child out from the city's indoor spaces and back into the streets, where black New Orleanians have for centuries expressed and pushed forward alternate modes of historicizing, seeing, and moving through the city. If the poems in this issue reflect the group's tendency to "yell" and "rail," it is because they reflect both the energy of a revolutionary movement and the desperation of a city infused with a "hurricane" of new forms of suffering and oppression.

The national dismissal of New Orleans as a party town, and white New Orleanians' reduction of their city's identity to its white-dominated history created ideological barriers to non-local black artists' abilities to see anything more than racial

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347 Ibid., 3
348 Ibid.
oppression in New Orleans neighborhoods. In *Nkombo's* next issue, September 1969, Dent situated *Nkombo* as one means through which local black authors would theorize the city in a manner completely opposite to this tendency. He writes, "You see we always thought of New Orleans as a wasteland . . . a place to get away from, to stay away from, to relax over a drink and laugh at from the enchanted distance of California, New York, Chicago."

The city "let its secrets simmer in a pot of voodoo-like ritual that couldn't even realize the thriving hustle of hustling Marie Laveaus." Dent posits that the "black mind jockeys'" task is to investigate these secrets, face them, and celebrate them. The "blast" of their "concerted, creative effort" will bring the city's true inheritance out into the national public sphere: the brilliance of its people, the history of their uprisings, and the African diasporic memories and knowledges that are embodied in its performance-based culture.

The poems contained in *Nkombo's* 1969 editions (its peak year, after which the journal only published three issues) attempt to achieve this blast by following four major themes: black life in the city, constructs of blackness, revolution, and black music. The poems use visual imagery and artwork as well as sound techniques and rhythm to translate blues-based modes of knowledge from music and performance into words.

For instance, Al James's poem in the September 1969 *Nkombo* about the young blues musician Walter "Wolfman" Washington includes a sketch of Washington playing his guitar beneath the poem. The poem and sketch mirror each other and show how Washington, "shaking his head from side to side, eyes shut tight/feet moving up and down as riding bicycle/and laying done some sounds you wouldn't/think possible," causes

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349 Dent, "From the Kitchen," *Nkombo* 2.3 (Sept. 1969), 2.
350 Ibid.
351 Ferdinand (Salaam), "Food for Thought," *Nkombo*, 2.3 (Sept. 1969), 3.
352 James, "Walter Washington."
audiences to crave the blues. Listening to Washington's blues can transform a person who has "disowned the blues" into a blues addict. Following James's poem is Dent's "For Walter Washington," a poem consisting of one long, narrow stanza whose rhythms approximate that of Washington's characteristic short blues chords (Dent calls them "shots of blue"), and one final, separate, coda. The long stanza shows how the "wolf wail" of Washington's guitar turns listeners from speeding away from the "stopped/time" moments, the "sweaty mad dreams," and "half-empty/half-caught days" of their life and brings them "back home" where life is lying "open/ready." The final coda addresses the readers as a group, at home, in a new mental space where Washington's music has brought them, where they embrace rather than flee from the blues that is New Orleans. It reads:

New Orleans is an easy town
to dance the blues in:
everybody
tune yr mind
guitar.

This final stanza articulates the magazine's local African American readers as a community of blues dancers and blues makers. They do not merely dance to the music; they possess a blues-making instrument in their minds. This blues making instrument is the culture, re-spatializing practices, and embodied knowledges that they inherited from living and growing in New Orleans. But it is out of tune and out of practice. Dent seems to say here that the work of the poet, like that of the bluesman, is to attune readers to the home blues contains for them: a city of knowledges and histories that they, by dancing and writing and thinking the blues, make and re-make.

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Dent, "For Walter Washington." Originally published in *Nkombo*, 2.3 (Sept. 1969), this poem is also published in Dent's collection of poetry and essays, *Magnolia Street*.  
Ibid.
The next poem in this issue is Salaam's "second line for brother slow drag pavageau (going down easy)." This poem, which is addressed to "Slow Drag," a local blues bass player, describes his jazz funeral from the point of view of the dead man traveling in his "flowered heast sparkling black in the reflection of the going down sun" through the city. Sound elements repeat throughout the poem ("slide on down brother," "to thee, to thee, to thee"). "Humming humming humming," the poem echoes with the sounds of the slow dirge, then picks up into the loud, fast tempo of the second line, then eases back into the dirge. The pattern repeats. Words push together and images and memories dance beside each other, hanging onto and re-living the highlights of Slow Drag's life and career, while at the same time, "easing" him "on down." The poem, like the parade marching through the streets, inscribes Slow Drag's life and his music into a space that its author creates in the city's public sphere. It draws on the city's parading traditions to create this space, but as it does so, it remakes those traditions into something new: a poetic form modeled on the parade that, in turn, works to ensure that readers recognize themselves in the city's music and never forget what that music and the second line are "all about."

Not all the poems in Nkombo are about New Orleans or New Orleans music. A large percentage of the magazine's poems directly address national dialogues within the Black Power and Black Arts Movement about black nationhood, capitalism, education, gender relations, and popular culture. But these poems are interspersed, in every issue, with specifically local poems that continually insist on the ways in which African

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355 Salaam, "second line for brother slow drag pavageau (going down easy)," 42.
356 Alcide "Slow Drag" Pavageau (1888-1969) was originally a guitar player who instigated a dance craze in the city during the 1930s (hence his nickname). In the 1940s, he took up the string bass and went on to play and record with Baby Dodds and the George Lewis Band. In the 60s, he played regular gigs at Preservation Hall in the French Quarter (near Dent's apartment). He was also a plasterer, slater, and bricklayer by trade. See Robert Summers, George Lewis: A Jazzman from New Orleans, 157.
American culture in New Orleans informs local interpretations of these debates and, potentially, provides nationally and globally useful answers. These locally vested poems did often come from the journal's editors. But, as Tony Bolden notes, they also came from Washington and Cha Jua, who wrote moving depictions of black working-class neighborhoods in New Orleans. In addition, Quo Vadis Gex's poetry and fiction uses blues music, personal memory, and local streetscapes to convey the way in which economic structures, social constructions of race, and discourses of "urban crisis" work together to construct black spaces in the city as devoid of meaning and history.357

Through Nkombo and BLKARTSOUTH's 1968-69 performances, the FST achieved the kind of collaborative and African diasporic aesthetic and public sphere/public space-transforming productions for which Dent and other early FST members had been searching. Yet, as I noted above and will go on to discuss below, the theater's founders did not immediately recognize these accomplishments. In early 1969, both John O'Neal and Gil Moses returned to work with the FST. They were shocked to discover that the FST that they had once known had been replaced with a new FST that possessed deep roots in New Orleans and was generating a rising local and regional reputation among working-class residents and local youth. Instead of embracing the theater's new identity, its founders initially felt threatened by this change of course and sought to turn the theater back around to embrace its former role as an educator of rather than as educated by the people of New Orleans. Soon, however, O'Neal would witness the value of the second line-inspired collaborative and non-traditional public performance practices of the Black Mind Jockeys. When he did so, he began to work with Dent and Salaam on the important task of adapting this young group's ensemble poetics and

357 See, for instance, Gex's 1969 story "America's Got a Surplus of Niggers."
participatory performance style into sustainable institutional forms that could remain functioning after the individual poets' and performers' departures.

"That's Not Us": The Blk Mind Jockeys and the Return of John O'Neal and Gil Moses

In December of 1968, John O'Neal's alternative military service duties came to an end. He became able to return to the FST in New Orleans as the theater's producing director. In preparation for his return, O'Neal had been working with the FST's New York office to get the organization's funding going again. He was successful. Two November 1968 benefits, consisting of a benefit show and a "Soul Food" dinner at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York, drew celebrity appearances by Ava Gardner, Bill Cosby, Duke Ellington, Lena Horne, and Brock Peters, among others. The theater's coffers began to fill, and the FST paid off debts. By January of 1969 the theater had received over $100,000 in funding and had created a yearly budget of $250,000. O'Neal designated $45,000 for the workshop and apprentice program. But he put the remaining $200,000 towards the task of bringing the former, professional touring identity of the FST back to life. From his post in New York, he began auditioning and hiring actors for the FST's summer tour. Filled with hope for the renewal of the theater after what he considered to be the two past years of struggle and low accomplishment, O'Neal recruited Gil Moses to direct a touring production of Amiri Baraka's Slave Ship and Evan Walker's East of Jordan. Moses had been working as a musician in California, and O'Neal hired his band to come to New Orleans and perform on the FST's summer tour too. Moses, who was returning to a theater he had helped to found, would prove to have

359 Ibid.
360 O'Neal, Interview by the author, 2010.
difficulty taking on the role of hired director rather than artistic producer. His struggle for power with Dent and O'Neal to shape the theater's larger aims made the summer of 1969 challenging in many ways. But summer held a still greater challenge for the theater's founders: on their return they discovered that a new FST had arisen in their absence that accomplished and sharpened all of their former goals for the theater. O'Neal, in particular, had thought that Dent was just "holding" the fort down till returned with new funding and the "real deal"—the theater's professional ensemble. But when he stepped into the FST's rehearsal space he discovered, rather quickly, that while he was gone, the FST had not gone into professional limbo.

During their prolific 1969 summer, the FST's different ensembles—its local community of writers and performers and its imported professionals—worked together. Salaam remembers the arrival of the "professionals." When the professionals walked into the rehearsal, the workshop group noticed that all the women were wearing wigs and false eyelashes. They said to themselves, "That's not us." The arriving group, in turn, noticed the young, local FST members and thought that they were merely apprentices. Both groups believed they were the FST. But as the summer went on, both the new actors and the theater's founders who imported them would undergo radical changes as they began working with the Black Mind Jockeys. The full group went on to perform in twenty-one towns, somehow managing to pull together and produce the theater's best season.

Gil Moses's FST production of Baraka's *Slave Ship* highlights the transformations that O'Neal, Moses, and the professional ensemble experienced during this summer. *Slave Ship* is a pageant-like play that re-enacts African American history via the lens of

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361 Ibid.
362 Salaam, Interview by the author, October 6, 2009.
ongoing struggle and nationhood. The play uses ritual-based elements and free jazz to pull audiences into a participatory mode where they "tap into the shared historical memory of slavery" and connect this memory to the ongoing formations of ideological slave ships that imprison black minds and bodies.\(^\text{363}\) For Baraka, this play signified his turn to Black Nationalism and Pan-Africanism. For Dent and Salaam, *Slave Ship* was an "imported" play that—because of its content, its use of jazz-based artistic frameworks, and its meditations on a shared Black Atlantic history—spoke powerfully to local and regional audiences. Moses worked collaboratively with them to adapt the production to FST audiences' interests and perspectives. Doing so made the FST production especially successful.

*Slave Ship* portrays American history via the lens of the trans-Atlantic slave ship. The ship's hull also comes to represent all subsequent material and ideological "hulls" that have been used as tools of white power and racism to oppress African Americans, fragment forms of resistance, and silence dissent. The FST's set featured a giant, creaking slave ship at its center. FST "apprentices" constructed, transported, set up, and took down this set throughout the summer tour.\(^\text{364}\) African drums form the set's soundtrack and its sonic narrative center. Moans, shrieks, and pleas to African gods intertwine with dialogue as the discursive foreground of the performance. Characters are defined by their styles of resistance—"Struggler," "Screamer," "Prayer"—and their interdependent relationships—"Woman with Child", "Husband."\(^\text{365}\) The performance was a ritual in which New Orleans audiences would have found rhythms, dances, and stories that resonated with their daily practices of life and with the histories of their communities. FST performers did their best to draw on these familiarities, taking liberties with Baraka's

\(^{363}\) Street, *The Culture War in the Civil Rights movement*, 136.

\(^{364}\) Salaam, Interview with author, October 6, 2009.

\(^{365}\) Baraka, *Slave Ship*. No page numbers are available in the digital edition used here.
script and encouraging "individual and group improvisation."³⁶⁶ For instance, although Baraka's script calls for the play to be performed in the darkness of an enclosed theater space, the FST often performed it in twilight or full daylight in public spaces where random people could enter or exit the performance space at any time. Moses also chose to begin the play began with Salaam's poem, "Names, Places, Us," a narrative version of Baraka's ritual reenactment of slavery and genocide. This poem prepared audiences for the play's abstract context by asking them to identify immediately with the characters on stage.³⁶⁷ It asks:

Who did they kill? What, where, who? Who did they kill, murder? 
What? 
They killed you! …Are you hip to the middle passage? 
how many of our people rest now at sea 
their bones & flesh chewed & eaten by fish, abandoned to die in a 
turbulent sea whipped by the frenzied hands 
of white masters into their places 
What were the names of those Blacks they killed then 
Who did they kill? What are you?…³⁶⁸

This poem hails the audience as part of a Black Nation that extends backwards in time to injustices and genocide that still exert an influence on present-day social structures and subjectivities. It thus invites audience members to identify immediately with the sound and music-inflected violence, suffering, and loss that the characters experience on stage. And the play, in turn, invites them to participate in the making of the performance ritual.

³⁶⁶ Street, Culture War in the Civil Rights movement, 136.
³⁶⁷ As he gradually developed the poem, "Names, Places, Us" had helped the Blk Mind Jockeys arrive at their jazz-ensemble approach to poetry show performances. Salaam notes that this poem was "one of the most frequently performed pieces which was orchestrated for the whole [Blk Mind Jockey] group" in performances. He adds, "Even though I wrote the poem, I was not 'the featured voice.' Different people had different parts in solo or duo, while all of us acted as chorus and musicians. I remember one particular performance we did at the University of New Orleans. There was a jazz band on before us and some of the musicians hung around for our set. The drummer and vibraphone player joined us once we got started on "Black Bones" which was how we referred to the poem whose formal title was "Names, Places, Us." This poem was published in the first issue of Nkombo." Art for Life, 32.
³⁶⁸ In the 1970s, O'Neal and Cha Jua continued to feature "Names, Places, Us" in FST poetry shows and pageant plays.
These identifications and acts of ritual making resulted in unpredictable and overwhelming audience reactions. For instance, one young audience member in West Point, Mississippi yelled out at the slave driver character who was whipping the slaves—"I want to see you after the show!"\(^{369}\) The entire audience at this show "rose to its feet, waving and singing, 'When We Gonna Rise Up!'"\(^{370}\)

In New Orleans, Southern University refused to allow *Slave Ship* to be performed in their auditorium. So, the FST took the show out to the shores of Lake Ponchartrain where a "large gathering of Sunday picnickers, students, and others" witnessed and participated in the spectacle.\(^{371}\) Afterwards, these picnickers might have left to attend their own public and improvisational performances of African diasporic history in the form of a weekend second line. The only difference between this play and those parades was the play's work to translate the knowledges and histories performed in New Orleans parades into the dominant/bourgeois artistic forms of theatre and literature. Salaam notes in his 1970 *Negro Digest* review of the production that audiences in the South experienced the production "not as if it were scenes of slavery from 'negro history,'" rather, the audience "readily identified" with the play "as scenes from their lives."\(^{372}\) When the FST toured this play around the South they discovered that audiences tended to identify the most with Blk Mind Jockey performers. Like these young New Orleans writers and performers, African American Southerners were "ready" to participate in the making of black theater. They did not need "imported" theatre, nor did they respond to it as strongly. This was not because Southern audiences were not receptive to non-local cultures. Rather, it was because, having participated in the civil rights movement, these

\(^{370}\) Ibid.
\(^{371}\) Ibid.
\(^{372}\) Ibid.
audiences were confident in the power of their own agency. Northern artists and artistic producers were not in tune with the desires and abilities of black Southerners because they continued to see the national artistic scene from a point of view that privileged Northern, urban art and dismissed the South as backward or less developed.

After nearly three years in New York, O'Neal had fallen into this kind of thinking, as well. But his 1969 summer tour with the "new" FST shocked him out, returning him to his original insights that the best kind of movement-based theatre was theatre constructed by and with unique, local working-class audiences. In an interview with me, he reflected on the differences he observed that summer between the "imported" professional performers and the New Orleans novices: when they performed together on stage, the passionate "young kids" from Dent's group "blew away" the performances of the actors who had "studied Theater" and "knew how to use the voice… but cared less than a tinker's dam for anything about revolutionary struggle."³⁷³ The Blk Mind Jockeys "were speaking from the heart and the gut. They'd come off stage hoarse, or they may upstage themselves by making an awkward turn or something like that. But there was no doubt that you believed them when they screamed or when they spoke."³⁷⁴ After observing these young actors and writers throughout that summer, O'Neal told himself, "we're going to make a company out of these people, and that's what I'm going to be working for."³⁷⁵

O'Neal's transformed perspective proved to be centrally important to the direction that the FST was to take. After a brief hiatus in Africa to work on his own writing, O'Neal returned in the summer of 1970 to work full-time as the artistic director of the FST. Dent, eager to spend more time on his own writing, resigned from the employment

³⁷³ O'Neal, Interview by the author, 2010.
³⁷⁴ Ibid.
³⁷⁵ Ibid.
with the theater that same month. As O'Neal re-took the reigns of the FST, he would institutionalize the workshop format as the center of the theater's programs and aesthetics. Although O'Neal's approach to this workshop program diverged from Dent, Costley, and Salaam's, and the conditions in the city in the 1970s also diverged from the crisis situation of the late 1960s, O'Neal would generate a lasting second-line-informed institutional form in Central City that continues to shape artistic production there today. At the same time, Dent moved away from administration to focus on the more intimate aspects of community building that appealed to him most—those that tended towards collaborative, democratic art-making about New Orleans history and public blues cultures.

The Post-Urban Crisis Institutionalization of FST and BLKARTSOUTH Aesthetics

In contrast to Dent, who had organized FST's workshops out of a personal desire to engage in collaborative artistic work with the cultures and histories of New Orleans, O'Neal sought to build on the success of the FST's workshops by broadening them into a professional theater and playwriting educational program. Throughout the 1970s, O'Neal ran the workshop program, which drew students from around the city's local high schools, universities, and community colleges to participate in twice-weekly acting, writing, or technical theater classes. The FST had, by 1970, moved to Central City, a rapidly decaying neighborhood adjacent to downtown New Orleans that had its own

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376 Technically, Dent resigned because there were no more funds to pay him. But in his letters and journals he reveals that this resignation also aligned with his personal desire to move away from administration and take time for his own writing. See O'Neal, letter to Dent, Oct 22, 1970, Incoming Letters, Tom Dent Collection, Amistad Research Center.
377 Free Southern Theater workshop guidelines, student lists, and curricula, 1970-76, Roll 19, Box 58, Folders 6-9; Roll 18, Box 54, Folders 24-30 and Box 55, Folders 24-31, Free Southern Theater records, Amistad Research Center.
378 Box 52, Folder 16, Free Southern Theater Records, Amistad Research Center.
public housing developments. Dent, Salaam, Gex, Cha Jua, and the other members of BLKARTSOUTH remained working with O'Neal during this period, at least until 1973 when O'Neal's embrace of Marxism alienated other former FST members who embraced Pan-Africanism. The theater's new location and its widening educational program, made it into a regular "scene" that included popular weekly "coffeehouse" discussions, where local poets also performed before interactive audiences, including many youth and children. The FST also produced a popular local newsletter and a regular show on New Orleans's public access channel. This show, *Nation Time*, was the first televised African American news and review program to be shown on New Orleans television. It featured music and performance reviews as well as political analyses of rising black politician networks who were transforming the local political racial regime. *Nation Time* exhibits the changed nature of FST audiences in this new decade.

Once the urban crisis resolved itself into new forms of geographical class and racial oppression, New Orleans became, for the first time since before the Civil War, a majority Black city with a rising class of black politicians at the helm of the city's government and public institutions. The height of the revolutionary movement was over, and so was the War on Poverty. The new era was characterized by the individual pursuit of upward mobility. Black working-class communities were now largely contained and labeled as "projects" whose residents were considered by both the black and white middle-class to be officially guilty of failing to lift themselves out of dire poverty. Black Theatre took on a new role in the city during this period. Lacking a national social justice movement, the job of Black Theatre in the mid-1970s, as it was conceptualized by most of its

379 See Chapter Five for a discussion of the neoliberal destruction of these housing developments after Hurricane Katrina.
380 Salaam, Interview by the author, October 6, 2009.
381 Box 17, Folders 9-17, Free Southern Theater records, Amistad Research Center.
participants, was to either do educational work or to produce professional work that would lead its artists to mainstream success. In its new home in Central City, the FST did both of these things.

The FST advertised itself on mainstream Soul radio stations and counted mainstream New Orleanians, including members of the City Council, among its supporters. In 1972, Mayor Landrieu created "FST week." The theater continued to struggle with financial difficulties. It also struggled to fill seats at its performances. Yet, the theater's apprentices and ensemble members (increasingly drawn from local and regional areas) often built on the experiences in the FST as the first step towards careers on "Broadway, television and Hollywood silver screens," where they would compete with the rising stars of Blaxploitation films. In many ways, this third incarnation of the FST can be interpreted as the theater's final enjoyment of the fruits of all its previous conflicts and labors.

While the "FST 3" achieved a notable impact on New Orleans's public sphere and helped to "sound" the experiences of working-class black residents throughout the city's media and artistic landscapes, the one thing that the FST did not continue to do was to create work out of Dent's jazz paradigm for artistic development. O'Neal's turn to Marxism and his single-handed dedication to keeping the theater going even when its other leaders pulled out transformed the new FST into a place where artists and community members could gain a critical and theoretical education about global systems of oppression. O'Neal's FST's post-urban crisis approach, which chose to create art using the class-based Marxist lens, was initially less successful than BLKARTSOUTH in pursuing the more messy and challenging process of creating counter-hegemonic

knowledges and geographies from the ground up. But, as my next chapters show, O’Neal’s difficult decade of art making within the challenges of the post-urban crisis city would drive him, in the 1980s and '90s, to partner with community-based theatre makers in other dis-privileged (black and white) Southern communities and develop critically important new methods for generating public storytelling and collaborative art making. Generating these methods required the show creation of new cross-racial and cross-regional arts-based social justice coalitions. While O’Neal, Dent, Salaam, and the other FST artists were participating in growing these networks, O'Neal also developed a passion and a talent for playwriting.

O’Neal was a prolific playwright throughout the 1970s. He produced a show for nearly each of the FST's "semester" programs. Both FST students and the new, local ensemble of professional black actors performed in these productions. O'Neal's plays contrasted with the Pan-Africanist productions that were taking place at the Dashiki Theater nearby. With the exception of the beautifully constructed history pageant, Where is the Blood of Your Fathers, they tended to be social realist dramas. Unlike Dent and Salaam's plays, O'Neal's productions included large casts and several acts (a purposeful tactic of O'Neal's that allowed him to place and pay as many apprentices and theater students as possible on stage during each production). In a manner similar to Dent and Salaam's, these plays tended to specifically address political issues black communities in New Orleans faced at the time. For instance, When the Opportunity Scratches, Itch It (1975), is a comedy about the mid-1970s campaign to build a highway over the Mississippi Bridge. This urban renewal project would have required the destruction of

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384 Cohen-Cruz, "Conflicting the Afflicted and Afflicting the Comfortable," 294.
385 The FST's campaign against the construction of this bridge began in 1970 and continued to 1973. See, for instance, "Here Come De' Bridge!: 3000 Blacks to Go!!" in The Plain Truth, January 22, 1970, 1. Series 1, Box 9, Folder 2, Free Southern Theater Records, Amistad Research Center.
yet another African American community in New Orleans—Gert Town. The play mocks the black bourgeoisie, black clergy, and white businessmen for taking advantage of any opportunity to profit at the expense of the poor. The play's gutsy satire differed from earlier collaborative, blues-based performance aesthetics of the Black Mind Jockeys. But it was effective. Largely as a result of *Opportunity* and the FST newsletter's public investigation of the highway plans, a grassroots campaign emerged that successfully prevented the highway from being built. Similarly, as I noted in my introduction, *Hurricane Season* (1973) presciently predicted the global economic impact of the modernizations of US ports and drew on second-line knowledges to argue for structures of cross-generational and cross-racial active listening as the only solution to preventing a cataclysmic economic restructuring that would squash unionized labor.

During the 1970s, O'Neal had to face a sharp decline in funding for the arts, especially for African American artists. The practical requirements of artistic survival in the competitive foundation funding marketplace and the dire conditions of the de-industrialized city required the theater to focus on promoting individual education and success for the sake of community success. In the post-civil rights, post-Model Cities era, radical black arts institutions were the antithesis of what city policy makers and national funders wanted to fund. Revolutionary artists could only survive if they had other "gigs." The city's second line parading traditions went on as they always did—as the radical democratic "leisure" practices of working-class men and women who spent their days and often their nights working at low-paying jobs. Meanwhile, O'Neal felt it was abusive to require professional black actors to rehearse and perform for little or no pay. Unwilling to continue running an organization that he felt weakened rather than strengthened black

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386 O'Neal, 1976 Program Report, Series 1, Box 5, Folder 7, Free Southern Theater Records, Amistad Research Center.
387 O'Neal, Interview by the author, 2010.
artists, he decided to close the FST and dedicate his time to supporting himself as an artist. In 1980, he wrote Don't Start Me Talking Or I'll Tell You Everything I Know: Sayings from the Life and Writing of Junebug Jabbo Jones.\(^{388}\) This one-man show (the first of O'Neal's five, widely acclaimed Junebug Jabbo Jones plays) enabled him to go on tour and continue to build theatre in New Orleans without having to worry about raising salaries for multiple performers. O'Neal did not formally celebrate the death of the FST until 1985, when he organized a jazz funeral and reunion for the theater. This funeral celebrated the birth of a new organization that O'Neal believed would help take the place of the FST—Junebug Productions. O'Neal served as Artistic Director of Junebug until June, 2010.\(^{389}\) In addition to Junebug, myriad theater and civil rights organizations emerged in New Orleans and in the Deep South as a result of FST veterans' post-FST work.\(^{390}\)

Chapters Three and Four will discuss Junebug's influential aesthetic practices, which revolve around practices of public storytelling. For now, however, I conclude by reflecting on the death and rebirth of BLKARTSOUTH. BLKARTSOUTH formally dissolved in 1971. But it still has not died. In contrast to the FST, which had to go on as an artistic institution complete with yearly programs, grant writing requirements and monthly rent payments, Dent and Salaam's writing collectives continued on in different

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\(^{388}\) For an excellent analysis of O'Neal's Junebug plays see Downey, "The Mythic Framework of John O'Neal and the Rise of Junebug Jabbo Jones."

\(^{389}\) In June, 2011, O'Neal retired. Gamal Abdel Chasten, formerly of the New York ensemble, Universes, took his place as Artistic Director of Junebug Productions.

\(^{390}\) As Cohen Cruz notes in "Comforting the Afflicted and Afflicting the Comfortable," organizations that the FST inspired and influenced include the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond (directed by FST associate Ron Chisolm. See Chapter Five for more on this), Students at the Center, the American Festival Project, and New Orleans theaters such as Dashiki, Nat Turner, Ethiopian, Congo Square, and Act I Theater and Festival. Furthermore, Dent and O'Neal participated in creating the Southern Black Cultural Association, a regional organization that "facilitate[d] support among black theaters." 296. Finally, and importantly, as I argue below, the FST legacy helped construct the regional arts organization, Alternate Roots.
iterations throughout the 1970s at the same time as their participants pursued related writing and teaching careers. During the transitional years of 1970-74, Dent and Salaam began to generate more self-sustaining ways to publish the work of black Southern writers. For instance, Debt and Jerry Ward worked with Charles H. Rowell to create *Callaloo*, the now world-famous journal of African American literature and culture that would be supported by university funding. Salaam founded and became editor of *The Black Collegian*, a journal that aimed to strengthen new Black Studies programs in colleges by supporting the needs and interests of African American students. Dent and Salaam went on to also focus on producing individual poetry books by BLKARTSOUTH authors, including themselves. They were, in effect, broadening their literary movement in the same way they broadened the FST's performance-based movement, by creating new media and literary spaces from which black art could be produced.

Dent and then Salaam's writing workshops thrived in New Orleans for four decades after the demise of BLKARTSOUTH. These workshops were not publication focused, although they did produce publications.\(^{391}\) Organizationally and pedagogically, the workshops reflected Dent's deep interest in building a community of writers who were engaged with each other's work and with New Orleans cultures, realities, and histories. They were democratic and discussion-based. In the words of Gex-Breaux, they were "educational without being academic."\(^{392}\) As a result of Dent and Salaam's

\(^{391}\) The most notable of these is the 1977 *Black River Journal*, which Dent organized with the Congo Square Writer's Union. This journal presented poetry, oral histories, and analyses of black music, culture, histories, and geographies in the de-industrializing city. Its depth and its uniqueness calls out for a full analysis in a separate research project. Also, Salaam and Kysha Brown's *Fertile Ground: Memories and Visions* (New Orleans: Runagate Press, 1996) came out of Nommo Literary Society and is a notable later rendition of the *Nkombo* publication aesthetic.

workshop and publication programs, many African American poets in New Orleans today emerged from the BLKARTSOUTH legacy, which included Dent's 1970s Congo Square Writer's Union and Salaam's 1980s and 90s Nommo Literary Society. In the 1990s, these workshop communities morphed to a new role in the New Orleans public schools when Salaam began leading the Students at the Center program, which I have described elsewhere.

Dent's 1968-69 play Ritual Murder is perhaps the best example of the way his investment in New Orleans's African diasporic history and his partnerships with the Blk Mind Jockeys generated a lasting impact on not only literature and theater in New Orleans but on its neighborhoods and public sphere. First staged in 1976 and produced almost every year since in New Orleans, Ritual Murder tells the story of a barroom murder in which a young black man, Joe Brown, killed his best friend, James Roberts. The performance consists of individual narratives by Joe's family, friends, mentors, and the police. But none, not even Joe who speaks to the audience from jail, arrive at an analysis of why the murder occurred. Instead, they provide the audience with images of Joe that reflect what they desired from him or why they dismissed him as a black man on a pre-ordained path to murder. Only the audience, the play implies, can, by listening to and observing their performances as parts of a whole, provide an answer as to why Joe Brown killed his best friend. Only they can explain and thus help to stop the "ritual

393 The list of these writers includes former Louisiana poet laureate, Brenda Marie Osbey, author/professor Tony Bolden, and rising, nationally known poets Sunni Patterson and Saddhi Khalil.
394 Michna, "Stories at the Center." See also Buras et al., Pedagogy, Policy, and the Privatized City.
395 Ritual Murder has been staged in a variety of non-traditional theater venues from schools, to community centers, to bars. Cha Jua has directed or produced most of these stagings of the play. The last staging (and the first one that I had a chance to attend) occurred in August of 2010 at the Ashé Cultural Arts Center, a community and arts development center that is a contemporary inheritor of the FST and BLKARTSOUTH performance and organizing traditions in Central City.
m Murders" that occur around the city each night as frustrated young black men like Joe Brown look out and come to terms, in unpredictable ways, with the limits that have been placed on their futures.

Cha Jua, who directed the play's premiere and went on to direct it around the New Orleans region frequently for the next two decades, explains that the play led naturally to audience discussions in which the audience would arrive at a systemic analysis of the causes of violent crime in working-class African American neighborhoods in New Orleans. By provoking broad audience debate and public story sharing, Ritual Murder has, over the course of the past four decades, expanded second-line geographies and knowledges to reach a wide spectrum of the city's population. It has done so during an era when many members of the play's local audience—middle-class and educated African American residents—have been physically and culturally moving away from these blues legacies. Dent died in 1998. Today, however, Ritual Murder, like many other aspects of his work, continues to bring diverse and oppositional groups of New Orleans residents together in a performance-based, democratic space where they can re-think and re-make their understandings of each other and of their city. This work was Tom Dent's offering to the city of his childhood. And in this offering, he transformed New Orleans into a place where he and others like him wanted to stay.

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Cha Jua, Interview by the author.
Chapter Three: Story Circles, Educational Resistance, and the Students at the Center Program Before and After Hurricane Katrina

On June 7, 2004, a group of students from Frederick Douglass High School led a second line from their school on St. Claude Avenue in the Upper Ninth Ward, through Bywater, their school's gentrifying, racially diverse residential neighborhood.\textsuperscript{397} Joined by teachers, parents, and a small crowd of local organizers and artists, the students' parade came to a stop at a set of train tracks on the corner of Press and Royal Streets. Here on these tracks on June 7, 1892, Homer A. Plessy, a shoemaker and educational activist, had been arrested for boarding a whites-only train car owned by the East Louisiana Railroad Company. Plessy’s step of civil disobedience was a planned act that the Citizen’s Committee, a civil rights group led by Afro-Creole elites and supported by African Americans throughout New Orleans, organized to generate a legal challenge Louisiana’s Separate Car Act of 1890.\textsuperscript{398} Douglass students designed their 2004 parade to honor and remember their actions.

The students' march was part of a day of events that composed the second annual "Plessy Day." Students at the Center (SAC), a writing and digital media program in New Orleans public schools co-directed by Salaam and veteran educator, Jim Randels, organized this commemoration in partnership with the (Frederick) Douglass Community Coalition (DCC). In the years just before Katrina struck, the DCC consisted of a rising network of local residents and community and arts organizations that was working to

\footnote{397 A previous version of this chapter appeared as part of my article, "Stories at the Center: Story Circles, Educational Organizing, and the Fate of Neighborhood Public Schools in New Orleans." American Quarterly 61.3 (2009): 529-556. The work represented in this chapter has since been broadly revised.}

\footnote{398 Medley, \textit{We as Freemen: Plessy v. Ferguson}; Scott, “The Atlantic World and the Road to Plessy v. Ferguson.”}
empower communities and schools in the Ninth Ward. SAC and the DCC's efforts centered on transforming Douglass High, a low-performing, low-income, 99% African American neighborhood public school, into a full-service community school and site of libratory, community-based education. Plessy Day was one of many interrelated events, programs, and public celebrations that they developed in their work to accomplish this goal. 399

Plessy Day 2004 began in the auditorium at Douglass where SAC students invited parents and community members to view floor to ceiling banners containing stories from *The Long Ride*, a SAC student-authored anthology about the long civil rights movement in New Orleans. The students also read their stories aloud. After these readings, they invited their audience to participate with them in a public, embodied sounding and convergence of local memories and histories of resistance in the Bywater's racially divided streets. When their parade came to a stop at Press and Royal Streets, the students divided the crowd into black and white groups. Eleventh grader Christopher Burton called out “All Aboard!” 400 Then, the students led the groups along imaginary stops on the railroad tracks. There, they performed short re-enactments that they had composed in collaboration with ArtSpot Productions, a local community-based performance company, of key moments in New Orleans's civil rights history.

Standing in the background of these performances was one of the city’s most elite public institutions—the newly constructed riverfront site of the New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts (NOCCA)—a prized, public arts high school that was (and remains)

399 The DCC's larger goals, as articulated in a 2003 grant application to the Ford Foundation, included connecting these programs at Frederick Douglass High School to nearby elementary and middle schools, especially Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary School in the Lower Ninth Ward. The DCC became, for a time, the Douglass/King coalition. *The Role of Art and Culture in Community Development*, Junebug Productions, Inc., Proposal to the Ford Foundation/Partnership for Livable Communities Program (2003).

400 Christopher Burton, Interview by the author.
nearly completely inaccessible to the African American working-class students who live in the neighborhood where it is located. Douglass students designed Plessy Day's events to inspire reflections on what it meant for them to stand, locked outside NOCCA's sculpted gates. By doing so, they also reminded participants and observers of how the long struggle for social justice and democracy in New Orleans has always relied on residents' collective, bodily expressions of resistant African diasporic geographies and memories in the city's public spaces.

One year after the students' second line and performance on the tracks, the Louisiana legislature declared Plessy Day to be an official state holiday. This vote, which occurred just a few months before Hurricane Katrina, was a triumph for SAC and the various organizations that made up the DCC. For the past three years, they had worked both to establish Plessy Day as a prominent city-wide holiday and to plan the construction of an interactive civil rights memorial park beside the tracks at Press and Royal Streets. In 2004, Reggie Lawson, director of the Crescent City Peace Alliance, a leading member of the DCC, had acquired a lease to this land. Lawson turned to SAC students and local sculptor John Scott, a friend and longterm colleague of Dent and Salaam's, to design a plan for the park. Scott and SAC's design for the park would have constructed it as an interactive site where residents from all backgrounds in New Orleans could participate in acts of public storytelling that would enable them to critically and collaboratively engage with divergent perspectives on the city's present-day inequities and problems. Both this design and SAC and the DCC's yearly pre-Katrina Plessy Day celebrations expressed their vision for the transformation of New Orleans through the creation of agonistic, discursive democratic practices. Drawing on and expanding

\[\text{Reggie Lawson, Interview by the author.}\]

\[\text{Ibid.}\]
BLKARTSOUTH and FST aesthetics and adapting them to public education within the neoliberal city, this vision understood the resistant knowledges, collaborative art making practices, and re-spatializing tactics of New Orleans's public blues cultures to be central to just and sustainable practices of local education and urban reform.

Because SAC and the DCC understood the health of schools and communities in New Orleans (or any city) to be mutually constitutive, they brought together a range of arts, social justice, and neighborhood organizations in New Orleans to create a shared vision and purpose. In DCC projects, theater companies (John O'Neal's Junebug Productions, ArtSpot Productions, and Dog and Pony Theater) partnered with teachers and students from SAC, the Urban Heart 21st Century Learning Centers (an SAC-based tutoring and school enrichment project in five middle and elementary schools), and the Algebra Project (Bob Moses's national math program revered for its democratic pedagogy and community-centered approach to mathematic training). Other DCC members included the Greater New Orleans Data Center (a local history and mapping organization), The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond (a New Orleans-based, and nationally renowned anti-racist training organization), the Ashé Cultural Arts Center (a cultural development center in Central City), and a range of neighborhood organizations, churches, small businesses, and residents. Finally, and importantly, the DCC's leaders were all members of and worked in partnerships with Community Labor United (CLU), a rising city-wide social justice organizing group that began in 1998 and was “committed to the holistic transformation of New Orleans communities through bottom-up

403 I discuss Ashé CAC's work at length in Chapter Five. Other groups in the DCC included the National Performance Network (a national network of community arts organizations), Small Learning Communities at Douglass and McDonogh 35 High School, Algiers Bywater Weed and Feed, and numerous churches and neighborhood associations.
SAC's daily contact with students in the Ninth Ward was the central thread that connected both the DCC's arts and social justice organizations directly with the stories, needs, cultural traditions, and social visions of families in the Ninth Ward. Through SAC, the diverse organizations in the DCC came to understand New Orleans's neighborhood schools to be the public institutions that were the most accessible to and, in fact, belonged to the disadvantaged communities they served.\textsuperscript{405} In the vein of SNCC, BLKARTSOUTH, and FST, they identified most with the students and families who were either left behind or out of the city and the nation’s economy—“people who were seen by some as the scraps, the remnants, the discarded ones.”\textsuperscript{406} They came to view the classrooms of New Orleans’s neighborhood public schools as the Freedom Schools of today.

Dis-remembered by popular post-Katrina narratives about the Ninth Ward that render it into a disorganized, victimized place, in the years just before Katrina, SAC and the DCC's model for education reform and urban democracy building soon had begun to shape the visions of rising national arts, education, and social justice organizations—from the Algebra Project, to INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, to the Community Arts Network, and the Breadloaf School of Writing. Sadly, however, this powerful local

\textsuperscript{404} The Role of Art and Culture in Community Development, 6. This grant, while unsuccessful, outlines the DCC’s goals in a useful way. The DCC coalition attained more successful grants from a variety of local and national educational and arts foundations (often via Students at the Center), including (among others) the Ford Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, National Performance Network, Baptist Community Ministries, Spencer Foundation, and the Open Society Institute. Most notably, the grant they wrote to establish Urban Heart Learning Centers resulted in a 2.8 million dollar grant from the US Department of Education’s 21\textsuperscript{st} Century Community Learning Centers program. And in 2003, the organizations in the DCC wrote a grant that enabled them to work together as part of a year-long arts-based organizing project, Weaving the Web of Community, sponsored by the National Performance Network and funded by the NEA. For reflections on the role of CLU in pre- and post-Katrina New Orleans see Luft, "Beyond Disaster Exceptionalism"; Woods, "Do You Know What it Means?"; and Flaherty, Floodlines.  
\textsuperscript{405} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{406} Ransby, Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement, 273.
movement for radical democratic social and educational change was struck a dual blow when Katrina and the subsequent forces of disaster capitalism swept over New Orleans. As Naomi Klein, Clyde Woods, Kristen Buras, and others have noted, immediately after Katrina devastated the city, disaster capitalism swept in, attempting to erase New Orleans's subaltern memories and fragment its longstanding communities of resistance. The city's public schools were one of the first sites disaster capitalism attacked. In early 2006, the vast majority of New Orleans's public school teachers—including SAC teachers—were laid off. Most of these teachers were African American. Many of them were not able to ever recover their jobs as they were replaced with primarily white Teach for America teachers and teachers from other fast-track credentialing programs. Hand in hand with this racialized staffing overhaul was the handover of the vast majority of the city's schools to state control. Myriad charter schools also immediately rose up as a part of this restructuring. In the 2006-07 academic year, thirty-two of the city's fifty-three schools had become charter schools; by 2007-08, the number of charter schools had risen to forty-two. In the post-Katrina city, school "choice" for students emerged as the new ruling education reform ideology.

For the landscape of school "choice" to fully expand, the city's neighborhood schools, such as the ones in which SAC and the DCC grounded their work, could no longer be allowed to exist. Five years into this restructuring, thousands of New Orleans's most needy students spend hours on school buses each day to make their way to low-performing state-run schools far from their own neighborhoods, where they go when they

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407 Klein, The Shock Doctrine; Woods, "Les Misérables of New Orleans"; Buras, "We Have to Tell Our Story"; Lipsitz, "The Social Warrant of Hostile Privatism"; Katz, "Bad Elements"; Camp, "We Know This Place."

408 Buras et al, Pedagogy, Policy, and the Privatized City, 23.

409 Ibid. See also Dingerson, "Unlovely: How the Market is Failing the Children of New Orleans"; Compton and Weiner, The Global Assault on Teaching, Teachers, and Their Unions; and Tuzzolo and Hewitt, "Rebuilding Inequity."
fail to gain admission into or are "unchosen" by the popular or high performing charter schools that now exist in the buildings where neighborhood schools once stood.

Related to this re-structuring of schools was the simultaneous restructuring of the city's public health and housing institutions. As Charity Hospital and New Orleans's public housing developments were shuttered, a tide of "mixed-income" developers and well-meaning non-profit and social justice organizations swept in to fill the voids they left behind. These developers and organizations often wanted to help New Orleanians, but they tended to be unwilling to learn or unskilled at listening to the local histories and politics of place that defined the pre-Katrina city. In the face of the destruction of their homes, communities, and the public institutions that served them and with which they often identified, many Frederick Douglass and Ninth Ward students never made it home after the storm. In fact, forty-three percent of the city's public school students from before the storm (ninety percent of whom were African American) have not yet returned.

This chapter compares SAC and the DCC's pre- and post-Katrina work and social visions in order to cast light on the uniquely destructive effects of neoliberal education reforms on possibilities for grassroots resistance and agonistic, pluralistic, democracy-

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410 Flaherty, *Floodlines*; Woods, "Les Misérables of New Orleans"; Camp, "'We Know This Place.'"
412 Bill Quigley, Davida Finger and Lance Hill, "New Orleans Five Years After Katrina." This study also notes that thirty percent of Social Security and Medicaid recipients have not returned. Furthermore, as the Greater New Orleans Data Center's research shows, since Katrina, the city's public housing apartments have been reduced by 75%, with 5000 units bulldozed and few replaced. Nearly all of these units were occupied by African American families. Today, almost 30,000 families are on the wait list for housing vouchers (more than double than in 2004). Even for homeowners, recovery has been skewed by race. Majority African American neighborhoods that experienced less flood impact, such as Central City, St. Roch, St. Claude, and the Seventh Ward, have seen between a 55% to 78% return rate. Meanwhile, in majority white neighborhoods like Uptown and the heavily flooded Lakeview over 95% of residents have returned. Additionally, high-ground neighborhoods such as the Bywater and the Lower Garden District that were, formerly, racially mixed communities with large African American populations, are now gentrifying, growing, and majority white. Plyer, "Neighborhood Recovery Rates, 2010." See also Robertson, "Smaller New Orleans After Katrina."
building in cities. Grassroots organizations similar to SAC and the DCC exist in lower-income urban neighborhoods around the nation where students, teachers, and community members are seeking radical change and increased autonomy in teaching and learning practices that shape their neighborhoods. In other cities, charter schools have often facilitated the growth of these progressive programs. However, in recent years the charter school movement has become affiliated with the neoliberal educational reforms that seek to transform public education systems in US cities into market-based systems. As I will show, in post-Katrina New Orleans, this market-based approach to solving the problems in urban education has facilitated the neoliberal policies of "accumulation by dispossession" that are currently transforming the city's inner core, especially its historic African American neighborhoods, into a playground for white, middle-class professionals. While neoliberal reform has had similar or related effects on cities around the globe, in New Orleans, state-sponsored neoliberal privatization schemes occurred much more swiftly and, to some extent, more broadly than elsewhere.

The "legalized corporate looting" of public institutions in New Orleans forced groups like SAC and the DCC to quickly adapt their organizing and resistant knowledge-building efforts to confront the new forms of institutional racism that constructed the

413 Woods, Development Arrested and "Les Misérables of New Orleans."
414 Examples include The Algebra Project and the Young People’s Project (YPP) in Cambridge, MA; Baltimore, MD; Halifax County, NC; Jackson, MS; Petersburg, VA; Summerton, SC; and Miami, FL; the Hazel Johnson School in Chicago, IL; the Southeast Education Task Force in Baltimore, MD; and the Power Writing Program in Bronx, NY. See Moses and Cobb, Radical Equations; Fisher, "Open Mics and Open Minds," "From the Coffee House to the School House," and Writing in Rhythm.
415 Harvey, Brief History of Neoliberalism, 178. Harvey defines neoliberal tactics of accumulation by dispossession as central to the recapturing of wealth from the middle and laboring class to the dominant class. This contemporary strategy of global capitalism "entails a very different set of practices from accumulation through the expansion of wage labour in industry and agriculture... [i]t is fragmented and particular—a privatization here, an environmental degradation there, a financial crisis of indebtedness somewhere else. It is hard to oppose all of this specificity and particularity without appeal to universal principles. Dispossession entails the loss of rights" (my itals.).
city's new neoliberal reality. Speaking about SAC, Salaam reflected to me in an interview:

Katrina was “the long march” for us. Have you ever studied the Chinese revolution? Mao writes about the moment when they thought they had lost for good, then there was a long march from Jiangxi to Shaanxi. They hardly survived, but when it was over, they were stronger for it. This was us with Katrina and everything that happened after.  

Investigating the "long march" of SAC and the DCC through post-Katrina education reform towards new modes of cultural and educational resistance in the neoliberal city reveals the adaptive power of second-line-inspired knowledges and art making to envision and enact radical democratic spaces in the city, even under the most repressive circumstances. Equally important, it underscores what is at stake in other cities, if neighborhood schools are completely dismantled as they were in New Orleans in 2006, and if community-based education disappears from the public "education marketplace."

**SAC and Neo-Griot Beginnings**

The idea for SAC emerged in 1996, after Randels and a group of his high-performing students in a US Literature and Writing class at McDonogh 35 High School spent a year studying and discussing the existing inequities in New Orleans schools. New Orleans’s pre-Katrina school system placed the better resourced and better performing students of all racial and class backgrounds in “signature” or “magnet” schools. This class, race, and performance-based system of “new” segregation produced an “educational brain drain” within the city’s neighborhood public schools that caused those schools to face more challenges with fewer human resources—in the form of both students and teachers—than the city’s elite district-wide schools.  

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417 Salaam, Interview by the author, October 6, 2009.
418 Salaam, “We Stand By Our Students: Students at the Center,” 150.
who [were] left behind stay[ed] behind." The reality of these assertions becomes clear when one looks at statistics for Douglass High and the other two public schools on St. Claude Avenue before the storm. In 2005, nearly all the students at Drew Elementary School, Colton Middle School, and Douglass were African American. They were among the poorest in the city (and the country). Their performance on standardized tests was low. In the 2003, 70% or more of Douglass's 10th and 11th grade students failed the state’s Language Arts, Mathematics, Science and Social Science Graduate Exit Exam. Meanwhile, at McDonogh 35, a “choice” school that recruited high performing students from working-class African American neighborhoods like the Ninth Ward, less than 10% failed the same test.

