New Orleans Music: A Reappraisal

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New Orleans Music: A Reappraisal

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Introduction

‘I’m not sure, but I’m almost positive, that all music came from New Orleans.’
-- Ernie K-Doe, 1979

New Orleans – for many people the very name means music. Arguably one of the most recognised music cities in the world (Cohen and Atkinson, forthcoming), this place variously called the ‘Land of Dreams,’ the ‘Big Easy,’ ‘The City that Care Forgot’ has been the source of much comment and speculation by music scholars, and is often cited in popular music research -- as the origin of musical styles, such as jazz; as a contributor to the early days of rhythm and blues and rock and roll; as the inspiration for musicians as diverse as Louis Gottschalk, Antoine Domino, and Sidney Bechet. Meanwhile, there has been a dearth of study of the community behind the musicmaking, and of the social, cultural and economic context in which the city’s expressive practices sit.

It is a primary aim of this study to test the hypothesis that the contemporary city has much to say to popular music research that has not been said, and could be the site of exciting and innovative work by contemporary scholars. In ignoring the contemporary city, in looking at it merely as an aberration in the wider research on African-American music, popular music scholarship is repeating the mistakes of a half century ago, when theorising on New Orleans music was passed over, for political and social reasons, thus leaving a void in the understanding of US-American culture, and the city’s contribution to it, that still exists. The result has been that much of the discourse associated with this predominantly African-
American city has it shrouded in myth and romanticised notions. In addition, the penchant of popular music studies to disregard issues of ethnicity and class within African-American communities, as well as to reify recorded music at the expense of live performance, are factors that have led popular music discourse to banish to the cultural fringes the musical activities of contemporary New Orleans. At the same time, literature on the ‘globalisation’ of music\(^1\) that has considered the pressures of international music industries on small countries, has not often dealt with the peculiar problems faced by a local community reacting under these same pressures without a national government working to protect its interests.

This study proceeds on the principle that through looking at music and musical activities in this locality (as opposed to structures, texts, and products), asking such questions as how New Orleans came to be a centre of innovative musical styles, how the city is represented and used by music historians, by the popular press, by the music industry and by the city itself for economic development and place marketing, and the manner by which tradition and cultural forms of expression are documented and passed down within the community, not only could much be learned about music’s role in producing society, but also wider patterns of social fragmentation and reassembly may be revealed which may help to explain how this community has embraced change, duality and contradiction, promoting a versatility that perhaps has contributed to the survival and durability of their complex cultural activities in an urban setting. It is argued that here in New Orleans, as elsewhere, any attempt to create generalities about musical expression of a people must take into account manifestations of historical and cultural differences within particular places. Through looking at music, it is possible to elaborate the intricate interplay of ethnicity and class relations in New Orleans. In addition, focusing upon New Orleans musicians, rather than ‘structures, texts or products,’ may contribute to a further understanding of the multiplicity of practices.

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\(^1\) See, for instance, Wallis & Malm (1984).
used by African-Americans to cope in a racially biased nation, and may shed some light on how processes of innovation have taken place in the Americas.

This work builds on the excellent research done recently by University of New Orleans historians and urban studies scholars, particularly Jerah Johnson, Joseph Logsdon and Arnold Hirsch. In revising and broadening the scope of New Orleans within the discipline of urban studies, they have helped to remove from mystification the complex cultural practices of the city and to explain them in the context of the city’s continued dominant Franco-African culture and its lingering resistance to Anglo-American domination, factors that affected the evolution of the city in the past and continue to affect the contemporary city. These reappraisals of the city’s past have resulted in a more solid historical foundation for researchers working in the area of Louisiana cultural histories, including popular music research, or for those who have hitherto avoided New Orleans because of the dearth of useable text, and my work has benefited from their contribution.

Henry Louis Gates has said that a literary tradition holds within it a way to study itself (1988). His work in African-American literary criticism inspired me to search for a way to look at the music of New Orleans through a model drawn from the cultural practices of the community itself; one which would allow the people of New Orleans, particularly the musicians, to tell their own story within an academic framework.

I have also drawn from Deborah Cameron’s work on the social distribution of knowledge. Cameron suggests that knowledge about a group is often collected by people from outside the group, who usually share the knowledge with each other but not with the group being researched, and as a result, the ideas and arguments produced by these researchers never get back to the community (1992, p. 113-130), remaining a discourse of experts talking to other experts. Cameron suggests that most of the time this ‘expert talk’ may be of little interest outside the academic world, but she adds that some expert information may be of great interest and use.
to the people researched. In those cases, a flow of knowledge from the researched to the researchers and back could be seen as important. The effect of this ‘non-circulation’ of knowledge is to marginalise the community’s knowledge while denying it other knowledge that might be interesting and useful.