These skewed test scores reveal schools like Douglass to have been working just as they were intended to—as the foundation of what Bob Moses, the founder of the Algebra Project, calls the "sharecropper education system." This system was designed to produce low-wage workers with internalized low self-expectations. SAC's main goal, as it emerged, became counteracting the sharecropper education system by producing forms of education that were "collective and social" rather than individual-based. As Randels and his students talked about how they benefited from the inequalities in this system, they came to believe that “students learn best when they teach and when they apply to community improvement and liberation what they learn in the classroom.”

They realized that the city would “never fund education the way it needs to be funded and

419 Ibid.
420 Sparrow, A Problem of Memory, 134.
421 At Benjamin Franklin High School, my alma mater and the only public high school in the city with a majority of middle-class and white students, no one failed and most students performed at “mastery” level or above. Louisiana Department of Education, 2003-2004 GEE scores report.
422 Ibid.
423 Moses, quoted in Sparrow, A Problem of Memory, 152.
424 Randels, “It’s the Working Conditions, Not the Teacher,” 52.
425 Ibid.
the way national professional organizations recommend."426 So they wrote grants for outside funding in order to create the small, student-centered classrooms where students could learn best. Soon, the organization they named SAC established classes in three public high schools in New Orleans, including Douglass High.427 Salaam joined the SAC team as writer-in-residence and, a few years later, as codirector.

SAC's guiding principles are: Start with what you know to learn what you don't know. Start with where you're at to get where you want to go. To achieve these goals, in SAC’s fifteen pre-Katrina classrooms teachers and students strove collectively to ask questions about the world in which they lived and the history that went into making that world.428 Students learned to see their schools as places within which they could imagine, struggle for, and institute social change.429 They conceived of the surrounding community as their true classroom. SAC’s writing and literature pedagogy reflected these beliefs. As former SAC student Maria Hernandez explains, because SAC “students and teachers sit in a story circle that is neutral ground . . . nobody is better than anyone else, not even the teachers. Every class member’s story is an important contribution to the

426 Ibid.
427 My analysis of SAC’s pre-Katrina methods comes from classroom observations in 2009, from interviews with SAC staff, and from the following sources: Students at the Center, Writing with Light, DVD; Students at the Center, Katrina and Me; Buras et al. Pedagogy, Policy and the Privatized City; Hernandez, “Worse Than Those Six Days at the Dome” and “Students at the Center: It’s a Family Affair”; Jones, “In the Beginning”; Carr, “Public Education in New Orleans: Reflections on the 50th Anniversary of Brown v. Board of Education”; Kelly, “Reflections on Writing ‘Resistance,’”; Randels, “It’s the Working Conditions, Not the Teacher,” “Public Schools: They’re Trying to Wash Us Away,” After the Storm Blog, and Student Stories: A Classroom Chronicle Blog. In addition, Salaam, Burton, and Jones’s presentations on SAC methodology and the current state of public education in New Orleans at Boston College on November 16 and 17, 2007 were useful to my analysis.
428 Salaam, “The Student Learns. The Student Teaches,” 41. Because I want to emphasize the chronological development of SAC, my analysis of SAC’s pre-Katrina classes here is in past tense. However, it is important to note, despite the systematic changes in public schools in New Orleans, the SAC pedagogical techniques remain the same today.
429 Friere, Pedagogy of the Oppressed; Giroux, Border Crossings; hooks, Teaching to Transgress; and Shor, Empowering Education: Critical Teaching for Social Change.
class.” A sense of trust in their teachers and peers enabled students who otherwise might not be comfortable sharing written work to do so. Early in the year, SAC teachers also began to add new voices and ideas to the circle in the form of readings such as Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave” and Assata Shakur’s autobiography. As former SAC student and current SAC staff member Christopher Burton noted in an interview, SAC teachers initiated the discussion of these texts by asking students to relate the texts to their own lives. Randels explains that this method "creates classroom conditions in which students can have as much expertise and knowledge as the teacher. . . . For students who have not had much prior success in traditional educational settings (or who come from families with this history), such conditions are vital to developing academic success." He adds, "In our classes and our story circles, [our students] learn that [their] experiences can infuse and inform the way [they] write about the history of [their] city." When Salaam joined SAC in 1997, SAC expanded its pedagogy methods into the realm of digital media production. Soon, SAC students' city-wide school newspaper, Our Voice, their videos, and their student-authored literary anthologies were sweeping over New Orleans.

As we have learned, a central aspect of the second-line aesthetic is its adaptability to the contexts of changing historic and geographic eras. Building on this aesthetic and working to address and take advantage of the cultural and social changes that have resulted from the digital era, in the 1990s Salaam had developed a new form of filmmaking called “neo-griot.” Neo-griot filmmaking combines the practices of

430 Hernandez, “Students at the Center,” 37.
431 Christopher Burton, Interview by the author.
433 Ibid. See also Randels’s discussion (coauthored with Tulane University School of Health researcher Adam Becker and SAC student Damien Theodore) in “Project BRAVE: Engaging Youth as Agents of Change in a Youth Violence Prevention Project.”
traditional West African storyteller/historians, or “griots,” with the new artistic possibilities of the digital media revolution. According to Salaam, "The neo-griot concept, starts from the prospective of writers who are grounded in their particular community and who deal with both the history of their community and critical commentary on the contemporary conditions of their community." Neo-griot production enables community-based "writing with text, sound and light" including: "the internet and . . . "pdf" formats and publishing on demand for radio, DVD, and internet distribution.

The neo-griot concept influenced SAC's emergence as a kind of contemporary BLKARTSOUTH with the added, important component of working inside public schools, where students from all backgrounds and with all kinds of interests had the opportunity to join their work. As former SAC student and staff member Ashley Jones notes, "Teaching [students] how to take their own experiences and express them through images forced them to analyze their lives. Every image says something distinctive, so one has to be conscious of the message an image can transit." For example, she adds, "In thinking critically about how to shoot a fight with a family member, [or] a hard decision made, these young people begin to think critically about who they are and what they can become." Neo-griot production methods appeal especially to youth, who can benefit in multiple ways from being trained in digital production technology, and who can creatively imagine and seek local and national youth audiences through this work.

A good example of the varied and wide reach of neo-griot techniques on public school students and their families is the case of the 2002 SAC feature-length film Baby

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435 Salaam, "Neogriot: Writing with Text, Sound, and Light.”
436 Ibid.
437 Jones, "Rain," 55.
438 Ibid.
Love, which Jones produced in partnership with Salaam. Salaam and Jones developed this fictional, narrative-based film as a way to begin discussions in classrooms and other educational programs about the intersectional nature of the most pressing, personal issues facing urban students today: poverty, racism, sexuality, social violence, and education.

Educational researcher and SAC partner Kristen Buras observed SAC's multiplicitous use of this film in their classes at Douglass in 2007. She writes:

At the opening of a class session . . . a student mentioned Baby Love . . . One of the teachers retrieved a copy from a nearby cabinet and passed it around so students could view its jacket, which included a brief description of the film, colorful photos, and a list of scenes . . . Salaam and Jones . . . considered aloud with the class the intricacies of shooting one of the scenes. With curiosities' piqued, Salaam queried students, "Would you be interested in making a movie?" A chorus of voices responded, "Yes!" Salaam specified that this would require students to first write a script, which led him to query even further, "What do you want to make a movie about?"

Salaam then reminded students that they and their parents were invited to a screening of Baby Love later that week. A community discussion of the film would follow. As Buras explains, "the circulation of Baby Love reveals the permeable boundaries between classroom and community and makes visible the processes underlying SAC's ongoing co-productions," which center on "the construction of understanding and knowledge through community participation."

In pre- (and post-) Katrina classes, the neo-griot concept has enabled SAC students to take responsibility for telling their own stories and the stories of their communities using digital technology. Doing so has also helped SAC to appeal to a wide variety of students—from those interested in writing to those who wanted to gain the technical skills to work in media and music fields. Bringing these students together in the

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439 Buras, "'We Have to Tell Our Story,'" 40.
440 Ibid.
same classroom to create shared goals enabled the SAC program to produce a cadre of young people armed with the desire and the skills to influence the way their communities were represented in the local media and dominant public sphere.

Whether they were teaching video production, literature, history, or creative writing, SAC methods before Katrina, as today, centered on students sitting in a circle exchanging ideas and stories in a reciprocal, democratic fashion. SAC teachers began this approach to teaching through the practice of story circles. Randels and Salaam's interest in this technique came through a partnership with John O'Neal. Story circles soon became central to SAC's work not only in classrooms, but also in their community organizing and neighborhood cultural development projects. With the story circle method, SAC and their coalition partners brought their second-line informed educational practices from the classroom back into the community.

**Story Circles: An Overview**

As I noted in my introduction, O'Neal's Junebug Productions worked with Roadside Productions, a primarily white theater in the Appalachian district of Tennessee, to develop the story circle method. The method, which solidified slowly over the course of many years and a variety of projects during the 1970s and 80s, harkens back to O'Neal's initial search, in the early years of the FST, to expand audience participation. In their post-Civil Rights and Black Power eras work, Junebug and Roadside discovered that generating participation in cross-racial audiences was equally important to their goal of strengthening organized movements for social change. Yet, cross-racial dialogue was

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441 In addition to the sources I cite below, my analysis of the story circle method comes from my observations of story circles in multiple venues since 2005 in New Orleans and from John O'Neal's March 2010 Artistic Residency at Boston College, which I facilitated. I have also gained insights into this method from adapting it for use in college literature and writing courses and service projects for college students.
even more difficult to develop. Asking cross-racial audiences to talk about race, or even getting the artists they were working with to talk about race, often led to participants becoming angry or defensive, or shutting down. Building on FST audience interaction practices, Junebug and Roadside decided to "emphasize story rather than argument" because they understood that "stories tend to bring people together, to help them find common ground or at least to understand each other." They codified the story circle method as a practice that would assure equality and freedom within the storytelling process.

In story circles, a small group of people tell stories together and follow a set of pre-arranged rules that encourage active listening. In a manner reminiscent of jazz improvisation or second line dancing, story circle participants are asked not to plan their stories in advance. As they listen, they discover not only new information about the lives of their fellow storytellers, but also new modes of communication and new shapes for the telling of stories. The process seems simple on the surface—people sit together in a small group and tell stories. But story circles are not merely about the act of telling. As with a second line, whose meaning can only be felt with full, interdependent participation, the act of listening and the full body experience of being in the circle with others are more important to the story circle experience. In a typical story circle session, participants sit together in a room and divide into circles of between five to seven people. Each circle is led by a trained facilitator who reminds participants of the rules. Participants are asked to limit the length of their stories to a few minutes (the time is determined by the number of participants but is usually not more than five minutes per person). The stories can come from their personal experiences or dreams or reflections, but they cannot be in the form

of an argument, lecture, or debate.\textsuperscript{443} The facilitator usually begins with the first story and models for participants the way in which stories usually have a beginning, middle, and end. O'Neal recommends letting the circles then begin naturally, with any kind of story that occurs to participants to tell.

The story circle process reveals subjectivity to be constructed through forms of social interdependence that inhere in our embodied selves as well as our collective memories, which we collaboratively produce in our interactions with each other. As Carol Bebelle, a DCC member and the director of the Ashé Cultural Arts Center (which I discuss in more detail in Chapter Five) notes, "No matter what happens in the circle, what is important is that the storytellers usually come to realize that the content of the narratives they tell is produced as much or more by how they hear the stories of others than by what they originally seek to tell. Telling and listening in this way, the storytellers come to understand the interdependence of their narratives."\textsuperscript{444} Eye contact, body language, and subtle performance elements shape the content of each storyteller's narrative as much as words do. Listeners "speak" back in equally embodied ways as they lean forward or look into the eyes of the storyteller. Even though the storytellers remain in their seats and do not usually touch each other, this process produces a kind of improvisational dance between them. This "dance" moves with the energy of their bodies as much as it does from the exchange of narratives.

The story circle's structured, yet unpredictable form is another way in which it builds on the second-line aesthetic. O'Neal makes this connection explicit when he facilitates story circles. He begins the process with a musical "call" taken from an African American spiritual. The stories that follow function as a collaborative, whole-bodied

\textsuperscript{443} For an excellent and detailed outline of this method see Cornerstone Theater's story circle guidelines in Cohen-Cruz, \textit{Engaging Performance}, Appendix 2.

\textsuperscript{444} Bebelle, Interview by the author.
response to that call. Locked in the space of the circle, the words and body language of
the other narrators infuse each participant's conscious mind. I may have an idea about
what story I want to tell, but once the circle begins, there is an energy pushing at me from
the circle that shapes the words I put around my narrative. It may even require me to tell
a story I did not intend to tell. Unable, within the confines of the process, to respond with
empathetic words or questions to the other narratives, my response to the stories I hear
comes in the form of my own narrative. As Bebelle explains:

What it forces you to do is to hear your three-minute story, what it meant
to you, how it effected you, who were the other people in it. And I can't
make any other judgment about you except what it is that happened in
your story . . . it takes away all of this stuff that can kind of get in the way of
us being able to hear . . . the story circle has this intimacy that it builds
between people that gives people at least a minute to catch their breath,
where all of a sudden you're just not as sure any more.445

John Grimsley, DCC member and director of Dog and Pony Theater, likewise notes that
"Once you hear a piece of somebody's story it's like they materialize before you. You
drop a lot of assumptions about people that you have. It's a very healthy process."446

After everyone in the circle has told his or her story (and participants are free to
"pass" until they are ready to participate), the participants share verbal responses. These
responses are also carefully structured. The facilitator may ask participants to share quick
"snapshot" images of some or all the stories they heard. These images may include
sensory elements, such as smell or touch. Sharing these image-memories of others' stories
allows participants to convey how they heard the story and leads to dialogue with others
who heard the story differently. In addition to or instead of the image sharing process,
participants may be asked to comment on or ask a question about one or two of the
stories. Doing so encourages storytellers to construct new affective lines of

445 Bebelle, Interview by the author.
446 Grimsley, Interview by the author.
communication across the circle, expanding and complicating its energy. After this "talk-back" process, the storytellers usually find a way to share what they have learned in the circle with everyone in the room. This sharing process can take the form of a mini-performance, a group-devised song, a summary of their reflections on what they learned and how they felt during the process, or any other form the participants wish.

Inside the semi-public community spaces of community centers or public schools, SAC and DCC story circles created improvised affective communities akin to those that second lines generate. If these affective communities felt safe (and I am not asserting that this was always the case), it encouraged participants to push past personal discomfort to want to actively witness another's story and walk in another's shoes. As participants did so, their cognitive maps of the city and their understandings of their own identities and communities shifted, through empathy, to include and account for the perspectives of others. Of course, some story circles worked better than others. How the process was introduced, and how participants were trained or made open to the process by facilitators, influenced their willingness to fully engage in the process. Participants' choices also determined direction each circle took. For example, if a teller chose to narrate a difficult or traumatic story, the next storyteller may have chosen to continue along the same vein and narrate a troubling memory or a traumatic incident in his or her past. Sometimes, however, circles began with intense stories only to radically shift to a humorous tone.

The SAC methodological video "The Story Circle" underscores the unpredictable nature of story circles and how they construct empathetic improvisational communities for multiple purposes. This video depicts a 2003 story circle training session at

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447 For example, the Community Arts Network reflection on the use of the story circle process in their national convergence at Douglass High notes that failing to define the purpose for the process within this gathering confused participants and made it hard for new knowledges and ties of empathy to emerge. Assaf, "What Happened in New Orleans?"

448 Students at the Center, "The Story Circle."
Douglass High that O’Neal facilitated for the training benefit of national SAC partners and the US Department of Education's Office of Vocational and Adult Education. After O’Neal explains the method (with the help of SAC student Maria Hernandez), the participants decide that dreams, or wishes, will be the theme for their circle. Greta Gladney, an SAC administrator who was also the director of the Small Learning Communities grant that SAC developed at Douglass and McDonogh 35 High Schools, begins the circle by telling the story of the dream image she had in her mind when she began to pursue buying her first house. A single, working mother, she did not have much money to spend. But the image she had drawn of the home she wanted—a house with a front porch, a fence, and a tree to the side—compelled her to keep searching despite obstacles. After months of looking at houses and wondering how she could afford to make her dream a reality, she finally discovered a small house in the Lower Ninth Ward that was the image of which she had dreamed. She smiles as she tells the group that she bought the house. From Gladney's triumphant story emerges the story of Hans Meede, the visiting policy maker from the US DOE. Meede narrates his childhood dreams of flying and climbing mountains, yet fearing to fall. He goes on to describe how he watched his daughters grow up to have similar dreams. He learned from his own dreams and those of his daughters the value of taking risks to achieve one's desired vision.

As the circle goes around, Randels is reminded of the connection between dreams and social identity. He tells of a dream he had during his childhood as the son of a Baptist minister and his parents’ struggle to keep a roof over their heads. The dream represented a moment of hope and resilience, a reminder that even in the face of adversity, dreams can be a source of strength and inspiration.}

449 Gladney's house was destroyed as a result of Hurricane Katrina. Now the executive director of the Renaissance Project (SAC's administrative partner) and the wife of Jim Randels, Gladney later narrated the story of her work to rebuild her house twice (once by hand when she bought it and once after the storm) to Stephanie Stokes of the Times Picayune, who wrote about Gladney's return and rebuilding story in her series, The Long Road Home. See, among other pieces of this story, "She Drew a Dream Home, Found it in the Lower Nine."
preacher. 

Ironically, this dream was about the Christian prophecy of the rapture, but it helped to turn him away from a religious path. Randels—whom his pre-Katrina students often called Jesus because of his long hair and beard—explains that in his dream he told Jesus he did not "want to go" into the sky with the other Christians. This dream-world decision to remain behind influenced his eventual discovery of a new form of spirituality that inheres in collective, grounded struggle.

Salaam follows Randels's story by remembering a real life moment that influenced his philosophical life choices. He narrates a tale about the first time he heard Langston Hughes read his poetry. When a teacher in his segregated elementary school played a recording of Hughes for the class, hearing Hughes's voice and words made Salaam want to be a poet. Without realizing it, he went on to model his career on Hughes's multifaceted career of writing, editing, traveling, and mentoring. Salaam notes in conclusion, "Sometimes we have dreams and we don't even know we have them. But further in your life you will see certain patterns and that's because you were following your dream." 

After Salaam's story, several students narrate repetitive dreams and nightmares that they have had. Each, somehow, ended up becoming reality. O'Neal, in turn, tells the story of a repeated dream he had of being enclosed and trapped in a small space. He experienced this feeling in his waking life during a vacation to the Yucatan when he climbed up a narrow staircase to view a Jaguar god at the top of a pyramid.

As the circles go around, the tellers lean in to each other. They laugh and empathize, building their memories up and expanding from the images that others convey. After the stories have all been told, the neo-griot camera zooms in on Meede, the

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450 See Chapter Five for a narrative of Randels's sister, Kathy Randels', theatrical production, Go Ye Therefore . . ., which was based on a similar family story.

451 Salaam in Students at the Center, "Story Circle Methodology."
only person in the room who is new to this process. Viewers of the film realize that the unplanned subtext that emerged, linking every story in the circle, was the connection between the dreams of the New Orleans participants of a better public education system and a better city and their real-life, collaborative work to achieve these goals. Meede must understand this too because as the camera rests on him during the final discussion, he pulls back, wide-eyed, and seemingly not sure how to receive the knowledge he has just received and helped to make through his whole-bodied participation. As he struggles to process what he has learned, Salaam re-directs the conversation towards the value of this process for pedagogy. Story circles, he explains, free students' imaginations from the restriction of "having to make sense" all the time. In schools, he argues, one reason struggling students do not respond [internally] is because they fear not giving back the right answer. Story circles, in turn, allow students to "remove the white boy in your head telling you, you can't say this, you can't think that." Randels notes, in turn, that SAC builds interdisciplinary curricula from this practice: stories, he argues, can be seen as an "eco-system" of students' lives. They can be used in science and math to help students generate critical maps and graphic analyses of their worlds. Hernandez jumps in to tell how she remembers initially wondering in SAC classes what the point was of narrating her personal stories to a whole bunch of people she did not know. "It was like a trick," she explains. In the practice of telling stories, a sense of community emerged among her peers without them expecting or struggling for it.

SAC videos and books attest to how the sense of community that grew out of story circle-based pedagogy moved SAC students and community members from merely

452 Salaam in Students at the Center, "The Story Circle."
453 Randels in Ibid.
454 Hernandez in Ibid.
thinking and talking about how to change the world to acting directly to change it. As LaQuita Joseph, another SAC student at Douglass High, reflects in another video:

in many classes you are taught about people who make changes. But in SAC, we take this to another level. We are taught how to make change . . . our writings, videos, and our jobs that are provided for us, like Urban Heart where we tutor other students: this is true praxis—taking what we have learned and putting it into practice.455

For SAC, this praxis hinged on the “alternative concept of history rooted in individual memory” that story circles and neo griot production practices developed in their classrooms (mirroring New Orleans's public blues performances in public space).456

Former SAC student Adrinda Kelly explains this in a reflective essay she wrote about her time in SAC:

455 Joseph in "SAC 2003 Summer Session."
456 Kelly, "Reflections on Writing Resistance," 45.
As I listened to my classmates recount stories about their mothers and grandmothers, I realized that these histories—individual, small, local—were as, if not more, important to my burgeoning sense of self as the canonized histories used to order and divide time and place. These family stories—hidden histories, if you will—spoke to a social and cultural milieu that was defiantly African American and helped legitimate my developing sense of presence in and entitlement to this broad, various world.\textsuperscript{457}

Within this alternative, memory-based concept of history, students like Kelly found that they can “claim . . . a connection” to the histories of organized resistance that abound in New Orleans.\textsuperscript{458} As the next section shows, this connection caused students to understand themselves as social and political agents with the power to shape their own educations and help determine their city's future.

\textit{The Long Ride}

The SAC book \textit{The Long Ride} is a prime example of how SAC students' personal connection to history transformed education at Douglass High at the same time that it generated dynamic venues for cross-class and cross-racial community storytelling and solidarity-building in the Ninth Ward and nearby neighborhoods.\textsuperscript{459} Written by SAC students in multiple schools beginning in 2001, \textit{The Long Ride} tells the story of the centuries-long struggle for social justice in New Orleans by asking which historical moments matter most—and why they matter—to today's youth and marginalized

\textsuperscript{457} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{458} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{459} The idea for this history book originated from the African American History Alliance of Louisiana (AAHAL), an organization that leads an annual commemoration of the 1811 slave revolt in New Orleans (Randels, "Writing, Education, and Resistance"). Before producing \textit{The Long Ride}, SAC also published two smaller texts (one, \textit{Resistance}, that focused on the 1811 revolt and one titled \textit{Sankofa}) that creatively approached African American histories of resistance in the city through students' creative writing and interviews. Due to Hurricane Katrina, SAC did not publish \textit{The Long Ride} in book format until 2007. However, students read pieces and drafts of it in class as they worked on it as a collaborative project during the years 2001–2005. SAC continues to add to the book. See below.
residents, whose task it is to continue the city’s legacy of struggle.\textsuperscript{460} \textit{The Long Ride} was and is designed as a continuous work in progress. Even today, as new students in each year of SAC classes tell stories together, they also read selections from \textit{The Long Ride}. They go on to write creative responses to the stories they read. SAC teachers then include these responses in the book’s text.

The first, pre-Katrina version of \textit{The Long Ride} begins with Adrinda Kelly’s essay, "Africa: Recovering the Unknown" and Maria Hernandez’s poem, "Queen Nzinga."\textsuperscript{461} It ends with a selection of critical essays and nonfiction pieces about contemporary New Orleans. Although \textit{The Long Ride} contains timelines that would be useful for any teacher of Louisiana history, its narratives are not concerned merely with reordering our collective understanding of the past. Rather, for each piece in the text, the authors seize a moment in history and retell it according to the questions that their present-day lives inspire them to ask about the past. Salaam explains that \textit{The Long Ride} project “calls for student writers to ‘Imagine’ themselves within history and to write from their own perspective about factual events that took place before [they were] born.”\textsuperscript{462}

Building on the story circle’s insistence on the interconnected, situated nature of personal stories about place, each time SAC students sit to write about New Orleans in the past, they necessarily connect that past to the present moment and ask themselves what the moment they are studying would have felt like to them, what they might have done, or what they think might be missing from existing written or oral archival narratives.

\textsuperscript{460} My discussion of \textit{The Long Ride} utilizes the 2007 version of the book. In 2011, SAC produced yet another new print version of the book. It is available for free download on the SAC website, http://www.sacnola.com. This version will be used to train incoming teachers in public and charter schools around New Orleans in the histories, cultural practices, social justice movements, and community identities of African American neighborhoods in New Orleans.

\textsuperscript{461} I learned in SAC classes that Queen Nzinga was a Queen in the Angola region of African during the seventeenth century renown for her diplomacy skills and guerilla resistance to Portuguese invaders and slave traders.

\textsuperscript{462} Salaam, "The Student Learns. The Student Teaches."
In SAC’s pre-Katrina classes, students interviewed elders around their school neighborhoods and explored local archives such as Tulane University’s Amistad Research Center. They read and discuss local history texts, such as Carnival of Fury, William Ivy Hair’s book about the 1900 Race Riot in New Orleans, and Keith Weldon Medley’s We as Freemen: Plessy v. Ferguson. Students and teachers then juxtaposed their investigations of New Orleans history with the ideas of critical race theorists such as Frantz Fanon and bell hooks. They also discussed pedagogical and rhetorical theory texts such as Paulo Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed and Jacqueline Jones Royster’s Traces of a Stream. Building these connections enabled SAC students to link narratives about practices that were separate and unequal in the past with their critical evaluations of how institutional racism shaped their own contemporary neighborhoods and public schools. They then learned to “embrace” the stories of everyday acts of African American resistance during New Orleans’ two-century-long, ongoing ride to social justice as their “birthright.”

SAC students understood this birthright as a kind of “torch” that their elders passed to them and that they could then use to light up change in their schools, neighborhoods, and city. Maria Hernandez’s story, “Imagined Conversation with Veronica Hill: Charter Member of AFT Local 527,” underscores how listening to the stories of teachers and educational activists from past eras enabled the passing of this torch. When her “imagined conversation” begins, Maria is visualizing herself knocking on Ms. Hill’s door to find out if “the rumors” about her breaking into a school board meeting in 1937 are true. In the story's imagined interview, as in the real ones she

463 SAC also uses these methods in post-Katrina classrooms. However, as I will go on to show, SAC’s post-Katrina programs differ in context and in form from their pre-Katrina programs.
recorded with retired teachers and union leaders Ed and Leatrice Roberts, the elder interviewee makes sure that the student is willing to listen before she begins to tell her instructive stories. In the story, Ms. Hill tells Maria, “That’s a long story that I’m willing to tell if you’re willing to listen.” Maria exclaims: “Oh, am I willing to listen!” Ms. Hill then begins to tell the story of how she and other union activists crawled into the window of the building where the school board was holding a closed meeting in order to push their petition under the door. When Ms. Hill explains the positive results of this action (in 1938 the school board voted to give black teachers a raise every time white teachers received one), Maria jumps to conclusions, exclaiming, “Sounds like you got what you wanted.” Ms. Hill then returns Maria to the art of listening. She explains that understanding this small success in the context of the longer struggle that led to it and followed it will require Maria to return, perhaps many times, to listen (and learn) more. Maria promises Ms. Hill that she will return. This promise is something that SAC students in classes at Douglass and McDonogh 35 went on to live out together as they dug up, recorded, rewrote, and publicized the collective memory of their neighbors and families.

SAC students' understanding of New Orleans’s civil rights legacy as a birthright that belonged to them inspired Damien Theodore to write his poem “This Blood,” which he performed at Plessy Day 2004. In this piece, Theodore imagines that his poetry will turn his blood and the blood of his “ancestors”—the blood of “that young black brother who tried to be a thug,” the blood “that slaves bled while on master’s field,” and the “cups of blood that American has created”—into love. The poetry that he will “piss out” through his pen will thus serve as “therapy” for him and for those who hear it or read it. It

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466 Randels, “A Legacy in Jeopardy.” After the Storm. Hernandez’s interviews are available (with a picture) at: http://www.strom.clemson.edu/teams/literacy/sac/pubs/LeatriceRoberts.pdf.
will make people in his community want to live “just one more day.” Most importantly, it will bring Frederick Douglass, Martin Luther King, and Langston Hughes back to life in the form of one new being—Damien Theodore—another “educated black man”—just what America is afraid of. Theodore’s poem vividly expresses SAC’s adaptation of the BLKARTSOUTH philosophy that poetry grounded in community and in collaborative critical historic inquiry is the “blood” that has given birth to organized resistance in past eras in New Orleans and that will give birth to it again. This aesthetic vision resonates with Robin D.G. Kelley’s famous lines, from *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*, that “When movements have been unable to clear the clouds, it has been the poets—no matter the medium—who have succeeded in imagining the color of the sky, in rendering the kinds of dreams and futures social movements are capable of producing.”

In the New Orleans public schools before Katrina, absent a national movement, confronting the sharecropper education system and overwhelming forms of racialized uneven development, the poetry of SAC students rendered these dreams. Their poetry not only reached young, African American residents in the Ninth Ward, but it also reached and began to catalyze new collectivities of artists and culture makers from all backgrounds in New Orleans.

For SAC students and their DCC partners, Plessy Day celebrations functioned as annual public rituals in which they could converge and proclaim their acceptance of this inheritance. For instance, as I noted above, in 2004, SAC students worked with ArtSpot Productions, a theater company led by Jim Randels’s sister, Kathy Randels, to adapt pieces from *The Long Ride* to perform on the site of Plessy’s arrest. One of these

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468 Chapter Five discusses ArtSpot’s work at length.
469 Kathy Randels worked with SAC students to create and perform several additional plays, including a play about the 1811 Slave Revolt and *Nine Stories*, a reclamation of African American histories in the Ninth Ward, which they performed on a Ninth Ward levee. SAC students’ radio stories and commentaries
pieces, a sketch by former SAC student Gabrielle Turner titled “Twelve Year Old Talks to Plessy,”\textsuperscript{470} expresses SAC and the DCC’s understanding of the central role of public education reform in achieving social justice and democracy in the city. In the original piece Turner writes:

\begin{quote}
With my head to the ground, I saw the shiniest pair of shoes walk past me. I knew exactly who it was. It was Mr. Homer. He always had the best looking shoes in the neighborhood, because he was a shoemaker. Before I looked up I saw another pair of shoes that weren't so nice walking behind Mr. Homer. I looked up and saw Mr. Homer with his hands behind his back and handcuffs tightly on his wrist. The other pair of shoes was a man in a dark blue suit.

Mr. Homer looked down at me with a weird expression on his face. He winked his eye at me as he always did, and I watched as they took him away . . . .

A couple of days later walking home from school, I passed Mrs. Louise's house. Mrs. Louise lived in one of the shotgun houses on my street . . . . She always kept some chairs in the alley for when her friends stopped by. She and three other women were sitting on her front porch talking. She leaned back in her old wooden chair with \textit{The Crusader} newspaper in her hand and said, "that man, he was only trying to get us black folk equal treatment."

I was a little girl, only twelve years old, and I didn't quite understand what was going on. I walked along the brick cobblestone sidewalk to get to her porch. I sat on her step listening to them talk about how people in this organization called the Citizens’ Committee gathered together to plan to have Mr. Homer arrested.\textsuperscript{471}
\end{quote}

According to Randels, Turner wrote this piece after doing interviews with her mother “about the way residences are arranged in the neighborhood of Plessy’s arrest.”\textsuperscript{472}

Turner’s family’s intimate familiarity with their neighborhood’s past and present social and material geographies enabled her to imagine and relate to Homer Plessy’s critical

\textsuperscript{470} Turner, “Twelve Year Old Talks to Plessy,” 70–72. Also available on Jim Randels’ 2008 blog, \textit{Student Stories}.

\textsuperscript{471} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{472} Randels, “Students at the Center: Writing to Develop Identity,” 194.
cognitive map of Jim Crow New Orleans over one hundred years earlier. Furthermore, because her story looks at this famous historical moment from the visual and conceptual angle of a child in Plessy’s neighborhood, Turner becomes able to demonstrate that something important is missing from more conventional historical narratives. What is missing from those narratives are the public storytelling practices of the everyday citizens—the women on the porch, the mother, the little girl—whose conversations, whose critical reading and writing, and whose sacrifices made both Plessy's critical geographies and his actions possible in the first place.

For the little girl in her story, as well as for Turner herself, SAC pedagogy enabled them to imagine walking in Plessy’s shoes, and to then join him on the train to social justice and revolution in New Orleans. They knocked on doors and asked Ninth Ward residents to attend story circle–based school/community planning meetings. Under the direction of cultural activist Malcolm Suber, a key DCC member and director of Urban Heart, SAC students tutored elementary and middle school students in writing, literature, and radio production. With other DCC partners and local businesses, they advertised and led monthly neighborhood clean up sessions. They ran city-wide student writing contests and led a monthly series of public student readings and book discussions in collaboration with Café Brazil and Tremé Community Center. They also traveled with digital media equipment to the homes of both prominent and little-known workers in New Orleans’ history of organized social and cultural resistance to


474 Ibid.

hear and record their narratives. They learned gardening skills and trained younger students to participate in the building of urban gardens. With the help of the Algebra Project and the Crescent City Peace Alliance, they ran a store inside of Douglass High called "Quality Education as a Civil Right" that sold t-shirts, sweatshirts, and other materials advertising their vision. They also worked with the Small Learning Communities at Douglass to organize Teens With Attitude, a student activist group that fought for educational justice and canvassed their community to develop true community ownership of Douglass. SAC students and alumni then helped design and present professional development programs for teachers in the New Orleans Public Schools. Additionally, they worked with Tulane University's School of Public Health to create Project BRAVE, a Centers for Disease Control-honored program that used student writings and performances to initiate community dialogue to understand violence. Finally, and importantly, SAC's growing cadre of dedicated young writers and community organizers worked with DCC partners to create a plan for and began revitalizing the theater at Douglass High as a community-owned space that would offer collaborative storytelling events, artistic residencies, film screenings and discussions, and public forums on a regular basis. Through all of this work, SAC students became key agents in Community Labor United and the DCC's work to expand the city's alternate, blues-based public sphere. Their care for their community was contagious: soon, the school district, the local teacher's union, national arts and activist organizations, myriad local teachers, and local and national universities became their partners.

476 Becker, Randels, and Theodore, "Project BRAVE."
477 For instance, SAC students' work with Junebug Productions and Artspot Productions attracted the interest of national social justice organizations such as Incite! Women of Color Against Violence, the National Performance Network, Blackout Arts Collective, and the Blues Project. The Blues Project Convergence 2004, www.bluesproject.com/case.html (accessed August 20, 2008). SAC also shared their work with national audiences through student presentations to a variety of audiences including Bread Loaf School of English, American Council on Education, League of Professional Schools, American Conference
For SAC and their coalition partners, putting students at the center of public education clearly meant putting their writing not only at the center of classrooms, but also at the center of the larger community and local public sphere. This vision—with students standing at the heart of a concentric circle going from the school to the neighborhood to the city and back in—understood under-resourced neighborhood schools as public institutions that are integral to achieving social justice in the city, both because of and despite segregation. Adrinda Kelly's story, “Resistance" perhaps best explains this vision.

“Resistance” is a creative exploration of the 1811 Slave Revolt that asks what it means to be a “child of contemporary America,” learning mainstream history from textbooks that ignore histories of resistance in New Orleans and throughout the African diaspora in order to erase them from dominant, collective memories. Kelly frames her re-narration of the 1811 revolt as a direct invitation to future SAC students and local community members to discover the power of their own words and to re-imagine neighborhood public schools as places where the educational process will lead to the writing of a people’s history of New Orleans. Poetry, she explains, can be a form of social action that sustains and expands the forms of embodied, collective resistance at the center of New Orleans history and its African American cultures. She writes:

of Geographers, Centers for Disease Control, and teachers and school administrations in Greenville and Summerville, South Carolina; Jackson, Mississippi; Miami, Florida; and Providence, Rhode Island who wanted to use SAC approaches. SAC students also published their writing in local and national publications, including a Spring 2004 feature in Teachers and Writers magazine, a Fall 2004 feature in Education and Organizing, numerous series in Louisiana Weekly, and student reflections on public education and equality on 50th Anniversary of Brown vs. Board of Education in Gambit Weekly. SAC students won a first place award—against professional writers/journalists—from the Louisiana Press Association for the Brown vs. Board of Education series, for their essays on the topic of school segregation (published in Gambit Weekly in 2004).

478 See Hall, Africans in Colonial Louisiana; Gehman, The Free People of Color of New Orleans; Albert Thrasher, On to New Orleans!; and Rasmussen, American Uprising: The Untold Story of America's Largest Slave Revolt. Although Rasmussen's book has garnered much attention of late it is important to note that the story of this revolt was in no way "untold" in New Orleans. Numerous books previously existed on the subject. And as I note above, yearly, popular community events celebrated the revolt's anniversary.
Understand that here, in New Orleans, enslaved people sought refuge in swamps before they would endure another day of dependence and say thank you for the sustenance their bloody hands had provided. Imagine the same hands that cherished a black woman’s hips made bloody in the sugar cane fields of master’s enterprise. Imagine having to mend those hands, to cradle the broken fingers that made your children, restoring them with your tears and your care. A cycle of brokenness begins that is bitter to the spirit, and it becomes easy to consider death and murder in the connotations of freedom. “Resistance! Resistance!” The chant begins on the lips of Charles Deslondes and then carries to the church and the cabins of the discontented until one after the other begin to steal away, slaves who are stealing themselves from slavery and returning to the camaraderie of black men with a cause. . . . .

Almost two centuries later, it is easy for me to distance myself from slavery and the people who endured it. . . . I don’t know African American History beyond the textbook pantomime of the “kind white master,” but I do know this: Charles Deslondes, Nat Turner and others like them mobilized these words into action:

No chains to bear, no scourge we fear;
We conquer, or we perish here.

There is no need for me to be ashamed. Slavery was not a passive institution, and mine is not a race of domesticated animals.

For Kelly and SAC, the students in New Orleans’s neighborhood public schools were the inheritors of the systems of oppression that brought an end to the lives of these slave maroons. They were also the inheritors of the slave maroons’ voices—their poetry that leads to and is action. By working to make neighborhood public schools into places constituted by the democratic production of knowledge and collective social action, SAC students and their teachers and coalition partners sought to uproot the structures of racism that shaped these public institutions in order to remake them as sites where the seeds of sustainable social equity and embodied freedom could be nurtured.

Had it been built in 2005 as planned, Plessy Park would have created a permanent public space in and around which SAC and the DCC could center this vision and generate a broad-based local dialogue about the legacy of separate and unequal in contemporary New Orleans schools and neighborhoods. In a manner that resembles the second line's
weaving and connecting of diverse neighborhood landscapes, the location for the park, in the shadow of NOCCA and just across the color line of St. Claude Avenue (the street that demarcates high from low ground in the Ninth Ward) would have brought together the Marigny and Bywater's increasingly white, artist populations with the African American students from across St. Claude who went to school in the neighborhood. SAC students collaborated with well-known local sculptor John Scott to design the park as an interactive, changing memorial, directed to both these populations. 479

Scott said of his design, “I wanted to develop history as a seamless language, like poetry. The challenge was to incorporate history in the art and to inform people . . . . From there, the whole idea is about the journey. How did we get here? What’s the significance?” 480 The central sculpted feature of the park was to consist of a steel railroad track with stops along the way marking key historic moments such as the 1811 slave revolts, Ida B. Wells’s anti-lynching campaign and the 1900 Robert Charles race riots, A. P. Tureaud and the American Federation of Teachers’ 1940s campaigns for equal pay for African American teachers, the CORE’s 1960 sit-ins, and the 1970 stand-off between the Black Panther Party and the New Orleans Police Department in the Desire Housing Development. Each stop would have featured student-authored narratives that would have provoked visitors to think critically about the way in which that historical moment continues to resonate in contemporary New Orleans. However, Scott and the SAC students’ true design innovations hinged on the way in which the park was to include the writings of future students and local residents as a part of the park’s changing narrative content. They planned to create an interactive park website and phone line on which visitors could log or call in and hear or see rotating narratives by local youth and

479 For more information about John Scott’s life and work, see Cotter, “John T. Scott, New Orleans Sculptor, Dies at 67.”
480 Etheridge, “Derailing Plessy Park.”
residents that connected New Orleans’s civil rights history to the contemporary city. SAC and its coalition partners hoped the park would also become home to frequent performances, historic reenactments, and poetry and prose readings by local youth.481

Together, the space of Plessy Park and the textual space of *The Long Ride* would have thus become mutually constitutive sites in the city for the cross-class and cross-racial production of resistant knowledges and geographies grounded in the promise of Congo Square. The park's indeterminate nature sought *not* to bring park attendees to a consensus about the city's racial violent past and its conflicted social present, but rather to create a means of sharing and empathy-building across difference that would enable residents to reach towards a more just, more sustainable, urban democratic future. By insisting on the importance of space and spatial practices to this future, SAC/DCC's plans sought to expand second-line geographies into the concrete spaces of an increasingly white neighborhood in order to intervene in the memories and identities of new residents by inviting them to hear and participate in their adopted neighborhood's civil rights legacy. As we will see, this vision directly counteracted the rising neoliberal rhetoric of "post-racialism" that was beginning to sweep over the city in the years just before Katrina. This rhetoric hit New Orleans like a second hurricane as the waters from Katrina began to recede.

"Choice" vs. Collective Resistance: Market-Based Educational Reform in New Orleans and the Nation

When Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans on August 29, 2005, SAC had just begun their eighth year of teaching at Douglass High. Their growing network of former

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481 Kathy Randels, Interview by the author, 2009; Adler, “The Passion of Kathy Randels,” *Gambit Weekly*. See, also, Chapter Five's discussion of Mondo Bizarro's I-Witness Central City project, which adapted many of the DCC's goals.
students had begun to play pivotal leadership roles in the city as teachers, organizers, and community-based artists. SAC spin-off organizations such as the Fred Hampton Youth Education project and the Neighborhood Story Project, a youth book-making project at John McDonogh High School in the Seventh Ward led by former SAC teachers Rachel Breunlin and Abram Himelstein, were expanding SAC and the DCC's mission into multiple neighborhoods. Furthermore, national organizations and the New Orleans Public Schools increasingly looked to SAC for models of community-based education reform. Grassroots reform had thus begun to transform Douglass and nearby schools into schools that were, if not yet without their problems, places where increasing numbers of high performing students wanted to go.

After the storm, however, everything changed. As soon as Katrina's floodwaters receded, state-sponsored forces of disaster capitalism grasped the crisis moment to temporarily remove the necessity for public consent. The swift, manipulative actions of neoliberal policy makers and financial interests made possible the broad and rapid educational restructuring that changed the nature of social and cultural life in New Orleans. The ensuing market-based educational reform movement in New Orleans not only removed neighborhood schools from their pivotal role in the city's educational, social, and cultural landscape, but it also created a local educational "economy" that has worked to actively distance students from the neighborhood cultures and community-based organizations that have sustained New Orleans's second-line knowledges and geographies. As a result, SAC no longer has the option to ground their work in any one neighborhood, and school/neighborhood/artist coalitions such as the DCC have become impossible.

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482 I discuss the Neighborhood Story Project's work in more detail in Chapter Four.
483 See Butler, "Changing Schools and Learning to Respect Myself"; Carr, "Separate But Equal"; and Theodore, "I Don't Want to Go to That School."
The case of Douglass High School exemplifies the fact that if, as Arne Duncan has proclaimed, post-Katrina New Orleans has been a test-case for the school choice "movement," it has also been an experiment in the way "post-racial" reform rhetoric can serve to "normalize new forms of inequality" in communities that formerly identified themselves with civil rights organizing. Before I describe SAC and the DCC's ongoing resistance to this rhetoric, I want to reflect on the accomplishments of the school choice "movement" in New Orleans in general. As I do so, I sound a cry to urban studies, critical ethnic studies, and education scholars around the globe to investigate the significance of the fact that if the privatization of public education could be used to fragment New Orleans's resistant cultures and communities, it can and will do so anywhere.

The work of educational policy analyst Pauline Lipman underscores the critical importance of understanding public educational and urban restructurings as mutually constitutive processes. Because of capitalism's "spatial fix"—its need to devour and profit from geographically grounded resources such as land and housing—once a community has become sufficiently de-valued, it can become a prime site for the cheap and profitable re-investment of capital. Restructuring schools plays a central role in making these reinvestments possible. As in the process of uneven geographical development, when state investments in one educational area (such as suburban or magnet schools) lead to the de-investment and decay in another area (such as urban, neighborhood schools), grassroots struggles to amend that decay tend to become co-opted by state and financial partnerships. Public schools, as public institutions controlled by

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485 Harvey, *Spaces of Capital: Towards a Critical Geography*. As Harvey notes, "The inner contradictions of capitalism are expressed through the restless formation and re-formation of geographical landscapes" 333.
486 Ibid.
the state, thus often function as key tools for state-sponsored facilitations of capitalist restructurings of urban life and the material city.

Schools not only serve a primary purpose in the manufacturing of resistance or consent through the production of knowledge, but they also function to mobilize and articulate the politics of place that capitalist hegemonies must manipulate to survive. The civil rights movement's push for school integration is a good example of how capitalism's spatial fix and education reform policies are linked. School integration was a triumph for the nationwide civil rights movement, but it also paradoxically helped make possible the articulation of white racism with the need of capitalism to restructure itself and find a new "ground" for profiteering. Racism and capitalism thus co-opted the terrain of school reform to help create the "urban crisis," wherein capital and jobs fled from inner cities to suburban areas, and new, nation-wide forms of de facto school and housing segregation emerged in their place.

In recent years, non-white urban residents' campaigns for better schools have become similarly co-opted by neoliberal capitalist ideologies of privatization. In their first phase in the 1980s and '90s, these policies influenced the overarching "roll back" of public funds to public institutions and the welfare state.487 In their second phase, which began in 1998 with the HOPE VI mixed-income housing legislation that catalyzed the destruction of public housing in US cities and expanded to schools in 2002 with the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) school accountability act, state/financial neoliberal partnerships pretended to respond to demands on the ground for better schools and more opportunities for low-income, non-white urban students, by "rolling out" new solutions to the problems they had themselves caused. As in the emphasis on "choice" in low-income housing, the neoliberal educational emphasis on school "choice" and accountability

seemed, on one hand, to answer grassroots demands. On the other hand, these policies worked to subtly deepen urban social inequities and fragment possibilities for broad-based organized resistance.

Charter schools promote themselves to their parent "customers" as sites of educational innovation. These promotions encourage parents to believe that they can participate in the path towards educational equity by turning away from collective struggle to focus in on the uplift of their own, individual children. As Lipman notes, "Rather than participating as part of a collective in public institutions, a parent [in the school choice market] is an 'empowered' consumer." Charter schools procure thousands of extra dollars per student per year from private corporations and produce glossy brochures that they hand out at widely advertised school fairs as well as promotional films and videos that promise benefits such as a college preparatory education, community-centered curricula, and (as is often the case in New Orleans charter schools) an identification with African American histories of self-determination and cultural resistance. Whether the schools actually offer these things within the NCLB environment of data-based accountability and competition is another thing entirely.

Charter school parents, or school "consumers," are often aware of the contradictions in neoliberal education reform. Yet, in the face of limited options and histories of institutional racism in public schools, they have made good use of the opportunity to "shop around" for local schools in the efforts to attain the best education possible for their children. I think, for example, of Sci Academy in New Orleans, which

488 Ibid.
489 Ibid.
490 Ibid., 137.
491 Ibid. See also Miner, "Ultimate Superpower: Supersized dollars drive 'Waiting for Superman' agenda."
students refer to as "The Plantation" because of the racial dynamics between the faculty and students and the military disciplinary style; or of Sojourner Truth Academy, a school that is locally famous for its high numbers of suspensions of special education students.\textsuperscript{492} In both of these cases, New Orleans parents have "voted with their feet" by removing their children when they realize the schools are not what they claim to be. For instance, among the young people I know in New Orleans, Sojourner Truth is increasingly deemed a "failure," not only because of its test scores but also because of parents' and students' feelings of alienation from the school and the high attrition rates of non-white teachers. Directed by young, Stanford graduate, Channa Mae Cook, Sojourner Truth (like many charter schools) recruits its non-unionized staff of mostly inexperienced teachers from the best universities in the country. The school identifies itself with histories of African American critical knowledge production. Paradoxically, however, its disdain of local, experienced African American educators and its militaristic discipline and behavior policies assume working-class black culture to be pathological and in need of a cure. Within the "school choice" marketplace, students and parents have the freedom to leave this school environment at any time and enroll elsewhere.\textsuperscript{493} However, the system of lotteries and competition among charter schools often leaves the most needy students and families with few options about where to go if they choose to leave.