The research strategy that I chose, therefore, was one which placed great importance on listening to what people say, on valuing their opinions as ‘experts’ on their own community, and on a commitment to local ownership of research, emphasising the redistribution of knowledge so that the community could speak to a wider audience. It laid an emphasis on oral histories, participant observation, and ethnography. The results revealed the extent to which music is at the centre of debates on power, ownership, creativity, and economic regeneration in the city of New Orleans. In addition, the information that I have collected has been discussed intimately with the people that I have interviewed, and the community was consulted in many ways on the theoretical and historical research that I have drawn from academic work.

In my search for a way to allow the people to speak, however, I consistently came up against the contrast between the community described in existing historical texts and the community that I was studying. Here I drew from a rising development in anthropology, that of ‘historical ethnography,’ whose aim as stated by anthropologist Marshall Sahlins is to ‘synthesise the field experience of a community with an investigation of its archival past’ (1993, p. 1). Sahlins argues that an ethnography with ‘time and transformation built into it’ is a distinct way of knowing the research object; for him, it served as a theoretical justification for looking again at some areas, such as North America, that he felt had been ignored by anthropologists since the 1930s and 1940s. This approach was useful in my research because it was necessary, I believe, to listen also to the voices of those New

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2 Particularly the idea of **empowering knowledge**, defined in Cameron, et al. (1992, p. 11) as that research ‘on, for, and with,’ rather than merely research ‘on’ a group or community.

Orleanians of the past who had come together from so many disparate cultures to forge a new way to live in this geographical place, and whose resultant way of life was the legacy to the New Orleans of today. This necessitated a search for scholars who had listened for those voices, often speaking in French or Spanish, Bambara or Choctaw, often buried in ancient archives in distance places, voices that have been ignored in the agenda of creating a homogeneous history of the development of the United States. In a city where the ancestors are an important part of the mythology and spirit of the present, this attempt at ‘historical ethnography’ seems only fitting.

Before a more detailed discussion of the method of research is presented, a broad description of the contemporary city would be useful to put the study into context.

**New Orleans -- The Contemporary City**

New Orleans (usually pronounced Noo AWR luhnz or Noo AWR lee uhnz by locals) is a US-American city of around a half million people situated on the banks of the Mississippi River in the state of Louisiana, part of the southern United States. The surrounding suburbs and communities raise the metropolitan area population to around one million. The city’s ethnicity patterns are unique to the United States, and are treated in more detail later. According to the 1990 United States census, 62 per cent of New Orleans residents refer to themselves as black. Other groups of Orleanians include those of French, German, Irish, Italian, Cuban, Mexican, Polish, or Vietnamese ancestry. The majority of the city council is black, as is the mayor, a member of an illustrious Creole family, son of the city’s first black mayor.

Historically, New Orleans was a French colonial capital, built in an area also populated by Chickasaw, Choctaw, and Natchez Indians. Later it became the cotton capital of the South and its largest and wealthiest city (Clark, 1970, pp. 3-9).

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4 Statistics supplied by the Office of the Mayor, City of New Orleans, 1996.

5 For more on the city's complex ethnic history, see Virginia Dominguez, *White by Definition: Social Classification in Creole Louisiana* (1986).
Riverboats brought cotton to New Orleans to be boarded on ships from places like Liverpool, bound for cotton mill industries abroad (ibid., p. 12). In the period of research, New Orleans was struggling from the collapse of the oil industry, which had made the city a boom town in the 1970s but had resulted in the population of the city declining by 20% in the decade from 1980 to 1990. The state of Louisiana is one of the poorest states in the union, with the highest percentage of incarcerated people, and highest cancer rates in the nation (DuBose, 1996). A third of the population of New Orleans live below the poverty line. Its weather is subtropical; its chief employer is the tourist industry, followed by the port. It is a city where the quality-of-life markers contradict each other. Although the poor suffer more severely, many of the negatives about New Orleans are experienced by the whole community -- historically weak government, intemperate climate, poor education system. On the other hand, the city's positive points can be enjoyed by the majority of its citizenry. Food is plentiful and delicious. Little restaurants and cafés serve creative dishes featuring the shrimp, crab, oysters, crawfish and fish of the surrounding wetlands. Huge foot-long po-boy sandwiches, French bread piled high with roast beef and gravy or fried oysters, are sold for just a few dollars. In addition, the city enjoys mild winters, beautiful public spaces, interesting architecture and professional sports teams. As a result of these contrasting elements, in 1991, two national news magazines cited the city, one calling it ‘one of the ten most liveable United States cities’ (Newsweek, March 1991) and the other ‘one of the ten most difficult United States cities to live in’ (Business Week, January 1991). Violent crime, mostly connected with drug use, has been the city’s largest problem, with city government policies on crime prevention having little effect. There were over 400 murders in 1993, resulting in the city being named the ‘most murderous city per capita in the United States’ in 1994, with 90 per cent of the homicides classified as ‘drug related’ by the police (Independent 4 April 1996, United States Census figures.