As Lipman notes, charter schools seem to "offer a space for agency where no other seemingly exists," yet this space often fails to match up to what parents hope for

\textsuperscript{492} Mock, "The Problem with New Orleans's Charter Schools."
\textsuperscript{493} Vanacore, "Most New Orleans charter schools outperform traditional schools, study finds." Research on Reforms has contested the validity of this \textit{Times Picayune} article and study because first, New Schools for New Orleans, a charter school policy organization in New Orleans, commissioned it, and second, because a high school with selective admissions criteria was falsely included as an open-admission school seemingly in order to boost the results in favor of charter schools. Ferguson, "No Stanford University Study Saying 'Charters Make the Grade.'"
and expect.\textsuperscript{494} As the educational marketplace expands, lottery systems for entrances into high performing charter schools weed out students and parents who do not have the cultural or economic capital to research and fight for a spot in the top schools. "Back door" expulsions are also common in well-known charter and "turnaround" schools such as the KIPP charter chain (which has 99 schools in 40 states).\textsuperscript{495} In these expulsions, children and parents are counseled that the school is not a "good fit" for them and told to go elsewhere, sometimes under threat of facing a permanent record marred by a public "front door" expulsion. Students requiring special services such as ESL classes or special education programs are similarly counseled.\textsuperscript{496} They are thus "un-chosen" by charter schools before they even have a chance to seize their new neoliberal "agency."

Furthermore, many charter schools work to attain high test scores with policies that encourage teachers to use scripted lesson plans (perfect for their revolving cadres of inexperienced, cheap teachers), require nine-hour long school days, and enforce militaristic discipline codes that would not be allowed in public schools.\textsuperscript{497} Thus, even as these schools promise such things as innovative curricula and college preparatory educations, in reality their dependence on inexperienced teachers and their focus on training students to "perform" on high stakes basic skills tests can get in the way of teaching students the higher order thinking skills they need to succeed in college.

\textsuperscript{494} Lipman, \textit{New Political Economy of Urban Education}, 137.
\textsuperscript{495} Miron, et al. "What Makes KIPP Work"; Diane Ravitch, \textit{The Death and Life of the Great American School System}, 136. Also, in "The Myth of Charter Schools" Ravitch notes that another well-known example of back-door expulsions in the new school reform movement occurred in the Harlem Children's Zone in New York City. Ravitch's statement that Geoffrey Canada, CEO of the Harlem Children's Zone, "kicked out his entire first class of middle school students when they didn't get good enough test scores to satisfy his board of trustees" is corroborated by Paul Tough's celebratory book on Canada's accomplishments, \textit{Whatever It Takes}. Furthermore, as Ravitch notes, not only is the Harlem Children's Zone an unsustainable, privately funded model for public education reform, but its test-based accomplishments are often over-estimated: "On the 2010 state tests, 60 percent of the fourth-grade students in one of [Canada's] charter schools were not proficient in reading, nor were 50 percent in the other."
\textsuperscript{496} Lipman, \textit{New Political Economy of Urban Education}, 140.
\textsuperscript{497} Ravitch, \textit{Death and Life of the Great American School System}. 
In other cities, the educational marketplace concept has gradually expanded, whereas the Katrina disaster provided neoliberal policy makers with the opportunity to turn over all of the city’s schools to the marketplace model in one broad sweep. In early 2006, the Orleans Parish School Board fired all but 61 of its 7,000 employees.\textsuperscript{498} With a weakened teacher’s union and a city devoid of most of its residents, former Louisiana governor Kathleen Blanco then helped facilitate a systematic dismantling of New Orleans’ school system by relaxing provisions in the state’s charter school law that “required staff and parent approval when converting a traditional public school to a charter.”\textsuperscript{499} When the city’s schools finally reopened in the fall of 2006, veteran teachers had been replaced in vast numbers by Teach for America teachers and other non-certified, non-local teachers recruited through programs such as Teach NOLA.\textsuperscript{500} The district’s former two-tiered system of neighborhood schools and district-wide “magnet” schools had been replaced with a diverse provider system consisting of district-wide, Orleans Parish–operated charter schools; district-wide, Orleans Parish–operated traditional schools with open admissions; and open admission, district-wide “Recovery School District” (RSD) schools, some of which are also charter schools.\textsuperscript{501}

In the years immediately following the storm, non-chartered RSD schools (especially high schools) became understood by local residents to be “dumping grounds” where low-income African American students are placed when they cannot find the

\textsuperscript{498} Dingerson, “Unlovely”; Buras et. al, Pedagogy, Policy and the Privatized City, 22.

\textsuperscript{499} Dingerson, "Unlovely." See The Long Ride and DeVore and Logsdon’s Crescent City Schools for a history of the relationship between teacher’s unions and organized struggles for desegregation and community-focused change in New Orleans’ schools. Also, for a global perspective, see Mary Compton and Lois Weiner, eds., The Global Assault on Teaching, Teachers, and Their Unions.

\textsuperscript{500} These cadres of young teachers have grown exponentially since the storm. Today New Orleans has the highest concentration of TFA teachers in the nation, with more TFA teachers than large districts like Chicago and New York. Buras, "We Have to Tell Our Story," 23; Vanacore, "Teach for America May Still Land Federal Financing."

\textsuperscript{501} Jim Randels, Interview by the author.
resources to gain admission at one of the city’s “choice” charter schools, or when they are “un-chosen” by charter schools for disciplinary, performance, or other reasons. By 2007, forty-two of the city’s eighty-two schools fell into this last category. RSD schools have more new teachers, higher student mobility, and a larger percentage of special education students than other schools in the city. They also suffer from more incidents of violence. Ironically, even though the RSD claims that its schools are designed to serve the neighborhoods in which they are based, a 2008 study showed that eighty-two percent of students in RSD-run schools lived more than a mile from their school and forty-two percent traveled three or more miles to school.

In the past two years, RSD schools have increasingly (and not at all surprisingly) been deemed failures and have been given over to various charter school organizations—some locally grounded, many not. Currently, only twenty-three non-chartered RSD schools remain in New Orleans. When these transfers occur, students are again uprooted and thrown back out into the school marketplace to search for a school that will deign to accept them, despite their poor credentials and their association with troubled school environments. Today, RSD schools are being further replaced by new "alternative" education programs—online charter schools run by for-profit companies,

505 Scott Cowen Institute for Educational Initiatives, 2008 Report, State of Public Education in New Orleans, 10. Also see Tuzzolo and Hewitt, “Rebuilding Inequity.”
military schools, and schools for students with proven discipline problems. In the landscape of school privatization, these alternative programs find it increasingly less necessary to disguise their work to lead New Orleans's neediest students towards a future on the prison pipeline.

According to attorney Bill Quigley, former director of Loyola University’s Poverty Law Center, in the years since Katrina, New Orleans’s most disadvantaged students have functioned as the “control group” against which the success of the city’s new charter school system is measured. This system is not all that different from New Orleans’ pre-Katrina "sharecropper education" system in the way that it siphons the “best” students out of schools that serve disadvantaged populations. Proponents of the diverse-provider system argue that it does a better job than New Orleans’ pre-Katrina school system because it filters more students out of failing traditional schools to place them in “innovative” charter school environments. But it does so at the expense of the least privileged students—those without parents who have the time, resources, and social capital to "shop" around the city's lottery-based school marketplace, and those who, even if they gain admittance to the city's better-testing schools, are often counseled out the back-door. Furthermore, with the NCLB emphasis on testing as the only measure of school success, charter schools often trade their focus on "innovations" for a focus on teaching to the test. Even with this limited approach to education, they often fail to

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508 Carr, "Schwarz Alternative School in New Orleans chaotic"; Associated Press, "Louisiana's first online charter school to accept applications." This online charter school without a building, run by a for-profit company, will receive 90% of the funding per student that traditional schools receive.  
510 Robelyn, “No Easy Road to Choice.”  
511 See, for example, Tough, “A Teachable Moment.” It is also important to note that in multiple national studies charter schools, on average, have proven to be no more effective and sometimes less effective at improving students’ scores on standardized tests than traditional public schools. See Carnoy et al., The Charter School Dust-Up.  
512 Mock, "The Problem With New Orleans's Charter Schools."
achieve the results they promise. As the work of the New Orleans-based Center for Research on Reforms shows, the unethical manipulation of the numbers on published testing reports to prove the success of the school choice movement has become a common practice in New Orleans, especially on the part of the RSD. Ferguson, "RSD's 2009-2010 Performance Report Omits 30% of Schools"; Hatfield, "Have RSD Schools Really Improved Significantly Since 2005."

Recent scandals in D.C. over cheating during Michelle Rhee's famous, anti-teacher, neoliberal reign over D.C. public schools confirm that the over-obsession with testing is, in fact, a national problem. Gillum and Bello, "When standardized test scores soared in D.C., were the gains real?" See also Ravitch, Death and Life of the Great American School System. Similar, massive cheating scandals have also arisen in Atlanta and Houston public schools.

As Sumi Cho explains, "post-racialism in its current iteration . . . reflects a belief that due to the significant racial progress that has been made, the state need not engage in race-based decision-making or adopt race-based remedies, and that civil society should eschew race as a central organizing principle of social action." Sumi Cho, "Post-racialism"; see also Gaines, "Of Teachable Moments and Specters of Race"; and Fields, "Of Rogues and Geldings."

The school privatization movement in New Orleans has, in the past five years, worked to fragment the collective social visions of New Orleans's working-class African-American communities with the promise of individual uplift and success. Post-racial discourse is a key component of this rhetoric. As Sumi Cho explains, "post-racialism in its current iteration . . . reflects a belief that due to the significant racial progress that has been made, the state need not engage in race-based decision-making or adopt race-based remedies, and that civil society should eschew race as a central organizing principle of social action." A crucial element in achieving US neoliberalism, post-racial discourse places collective memories of the long civil rights movement succinctly in the past and equates freedom and democracy today with individual "choice" and free access to the public/private marketplace. It thus works to turn discussions about social equity into discussions about the marketplace. It thus works to fragment the place-bound political and social bonds and geographic knowledges that sustain and nurture counter-hegemonic
ways of seeing and hearing a *different* version of reality in US cities. One particularly
tendentious public meeting about the future of RSD schools exemplifies the power of this
deceitful discourse.

At the October 2010 Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education
meeting in New Orleans, hundreds of parents and teachers crowded the McDonogh 35
auditorium for a seat. The subject of this meeting was the re-approval of RSD control
of the majority of New Orleans schools. Charter schools collaborated to bring in parents
and gave them red t-shirts to wear that read "My Child, My School, My Choice." These
primarily working-class African American parents gave testimonies about their children's
individual successes and transformations in charter schools. Meanwhile, opponents of the
RSD and market-based system held up signs that proclaimed their desire for "Equal
Education Access for ALL Children." Using a chart that outlined RSD schools'
performance stagnation, Karen Harper-Royal, a parent, teacher, and education activist
told the story of a mother she knows who had been to six RSD schools trying and failing
to find a space for her child. Audience members, familiar with similar stories, applauded
as Harper-Royal argued that the "recovery school district has been a five year experiment
that has failed" because its gains have been at the expense of the city's most needy
students. By contrast, she argued, "It's not about my child, or anyone's child," but rather,
"we need an ALL children approach to educating our children." As she spoke, a charter
school parent yelled out, "It's not about rights! What about those of us whose children are
doing well?!" The members of the crowd wearing the red t-shirts applauded.

The divisions in this crowd raise the question: what is education reform "about":
individual or collective rights? The hegemony of neoliberalism seeks to convince people

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http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3nfGTRZ06rE&feature=related.
that the answer must be one or the other. The paradigm of "choice" reduces each subject's story to the realm of the individual and the private without acknowledging all subjects' interdependence. In the neoliberal political universe, what matters is that I have a choice, that I have access to and power within the ever-expanding public/private marketplace. My story matters only insofar as it locates me as a subject with the right to this choice. Privileging individual "choice" thus reduces the discursive democratic sphere to a space where everyone has the freedom to tell their story but few are required to actually listen.

Within the deceitful landscape of post-racial racism, the production of a space for the agonistic, public telling of counter-stories is a key tactic through which grassroots movements can re-claim the "torch" of reform. Using the tactic of story circles, SAC and their coalition partners have, in the years since Katrina, created a new space for generating organized resistance to neoliberal school reform that has catalyzed knowledge and organizational strategies in grassroots education reform circles not just in New Orleans, but also throughout the nation. Absent a neighborhood school and a neighborhood in which they could ground their work since the storm, SAC has remade its identity as a city-wide, story-gathering and pedagogical training organization that functions as a powerful node in rising national, critical evaluations of and resistance to market-based education reform.

**When It's Your Turn, You Have to Play**

Speaking of SAC's post-Katrina determination to rebuild their program, Salaam explains, SAC “is based on what can work within the conditions in which we find ourselves . . . . That’s part of the jazz aesthetic—when it’s your turn to take a solo, you

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518 Buras, et al., *Pedagogy, Policy and the Privatized City.*
can’t say, ‘Well, wait, that’s not the song I wanted to play.’ [No], it’s your turn.”519 In New Orleans schools and neighborhoods, the song has changed. As in Plessy’s era, the city’s tune now seems to grow ever more somber. But SAC and its coalition partners continue to play hard.

They began to develop their post-Katrina modes of resistance in November of 2005, when they led a second line through the Sixth, Seventh, Eighth, and Ninth Wards to proclaim their determination to return and rebuild their programs. For many of those involved, this parade remains in their memories as a first step towards adapting and broadening their vision in the face of the destruction of neighborhood schools in New Orleans. As Salaam recalls, the parade began with a memorial at St. Augustine Church. Greta Gladney's son, Stephen (then a middle-schooler, but who would soon become a nationally renowned musician and a powerful writer in the SAC community),520 opened the program with a saxophone solo. As they paraded towards St. Claude Avenue, the crowd grew. The band played a dirge as they approached Colton School on St. Claude, which was closed then and remains closed to this day.

After stopping there for lunch, the group proceeded to Douglass. Unable to get into the shuttered and mostly undamaged building, which had served as a key evacuation site for many families during the flood,521 SAC students and staff sat outside to talk about how they were going to face the issues before them. Salaam recalls, "Sitting in a big circle, we listened to each other—high school students, teachers, staff, community activists, civil rights veterans—everyone taking a turn speaking their hearts and

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519 Salaam, Interview by the author, February 20, 2009.
520 Salaam, "Salvaging Our Culture and Our Schools," 154. For Stephen Gladney's story, see the SAC video, "A Jazz Journey."
521 See Kimberley Waters's video documentation of evacuees' shelter at Douglass during the flood in the film Trouble the Water (Lesson and Deal).
minds.\textsuperscript{522} This initial post-Katrina SAC circle dealt with the most immediate issue facing the students who were there that day—the question of whether they ought to go into the building to reclaim their band instruments. Understanding that these instruments were an integral part of the identities of many of the students present, the participants in the circle resolved this question through a conversation in which each opinion was valued equally. Although they decided, collectively, to wait to get the instruments, the students' needs and desires were validated in the process of making this decision. As Salaam explains:

> The conclusion itself was not as important as the process. No one felt oppressed or put down for their view. Everyone had a turn, whether they were a 15-year-old student or a 50-something visitor who was there to support organizing in New Orleans. It was a beautiful moment because when we left not only were we all in agreement, but, more important, we all felt validated in the sense that our opinions were heard and considered and that we each had full input into the decision making process.\textsuperscript{523}

In future months and years, SAC remained grounded in circles like these. They refused to jump on the charter school bandwagon, instead opting to remain as long as they could at Douglass and to teach in the only locally run, non-chartered high schools in the city. They convened in classrooms and community centers, in New Orleans and throughout the Katrina diaspora at host sites such as Andover Bread Loaf School of Writing and Clemson University. While they did not always achieve consensus, SAC circles continued to achieve an equality of voices. Their voices grew increasingly loud as the post-Katrina city evolved. SAC and the rising cadres of young leaders they built in the city have began to serve as national role-models for community-based, liberatory education practices in the calamitous, top-down reform context. For instance, SAC students such as Gabrielle Turner, Ashley Jones, and Christopher Burton became SAC staff members and teachers. Also, former SAC staff members such as poets Sunni Salaam, "Salvaging Our Culture and Our Schools," 156.\textsuperscript{522} Salaam, "Salvaging Our Culture and Our Schools," 156.\textsuperscript{523} Ibid., 157.
Patterson and Saddi Khali and organizer Shana Griffin became influential leaders in local and regional arts-based organizing struggles.\footnote{Camp, "'We Know This Place,'" Woods, "The Politics of Reproductive Violence: An Interview with Shana Griffin."}

The collective work of SAC staff members, students, and almumae in the past five years has made New Orleans into a central node for grassroots and academic partnerships in the resistance of neoliberal school reforms. In 2006 and 2007, SAC students, teachers, and community members produced the first post-Katrina book critiquing neoliberal school reforms, \textit{Katrina and Me}, a collection of storm stories and essays. Randels and other SAC staff also collaborated with UTNO to write the 2007 report "No Experience Necessary: How the New Orleans School Takeover Experiment Devalues Experienced Teachers." This report, which SAC used to make presentations to national audiences in education policy and foundation funding around the nation, documented the ousting of local, veteran, and mostly African American teachers from the New Orleans public schools for the sake of cheaper, inexperienced non-local hires who are more easily molded to accept long, unpaid hours of work and scripted lesson plans. It also analyzed the dumping-ground mentality that shaped the direction of RSD schools by showing, for example, the advertisements of Teach NOLA, a neoliberal teacher recruitment firm that directed experienced teachers to OPSD and charter schools, whereas it directed non-certified, inexperienced teachers to RSD schools. A rising number of academic reports and books about the impact of school privatization on New Orleans's African American communities have emerged from SAC and UTNO's publications. For instance, educational researcher Kristen Buras recently collaborated with SAC to publish \textit{Pedagogy, Policy, and the Privatized City: Stories of Dispossession and Defiance from New Orleans}, a book that places SAC staff and students' essays and stories in
conversation with reflections and analyses by leading educational policy researchers. With contributions from eminent scholars such as Robin D.G. Kelley, Pauline Lippman, Michael Apple, and others, this book frames SAC’s history as a powerful case study of what can and "must be done to challenge oppressive conditions and democratize our schools" within the neoliberal hegemony.525

Beginning in 2006, McMain Secondary School, which is located Uptown, proved to be a surprisingly empowering context for SAC’s work. Principal Bridgette Frick invited SAC to help transform McMain from a magnet academy to a school that was open to all New Orleans students. In 2006 and 2007, SAC spent mornings at McMain and afternoons at Douglass. While they remained focused, along with groups such as Gladney's Renaissance Project and Reggie Lawson's Crescent City Peace Alliance, on returning Douglass to the control of the community, SAC also discovered new arts-based organizing and cross-cultural dialogue possibilities at McMain.

Through internship programs and summer professional development programs for students and teachers, SAC developed a new framework for growing resistant communities among teachers and students within the schools where they taught, even if they could not focus their work on any one particular neighborhood. Former McMain student and SAC staff member, Alexandra Lear, describes this process in her essay "In SAC I Learned to Think." Lear contrasts the individualistic, money-driven cultural context that surrounds her and her fellow SAC students with the safe and equitable collaborative/creative spaces generated by SAC classrooms. She goes on to describe how SAC's democratic pedagogy and Randels and Salaam's emphasis on students' personal connections to history and literature pushed her to find her writer's voice:

525 The disciplines of American Studies and Critical Ethnic Studies have also begun to draw the lessons of SAC's work and narratives of resistance. See Michna, "Stories at the Center," and George Lipsitz, How Racism Takes Place.
You see I am lazy, so I started off the year as usual: I did the first assignment to see what my new teachers Jim and Kalamu would do to my peers who did not do the assignment. But I quickly found out that it is about what you do and not about what you do not do. . . . Since I had written my paper and read the story, I raised my hand, thinking I was going to be discussing the reading materials. But instead I was asked to read my work. My mouth dropped, and my eyes got big. What did I get myself into? This lazy person just got bamboozled; I told them my story was personal and Kalamu asked, “So, what’s personal about it?” I was speechless, so I just looked away from him and at my paper and started reading my personal essay. Then another unexpected wrong turn occurred when I finished reading. “Pick two people to comment,” was all I heard, and I looked up and everybody looked away like we were all negative sides of a magnet. Then I started talking to myself “why I gotta pick two people, not gonna do it, nope I refuse” but all that came out as Audie and Kandyce. It was funny to me but not to them. For some reason I do not think they listened to my story. They both gave a little shrug and said, “I liked it.” Then that oh so popular question came out of Kalamu’s mouth “what did you like about it?” Pause.

Those words challenged us to think. Some people accepted this new form of teaching and wanted to learn about what else they could do and some did not. But I was one, like many others, who wanted to experience more that SAC had to offer. We get to travel, attend and speak at conferences, and I learned most of my New Orleans history from being a part of SAC. I love this program. Everybody is treated equally. It is not forced, and everybody interacts with good vibes. SAC is the future, if you ask me.526

As Lear's essay shows, the dialogic discussions that define SAC classrooms mean that students' writing emerges dually from a call and response process with their peers and teachers and from the ways in which those present in the classroom (students and teachers) connect each piece of writing they hear and read to their own lives. In this environment students have to remain engaged because their critical thoughts and their perspectives are crucial to the knowledge and writing that the SAC circle produces. It is a rhythmic process.

To be in an SAC class is to help make the SAC rhythm. When students do pull

526 Lear, "In SAC I Learned to Think."
back, like Audie and Kandyce in Lear's essay, others in the circle nurture them out again in order to keep the circle's "beat" going. In all SAC classes that I observed, this sense of balance was maintained but "not forced." Democratic harmony between equity and free expression, or what Lear calls "good vibes," is at the core of the SAC rhythm. Regular SAC techniques, such as the "Pick Two" writing workshop method (which occurred in every SAC classroom I visited over two years), ensure this rhythm, and the teachers work a bit harder to keep it going when chatter or outside distractions in the school such as announcements or interruptions threatens to dissolve it. Within the SAC jazz or second-line cadence of learning and sharing, the classroom becomes a community where all students and teachers both feel connected to each other, across and through their differences, and feel driven to always keep learning and creating.

At McMain, SAC classroom communities have included for the first time large numbers of Vietnamese-American students. As African American and Vietnamese American students in post-Katrina SAC classes have written stories and shared their life histories with each other, SAC has developed a new emphasis on global diaspora and post-colonialism that has led to new modes of educational resistance to neoliberal ideologies. In 2008, SAC's Advanced Placement students at McMain worked with staff to develop a new course entitled "Post-Colonial and Diaspora Literature from Africa and Vietnam." This course is now part of Bard College's Early College program, an alternative to test-based Advanced Placement programs that gives college credit to high school students taking college-level courses in their schools. Student writings in this and other SAC classes at McMain have, in the past three years, focused on exploring issues of assimilation and cultural preservation both in African diasporic and Vietnamese American histories and in the context of present-day New Orleans, where dominant models of school reform de-value culture and community and instead privilege
assimilation and uplift. Recently, SAC students published these writings in a new version of *The Long Ride* and a new book, *Who Am I?: Reflections on Culture and Identity.*

SAC attempted to develop college preparatory curricula in post-Katrina classes at Douglass as well. But, from 2006-2009, the school endured a new principal almost every year. Functioning under the heavy hand of Paul Vallas and his singular emphasis on raising test-scores, these principals often did not know or value SAC's history in the school. Ironically, even as school administrators refused to allow SAC to develop Advanced Placement courses at Douglass, each year after Katrina, the RSD threatened to close Douglass because of its poor performance on test scores. The DCC, Douglass alumnae, and many local residents continued to push for community involvement in decisions about reform at Douglass. They created a plan that adapted their pre-Katrina work to advocate for making Douglass into a college preparatory arts and culinary academy that would draw on local cultural resources and embrace a curriculum relevant to students' lives. However, in early April 2008, the RSD announced that Douglass would be closed. Buras, whose field work describes the meetings that led to this decision, recalls that when a crowd of community members, alumnae, and DCC members addressed the RSD narrating the school's significance to local histories of resistance and community-building, an RSD official responded, "Kids don't know they're going to school at a historic landmark. They just know they're going to a building where the electricity doesn't work, where the technology has been antiquated." This kind official's rhetorical "sleight of hand" is emblematic of school privatization rhetoric in New Orleans and other cities. This slippery rhetoric erases the importance of history by pointing to the need for modernization and twenty-first century innovation. By doing so,

527 This book and SAC's other post-Katrina anthologies are available for sale at www.sacnola.com
528 Lawson, Interview by the author; Buras, "We Have to Tell Our Story," 43.
529 Buras, "We Have to Tell Our Story."
it shuts down the collective, critical inquiries into the past that are necessary for movement into a more just future. Instead, this sort of rhetoric offers dis-privileged communities a re-modeled version of the American grammar of racism, this time in the guise of post-racialism, whose goal remains to stigmatize and suppress blues knowledges and geographies.

In the fall of 2009, SAC finally left Douglass. Their program there was not supported by the rolling tide of administrators and was no longer able to function in a way that was useful to students. That same year, Douglass closed its doors for good. The best way for Paul Vallas and other neoliberal education reformers to suppress the powerful histories of community organizing and educational resistance through storytelling at Frederick Douglass was to transform Douglass High into a KIPP school. When the RSD re-opened Douglass in the fall of 2010 as KIPP "Renaissance" High school, neither former teachers nor former students were invited to re-enroll. Instead, KIPP hired a new, mostly non-local and mostly white staff and recruited students from its local middle schools. As the concluding section to this chapter shows, KIPP's work in the past year to erase the resistant historic memories and solidarities that SAC and the DCC had nurtured in the Douglass neighborhood contain dire implications for the future of grassroots community-based resistance in cities across the nation.

**KIPP, SAC, and the Future of Public Education in New Orleans**

A brief history of the KIPP program underscores the threat that its militarized and influential educational model presents to public blues-based resistant knowledges and democratic social visions in New Orleans and cities throughout the US. KIPP began in Houston in 1994 when two white male Teach For American protégés and Ivy-League graduates, David Levin and Michael Feinberg, decided to collaborate to design a plan for
urban schools that would allow them to get around the bureaucracy of district offices in order to extend the school day and hold class in the summer and on some Saturdays.\textsuperscript{530} As Levin and Feinberg began (with the help of private donors and school choice policy advocates) to open schools in Houston, New York, and other cities, KIPP began to grow nationally famous for its long school days, its mostly non-unionized, mostly young and white teachers who were committed to working sixty-plus hours a week and to being "on call" twenty-four hours a day by phone, and its drill- and chant-based learning strategies. KIPP soon grew able to broadly proclaim test-score gains in many of their schools. It then emerged as the golden child of the charter school movement.\textsuperscript{531} Of course, with nearly 750 more hours in school than their non-KIPP counter-parts (and with the majority of their time spent in teacher-centered, test-focused curricula), it is not surprising that KIPP students test at a higher level than their grade level peers from similar backgrounds.\textsuperscript{532}

In its role as the charter school golden child, KIPP has taken advantage of and broadly contributed to the rise of the school privatization/urban "reform" ideologies in order to perform top-down "turnarounds" of failing schools in cities across the nation. The KIPP program subtly advocates militarism and paternalism as the ideologies of choice in the charter school movement.\textsuperscript{533} KIPP's focus on basic skills test-score gains has distracted attention away from the other elements that go into making a "good" school—such as higher order thinking skills and students' confidence, health and happiness, which cannot be measured on multiple choice tests. KIPP schools further

\textsuperscript{530} Lack, "No Excuses: A Critique of the Knowledge Is Power Program."
\textsuperscript{531} Angrist, et al. "Who Benefits from KIPP?" This study compared students admitted to a KIPP school in Lynn, MA with students who applied but were not admitted.
\textsuperscript{532} Lack, "No Excuses," 132. In addition, as Lack and Jay Matthews (a journalist and KIPP advocate) both note, not all KIPP schools have achieved test score gains. See Matthews, \textit{Work Hard. Be Nice.}
\textsuperscript{533} Whitman, \textit{Sweating the Small Stuff}. 
distract attention from their ability to reach these loftier goals by claiming to focus, more
than anything, on the objective of getting every KIPP student into college. KIPP
kindergarteners learn their college graduation dates before they learn how to read.
Classrooms are named according to the college from which the teacher graduated. KIPP's
logo, "work hard, be nice," preaches the idea that if given the chance, even low-income
minority students can perform at the same level as upper income students (as if this
should be a surprise).

It has proved hard for researchers and the education media to critique these
laudable goals. It is also important to note KIPP schools are not all alike—school leaders
are granted autonomy in their choices about curricula and staffing. But KIPP schools do
all strive to maintain a highly ordered and disciplined environment. Lack's emerging
research on KIPP argues that KIPP's militaristic pedagogy often seems more intent on
preparing students for subordinate jobs, not higher education. Whereas SAC classes buzz
continually with chatter and excitement and grow most fully quiet and reverent when
students are listening to their peers read from their own work, KIPP school climates tend
to be designed to render teachers and administrators as not just authority figures with zero
tolerance for students' "rebellions," but also as the controllers of the consumption-based
"reward" system that, within KIPP schools, is supposed to ensure students' happiness.
This top-down school "culture" of discipline and monetary reward are imagined to
function as "cures" for the pathological "street" cultures that the schools' primarily non-
white low-income students bring with them into the classroom. The underlying

534 University of Wisconsin educational researcher Beth Sondel finds ties between KIPP's paternalistic,
imperialistic, and militaristic approach to education and early twentieth-century approach that the Carlisle
Schools "developed to inculcate Native Americans into White culture" as well as "the Black Colleges of the
1920s developed by White people for "racial uplift" of African Americans." She notes that while KIPP
schools may not be "enacting the same degree of cultural genocide as the aforementioned institutions . . . it
is important to pay tribute to the historical trajectories that may have led to some of the theories of racial
assumption that is often made blatant in KIPP hallways and classrooms is that it is the school's job, and the teacher's job, to de-socialize non-white low-income students from their communities. KIPP ideology seems built around a conception of low-income African American and Hispanic communities as pathological, or inherently outside and unable to function within middle-class behavior norms that enable people to be hard working, ethical, and respectable.\textsuperscript{535} Not surprisingly, in New Orleans KIPP seems to target low-income African American students more than any other group.\textsuperscript{536}

According to Jim Horne, KIPP's summer school for new students consists of training in KIPP's zero tolerance/reward-based behavior system. This training resembles the discipline policies of prisons or reform schools and would not been deemed acceptable were KIPP students primarily white and/or middle class. As Horne notes, in summer sessions:

New students must learn the SLANT rules, which means to "sit up straight, look and listen, ask and answer questions, nod to show understanding, [and] track the speaker". . . any rule infraction will bring an instant corrective response, and [that] . . . the smallest misdeed will be no more tolerated than the most egregious offense . . . "Miscreants" must learn, for instance, that isolation and ostracism from the KIPP family is total as long as the punishment lasts, and children who talk to "miscreants" at or away from school risk the same punishment if apprehended. In fact, it becomes the duty of other

\textsuperscript{535} Richard Kahlenberg's laudatory reflections on KIPP unwittingly show that KIPP extends this ideology into students home-life as well. He writes: "KIPP does not educate the typical low-income student but rather a subset fortunate enough to have striving parents who take the initiative to apply to a KIPP school and sign a contract agreeing to read to their children at night." "Two Teachers, 16,000 Students, One Simple Rule," B06.
\textsuperscript{536} Tough, "What it takes to make a student." Tough, a journalist who is also a KIPP advocate, notes KIPP's openness about this racialized approach. According to Lack, "even though African American and Hispanic students make up 70% of the student enrollment in urban public schools, KIPP serves a student population that is 95% African American and Hispanic. Sixty-three percent of students at the typical urban school receive free or reduced lunch; at KIPP schools nationwide, 78% of the students have their lunch subsidized" (130). In New Orleans, 98% of KIPP students are African American and 92% are low-income or "At Risk" (determined by Free or Reduced Lunch statistics) (Louisiana Department of Education, 2010-2011 Public School Enrollment Data).
students to report offenders who are associating in any way with "miscreants." If they do not, they, too, risk the same punishment.\textsuperscript{537}

In a well-known case in San Francisco in 2006, students who were deemed "miscreants" were forced to wear a sign around their necks labeling them as such.\textsuperscript{538}

Crafted into a state of dependence and fear of isolation, KIPP students begin to focus single-mindedly on the rewards doled out by their school authorities: acceptance into the group and "paychecks" to spend at the school store. As Horne notes, "any anger or resentment among students arising out of punishments becomes internalized and accepted as the resulting consequences of improper individual choices and actions, rather than being directed outward toward questioning the organizational structure of total control and constant surveillance."\textsuperscript{539} Socialized to value conformity, to be submissive to corporate and top-down structures of authority and discipline, and to understand happiness and success in terms of material consumption, it seems that KIPP students would make better (non-unionized) hotel workers than they would journalists or lawyers.

Perhaps the biggest irony of the KIPP system in New Orleans is that while KIPP purposefully recruits low-income African American students, its individual uplift-based, blame-the-victim ideology also functions as a powerful agent for the fragmentation of social critique in low-income African American communities. Not surprisingly, KIPP parents were well numbered among the red-shirt wearing crowd at the 2010 BESE board meeting that I previously described. KIPP's student attrition patterns contribute to this

\textsuperscript{537} Horne, "Learning About KIPP: Lesson 3, Social Justice in Blackface." In a similar analysis, Lack notes, "At a KIPP school I toured, it was not unusual to see students lined up against the walls of the hallway like soldiers while being lambasted by an angry teacher. Students who violate behavioral expectations, as referred to in the Commitment to Excellence contract, are stripped of the right to wear their KIPP shirts . . . [and] Miscreants are routinely sent to a time-out area better known as —the bench or—the dugout. . . . Even though such practices have been thoroughly shunned by prominent developmental psychologists . . . KIPP proponents utilize a 'whatever works' mentality to the ends of compliance and academic achievement" (139).

\textsuperscript{538} Berlak, quoted in Horne, "Learning About KIPP: Lesson 3."

\textsuperscript{539} Ibid.
fragmentation. A Western Michigan University study recently reported that, on average, over forty percent of male African American students leave KIPP between sixth and eighth grades. KIPP also fails to admit and retain special education students. Whether these students are "counseled" to leave or whether they leave on their own volition, which is often the case for students whose parents do not have the time or energy to comply with KIPP's demands on them, the fact remains that as KIPP schools grow, they continue to create a divide in low-income African American communities wherein KIPP-compliant students and families come to be seen (by both the dominant local and national publics) as "deserving" of uplift, while others are deemed miscreant, undeserving, and criminal. KIPP schools—and there are six of them in New Orleans now, with more on the horizon—thus build on that old blame-the-victim ideology at the heart of urban renewal/"Negro removal" policies. This ideology is yet another iteration of the plantation system that Kelly's essay "Resistance" describes, which relies on a rhetoric bound to the publicly violated black body (decapitated heads of maroons on poles or children wearing signs reading "miscreant"), a language of trauma through which it erases or represses the intellectual and cultural tools of the subaltern public.

As students in New Orleans today wake at dawn to travel on long bus journeys to

540 Miron, et al., "What Makes KIPP Work." This study also notes the high levels of private funding that KIPP receives for their schools, which would be unsustainable in public, non-chartered schools.  
541 Mock, "The Problem With New Orleans's Charter Schools."  
542 KIPP is now embroiled in a controversy over the opening of its seventh school site, also on St. Claude Avenue, in the former Colton Middle School. Paul Vallas and the RSD approved KIPP's take over of this now empty building for the creation of another KIPP academy. In response, parents and residents in the increasingly white Bywater neighborhood have generated a rising grassroots campaign advocating for residents' rights to have a neighborhood school and to determine the shape of their children's education in that school. Ironically, these same residents (many of whom are new to New Orleans) did not speak out against KIPP's teacher-focused, militaristic pedagogy until it threatened to impact their own children. Former members of the DCC, such as the Crescent City Peace Alliance, have become part of this cross-racial alliance in the hopes that it leads to future solidarity in the struggle to regain public control over public education in the city. See Chang, "KIPP charter school's tentative hold on Colton school site is challenged" and Cohen, "Politicians side with parents asking review of plans to put KIPP charter at Colton site."
attend schools where they are taught by young, non-local teachers who lead them on silent parades on black tape through school hallways, as they learn to be careful to avoid certain *shunned* classmates, and as they focus their hearts on monetary and test-score rewards, more and more of these children will lose the opportunity to seize the torch of social justice struggles from their elders. Fewer and fewer of them will come to understand themselves as the agents of a legacy of radical democratic vision-making in their city. Through this loss, possibilities for public storytelling, collective deliberation, and collective resistance in New Orleans’ African American working-class neighborhoods will continue to dwindle. The social, cultural, and geographical cables holding those neighborhoods together will thus keep slipping deeper and deeper into Katrina’s muck.

With the opening of KIPP Renaissance High School, SAC and the DCC’s connections to public schools in the Ninth Ward were dealt a near fatal blow. To rebound from this loss and build new cross-racial communities of resistance in the city, SAC has turned to the education of new, non-local teachers as a key element of their work. Using *The Long Ride* and the story circle method, SAC has created a racial healing program designed to bring together new teachers, most of whom are white, with veteran teachers, most of whom are African American. Led by Randels, Salaam, and SAC staff members, Julie Wedding and Katrena Ndang, these groups of teachers convene at UTNO in weekend sessions to tell their stories and brainstorm new ways to challenge post-racial discourse and institute bottom-up curriculum building in the new data-driven educational climate.\(^{543}\) Most importantly, however, SAC achieves their goals and maintains an

\(^{543}\) In August of 2011, all first year RSD teachers will receive a copy of *The Long Ride* and have the opportunity to attend story circle and pedagogical training sessions with SAC and the United Teachers of New Orleans. New dialogues among non-local teachers, such as the New Teachers Roundtable, are beginning to rise up in the city as young teachers have learned from SAC to question to top-down reforms that brought them to New Orleans. See *New Teachers Roundtable*, http://newteachersnola.posterous.com/.
influence on New Orleans's public sphere by their daily presence in local classrooms. As long as SAC classrooms exist and as long as SAC students continue to write and make videos for changing and growing audiences, the promise of Congo Square will continue to be reborn in New Orleans youth. The power of this work remains thunderous. SAC's current work reminds me of recent McMain graduate Demetria White's essay, "The Beat Goes On." the concluding essay in the 2011 version of The Long Ride. White argues that her family's history of participating in Mardi Gras Indian traditions created a "beat that could be found in every family member." This beat—"Fi ya ya! . . . throb[bed] in their souls . . . so strong" that if you were to look through her family scrapbook of pictures of past Mardi Gras mornings, "you might be able to hear it." SAC's beat possesses this same power. Today, walking through Plessy Park (which, thanks to the longstanding efforts of the Crescent City Peace Alliance, Keith Medley, and the Plessy and Ferguson Foundation, bears a new plaque honoring Plessy and the Citizens' Committee's actions), or past the KIPP'ed exterior of Douglass High School, with its back starkly turned from the community, you cannot help but feel it. In the neoliberal city, as SAC's circle of resistant stories continues to grow wider, the beat will continue to go on.

544 White, "The Beat Goes On." 266-67. This essay is also in the 2007 version of The Long Ride.
545 Ibid.
546 Additionally, the Porch (a Seventh Ward Cultural Center), NOCCA, the Renaissance Project (a neighborhood organization working to revitalize the St. Claude corridor and empower its residents), and the arts non-profit, Transforma Projects, led the 2007-2009 organizing that led to the plaque being placed at the park. Medley wrote the text for both sides of the plaque. One side is devoted to Homer Plessy and the other to the Citizen's Committee. Uninterested in validating the hypocritical separate and unequal approach to education that NOCCA's ownership of this site embodies, SAC purposefully declined to participate in the plaque campaign and ceremony (Jim Randels, email message to author, 28 April 2011). See Michna, "Stories at the Center."
547 As I write this in June of 2011, SAC is preparing to debut a website containing recent stories by staff and students and links to free, downloadable versions of their books. All SAC books can also be purchased in print form on demand, http://www.sacnola.com.
"Parade coming. Could be any Sunday, just about . . . People on the steps of shotgun houses, shoulder to shoulder on the sidewalk, watching everyone passing by, ice chest just inside the door full of beer and wine coolers and lemonade, people all out on the grassy neutral grand cooking up food." These opening sentences from Tom Piazza's post-Katrina novel *City of Refuge* describe the Lower Ninth Ward just weeks before Hurricane Katrina makes landfall. The scene portrays a moment in a second line parade from the eyes of Lucy Williams, a Ninth Ward resident. She is standing on her front porch, sharing cold drinks with a friend, and gazing at the parade's crowd of moving, talking, dancing people. Lucy notices a white man "wearing nice-looking, respectful clothes," pointing out and explaining things to his seven-year-old daughter, whom he is holding by the hand. This is Craig Donaldson, one of *City of Refuge* 's two protagonists (Lucy's brother, S.J., is the other). Craig, a white Midwestern transplant and music writer, relishes bringing his daughter, Allie, to see and participate at second lines and Mardi Gras Indian performances. Yet, as often as they attend these events they still often seem, to others, like they are out of place. Lucy's greeting to Craig acknowledges this fact with humor: "Hey white folks!" she yells out. Craig responds with a laugh and a "hearty" hello. The conversation that ensues is emblematic of the kinds of cross-class and cross-racial exchanges of words, movement, and gazes that have, in recent years, become ubiquitous at second line parades.

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548 Piazza, *City of Refuge*, 3.
549 Ibid.
"You need something to drink," Lucy asks. "Sure," says Craig. "Give him a Crystal Mist," Lucy says to her friend. "You ever had a Crystal Mist, white folks?"

"Nope," responds Craig, "but I'm looking forward to trying it." By offering Craig and his daughter a drink, Lucy draws attention to the opportunity the parade has created for them to share this moment and this space, despite the racialized social and geographical structures that create a distance between their lives. Her second question jokingly reminds Craig of these distances by pointing out how the very tastes and textures of life in New Orleans become fabricated by residents' embodied experiences of racialized uneven development. Lucy's offering and Craig's swig of the wine cooler represent their light-hearted yet deeply serious salutes to the parade's re-spatializations of these social boundaries.

City of Refuge's opening frames cross-racial exchange in New Orleans's cultural performances as something that grows in meaning as diverse members of the city's population join the parade. For Craig, being in the Ninth Ward and participating in second-line exchanges allows him to gradually unravel the geographies of white privilege that he carries around inside his head. I read Craig in this scene and throughout City of Refuge as a figure for white and/or middle-class writers in New Orleans who seek to not only jump in the parade themselves, but also to bring their crafts and social capital to the task of strengthening and sustaining the knowledges and geographies of New Orleans's public blues cultures. After Hurricane Katrina, a swelling tide of such writers arose in the city. Newcomers and natives, well-known writers such as Piazza, Dan Baum, Chris

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550 Piazza, City of Refuge, 4.
551 Books and online writing that I do not discuss here but that would also be relevant are Chris Rose, I Dead in Attic; Andrei Codrescu, New Orleans, Mon Amour; Dave Eggers, Zeitoun; Jerry Ward, The Katrina Papers, Ned Sublette's memoir, The Year Before the Flood: A Story of New Orleans, and the blogs mentioned above, which have, in a variety of instances, been adapted into book, film, and performance form. I choose not to include these texts in my analysis here because their formal innovations are less intentional than coincidental. Rose's book, for example, appears to be a call and response text, and certainly
Rose, Andrei Codrescu, and Dave Eggers, self-publishing writers such as the Neighborhood Story Project and Mike Molina, and bloggers such as Ashley Morris, Christian Roselund, Eli Ackerman, and Dedra "G Bitch" Johnson, worked, often collaboratively, to employ fiction, journalism, and nonfiction texts to expand the power of second-line epistemologies in the precise moment when they were most threatened. To do so, they engaged in practices of engaged listening and research that deepened their various personal histories of solidarity in New Orleans's black working-class neighborhoods. They then used their texts to frame these neighborhoods' cultures as central to the question of why New Orleans matters to the nation and the globe.

In the face of popular media narratives about the Katrina disaster that wrongly depicted New Orleans's low-income African American residents as, in Robin Kelley's words, "helpless victims . . . poor, utterly disorganized, and completely dysfunctional," several of these writers drew on the crisis moment to generate new models for popular literature modeled on the call and response and collaborative public space making aesthetics of the second line. By doing so, they hoped to amplify the voices of the people who, after the flood, were alternately most demonized and most romanticized in the national public sphere. Yet, New Orleans authors faced a paradox as


553 Kelley, Yo' Mama's Disfunctional, xv.
they set to this work. If they wanted to use their work as well as their social and cultural capital to bring the stories and knowledges of displaced African American working-class New Orleanians forward, they had to find a way to do so without claiming to speak for the people and communities they described.\textsuperscript{554}

As Madhu Dubey notes, African American and progressive urban intellectuals from all backgrounds have faced this paradox as they have sought to convey the stories and communities of ghettoized and socially and spatially isolated African American (and, I would add, Chicano/a and East Asian) neighborhoods in de-industrialized US cities.\textsuperscript{555} Urban intellectuals (such as fiction writers like Piazza, or John Edgar Wideman in Philadelphia, or Edward P. Jones in Washington D.C., as well as "new" journalists and/or realist TV series makers such as David Simon and Simon Burns, and social scientist ethnographers like Sudhir Venkatesh and Elliot Leibow) have often taken on the role of cultural translators in their work. These urban intellectuals' desires to speak for disprivileged and dispossessed urban residents can, at times, unfortunately, create more absolute distance between their "subjects" and the dominant class. This is because, as Dubey argues, “Whether deriding the nihilism of black urban culture . . . or celebrating its expressive richness, the intellectual cannot give voice to the urban masses as long as he or she claims to represent them."\textsuperscript{556} Put differently, to speak for the subaltern is to assume the subaltern's inability to speak. Doing so reinforces the barriers that already exist and that are intensifying in the neoliberal era between the subaltern and the public sphere.

Post-Katrina novels, oral history collections, ethnographies, and nonfiction texts have in various ways employed second-line knowledges and aesthetics to address and

\textsuperscript{554} Dubey, \textit{Signs and Cities}, 39.
\textsuperscript{555} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{556} Ibid.
move beyond this representational paradox. Here I discuss four examples of such texts: Piazza's *City of Refuge*, Dan Baum's *Nine Lives: Death and Life in New Orleans*, The Neighborhood Story Project's creative, collaborative ethnographies, and Mike Molina's "five dimensional" novel *The Second Line*. Each of these books have innovated with the second-line aesthetic in remarkable, unique ways to generate new definitions of literary authority in the de-industrializing and gentrifying city. With various degrees of success, these texts portray the practice of urban literature making as a process of reciprocity with the communities whom their books depict. They each experiment with a circle- or call-and-response-based writing framework to theorize reciprocity as a defining feature of contemporary literary authority. They also each attempt to formally mirror and thematically reflect on the collaborative knowledge and space making structures of black working-class New Orleans in order to improvise new ways for urban authors themselves to "dance" or participate within the interdependent conflicting (or agonistic) parade of stories, geographies, and epistemologies that is the city. Each book is thus an experiment within a larger, unfinished dialogue among writers and publishers in New Orleans about how dominant literary forms must change when, instead of understanding representational authority to belong solely to the author, they embrace a collaborative, call and response approach to imagining and narrating the city. Viewed comparatively, the works of Piazza, Baum, Molina, and the Neighborhood Story Project reveal the difficulties and possibilities inherent in a second line concept of authorial reciprocity, especially when it comes to overcoming the exclusions that are at the center of dominant structures of knowledge production about cities.557

557 See Taylor, "After the Deluge," 3. Taylor lists and categorizes the primarily white-authored post-Katrina literary texts and their relationship to other forms of artistic production within the city's artistic, music, and media spheres.
Until Katrina, the only authors in New Orleans who had taken up questions about reciprocity and representational authority were deeply connected to grassroots organizing and radical social movements. As we have seen, the second-line literary aesthetic emerged from story-circle methodologies and local authors' solidarities with the makers of local African American cultures. After nearly fifty years of development, the legacy of BLKARTSOUTH and SAC became, for a growing number of New Orleans writers and intellectuals, a powerful model of how to research and write about New Orleans's public blues cultures in a way that supports them and expands their reach. The bottom-up gathering of local place-memories and counter-knowledges that the second line literary aesthetic enables has provided a growing network of local authors with the research and creative tools to generate texts that critically reflect on and expand the collaborative space making power of African diasporic cultures in New Orleans. This work begins with the understanding of texts as public spaces.

The books I discuss in this chapter tend to conceive the role of the book, and of urban literature in general, as intricately connected to how cities and public spheres are understood and sustained. They seek to re-spatialize literary texts as "places" where pluralistic exchanges of conflicting geographies and stories can "speak to each other," expanding solidarity and empathy across social barriers as they do so. Lastly, and importantly, these books seek to broaden local and national understandings of the democratic visions, organizing tactics, and critical historical and geographical lenses that New Orleans's second-line knowledges hold. As we will see, however, it is one thing for a collaborative writing group or institution to produce second-line literature that engages the public in the shared work of re-making historic and geographic knowledges. It is

another thing altogether for a single or even a dual authored text to do so. To return to Craig as a figure for the white and/or middle-class urban intellectual who recognizes the national and global pedagogical potential of second-line knowledges, Craig would have never learned or have been transformed by the meaning of the parade in Lucy's neighborhood if he had just stepped back and observed from a distance, or if he jumped in without an a critical awareness of the geographies and history that his body and subjectivity carry into the collective. To understand, dance within, and communicate the meaning of the parade to others, Piazza's protagonist and the authors in this chapter must pursue cross-racial exchanges and solidarity that enable them to question and think outside of normalized local and national white geographical imaginations. Doing so presents a different challenge to different authors, depending on how their own geographies and memories are situated with regard to the neighborhoods and people they are writing about. For their texts to succeed in portraying and drawing forth the situated knowledges of residents from divergent race and class backgrounds into their narratives, they must be designed to be understood by readers as the product of a continuous, intersubjective, reciprocal exchange that includes the author and the reader.

**Of Racial Myths and Cross-Racial Solidarity in the Neoliberal City**

Dubey, Eckstein, Rotella, and other scholars have amply demonstrated the ways in which the geographies of racialized uneven development in de-industrialized US cities have caused contemporary urban literature to be grounded in a critical response to dominant narratives about black working-class residents.\(^559\) As we saw in Chapter Two, beginning with President Johnson's War on Poverty and Daniel Moynihan's 1965 "Report on the Negro Family," urban social policy and urban sociology have worked in

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combination to generate hegemonic narratives that imagine working-class African American residents in all US cities to be socially pathological and unemployable. Building on the flawed blame-the-victim logic of Moynihan's report, these narratives disguise the combined impact of urban disinvestment and global capitalist restructuring on the working poor by defining dispossessed and displaced working-class black residents as criminal and unassimilable. As Kelley notes, images of black dysfunctionality in de-industrialized cities have become "the thing against which normality, whiteness, and functionality have been defined." The dysfunctional image provides a counter-image, a kind of trickster figure that portrays black people as street-smart, mystical, and more knowledgeable about white people than white people themselves. Such images mark poor African American urban residents, especially women, with assumptions of social pathology that are both a source of "slander" and a source of "attraction."

As I noted in Chapter One, Hortense Spillers shows that these discourses stem from the centuries-old "American Grammar" of racism that, since the era of slavery, has categorized black women and black motherhood as a threat to black and white masculinities and to the nation. This grammar adapts itself to the shifting context of each historic moment to re-assert its authority and hide its connection to the shifting violences of capitalism and imperialism. For instance, when de-industrialization occurred in US cities, the American racist grammar blamed black women and not the rising global neoliberal economy for black men's inabilities to find and keep good jobs. As Steve Macek explains, in the 1980s and '90s, popular media and the political establishment

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560 Furthermore, as Dubey notes, “Dominant discourses on the ‘underclass’ pathologize black urban culture on the grounds of its aberration from a normative model of US mainstream culture,” Signs and Cities, 39.
561 Kelley, Yo’ Mama’s Dysfunctional, 3.
562 Ibid.
563 Hortense J. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe."
generated a prevailing cultural narrative of the inner city that featured woman-led African American families behaving in "alien, dysfunctional" ways that were as a growing threat to the nation's cities.\textsuperscript{564} Such narratives were used to justify Reagan, Bush, and Clinton era state economic ideologies that "blamed-the-victim" in order to justify the neoliberal privatization of, or the removal of state responsibility for, urban public institutions (housing, schools, community centers, prisons, etc).

Postmodern narrative techniques have, in recent years, enabled urban writers to theorize the challenges of representation in the context of pluralistic and institutionally racist, deindustrialized cities.\textsuperscript{565} In addition, the rise of digital media and the Internet has opened up the tools of mass and artistic media representation to communities that did not previously have much access to the public sphere. Yet, as Chapter Three showed, neoliberal hegemony has continued to expand blame-the-victim and uplift ideologies into many of today's most progressive "social change" projects. As post-Katrina media and governmental responses to black residents stranded in New Orleans revealed, underclass discourse continues to dominate how white and middle-class Americans imagine the inner city.\textsuperscript{566}

The case of post-Katrina New Orleans exemplifies how dominant media narratives and repeated iterations of the national moral panic over race and poverty in the city have worked hand in hand with neoliberal policy makers' efforts to divest New Orleans of its long weakened public institutions.\textsuperscript{567}

\textsuperscript{564} Macek, \textit{Urban Nightmares}, 40.  
\textsuperscript{565} Dubey, \textit{Signs and Cities}.  
\textsuperscript{566} McKittrick and Woods, "No One Knows the Mysteries"; Settles and Lindsay, "Crime in Post-Katrina Houston"; Berger, "Constructing Crime, Framing Disaster"; Tierney and Bevc, "Disaster as War"; Frailing and Harper, "Crime and Hurricanes in New Orleans"; powell, et al., "Towards a Transformative View of Race: The Crisis and Opportunity of Hurricane Katrina"; Hartman and Squires, \textit{There Is No Such Thing as a Natural Disaster}; Potter, "Reframing Crime in a Disaster"; Trujillo-Pagán, "From 'Gateway to the Americas' to the 'Chocolate City'"; Czaja, "Kanye Race Debate and the Repercussions of Discussion."  
\textsuperscript{567} Woods, "Les Misérables of New Orleans."
residents as criminals or as embodying pure victimhood in New Orleans were useful to the state and local governments' market-based/privatized rebuilding approach to rebuilding the city. This approach relied on framing New Orleans itself as a dysfunctional victim, a kind of municipal black mother, whose recovery depended on cultural uplift and re-education (a kind of cultural rape) by charity, volunteer, and non-profit networks from outside the city. The "new" New Orleans that emerged has, in the five years since the storm, functioned as a model around which forms of neoliberal cultural re-programming and economic restructuring in other cities with prominent black working-class cultures (from Washington D.C. to Detroit to Port-Au-Prince) can be based. For cities to begin to imagine a path away from racialized uneven geographical development and race- and ethnicity-based tiered citizeenships and towards sustainability and pluralistic democracy, prevailing underclass narratives must be challenged at every level and within every institutional apparatus, including the apparatus of the literary publication market.

As Barbara Eckstein's work shows, in New Orleans mass-market urban literature often participates in the public "framing of the city’s problems, the proposed solutions to those problems, and the perceived effectiveness of those solutions." Literature has served to reinforce poor planning decisions and uneven development in the city. Furthermore, when they capitalize on myths about the city, literary works about New Orleans have also served as tools that officials use to strengthen the city’s racially uneven service economy and its unhealthy dependence on tourism. In the immediate post-Katrina era, when much of New Orleans (from its devastated neighborhoods to its public schools) were up for grabs, established writers like Baum and Piazza as well as rising local talents, such as Molina and the Neighborhood Story Project authors, saw that

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568 Eckstein, Sustaining New Orleans, xi.
569 Ibid.
literary texts would again play a role in generating images of the city that helped define and determine who had the right and the ability to help shape the city's future. These authors pulled from the aesthetic philosophies of New Orleans's public blues cultures to reframe the role of the author as similar to the role of social aid and pleasure clubs in putting on second line parades and jazz funerals. Just as each club is grounded in a particular community and history and designs the structures for their parades accordingly, these authors understood their task to be concerned more with creating a structure for their texts' stories than with interpreting and dictating the images of the city that these stories contain. They thus created a theme, a series of narrative "stops," and a prevailing rhythm and tone for each text, but like second line parade makers, they tried (with various measures of success) to let their narratives emerge from real encounters in the city and real stories.

The second-line literary texts this chapter analyzes frame these stories as situated and pluralistic in nature. Sometimes, as is the case with City of Refuge, they turn the tools of fiction to do so. In other instances, as with Molina's The Second Line, they use visual images, poetry, lyrics, digital interventions, or thematic narrative threads to connect them. Often, these texts rely on oral history testimonies for their content. Just as the meaning of a second line parade can only be fully understood with participation and grounded solidarity with the parade makers, the more these texts explore modes of solidarity and creative reciprocity with the communities they depict, the closer their texts come to approximating New Orleans's counter-geographies and depicting the city as the product of multiple conflicting "stories so far."\(^{570}\)

A central challenge for each of the books this chapter describes involves the question of how the author's (or authors') own geographic "story so far" changes during

\(^{570}\) Massey, For Space, 12.
the process of constructing the book. Each book employs personal stories or symbolic figurations of the author to explore this process and to question how representational authority changes when it moves inside the logic of the second line. The books' successes at creating a story or stories that capture the city pluralistically often hinge on these personal stories or figurations of the author in the text.

For the authors with more social capital, especially white authors, black women's stories and memories present the deepest challenge to their attempts to model their texts on the second-line ethic of reciprocity—of interdependence and exchange. To "jump" into or model their narratives on second-line epistemologies these authors have to directly face, move through, and narrate the ways in which racist, hetero-patriarchal ideologies inform their own identities and exert an influence, despite their best efforts to move past these ideologies, on their understandings of the people about whom they are writing. Patriarchal racist ideologies generate social capital for white men. As such, these ideologies are a force that undergirds white male authors' feelings that they have a "right" to a public voice. As Spillers shows, such ideologies depend upon the silencing and demonization of black geographies and memories, especially those of black women.

Although I am going to outline the ways in which City of Refuge and Nine Lives fail to adequately face these challenges that racial and gender privilege present to them, I want to emphasize the value of the pursuit itself. Likewise, while I understand the Neighborhood Story Project and Molina's books to be more successful in their methods for creating urban literature grounded in reciprocity, I want to underscore that these authors' texts are not formulaic "answers" to the question of authorial authority in the neoliberal city. Rather, their texts provide fruitful models around which other urban authors seeking solidarity and reciprocity with disprivileged communities might innovate in different contexts and historic moments. As in the other chapters in this project, these
literary texts, however finished they appear on the surface are, in reality, products of an ongoing dialogic process in New Orleans about methods for generating literature and theatre modeled on blues epistemologies, herstories, and radical democratic, imaginative and material re-spatializations of the city.

The Problem of Craig and Lucy in City of Refuge

Uptown (the neighborhood where I grew up) consists of the city’s wealthiest and some of its poorest neighborhoods. Because Uptown is where many white authors in the city live, and because the wealthier areas of Uptown suffered little damage from the 2005 hurricanes, white middle-class authors writing about New Orleans after the storm found themselves to be writing from a literal island of privilege. Both caught within and separate from the trauma consuming the rest of New Orleans, uptown authors seeking personal and collective post-Katrina healing turned to the image and the aesthetic of the second line to imagine new possibilities for racial healing and solidarity in the city.571

Even though second line parades are not frequent in the white parts of Uptown, it is not surprising that Uptown authors would turn to this cultural performance form as a "way in" to writing about race relations and possibilities for racial healing in the city. As Sublette notes, second lines have long functioned as a "ghetto day pass" for whites to go

571 Other examples of post-Katrina literature from Uptown writers include Rose's I Dead in Attic; Julia Reed's memoir The House on First Street (2008); Anthony Dunbar's mystery Tubby Meets Katrina (2006); Amanda Boyden's racist dialect novel Babylon Rolling (2009); and Codrescu's essay collection, New Orleans, Mon Amour (2006). Poppy Z. Brite's post-Katrina "chef novels" (about the lives and relationships that emerge in the city's chaotic restaurant kitchens) deserve special mention, especially Prime (2005), a queer novel that powerfully captures restaurant culture and the specific heightened and often racial conflict-ridden role that food culture plays in New Orleans. As a long-term resident of Uptown, Brite's perspective is often grounded in a geographical view of the city from the perspective of that neighborhood. Her most recent publication Second Line: Two Short Novels of Love and Cooking in New Orleans (2009). The title in this case is a double reference both to the novels' Lower Ninth Ward context and "line cooking" in French Quarter restaurants.
into neighborhoods where they would not normally feel they were able to go.\footnote{Sublette, "Helen Regis with Ned Sublette in New Orleans." Regis adds that this is also true for "middle-class African Americans who don't necessarily feel comfortable walking around in a housing development unaccompanied. [But] when you're following a second line, you're accompanied. You have the band and the club saying it's okay to be here."} Some white middle-class participants are drawn to second lines because they imagine them to express the "mystical allure" of working-class blackness that lies inside the dominant dysfunctional image of the "underclass."\footnote{Kelley, \textit{Yo' Mama's Disfunctional}, 3} Certain, more traditional, parades have grown popular with the "third line" of journalists and academics that follow them because of this imagined meaning. The Black Men of Labor (BMOL) parade is a good example.

According to Sakakeeny, the Black Men of Labor parade seeks to refute underclass imagery by reclaiming respectable black masculinity and patriarchy in the streets: "The members . . . view their parade as an opportunity to challenge . . . the 'misconception that black people, all they do is take drugs, rob, and steal.'"\footnote{Sakakeeny, "Instruments of Power," 220.} The parade's performance of black masculinity is mediated by prevailing images of masculinity that define it in white patriarchal terms. These images rely on images of black women as castrators of black men and the source of underclass pathologies. The BMOL parade seeks, with questionable success, to disentangle these corresponding sets of images. At times it seems to nostalgically celebrate gender roles in black communities during the industrial era. In other moments, the parade seems to want to critically reclaim historical memory of the industrial city from this nostalgia. For example, the club requires their bands to dress in formal black and white suits, an image that evokes the prevailing narrative about New Orleans jazz origins that understands it to have been a product of masculine accomplishments. However, club members themselves come out in costumes that combine African colors and imagery with the suits and shoes of working,
laboring men in early twentieth-century New Orleans. The "story" that these costumes tell reclaims, in classic second line style, the industrial city as a site produced by African diasporic cultures as much as Western ones. The club's choice to march on Labor Day complementarily insists that all participants to look to the economy and to labor structures (not black women) for clues as to why discourses about the social threat of working class black dysfunctionality were invented in the first place.

Despite the BMOL parade's collage of meanings, its nostalgic imagery of "dignified" industrial era black men and not its story of the losses brought about by de-industrialization is what has made it into the most written about, filmed, and talked about parade by white residents and visitors to New Orleans.\(^{575}\) BMOL's traditional aesthetic has thus, in some ways, come to stand in as a fixed image in popular local and national media of contemporary New Orleans second lines. By contrast, parades that are led by bands in informal clothes, that feature women, or that employ more upbeat, hip-hop infused tunes are less often seen and known by outsiders to the culture.

*City of Refuge* is a literary celebration of parades like Black Men of Labor that is caught between insider and outsider interpretations of the parade's symbolic meaning. In both form and content, the novel conveys and aesthetically mirrors the industrial-era heritage of performances of black power and citizenship on the streets of Jim Crow New Orleans. It also seeks to draw attention to the way in which black men's labor—both their work with their hands and their cultural and artistic work—shapes both the city's material spaces and its cultural identity. However, because the novel embraces a patriarchally

\(^{575}\) Ibid., 186. For more national coverage of the BMOL parade see Spike Lee's interviews with Fred Johnson in *When the Levees Broke* (2006); Stabler, "The Black Men of Labor's Labor Day Parade"; Katz, "New Orleans parade tradition advances black men's image"; Simmons, "New Orleans: Two Years After Katrina, Life is Still hard in the Big Easy"; Allen, "New Orleans Rebound Brings Surprising Riches." The Black Men of Labor website, http://www.thebmol.org, contains yet more examples of national coverage of their parade and civic engagement work.
defined version of black masculinity as the essence of second-line cultures, it often turns away from the "law of the mother" that is at these traditions' core. This law—black women's inherited and denied legacy—is the force behind the parades' ability to "continually erupt [subjectivities] out of [their] own categorization[s]." It is that which enables second lines' sounding and performance of difference as the "condition of possibility of being." City of Refuge's inability to understand second-line cultures within the terms of the law of the mother prevents the novel from achieving its goals of depicting the national importance of second-line cultures and enacting these cultures for a national readership within the form of the text.

City of Refuge draws on the second-line aesthetic to improvise within the realist novel format and generate an imagined New Orleans that consists of conflicting black/white, middle/working-class male representations. But rather than allow these narratives to take shape in and through difference, an unnamed, central narrative voice shapes them so that they come to a kind of ethical consensus and put forth a central, unitary message. This message ultimately generates an image of an imagined leadership role for white intellectuals within second-line cultures. In this role, as the novel imagines it, the engaged white intellectual can mediate between the dominant public sphere and black working-class communities by "translating" their cultural productions as collective resistance to the social castration of black men.

Published in 2009, City of Refuge moves back and forth between two oppositional "worlds" within the city of New Orleans: that of Uptown professional creative class as seen through the eyes of Craig, and that of black working-class communities in the Lower Ninth Ward, as seen through the eyes of S. J. Williams. Piazza employs a close

576 Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe."
577 Moten, In the Break, 26.
578 Mouffé, The Democratic Paradox, 19.
third-person lens to follow Craig and S.J. and their families' experiences during Hurricane Katrina and the six months that follow. The central question guiding the actions of both protagonists is their relationship to New Orleans's public blues cultures. Craig fetishizes these cultures and does not begin to establish a sense of agency as a writer and father until he leaves the city and relinquishes his parasitic dependence on them for meaning in his life. For S.J., second-line cultures are just home. He does not think much about them, except in dreams. In contrast to both S.J.'s and Craig's points of view, the women in the novel view second-line cultures as either mystical and deranged or as images of a victimized and idealized black patriarchy for which they yearn.

Yoking together these multiple, but male-dominated narratives is a poetic, omniscient second person narrative voice that "steps in" when the characters' suffering or love for the city becomes too much to contain on the page. In these moments, "you" becomes anyone and everyone in New Orleans. This second person lens scans the city, almost randomly picking up glimpses, smells, and sounds from the points of view of myriad, diverse residents. It then combines these perspectives into a pluralistic and interconnected whole akin to the moving "river" of subjectivities that makes up a second line.  

A good example of this second person intervention occurs in a post-Katrina scene that sums up what Craig and SJ leave behind when they evacuate. The second person lens pans up from the chaotic Convention Center to President Bush's Air Force One view of the city and then back down to a Superdome bathroom, where it links the flood victims' different perspectives beneath one twisted representative banner or "flag" of awareness of the national social failures that the disaster revealed:

The mind cannot process all the disjunction, the endless din echoing in the Superdome halls and the sour itch in your clothes . . . only scraps adhere,

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579 Piazza, *City of Refuge*, 3.
like rags caught on sticks and flapping in the wind—a baby's bib... white with yellow piping around the edges and a Teddy bear printed on it, crumpled and left on the floor in the sweltering, darkened toilet stall, barely visible next to your foot, caked with feces among the paper towels and fouled underwear, amid which you squat over the bowl full to overflowing with a sickening stew, laced with blood, that made you retch to look at it, let alone to smell it, trying to position your legs so that you can add to its contents without touching what is already there... and this is the shelter provided you, the emblem of the quality of thought and caring devoted to your fate, and you will remember that bib, it is your new flag, and where is the baby it belonged to? 

The sickening, multiplicitous parade of perspectives these scenes convey is the story of a city without a "sequential narrative," a site of chaos, unmoored and unprotected, that yearns and screams out to have its pieces picked up, reordered, and soothed. Such scenes become, in the novel, the reason for the return of the second-line culture makers to the city, for only they can order New Orleans's diverse and divided communities from the bottom up into a (male-led) mutually sustaining whole. More than any other white character, Craig idealizes and yearns for this sense of order and connectedness. His ache to find himself within second-line cultures causes him to universalize and de-racialize their meaning.

Craig's evacuation story begins as a swan song for a lost utopic and innocent era when he could drive from his home near Tulane University Area on Sunday afternoons and drink Crystal Mist with people like Lucy who welcomed him into the parade. One of his last stops before he packs up his family to leave the city is his office at Gumbo, the local weekly arts and entertainment paper where he is an editor. Craig's office is a "shrine" to his fetishization of New Orleans's public blues cultures. As the narrative

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580 Ibid., 168.
581 Ibid., 167.
582 Gumbo is a fictional stand-in for The Gambit, New Orleans's popular weekly entertainment newspaper that is often criticized by the African American press for its white-focused perspective on music and entertainment in the city.
explains, "Nobody ever had more of a crush on New Orleans than Craig Donaldson," "Behind his desk chair hung a framed 8 x 10 photo of Fats Domino, signed to Craig by the Fat Man himself. The walls were festooned with ancient album covers, photos, posters for club appearances by New Orleans rhythm and blues legends, an old 78 record on the King Zulu label, menus from favorite neighborhood restaurants." The closed-door secrecy of this shrine, far away from Craig's house and social life, and soon to be destroyed by the flood, reflects the growing distance between Craig's daily immersion in a romanticized racially harmonious New Orleans and the pressing demands of his white middle-class family life.

In their early visits and first years as New Orleans residents, Craig's wife, Alice, had shared his adoration of the city. Piazza's characterization of Craig and Alice's mutual fascination with and opposing levels of identification with New Orleans's public blues cultures draws out the challenges that second-line epistemologies present to white-middle class geographies. Alice struggles to feel at home in the city and to find a place from where she identifies her own contribution to the collective culture. What Alice fears more than anything is losing her husband, and through him her children, into what she perceives to be the over-fluid mix of the collective. White spatial desires for a neighborhood composed of distinct and isolated middle-class homes, class-segregated schools, and a sanitized and disciplined gentrified urban core spin around in Alice's head causing her to pine for some place, any place different and "whiter" than New Orleans. All of these desires, however, remind Alice of the subjugation of women within traditional notions of the American Dream that she turned to New Orleans to escape. Simultaneously repelled from and lost without the white suburban reality in which she was raised, Alice only becomes happy when her family settles down in a nostalgic and

583 Piazza, *City of Refuge*, 19.
upscale/gentrifying immigrant urban community near her aunt and uncle's home in Chicago.

Craig, meanwhile, mistakes the subjectivity-in-difference expressed by second lines for an annihilation of possibilities for white subjectivities in the city. He thus allows New Orleans's public blues cultures to take the place of his own identity. While preparing his office for the storm, he thinks to himself:

Where would he be if this were gone? All this life had been a kind of exoskeleton, or scaffolding, inside which he had assembled enough of a self to keep the operation working. His self was invested in the city, in its rituals; he read meaning into it and it returned the favor by endowing him with a set of coordinates . . . it was a refuge he'd found, a world that worked in a way he needed the world to work, a safe harbor to get away from something in himself for which he lacked a name, some emptiness, some longing, some intimation that perhaps he did not really even exist.\(^{584}\)

Caught between his desire to lose (not find) himself in New Orleans's counter- (or black) geographies, and his desire to provide his family with the white middle-class lifestyle that Alice desires, Craig often seems "threatening" to Alice. She fears his love for the "glorious and dangerous underworld full of music and food and sex"—that is, to her, New Orleans's blues cultures—will endanger their children.\(^{585}\) One small incident just before the storm confirms, for Alice, that their family's future in New Orleans is not and can never be anything but dangerous.

The principal of Boucher (an only slightly fictionalized version of the selective admissions, middle-class Uptown public elementary school Lusher) calls Alice to let her know that their seven-year-old daughter Annie was caught calling one of her classmates a "mother-fucker." Confronted with her imagined version of black women as dysfunctional

\(^{584}\) Ibid., 80.
\(^{585}\) Ibid., 19.
rising up in her own daughter, Alice immediately becomes possessive of her daughter's right to be socialized as white. "Craig, is it too much to ask that my seven-year-old daughter grow up without calling people 'motherfuckers' and dancing like a hooker?" she asks Craig on the phone. Craig responds that "This isn't the end of the world," but rather just something Annie picked up that they can discuss and resolve. Craig has learned to see class and race performances as codes, not absolutes, that one can interpret differently and switch in and out of using. Alice's resistance to this point of view reveals, however, just how serious this game of codes is and just how deeply embedded within one's notion of selfhood it can grow. Craig's point of view, after all, has led him to believe, or want to believe, that he can transcend race. Yet, as a white Uptown homeowner and Boucher parent, he is unable to completely distance himself from white geographies. To assuage his feelings of guilt and confusion over this problem, he temporarily and with increasing fluency "borrows" the coordinates of his lifestyle, his cognitive maps of home and community, and his identity from his idealized understanding of second-line cultures. In a way, Alice is the more realistic of the two. She realizes that she cannot romance herself into an identity apart from the socially constructed coordinates of her universe. Yet, by clinging to her learned white behaviors and geographies, Alice comes closer and closer, as time goes on, to being motivated exclusively by the racist, class "anxiety" of her middle-class Michigan parents.

Alice and her extended family's white geographies are constructed around the notion of the "underclass" as a dangerous, "threatening" social and cultural other. Alice, like Craig, fell in love with what she believes to be the mystical blackness at the heart of New Orleans's uniqueness. She and Craig both hoped that they could come to understand themselves better by immersing themselves in what they imagined to be this "foreign"

586 Ibid., 18.
culture. But when Alice's imagined version of New Orleans's "underclass" culture stops being other to her children and starts being part of their core identities, she begins her determined march away from New Orleans and everything she thinks it represents. Craig, in turn, cannot walk away from New Orleans until he establishes his own role and sense of representational authority within the cultures he idealizes. He does so, finally, when he takes a job as a writer about New Orleans (in Chicago) whose job it is to tell the storm stories of SJ and his neighbors.

With this turn of the narrative Craig goes from being a figure of the white Uptown man struggling to position himself ethically within the race and class divided city to being a figure for the white Uptown author, such as Piazza himself, struggling to theorize and advocate for his own representational authority in the city for non-local audiences. Piazza's story of S.J.'s "world" challenges the claims that Craig, in his narrative, is trying to establish. As such, it works almost as a dialogue, like the one we will see in Rachel Breunlin and Ronald W. Lewis's *The House of Dance and Feathers*, between the white urban intellectual and the "subject" of his writing. However, in the case of *City of Refuge*, this dialogue ultimately serves to provide a dual-voiced affirmation of Craig's (and Piazza's) claims to representational authority. It is not the story's fictional nature that makes this dialogue one-sided. Rather, it is Piazza's refusal to "jump" into a confrontation of his own authorial authority's relationship to patriarchal frameworks for the construction of realist and historic narratives that causes the call and response network between Craig and SJ's stories to fall flat.

SJ's narrative appears, at first, to complicate Craig and Alice's perspectives of New Orleans by depicting black working-class neighborhoods as thriving sites of collective culture that value difference and individual self-expression. Yet, because the novel imagines these neighborhoods via a patriarchal lens, SJ's narrative ultimately
reinforces Craig's perspective, a slip that makes the novel's overall depiction of the city into a unitary rather than pluralistic story. The way out of this return to the patriarchal perspective, for both Craig and the novel, would be to recognize and give voice to the ineradicable distance and antagonism between the spatial grammar of American racism and the female-centered geographies of resistance expressed by blues performances. Even as the second line sounds and performs the possibility of these geographies' mergers into a pluralistic democracy, it does not enact a resolution of the differences between them. Implicit in the parade's form, even in contemporary parades whose meanings hinge on continuous cross-racial exchange, is the fact that the Craigs and the Lucys of New Orleans will always see and be in the city in different ways.

A carpenter by trade, S.J. is a widower with one daughter, a college educated professional who lives with her husband and children in North Carolina. S.J. has also long been the caretaker and father figure in the life of Lucy's son, Wesley. Unlike her brother, Lucy has struggled with different addictions throughout her life and has never managed to find a steady career. At age nineteen, her son Wesley is teetering on the brink of following his mother's footsteps. The narrative makes it clear that S.J. is Wesley's only hope of escaping a fast life of drugs, violence, and underemployment. The Williams family unit comes to stand in for the tensions surrounding a generational divide in the Ninth Ward. S.J. grew up in the age of industrial port jobs, when the Lower Ninth Ward was a kind of country neighborhood in the city, where working-class African American families could build, purchase, or settle down in roomy homes with large yards and a cooperative village atmosphere. Wesley, on the other hand, grew up in the de-industrialized Lower Ninth Ward of the 1980s and '90s, where mass underemployment, poor schools, and the Desire and Florida housing projects paved the way for the drug economy and the drug war. According to the novel, when Katrina hits, "old timers" like
S.J. still functioned as the protectors of the village mentality, giving young men involved in the drug trade the evil eye as they walk past and making sure that mothers, grandmothers, sisters, and children are taken care of.

Unlike *Nine Lives*, which (as we will see) imagines the Ninth Ward according to generational and ethical categories of working-class blackness wherein the keepers of second-line cultures are heroic traditionalists, and the undeserving poor are pathological non-participants, *City of Refuge* represents black identities and cultures as dynamic and in a state of constant negotiation with the pressures of the dominant social world with its institutionalized racism and uneven geographical development. Thus, we not only see the storm and its ensuing diaspora through S.J.’s eyes, but we also see them through Wesley's. Readers come to understand, through Wesley's story, that the young men running the drug trade have histories, make choices, and are active, daily participants, both for good and bad, in the construction of their neighborhood's cultural, social, and spatial landscapes. As we follow Wesley in the rising waters, watch him save an older woman and try to save a friend, and as we then see him and Lucy encounter, for the first time, the truly white spaces of the suburban Northeast and rural Missouri, we think, perhaps, of Alice and her fatigue at always feeling like she is existing in somebody else's map.

S.J. feels similarly ungrounded in Houston, where he lives for several months after the Flood. For S.J. his discomfort in his new life is the result of the destruction of the narrative in his head that linked his memories to his present life and his imagined future. In a dream, the image of the second line emerges, symbolizing that the only way to reconnect these disparate parts of his self is to move home. In the dream, SJ is dancing with his father, "the whole river of everyone they knew and their family [is] there" and
they are "showing each other steps, surrounded by an aura of weird ecstasy." They had never actually second lined together in life, that SJ could remember, but here they [are in this dream], both of them part of the music and the river, ecstatic, relaxation and precision, wit and seriousness, transcendent." In this scene, the second line's collaboratively produced, crowd-driven rhythm and movement is SJ's memory and identity. It is the connection between his past, present, and future. Upon waking, SJ realizes the parade is his home. He decides to leave Houston (and his new serious girlfriend there) to return to the Lower Ninth Ward and try to re-forg[e what he can of the elements in the neighborhood—its homes, front porches, networks of relations, and spatial practices—that make its and his identity possible. Within the world of the novel, the re-forging of this collective, historical identity is the key not only to the Lower Ninth Ward's survival but also to New Orleans's survival.

*City of Refuge* depicts SJ's determination to rebuild his destroyed home with his own two hands as a signifier of second-line culture makers' necessity to the city and of their resilience and strength in the face of intense obstacles. If SJ survived and returned, the story implies, then New Orleans will survive as well. In a connected move, the novel also claims for itself a key role in sustaining New Orleans and its second lining "essence." This claim is most powerfully asserted in *City of Refuge'*s final scene. After a lengthy description of Craig and SJ's experiences during the second-line-esque 2006 version of the Zulu parade that appears to wrap up their stories in the same way as they began—within the hopeful, life-affirming cross-racial space of a second line—the novel veers towards a different ending that reads, at first, almost like a post-script. Here, in the novel's last pages, Craig encounters his co-protagonist for the first time. It is still Mardi

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587 Ibid., 293.
588 Ibid.
Gras day. It is also Craig's last official day as a New Orleans resident. He has sold his home, made a big profit, and is moving to Chicago to start a new career as a writer.

Just as Craig is about to depart the city, he drives by SJ's house and sees SJ on a ladder working. Wesley (now matured into a respectable black laborer) is helping from below as they nail back the house's damaged façade. Astounded by these black strangers' tenacity and resolve, Craig takes a picture. He asks himself, "What kind of person . . . did it take to come back and get on a ladder and start making repairs? To rebuild a life out of these ruins?" Craig then departs his beloved city, placing his confidence in this image that it will indeed return to its former glory. "Later," the narration tells us, "he would put [the picture] above his work desk . . . as a reminder of exactly what he needed to keep in focus for himself."

Craig's planned use of the picture as a memorial to the New Orleans he loved and a reminder of everything in it that "matters" becomes a figure for the overall purpose of City of Refuge. The novel itself produces an idealized image of men like SJ through the narrative "camera" lenses of a man much like Craig. Placed in the eyes of the national public, this picture imaginatively links the past, present, and future of the Ninth Ward and neighborhoods like it to the labor and care of black patriarchs like S.J. The photo and interpretation figure Craig, in turn, in the role of authentic representer of SJ's story within the national public sphere. In his role as a writer of a weekly column about New Orleans for a Chicago weekly paper, Craig's representational authority (like Piazza's) is rooted in solidarity and grounded reportage within the mostly black working class neighborhoods whose stories he tells. As middle-class man and cultural translator, only he (and, the text

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589 Ibid., 402.
590 Ibid.
implies, writers like him) can bring SJ's story into the dominant national public sphere. SJ himself is too busy doing the real, tenacious dirty work to rebuild New Orleans.

Craig's photo defines S.J. as an emblem of “real” black authenticity and as someone who is necessary to the survival of the neighborhoods where second-line cultures exist. By contrast, the novel portrays Lucy as incapable of returning and surviving. Instead, like many real women from the Lower Ninth Ward, she dies from the stress and the sadness of post-Katrina existence. Lucy and her tragic death come to stand in for all the "undesirable" residents whom the city's middle-class, its policy makers, as well as state and national lawmakers want to keep out of the "new" New Orleans. Her death is technically the result of a massive heart attack caused both by her pre-existing heart condition and "the intense stress" of the weeks after the storm. But the narrative implies that it is also the result of something psychic: a feeling that outside of New Orleans her life was not worth anything to anyone.

As we have seen, families, especially female led families, were crucial to sustaining cultural and social communities of resistance and self-determination in the Ninth Ward. It seems strange then that the only woman-led family in City of Refuge is a stereotypically dysfunctional one. Portraying Lucy as a dysfunctional victim in need of protection by male patriarchs and culture bearers allows the novel to place much of the blame for the imagined, threatening undersides of black working-class culture on single mothers. In the text, Lucy embodies the "pathological" flipside to Craig's idealized blues cultures that Piazza thinks he must show in order to avoid creating a narrative that mimics Craig's romantic perspective. By embodiment I mean that her physical, maternal body comes to stand for these things. Readers are led to intimately view Lucy's skin,

591 Newcomb College Center for Research on Women, "Katrina and the Women of New Orleans."
592 Piazza, City of Refuge, 346.
stomach, and even her cesarean section scar in a way that we view no other character in this sex- and blood-free novel. It was never certain, we learn, to SJ or the "nice white social worker lady" that often visited during Wesley's childhood, whether Lucy was a fit mother.

By portraying Lucy as a helpless dysfunctional victim, *City of Refuge* "reclaims" the Lower Ninth Ward as a space that does not pose a threat to patriarchy but rather a place that celebrates black masculinity defined in white patriarchal terms. But by embracing nostalgic white images of a "respectable" industrial-era black patriarchy and theorizing such images as the essence of the place-based identities that make second-line cultures, *City of Refuge* turns away from the "law of the mother" that is at their core. Its reclamation of the Lower Ninth Ward and neighborhoods like it as patriarchal spaces is a response to prevailing "blame the victim" "underclass" discourse that, rather than investigate the impacts of structural racism and de-industrialization on inner cities, defines neighborhoods like this as sites in need of cultural cleansing and uplift. In the years since Katrina, this discourse has reinforced the government's privatized approach to rebuilding New Orleans that frames New Orleans itself as the municipal black mother whose recovery depends on cultural uplift and re-education by charity, volunteer, and non-profit networks from outside the city. *City of Refuge* aligns itself, perhaps unwittingly, with this point of view. It thus comes close to imagining the death and displacement of residents who do not fit the patriarchal or romanticized industrial era laborer model as necessary sacrifices for the Lower Ninth Ward’s future identity as a thriving, cleansed, re-built community.

If Craig is a figure for the white male author in the city (and for Piazza himself), then *City of Refuge* ultimately figures the white author's social and ethical role to inhere in translating and championing a patriarchal interpretation of New Orleans's public blues
cultures for the broader local and national public spheres. This approach claims for the white author a role at the organizational head of the "parade," to order and make sense of the conflicting and contrasting stories that constitute New Orleans culture and geography. By contrast, putting Lucy's story and the stories of black women in general at the center of the novel may have enabled it to not only better understand and convey the knowledges and geographies that second lines and other working-class African American performance forms in New Orleans express, adapt, and pass on in each changing era, but to also expand their reach.

**Testimonial Narratives and Fictions of White Supremacy: Dan Baum's *Nine Lives: Death and Life in New Orleans***

"This beautiful, benighted poor little city is really like the cute cousin of the family who isn't all that serious but everybody just loves." --Dan Baum

Soon to be released as a Broadway musical, Dan Baum's 2009 non-fiction book, *Nine Lives: Death and Life in New Orleans*, chronicles the lives of nine New Orleanians from Hurricane Betsy to their returns home after Hurricane Katrina. Baum, a *New Yorker* writer covering the city in the immediate aftermath of the flood, felt strongly that he was doing a disservice to the city by writing about it only in terms of the Katrina disaster. After a lengthy conflict with his editors about this and other issues that resulted in his 2006 dismissal from the *New Yorker* staff, Baum decided to write a contemporary, cultural history of New Orleans through the oral testimonies of a diverse range of local residents. With his wife Margaret as editor and ghost co-writer, Baum set about following the lives of his chosen "characters" over the course of the next two years. These individuals included Ronald W. Lewis, a Lower-Ninth Ward native who founded a Mardi Gras Indian and social aid and pleasure club museum in his backyard (we will read more

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593 Larson, "Famous New Orleanians tell their stories in 'Nine Lives.'"
about Lewis from the perspective of his own book in the section that follows); Belinda Rawlins, an African American mother and professional; her husband Wilbert Rawlins, a locally revered high school band leader; Billy Grace, an Uptown elite and captain of the Rex Mardi Gras krewe; Frank Minyard, New Orleans's controversial elderly, jazz playing city coroner; Joanna (John) Guidos, a transvestite bar owner who kept her bar open during and after the storm and became a neighborhood hero as a result; Tim Bruneau, a white police officer; Joyce Montana, the wife of Mardi Gras Indian Chief Allison "Tootie" Montana; and Anthony Wells, an unemployed African American man with a tendency to spend a lot of time in prison. After hundreds of interviews with his subjects, their friends and family, and a range of other local sources, Baum "re-created" four decades of his characters' lives in a text that reads more like a novel than a work of non-fiction. Organized chronologically, Nine Lives moves back and forth between narratives and pivots around different intersecting relationships, places, and events that the characters share. The one thread that connects every story is the Ninth Ward—many characters grow up there or live there as adults, while others experience moments in the neighborhood that are significant to their identities and ethical sensibilities.

A New York Times editors' choice selection with reviews by forty newspapers and magazines, Nine Lives has generally been hailed as a powerful reclamation of the "silenced voices" of New Orleans flood victims. A primary reason that the book

appeals to a broad national readership is because it manages to simultaneously proclaim its stories' authenticities (their non-fiction or "real" status) at the same time as it employs the tools of fiction writing to present the narratives in a dramatic, imaginative fashion. In his introduction Baum frames the book as an advocacy project that seeks to not only bring the "true stories of real New Orleanians" into the dominant national public sphere, but also to celebrate what he perceives to be New Orleans's essential "weirdness": its collective-minded and anti-capitalist culture. The book re-imagines New Orleans as a heroic, municipal site of "civil disobedience" within the nation that progressives around the nation ought to celebrate. Baum argues that New Orleans culture continually presents a threat to "the rules of modern America" and is, for that reason, continually underserved, misunderstood, and victimized. According to Baum, the socially dominant purveyors of these "rules" (the logic of late capitalism combined with American individualism) want to wipe New Orleans out of existence. *Nine Lives* presents, by contrast, a multi-voiced narrative argument for the preservation of New Orleans as a site of escape and critical reflection from the nation's capitalistic and materialistic mindset.

Grounding his narrative in diverse oral-histories of the city allows Baum to improvise a unique, second line inspired form of post-modern urban literature that depicts New Orleans as a metropolitan site of resistance whose meaning and collective memories emerge from its residents' conflicting, situated geographies and call and response expressive acts. However, as with *City of Refuge*, *Nine Lives*'s experiments with the second-line aesthetic unravel when they confront the figure of the white male author himself. Baum's white author figure (in this case, himself) exerts a powerful absent presence on each of the novel's narratives. Caught between his desire to let the meaning

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596 Ibid.
597 Ibid., xi.
of the book emerge from the stories themselves and his desire to shape the narratives to make an argument rooted in his own situated knowledges and geographies, Baum invents a fragile, paradoxical form of creative non-fiction that exerts a continuous claim on the "real" by employing the techniques of fiction to erase the role of the interlocuter (himself) on the production of the narratives. Doing so allows the text to maintain the illusion of authorial objectivity and transcendence, only to ultimately push forward a white patriarchal view of the city.

To put it in terms of the story circle, Baum had to participate in the story circle to gather up the pieces of his text: he had to and did spend ample time with his interviewees, he had to share stories about his own life as he asked them questions about theirs, and he had to communicate in sustained and embodied ways with them. But when he translates their stories into the text, he erases his presence from the call and response process that produced it. There is nothing unusual about this method. Yet, because it is New Orleans and because his narrative is pulled and shaped by his fascination with the epistemology of social interdependence that New Orleans's public blues cultures express, Baum feels anxious about this removal. His anxiety flows over into the text in every chapter but especially in the book's introduction and appendixes. There, he lists and categorizes all of his interviews and explains why he had to exert a strong shaping hand on the stories, even fictionalizing them in places, even though he did not want to.

Baum did not record the stories as he listened to them, and he never makes it clear in the text which elements were actually spoken by the characters, which were fictionalized, and which were narrated by other interviewees. Explaining his choice to not record the stories with the assertion that he "types as fast as most people speak," Baum insists that people in New Orleans yearned to tell their stories to him. In this way, he implies, they unb Burdened themselves of the trauma of their experiences by entrusting
their narratives to him to tell. This process, he implies, was gratifying as well as healing for the storytellers. "It is a measure of New Orleans's openhearted and storytelling nature," he writes, that of the more than a hundred people he asked for interviews, "fewer than half a dozen declined." Gratifying or not, telling one's story is not the same thing as giving it away. Baum does not mention that the context under which he asked for many of these interviews was that of an immediately published story for a major nationally published media source, The New Yorker, not a book of "life stories" that would be copyrighted to a sole author. Nor does he explore how questions of ownership and interpretation change in these two different contexts.

When we compare Nine Lives to another oral-history-based best selling post-Katrina text, Dave Eggers's Zeitoun (the harrowing story of one Arab American New Orleans family's experience with police violence and the prison industrial complex in the post-Katrina disaster), we see that unlike Zeitoun, which was "written with the full participation of the Zeitoun family" in every stage of the writing process, the broad reach of Baum's story required him to take a more independent approach to the editing and shaping of his book's narratives. Baum does not even consider the questionable ethics of using "memories" and interpretations of events from interviews he did with people who did not know their stories would be condensed into particular "re-created lives." Explaining how he had to "boil down" the narrative from a million words to 120,000, he also glosses over the fictionalizing that had to happen in order to "re-create" realistic dialogue. While he did not change any major aspects of the characters' narratives, he admits that he improvised scenes and dialogue in order to make the story's parts flow together more smoothly. True to the call and response format, Baum also notes that he

598 Ibid., 326.
599 Eggers, Zeitoun, 1.
600 Baum, Nine Lives, 326.
prioritized making each story appear in the way the characters remembered, even if those memories were contradicted by others. But even as the stories sometimes meld together in moments that different characters share, he never presents any of those contradictions. By contrast, Eggers attests in a preliminary note to his book that all facts in his story have been confirmed by multiple sources.\textsuperscript{601} Nine Lives is more ambitious than Zeitoun in its attempts not just to convey New Orleans realistically, but to also "re-create" the feeling of living there by mirroring the city's prevailing aesthetic in the form of the book itself. But given the book's ambitiousness and the public blues aesthetic shaping its form and content, could it have been possible for Baum to also adhere to facts? Had he attempted to do so, he might have found that his storytellers would have had to engage in potentially conflicted dialogue with each other and with his text, a process that would have been challenging but would have perhaps made for a better, more complex narrative.

Rather than find a way to present and manage the "agonistic" conflicts that necessarily emerge between the divergent memories and cognitive maps of the city that Nine Lives invokes, Baum's editing and fictionalizing process works, instead, to unify all the stories with his own argumentative subtext. This subtext asserts (in a manner reminiscent of the "classic" jazz histories that Wagner chronicles)\textsuperscript{602} that white patriarchy makes possible the black masculinities that Baum (like Piazza) reads as at the center of New Orleans's blues cultures. Going a step further down the patriarchal aisle than Piazza, Baum's narrative also asserts that the "good" patriarchal leadership of "bluesy," yet respectable middle-class white men is what sustains New Orleans's inassimilable cultural identity. Baum thus comes "out the door" claiming to be merely a supporter and host of

\textsuperscript{601} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{602} Wagner, \textit{Disturbing the Peace}. See Chapter 1.
the contradictory and sometimes unpredictable "parade" of oral testimonies that his book contains. But, by fictionalizing the narratives and editing them to fit within his own attachment to prevailing US social ideals and hierarchies, he ends up presenting readers with a coordinated, staged, and at times even minstrel-like version of New Orleans's public blues cultures that advocates not so much for New Orleans as for the social role of white middle-class urban intellectuals as translators and advocates for silenced and idealized industrial-era black masculinities. In his introduction Baum writes that New Orleans itself is the protagonist of his story. If New Orleans is his protagonist, this New Orleans is a puppet-version of a Black Men of Labor parade, whose performances express a longing for an idealized, industrial urban past where a soft, carnival-loving capitalism sheltered the city from the harsh realities of the rest of the nation, and where "welfare queens" and unruly African American youth are healed by being subjugated under the laboring thumbs of black men whose masculine identities devolve from white patriarchy.

The most disturbing aspect of this distorted image of the city is that Baum draws it almost directly from the oral testimonies of local residents. As John O'Neal might say, the meaning of a story always emerges more from how it is heard than how it is told. The case of Nine Lives underscores, in a profound way, the role that solidarity and oral history ethics play in producing the ways in which the stories of marginalized communities are heard and received within the public sphere. Baum's failure to achieve his stated goals illuminates broader questions about the role literature and journalism can play in re-imagining and enacting new images of the city and new forms of cross-racial solidarity in contemporary urban environments. As Dubey has shown, middle-class urban intellectuals contribute to the strengthening of pluralistic, discursive urban democracies when they create narratives that introspectively question and complicate their own social roles as
narrators. Post-modern urban fiction's reflections on realism's tendencies to re-inscribe the social hierarchies it claims to contest can generate in readers' minds an understanding of their interdependence with those of others from whom they are socially alienated. Nine Lives appears, on the surface, to also challenge social hierarchies by presenting the city as a composite of conflicting yet interdependent cognitive maps and memories. But what the book ends up accomplishing, instead, is a reconfiguration of the white middle-class urban intellectual as a transcendent or objective autonomous subject who is the exception to the rule of situated knowledges and geographies. This assertion of the white middle-class author as an objective or transcendent subject depends on ideologies of white supremacy that turn away from institutionalized racism and the ethical challenges created by race and class privilege, instead projecting the specter of racism and pathology onto working-class whites and black women. Critically evaluating Nine Lives can draw our attention to the interdependence of mass-market urban literature and the neo-liberal and post-racial ideologies whose logics require such demonizations. Analyzing Baum's keen attention to, yet ultimate misreading of New Orleans's public blues cultures can, in addition, shed light on the importance of emerging, alternate models for literary work that can ease urban literature makers out of this dynamic.