The 1994 mayoral campaign was waged with crime as a major issue (Birmingham [Alabama] News, 30 September, 1994, p. 2). Many people have moved to suburban areas or across Lake Pontchartrain to ‘safe’ neighbourhoods to escape crime, causing the break up of old stable neighbourhoods and disbursement of secure residents.

With the declining population and high unemployment, the city cannot produce the tax revenue to support itself. The public schools are practically insolvent, with their physical plants in terrible condition and teaching materials outdated or scarce. The private and parochial schools are of varied competence, but many New Orleans parents choose to make the financial sacrifice to send their children to them (Kennedy, 1996). This lack of revenue has led to the city’s embracing gaming casinos for revenue, but this has not been successful, the largest of these, Harrod’s, having declared bankruptcy in 1995.

On the other hand, the city enjoys an international reputation as a place of pleasure and entertainment. The largest of the many public celebrations in New Orleans is its annual Carnival celebration, culminating in Mardi Gras Day, in which the city hosts over a million visitors (Hardy 1992). Carnival is a vestige of the French Mediterranean celebration, and despite the fact that over a century ago Anglo-Protestants in New Orleans co-opted Carnival into their status hierarchy, organising it around socially exclusive ‘krewes,’ it is still a time of city-wide participation, an eruption and disruption that is enjoyed by all socio-economic levels, and the lord of misrule still reigns.8 The largest public musical event is the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, which on its twenty-fifth anniversary in 1993 attracted 320,000 people to its various events. The festival, a non-profit event presided over by a foundation made up of local people, is second only to Mardi Gras in event size and tourist income.9

8 Abner Cohen (1993) and others have written about the ability of carnival to bring about a community ‘release’ that may help to resolve conflicts effected by the hardships of living in modern society.

Musicmaking in New Orleans

Even the most casual observer of musicmaking in New Orleans will notice substantial differences between the way music is performed there and in other US-American urban centres: the unit of musicmaking is often a group of musicians more informally connected than a typical ‘band.’ Band membership is often temporary and shifting, varying, as the ‘gig’ requires, in composition of players and even in the types of music played. Musicians often identify themselves as first of all players of their particular instruments rather than as band members and individual rather than group identity is emphasised.

Categorising musical styles is a difficult activity whenever and wherever it is attempted, but it is particularly so in New Orleans, where by tradition musicians have resisted classification, often for economic reasons: the more versatile a player in this city of tourism and festival, the more opportunities for playing. Characterised more by the manner in which it is played than any particular style of playing, the city’s musical repertoire is vast and ever changing. At the same time, musical styles remains popular in New Orleans for much longer than in the rest of the United States. Music can be heard today that has been played in the city for the last one hundred years and even longer: turn of the century jazz, 1950s rhythm and blues, funeral dirges of the Nineteenth Century and brass band music are all still played with regularity.

In contrast to the reification of youth typical in American popular music, the New Orleans music community holds older musicians in marked respect. Young musicians emulate older musicians and music teachers are held in particular esteem by the community. The streets of New Orleans are an important place for musicmaking, which is unusual in the United States in the 1990s. Festivals, saturated with music, are held often, each with their own complex cultural traditions and legends and impromptu parades and celebrations occur frequently, more reminiscent of activities of the Caribbean islands than the United States.

10 See Al Kennedy’s work on music in New Orleans public school system (unpublished, 1996).
Musicians display a sense of cohesiveness and support of each other that might be considered surprising considering the lengthy period of economic deprivation experienced by the city, which may have caused conflicts and rivalry.\(^\text{11}\) In addition, musicians who have left the city to work in larger music industry centres are still held in high regard locally, particularly those who choose to return to the city at the end of their careers.