Baum grounds his depictions of second-line cultures in the stories of Lewis, the creator of the House of Dance and Feathers Museum in the Lower Ninth Ward and Joyce Montana, the wife of famed Mardi Gras Indian leader Big Chief Tootie Montana of the Yellow Pocahontas Tribe. I contrast Lewis's own second-line inspired, auto-ethnography text with Baum's depiction of him in the chapter section that follows. Here, I want to focus on the definition of black patriarchy that emerges in Baum's version of Joyce Montana's narrative.

603 Dubey, Signs and Cities.
*Nine Lives*'s presentation of Joyce's story follows her reflections on her husband's work since the 1950s to transform Mardi Gras Indian practices from conflict-ridden encounters with other tribes to performances of racial unity in and through difference. As I noted in Chapter One, Tootie Montana's costumes were largely the inspiration for this city-wide transformation in Mardi Gras Indian practices. Montana transformed Mardi Gras Indian competitions into battles over "prettiness" instead of battles over territory. As a result, instead of merely performing black-working class neighborhood identities on Mardi Gras Day, Indian practices today call forth a wide range of participants to actively and collaboratively construct those identities during year-round practices and sewing sessions. During sewing sessions, extended families of supporters tell, sing, imagine, and slowly etch neighborhood, diasporic, or "tribal" stories into each Indian's costume. Born out of the domestic hearths that are traditionally associated with femininity, these collaboratively constructed costumes and the men who wear them export the specific and shifting histories of interrelated diasporic communities into urban public space. Equally important, they publicly express a counter-hegemonic conception of black masculinity and power as something intrinsically tied to the collaborative, village-minded resistance and survival strategies of laboring black women.

*Nine Lives*'s interpretation of Indian sewing traditions edits out this latter part of this story. Tootie Montana, like Ronald Lewis, is portrayed as a dignified black laborer whose moral authority saves corrupted, dysfunctional young black men (often the products of single-mothers) from criminal, jail-bound lives. Baum's depiction of Joyce's narrative is a story of passivity in marriage that portrays Tootie's "tough love" approach with their son, Darryl, as an example of the socially transformative effects of black laborers.

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605 Ibid.
patriarchy. In the edited version of her interviews, readers do not get to see if Joyce ever found herself criticizing this approach. Nor do we know the questions Baum asked to pull forth her story, or the kind of dynamic relationship between interviewer and interviewee that led to the shape of the stories she told. Also, we never learn of any examples of women who participate publicly in the Indian masking tradition (and there are plenty). Instead, Joyce's narrative depicts women's roles in the tradition as that of help-mates to their husband's private, meditational enterprises and their heroic public personas.

According to *Nine Lives*, Tootie's all-consuming sewing work causes him to be simultaneously enmeshed in the hearth-space and absent from it. Joyce helps Tootie in a subservient way, staying up all night to "put the finishing touches on [each] suit," having not a moment to prepare herself for Mardi Gras Day. Her "re-created" story does not mention the circular community of children and neighbors, storytellers, call and response singers, and sewers that Indians' year-long costume making and performance preparations generate. Instead, Baum's edited version of Joyce's narrative depicts the entire process as revolving around giving glory to the Chief. When he steps out in his costume on Mardi Gras morning the crowd yells, "Big Chief! . . . Biiig Chief!"

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606 Woods, "Upholding Community Traditions: Interview with Cherice Harrison-Nelson" and Big Chief Brian Harrison and Big Queen Cherice Harrison-Nelson, *Guardians of The Flame Blog*.

607 Joyce Montana's story strongly resembles that of Baum's own wife, Margaret, who (almost unbelievably) agreed to act as a ghost co-writer for this book and all of Baum's work. As Baum notes in his acknowledgments, "the work that goes out under my byline is at least half Margaret's, but also, she brings me cups of tea" (Baum, *Nine Lives*, 323). Like Margaret, Joyce sacrifices public recognition for the private satisfaction of nurturing her husband's artistic voice. Dana Goldstein of *The American Prospect* notes that "there is something troubling to me about the way Dan and Margaret go to pains to portray their working relationship as a partnership of equals…even though Margaret’s name appears nowhere on their work. In the workplace, editors also don't get byline credit for the work they do, but they do appear on a publication’s masthead, and most importantly, they are paid for their efforts. Margaret Knox’s situation is totally different. Outside of the 'Dan Baum' website, her work alongside her husband goes completely unacknowledged by readers." "The Peculiar Arrangement of a Former New Yorker Writer." See also Beckett, "Where Is Knox’s Vox?"


609 Ibid., 19.
wearing [the costume], out in the early sunshine" gratifies the crowd; it also makes Joyce's "heart full." This final triumph in the narrative's depiction of Tootie's year-long meditative sewing indoors imagines Mardi Gras Indian practices as labor partnerships that works, ultimately, to make possible a public reclamation of black masculinity within the terms of old-fashioned white middle-class gender roles.

The narrative's interpretation of Tootie's famous death on June 27, 2005, at a city council meeting where he was protesting police violence at Indian gatherings takes this sub-textual argument a step further. The narrative edits out Tootie's famous, decisive last words, "This has got to stop," replacing them instead with a different dramatic peak: Joyce's cries of shock and grief as her husband fell to the floor in the middle of the city council chambers. "Tootie? Tootie! You can't leave me, Tootie!" Joyce screams.

Through her, the narrative insists that it was not Tootie's performances of counter-hegemonic histories or herstories in the streets of New Orleans that mattered most. It also veers away from the police power that Mardi Gras Indians have always signified on and resisted. Rather, Nine Lives insists that Tootie's mastering of a kind, yet masterful patriarchy was what transformed the social dynamic of not only his own home but also that of social formations of "unruly" youth who were and are prime targets for the police. Any readers familiar with Mardi Gras Indian forms of resistance and this well-known historical moment in New Orleans are left wondering what the real Joyce Montana thinks about Baum's decision to edit out Tootie's last words from their "re-created" life history.

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610 Ibid., 18.
611 Ibid., 204. It is interesting to note that a group of SAC students who were there to chronicle the meeting for the SAC newspaper, Our Voice, were the first people to step up and try to resuscitate Montana. Also, for a more accurate story of Big Chief Montana's death see Lisa Katzman, dir. Tootie's Last Suit; eckdahl, "Chief Tootie Montana Dies of a Heart Attack at a City Council Meeting" and "A Colorful Farewell for the Chief of Chiefs"; and Salaam, "Tootie Montana, My Knee Will Bend No More."
To contrast the story of Joyce as the submissive wife, Baum presents us with the un-submissive Belinda Rawlins, a woman who grew up in the Lower Ninth Ward but who was always determined to raise herself up and out of the neighborhood in order to attend college and attain a white collar career. Despite becoming "another Lower Nine teen with a baby on her hip," and a failed, too-early first marriage, Belinda manages to attain two degrees and build a professional career for herself. In the narrative, the song "On My Own" becomes her "anthem." According to the text, in her adult life, Belinda distances herself physically, emotionally, and culturally from her family and home community. She thinks the Mardi Gras Indian performances are "silly." Readers do not see her dancing at or watching any Sunday second lines. She "wrinkles her nose" at crawfish and avoids men "who [are] thrashing around at the bottom of the economic ladder." Belinda, however, is impressed when she meets public high school band leader (and local legend) Wilbert Rawlins. Wil's formal manners and traditional courtship methods win her over. When they marry, however, she begins to both long for and reject the traditional middle-class forms of domesticity that Wil expects them to follow. A working mother, Belinda values her own public life. But she bitterly resents her husband's public life as a bandleader and father figure to hundreds of underprivileged kids. The narrative makes it clear that Belinda's fixation on being an upwardly mobile strong black woman requires her to castrate and control her partner. By juxtaposing Belinda's story with Wil's, Baum paints a picture of Belinda that condemns her unwillingness to sacrifice herself for the sake of helping her husband fulfill his important patriarchal role in the city. But is this the "real" Belinda? The narrative anxiously doubles back on itself to answer this question. We cannot question the narrative's authenticity.

612 Baum, Nine Lives, 151.
613 Ibid., 86.
614 Ibid., 152.
when we are being given two "real" oral narratives (Belinda's and Wil's) combined with dozens of edited inserts from other interview sources to back it up. The narrative's form—its oral origins and close-third person detail—is supposed to be proof that the representation is mimetic of reality. It is also supposed to work as proof of Baum's objective or transcendent interpretive stance.

As L.H. Stallings notes in her analysis of Paul Beatty's novel *The White Boy Shuffle*, "the fiction of white supremacy can be maintained as long as the black mother is misrepresented or erased." In dominant images of working-class black women, they are either castrating matriarchs or submissive nurturers of strong laboring patriarchs. Baum's narrative interpretation of black women in New Orleans conveniently matches such images. For instance, two years after Katrina, when Belinda finally comes out for a screening of a documentary that had been made about her husband's students' triumphs. The narrative reads, "She felt a rush of shame. She had been competing with them [the students], resenting them, pulling him away. Her life was not going to be like on *The Waltons*. She had the white picket fence, Ninth Ward style—a husband, which was more than a lot of women could say."

According to Baum's story, Belinda does not truly gain a husband until she learns not to castrate and control him.

In contrast, Joyce has always willingly sacrificed her sense of personal agency for the sake of supporting her husband. According to the narrative, after Tootie's death she begins to feel that she has earned the right to fight her own battles. These battles, however, are strictly confined to a place where there are clear and reassuring gender hierarchies—the Catholic Church. St. Augustine's church in the Tremé is about to be closed. A group of young white protesters has come together with the parish's mostly

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elderly African American parishioners to blockade themselves in the church and protest its closing. Joyce decides to join them. The narrative reads: "Tootie had overseen her life for fifty-three years, but he was gone, and she would have to find her own way. She took the seat that Marion was holding for her. She folded her hands and set her jaw, waiting for the sirens."

If Belinda and Joyce's concluding actions and reflections seem to match, over-conveniently, with dominant underclass ideologies that blame black women for not respecting and valuing black patriarchal authority, it is no accident. Yet, *Nine Lives* circumvents any criticism of its white patriarchal subtext by claiming both a direct connection to "the real" and to objectivity. Whether or not Joyce Montana believed herself to be merely a help-mate to her husband's public persona or whether or not Belinda Rawlins really wholly disdained her Ninth Ward childhood is not the issue. At issue is the way in which Baum presents the stories as authentic and pluralistic memories of life in the city, as a kind of literary second line, yet as we read we discover that each narrative is connected to one set of ideological assumptions. Either all New Orleanians share the ideology of the dominant class that views black masculinity as something defined by white patriarchy, or Baum is editing the stories to match and amplify his own "song."

If Baum edited, as he says he did, nine-hundred thousand words out of his interview transcripts, and if he admits to fictionalizing aspects of the stories for the sake of balancing coherence with conciseness, why does he insist on the narratives' oral authenticities? Patricia Hill Collins argues that reproducing hegemony in gender

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617 Ibid., 298.
618 For instance, in the appendix Baum admits that some of the dialogue in Joyce's story comes from other places: "When Tootie tells Joyce on page 139, 'That King Tut suit come out of a book, so I can't give him no credit,' those are words Tootie spoke to the filmmaker Lisa Katzman of *Tootie's Last Suit*. I know,"
patterns is a central way in which the US white supremacist ideologies impede black freedom. She writes, "the vast majority of the population accepts ideas about gender complementarity that privilege the masculinity of propertied, heterosexual White men as natural, normal, and beyond reproach. In this fashion, elite White men control the very definitions of masculinity, and they use these standards to evaluate their own masculine identities and those of all other men, including African American men."619 In the case of his novelistic non-fiction narrative, Baum plays a shell game that uses dominant romanticized notions of "authentic" black aurality in New Orleans to subjugate black women and attain yet more social and capital for white men.

Baum further elides introspection about the way his own race- and class-situated knowledges determine how he "hears" and shapes the oral narratives by finding a white working-class character to bear the burden of the specter of white racism and racial violence. This specter haunts the spaces between the book's divergent black and white storm stories, especially between stories like Joyce's and that of white Mardi Gras "king," Billy Grace. By tying white racism to late-capitalist economies, governmental institutions, and working-class whites, the story becomes free to portray middle class white men such as Billy (and Baum himself) as rational figures who learn from their mistakes and fall easily into the role of hero. The narrative thus portrays Tim Bruneau, the white character with the most stereotypical working class and "red state" views, as the white character least capable of heroism and most in need of reforming. Tim is reformed by Katrina and a dead black woman's body (Maria), and, as a result, he becomes a storm hero.

Baum writes, "that that's how Tootie felt at the time, so I have him speaking those words—his own—to [Joyce]," Nine Lives, 326.

619 Collins, Black Sexual Politics, 186.
Before the Flood, Tim's greatest pleasure in life had been "pounding" black "scumbags." While patrolling on the morning after the storm and looking for scumbags to pound, he finds a black woman dead on a street in Central City. Tim attempts, but fails (in the face of the rising waters) to bring her body to the city morgue. While she is lying wrapped in a deflated water bed in the back of his patrol car, Tim gives the woman a name: Maria. "Maria's" body reminds Tim of his own and all of New Orleans's entrenchment in the legacy of slavery. No longer threatening and alive, her body is reborn in Tim's imagination as pure, virginal victimhood. It is only after looking this non-threatening black woman in the eye and carrying the weight of her body that Tim is able to change his ways. He not only goes far out of his way to attempt to find a resting place for her, but he also quits the police force, which is depicted as intrinsically tied up in historical cycles of racial violence. *Nine Lives* leads us to imagine that in his new career as a disaster planner, Tim will devote himself to working to ensure that a racial/social disaster like Katrina never happens again.

We might view the figure of Maria as a kind of figure for New Orleans in *Nine Lives*. According to the logic of this "non-fiction" novel, it is only through New Orleans's death and the specter of her disowned, dismembered materiality that the average white working-class racist can come face to face with his own hatred. The narrative encourages readers to connect the logic (or illogic) of Tim Bruneau's racism to his lack of education and his irrational, violent behaviors. But when white middle-class characters, such as city coroner Frank Minyard, reveal their racism, the text quickly covers it over or edits it out. For instance, early in his narrative about his career as coroner, Minyard explains how he covered up the New Orleans police's racially motivated murder of crime suspect Adolph
Archie in 1990. Baum is working to create a story arc that renders Frank into a Katrina hero (something that he indeed was), so he fails to dwell on this well-known scandal for long. Baum could have depicted Minyard's flawed participation in the reproduction of racist structures of police violence in the city and still depicted him as a storm hero. To do so would have been less damaging to Minyard than it would have been to the overarching story that Baum himself was trying to tell. For this reason, when telling the story of Minyard's police cover-up, Nine Lives circumvents the issue of the race of the white cops and their black victim. The story of Rex captain Billy Grace furthers this kind of circumvention. Baum's version of Billy's story depicts him as a passive anti-racist whose class anxieties prevent him for standing up for racial justice in decisions about the integration of old-money Uptown Mardi Gras krewes (the clubs that sponsor the parades). Nine Lives depicts both Frank Minyard and Billy Grace as eccentric, and flawed, yet upstanding citizens and public leaders who are crucial to the city's future. By contrast, it depicts the characters who are their greatest social opposites—Tim Bruneau and Anthony Wells, an unemployed African American man—as a disease that needs to be taken out of New Orleans and cured.

_620_ Mary Howell, a New Orleans civil rights attorney, refers to this murder by the police of Adolph Archie, an African American man, as as "a lynching that happened in open, in public, in downtown New Orleans." She adds, this murder, which Minyard condoned and covered, was "the beginning of the end for this police department, the fact that this could happen in broad daylight, openly. Everyone in town knew what had happened. There was a sizable minority, very vocal, who thought that this was just fine, and the police chief at the time went on the air and said the lessons to be learned, after it was announced that Archie had died, is that you resist the police to the threat of your own demise. That was the message from the police department." Interview, _Frontline: Law and Disorder_.

_621_ During Katrina, Minyard knew his work running the coroner's office was essential. Thus, at seventy-six years old, he remained in the city and even tried to swim through the floodwaters to his office in order to be able to identify and process bodies as they came in. When, after being stranded for several days, he finally arrived at the temporary morgue that FEMA had set up, he saw that no work was being done to identify bodies. As Nine Lives shows, Minyard immediately put a stop to bureaucratic delays and demanded that bodies be collected and identified before they decayed past recognition. Without Minyard, many New Orleans families would not have been able to claim their relatives' bodies.
Anthony Wells is the only character in the book whom Baum portrays in first-person. Anthony's undated, first person narratives draw on the perennial and adaptive "American grammar" of images of working-class black men as hyper-visual, socially victimized "field hands" or "street thugs" whose dialect, social helplessness, and raw physicality make them a threat to mainstream society. However, Baum's claim to be using Anthony's "actual" voice allows his narrative to reject any association with such racist images. Furthermore, putting Anthony's sections in first person italics allows Baum to create the illusion in the text of actual oral recordings. In reality, however, these pieces of Anthony's story are (like the rest of the book) highly edited and shaped. The gap between the presentation of the narrative as an image of the "real" and the reality of Baum's editing and shaping hand allows the text to elude the performative elements in Anthony's exchange with Baum and Baum's exchange with Anthony. In all of Baum's interviews, this performative element existed and functioned, as in any dialogic practice, as a ground for exchange in and through difference. Yet Baum seems more anxious about the performative element within his conversations with Anthony's narrative than with the others. The book's claims on the real cannot afford to reveal the ways in which both the content of Anthony's narrative and aural form of his speech performances might be shaped by his interactions with a white man who is performing the role of the sympathetic journalist/advocate even as he is uncomfortable with this role and its relationship to white privilege.

As W.T. Lhamon has shown, for black men, performing white stereotypes of black masculinity can be a liberating form of critiquing whiteness. By writing the possibility of such a performance out of Anthony's narrative, Baum silences possibilities for this critique. Thus, even though readers are made to feel that they "hear" Anthony's

622 Lhamon, Raising Cain: Blackface Performance. This is, after all, what the Zulu parade is all about.
words, the text puts forth a version of Anthony that is completely victimized, without agency, and without choice. Readers understand Baum, in turn, as the figure who is giving Anthony a chance to have a public voice and to begin to seek a sense of personal agency. Ironically, it is Anthony's performance of blackness and Baum's performance of whiteness that enables the white author to frame himself as a transcendent rational subject whose social role is to hand out empowerment to working-class African American men. The text does distinguish, however, between the kind of men whom Baum imagines need this assistance and the kind who do not.623

Again, Baum uses character mirroring and juxtaposition techniques to contrast Anthony's value system and behaviors with those of other characters. Anthony's narrative is thus a kind of inversion of those of Tootie Montana and Ronald W. Lewis. As the bearers of public blues cultures, Nine Lives celebrates these men as embodiments of nostalgic, pre-urban crisis era, working-class masculinities. The book does not take into account the ways in which second line and Mardi Gras Indian traditions have incorporated hip-hop and the struggles of African American youth in the de-industrialized, drug war infested city.624 Instead of exploring the ways in which the parades' meanings are interdependent with the shifting perspectives and memories of non-social club members, who are residents in black working-class neighborhoods, Nine

623 My reading of Baum's depiction of Wells as pure dysfunctional victimhood is confirmed by a post on Baum's blog titled "Good Tidings of Great Joy," in which he posts a picture of Anthony and Roger Wells playing cards on the hood of a car and tells the story of Wells calling him to report he'd "found Jesus." Baum implies that his book has played a role in inspiring Anthony to turn his life around, January 8, 2010, http://www.danbaum.com/Nine_Lives/Blog/Entries/2010/1/8_Good_Tidings_of_Great_Joy.html. Baum's YouTube video, "Dan Baum of 'Nine Lives' discusses Anthony Wells," is equally paternalistic and disturbing. In the video, Baum states that Anthony and his brother "had never really had a job, had been in and out of jail a lot, used drugs, done bad things, but they're just loveable. They have a way of talking, a rhythm to their language, a poetry to their voices, and they have a love of New Orleans as great as anybody in the city though their lives have been harder than just about anyone's," (my itals.) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bs5TKMo5BqA&feature=related. 624 Regis, "Blackness and the Politics of Memory."
Lives portrays Anthony and men like him as a threatening, parasitic moss on the great, patriarchal-rooted oak tree of black working-class second-line cultures.

Critiquing Nine Lives's various methods for re-creating the lives of "real" New Orleanians can inform our understanding of how the city's second-line knowledges have come to stand, simultaneously, as threats and utopias within the national imagination. What we learn from Nine Lives is that to do away with the moral authority of middle-class urban writers and intellectuals, no matter how well-researched their work, is to call forward an alternate "law of the mother" tied to Black Atlantic histories of slavery that understands pluralistic, agonistic imaginative maps of the city to be central to possibilities for sustainable and just urban futures. Remaking the city and the local and national public spheres with this law of the mother would destroy both the concept of patriarchy and that of white male transcendence, or any kind of transcendence. It is for this reason that both Piazza's and Baum's narratives break down or fail to meet their goals of producing a textual version of New Orleans's public blues cultures. To write in a way that depicts their own perspectives' interdependence with other stories and perspectives in the city, they would have to confront the fact that their own authorial authority—their feelings that they have a right, an ability, and the power to tell the city's story—hinges from white patriarchal hegemonies and the ideology of white male transcendence. Both books seem on the edge of jumping in and telling this story: that of the authors' own struggle to face and write about their personal imbrications within structures of racism and privilege. But neither manage, ultimately, to do so.

In sharp contrast to Baum and Piazza's methodologies, the Neighborhood Story Project's collaborative ethnographies begin with the difficult work of attending to the intersections between race and gender oppression. In the next section, I explore the Neighborhood Story Project's locally best-selling post-Katrina books and public
storytelling projects as a way of analyzing the role that critical race studies and feminism can play in generating powerful new models of and new possibilities for a second-line literary aesthetic capable of reaching and transforming local and national audiences across race and class barriers.

Creating a Collaborative, Popular Second-Line Literature: The Neighborhood Story Project Books

Since its founding in 2003, The Neighborhood Story Project (NSP) has generated multiple new publications and publication forms, ranging from the single- and dual-authored youth narratives, to a collaborative ethnography by the Nine Times Social Aid and Pleasure Club, to a catalogue and history of Ronald W. Lewis's House of Dance and Feathers museum. Each of these publications is an experiment in the practice of second-line literature making that seeks, in collaboration with a wide range of local individuals and communities, to discover new methods for building solidarity through storytelling, oral history interviews, and collaborative ethnography.

As I noted in Chapter Three, NSP is directed by Rachel Breunlin and Abram Himelstein, both of whom are white and both of whom moved to New Orleans as adults and live in the Seventh Ward, a primarily African American, historically Creole neighborhood. NSP began before Katrina, when Breunlin and Abram Himelstein were

625 Other NSP projects and book forms include: the "Seventh Ward Speaks" poster project (2008), a collaboration with the Porch Cultural Organization and Neighborhood Housing Service's Seventh Ward neighborhood center that featured stories from a wide range of seventh ward residents on professionally designed and printed posters and premiered at several local gatherings (including a second line) as well as toured nationally; Cornerstones, by Breunlin, Himelstein, and Bethany Rogers, a book about the places that New Orleanians identify as significant to their community identities and histories. The book has continued as a part of Tulane City Center, with an interactive component where residents can write in and vote for the sites that they wish to be included in the text; imaginative youth anthologies produced by students in the University of New Orleans's Charter High School network about how students imagine their lives in ten years; and Letters from the Backside (2011), a poster exhibition of "open letters" by the workers behind the scenes running the annual, four month long seasons at the famous New Orleans race track.

626 For an introspective analysis of some of NSP's collaborative ethnography methods see Breunlin and Regis, "Can There Be a Critical Collaborative Ethnography."
working as Students at the Center teachers. In 2003, when SAC lost some of their funding, Randels and Salaam chose to begin concentrating their efforts on Douglass High and the Ninth Ward. Breunlin and Himelstein, in turn, decided to keep going on their own with their creative writing program at John McDonogh, a high school on the border between the Sixth and the Seventh Wards. Breunlin had been publishing small chapbooks of student writing through SAC. After months of conversation about exactly how they could continue to publish student work outside of the nurturing SAC structure, one day Himelstein expressed to Breunlin a new vision he had of having a group of ten students write ten books about their blocks in one semester. He said, "I'm going to pay them each $1000, and we're going to celebrate with block parties for each book." Astounded at this big vision, Breunlin responded, "That's ridiculous. We can't!" Soon, however, they both discovered that if they worked hard and drew on their complementary sets of professional skills, they could find a way to make this vision happen.

In every NSP book since this first year (and there have been many), the authors and project directors employ second-line knowledges and geographies to create collaborative narratives about working-class African American neighborhoods. These narratives revise dominant images of those communities with a resistant herstorical authenticity that understands the meaning of place to inhere in interdependent exchanges of individual and collective memory. Like the drums and dancers at Congo Square, NSP books make a communicative circle across and through difference in the face of the harsh square corners of the neoliberal city. Their model builds this circle from the ground up, beginning in the communities where the authors live, moving across those communities in innovative and improvisational discursive paths, and then moving out to readers,

627 Breunlin, Interview by the author.
628 Ibid.
629 Ibid.
collaborators, and participants in other neighborhoods, the city as a whole, and increasingly to national and international audiences.

NSP's methodology adapts Free Southern Theater, BLKARTSOUTH, and SAC writing aesthetics and public engagement tactics to anthropological, popular literature, and cross-racial solidarity goals. Breunlin, who has a background in urban and applied anthropology, designed the program to "build on the strengths" of New Orleans neighborhoods by teaching "young people to learn the deeper histories of their communities, to see the connections between their own experiences and others, and be able to share their perspective with them."630 Himelstein, in turn, brought a background in creative writing and self-publishing to the program.631 When they first came together, they combined their experiences and skills to conceptualize a year-long course for John McDonogh students that would create a "bridge between the classroom and the neighborhoods where the students lived."632 Originally located in a house across the street from the school, the course entailed frequent field trips to students' neighborhoods and used SAC writing methods such as story circles to generate students' narratives. As major themes in each student's life story began to emerge, students did interviews with family members, community members, business owners, and culture makers in order to connect their stories to the larger stories of their communities and those communities' histories.

During the NSP's first independent, intense year (2004-2005), all but one of their seven students wrote and published a book. While single or dual authored, these texts were each produced from multiple partnerships, with Breunlin and Himelstein as editors

630 Breunlin, in Breunlin, Himelstein, and Nelson, "Our Stories Told by Us," 78.
631 Himelstein's self-published novel, Tale of a Punk Rock Nothing (2004) became a cult classic in the punk rock scene after Himelstein marketed it himself at punk shows, through contact building with the authors of popular 'zines, and distribution at independent bookstores and online. Breunlin, Interview by the author.
632 Breunlin, in Breunlin, Himelstein, and Nelson, "Our Stories Told By Us," 78.
and writing mentors and with friends and family members on their "book committees."\textsuperscript{633}

The authors and their partners celebrated their first year of success with a big book release party that brought together all of the NSP's partners and supporters into one room.

As Himelstein remembers:

\begin{quote}
Three hundred and fifty people, white and black, old and young, Christians and anarchists, in one room, on the same page, here to celebrate the publication of five books and six new authors. It felt like a functioning society, and that was the reward. The books were beyond what Rachel and I could have dreamed. More than yearbooks of a block (which would have been enough . . .) the books had become literature.\textsuperscript{634}
\end{quote}

These first NSP books generated a model for a second-line literature in the Seventh Ward that combined the techniques of creative non-fiction with auto-ethnography and grassroots publication strategies. In contrast to SAC, this model emphasizes students' individual, as opposed to collective, agency as authors. But in a manner related to SAC's and BLKARTSOUTH's tactics, the NSP's model directly addresses dominant structures of literary authorship and revises them according to the second-line aesthetic. NSP authors thus produce books not only for themselves and their communities, but also for a wider public. From the beginning, NSP sought out this wider readership by selling and promoting their books at local independent bookstores and by pursuing speaking engagements for their published authors.\textsuperscript{635}

Breunlin and Himelstein's multiple functions as publishing agents, editors, teachers, and writing mentors enable each NSP project to function as a kind of writing

\textsuperscript{633} Arlet and Sam Wylie, siblings, co-authored their book, \textit{Between Piety and Desire}.

\textsuperscript{634} Himelstein, in Breunlin, Himelstein, and Nelson, "Our Stories Told By Us," 85. My emphasis.

\textsuperscript{635} Breunlin, interview with author. Breunlin notes, for example, the following 2010-2011 engagements by NSP authors: Kareem Kennedy spoke at a conference at UNO on Education Reform in New Orleans post-Katrina in the fall of 2010; Kenneth Phillips worked at the Freret Festivus, Fall 2010; Daron Crawford spoke at a New Orleans Music course at Tulane and in a forum on writing at Audubon Montossori (2010); Daron and Susan Henry spoke at the Tom Dent Literary Festival (2010); Kareem spoke a professor at Xavier University on writing memoirs of the city (2011). Breunlin, email message to author, February 14, 2011.
and publishing social aid and pleasure club. The club, or collaborative, works together to set up the tone, theme, and structure of each student's auto-ethnography. The NSP directors' roles, in addition to being "part" of the collaborative that works on each text, is to provide an institutional structure of support that enables multiple literary "parades" to be planned and executed at the same time. Together, the NSP books have carved a new space in New Orleans's public sphere where residents of African American working-class neighborhoods can convey their histories and cognitive maps of the city in their own words and in creative dialogue with one another. This work is especially important given the mass displacement of residents in these neighborhoods after the storm.

NSP projects begin by working to connect individuals' stories to the stories of their family members, neighbors, teachers, and mentors. In their early years, this approach caused the NSP to gain an almost immediate deep and broad support from the communities where their student writers lived. As Breunlin recalls, "When we started, we realiz[ed] there was a real desire in the communities to connect with the kids, and that we were going to get amazing access. And we felt like we needed to honor that part in a way that we hadn't originally intended." To "honor" this emerging deep connection, NSP employed the ethics of academic ethnographic research to formalize their interviewing techniques. These ethical standards include taping the interviews, a formal and permissions return process, and professional editing, with approval by the interviewees. Drawing on SAC's standards for paying students for their participation as interns and program assistants, the NSP also honored the writers by talking explicitly about their writing as work and paying them royalties for it. Authors can also buy books

636 Breunlin, Interview by the author.
637 Ibid.
at cost to sell themselves. Their approach, in this way, is radically different than that of Baum.

A primary problem that the first NSP books had to resolve was the question of "how to balance the honesty of a writer and the ethics of a field worker." This problem is what led to Breunlin's decision to take on the role as the editor of the interviews. By doing so, she allowed the NSP writers to do deep ethnographic work from the start without having to bear the burden of processing the emotions of their interviewees themselves. This process allowed NSP to protect both the interviewee and the interviewer, to some extent, from the psychic strain that can result from oral history testimonies in traumatized communities. As Breunlin noted to me in an interview:

I'm not going to ask the student to deal with the emotional drain of the book with the people they're interviewing. They don't have the capacity for that. I will work with them on that—they're not trained to know how to deal with adults on that level. Adults, like anyone [can] . . . kind of slip into . . . a trance-like state in the interview. That's what happens with all people when they do an interview, they say things, they process their life, and it's good for the students to hear those things, but do they have the background and the training to publish that themselves? I don't think so.

Part of the writing process for NSP authors, especially for the NSP student writers, who met every day as part of a course on John McDonogh, is linked to learning the techniques for participating in these ethnographic methods at the same time as they compose their own narratives. As they wrote drafts in their journals, read literary models, and discussed creative writing techniques, they went on retreats to learn research methods. There, they brainstored ways to "defamiliarize" familiar people and places in order to be open to the

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638 Breunlin, in Breunlin, Himelstein, and Nelson, "Our Stories Told By Us," 80.
639 Thompson, Performance Affects.
640 Breunlin, Interview by the author.
ways in which other peoples' stories might change their own stories, place-impressions, and memories. 641

Breunlin notes that in the first year of their work, students' initial interviews "lasted about five minutes" and were "rapid fire and vague." 642 This process frustrated both the students and the adults. As Breunlin and Himelstein reassessed their methods, they realized that the bridge they wanted to build was not just between students' lives and their education. They wanted the community to become the students' classroom. A key part of the NSP's work thus became about teaching students methods to re-evaluate their personal stories after they did interviews. Doing so allowed students' completed books to emerge as a product of call and response where each call deepened with each response, and vice versa. In a manner similar to SAC, the interdependent, critical deepening of the students' narratives also came through critical discussions about other texts.

NSC pedagogy focuses on critical race studies and gender studies. This focus encourages their classes of writers to think complexly about the stories that they hear, even though those stories are also often connected to intimate aspects of their own families' lives. Breunlin gives the example of Kesha Jackson's book What Would the World be Without Women: Stories from the Ninth Ward (2005):

Kesha wrote a story about growing up with a mother on drugs and the loneliness she felt living with her grandmother while her mom was in a rehab program. . . . After a few months, Kesha took a trip to visit her mom, Pam, bringing along a tape recorder and a list of questions, partly derived from her own writing. 643

In this interview, Kesha practices the deep listening techniques she gained from story circles, critical race and gender studies, and NSP ethnography training practices. Instead

641 Ibid.
642 Breunlin, in Breunlin, Himelstein, and Nelson, "Our Stories Told By Us," 80.
643 Breunlin, Himelstein, and Nelson, "Our Stories Told By Us," 82-83.
of setting up her mother with accusations and questions about her failings, she lets her mother tell the story of her life in her own words. Where did you grow up? What school did you go to? What was it like? Did you get your diploma? What did your parents do for a living? When did you have your first child? When did you start your habit? Her mother's responses to these questions expand Kesha's analysis of her own life story and provoke new questions. Pamela, in turn, also comes to understand her own story better through telling it. As their dialogue moves into a more analytical and more honest realm, their narratives turn to the story of their neighborhood and its relationship to flawed social institutions and ideologies. Blame and shame do not disappear when this happens, but for Kesha and Pamela these feelings take on a new critical layer as they evaluate their family's history in relationship to that of their neighborhood and its struggles. The book further expands the collaborative or collage-like nature of this story-exchange by placing Pamela and Kesha's stories side-by-side with other interviews and photographs and memories of shared events as connecting links. The image-laden text that emerges is a space of resistant, collective memory-making that is grounded in the second-line aesthetic of interdependent exchange and its privileging of black women's geographies and black working-class knowledges.

The question that is the title of Kesha's book, *What Would the World Be Without Women?*, reflects a central theme in NSP books. Often women-centered, the stories that NSP authors tell speak back to prevailing underclass discourses that stereotype and castigate black women. These books do what Piazza (and Baum) proved unable or unwilling to do—they tell the stories of and celebrate the herstorical memories of New Orleans "blues women," whether those women be musicians, parade-makers, spiritual or community leaders, barroom owners, or just everyday observers and participants in the

creation of life and culture and discourse in those neighborhoods most dismissed and
demonized by white hegemonic ideologies. In doing so, the NSP authors show their city's
second-line knowledges to be grounded in working-class African American women's
resistance to white patriarchal ideals.

Take, for example, the story of Evelyn Pierre, known by friends and family as Ms.
Coochie. Pierre was a lifetime resident of the Desire Housing Project in the Upper Ninth
Ward before the project was torn down in the late 1990s. Multiple NSP authors capture
her story, but Ms. Coochie was especially central to the NSP's first post-Katrina book,
Coming Out the Door for the Ninth Ward, which was written by the Nine Times Social
Aid and Pleasure Club, a club that originated in the Desire Projects. Coming Out the
Door is the second collaboratively authored NSP book (the first is Arlet and Sam Wylie's
2005 book Between Piety and Desire). This book came into being out of connections that
NSP built during the writing and publication of Kesha's book, which told the story of
Nine Times's formation. After Katrina, when the New Orleans public school system
temporarily closed John McDonogh, Nine Times members approached Breunlin and
Himelstein about writing their own book. The book they created tells the history of the
club's formation within the context of the Desire Projects, from their construction in the
1950s, to the rise of the drug war in the '80s, to the fragmentation of the community in
the 1990s. It also follows club members through Hurricane Katrina to their returns home
after the storm. Since its publication, Coming Out the Door has been honored as the book
choice of the year by One Book, One New Orleans, a city-wide reading program; it has
also been a local best-seller.

Coming Out the Door portrays Ms. Coochie as a central culture bearer in the
Upper Ninth Ward whose work to pass on a love and understanding of Mardi Gras Indian

Dinerstein, "Second Lining Post-Katrina," 626.
performances and second lines led youth around the Desire Projects to grow up with a feeling of connectedness to those cultures. While the Nine Times club members were growing up, parades and Indian performances rarely, if ever, took place in the projects. The book tells the story of how Ms. Coochie and members of her generation mentored them in the work to build new parade forms and groups that transformed the Upper Ninth Ward, over the course of the 1990s, into a new central node within New Orleans's second-line landscapes.

Raised in the Seventh Ward, Ms. Coochie grew up immersed in second lining and Mardi Gras Indian cultures. Her uncles were members of The Jolly Bunch, a traditional marching club, and her mother would take her and her brothers and sisters to parades on a regular basis. They moved to the Desire Project when Ms. Coochie was a bit older. In the Desire, she married, began working, had children, and divorced. In an interview in Kesha's book, she describes how she sent her children to the Black Panther Party's breakfast program in the neighborhood. Since no parades occurred in their neighborhood, when Ms. Coochie was a young mother she drove her own four daughters and her son, Louis, as well as many other neighborhood children to Sunday second lines. Ms. Coochie became known then, and is known now, for her role as a community mother abounding in tough love.646 Nine Times member Jean Nelson asks her, "Why do you curse other people's children out?" Ms. Coochie responds that she does not know why she does. Nelson responds, "You curse us out because you love us."647

Jackson, Nelson, and other NSP writers laugh their respect for Ms. Coochie's tough love approach. Their respect and laughter become a way to draw out her counter-narrative to dominant media portrayals of black mothers in New Orleans's public housing

647 Ibid.
developments. In their interviews, NSP authors pull forth this counter-narrative by asking Ms. Coochie about her care-taking responsibilities, her physical health and stress-related health problems, and relationship with her children, especially with Louis, who was murdered on August 6, 2000. Ms. Coochie mentored Lewis when he co-founded Nine Times. Her method for passing on second-line knowledges to her children centered on encouraging them to find their own path to self- and community-expression within the structure of the traditions. She helped set up the parades and made sandwiches for club members to take with them on the route. She cried with pride as they came out the door for the first time in 1998. When Louis died, she hired a horse-drawn glass hearse to carry his casket through Desire. At the funeral parade, Ms. Coochie and her daughters "brought [Louis] down," with every bit of energy and love they had inside them until his body was put down and his spirit lifted away. Coming Out the Door reveals that it is because of the Ms. Coochie, and the legacy of women and men like her, that young men like Louis come to understand the significance of New Orleans's public blues traditions.

Whereas dominant images of second lines (and Piazza and Baum's texts) center on the role of men, Coming Out the Door locates women's stories as a primary transmitter of the public collective memories expressed by the parades. Connecting second-line knowledges to black women's stories frames the parades as what Moten calls a sonic (and spatial) grammar of resistance. This sonic-spatial grammar of resistance expresses an inherited aural and performative revolt and blues system of knowledge, music, dance, and spatial production grounded in black mothers' histories of resistance to the geographies and discursive systems of white patriarchy that are at the heart of capitalism, imperialism, and slavery. The Neighborhood Story Project authors, in turn,

648 Nine Times Social Aid and Pleasure Club, Coming Out the Door for the Ninth Ward, 113.
649 Ibid., 136.
650 Moten, In the Break, 6.
contribute to translating this grammar of resistance into written form. Fittingly, *Coming Out the Door* was released just in time for Nine Times' first parade in the Ninth Ward after Katrina, in November of 2006. The authors and NSP staff sold copies of the book along the route.651

The latest textual model by NSP authors and directors goes further: it begins to forge a path towards textual public blues solidarity wherein white authors and culture makers can collaborate in the production of this grammar of resistance. Whereas in previous iterations of the organization's publication aesthetic, Breunlin and Himelstein had remained in the background as deeply engaged supporters of the NSP authors' work, in the 2009 book and museum catalogue, *The House of Dance and Feathers: A Museum by Ronald W. Lewis*, Breunlin became a co-author and co-researcher, with Lewis, of the personal narratives and histories in the catalogue. This methodological shift significantly expands the NSP's second-line literary model to address the question of the "third line" of academics, journalists, and filmmaker/photographers who increasingly follow and represent second-line cultures in texts that are addressed primarily to the dominant class.

In *The House of Dance and Feathers* catalogue, Breunlin and Lewis (with Helen Regis) enact a model of second-line scholarship and textual memorializing grounded in reciprocal exchange, critical race dialogues, and a performative understanding of history.

Lewis created the House of Dance and Feathers museum in a small building in his backyard on Tupelo Street in the Lower Ninth Ward in 2003.652 He modeled the museum on Sylvester and Anita Francis's Backstreet Cultural Museum in the Tremé.653 As Lewis notes, "We have very few [museums] in our culture that brought it to [the] level" of the Backstreet Cultural Museum. "Even though we have the state museums and art galleries

651 Breunlin, email message to author, May 24, 2011.
that show the history of the culture, they don't carry the same significance as someone who has lived the culture."\textsuperscript{654} To enter the Backstreet museum or the House of Dance and Feathers is to enter a space of living history where costumes and photographs come alive in the stories of the museum guides who have a personal connection the collective histories they are narrating. These stories occur in dialogue as the guides ask the museumgoers to share where they came from and why they are there. Through these dialogues, the culture that the museums preserve and sustain also becomes protected. The information the guides share—the versions of the histories they give—are contextualized by each encounter in the space of the museum. This presentation of history inheres in a second line or blues-performance concept of history that understands it to be the product of embodied discursive exchange and interdependence.

Before Katrina, Lewis's museum had just gained official status. His collection of Mardi Gras Indian beaded patches, second-line outfits and objects, photographs, and paintings was growing so rapidly that it almost overflowed the museum's small space. However, as was true for much of the Lower Ninth Ward, Katrina completely destroyed the museum. In the months that followed, Lewis participated with Baum in extensive interviews that chronicled his family's story in the neighborhood. But at the same time, he was creating his own photographic catalogue of the Katrina diaspora.\textsuperscript{655} When he attended a seminar called ReInhabiting NOLA—organized by Breunlin's husband Dan Etheridge (the associate director of a community design center at Tulane University)—Lewis passed around this book of photos. Breunlin notes of this moment, "It reminded me of the mission of the Neighborhood Story Project: Our stories told by us."\textsuperscript{656} Breunlin

\textsuperscript{654} Lewis and Breunlin, \textit{House of Dance and Feathers}, 7.
\textsuperscript{655} Ibid., 2.
\textsuperscript{656} Ibid.
and Lewis soon got to know each other well, as Etheridge led a team of visiting architects and students to work with Lewis to redesign and rebuild his museum.

Both the rebuilt museum and the museum catalogue are exceptional examples of the kinds of cross-racial partnership that lent strength to artistic and organizing communities in the post-Katrina city. The museum and the book's groundedness in collaborative storytelling and critical geographies have also transformed the historic and spatial knowledges of many visitors, volunteers, and neighbors. Even the design of the building reflects an understanding of subjectivity and history as the products of interdependence and exchange. Etheridge, Lewis, a nonprofit architectural practice called Project Locus, and architecture students from the Kansas State University designed the museum to have walls made of windows that raise up at an angle from the ground, letting in air while holding onto the shade. This design makes experiences of the building open and responsive to the public, outside realm, while they also remain private, internal, and reflective.

Lewis's organization of the museum's interior also expresses this open yet private, reflective aesthetic. As Breunlin notes, "Every time I visit the space, I feel like I am moving into a surreal landscape built on the layering of gift exchange, oral history, and the juxtaposition of objects and images that represent connections between times and places . . . Ronald's assemblage provokes the viewer to feel the tensions that exist amongst . . . different elements. They aren't presented as straightforward narratives, and they aren't easily resolved." For example, Lewis explains how he created the Pan-Africanism exhibit, a shelf that contains African masks, boats, and an Aunt Jemina doll side by side on the same shelf: "The masks represent West African culture and the boats

657 See more examples of such partnerships in Chapter Five.
represent those slave ships that brought us to and fro—mostly to. And in the middle, I put an Aunt Jemima doll with its image of racism. Its easy to just push history to the side, but I don't want to do that because it's there. . . . I want to identify with it all." Together, the diversity of the collection; the continuous changing, re-locating, and relayering of objects in the museum; and the encounters between museumgoers and Lewis, as curator and narrator of the museum's stories, construct the museum's message that second line and Mardi Gras Indian cultures go "beyond" local neighborhoods. They are "about the whole city of New Orleans," and they "tie different parts of the city together." They also tie the city as a whole to the remembered, archived, and embodied repertoires of history and geography from the Black Atlantic.  

Lewis and Breunlin's book strengthens and enlarges these local and global connections by employing and bringing together divergent storytelling lenses into one text. The core of the book consists of essays by Breunlin, Lewis, and Regis and images of the photos and objects in the museum. Each image contains an expansive caption that purposefully counteracts the tendency of prevailing forms of second line and Mardi Gras Indian photography to render the specific histories and identities of the maskers invisible or irrelevant. By contrast, Breunlin and Lewis's captions frame each historic artifact as the product of the dynamic between individual and collective memories and expressive acts. Breunlin and Lewis's introduction, "The Making of a Museum and Its Catalogue," works, complementarily, connecting the stories of the Black Atlantic and African diasporic cultures in the museum to white urban geographies—a re-spatialization of history that yokes the memories and geographies of all visitors and participants in the history and present-day iterations of the hull.

659 Ibid.
660 Ibid., 14; Taylor, The Archive and the Repertoire.
Breunlin and Lewis designed the introduction to juxtapose their own oral histories about their (race, class, and place-based) relationships to the book's content and their reflections on the process of creating it. The text reads like a recording of two stories from a story circle being played back a little at a time. Each narrative makes clear the ways in which its content emerged as a result of the other. Through these paired narratives that exist independently yet speak to each other on the page, the book's aesthetic principles become clear: its goal is to theorize and enact a method for the reciprocal, cross-racial creation of historic narratives.

A metaphor for this aesthetic goal emerges in Breunlin's transcriptions of her own oral stories about her initiation into black working-class cultures in New Orleans. These stories are paired with Lewis's reflections on the history of the museum in the book's introduction. Breunlin explains that growing up, her family "passed down knowledge through books and conversation. . . . [and not] through dance." Music, in turn, "was barely a backdrop." At her first New Orleans second line, Breunlin "watched from the sidewalk until a stranger told [her she] needed to jump off the curb and into the crowd. How else would [she] keep up with the [moving] band?" She "couldn't believe [she] was worthy of the invitation." This kind of invitation shaped her actions in life as she established a home in the Seventh Ward and began NSP, until one day she was invited to Mardi Gras Indian Chief Ronald "Buck" Baham's house the night before Mardi Gras. This particular invitation felt like a great honor to Breunlin. It is rare for a white ethnographer to be invited to the intimate, spiritual space of Lundi Gras evening at the home of a Mardi Gras Indian chief. Baham's invitation ended up showing Breunlin that solidarity with the cultures that she studied did not involve only a critical evaluation of

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662 Ibid.
those cultures' meanings, but also required a continuous critical evaluation of her own
raced and gendered position within the neighborhoods she researched.

Breunlin notes that this realization especially struck her when she visited Baham's
house to give him some photos she had taken of him. She remembers, "Something shifted
in my bag and there was a clicking sound, like a tape recorder shutting off." Baham
thought she might be taping their conversation, and Breunlin was deeply embarrassed.
She writes, "I can still remember blushing as I confronted my naïve belief that I was
outside the larger, complicated history of documentary work in New Orleans." Much
like the history of urban literature, the history of documentary photography and oral
history research in New Orleans is fraught with ethical dilemmas. The mostly white
academic and mass media industries are drawn to the city's second-line cultures, but the
images and works they produce about those cultures often work to feed racial/racist
desire and convey the people and cultures of black working-class communities as static
and non-modern. In the long moment of silence that passed between them, Baham and
Breunlin were both aware of this context that surrounded their conversation. Baham
believed Breunlin when she said she was not recording their conversation. But, she notes,
"We were still caught in this history, unsure how to move on." It was then that Baham
said, "I'd like to interview you." His questions about her work "leveled the playing
field and were the beginning of a friendship and collaboration that's grown over the last
five years." Their conversation became the model for Breunlin and Lewis's
collaboration, except that in the latter case, Breunlin did not need to wait to be asked

663 Ibid., 5.
664 Ibid.
665 Ibid.
666 Ibid.
667 Ibid.
before she put her own story out on the page as integral to and not transcendent from the narratives they were creating about the museum's history and its community meaning.

Breunlin and Lewis convey representational reciprocity as their book's and the museum's central ethical message. They both thus outline a tactic of resistance to the prevailing forms of photography that surround New Orleans public blues cultures and to oral history texts like Baum's. This tactic of resistance inhere in cultural participation and personal storytelling—the seeds that enable grounded solidarity to grow between the media, the academic industrial complex, cultural tourism and the working-class African American communities that produce New Orleans's unique sounds, performances, and cultures.

For instance, to "enter" Lewis's museum is to hear and engage with Lewis's "personal stories" about the objects, and to tell one's own stories as well. This approach makes every visitor's experience of the museum different. Lewis explains that getting to know the "stories behind the suits" deepens and broadens his own and visitors' understandings of the meaning of each Mardi Gras Indian performance or second line parade. The book's captions, in turn, provide these stories within the text. They tell not only who the costumed performers or un-costumed participants are, but also how their individual expressions and histories relate to community traditions and histories. For example, the caption for a picture of Monique Jordan, the 2008 Queen of the CTC (Cross the Canal) Steppers' parade, not only identifies Jordan and describes the symbolism of her elaborate red collar with the word "Mom" etched in red beneath an arch of feathers, but it also quotes Jordan's story about the collar, which honors her mother Henrietta Kincey Jordan, who died in a house fire after the family evacuated for Hurricane Katrina. For her mother ""There never was a dull moment,"" Monique remembers. "\"She worked at

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668 Ibid., 8.
the voter polls, picked up money to help with funerals, gave barbeques in the neighborhood, and worked at Dunbar Elementary. She loved to party and hung out at the Welcome Inn, just a few blocks from our house. In the early '90s, she was a member of the Lower Ninth Ward's Double Nine and always wanted to be a queen."\(^{669}\) In typical collections of second line photos, viewers would receive the image alone. Unless they were a part of or versed in the history of second lines, they would interpret this image according to prevailing, nostalgic interpretations of New Orleans second-line cultures. By contrast, pairing stories with pictures requires all of the readers of this book to "hear" and understand the relationship of collective and individual memory, local strategies for resistant community-making, and counter-geographies to the production of New Orleans's second line parades.

In addition, by telling their own stories in the book, Breunlin and Lewis create a model for the construction of ethnographic and photographic history texts as a product of exchange and interdependence. Breunlin and Lewis hope that the book's reciprocal format will "inspire literature that is a part of, rather than separate from, the communities it represents."\(^{670}\) This approach also encourages a reciprocal approach to the reading of local, cultural histories that encourages the construction of "cross-cultural-links" that "provoke debates about histories, genealogies, and the repatriation of photography."\(^{671}\)

The popularity of House of Dance and Feathers as well as all of the NSP books, which have been best-sellers in local book stores for several years and are beginning to have a national following,\(^{672}\) is a hopeful sign that their books will do exactly that. Just as

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\(^{669}\) Ibid., 138.
\(^{670}\) Ibid., 15.
\(^{671}\) Ibid.
\(^{672}\) Neighborhood Story Project books have been reviewed by national media and publications such as The Today Show, MSNBC, Columbia University Teachers College Record, The Adirondack Review. See also Abe Louise Young, "Our stories, told by us," in What Kids Can Do and myriad local articles and reviews from 2005-2011: including, Helen Eckinger, “Their Worlds, Their Words” (2005); Jason Berry, "A Sense
Baum and Piazza's texts benefited from the NSP's model of a reciprocal approach to writing about marginalized urban neighborhoods, other writers and media makers in the city will continue to benefit from it as it develops and expands. HBO's *Tremé* series, for instance, has been engaging more and more with NSP work as they create the show's second season.\(^{673}\) It remains to be seen if and how they and other urban literature and filmmakers will adapt this ethic of reciprocity into their filmic depictions of New Orleans in the near future.

**Mike Molina and Second-Line Literatures of the Future**

Hurricane Katrina compelled writers in New Orleans to inquire into the ways in which literary representations of the city had to change if writers were to put working-class African American knowledges and geographies at the center of their representations of the city. That this re-thinking of literature occurred during the rise of the age of digital storytelling makes these experiments in urban literature making in New Orleans all the more significant. Pairing second-line literature making strategies with the neo-griot approach to technologically-focused, future-oriented community-based art making ought to provide writers and writing groups with myriad new tactics for building reciprocity and solidarity into their literary projects. Furthermore, the democratization of the means of literary and media production that is increasing as a result of the increasing affordability of the tools necessary for digital publication gives second-line literature makers the ability to use their work to not only imagine a more democratic, just future, but to also actively transform the public sphere with agonistic communicative democratic

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\(^{673}\) Breunlin, Interview by the author.
exchange. A central task for second-line literature makers within this digital environment is to find ways to use writing and literature about New Orleans's public blues cultures to help engage the national public in anti-racist solidarity building and to construct articulations of community across difference in other cities.

One author who has begun to develop a plan for how to do so is Mike Molina, a spoken word poet, novelist, and filmmaker. In typical second-line fashion, Molina's work simultaneously accomplishes steps towards an agonistic democratic future at the same time as it generates a new vision of this future that works from within the realities of the current neoliberal hegemony. Pairing utopic visioneering with a practical model for the expansion of second-line knowledges and geographies allows Molina to create an aesthetic filled with a poetics and a spatiality of hope that encourages audiences, especially the youth in his Atlanta-based Katrina diaspora program "New Roots," to confront the realities of institutional racism and inequality in the neoliberal city, even as they celebrate their collective progress towards constructing a better future. I conclude here with a discussion Molina's self-published post-Katrina novel, *The Second Line*, because this book accomplishes for me, as well as for Molina's growing audiences, what David Harvey calls an act of "insurgent architecture." It strategically thinks about what needs to radically change in the city—how to change it and with what tools—and provides a map of how to continue living in and organizing resistance in the present-day world. For Molina, as well as perhaps for all of the writers in this chapter, urban fiction writing can be a powerful tool in the collaborative struggle to build New Orleans into a socially just, equitable locale.

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674 New Roots, a project sponsored by the national organization, the Young People's Project, has a website that chronicles Molina's work with New Orleans youth currently living in Atlanta: [http://newroots.ning.com/](http://newroots.ning.com/).

675 Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, 233.
Written in 2006 and 2007, during the crisis period where New Orleans's future really was still up in the air and activists from around the globe were organizing with groups such as Common Ground and the People's Hurricane Relief Fund to struggle for a bottom-up approach to rebuilding,\textsuperscript{676} The Second Line expresses the vision of New Orleans's future that groups like the DCC, SAC, and CLU had created. Molina, a New Orleans native with ties to these organizations, grounded his utopic narrative of a partially-realized urban transformation in their public-blues philosophies, aesthetics, and organizing tactics. The Second Line is also constructed around the blues-based tradition of ironic and humorous urban realism that thrives in contemporary spoken word poetry. Multiple song-like poems appear throughout the text. Characters perform these poems as part of the narrative. Readers are also advised to listen to aural versions of the novel's poetry on Molina's CD, Anthem (to be included with the second edition of the novel) and the video spin-offs from the novel that he has posted on his website.\textsuperscript{677} This multidisciplinary approach to creating a novel is part of what Molina calls his "Five Dimensional" (narrative, poetry, musical, visual, and participatory) vision for a publicly engaged, reciprocity-seeking literature of the future. This digital/aural approach to writing and publication resembles Salaam's neo griot practices. The Second Line itself only contains two of the five "dimensions" of Molina's urban literary reflection on the post-Katrina city. Thus it is meant to be read, heard, and responded to through its digital, web-based components.

The novel takes place in an imagined New Orleans in 2020. Rather than having succumbed to the disaster-capitalism approach to rebuilding, in the novel's version of the Katrina story, the city's diverse residents' experiences of the storm inspired them to

\textsuperscript{676} Luft, "Beyond Disaster Exceptionalism"; Flaherty, Floodlines.
\textsuperscript{677} See www.momolina.com for access to The Second Line's digital video and music components.
embrace practices like the story circle method as keys to a just and sustainable future. In the "new" New Orleans that results from this imagined embrace, second-line knowledges and geographies have become the driving force behind housing reforms, cultural practices, and the city's economy. As a result, rather than being fragmented or destroyed, the city's black working-class communities have emerged as thriving urban centers that, while they still endure problems of poverty and marginalization, are constituted by flourishing community dialogues and coalitions working to redistribute the region's natural, cultural, and technological resources in an equitable, sustainable way. In Molina's New Orleans-of-the-future, local public blues culture makers have led the city to become a model for democratic, sustainable urban transformation that visitors and observers from around the world understand (rather than romanticize) and for which they feel the need to fight.

*The Second Line* contains two distinct settings, each of which becomes a space for a different "dimension" of the story. The first setting is a call and response storytelling session that takes place in the Good Favor Social Aid and Pleasure Club, a bar and storytelling space in Central City. The second setting is a surreal, poetic bus ride on "Saint Rita," the RTA bus. According to Molina, the Good Favor Social Aid and Pleasure Club is a spatialized/material version of a story circle: it is a place where the stories "make its identity." Similarly, in the Saint Rita bus section, "stories and narrative performances flit around in the narrator's head and across bus seats, [until] eventually these narratives and poems and performances come to 'drive' the bus." In the case of both settings, it is the conflicting stories of diverse local residents combined with their divergent collective memories of history and community that drive the production of the

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678 Molina, Interview by the author.  
679 Ibid.
geographic spaces that the novel depicts. To help readers narrate this collaboratively produced, memory-based narrative terrain, *The Second Line* contains a glossary of local phrases, cultural practices, and sites that are important to New Orleans residents' notions of home. In addition, Molina provides readers with the opportunity to visually experience this terrain for themselves in his online "Crossroads Cab" video series.  

Readers learn through the stories and poetry on Saint Rita and at the Good Favor Social Club that in this fictional New Orleans, the city's problems are not completely solved. Poverty, racism, and sexism all continue to exist. As the blues/spoken word journey on the Saint Rita bus reflects, the overwhelming intersectionalities of these forms of oppression and inequality continually threaten to spin the characters into violent conflict and despair. On the bus, baby roaches crawl across the seat as the novel's senior griot, Papa Fat, spouts out an elegy for all the creeping, crawling things that "run" the dirty, decaying city. Diamond, a young African American woman, gets on and off the bus twice—once pregnant and once not—both times telling loving stories of motherhood and loss in the Katrina flood and the difficult aftermath. A Creole man named Priest reflects on the class barriers that exist and thrive in the city despite its transformations. Valerie Michaux, a jaded "blues" woman, narrates all the ways she feeds her feeling of powerlessness by trying to control and manipulate men. Conflicts arise between Mexican, Vietnamese, and African American passengers. These stories and desires collide increasingly into a daiquiri-fueled mix of imagery that fails to meld into a coherent,

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680 Molina, *Crossroad Cab* video series, http://www.momolina.com. In the Crossroad Cab video series posted on Molina's website/blog, Molina's brother, Antonio Molina, plays Papa Fat, *The Second Line*'s central elder figure. Akin to real-life griots such as Dent, Salaam, and O'Neal, Papa Fat's storytelling talent and his belief in the social value of storytelling has inspired the transformations in the novel's imagined New Orleans of the future. Papa Fat inserts himself and the stories of others into the narratives of young storytellers, such as the novel's protagonist, Manny. By doing so, he trains young New Orleanians to construct cognitive maps of the city that are a product of divergent perspectives, memories, geographies, and experiences of oppression.
consensus or narrative map of the city as a whole. Saint Rita contains the managed chaos, the structured adversity of viewpoints, that agonistic, freedom- and equity-seeking democracy requires. The ride is never smooth and the journey's destination is never clear. Yet, amid the troubles and conflicting poetic visions of the characters, there is a sense of hope that flows through all of the pieces of the story. This sense of hope is the primary difference between how New Orleans is lived in Molina's vision and how it is lived in reality today.

In *The Second Line* hope flows through the free-form expression of people in storytelling sessions and poetic bus parties. It infuses the renaissance of parading practices centered in political and culture-making spaces like Good Favor. Most of all, it inheres in the realization that all the characters and working-class residents in *Molina's imagined New Orleans* have of the power of their united action and will. Through this realization of their collective power, the potential of second-line epistemologies and geographies has gradually begun to be realized within the city's dominant public sphere.

"My best day?" the character Malo, an activist, remembers:

December 10th, 2010. International Human Rights Day. We had the People's Housing protests that day, after five years of no progress in New Orleans for anybody but the rich and the Saints. That was the year we got them to turn the projects into tenant owned coops . . . . We marched all day. It was like 75,000 people in the streets. People came from Cali, Seattle, D.C., New York, Brazil, Europe, Haiti, Africa, even from Iowa man, everywhere.

Malo remembers that the protest grew tense and violent as the police arrived with "sticks and pepper spray." In this moment, he asserts, "I saw for once that the people have all the power. Anytime we want, we can put a stop to all this." As the book's concluding poem, "Repast," explains, the power of which Malo speaks does not only inhere in the present.

Rather, it is an articulation of the promise the city's blues ancestors such as Juan Malo, the musicians at Congo Square, Robert Charles, Homer Plessy, and Buddy Bolden. It is a transformation of that promise into the present-day as part of a collective vision for the future. It is "one life expressed/as faith in the flesh/Our ancestors manifest infinitely."  

_The Second Line_ imagines collaborative public storytelling and poetry to be central to possibilities for enacting the transformation of this promise. The novel reflects Molina's belief that performing poetry and story sharing "allow us to step out of what divides us." In periods of crisis and social transformation, the unifying potential of poetry and storytelling is all the more crucial and powerful. As I show in the next chapter, believing in this potential is also what drove a network of community-based theatre makers to seize the Katrina crisis in order to engage New Orleanians from all backgrounds and walks of life in the process of learning that they alone have the power to "put a stop" to racism and oppression and transform their city into a place constituted by embodied freedom and social equity.

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683 Molina, interview.
Chapter Five: Cross-Racial Storytelling and Second-Line Theatre Making After the Deluge

What if we began to acknowledge the current state of affairs in our world as an ongoing progression of natural and unnatural disasters resulting from circumstances within and beyond our control? Might we then see the need for a type of art that exists in constant response to the calamities in our communities by illuminating beauty and demanding justice? Might we then see the need for art that is so deeply woven into the fabric of a community that it prevents disasters long before they occur?

--Nick Slie

In March 2009, I found myself sitting in a story circle at the former Lakeview Baptist church in the white residential neighborhood of Lakeview. I and the six people sitting with me had just emerged from ArtSpot Production's staging of Jan Villarrubia's play, *Turning of the Bones*, a semi-autobiographical story of a white woman's layered attempts to understand the experiences and perspective of her family's African American servant. Directed by Ashley Sparks, *Turning of the Bones*’s depiction of New Orleans's conflicting black and white geographies and memories provocatively refused resolution and left the audience without catharsis. As a review of the play noted, "The work is a memory play, and the past is forever in question. Villarrubia has characters object to her text itself, contesting scenes on the grounds they never happened or did not happen in the way they are being portrayed. Cashmere [Villarrubia's African American servant character] is a harsh critic of [Villarrubia's own] narrative, suspicious that the production itself is an attempt to expiate racial guilt." After the performance, Sparks invited

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684 Nick Slie, "What If . . . Disaster Relief Included and Arts Component."
685 ArtSpot directed the production of *Turning of the Bones* in collaboration with the Vestiges Project (an arts collaborative led by visual artist Jan Gilbert, a Lakeview Resident, http://www.thevestigesproject.org/web/) as a part of their work in the city-wide neighborhood-based university/public arts partnership, HOME: New Orleans?, which I discuss later in this chapter. The production was also staged as one of the events in the annual State of the Nation Festival.
686 Wonk, "Turning of the Bones."
audience members to join story circles where we could reflect on the thoughts and feelings the play inspired in us.\textsuperscript{687} For the mostly local audience, our personal enmeshments in the city's racial divide were heavy in our minds. A few dozen of us followed Sparks into a large room where chairs were placed in five circles. I sat down in one of the circles, joined by my sister, who had come with me to the play. Our circle's facilitator, a collaborating artist with ArtSpot, went over the rules of the story circle discussion process. Some of the people in the circle were already veterans of this process, and others were new to it. Then, the stories began.

The first story in every story circle often sets the tone for the stories that follow. In this instance, the first person to speak was a white middle-class woman who told a story about how her six-year-old daughter came to her after school one day to say that she felt strange about how her friends on the playground always used the words "black" and "white" in their descriptions of people. The mother lamented that some parents educate their children on racial differences in the attempt to be what she conceived as politically correct. She said she would rather teach her daughter to be color blind. The backs of the other white people in the circle—most of whom (including myself) had a background in anti-racist organizing—bristled a little bit when she said this. Yet, no one interrupted or got in the way of her story. Instead, the rest of the stories that emerged kept going with this theme in the attempt to resolve the questions the woman's story raised: how ought parents of different races teach children, or how did we experience as children, the history of racial oppression and the practice of racial distinction? If we teach this practice, how,

\textsuperscript{687} Each night a different organization led the story circles after the performances of Turning of the Bones. These organizations included: ERACE (a local anti-racist dialogue organization), Junebug Productions, The People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond, Students at the Center, and Truth Be Told. ArtSpot and HOME: New Orleans? also sponsored story circles and public discussions during the creation process for the play. Originally, they hoped to stage Turning of the Bones in Villarrubia's parents' home as a part of a dual production with a play about Lakeview by a local African American playwright. This plan did not come to fruition.
then, do we begin to move past the boundaries that socially produced racial categories create without erasing or silencing the weight of the categories themselves? How did our different experiences of Hurricane Katrina challenge or change our points of view on the answers to these questions?

The experience of talking about these things was difficult. But the tool of story prevented the group from splitting up into argumentative stances, as our bristling might have made us prone to do. At the close of the circle, the group had generated few answers, but we had heard and learned from varying perspectives. This learning process was being repeated in circles throughout the room. It had occurred here the night before and would occur the following night. Each performance of Villarrubia's play inspired and set the tone for cross-racial sharing that gradually, one story at a time, constructed new lines of understanding between the strangers and friends who encountered pieces of each other's geographies and memories in the circle-based processing and talk-back sessions after the play. Each performance thus untied, just a little bit, some of the dangerous memories and deep divides in New Orleans's racial landscape that the play itself depicted.

Produced as part of the multi-neighborhood, multi-year project, HOME: New Orleans?, *Turning of the Bones* was one among numerous related performance and public storytelling projects that community-based performance artists in New Orleans created after Katrina to help residents achieve a sense of individual and community healing. Long entrenched within the practices of second-line knowledge and art making, the members of New Orleans's community-based performance network knew that for this healing to occur, residents from all backgrounds would have to confront the realities of institutional racism that the disaster uncovered. Doing so seemed like the first, crucial step towards community recovery. Using tactics such as story circles, community sings, and
interactive story site projects in public and digital space, the four projects I discuss here in detail—Ashé Cultural Arts Center and the Contemporary Arts Center's *Truth Be Told* project, Mondo Bizarro Production's *I-Witness Central City*, ArtSpot Productions and Home: New Orleans's *LakeviewS, A Bus Tour*, and ArtSpot Productions' *Go Ye Therefore*...—generated spatial/performance encounters where local residents could embark on the journey *through* the racial conflicts that divided their cognitive maps of home and community, and towards a politics of place grounded in deep listening and reciprocal exchange. Together, these projects gave birth to a new theatre-based anti-racist movement in New Orleans that has worked in the past five years to expand second-line knowledges and geographies across New Orleans's racialized social and cultural landscape to influence how residents from all backgrounds, including those new to the city, understand and construct their divergent "stories so far" of home and community.

This rising movement built on a new "we-ness" that emerged in New Orleans during the crisis period as local residents told their storm stories to each other. In the months after Katrina, standing on front lawns covered in debris, in local cafes, online, or in airports, gas stations, and other byways around the country, and everywhere New

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688 While I am focusing here on companies and organizations that created projects that successfully involved diverse and broad sectors of the public in circle-based communication and theatrical encounters, I also want to acknowledge the wider community of theatre artists that acted as partners in this work, including: NOLA Playback Theatre, directed by Anne-Liese Juge Fox; VOIC'D, a group of women performers including members of ArtSpot and Junebug Productions that came out of Junebug's FSTI course and is currently creating performances that examine how educational institutions have shaped how we perceive America; Stephanie McKee's Moving Stories dance production company; Jose Torres Tama's one-man performance, *The Cone of Uncertainty*, a "multi-media protest piece" about discourses around labor, immigration, and Chicana/Chicano experiences in the pre- and post-Katrina city; Creative Forces, a youth educational (science and math) theater company directed by Mat Schwartzmen from 2007-2010; the New Orleans Fringe Festival and the State of the Nation Festival; and the new theatre companies that have arisen in New Orleans recently, often with the mentorship of the artists this chapter discusses, such as The NOLA Project, Cripple Creek Theatre Co., Goat in the Road Productions, and New Noise. The UNIVERSES ensemble and the Urban Bush Women out of New York were also frequent partners in the work I describe in this chapter.

689 Massey, *For Space*, 12.

690 Carol Bebelle, Interview by the author.
Orleanians found each other, they asked for, narrated, and listened to each other's stories of survival and return. With whole neighborhoods gone and residents' entrenched racialized geographies at a standstill, the telling of storm stories brought New Orleanians together in a way that had never before been possible. It incited new forms of civic activism and empathy across formerly entrenched racial, social, and geographical barriers.\footnote{Campanella, "Civic Engagement in Postdiluvial New Orleans."} Furthermore, it enabled New Orleans residents to articulate Katrina as not just a social trauma, but also a cultural one. As residents re-examined narratives of their shared pasts and worked to revise notions of their collective identities,\footnote{David, "Cultural Trauma, Memory, and Gendered Collective Action"; Alexander, "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma."} the moment of crisis combined with the power of storytelling to produce a temporary willingness in almost everyone in the city to admit to the reality of institutionalized racism.\footnote{Bebelle, Interview by the author.}

For local community-based artists, especially those who had already been working for decades to use storytelling as a way to build solidarity and increase awareness of institutional racism in the city, the post-Katrina moment contained a potential for social transformation they felt they had to seize.\footnote{Bebelle, Interview by the author; Slie, Interview by the author.} For instance, when Nick Slie of Mondo Bizarro Productions returned home to his neighborhood in Uptown New Orleans, he remembers thinking, "we don't need to be doing theatre on the stage right now . . . theatre right now is being out and working in conjunction of people who want to come back to this place."\footnote{Slie, Interview by the author.} Slie and other community-based theatre artists knew that for the city to heal and recover, its memories had to be sung out into meaning, heard, and understood. They committed themselves to the work of achieving this healing by working
to turn the surge of storm stories towards addressing not just the city's present crisis, but also the past and present structures of racial inequity that caused it.

As I will show, in the five years since Katrina, New Orleans's community-based theatre makers have maintained this commitment in the face of funding structures that make collaboration and long-term arts-based organizing challenging, if not impossible. My analysis of their work intervenes in rising national and international dialogues about the role that community-based performance can play in peacebuilding, public health, and traumatic recovery projects in conflict zones and oppressed communities. Community-based performance in post-Katrina New Orleans enlarges the definition of this artistic field from being concerned with organizing and empowering specific, small-scale communities to a broader definition as a truly public art capable of building new forms of urban solidarity and of transforming people's understanding of their power over, and their movement into and through urban space. I juxtapose the struggles and accomplishments of local community-based performance artists with large-scale post-Katrina performance projects by prominent national arts organizations, such as Paul Chan and Creative Time's 2007 production of Waiting for Godot. In contrast to the temporary moments of respite or false resolution that short-term, non-locally grounded projects tended to create, the local knowledges and long-term commitments of grassroots performance organizations in New Orleans have, in the past five years, infused the city with new aesthetic forms, community spaces, and community rituals that have broadened the local public's capacity for cross-racial dialogue and, by doing so, have increased New Orleans's capability for

696 Cohen, Varea, and Walker, Acting Together on the World Stage; Cohen-Cruz, Local Acts and Engaging Performance; Leonard and Kikelly, Performing Communities; Nicholson, Applied Drama; Thompson, Performance Affects. Also, for the national context of story-circle-based theatre and dance productions see Cohen-Cruz, Engaging Performance and Local Acts. Also see Burnham, "Telling and Listening in Public: The Sustainability of Storytelling."
becoming a sustainable and just locale.\textsuperscript{697} I emphasize both the transformative goals and the long-term challenges that these projects have raised in order to reiterate what I have argued in previous chapters—that the key to a just, and sustainable, future New Orleans inheres in not only in the city's \textit{material} geographies, but also in its \textit{imaginative} and \textit{performative} ones.

\section*{Finding and Funding "Community" in Community-Based Performance}

My understanding of the evolving field of community-based performance draws largely on the work of Jan Cohen-Cruz. In \textit{Local Acts: Community-Based Performance in the United States}, Cohen-Cruz traces the field's emergence in the US to the 1970s. As radical theatre makers, reeling from the insights of the Black Power, Black Arts, and Third World Left cultural and political movements, began to inquire into African diasporic as well as indigenous North and South American cultural performance forms, they created new forms of theatre that conceptualized performance as an "efficient\textsuperscript{698}" form of social and communal action and as a tool for the expression of marginalized histories and forms of knowledge making.\textsuperscript{699} These new theatre forms grew exponentially as rising national grantmaking trends in the mid-1970s began to "pay artists to facilitate 'community service' projects at public institutions such as schools, senior centers, and prisons."\textsuperscript{700} The grants that resulted from this process sometimes worked as a way for

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698 Schechner, "From Ritual to Theatre and Back."


700 Ibid., 55. In this instance, as in the earlier instance of Model Cities and in contemporary instances such as the national Animating Democracy initiative (http://www.artsusa.org/animatingdemocracy/), one of the biggest effects of successful community-engaged performance projects was the way in which they helped to push forward or "filter up" artists' and intellectuals' changing constructs of the social potential inherent in their work to the ears of policy makers and grant-makers.
\end{flushright}
those in power to co-opt the radical potential of this art.\textsuperscript{701} However, grantmaking practices also evolved in response to artists and organizers who pushed forward the democratic values and knowledge making practices that were at the center of their work. As I will show, this push-and-pull between foundation funders and artists working in the community-based performance field continues to shape, and often to limit, the socially transformative potential of this evolving art form.

Moving between the fields of "popular" art and the "high" art form of traditional theatre, community-based performance in the 1970s and today draws both from the artistic and cultural forms of specific working-class communities and from avant-garde theatrical inquiries and practices.\textsuperscript{702} Depending on the level and nature of audience participation, community-based performance can lean towards the realm of ritual-making, creating a space-apart from the practices of everyday life that calls together a community of individuals with shared values or experiences so they might "marshal" their collective strength and construct and temporarily enact new social ideals.\textsuperscript{703} Or, the work can lean more towards the realm of art, in which case it seeks to "make the familiar new," and functions to offer audiences a "temporary suspension of belief, an 'imagine if,' inviting participants to engage critically."\textsuperscript{704} Whatever their location on these performance and cultural spectrums, the engaged performances that community-based

\textsuperscript{701} Ibid., 57. Cohen-Cruz, for instance, notes Arlene Goldbard's argument that in the 1980s and 90s, community-based artists "co-opted" the ways in which funders such as the NEA tried to "contain" the potential of their work. She cites policy advocate Caron Atlas's argument that it is up to the artists to approach big funders with a critical mind and to be creative about the places where they might find alternate funding. By contrast, Dylan Rodriguez argues that one of the largest political accomplishments of neoliberal economic and state partnerships has been their success at luring organized movements for dissent into funding structures that "professionalize" activism and require non-profit organizations to "increasingly articulate their reason for existence through the imperatives of obtaining the financial support and civil sanction of liberal philanthropy and the state," "The Political Logic of the Non-Profit Industrial Complex," 33.

\textsuperscript{702} Cohen-Cruz, \textit{Local Acts}, 82-83.

\textsuperscript{703} Ibid., 85.

\textsuperscript{704} Ibid., 86.
performance makers create are both political and spiritual: "Political because they provide a way for a group of any status to participate in a public discourse about issues that affect their lives; spiritual because a purpose is embedded in the process and goal of such work that goes beyond material results and our day-to-day existence."705

As cultural workers and artists, community-based performance makers also function as social, cultural, and sometimes spiritual mediators. They usually seek to use their work to push forward the concerns of marginalized communities into the dominant public sphere. However, in New Orleans, as in other locales, community-based performance artists (like their predecessors in 1960s radical theatre) tend to come from backgrounds where they identify with the professional class as much as or more than they identify with dis-privileged groups. This is not always the case, but even if these performers share the backgrounds of the marginalized communities in which often work, they tend to possess social, educational, and cultural capital that separates them from many of their audience members and community collaborators. Embodying this mediating position between divided social groups encourages community-based performance makers to use their crafts to critically engage with the term "community." Community for these artists can refer to a set of social relations within a particular geographical location. But it can also refer to sets of identifications that emerge across geographical spaces as people participate in socially mediated systems of language, cultural production, and class, race, or ethnic allegiances.706 A central concern of this performance field is the critical definition of how constructs of community become generated and how theatrical performance can work to make these constructs useful to the creation of equitable, social and political practices.

705 Cohen-Cruz, Engaging Performance, 3. See also Leonard, "Grassroots, Community-based Theater."
706 Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities.
Community-based performance makers in all locales consider it their job to look for and create new paths towards active communal listening and empathy, to transform how knowledge and power are produced, and to help people build new articulations of community in which they might begin to imagine themselves and their homes differently. For community-based performance artists in post-Katrina New Orleans, involving audiences in critically addressing the roles that race and racism play in shaping their understanding of their city was integral to pursuing such re-imaginings. Their emphasis on cross-racial dialogues and anti-racist solidarity building did not emerge anew out of the flood. Rather, it stemmed from their long enmeshment in New Orleans's participatory blues cultures, and from tools they developed during their collective participation, for several decades, in Alternate ROOTS—a US Southern community-based theater support organization that has long made arts-based, anti-racist organizing one of its chief goals.\footnote{ROOTS was originally an acronym for Regional Organization of Theaters South. The organization dropped this acronym when it decided to become multidisciplinary in focus. My analysis of the importance of Alternate ROOTS to New Orleans theatre makers comes from interviews that I did with artists, especially John O'Neal and Ashley Sparks, of ArtSpot Productions. I also participated in the annual ROOTS summer conference, "The Aesthetics of Diversity," in Asheville, NC, August, 2010. For historical context, I want to note here that the movement for cultural democracy within which ROOTS locates itself has grown exponentially since the 1980s, when—thanks largely to the policy work of Don Adams and Arlene Goldbard as co-directors of the national, federally-funded Neighborhood Arts Programs National Organizing Committee (NAPNOC)—a national network of artists and organizers concerned with promoting cultural democracy emerged (see Cohen-Cruz, \textit{Local Acts}). Through NAPNOC and related organizations, a trend of national conferences about the role of performance and art in democracy making and social justice struggles began. These conferences continue today in the guise of organizations such as Alternate Roots, Theatre Without Borders, and the National Performance Network (NPN), which is headquartered in New Orleans and also influential on the work this chapter describes.}

Founded in 1976, and developed under the direction of John O'Neal and Roadside productions, ROOTS functions as a kind of regional and cross-racial version of FST. The question that FST artists faced—of how to move from \textit{gathering} community stories, through performance, and towards transformative social action—remains the central
aesthetic question for ROOTS artists. To draw out theatre's transformative possibilities, ROOTS artists tend to use community engagement tools such as story circles and other collaborative expression methods that allow the artists to become grounded in a community's particular history and present-day struggles.

ROOTS artists' dialogues about how to move through storytelling and performance to social action and transformation are connected to conversations among community-based performance makers and applied theater practitioners around the globe. James Thompson, a leading applied theatre scholar, has researched the work of global theatre artists to achieve this goal. In *Performance Affects: Applied Theater and the End of Affect*, Thompson describes how contemporary community-based and applied theatre practices today (especially those that take place in traumatized regions or regions suffering from social or structural violence) tend to conceive of storytelling as a way to help audiences and communities move through trauma towards healing and social action (or changed behaviors). Thompson insists that community-based performance makers (as well as grant makers and critics of this field) need to rethink this approach. He argues, and I agree, that an over-focus on achieving a quantifiable social effect through engaged performance has begun to draw artists' (and funders') attention away from the unique

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708 For the national context of story-circle-based theatre and dance productions see Cohen-Cruz, *Engaging Performance* and *Local Acts*. Also see Burnham, "Telling and Listening in Public: The Sustainability of Storytelling."
711 In *Performance Affects* Thompson highlights multiple instances in which well-meaning theater makers from Western nations arrived in suffering communities in East Asia and mistakenly applied their own notions of trauma theory to creating theater programs that would "allow" participants to heal via traumatic witnessing. In Sri Lanka after the 2004 tsunami, for instance, a group of applied theater makers asked tsunami victims to "tell their stories," and judged them to be resistant to healing when they refused. Naively, and egotistically, these artists did not inquire into or seek to use the cultural tools of Sri Lankan culture for dealing with and recovering from trauma. Thus, their work there ultimately did more damage than it did good.
power of performance to structure embodied, transformative, affective encounters between subjects. This over-focus on effect is creating a "field dominated by practitioners with great knowledge of the issues to be communicated or awareness of the problems faced by the participants, but with little capacity . . . for uniting a group in joy."\(^{712}\)

Thompson advocates for an aesthetic and funding policy shift in applied or community-based theatre that will encourage artists to create performances that move beyond the desire for traumatic or social healing as the resolution of the past in the present, and towards the more complex definition of healing as an embodied process, in which one remains aware of the impossibility of erasing the past and productively surrenders to the difficulty of knowing and understanding it. This productive surrender inheres in the experience of affect that brings audiences into a confrontation with their "whole beings," "from [their] instincts and [their] unconscious right up to [their] most lucid state."\(^{713}\) Through this deep affective experience, audiences (and artists) re-encounter themselves and their worlds. As they move through the porous portal of performance back out into the world, they do so with an awareness, and perhaps a greater openness, to the situated nature of how they view, experience, and help construct the world in which they live.\(^{714}\) As members of or dedicated workers in the communities in which they work, community-based theatre artists have a unique ability to participate in nurturing the public's capabilities for dwelling in the difficulty of knowing the past and understanding the impact of the past on the present. But to do so, they must be committed to include themselves in the process of productive surrender. And, they must be ready to acknowledge the long-term, complex nature of this work.

\(^{712}\) Thompson, Performance Affects, 118.
\(^{713}\) Grotowski, Towards a Poor Theatre, 57.
The unique context of post-Katrina New Orleans, with its longstanding public blues cultures, provided community-based performance artists there with a framework for these commitments. However, the funding structures that currently exist to fund performance and social justice work that is focused on long-term, rather than short-term, results have created challenges that have hindered these artists' abilities to work collaboratively towards a vision of what they want to achieve with their collective work. As community-based arts police advocate Caron Atlas notes, contemporary arts and cultural democracy funding practices tend to be "project-based."  

This project-based approach to arts funding prioritizes short-term, evaluable agendas over long-term, slowly building grassroots work. If planned carefully, short-term or project-based community arts work can be empowering for a broad range of local participants, as well as for artists. Several well-known community-based performance organizations with national reputations have generated ethical guidelines for how to "enter" and "exit" communities within this project-based approach. For example, Jawola Willa Jo Zolar, founding director of the Urban Bush Woman, a leading and highly influential community-based dance company that has developed a lasting, supportive relationship with artists in New Orleans, explains, "Entering community is a process of giving and receiving and listening. It’s a conversation of listening together. It is a place where dominance is established or a place where listening is established. Move toward the listening."  

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715 Caron Atlas, interview with Cohen-Cruz, cited in Local Acts, 58. See also Atlas et al. Investing in Creativity: A Study of Support Structure for U.S. Artists and the Community Arts Network Reading Room in general, http://www.communityarts.net. This archived website abounds with artist, arts administrator, and grantmaker reflections on funding challenges to community-based artistic work, be this work long-term or temporary/project based. Brandi Rose's 2009 article, "Creating a Monster: Capitalism in the Community Arts Classroom" is a useful place to begin.
716 Cohen-Cruz, Local Acts, 58.
717 Treuhaft, "Community-Based Artistic Practice: Perspectives"
718 Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, quoted in Treuhaft, "Community-Based Artistic Practice: Perspectives" 4. My emphasis.
However, as traveling community-engaged artists openly admit, despite their admirable and sustained efforts to enter and exit communities in an ethical and fruitful way, in practice there often remains a gap between their desires to draw on local resources and their abilities to not come across as "experts" arriving with temporary, or worse, pre-fabricated, answers to the community's challenges.719

Relying on the project-based approach can cause non-profit arts organizations to unwittingly stop-short or impede the public's ability to collectively work through "dangerous memories" towards long-term or sustainable social healing. The constant process of applying for, receiving, and working to meet the conditions of short-term grants also creates a competitive market mentality in the arts production field that pits community-based artists against each other for all too rare funding sources. Furthermore, the interdisciplinary field of community-based performance often falls between funders' definitions of art or public health, which often makes it hard for these artists to attain funding. On the one hand, community development funders often fail to understand the integral role that the arts can play in community health, especially in an environment such as post-Katrina New Orleans. On the other hand, arts funding sources often look down on community-based performance as an applied art, and not a high art. As The Urban Institute's 2003 report on funding in for US artists asserts, "If an artist is working at the intersection of arts and community development and making contributions in both realms, it is unlikely that the full extent of those contributions will be recognized or valued in either the arts or community development."720 Recent rising national initiatives,
such as the Animating Democracy Project, have sought to begin amending this problem. Yet, even within foundation funding sources that value the work of community-engaged artists, artists are still required to compete with each other for sources of funds that remain scarce.

The popularity of project-based arts funding creates many challenges for the long-term, affective work that is needed in New Orleans, and cities like it, that are divided by structural racism and histories of racial violence. As Flaherty notes, in post-Katrina New Orleans, while local performance companies like ArtSpot, Junebug, and Mondo Bizarro Productions and the Ashé Cultural Arts Center were busy with on-the-ground recovery efforts, prominent national organizations and non-profits "did not hesitate to move to the front of the [foundation funding] line," often vying for the support of foundations with whom they already had relationships.\(^{721}\) Funders, as a result, tended to support prominent non-local art-makers in the creation of marginally ("drive-by") community-based projects that were more concerned with the interests of the artists than the interests of New Orleans residents. This resulted in privileging human and financial resources in the hands of famous artists visiting the city, rather than in the hands of locally rooted artists who wanted to produce more long-term, collaborative, and socially impactful projects.\(^{722}\)

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develop further, receive more generous support, and be more widely seen," Jurczak recommends that artists find a way to share administration tasks. The artists respond, in turn, that how they do administration is strongly related to how they do art. Sharing an administrator would require them to find a unique person who is deeply engaged with the diverging aesthetics and beliefs of each company. Even if they were to find such a person (and at times I have thought that the only possibly contender would be someone like me who works full time researching and thinking critically about multiple theaters), sharing him or her might complicate each organization's abilities to attain foundation funding because the administrator would be responsible for writing competing grants.

\(^{721}\) Flaherty, *Floodlines*,126.

\(^{722}\) Not all outside artists' projects were guilty of this kind of "carpet-bagger" approach. HOME: New Orleans? and the Urban Bush Woman Institute are examples of more ethical, reciprocal, and lasting projects that outside artists have helped to develop in partnerships with local artists and communities. See Slie, "What If . . . Disaster Relief Included an Arts Component?"; Wallenberg, "In Katrina's Wake," and Juge Fox, "Stage[s] of Recovery."
Rather than engaging in the slow and difficult work of racial healing, the "drive-by" community-engagement model has led to projects that have been largely unaccountable to the neighborhoods and residents they claimed to serve. This model has also contributed significantly to the gentrification of formerly working-class African American communities in "high ground" areas around the city.723

In the face of these funding challenges and the challenges of putting their own lives and homes back together after the 2005 floods, in the years just after the disaster, New Orleans community-based performance makers bonded together with fierce determination to generate a city-wide network of theatre and racial healing projects. Their resulting performance and storytelling projects in public and semi-public spaces around the city garnered the participation of thousands of local residents and began to help those residents embark on the difficult confrontations with the city's racial and racist histories that are necessary for equitable democracy to be achieved in the city. As the next section shows, the second-line knowledges of one especially battered neighborhood in New Orleans—Central City—enabled this work to commence and to deepen as the Katrina crisis period waned.

Ashé Cultural Arts Center: Giving Birth to a City-Wide Story Circle

In the early twentieth-century, Central City was home to the first Mardi Gras Indians and to Buddy Bolden and Louis Armstrong. During the civil rights and Black Power eras it was the center of multiple de-segregation campaigns and the home of the

723 For Tulane University geographer Richard Campanella's emerging analysis of new segregation and gentrification in post-Katrina neighborhoods based on the 2010 census see Krupa, "Racial divides among New Orleans neighborhoods expand." The trend of white residents replacing former black residents is most pronounced in high-ground neighborhoods such as the Upper Ninth Ward, the Irish Channel, and Tremé.
FST and other Black Arts cultural organizations. However, by the 1980s, Central City had become a blighted victim of urban disinvestment, white flight, and the drug war. In 2005, it was declared to be the most dangerous neighborhood in the US.\(^{724}\) Despite this fact, and in resistance to it, the neighborhood's second line and Mardi Gras Indian traditions continued to thrive. Central City also abounded with church-based campaigns to organize residents, bring resources to them, and renew the neighborhood's schools and public spaces. For example, the Living Witness Church of Christ regularly brought their full gospel Pentecostal service onto the sidewalks in the hopes of transforming the neighborhood through spiritual nurturing. They also organized one of the city's leading residential substance recovery programs. In 1998, community empowerment and renewal efforts in Central City rose to a new height when Carol Bebelle and Doug Redd opened the Ashé Cultural Arts Center [Ashé] on Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard, the neighborhood's historic business corridor.\(^{725}\) Ashé soon began to develop theatre, storytelling, song, and dance programs as a way of summoning the collective memories, traditions, and stories of Central City residents in order to organize resistance to a new, violent white power machine—that of neoliberal urban reform.

As an institutional role model and artistic home-base for community-based artists around New Orleans, Ashé has played a central role in the nurturing of cross-racial storytelling and performance projects around the post-Katrina city. Before I discuss the center's work to nurture this rising theatre and social change landscape, I need to note the

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\(^{724}\) Rose, "Oral history project aims to show that there's more to Central City than crime." See also Berube and Katz, "Katrina’s Window."

\(^{725}\) Oretha Castle Haley Blvd. was previously called Dryades and was the center of New Orleans's Jewish community. Until the era of white flight, it housed over 200 businesses including department stores, markets, banks, and specialty shops. GNOCDC, "Central City Neighborhood Snapshot." Unlike the shops in downtown New Orleans, these stores tended to be open to African American residents.
drastic ways in which Hurricane Katrina and the subsequent neoliberal rebuilding policies transformed Central City and broadened the already desperate need for cross-racial dialogues there.

Before Katrina, there were 8,175 households in Central City. The neighborhood was 87% African American. Nearly 40% of adult Central City residents had not completed high school. Over 75% of children under age five in the neighborhood were living in poverty. Central City was also home to a large percentage of the city's public housing developments. After Katrina, the Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO) shuttered all of the city's public housing developments. Despite broad grassroots protests, Central City's large public housing neighborhoods were bulldozed in 2007 and 2008. This act can be interpreted as grand, violent gesture of new forms of white power masking as urban reform. A kind of twenty-first century race riot (akin to the Robert Charles riot in 1900 in this same neighborhood), this physical act of the destruction brought state-sponsored forms of violence, such as police profiling and the prison-industrial complex, to the level of domestic space. Front stoops, kitchen hearths, bedrooms, playgrounds, and window curtains blowing in the breeze were claimed by these acts of demolition to be sites of racial control and discipline.

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726 Greater New Orleans Data Center, "Central City Neighborhood: Income and Poverty."
727 The Guste, Magnolia and BW Cooper public housing developments were all located in Central City before the flood. Another development, C.J. Peete, and part of the Guste homes were destroyed before Katrina in 1998 and 2004, respectively, as a part of HOPE IV redevelopment projects in New Orleans. GNOCDC, "Central City Neighborhood Snapshot."
728 Approximately 5000 public housing apartments have been destroyed in New Orleans since 2005. See Woods, "Les Misérables of New Orleans," 769. Woods notes that the city's homeless population rose in an approximate match to the numbers of people made homeless by these demolitions. See also Flaherty, Floodlines and Luisa Dantas, Rebecca Snedecker and Judith Hefland, Land of Opportunity.
729 Barbara Bush's famous words in the Houston Astrodome that poor people in New Orleans were better off there than they were in their former lives and communities expressed in a rare moment of undisguised frankness the pathology of American racism that lay beneath these acts of destruction. See Spike Lee, When the Levees Broke, Act 2.
of Central City's residents have not been able to return home.\textsuperscript{730} Not only have residents
not been allowed to return to homes they had lived in for years, if not generations, but
they have also been denied a voice in deciding if or how the city's public housing would
be reconstructed. Rents around the city have skyrocketed since the flood, causing low-
income families to live together in crowded conditions in homes that had been decaying
even before Katrina and are often, now, hazardous to their health. Today, the "mixed-
income" housing units that have slowly arisen in Central City are only open to a few of
the neighborhood's former residents—those who are able to pass the stringent criminal
background and credit checks required by the application process.

In the face of these "reforms," the Ashé Cultural Arts Center has served as an
integral site in the production of resistant collective memories and self-determination in
Central City. Bebelle distinguishes Ashé's mission from that of the typical community
arts center.\textsuperscript{731} Ashé is a community development organization that uses art and culture as
"primary strategies" for the pursuit of community health and strength.\textsuperscript{732} These strategies
stem from the blues-based idea that people are necessarily "rooted in their culture—that's
their essential DNA."\textsuperscript{733} Ashé's approach emerged from the combining of Bebelle's
background in public health and Redd's background as an Afro-centric visual artist for
African American cultural groups around New Orleans. The name, Ashé, signifies the
center's philosophy. Taken from the Yoruban word for "life force" or the power to get
things done, the term "ashé" is "is intrinsically related to the essential nature of creativity
called iwa, perceptible to those who have 'walked with the ancestors' and thus acquired

\textsuperscript{730} Plyer, "Population Loss and Vacant Housing in New Orleans Neighborhoods."
\textsuperscript{731} Bebelle, Interview by the author.
\textsuperscript{732} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{733} Ibid.
critical and discerning eyes. In the New Orleans context, the name Ashé also signifies the city's African diasporic spiritual core and its historic, yet endangered role in the shaping of consciousness and social justice movements there. Not an embrace of blackness as a singular concept or a blurring of complex African American cultural and social identities into a false unity, Ashé's embrace of African and African American culture as integral to the health of black communities stems from the second-line epistemological concept of collective memory and history as embodied in how people build relationships, move through and understand the places where they live, and in the forms they find for personal and cultural expression. For Ashé, as well as for New Orleans's public blues culture makers, a community's health and its social and cultural capital are intrinsically linked to the cultural tools and fluencies that all of its individual members possess and develop.

Ashé's philosophy embraces the idea that percolates in all forms of celebration and remembrance in Black New Orleans that "when times are hard . . . and our backs are up against the wall, it is the spirit of song, story, memory, image, and creativity that keeps us going." As Bebelle notes, "The spirit of culture, song, dance, story, and image creates a spiritual force that energizes and motivates us to endure, move forward, and make it through the other side." Ashé's dance and nutrition program with low-income African American women, "Sistahs Making a Change," exemplifies how this vision works. In addition to programs with the elderly and with women, Ashé runs a summer camp and youth arts education program called the Kuumba Institute, leads an annual African diasporic march and Fourth of July march and ceremony of remembrance of the African Maafa (Atlantic Slave trade), stages the work of local poets and playwrights from Jose Torres Tama to John O'Neal to Tom Dent, regularly displays and sells the work of local visual artists and craft makers, and acts as a space for multiple kinds of community and neighborhood meetings that seek a racially just rebuilding of New Orleans.

734 “Aesthetic Discourse,” Aesthetics in Africa.
735 Bebelle, "The Vision Has Its Time," 93.
736 Ibid.
737 In addition to programs with the elderly and with women, Ashé runs a summer camp and youth arts education program called the Kuumba Institute, leads an annual African diasporic march and Fourth of July march and ceremony of remembrance of the African Maafa (Atlantic Slave trade), stages the work of local poets and playwrights from Jose Torres Tama to John O'Neal to Tom Dent, regularly displays and sells the work of local visual artists and craft makers, and acts as a space for multiple kinds of community and neighborhood meetings that seek a racially just rebuilding of New Orleans.
Bebelle and Redd seeking to develop a wellness program in Central City that focused on nutrition and exercise. Bebelle understood the importance of this idea, but she did not see how it fit with their larger goal of developing community health by strengthening culture. Thus, she reworked the wellness program to include cultural elements—dancing, community meal sharing, and nutrition education based on local cooking styles. Sistahs Making a Change has been a thriving weekly program at Ashé ever since. On Monday and Thursday nights, women can be found dancing "all kinds of diasporic dance, from "liturgical dance, [to] line dance, [to] second line, [to] samba, salsa, and African." The program's multi-cultural dancing draws from not only New Orleans's many traditions of African diasporic dance, but also from a feminist and pragmatic approach to public health that recognizes how women's identities, daily life habits, and feelings are central to the whole development of families. By orienting women to self-expression through dance, Sistahs Making a Change counteracts racial and gender objectification, increases women's physical and spiritual health, and strengthens local culture.

With "Sistahs Making a Change" and related programs, Ashé creates a space for the articulation of the Central City community around its residents' different assets and their differently experienced forms of marginalization. Grounding its model for art making in local institutions (community centers, churches, retirement homes, schools, and main streets), local holiday traditions (jazz funerals and second lines, community sings, Mardi Gras, Fourth of July, Kwaanza, and Christmas), and in repetition, Ashé also

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738 Bebelle, Interview by the author.
739 "Voices Not Forgotten" is another Ashé program that exhibits the center's unique approach to community development through culture and public health. Voices Not Forgotten resulted from a 2007 collaboration between HOME: New Orleans? and Ashé to create a performance-based health and wellness project with African American elders that incorporated storytelling, dance, music, and visual arts. Choreographers Michelle Gibson, Kesha McKey, and Giselle Nakhid-Deal worked with theater artists Derrick Deal and John Grimsley and multi-disciplinary artist Karel Sloane-Boekbinder to create a program that engages thirty resident "Movers and Groovers" in the collaborative creation of performances for the Central City public and its senior center communities.
cultivates celebrations that bring together communities of similar and dissimilar residents around the city, in repeated and varied ways, to produce social and cultural interchanges and opportunities for learning.

After six years of developing programs in Central City, when Katrina struck, Ashé was ready to take up a larger, city-wide mission for racial healing and arts-based cross-racial organizing. The project that enabled Ashé to begin this work was Truth Be Told (TBT), a city-wide cross-racial storytelling and performance initiative. Truth Be Told sought to engage diverse communities of artists as well as New Orleans residents, from all backgrounds and walks of life, in the long-term process of talking about race. TBT was the first project in the nation to envision public storytelling-based performance as a public art capable of influencing a large-scale urban transformation. As a short-term project, TBT was not fully successful in achieving its broad goal of enacting an agonistic, discursive/performance-based public sphere in New Orleans. Yet, through its work to draw on and strengthen local knowledges and resistant geographies during a period of social and cultural crisis, TBT generated a powerful vision for urban justice that re-framed the work of community-based artists throughout the city. Over the course of the next five years, as New Orleans's community-performance makers took up the TBT vision and adapted it to create a diverse landscape of story sharing and participatory performance projects in public spaces, TBT's goals began to be fully realized.

To create TBT, Ashé partnered with the Contemporary Arts Center (CAC), an arts and performance space that primarily serves the white public. As Bebelle explains, the goal of TBT was "not about changing the landscape of four hundred years of reactions between black and white people. . . . It was about understanding that you cannot change a problem that you can't talk about. And we could not talk about race."740 Yet, as Merritt

740 Bebelle, in Aman, Truth Be Told (TBT) video.
Shalette of the CAC notes, the racial divide after Katrina was "unavoidable, you could not avoid talking about it." TBT artists had "the opportunity to just savor [this] moment and go on, or [they had] the opportunity to grab the moment and get something more out of it." To "grab" this moment and change this landscape, TBT created a network of "safe spaces" in the city where people could learn to talk about race. They focused on black and white relationships because in the immediate post-Katrina environment they believed those relationships to be the most pressing. To encourage conversations about black and white relationships within every level of the project's organization, TBT hired a black and a white artist or administrator to play each role in the project. This organizational approach linked artists working with different communities across the city within Truth Be Told's collaboratively produced vision. Bebelle and Jay Wiegal of the CAC were the project's co-directors. Tammy Terrell, an African American arts administrator, and Shalette were its coordinators. John O'Neal and John Grimsley, black and white playwrights, were the artistic directors, and so forth. TBT began in the spring of 2006 as a series of conversations among these and other participating artists. As artists met to plan the project's community engagement and performance aspects, honest and difficult conversations about their personal relationships to structures of racial privilege were central to their work. As TBT evolved, these discussions never grew easier.

TBT's vision for a future, racially-just New Orleans inhered in the physical and narrative structure of the story circle, which the project's organizers perceived as a small-

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741 Merit Shallette, in Aman, *Truth Be Told*.
742 Bebelle, in Aman, *Truth Be Told*.
743 Tammy Terrell, in Aman, *Truth Be Told*.
744 Bebelle and Grimsley both explained to me in interviews that the next phases of the project (recently granted funding in summer of 2010) will focus on "black brown" relationships and will also include discussions and artistic work with the city's East Asian communities.
scale model for a discursive/performative democracy founded on practices of full-bodied listening encounters. They structured the project's first year-long phase around fifty story circle sessions which they advertised widely and located at a variety of public gathering places including community centers, arts centers, churches, senior centers, and rebuilding conferences. In the circles at these sessions, TBT brought together hundreds of New Orleans residents of different ages, races, and class backgrounds. O'Neal and Grimsley, as well as several other theatre and performance artists working in the project, then collaborated to create two plays out of the stories that were told in the circles. The first play, *Story Circle*, was written by Grimsley and directed by O'Neal. The other, *Sankofa: Shine, Shine, Shine*, was written by O'Neal and will be directed by Grimsley (a production is planned for the fall of 2011). The production of these plays provided TBT with yet another venue for public, collaborative storytelling in post-show story circle sessions and talk-back sessions.

For TBT, the key to achieving equitable democracy in the city inhered in generating multiple new "common grounds" where people could move, through the affective power of stories and collaborative, embodied expressive acts (such as singing and dancing), to establish a strong sense of empathy for others whose lives differed dramatically from their own. In the context of the traumatized city, TBT insisted that these common grounds had to be structured in a way that was inviting and not threatening. As Bebelle explains:

> Common ground is inside of the human experience. It really isn't just about the issue of privilege and the absence of it, resources or the absence

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745 The sessions were all recorded; the storytellers signed releases giving the artists permission to use material from their narratives. My impressions of TBT's story circle sessions are drawn from interviews that I did with the project's organizers, from public videos that were made of the project, and from the *Story Circle* script.
746 Bebelle, Interview by the author.
of them. It's the whole notion that when a white mother loses her child that that pain is the same pain that a black mother feels when she loses her child. And if you can get the two of those mothers together, as unfortunate as it is, and if they are able to bond around the fact that there is a commonness in their experience and that her whiteness didn't make it any easier to lose her child, then there is a breakthrough that happens.\textsuperscript{747}

With each story circle session, TBT enacted a model of urban agonistic democracy that would enable all storytellers (participants as well as organizers) to begin to move beyond anger and fear of talking about race and towards this more productive, empathetic understanding of the perspectives of others. The tight, bodily form of the circles encouraged participants to think about how their own knowledges were situated and interdependent with the stories and knowledges of others. The circles involved them in a space in which they could experiment in re-constructing their embodied identities and re-remembering their pre-Katrina lives in ways that were grounded in reciprocal exchange of perspective with others whose lives were differently shaped by structures of privilege and oppression. TBT organizers hoped that this process would enable participants to embark on the "difficult return" to traumatic memories of the impact of racism on their lives.\textsuperscript{748} But, by never forcing this return, viewing it as an ongoing process without an easy resolution, and creating a structure of support around it, TBT story circles enabled participants to move past racial assumptions and into a collective critical inquiry about their shared past, present, and future world.

Not all of TBT's story circles directly addressed the questions of racial identity and racism. The facilitators used O'Neal's method of not specifying any specific topic as the circles' focus. As Jan Villarrubia notes, this method tends to work best in a racially divided society because it is less threatening.\textsuperscript{749} Yet, because the project itself was

\textsuperscript{747} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{748} Simon, Rosenberg, and Eppert quoted in Thompson, \textit{Performance Affects}, 69.
\textsuperscript{749} Villarrubia, Interview by the author, May 21, 2010.
generally understood to be about race, the questions of race and racism tended to become central to most TBT story circle sessions. Grimsley, for instance, remembers a session where he brought an Aunt Jemima doll for participants to pass around. This led to a particularly intense circle that saw participants go right to telling stories about their experiences with racism.\textsuperscript{750} In other sessions, the stories that were shared would be more light-hearted, or would veer back and forth indecisively from stories of racial trauma to humorous takes on race and culture in New Orleans's unique atmosphere.\textsuperscript{751}

As I have previously shown, implicit in the second-line aesthetic is the requirement that members of the dominant race or class first learn the stories and critical geographies of the parade makers before they can join in, with their own bodies, memories, and performances, to participate in the performance's re-spatialization of the city. TBT created a space for New Orleans residents of all backgrounds to hear and learn the stories and critical geographies of people who were different from them. But moving from this practice of listening towards collective forms of social action would require the creation of yet another kind of common ground: a stepping-stone or what Cindy Cohen calls a "permeable membrane," where people can enter and experience the world of the familiar differently before they move outward and try to make the world different.\textsuperscript{752} TBT artists believed that performance would provide such a place.

\textsuperscript{750} Grimsley, Interview by the author, April 14, 2010.
\textsuperscript{751} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{752} Cohen's term "permeable membrane" comes from Adrienne Rich's essay "Permeable Membrane." Cohen defines this "permeable membrane" dynamic between entering and exiting a performance created to encourage peacebuilding and social transformation as follows: "Within the boundary of the membrane, elements that are free flowing in the larger world (making them difficult to face, contextualize or fully comprehend) are condensed, organized, given dimension and framed so that they can be recognized and reviewed. Inside the 'nucleus' these elements from the real world are transformed, in part by the formal qualities of the performances themselves, in part by the intelligence and creativity of the artists, leaders of rituals, participants and witnesses. This transformed material then leaves the time/space of performance, and re-enters the quotidian world of everyday life, through the consciousness and the bodies, the words, actions and relationships, of those who participate in and witness the performance." "Conclusion," In Cohen, Varea, and Walker, Acting Together on the World Stage, Vol 2.
To create a transformative work of theatre that would enable New Orleans residents to experience the world in a way that challenged and unmade their racialized cognitive maps of home and community, the project's staff had to first find a way to share their own dangerous memories or racism and learn how to be together in harmony—across and with the differences that defined their creative circle.753 The group moved towards this organizational goal slowly, and with difficulty. Reflecting on how interpersonal discussions about race in the TBT creation process never really seemed to move forward at the pace in which the organizers wanted, Bebelle noted to me in an interview:

I'm not saying [the project] wasn't a success. What I'm saying is that even being part of the creation process that I, too, was surprised that there's a way in which we don't get it that [racism] is a problem that's not going to solve itself like others have. We will be accepting gays and lesbians. We will have decriminalized marijuana. We will have done all of those things and we will still be grappling with this bad boy. . . . Because there is some way in which this thing has mutated [and now] . . . causes people to have to sacrifice often for people that they don't feel [are] worth the trouble. And the promise of what you get for the sacrifice is something that is really intangible: a stronger democracy, greater integrity in the world, . . . a better social structure for human beings to be in. And because of that, some folks got way [ahead] and left other folks way behind, the people who have are scared to death that they don't know how to live a life that doesn't have a lot of bounty in it. It gets down to how is this going to affect me?754

TBT's project organizers were never able to fully make answering this last, key question a priority.755 As a result, in the everyday process of organizing all the project's different elements, including the performance, the fear of discussing race rose up repeatedly.756

753 Bebelle, interview by the author; O'Neal, "Do You Smell Something Stinky?"
754 Bebelle, Interview by the author.
755 Ibid.
756 Ibid.
This fear became especially apparent when the organizers took part in The People's Institute Undoing Racism workshop.

The People's Institute anti-racist training program was developed in New Orleans in the 1990s and is now a key resource for anti-racist organizers, artists, and teachers around the nation. Drawing on public blues concepts of call and response performances of agonistic collective memories in public space, People's Institute workshops teach the idea that "Understanding the lessons of history frees us to create a more humane future."757 Participants in People's Institute workshops learn that nothing is separate or transcendent from racial oppression in US society. These workshops take the story circle to the level of application by asking participants to not only listen to each other, but to also move beyond listening and act on what they have heard. The first step towards such actions is the step of admitting how racism has shaped the ways in which one sees and moves through the world and relates to others. Another important aspect of People's Institute training is a focus on gatekeepers of public and private institutions as important negotiators or perpetuators of institutionalized racism. This part of the training can prove challenging for workers in prominent arts institutions, such as those at the CAC, who can easily fall into the trap of imagining their aesthetic evaluation process to be separate or transcendent from race and class.758

Some white members of the project became defensive after the People's Institute workshop. Gradually, conversations about race among the project's organizers shut down. I see TBT organizers inability to move through conflict and defensiveness into honest dialogues about race in their everyday work not as a sign of the project's failure to reach its goals, but of the long-term nature of those goals. As Bebelle notes, "Even with people

757 The People's Institute, "Our Approach."
758 Greg Tate, quoted in Leo Segedin, "Making It: Race, Gender, and Ethnicity in the Art World." See also Berger, “Are Art Museums Racist?” and Taylor, The Mask of Art.
who all agree with each other," talking about race is not easy work "because every rock that you pick up has the potential to stab you in the heart."\textsuperscript{759} \textit{Story Circle}, the first play that emerged out of TBT's public and private storytelling work, expressed the necessity of this difficult, long-term work in post-Katrina New Orleans. If the city was to ever emerge from the crisis period as a place no longer defined by institutional racism, in any of its many guises, people in New Orleans had to learn how to talk about race in a way that encouraged empathy and solidarity rather than anger and defensiveness.

\textbf{The Pedagogy of Affect in \textit{Story Circle: The Play}}

Grimsley and the TBT artists composed \textit{Story Circle} as an expository play that outlines how New Orleans artists can draw on the city's public blues epistemologies and aesthetics to experiment with affect as a tool for anti-racist social transformation. Because the play was less concerned with its own affect and more concerned with portraying the affective possibilities of story circle-based art, I view \textit{Story Circle} as a pedagogical event that functioned for New Orleans artist communities as a kind of "field guide" for the production of public blues-based community-engaged theatre in the post-Katrina context.

\textit{Story Circle} is largely inspired by O'Neal's Junebug aesthetic of linking personal story with historical memory through spiritual song and mythology.\textsuperscript{760} Grimsley drew on his memories and personal impressions of the stories that people told during TBT's story circles in order to write the play.\textsuperscript{761} In order to attune audiences to the role of public memory and history in shaping individual and collective memories about life in the city, he added historic narratives from the eras of slavery and Jim Crow to the play's

\textsuperscript{759} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{760} Downey, "The Mythic Framework of John O’Neal."
\textsuperscript{761} Grimsley, Interview by the author.
contemporary narratives. The play's characters arrived on stage chanting their racial assumptions or starkest memories of racism in their lives. In a manner that is starkly opposite to the story circle format, these sound-bites were accusatory.

Voice Five - I was attacked on the bus by…
Ensemble - BLACK
Voice Five - people on the way to work.
Voice Six - I am concerned about my son. He is a big…
Ensemble - BLACK
Voice Six - …boy. I need for him to understand about this world….
Voice Eight - My roommate was attacked and robbed twice because we are…
Ensemble - WHITE.

Each voice fragment was locked within one position and did not appear to hear or respond to the others. Suspended in positions behind their chairs, outside the "circle," the voices only converged around the words "BLACK" and "WHITE," as if the only things the speakers could agree on were the oppositional and unconquerable differences between them.

As the characters sat down in their chairs and sang a chorus about "unbinding the shackles of denial and hatred" and letting the "truth be told," the mood of the performance shifted. An African drum call invoked the history of the Black Atlantic that all the characters shared. Its rhythms proclaimed the need for music and narrative in the collaborative social process of constructing the "chain of understanding of ourselves and others." The performance revealed this chain of understanding to inhere in participants' willingness to understand how their own embodied subjectivities and their geographic understanding of their neighborhoods and city were shaped by historical social structures

762 Story Circle's cast included notable New Orleans actors and musicians Troi Bechet, Kerry Cahill, Harold X. Evans, Dollie Rivas, Diana Shortes, Carol Sutton, Philip Tracy and Chris Williams, several of whom played multiple roles.
763 Grimsley, Story Circle.
764 Ibid.
that commodified and objectified black bodies. As the characters began to tell their stories of moments when they were the victims or instigators of racism, "Navigator" Harold X. Evans guided them through a gradual understanding of the process as "true democracy."765 Evans' advice to the storytellers about the value of sharing their stories works doubly as advice to the audience about the value of the story circle method and its potential transformative power. But unlike real story circles, the stories in the circle came to life in a fantastic and imaginative way.

Once the storytellers arrived at a set of central themes—the racist/sexist gaze, white guilt, and racist police violence—a series of ancestral characters (slaves, slaveholders, Marie Laveau) emerged from the circle to interrupt their dialogue. These historic characters' stories of New Orleans's racially violent history made a direct connection between the forms of physical violence and violation of the past to the less obviously violent structures of institutional racism today. Their ghostly stories were intended to help the audience confront the role that history and collective memory played in constructing ways of life in the city that make their different racial groups embodied experiences of the city oppositional.

I did not have the chance to attend Story Circle and witness, in full, John O'Neal's directing and the affects it produced in audiences. But upon reading the script, talking with the producers, and evaluating a range of local reviews, I wonder if, by importing these historic characters into the circle of songs and stories, the performance took a kind of short cut to depicting the embodied construction of freedom and agonistic democracy that is at the center of the story circle method.766 Rather than bring the audience into the collaborative knowledge making process of the circle, Story Circle offered a narrative

765 Ibid.
766 Cuthbert, "Story Telling in Black & White"; Meriamen, "Well-meaning play that addresses racism falls short of its purpose"; Wonk, "2008 Theater Year In Review."
explanation of how this process can make the ongoing legacy of racial violence "real" to story circle participants. The play's historic characters strengthened this explanation, but at the same time, they drew the audience's attention away from the re-making of situated geographies and personal identities—a process that becomes possible with participation in story circles. It may not have been the author's and director's intentions, but this explanatory short-cut imbued the play with a message that seems not to stimulate audiences to re-encounter themselves in new, affectively profound ways, but to encourage audiences to intellectually confront the pressing need in New Orleans for more cross-racial story sharing and more artistic creations that reflect on and organize the knowledges made by that sharing.

In other words, Story Circle appeared to want to give audiences an affective experience of the story circle and its propensity to transform participants' subjectivities, memories, and geographies, but what it actually accomplished was a convincing political appeal for more story circle-based art in the city. This message becomes especially clear when we compare the design of the theatre space to the content of the performance. When audiences entered Story Circle's performance space, they walked through doors marked "White" and "Black." Some audience members chose to enter through the racially "appropriate" door. Others resisted in varying ways—pausing to discuss the entrances and their historic irony in New Orleans's Creolized culture, entering the racially "wrong" door, or searching for a way around either of these entrances.\(^{767}\) These dual entrances required audiences to connect their embodied/spatial paths through the performance space to their socially constructed racial identities. But instead of building on the new knowledges that were produced in the space of the theater as audience members made choices about how to enter this space and how to interact with others through their

\(^{767}\) Grimsley, Interview by the author.
entrances, the play became a circle that did not include the audience's choices or voices. Throwing out an initial taste, but ultimately refusing to allow audience members to take emotional risks and begin to feel the power of transformation during the performance, the play insisted on New Orleans's reality in this historical moment—accusatory, violated, divided, and stuck. It advocated, without enacting, residents' circular, call and response expressions of their memories and geographies as a solution for the city to find a way through this crisis. When audiences exited through Story Circle's marked doorways, they carried with them the knowledge that the only way to answer the questions they began to ask as they entered the play was to pursue participation in the story sharing practices such as the one the play depicted.

For those who chose to remain after the performances, Story Circle's post-show discussions offered audience members a chance to begin this participation. For Bebelle, these discussions successfully expanded TBT's goal of involving a wide range of New Orleans residents in beginning to move through moments of personal discomfort to arrive at an understanding of their embodied relationships to racism and the city's racialized geographies. She noted:

I was particularly moved by elder whites who had taken the time to come out, some of whom were moved to tears. And were moved to share that they thought that they would get out of this life before they would ever get to a place where they thought that there might be a chance that they would not feel so bad about parts of their life that they lived, the way their parents were, or the way they had to act because their parents were a certain way. Yeah, that is the mushy touchy feely stuff. But so much of that is our life. That's the stuff that defines us.768

It was precisely this "mushy touchy feely" stuff that made the overarching TBT project into the spark that started a city-wide anti-racist performance movement. TBT

768 Bebelle, Interview by the author.
underscored to all participants, but especially to its wide network of participating and creating artists, that race and racism are "mushed up" inside us, shaping how we understand our embodied selves and how we move through our city creating affective and political communities. To change these communities and the geographies that emerge from them, we have to be willing to tolerate the corporeal and psychic "discomfort" that comes from "conceding" to people their stories.\textsuperscript{769}

Drawing on the lessons of Truth Be Told, Ashé has worked in years since to cultivate these moments of discomfort that emerge from cross-racial storytelling and performance as the source of New Orleans' greatest potential. As Bebelle explained to me:

\begin{quote}
We've taken on the purpose of being like a womb. Once something is born, whether it's a spark of greater consciousness on the part of an individual, or whether it's a template of how it is that you could approach doing something to accomplish change, our expectation is that people are going to find a place in the world to hook that up to. That's what we want—that you take this new view, this shift, this slight shift, and you don't let it get away. . . .We ask that we all be willing to experience those moments of discomfort, to be able to learn more and to be clearer about what part we can play in making things better.\textsuperscript{770}
\end{quote}

The remainder of this chapter focuses on the myriad performance projects that have emerged in the past five years \textit{from} this womb. While I focus on the productions that I have been able to participate in and observe in detail, I want to acknowledge the importance of two ongoing projects: Junebug Production's Free Southern Theater Institute, and \textit{Swimming Upstream}, a collaboration between Ashé and Eve Ensler's V-to-the-10\textsuperscript{th}, the ten year anniversary celebration of the release of the Vagina Monologues.

\textsuperscript{769} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{770} Ibid.
The Free Southern Theater Institute (FSTI) began a year after TBT. A collaboration between Junebug Productions and Tulane, Xavier, and Dillard universities, this project consists of a series of semester long courses with college students and community members, each of which builds to an end of semester performance. The curriculum for the courses centers on using the story circle method to train participants in ways to build new forms of dialogue and new, counter-hegemonic community articulations. The FSTI course has proved challenging for its lead teacher, Kiyoko McCrae. She has struggled admirably to manage the intense discussions and collaborative knowledge production that emerge when people from diverse and sometimes oppositional backgrounds and new to the field of social justice artistic work engage in twice-weekly story circle sessions with each other. In addition to producing new knowledges among the class members, the FSTI course trains participants in a variety of production and acting methods. Class members and McCrae have created memorable performances, such as This Pen is Red, a 2010 play about racism and public education. Like Story Circle, these performances are more focused on conveying the social value of what participants learned from the story circle process than producing participatory transformative affect in the space/time of the production. The FSTI course has thus become a powerful new tool in New Orleans for codifying and passing on the public blues-inspired methodological lessons and historic knowledges that FST and Junebug have developed over several eras.

Swimming Upstream was the product of another kind of educational endeavor: one that sought to teach national female audiences the important lessons that women

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771 Kiyoko McCrae, Interview by the author.
772 Beginning in 2010, Junebug Productions also began running a story circle methodology course separate from (yet in partnership with) the FSTI course. This course is taught by McCrae and Wendy O'Neal, a visual artist and anti-racist organizer who is also John O'Neal's daughter.
artists in New Orleans learned as they have worked to rebuild their homes and communities after the Katrina disaster. Ensler, a renowned feminist performance artist, spent a year working with New Orleans women and Ashé artists to generate the musical script for this play.\textsuperscript{773} Like TBT, the content for the play emerged from a year of story sharing and collaborative, artistic-expression-based meetings. Written by sixteen local women, and performed by an eleven-member cast, the play used song, dance, spoken word, and storytelling to express the details of women storm victims' lives before and after Katrina. Well-known actors such as Anna Deveare Smith, Phylicia Rashad, Jasmine Guy, Shirley Knight, and Karen Kaia Livers joined \textit{Swimming Upstream}'s cast of local actors for different performances in New Orleans, Atlanta, and New York. The characters they played were from diverse backgrounds and neighborhoods in the city. Much like \textit{Story Circle}, \textit{Swimming Upstream} used detailed personal stories to touch on the role of race and class privilege in constructing their different memories of the city. It also employed humor, performance poetry, and collaborative singing to enact embodied forms of solidarity between women throughout New Orleans, or any city.

In its première performance in 2008, \textit{Swimming Upstream} famously reclaimed the Superdome as a site for survival and female solidarity during the V-to-the-10\textsuperscript{th} celebration.\textsuperscript{774} Ten thousand visitors and residents, mostly women, attended the performance. This Superdome performance not only testified to the national historic significance of residents' collective traumatic memories of the Katrina disaster, but it also drew on the moment of "we-ness" in the city to expand solidarity between local residents

\textsuperscript{773} Juge Fox, "Stages of Recovery."
\textsuperscript{774} I did not see \textit{Swimming Upstream} until 2010, when Bebelle and Ensler brought the performance to New York's Apollo Theater. The production I saw had audience members clapping, singing, and crying throughout the performance. According to my family and friends in New Orleans, the 2008 and 2010 performances in New Orleans produced an even broader response and served as one of the most transformative and cathartic performance experiences of their post-Katrina lives.
and visitors. It did so by emphasizing the importance of humor and singing to producing empathetic lines of identification between socially produced communities. *Swimming Upstream* also, importantly, insisted to the national media and thousands of visiting artists and audience members that African American women's recovery of their lives in New Orleans was crucial to the nation's social and environmental health. By performing black women's geographies in New Orleans as integral—both to the moment of national shame and racism that the New Orleans Super Dome after Katrina represented and to the hope, joy, and collaboration that existed there during V-to-the-Tenth—*Swimming Upstream* asked a local and national public to keep the dangerous memories of Katrina alive, as necessary elements in the work to construct a more just national future.

**Public Storytelling and Performance as Digital Second Lines: Mondo Bizarro's I-Witness Central City**

One of the longest lasting performance and storytelling projects to emerge from the "womb" of Ashé is Mondo Bizarro Productions' I-Witness Central City project, a "story map" and series of story sites around Central City where residents and visitors can stop beneath an eye-catching sign and call a number to hear a first person narrative a personal memory or historic event that occurred there. Less obviously a "performance" project than the other projects in this analysis, the I-Witness project has, over time, exerted a powerful affective influence on how people experience this embattled neighborhood. It is also a crucial tool with which the Ashé community continues to resist the post-racial neoliberal geographies that urban planners and developers are currently

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775 Eve Ensler, Interview with Amy Goodman.
attempting to impose on Central City and many other low-income non-white neighborhoods in New Orleans.

For Mondo Bizarro Productions—a group of young, mostly white, mostly locally-rooted theatre makers—the Katrina crisis presented an opportunity to draw on their training and experience in the creation of performances out of personal narratives and biographical stories to use stories to transform how residents, visitors, and the larger public travel through and understood Central City. By collaborating with O'Neal, Ashé, and neighborhood churches and businesses, Mondo Bizarro targeted a diverse group of residents, community leaders, artists, and volunteer workers in the neighborhood. They collected, videotaped, and edited the stories that their chosen participants told about their recent and historic memories of the neighborhood. In addition to their interactive phone story sites, they also created a digital map of the neighborhood that they placed, complete with the videos, online. I-Witness uses both digital and real-time spatial elements to map Central City through stories and articulate why this neighborhood should be valued within New Orleans's larger, cultural and social landscape. A kind of technological second line, I-Witness works (much like the vision for Plessy Park) to reconfigure New Orleans's overlooked, demonized, or neglected public spaces as narrative and performance "monuments" that intervene in residents' race- and class-inflected spatial practices, thereby building new affective communities capable of resisting neoliberal post-racialism.

The project began as a partnership between Bruce France and Nick Slie, co-directors of Mondo Bizarro, a performance production company they started in 2003 under the guidance of O'Neal, ArtSpot Productions, and Alternate ROOTS. While France

776 You can view the I-Witness Central City project here: http://www.mondobizarro.org/blog/?page_id=776

777 Rancière, Emancipated Spectator.
and Slie had been trained in the story circle method, their work tended to be artist-driven rather than collaboratively produced with the local community. However, when they returned home to New Orleans after evacuating for Katrina, they quickly learned that to make meaningful work in New Orleans's devastated landscape, they needed to find a way to engage directly with the experiences, needs, and stories of people seeking to return home and rebuild their lives. Slie recalls how he went to investigate the theater at Nunez Community College in St. Bernard Parish, where he taught, only to discover that the stage was filled with fish. The stage at Ashé, in turn, was filled with cleaning supplies. Meanwhile, the streets of the city were slowly re-filling up with stories and memories that Slie and France knew needed to be preserved and publicized. Joe Lambert of Berkeley, California's Center for Digital Storytelling—a longtime friend of theirs—had sent them voice recorders and encouraged them to begin recording the stories of their friends and the people they encountered around the region. They began immediately to gather stories.

As Slie noted to me in an interview, listening to the stories of Katrina survivors at FEMA camps, schools, churches, and their family and friends' homes, took them "back to a place where we hadn't been for a while—the process of sitting there and hearing." He and France began to wonder, how could they produce engaged performances about New

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778 Bruce France, Interview by the author.
779 Slie and France both returned to New Orleans before they began working (with O'Neal, Kathy Randels, Stephanie McKee, Roscoe Reddix, and others) on the Alternate Roots-sponsored touring performance, *UPROOTED: The Katrina Project*. Their first story-gathering work in the post-Katrina city occurred simultaneously with or during breaks between with their tour of this performance project. See O'Neal, "Do You Smell Something Stinky?"
780 Lambert is the director of the Center for Digital Storytelling in Berkeley, California and the author of *Digital Storytelling: Capturing Lives, Creating Communities*.
781 Slie, Interview by the author. A predecessor in the development of I-Witness Central City was Slie and France's first, 2005-2006, oral history gathering project, also called I-Witness. This earlier version of the project contained stories from people from a variety of background and neighborhoods. Slie and France digitized some stories for internet publication, but this earlier project did not contain film or performance elements.
Orleans unless they became professional listeners? Drawing on the Ancient Greek
definition of theatre as "a seeing place" and rehearsal as "re-hearing" or "re-listening,"
they re-imagined Mondo Bizarro as a theater concerned with producing public places for
engaged listening. They concentrated their story gathering efforts on Central City because
they believed that neighborhood to be one of the sites most in need of being re-listened to
by the local and national public.

Slie's memories of Mondo Bizarro's decision to pursue this project express how
the Katrina crisis turned their attentions, as well as many of their artistic partners'
attentions, to the public, call and response aesthetic philosophy of second-lines:

The large community experience of Katrina was this moment of pause
when we asked, who are we? What are we doing? What have we done,
and where are we going? It was like the collective conscious moment of
9/11, but in a far more elongated way. A lot of people, including us, took
it to the streets. It was a way of saying, the real work is happening here.
[We] were emulating what is the largest creative ensemble artistic
tradition here—the second line social aid and pleasure clubs. For our
company it ended up turning into this kind of amazing moment to ask
ourselves deeper questions. And that carried on into a lot of work that we
were doing.782

Modeling its structure on the organized, yet improvisational traditions of the second line,
I-Witness Central City uses careful editing to succinctly portray a series of contrasting
geographical memories of the neighborhood during recent eras. In contrast to the
traumatic or oppressive memories that constitute much of the content of the TBT and
Swimming Upstream projects, the stories in I-Witness Central City tend to focus on
positive memories and reflections on the thriving, meaningful culture of this demonized
neighborhood. I-Witness stories follow a series of key themes that are important to
residents: the centrality of African diasporic knowledges, cultures, and democratic ideals

782 Ibid.
to the neighborhood's daily realities, the problems of poverty and police violence, and the threat of gentrification.

I-Witness Central City also uses the second line's emphasis on improvisation and its call for public interaction. People who call in at each "story site" can leave a response to the story. The Mondo Bizarro crew can then arrange to come out and hear and film respondents' stories. Joanna Russo, a Mondo Bizarro staff member and new resident of New Orleans notes that the responses abound with gratitude and critical feedback. "One woman said, 'Wow, thank you guys. When I called this number I was so glad to hear that it was a positive history and not just something about somebody getting killed." This woman's response helped Mondo Bizarro come to understand their work as a kind of commemorative project that not only preserves the neighborhood's memories but also proclaims their importance to the city's history as a whole.

The story/performance of musician Luther Gray encapsulates how this project works to express the participatory resistant geographic knowledges that thrive in this neighborhood. Standing across from Ashé, Gray tells the story of the 2007 funeral parade that Central City residents threw for Douglass Redd, the co-founder of Ashé. In the filmed version of Gray's story, Gray detours from his narrative of Redd's funeral parade to explain the meaning behind the objects that jazz funeral and second line parade-makers carry. Waving his arm with an invisible handkerchief, he explains how participants use handkerchiefs to "cleanse" the neighborhood's geographic and social atmosphere, making it ready to be reconstructed and renewed in every collaborative, artistic instance. Umbrellas, by contrast, are parade-makers' way of physically "carrying" African diasporic memories into the city streets. As Gray explains, the use of umbrellas in New Orleans parades comes from a Yoruban spiritual practice that understands rain on the day

783 Joanna Russo, Interview by the author.
of a person's funeral to mean that the ancestors are "opening" heaven to receive their spirit. Gray's story, like the parade, is an expression of the heavy and lasting impact that Redd made on collective memories in his neighborhood. The camera pans to the window of Ashé, where more African objects are publicly displayed. It juxtaposes an image of Gray telling his story with an image of Gray gazing at Ashé, remembering. This filmed oral history works like a palimpsest to mirror the layered African diasporic spiritual practices, critical geographies, and collective memory making tactics that were born and still thrive in Central City. In a manner strikingly similar to an actual second line parade, Mondo Bizarro's depiction of Gray's story teaches and spreads the philosophies and spirituality of New Orleans's African diasporic traditions at the same time as it honors the life of the storyteller, the subject of his story, and the organization that sustains them both. This depiction of place and subjectivity as wrapped up in and sustained by participatory space-making proclaims Central City's critical importance to New Orleans's public memory and to its possibilities for a just urban future.

Mondo Bizarro artists seek to spread these space and collective memory making practices from their storytellers as they expand their project to include local youth. In the past two years, they have worked to train youth in the Seventh Ward to go out and record stories in their neighborhood. They are also mentoring students from Xavier and Tulane Universities. By passing on the editing and production skills necessary that other New Orleans residents need to keep this collaborative work going, Mondo Bizarro has strengthened local second-line knowledges and geographies in a moment when they are under their greatest threat.784

784 In the Seventh Ward, Mondo Bizarro also worked in partnership with Stephanie McKee, a community-based/African diasporic dance performance artist and the former director of the Seventh Ward Neighborhood Center, to use some of the stories that Seventh Ward youth recorded to develop a grassroots movement to open the Circle Food Store on St. Claude Avenue, a historic grocery store that was a "fixture" in the community for many years. This campaign successfully raised awareness in the New Orleans City
Visual artist Jeffrey Cook's narrative about a tree house he and his friends built on Carondelet and Felicity streets shows the long-term affective impact of this project on new and old residents in and visitors to Central City. Cook narrates the neighborhood's previous lively atmosphere while standing across the street from a large, blooming elm tree. The tree is the only living thing inside an empty lot filled with fragments of destroyed buildings. Cook tells the story of how he and his friends had to compete with other young boys to attain this popular tree as their own personal "territory." Rather than use physical combat, the children drew on Mardi Gras Indian and second line performance traditions to out-dance or out-draw each other for "ownership" of the space. Within Cook's narrative, the tree house becomes a container for the children's memories, imagination, and artistic expressions: it was their "fortress," their "space ship," and their "time traveler." The camera zooms in on the tree's branches as Cook explains how the tree house evolved over time into an art piece. When it rained, the boys would nail up wood and plastic to cover the leaks.

According to Russo, who was one of three Mondo Bizarro artists present to listen to and film Cook's story, the tree house was, in a way, Cook's first collage. As Cook evolved as an artist, the tree came to represent to him the origin of his aesthetic. It also functioned as a material site of hope for him as he passed through the neighborhood and hoped that that reconstruction in Central City would take into account the memories, histories, and values of the neighborhood's residents. Cook worked to expand this sense of hope, a version of Congo Square's promise, as he generated sculptures and collages that sustained and strengthened the neighborhood's collective memories. Fittingly,

Council about the community's need and desire to re-open Circle Foods. Due to the death of the store's owner, the community struggle to open the store is still in process. McKee, interview by the author; Parker, "Campaign is Launched to Re-Open Circle Foods." To access Cook's story directly see http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7JcvjsJi09k. Ibid.
throughout the filming of this story, the camera creates a visual and oral narrative/performance collage that links Cook to Ashé (who is wearing an Ashé sweatshirt), then to the tree to the empty lot—soon to be a site for redevelopment in the neighborhood—and back again.\footnote{787} The camera's juxtaposition of these images portrays this site as a synecdoche for the entire community. Cook views the tree in the same way. According to him, developers would show their ethical sense of respect for his memories and the community's collective memories if they kept the tree alive and let it live "its own private renaissance."

Soon after Mondo Bizarro recorded his story, Cook passed away. Russo explained to me how after Cook's death, members of the Ashé community learned that the construction crew was going to destroy the tree. They snuck into the construction site while the tree still remained intact and stole one of the wooden steps that once led to the tree house. They gave this step to Cook's mother, who had only recently heard and seen her son's I-Witness story. Had Mondo Bizarro not captured the story, artists in the community might not have known the significance of the tree and might not have thought to save the stair. As in the carrying of objects in second lines to pass on and remake African value systems, the passing of this object to Cook's mother proclaimed the central and enduring value of her son's beliefs and his collective-minded art work to the community. This proclamation was radically opposite to the values of the mixed income housing development that has, in the years since Cook's death, been completed on this site.

The destruction of Cook's tree represented, for Mondo Bizarro and their partners at Ashé, the dominant development mentality in New Orleans that understands Central

\footnote{787} The filmed version of Cook's story was edited by Mondo Bizarro ensemble members Russo and Melisa Cardona.
City and neighborhoods like it to be incapable of "blooming" from within their "trunk and roots." As with other developers of mixed-income housing in New Orleans and other cities, the public/private partnership (between nonprofit developer Gulf Coast Housing Partnership and private developer LDG Corporation) that attained ownership of the site where Cook's tree stands portrays their development as an act of charity and uplift and not an act of racial violence. They rely on the dominant contemporary language of urban reform that embraces post-racialism to portray poor, non-white residents as socially dysfunctional and unable to compete in the city's housing marketplace. Using this language enabled these developers to sell a re-development plan to Federal housing grant makers and receive over $25 million dollars in Gulf Coast rebuilding. The project somehow managed to land a prime real estate site in one of the city's most historic African American neighborhoods (the only black neighborhood to be within walking distance of the CBD) and to get away with constructing only around seventy low-income apartments out of a total of over three hundred units.

The deceitful "post-racial" definition of poor, non-white neighborhoods as incapable of blooming from within is a contemporary manifestation of the American

788 The regional online news organization Bayou Buzz called the Muses development an instance of "best practices" in sustainable urban development. This narrative is an example of how the dominant/popular concept of sustainability hinges on practices of integration that sustain America's "racist grammar" by requiring the displacement of "undesirable" poor, non-white people and the erasure of their collective memories from the city's core landscape. Bayou Buzz, "Louisiana Recovery: New Mixed Income Housing Off St. Charles In New Orleans."

789 Hackworth, The Neoliberal City; Woods, "Les Misérables of New Orleans." For a global perspective on how development language positions certain subjects as "exceptions" to the neoliberal ethics of "choice," see Ong, Neoliberalism as Exception.

790 Carr, "Ground breaks for Central City housing development 'The Muses.'" Muses' advertising is subtly coded with de-racialized promises that the "underclass" will not be allowed access to the development's privatized public spaces. Instead, it promises potential homebuyers and renters: "School teachers, lawyers, singles in their 20s and 70s, policemen, firemen, engineers, construction managers, assistant store managers – these will be your neighbors at The Muses . . . . All tenants must meet The Muses' leasing requirements, including review of credit scores, criminal background check, personal/professional references, and tenant work requirement." Muses Apartments website, accessed November 9, 2009. http://www.themusesapartments.com/neighborhood/.
It has enabled developers to market Central City to more privileged (and white) residents as an "edgy" artistic community that they helped to bring "back to life." Post-racial ideology even influenced the name they chose for the development on the site of Cook's tree: "Muses"—an homage to the city's pre-urban crisis and pre-civil rights era identity as a neighborhood of Eastern European immigrants. Muses Apartments markets itself as a "green" building site constituted by "urban convenience" and walkability. Its advertising literature cites Ashé and other grassroots artistic organizations on Oretha Castle Haley as "cultural assets" that make the neighborhood desirable to the "urban" (read middle class) consumer who wants to live in an "inspired" way, in a neighborhood with a prime "walk-score." The irony that this development, like mixed-income developments throughout the city, claims to be concerned with bettering the lives of low-income non-white residents by creating a kind of integration-via-violent-displacement (a form of what Harvey calls "accumulation by dispossession") is fully apparent to residents in the community who have witnessed the pre- and post-Katrina destruction of low-income housing in the neighborhood. When the neighborhood was a primarily poor, non-white space, it was viewed by developers and

791 Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe." For Spillers' analysis of post-racialism and the American racist grammar see "Mama's Baby, Papa's Too?"
792 This name also associates the "new" neighborhood with the all-female, mostly white Mardi Gras parade, Muses, a parade that has come to represent the city's new whiter and "jazzier" avant garde identity.
793 Muses Apartments website, accessed November 9, 2009.
794 Walkscores, a development by Frontseat For Civic Life (a software developer), have become a primary means with which upwardly mobile city dwellers and developers determine location-based real estate values. I do not mean to critique the idea of "walkability"—certainly being able to safely walk to shop at healthy food stores, to school, to work, or for other recreational purposes should be a primary goal for any urban community. My critique here is the way in which the public measuring of a neighborhood's walkability is often a coded way of quantifying the extent of its gentrification and of the removal of its "undesirable" poor (and most often non-white) populations. The destruction of New Orleans's public housing and neighborhood schools has been central to the city's geographic removal of these residents and its subsequent "improved" walkability for middle-class residents. Walkscore. Frontseat for Civic Life. Accessed November 19, 2009. http://www.walkscore.com.
795 Harvey, Spaces of Global Capitalism and A Brief History of Neoliberalism.
policy makers as a history-less, culture-less site filled with threatening bodies that had to be policed at all times. In a manner opposed to how Cook's childhood friends and Mardi Gras Indian cultures compete for territory with artistic performances, this violent seizing of Central City's culture, its abstract (material) space, and its representational spaces openly sought to rid the neighborhood of its long-term African American residents. Only when those residents have been displaced will the neighborhood be proclaimed to be a successful urban renaissance story, complete with "safe" and "inspiring" jazzy public spaces.

These violent social and spatial acts are exactly why the I-Witness story sites matter to Central City. As an interactive, collaboratively produced monument that is simultaneously alive in the spaces of daily life and a container for memories even apart from and after spaces in the neighborhood become transformed beyond recognition, I-Witness provides a dynamic forum for capturing the visions that Central City residents and community leaders' construct through parades, stories, worship practices, and political struggle of their neighborhood's future goals. By doing so, it functions like a digital version of Cook's tree, a palimpsest of hope for a neighborhood where resistance has long thrived under the most dire and hopeless of situations.

The I-Witness Central City project has also helped to shift artistic space making practices within the local community-based performance field. For example, creating the I-Witness project inspired Slie and France, as well as new Mondo Bizarro artists Russo, Melisa Cardona, and Hannah Pepper-Cunningham, to deepen their commitments to re-evaluating their own personal relationships to racial privilege. Their first performance to

796 Lefebvre, The Production of Space.
797 It is important to note that organized resistance to the destruction of public housing in Central City existed throughout the post-Katrina era. See South End Press Collective, What Lies Beneath; Flaherty, Floodlines; Woods, "Les Misérables of New Orleans"; Luft, "Beyond Disaster Exceptionalism";
come out of this commitment is *Race Peace*, a multi-disciplinary, interactive racial storytelling production that they created in collaboration with Carleton and Maurice Turner of M.U.G.A.B.E.E (Men Under Guidance Acting Before Early Extinction), a Mississippi-based African American hip-hop and poetry performance duo. Working under the mentorship of Alternate ROOTS elders O'Neal and Dudley Cocke of Roadside Productions, Mondo Bizarro and M.U.G.A.B.E.E. designed *Race Peace* to be adaptable to the needs and contexts of each community where they stage the production. The performance-dialogue that the production creates simultaneously employs the genres of oral history, digital video and photography, performance, whole-bodied People's Institute anti-racist training tools, and circle-based dialogues. In classic second-line aesthetic form, it remakes the spaces of the community centers, schools, and theaters where it is staged into spatial encounters that are constructed both by the artists' personal memories and critical/creative social analyses and by the memories, oral histories, and visual landscapes of their audience communities. After traveling to Los Angeles, Asheville, and a few other locations, in February 2011, *Race Peace* held its New Orleans première. Ashé hosted this two-day event, which was attended by students, grassroots organizers, union members, and local community-based artists from diverse disciplines. Mondo Bizarro and M.U.G.A.B.E.E. concentrated this New Orleans performance and dialogues on emerging community stories about police violence against undocumented workers. Doing so opened up important new local conversations about black/brown relationships and possibilities for solidarity in the post-Katrina city.

As *Race Peace*, *Swimming Upstream*, and other second-line-inflected forms of community-based performance continue to thrive in New Orleans and to travel around the US, New Orleans artists are beginning to share the tools they created during the Katrina crisis period in order to inform and expand possibilities for cross-racial dialogues.
and solidarity in cities throughout the nation. However, to accomplish the long-term transformative goals of this work, they must often compete for funding with organizations with more short-term priorities. The next section outlines the critically important stakes of this competition within the context of the neoliberal city by exploring two post-Katrina performance spectacles in public space, one designed with the city's short-term needs in mind and one designed as a step in a long-term struggle to move through dangerous and difficult racial memories towards achieving lasting change.  

Parading Post-Racialism or Singing Spiritual Geographies of Change?: Creative Time and ArtSpot's Performance Spectacles in Public Space

In the years since Katrina hit, New Orleans has abounded with publicly engaged performance projects created by well meaning, prominent non-local theatre organizations. Paul Chan and Creative Time's November, 2007 production of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* is the best-known example of a community-engaged theatre project in post-Katrina New Orleans produced by a visiting artist group. In this concluding section, I contrast the *Godot* production with the ongoing cross-racial performance and community engagement work of ArtSpot Productions, a longstanding leader in New Orleans's community-based performance landscape. While Creative Time's *Godot* and ArtSpot's post-Katrina productions share a similar insistence on creating

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798 Thompson, *Performance Affects.*

799 Another example, from the realm of the visual arts, was Dan Cameron's International Biennial Visual Arts Exhibition, Prospect.1, an internationally promoted and enormously funded city-wide exhibition that promoted cultural tourism as the key to New Orleans's sustainability. See Sue Bell Yank, "Biennial Rising: Prospect.1 New Orleans and the Post-Disaster Arts Movement" and Joshua Decter, "Art and Its Cultural Contradictions. In addition, even though it often features the work of local artists, the Fringe Festival, an annual large-scale performance festival, benefits from and broadens this gentrification with their work, which has helped nurture, small indoor theaters that stage avant garde plays for mostly white and wholly middle-class audiences. Art galleries and high end restaurants exist by the dozens. But, with the exception of a Food Cooperative designed to appeal to new, white residents, no full functioning grocery store yet exists anywhere near the neighborhoods along the St. Claude and Claiborne Avenue corridors. Due to the ongoing work of Greta Gladney, Rashida Ferdinand, and other DCC-affiliated organizers, farmers markets help amend this problem.
whole-bodied performance-spectacles in public residential spaces in a way that inspires
audiences to re-spatialize their concepts of community, Creative Time's short-term
approach veered away from the challenges that such re-spatializations provoke in the
race-divided city. In contrast, ArtSpot's affective/cross-racial performance encounters
seek to generate theatre as a truly public art capable of summoning into being new forms
of urban collectivity and spirituality that multiply love, justice, and forgiveness. I
conclude this chapter with this comparison in order to emphasize the crucial role that arts
funding structures can play in generating or shutting down possibilities for agonistic
democracy-building in contemporary, neoliberal cities.

When Chan, Creative Time, and the Classical Theater of Harlem received
$250,000 in funding (from foundation, private, and state sources) to stage Godot in New
Orleans, they thought carefully about how they would ground their work in the concerns
and needs of local communities. Yet, because they understood their temporary
endeavors in New Orleans to be concerned with bringing and spreading healing rather
than expanding local residents' capacities to heal their own city, the Godot production
unwittingly manipulated the temporary or "conjunctural" cross-racial "we-ness" in the
city to usher in a new (and soon-to-be popular) conceptualization of New Orleans's public
blues traditions as utopically pluralistic and post-racial.

Godot's curator and producer Nato Thompson expresses Creative Time's goals in
his statement that "More than a play, Waiting for Godot in New Orleans [was] a socially
engaged performance at the heart of a national crisis, and direct support to the community
[was] an essential component of the project. Creative Time spent months before the

800 "Thanks," "Creative Time Presents Paul Chan's Waiting for Godot in New Orleans," Creative Time
website.
801 Denning, Cultural Front.
show generating interest in the project and asking for input from local artists and educators, such as SAC, ArtSpot, the Renaissance Project, and the NSP. They met individually and in groups with community leaders and these organizations to ensure that they "shared in the responsibility for making the play happen" and in determining how and where it happened. They also held workshops for students at local high schools and universities. Furthermore, they set up a shadow fund to give out small grants ($1000 to $5000) to their partner organizations as well as local schools and churches. Tickets were free, and Creative Time served gumbo to the audiences each night they staged the play. Thousands of New Orleanians (and New Yorkers) came out for Godot's five performances, spread out between two weekends and two locations, one in a lot in the Lower Ninth Ward where a house once stood and one in the front lawn of a devastated house in Gentilly. The performances (which featured nationally known local actors like Wendell Pierce of HBO's The Wire and The Tremé, as well as film stars such as American Gangster's Kyle Manzay) proved cathartic for the audiences, so cathartic in fact that the play drew far larger crowds than Creative Time had planned and had to turn away hundreds of local residents each night.

Godot appeared on the surface to be a gesture of solidarity on a grand scale from a powerful New York art organization to the struggling city of New Orleans. It is not until we evaluate the potential space-making and social dialogue possibilities that Godot swept aside that we begin to see it as a parasitic rather than a reciprocity-defined endeavor. Godot inspired white residents who had never been to the Ninth Ward before (except, perhaps, for charity missions) to travel across the Industrial Canal for the short duration of the performance. Pre-show activities encouraged these white visitors to feel like they were "authentically" sharing in black cultural traditions as they ate a gumbo dinner beside

a select few "real" Ninth Ward or Gentilly residents and danced a little second line parade to their seats. The gumbo that Creative Time served ended up serving a second purpose as well. It became a conciliatory offering to hundreds of local residents who were tired and hungry from standing all day in lines to get tickets to the free performances and yet who were often turned away for lack of seats. Non-local visiting artists and white residents who had traveled to the neighborhood specifically to see the show ended up being more likely to have a ticket in hand than neighborhood residents who, engaged in the difficult work of putting their homes and lives back together, did not have time or energy to wait in line for hours. As a graduate student with a flexible work schedule who could afford to wait in line all day, I was lucky to gain admittance to the second night of performances in Gentilly. There I witnessed first hand that while many local residents watched the show from "outside" the production fence, no famous non-local visitors were refused seats.

*Godot* sought to give residents a respite from the city's collective exhaustion and its social divisions—to bring them together to relax and celebrate over a shared meal and a mock second line parade. By doing so, the production hoped to help residents sweep their memories of the deaths, rapes, vigilante justice, and race-inflected diaspora that were integral to the city's collective experience of Katrina temporarily under the rug. But, Boal would argue, as is the case with any catharsis-seeking performance, the production ultimately only served to reinforce the social divisions it hoped to ameliorate.\(^{804}\) As audience members walked uncomfortably past the un-ticketed throngs and sang, danced, and smiled for the news cameras, they embraced and performed, with Creative Time, an over-easy vision of a *new* New Orleans united by theatre and culture. Meanwhile, the divided feeling inside the crowd mirrored the divisions of race and class that had long

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\(^{804}\) Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed.*
shaped the city and were becoming more and more exacerbated as the recovery process struggled to get started. Once the play began, its metaphoric characterizations also covered over this divide.

The Classical Theater of Harlem transformed Beckett's play into a post-racial narrative that depicted the city's antagonists, its "Pozzos," to be the Federal government and defunct local public institutions. It portrayed Didi and Gogo both as universal New Orleanians and as working-class African American men who needed to realize that if they could break free from these corrupt institutions, they would be able to pull up their boots and move on with their lives. The performance thus paradoxically depicted working-class African American New Orleans residents both as non-racial, universal symbols and as endangered blues culture-bearers whose self-realizations could only be brought about if they broke free of their dependence on the institutions that had failed them. It also positioned New Orleans culture as a highly marketable product within the international art market, an act that helped lay the groundwork for future "drive by" community engaged projects, such as the Prospect.1 Arts Biennial, that have contributed to the artistic gentrification of local neighborhoods. Chan's visual elements were the most indicative image of this artistic sleight-of-hand.805

In the Ninth Ward, where most street signs (and homes) had been blown away, Chan hung a series of new plastic signs with quotes from Beckett's stage directions: "A Country Road. Tree. Evening." On the one hand, these signs fit in with the neighborhood's stark landscape of decay and debris. But they also rendered the Ninth Ward as a real-life "no place," such as that portrayed in Beckett's abstract play. Depicting the neighborhood's suffering as lying in the realm of the universal, Chan sought to increase national and international empathy for New Orleans. The visual image of the

805 Decter, "Art and Its Cultural Contradictions", Yank, "Biennial Rising."
signs successfully appealed to prominent national and international media outlets such as NPR, the New York Times, and the Guardian in the United Kingdom. To do so, however, Chan's aesthetic had to turn away from a reflection on this neighborhood's specific, historic struggles and the lessons they might hold for the nation. Because he did so, even as his crew worked on the ground to engage with local community leaders, Godot broadcast for a wide national and international audience a narrative of post-Katrina New Orleans that reinforced the appropriation of grassroots rebuilding efforts by non-local organizations.

In an interview with me, Slie reflected on Creative Time's approach to community engagement. "When you have that much support, and that many front page articles in the New York Times, acting like this is the best thing for the community ever." He noted, "you're really giving lip service to community engagement because there's two things that you never did: you never asked this question: 'what do you guys want to do?'" Had Chan asked this question (as Eve Ensler and Urban Bush Women have both done in years since in New Orleans), the production would have taken longer to develop and it would have had a different, perhaps less nationally recognized impact.

My memories of the show tend to dwell on one image: a sign that a woman was holding in the ticket line that read "Waiting for Waiting for Godot." Having been turned away on the previous night without a ticket, this woman, a Gentilly resident, was the first to show up on the day that I arrived. Her sign and the crowd's general desperation for tickets for this show revealed to me that, perhaps unwittingly, Creative Time's production succeeded in rendering Creative Time as the "Godot" for whom New Orleans was waiting. Like the never-arriving Godot, the performance necessarily disappointed those who looked to it for satisfaction.

Thompson might argue that if Godot was truly (as its organizers have proclaimed
it to be) a model for fundable large-scale community-engaged performance projects, it articulated a performance ethic that insisted on the heroic ability of artists with global "track records" to help "heal" traumatized communities within the measurable period of a grant funding cycle. This ethic, which resembles the ethics that undergird much NGO work around the globe and helps enable the neoliberal privatization of the forces of social reproduction, can result in artists' and grant-makers' prioritization of projects that do little of the difficult work necessary to build solidarity among antagonistic groups in needy communities. Instead, such projects can function to reinforce post-racial narratives that portray racism as a matter solved (or covered over) by an "easy" multi-culturalism.

Artists, in this model, are the new parade makers bringing a happy, yet artificial "post-racial gumbo" to the masses.

Creative Time's 2010 Field Guide to the Godot production, a book that seeks to prescribe Godot as a model for community-engaged theatre work, underscores the production's dependence on this narrative. In a manner reminiscent of Baum's blog and his appendixes in Nine Lives, the field guide alternately and excessively lists Chan and others' notes from their semester of potlucks, workshops, and conversations with artists, teachers, and activists in New Orleans. It pairs these notes and lists with glowing local and national reviews of Godot and essays or testimonies from a range of "authentic" local grassroots leaders attesting to their belief in its contribution to the city's recovery. This anxious chronicling over every single bit of community engagement in the city reveals Creative Time artists' anxiety over whether their desire to intervene in and help communities in New Orleans was incommensurable with their desire to produce a world-class performance (what, we might ask, might TBT or I-Witness field notes on

806 Chan, Waiting for Godot: A Field Guide.
community-engagement look like, and how many volumes would it take to contain them?)

This anxiety becomes especially evident when we attend to the aporia between the book's opening essay, "What to do with the Negroes?" by Salaam, and the remainder of its content. Creative Time asked Salaam to submit this essay and then placed it as the first entry in the book following an opening sequence of images of racial stereotyping from mass media coverage of Katrina. In "What to do with the Negroes?," Salaam reflects on how a lack of understanding of the city's racially violent history has shut down contemporary public discussions about racism. He wonders why the city's white residents and the nation proclaim to value New Orleans's public blues traditions, yet have failed to engage with the memories and geographies of resistance expressed by the communities that make those cultures. The essay ends by explaining that what is missing from the post-Katrina city is not just churches and schools, neighborhoods, corner stores, and gardens, but

What is gone, what we miss most of all, is us.
We the people are not here. What is left is an amputated city ignoring its stumps. Moreover, even if it were possible, our city does not desire to re-grow or replace what was “disappeared.” “Good riddance,” says the new majority.

This fact was certainly prescient in the minds of everyone who attended Godot, especially at its stagings in the Ninth Ward. Inviting white residents to reflect on what and who was lost after the flood produced a powerful sense of hindsight about the racist system that produced the Katrina disaster. But just at the moment when white audiences might have begun to meditate on their personal imbrications in this system, Creative Time encouraged them to join a cross-racial second line and commune with a few remaining

807 Salaam, "What to do with the Negroes," 1[15].
Ninth Ward residents over bowls of gumbo. This invocation of the second-line aesthetic twisted it to achieve the inverse of its intended meaning. Instead of sounding and crafting urban space with collective memories of resistance to slavery and imperialism and an insistence on a just agonistic democracy-to-come, Creative Time's second line re-defined the Ninth Ward and black working-class New Orleans as sites that could be healed via an embrace of NGO-sponsored post-racial politics of place.

Written directly to influential members of the new, whiter and wealthier New Orleans—artists with global reputations—Salaam's essay sounds the need for a dialogue about how the Godot project engaged (or failed to engage) with the national idea of post-racialism within the context of the displacement of African American residents from the neighborhoods where they were doing their work. Rather than take up this challenge, the Field Guide displaces it by framing Salaam's essay as a critique of the racist elements that prevailed in the mass media response to Katrina. It further displaces Salaam's questions by failing to engage with the community-engaged theatre networks that existed in New Orleans when Creative Time arrived there and that were making dialogues about race and racism their first priority. If Chan and Creative Time had found a way to use the Godot project to nurture the slower story-sharing and dialogue process—with all of its dangerous memories and heavy emotional "rocks"\textsuperscript{808}—that swept over New Orleans's theatre landscape after the Flood, Godot could have contributed more significantly towards creating new forms of solidarity that would help democratize, heal, and generate progress towards racial equity in New Orleans in the long-term.

I view ArtSpot Productions' post-Katrina work as a prime example, not just for New Orleans, but also for community-based theatre makers around the globe, of the potential that theatre contains to cultivate and manage forms of agonistic communicative

\textsuperscript{808} Bebelle, Interview by the author.
democracy inside of already existing urban social structures and institutions such as churches, neighborhoods, and schools. In the past five years, ArtSpot's public blues inflected productions have inspired an increasing number of national and international theatre makers to "come and witness" the socially transformative power of New Orleans's radical democratic dreams. As a result, ArtSpot has evolved into a theater that is both world-class and community-based.

ArtSpot began in the 1990s when Kathy Randels, a rising international performance artist and a New Orleans native, generated the company as a venue for her mostly solo work. As I mentioned in Chapter Three, ArtSpot has been a long-term partner of SAC. Randels has also worked under the mentorship of O'Neal and Dah Teatar, a performance group in Serbia uses theatre in cross-ethnic peacebuilding efforts. In the late 1990s, ArtSpot transformed from a solo operation into an ensemble. Equally inspired by New Orleans cultural traditions and alternative "Third Theatre" in Europe, the ArtSpot ensemble's collaborative creation methods center on painstaking physical training, engaged research, and the production of non-linear performances rooted in personal stories and community histories. Its members and staff include Sean LaRocca (musician, composer, and Managing Director), Jeff Becker (sculptor and "stage spectacle" maker), Lisa Shattuck (writer and performer), Ashley Sparks (performer and director), Rebecca Mwase (writer and performer), and Randels, who retains the role of Artistic Director. All ArtSpot members, as well as their technical staff and guest artist

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809 Slié, Interview by the author.
811 LaRocca, interview by the author. "Third Theatre" groups, such as Odin Teatret in Norway and Dah Teatar are known for their experimental, collaborative social-justice oriented performances, often in public spaces, and their diverse audience engagement methods. See Milosevic, "Theatre as a Way of Knowing" and Watson, Towards a Third Theatre.
partners, participate in the collaborative process of conceptualizing, writing, designing, and performing their productions.

ArtSpot typically locates its productions in spaces that are not normally understood as sites for theatrical performance. For instance, long before Creative Time arrived in New Orleans, ArtSpot staged a site-specific production on a Ninth Ward levee that Randels and other ArtSpot artists created with SAC students. ArtSpot's performances in public space compel audiences to re-configure their cognitive maps of the city around the unseen and unheard memories that surround overlooked places of daily life. Where and how ArtSpot stages its productions determines their abilities to summon these memories and express the ways in which daily spatial practices can erase, remake, or breathe new life into residents' collective memories and notions of self and community. In the past five years, ArtSpot has created productions in New Orleans' City Park, in a nature preserve in the suburban bayous, on a bus tour around a devastated residential neighborhood, and in two local churches.

ArtSpot's first post-Katrina work to use theatre to engage New Orleanians in racial dialogues and racial healing took place in their work with HOME: New Orleans?. As a neighborhood-based, multi-disciplinary arts project, HOME: New Orleans? (HNO) brought together artists, local organizations and residents along with university faculty and students to discuss and express in their artworks the various meanings of "home" that emerged and changed in the post-Katrina city. This project began when Jan Gilbert, a

812 This production, *Lower Nine Stories*, took place in 1998 as a part of John O'Neal and Junebug Productions Environmental Justice Festival.
813 Randels, Interview by the author, 2010.
814 One of ArtSpot's most notable post-Katrina productions, which I do not have space to discuss here, was the 2009-2010 production of *Loup Garou*, co-produced by Mondo Bizarro. Directed by Randels, written by Raymond "Moose" Jackson, and performed by Nick Slie, *Loup Garou* heralded the destruction of the Louisiana wetlands using the voice and the haunted memories of an isolated werewolf in the swamps of Lafourche Parish. The performance was created as a site-specific piece in New Orleans's City Park with a set "spectacle" by Jeff Becker. See Wallenberg, "As Fear Spreads."
visual artist and founding member of The Vestiges Project, invited Richard Schechner to visit the city, witness the devastation, and work together with artists to create a vision for arts-based recovery in the city. Ron Bechet, a visual artist and professor at Xavier University, joined the project and added his vision engaging university students in working for and learning from local artists and community leaders. Many meetings were held and, thus, a network was built, which facilitated bringing in outside support and infrastructure, embracing local communities' existing artistic and community resources, facilitating an arts-based recovery and healing process that would aid and link neighborhoods through dialogue and artistic encounters. HNO evolved as a multi-neighborhood project that sought to respond in dynamic ways to the needs of specific communities. ArtSpot and Gilbert, both HNO steering committee members, took the lead in Lakeview to produce a series of multi-disciplinary art installations, performance projects, and spiritual anti-racist dialogue projects.

The first HOME: New Orleans? project that ArtSpot created as part of the Lakeview team of artists was *LakeviewS, A Sunset Bus Tour* in June, 2007.\(^\text{815}\) This sold-out performance bus tour took audiences (many of whom were Lakeview residents or former residents) through Lakeview's destroyed and decomposing residential and commercial streets. Along the way, memories of life in the neighborhood that the artists had collected and told during its community-engaged creation process played on the bus's loudspeakers. These stories, combined with the bus's physical movement through the neighborhood and the conversations that arose between passengers along the way, constructed a map of Lakeview layered with loss, memory, and difference.

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\(^{815}\) This team included Jan Gilbert, Andrew Larimer of the NOLA Project, Jan Villarrubia, and all Lakeview residents.
The first stop on the tour emphasized the role of race in this neighborhood story-map. Audiences departed the buses at Holt Cemetery, an African American cemetery where many of New Orleans's poor black residents were buried in unmarked graves. Randels, a late arrival on one of the school buses, lurked as the stalking and silent "Black Lady," a character in black attire that she developed in her work with women performers in Serbia to raise international awareness about genocide the impact of UN bombings there in the 1990s. Mercado-Narcisse, *Lakeview*’s only African American artist, performed in the role as "The Suited Man," a character who narrated the different perspectives of three generations of black fatherhood in New Orleans. As Rachel Carrico and William Bowling attest, Mercado-Narcisse's performance "echoed* Lakeview*’s play between themes of generations and renewal while acknowledging the ever-present question of race made manifest by kicking off the tour at Holt." The mostly white audiences thus began the performance tour by having their own memories and racialized geographies challenged, both by the Suited Man and the continuously rolling, diverse stories on the bus tapes.

The tour's second stop was at the flooded remains of Lakeview Baptist Church, where Randels's father worked as pastor for thirty years before Katrina. In the church's gutted sanctuary, HNO student volunteers had carved the transcripts of oral histories by church members about their memories of the church before the flood. The symbolic act of writing these stories on the floor of the church etched local memory into the building's concrete foundation. In 2007, Lakeview Baptist was in the process of being re-organized by a non-local religious organization that converted the building to an arts center. Today, the former congregation's stories remain there—buried beneath the sanctuary's new

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816 Bowling and Carrico, "Lakeview." A year later ArtSpot returned to create a second cross-racial performance encounter at Holt with a staged reading of Villarrubia's *A Turning of the Bones*, which tells the story of her family servant's burial there. The reading was, of course, followed by story circles.
identity as a gallery space. The performance at Lakeview Baptist was titled *Coming Forward*. Directed by Randels, who also played the "Black Lady" in the sanctuary, it featured eight church members giving testimonies about the value that the church had in constructing their memories and concepts of community in New Orleans. Each narrator held an object from the church in his or her hands. The Black Lady and the Suited Man functioned as mediators between the performer-church members and the audience, enabling the audience to both "perform" as congregation members in a way that influenced the content of the production while also ensuring that they did not feel compelled to participate in the worship practices in the production's content. The presence of the Black Lady and the Suited Man, weaving in and out between the cast and audience, rendered the sanctuary as a portal through which individual and collective notions of spiritual community traveled out, to shape the neighborhood's broader public memory and identity.

Within the space/time of this church performance, ArtSpot enacted (and involved audiences in the construction of) their idealized ethical vision of place making in a new New Orleans. In this vision, which resembles that of the FST and the DCC before Katrina, acts of storytelling, active listening across difference, and determination to collectively trust in and reach for a better world would define how places in the city are understood and valued. The conclusion to the performance encapsulated this collaborative storytelling-based ethic of place making. While singing of their "walk" with Christ, the church member/performers stood and walked to the front of the sanctuary. There, on the gutted frame of a wall beneath a giant wooden cross, they placed the objects that they carried. These objects functioned as symbolic repositories for personal

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817 Randels, Interview by author, 2010. See my discussion of *Go Ye Therefore . . .* for reflections on ArtSpot's depiction of the role of cultural imperialism in the transformation of Lakeview Baptist.  
and collective memory. Placing the objects on the frame of the church, on top of the stories written on the floor, showed the church to be constructed in and by personal memory, spiritual communion, and a shared valuing of the church space. As audiences exited from this ritualistic performance, they passed through hanging portraits of the church members and storytellers. As they did so, they were reminded that their movement into, within, and through semi-private, spiritual spaces such as churches helps determine how they walk through, what they see and hear, and how they interact with others to construct the public world beyond. Mirroring the blues/spiritual connection of second line parades to African American churches, this critical geography of personal and collective spiritual place making seems remarkably more self-reflexive and honest than the happy pluralistic parade of Creative Time's Godot.

LakeviewS artists' decision to conclude rather than begin with a meal encouraged audiences to process these new geographical modalities over shared conversations and interactions. After a performance and visual installation at Randels' and Gilbert's homes, 819 the last stop on the tour was a performance on the concrete slab—all that remained of Bruning's, a famous Lake Front seafood restaurant. Here, Andrew Larimer's short play Generations humorously depicted two new New Orleans residents as a crab and a crawfish who crawled up out of the lake and followed the bad, romanticized advice of tourist guidebooks, as they sought to find a way to integrate into the post-Katrina city.

The stops at Randels's and Gilbert's childhood homes reaffirmed the value of individual memories while also proclaiming the class, gender, and racial organization of residential spaces as integral to the production of geographic stories-so-far throughout the city. In Randels's family home, she gave a performance drawn from her 2006 solo piece Spaces In Between, in which she performed as the Black Lady to re-examine, from an imaginative distance, the gender roles and spatial practices that were produced by the dynamics of her own family's Baptist household. Similarly, Gilbert's Biography of a House, an installation of photographs along the flood water line on the outside of her parents' home that she combined with home audio recordings of family gatherings, required audiences to come up close and negotiate the space of the house. The installation's reliance on audience members' collage-like piecing together of the family's history theorized the story of the home as a narrative constructed as much by its outside as by its inside interdependent, distinct perspectives and memories. See Bowling and Carrico, "LakeviewS."

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This performance articulated the spatial practices of the new New Orleans residents who were part of the bus tour as crucial to determining the future life of the city's collective memories. Yearning for dialogue and food, the audience and artists then dove enthusiastically into dinner. Unlike Creative Time's pre-show gumbo dinners, which encouraged audiences to look to an outside art institution's salve-like interpretation of their collective suffering, the conversations that took place in this post-show, post-tour moment reflected on the role that New Orleanians' difficult acts of remembering and listening to the memories of others would play in determining the outcome of the city's recovery. As Gilbert notes, "The vibe of the meal was . . . that of celebration, reclamation, and communion. . . . After you've been through a process, several events, you get out and can talk and share your excitement, questions, ideas . . . being out in the night air in a community spot where we hadn't been able to be, on the scarred, tiled slabs of the former restaurant, was itself a cause for celebration."  

Three years later, ArtSpot's site-specific production *Go Ye, Therefore* . . . used the personal, racial stories of ArtSpot members to reflect on the lessons they collectively learned from *LakeviewS*, Truth Be Told, *Swimming Upstream*, I-Witness, and all the other cross-racial story sharing performance projects in post-Katrina New Orleans.  

*Go Ye* was staged in May and June, 2010, in the backyard of a house in the Gentilly neighborhood, a racially diverse area of New Orleans that has only seen a 35% residential

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820 Gilbert, email to author, March 10, 2011, used with permission.
821 ArtSpot was involved, in one way or another, in all of the above performance projects. In the years between *LakeviewS* and *Go Ye*, ArtSpot also produced several other site-specific performances, most of which also invoked public participation and storytelling. These performances included *Artistic Ancestry* (an international performance festival celebrating ArtSpot's tenth anniversary in 2006), *Loup Garou, Beneath the Strata Disappearing* (a site specific performance linking legacies of maroon resistance and the environmental destruction of the Louisiana wetlands), *Flight, Turning of the Bones*, and the State of the Nation theatre festivals in 2006 and 2009.
return since Hurricane Katrina. Here, in this half-empty neighborhood, one would not expect to find crowds of local residents and national theatre makers spraying bug spray on themselves beneath ancient oak trees in anticipation of participating in a world-class theatre event. But ArtSpot's site-specific productions have earned them a growing local and national reputation, and they are capable of drawing a crowd wherever they stage a performance.

*Go Ye* emerged out of Randels and Mwase's desires to explore their relationships with their families and with the global Baptist church. These desires led them to create structures of community-engagement for the piece that drew together local congregations, their extended families, and neighborhood residents to sing and share stories about their spiritual practices, church histories, and the impact of these practices and histories on New Orleans's social and cultural landscapes.

It is a common axiom that the most segregated place in the US is Sunday morning. According to Mwase, ArtSpot's research into local Baptist congregations revealed to them the extent to which churches in New Orleans both reinforce the city's racial divide and "ground" local communities. Randels and Mwase, both talented singers, offered to perform songs of praise for each congregation they visited. Their performances inspired congregation members to attend ArtSpot's series of "community sings," events where participants had a chance to participate in acts of collaborative, improvisational musical praise and to meditate together on racial differences in worship styles. A musical rendition of the story circle process, community sings draw on the

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822 In addition to its sponsorship by HNO, *Go Ye Therefore* . . . was co-commissioned Ashé, 7 Stages Theater (Atlanta), and the National Performance Network. ArtSpot produced an adapted site-specific version of *Go Ye Therefore* . . . with 7 Stages in Atlanta, in the fall of 2010. In 2011, they are also adapting the performance for use in a series of racial healing retreats for women in New Orleans.

823 An earlier version of my analysis of *Go Ye Therefore* . . . (in the context of these other projects) appeared in *Theatre Forum*, June 2011, 57-65.

824 Rebecca Mwase, Interview by the author.
spiritual practices of African American Baptist churches such as the ring shout and on the public spiritual space-making aesthetics of second lines and Mardi Gras Indian performances. ArtSpot's community sings were also inspired by and modeled on singing at Alternate ROOTS conferences and on the weekly community sings that take place at Ashé. Even more transformative, at times, than story circles, Ashé and ArtSpot's practice of community sings filters narrative through the realm of the aural in order to foreground the embodied nature of freedom and democracy. For white residents, who tend to have less access to second-line knowledges than African American communities, this process encourages a critical awakening to the full-bodied nature of public blues democratic ideals. I observed this fact at ArtSpot's community sing at Lakeview Presbyterian Church, a public event they organized as part of Go Ye's community engagement. A few dozen members of the church's mostly white congregation sat in a circle in the sanctuary and re-learned familiar hymns with new, improvisational harmonies. The participants initially expressed some trepidation as they sang with and to each other. Gradually, following Randels and Mwase's step-by-step harmonizing instructions, we began to look into each other's eyes and lose ourselves in acts of singing that felt free and unbound. At the end of the session, Randels and Mwase drew on the African American histories that produced these traditions by having the congregation sing hymns from the civil rights movement.

I am an atheist, but singing "Trouble of the World," the song that Mahalia Jackson famously performed in Doug Sirk's Imitation of the World, in five-part, improvisational harmony, in a white church with white parishioners living in a still devastated New Orleans neighborhood, brought home the uncanny power of song to sustain and shape collective memories, strengthen community bonds, and enable communion across difference. ArtSpot's community-sings inspired participants to ask what it would mean
for New Orleans or any city for its residents to come together physically and engage in harmonious, improvisational singing together on a regular basis?Potentially even more powerful than the practice of second lines, joining voices in this spiritual way together would enact a new social vision founded on deep listening and interdependence. Such public and collective acts of singing might transform New Orleans into the city that so many people dream it can be—a city where the subaltern memories and democratic values of its music shape its institutions, its geographic and social landscapes, and its spiritual communities. Post-show discussions after each performance of Go Ye built on these transformative, song-inflected visions and brought together other existing and potential spiritual and social communities in New Orleans, such as local women spiritual leaders, neighborhood residents, elderly residents, and networks of local and visiting artists. In combination with the community sings and the participatory elements of the production, these discussions rendered Go Ye into a kind of public-sphere in miniature that engaged diverse audiences in historicizing, debating, and re-imagining their dreams for ideal spiritual and social communities in the city.

The location for Go Ye stemmed from a story in the life of set-designer Jeff Becker, who is known for his sculptural, magical set spectacles. Becker is a friend of the house's owners, Kevin and Tiffany Eyer. Their house was one of the first houses he visited after Katrina. According to Becker, when he stepped inside and perceived its total destruction, the tears he had been holding in since the day of the storm suddenly poured forth. All New Orleanians have such a landmark—the place they were when the psychological impact of the floodwaters became too much to hold inside. Tears that one may have held in for weeks or even months came flooding out with the encounter of a place or an object that once contained significance for one's life but was now destroyed. When Becker constructed the set, he wanted the house to re-enact this moment that the
audience community shares. He wanted the house to cry. In the play's first act, this is exactly what happened.

The first act introduced Go Ye's reflections on cultural imperialism's impact on spiritual identities, collective memories, and constructs of home. Performing as herself in the first of the play's three locations in the Eyers's backyard, Randels narrated how, after Katrina, her parents lost not only their home but also their church. Interrupting Randels's story, Mwase burst through the gate on top of an RV named "Gutting for Glory."

Wearing a jumpsuit constructed of blue tarp, the notorious covering that graced nearly all New Orleans's rooftops after the storm, her character embodied the missionary narrative as it played out in post-Katrina New Orleans. She proclaimed:

I am a new New Orleanian. I came here to build a community that’s just and equitable at its core; that plants churches and builds green homes. . . . A few have expressed concern about losing many of the traditions and history of the city, as folks like me, come here to help. But, there is a difference between remembering history and glorifying the past.\(^{825}\)

The audience laughed. Mwase's character was someone whom all New Orleanians knew well. With most of its residents absent or overwhelmed, newcomers with good intentions filled up the city, determined not just to rebuild it but also to remake it. As we have seen, this "blank slate" point of view became embodied, for many residents, in the thousands of young professionals that arrived in the city after the storm, as church and school volunteers, Americorps workers, Teach for America teachers, artists, or employees of non-profit organizations.\(^{826}\) Mwase, a former New Orleans Americorps member herself, drew on personal experience to reflect on and satirize the complex role that she and other young professionals have taken on in the city since the storm. Her character stated that

\(^{825}\) Randels et al., Go Ye Therefore . . . All future in-text citations of the play's text are from this unpublished manuscript, used with permission.

\(^{826}\) Klein, Shock Doctrine, 35.
the city was her "cross to bear." To remake its troublesome culture, she had to rid it of the weight of its memories. She thus climbed down from the RV and up into a small balcony on the house where she proceeded to toss storm-damaged objects onto the ground.

The scene is reminiscent of Creative Time's *Godot* where, in this same neighborhood, in a similarly gutted house, discarded moldy objects signified the impossible levels of destruction, decay, and loss in New Orleans. Trapped in a crumbling landscape emptied of meaning, *Godot*'s characters seemed similarly unmoored. By contrast, *Go Ye*'s treatment of storm objects rendered them as sacred, yet damaged containers of everyday memories, as constructs of self and community that were often carelessly discarded by those who arrived after the storm to oversee the city's recovery.

As Mwase exorcized a suitcase, hatbox, refrigerator door, hymnal and other objects from the house, Randels stood beneath her mute, with arms out, pleading in silence for her to see the meanings these objects contained.

When Mwase disappeared with a flippant kick of her heel, Randels proceeded to gather the de-valued objects—all of which were real artifacts from Lakeview Baptist before it was re-constructed—and made an altar with them. She told the story of how the young church arrived from out of town to "help" her father's church after the storm. "A church is a building and a group of people," she explained. "It looked to me like they were just interested in the building." The colonizing merger "washed away what Katrina herself couldn’t, 92 years of a church’s history." As we saw in *Coming Forward*, it did not erase the church building, but it did erase the church. When Randels described this erasure, the red walls of the house began to cry. The drops that poured down from invisible outlets along the house's large, yellow-framed windows rendered the house as a

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827 This was the same church where *Coming Forward* (in LakeviewS) was set. In its new merged identity as "Sojourn Lakeview Baptist Church" and the Convergence Center for the Arts, it was the setting for *Turning of the Bones* in 2009.
living repository for the relationships, power dynamics, and personal stories that construct and lend strength to New Orleans communities.

Further scenes elaborated the connections that *Go Ye* drew between imperialism, collective memories, affective constructs of home, and singing spiritual communities. For instance, in a scene about corrupt revivalist preachers, Mwase and Randels perform as Brothers Ebony and Ivory, racialized representations of the intersectionalities between patriarchy, guilt, and greed in Protestant worship practices. Mwase, as Brother Ebony, wore a Don King wig and spoke with the diction of a stereotypical televised Gospel preacher. Randels wore a suit and moustache that would have suited televangelist Jim Baker and shrieked in a high-pitched whine. The preachers told the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, cities that they compared to New Orleans. Within their sermon, the narrative of Lot's wife, who was turned into a pillar of salt because she disobeyed God's dictum to leave her home without looking back, became a metaphor for women's sinful, rebellious natures. Standing on the roof, Brother Ebony compared the women in the audience to Lot's wife, hailing them as drunkards and "sexual deviants" who needed to be controlled by the Lord. "*Maybe, maybe,*" s/he exhorted, half in spoken word, half in song, "*You think . . . I am more powerful than my husband . . . . I don't need God to take care of me. Captain Morgan will take care of me!*" The audience laughed as s/he then proceeded to run down through the house, out into the yard, and begin exorcising demons from women standing in the "pews." The preachers then began to exorcize demons from each other.

Ebony demanded Ivory to "Release your Up-Tight-Whiteness!"

"*Now Brother Ebony,*" responded Ivory, "Release that little devil on your shoulder telling you it’s ok to drive a $60,000 car when your congregation lives in poverty!*" They dunked each other's heads, wigs half falling off, into a bathtub filled with water. Cleansed, but still sinners, the preachers became yet more absurd as they repeated
in a frenzy the performance's refrain, Matthew 28:19, and ask the audience to join them in a hymn. The audience was caught in a paradox. Should we sing with these parodic characters in real praise, for some of us knew the song and value it? Or should we sing with them as a players performing part of the production's critique? The pastors made joining in even more difficult as they demanded the audience to stop on command and then sing in double and triple time. Finally, even more absurdly, they demanded an offering and would not accept anything but real money.

This scene highlights the challenge that Go Ye presented to theatre in New Orleans or any struggling city. Spiritual beliefs, like racial and gender identities, are socially constructed, but complexly interwoven within each person's sense of self, spirituality, history, and community. Go Ye called out to these deep and often conflicted parts of the audience members' selves to ask if there were methods through which people can better communicate across and within difference without silencing or demonizing others. The performance showed audiences the kinds of dominant discursive and community-making structures that serve the interests of the few rather than promoting freedom and conscious interdependence—Ebony and Ivory's sermons as well as Mwase's "New New Orleanian" speech were effective satiric examples. Complementarily, the performance's choreography, conceived by Monique Moss, emphasized Christian and Western societies' failures to see and acknowledge social and spiritual interdependence. Randels and Mwase alternately repelled and fell into each other, washed each other's feet, raised their hands in need, and performed the gentle elongated squeezing forth of waters, of burdens, of demons, of barriers. With these actions they expressed the empowerment and freedom that emerge when individuals with different relations to power structures struggle to understand and embrace their interdependence.
In *Go Ye*'s final act, the work to recover the story of Lot's wife—a woman who is nameless in the Bible—deepened the expression of this struggle. The hole at the center of her story became an image for the submerged histories of women and non-white people that trouble the Baptist faith. Brother Ivory proclaimed: "*We do not know her name. We don't need to—we only need to know her as a symbol of God’s Wrath on the disobedient.*" But knowing Lot's wife's name and story would change the patriarchal church ideologies that her image has helped to construct and that, in turn, have helped construct global structures of empire and racism. Mwase and Randels thus wondered about the reasons why Lot's wife might have turned back.

"Was it a reflex?" they ask together.

"Did she have the habit of looking back to see if everything was OK…?"

Was she looking "for some thing—her parents' graves. Her home. . . or someone—her lover?" Or did she turn back out of a desire to behold "the awesome, terrible, ferocious, magnificent, and humbling power of God"?

As they spoke, they led the audience to pine-stump seats in a third stage area beneath a large pine tree. Their questions morphed into an interrogation of the violence and unanswered questions in their own stories and spiritualities. The performance then shifted back in time towards the history of colonization that was at the center of their shared history and faith.

Mwase initiated this shift as she reflected on her longing for her home language, Shona, a language she only remembers in songs. To learn more, she would have to confront the colonizing societies that stripped her culture from her. Performing a sermon as her father, she explained how her church and family's ethic of forgiveness prepared her for this confrontation. Her sermon declares a year of "jubilee":
In Leviticus 25:10, 17, God gives us the answer to restore spiritual and earthly well-being: “Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee; each one of you is to return to his family property and each to his own clan. . . .”
The year of Jubilee is the time to forgive. Forgiveness as a path to restoration is central to Jesus’ message, and the essence of Jubilee.

But whom should she forgive? And with whom, in the present-day, should she reconcile? Could such a jubilee be the key not just for Zimbabwe but also for a city like New Orleans, whose communities have been knitted together over the centuries by histories of racial injustice and violence?

The climax of the play reflected on these questions. In this scene, Mwase and Randels re-enacted the colonizing encounter from the point of view of two children in Zimbabwe engaging in a role-playing game about their nation's history. Since Mwase's character was the only one who had access to collective memories of what actually happened when the whites first arrived, she took on the "role" of colonizer and diamond company owner, Cecil John Rhodes.828 Randels's character, in turn, took the role of a tribal chief. As they played this game of racial and cultural reversal and remembering, Mwase's character became increasingly cruel. She tricked the "chief" into trading away her land and ordered her to dig for diamonds "faster [and] faster!" Randels's character followed orders until, exhausted, she finally said, "I don't want to play anymore. You're mean."

Mwase's character retorted: "He [Rhodes] was mean!"

Randels's character refused to believe this. She shouted out: "Nuh uh! You invited us here! God told us to come here! God gave us that house!" The two children then

828 Rhodes, a consummate imperialist, owned an early twentieth century diamond company that carved 90% of the world diamond market out of the displacement and back-breaking labor of South Africans, especially Zimbabweans. He is famous for claiming that the British, "are the first race in the world and that the more of the world we inhabit the better it is for the human race." Cecil J. Rhodes, "Confession of Faith."
jumped onto tree stumps and stared at each other in silence, separated by the force of the violence at the center of their oppositional, cultural memories and identities. In the space of this gaze, Mwase morphed back into the role of the colonized subject. She turned to escape, but Randels pulled her back. As Randels's held intensified, the scene became a kind of lynching that was also a kind of rape.

Randels's character stripped Mwase's character of her traditional Zimbabwe dress. She then mounted her, strangled her, and forced her to sing J.W. Van Deventer's popular hymn, "I Surrender All" in English. This strangulated singing was a performance of an erasure far worse than death. Mwase's character seemed on the fringes of not losing her voice, but also disappearing from memory as white power and the English language weighed down her resistance and engulfed the meaning of her song. Although her voice faded, it did not die. Out of her song, the contemporary Mwase rose, picked up her ancestor's dress, and placed it on the pine tree. She made a memorial of the garments and then marked, in chalk, the space where her own head fit inside them. By inscribing herself inside the space and texture of this organic monument, she enacted a resistance that was also a re-membering: a transfer of new life into suppressed collective memories via the strength of her own body, voice, and movement.

Randels's character watched on, silenced. Doing so transformed her back into her contemporary character. Stripping herself of her ancestor's dress, she tried to rip it and then to burn it. But she could neither destroy it nor rid herself of it. This struggle led Randels to mirror Mwase's actions. She held up her dress high, covering her face with it. With this act, she composed a living monument to histories of white violence on the space of her own body. This dress-as-monument expressed the heavy and ugly, but critically important memories that she and other white people must re-learn and retain if they want to move forward with others into a more just future. By "wearing" the
memories of their shared past on their bodies in this way, Mwase and Randels insisted on the embodied nature of personal and cultural memory. Their performances showed that how women remember—or refuse to remember—determines their relationships with each other and their abilities to create and sustain spiritual and social communities.

The "game" that was really being played in this final scene, and throughout the performance, was a game between two American women—two performers, who were using their bodies, songs, and stories to struggle through their oppressive pasts in the name of producing a kind of theatre that was capable of helping and healing the urban spiritual and social communities in which they are both members. Like Lot's wife's name, there were elements in each of their pasts—Randels's pre-Katrina New Orleans, Mwase's access to pre-colonized Zimbabwean culture—that could never be recovered in original form. As collaborating artists, if they could not recover and communicate these parts of their selves to each other, they risked strangling and violating each other. Their performance showed that for artists and citizens in this divided society, the key to moving forward together without such ideological or physical acts of violence is to be committed to honoring and remembering the violent and submerged stories that construct our bodies, our memories, and our collective past, while also listening to and drawing forth the songs, dances, prayers, and moments of pure joy that exist within each of us, and wherein our collective potential can be found.

Throughout the play, Mwase and Randels mirrored, repelled, blessed, and exorcized each other. But only in the play's final moment did they join hands. "We lift up Lot's wife," they stated as they moved towards each other on the play's final "stage," a platform built on top of an above-ground pool and decorated with a large cross made out of salt. They washed each other with salt and declared, "We learn from her pillar. We look back and question. . . . We move forward with the knowledge of our fathers and
grandfathers, our mothers and grandmothers." Lifting their arms in song, they released their tears in a moment of total praise. They then fell backwards and landed, to the audience's surprise, in a hidden pool of clear water. Cleansed and wet, but unreleased from their journey, they came forward together, returning to the platform for the curtain call.

What would it take, this baptismal moment implied, for the audience and for New Orleans to be able to clasp hands, release their tears to each other, and move forward together? How is forgiveness possible, in a spiritual and social landscape of domination that strips some of us of our memories and languages? How might singing together enable us to recover these memories and re-learn these languages?

It was the practice of community-engaged, collaborative theatre-making that enabled Randels and Mwase to ask these questions and begin their journey into spiritual and racial healing together. Likewise, Go Ye showed that theatre has the potential to be a social and spiritual tool that can facilitate the broader public's movement through song, movement, story, and dangerous remembering, towards the construction of an equitable and joyful spiritual and social world.

Even though ArtSpot is more concerned with the complex role of affect in their performances than any other theatre group I have observed in New Orleans, in order to attain funding, they must still frame their work in the short-term, effect-focused language that funders tend to value. In fact, throughout the production of Go Ye and afterwards, ArtSpot artists were so busy documenting the play's social effect (the new community dialogues it began, the kinds of audiences it drew, and the crossing of racial barriers at church and post-show suppers that it immediately inspired) that they failed to realize the stunning and confounding affect their performance had on audiences. The audiences I observed at several of Go Ye's performances, many of whom participated in pre- and
post-show sings and discussions, and many of whom were my friends and family, were unable to talk about their emotional responses to the performance until a little time had passed.

Becker's original vision for the set would have had the audience marching over a bridge above the pool and out into the Eyers's front yard to group together as they choose and reflect on the play. But Sparks and Randels, pragmatically aware of their need to document these reflections in order to share them with funders, organized ways to keep the audience inside the fence, talking and sharing food. This deepened the level of their engagement, of course. It led to new lines of communication and new insights about their work. But I found that the audience's true responses did not emerge until they were away from the artists and from strangers. The play's portrayal of dangerous local racial and diasporic memories, and these memories' relationships to our spiritual identities and communities, provoked anger, confusion, confessions, and relief. In discussions at local bars, in cars on the way home, and in local kitchens, I saw people cry about this play, and get in shouting matches over it. I also saw people return again and again to the play, wanting to experience it again and understand it. These kinds of reactions cannot be measured in a grant evaluation. But they are exactly the kind of revelations that New Orleans and other cities like it need. Community-based performance makers like ArtSpot, Mondo Bizarro, Junebug, and their colleagues are capable not only of generating this kind of collective affective encounter, but also of growing such encounters into the kinds of institutions and ongoing dialogues and practices of collaborative art-making that are the key to growing empathy and solidarity across the numerous divisions that characterize the city's uneven and unjust terrain.

829 Becker, Interview by the author.
Coda: A Politics of Remaining

The work of the second-line theatre and literature makers in New Orleans is integral to enabling the city's residents to move through the difficult process of agonistic storytelling, song, and performance, and to begin moving in harmony towards a better world. These artists' accomplishments result from their embrace of a politics of *remaining* grounded and committed to the place where their own and their audiences' pasts, presents, and futures collide. As I have shown, this politics of remaining does not entail immobility or a conservative attachment to place-identities. Rather, it entails rigorous theorization of global, interrelated experiences of slavery, empire, neoliberal capitalism, and uneven geographical development through the lens of one's own and one's community's subaltern histories and geographies.

This practice of grounded, long-term community-based art can expand the power of local stories to shift knowledge and spatial practices on *multiple* spatial scales. As McKittrick notes, a "singular scale or geographic totality carries within it intricacies and connective social processes which can, and do, impact upon multiscalar areas." Changing the production of space on a global scale requires beginning with the body—the memories one "wears," or hides—and with one's own community and culture. Encountering the "worn" memories of others through story and performance shifts how we understand ourselves and our relations to others. It alters how we see and move through the world. As participatory art helps us embrace and grow these alterations, we begin to change the places where we live. Through doing so, we change the interconnected spatial contexts that construct and connect us to other locales.

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830 McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, 83.
Just as New Orleans musicians exported jazz and blues music in the early twentieth-century to help re-make US cultural geographies with African diasporic and African American knowledges and geographies, when it is sounded and performed for the nation, the work of second-line culture, education, literature, and theatre makers in New Orleans today contains similar, potentially profound implications for US democracy. It is my hope that this dissertation helps to amplify the ongoing importance of this work, for it is work that is in danger.

As I have shown, the neoliberal privatization of public resources—from schools, to hospitals, to arts funding structures—has worked to fragment the social justice movements and intellectual and artistic products that emerge out of and provide key support for New Orleans's blues-based cultures of resistance. Whereas past hegemonies concentrated on geographic removal, ghettoization, and physical violence to subdue the organizing power of New Orleans's public blues knowledges and geographies, neoliberalism's unique power inheres in its additional focus on the social and spatial co-opting of the progressive mantel of reform. For this reason, neoliberalism poses a dire threat to radical democratic, resistant knowledges and geographies in New Orleans and to related knowledges and geographies in marginalized communities throughout the US and the global South. Even in the face of this threat and the impact of several "unnatural disasters" in a row, second line culture makers and second-line literature and theatre makers in New Orleans continue to collaborate to make a circle out of the capitalism's square, divided corners. In the words of Nick Slie, their work is for New Orleanians, but it also contains an invitation to people from around the nation and the globe to "come to a place that's on the front line of the 'end times' in our country." Slie implores you, as do I, to "come to our great State of Louisiana and New Orleans and witness one of the

831 Salaam, "Congo Square."
largest environmental catastrophes ever, the loss of the coast, witness all these things about public housing and public schools. *Come and witness with us.* ³³ To take up this invitation is to jump bravely into the circle of agonistic knowledge and space making that is key to achieving justice and freedom in the city and the nation.

³³ Slie, interview by the author.
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