**Rationale and Methodology**

Albeit in different ways, both Marxism and modernism suggested that more international concerns and identities would eventually replace the attachment to the local. With the rise of global industries, computer technology and travel, and the resulting flow of information, images and people across political borders, this thinking has persisted in the academic discourse of the late Twentieth Century. The mass media and popular culture particularly have emphasised the concept of the global village (McLuhan 1964, p. 32) and in turn a notion of a backlash to such cultural imperialism, with the idea of localities fighting international global domination.\(^\text{12}\) This thinking influenced popular music studies, which continued to emphasise global concerns, in particular the international recording industry and hit records. The prevailing trend both within the recording industry and popular music studies has been to discount or marginalise the local. Record industry management often claim, for instance, that place has no significance in the selection of artists (Street, 1993, p 52).\(^\text{13}\) However, locality research can still be seen as important in understanding popular music industry.\(^\text{14}\) John Street has said

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\(^\text{11}\) See for instance Cohen (1992, pp. 1-2) on the economic basis of rivalry between bands in Liverpool.


\(^\text{13}\) This was affirmed by a survey that I conducted with Dr. Sara Cohen at the Institute of Popular Music in 1994, in which A&R directors of record companies in the United States and United Kingdom were asked if region played any importance in who was signed. The vast majority of those who responded said ‘no importance.’

... though power in the music industry resides at a central/national level, it is not logically necessary that the local has no place in the study of the production and consumption of popular music. While there may be no local power base, it does not mean that the locality lacks any significant role and can be written out of the study of popular music. Cohen and Finnegan show how local structure and resources are crucial elements in music production and consumption. They do not deny the power at the centre, but they point to the way that local factors mediate the experience and effect of that power (1993a, p. 53).

The recent work in popular music studies that has emphasised the global flow of musical influences over imaginary borders of region, nation and continent has given rise to debate and some scepticism as to the very possibility of a musical community isolated from cultures surrounding it.¹⁵ This is particularly true of African-American musical communities and certainly of the predominantly African-American musical community of New Orleans, which exhibits a range and complexity of musical influence and cultural identities that reflect its historical development. Founded as a city, urban from its beginning, at the cross-roads of migration and commerce from the Caribbean and Europe into the interior of the United States, New Orleans’s musical community is particularly heterogeneous and multiply influenced. As musical cultures become yet more internationally influenced and increasingly permeable, this creates challenges for those students of the music of a particular area. If all musical communities draw from the same influences, how do we isolate a particular musical community for research? Particularly challenging is looking at a place like New Orleans, where musical production is largely improvisational, throughout various genres, allowing (and encouraging) musicians to embed all kinds of fragmentary musical details from multiple sources into their music. But, as Ingrid Monson has suggested, instead of ‘dissolving cultural identity into meaninglessness,’ this very diversity, or what she calls ‘polymusicality,’ could be seen as an integral component of a locality’s music making, and ‘the way that these diverse musical elements are integrated and valued can then become the plane for cultural analysis’ (1994, p. 285).

¹⁵ See for example Waterman (1990), Comaroff (1991), Schramm (1979) and Monson (1990).
While the research was concerned with looking at a specific geographical place, the research strategy embraced the widest possible scope. As a complex form of behaviour, music mirrors wider cultural patterns in a community, therefore requiring that it be studied in conjunction with other communal concerns in order to determine the role of music within the broader culture. As Monson has said, in researching musical communities we soon come to recognise that:

• boundaries between areas of study are entwined
• what is observed in music is likely to recur in other domains of cultural activity
• musicians borrow from everywhere
• our work is often more idiosyncratic and historically situated than generalisable (ibid., p. 284).

Therefore, this research explored a range of concerns, from the historical and political to the economic, in order to more fully embrace the role of music in the city.

While much of the historical and statistical data for this study was acquired through a survey of existing literature and documents in the libraries of William Ransom Hogan Jazz Archives of Tulane University, Earl K. Long Library at the University of New Orleans, and the Institute of Popular Music at the University of Liverpool, the ethnographic research, on which this work is primarily based, is drawn from interviews and observations of music in New Orleans made between 1980 and 1997, and particularly during the years, 1980 to 1991, a period of exponential growth in the tourist industry of the city with a resulting heightened emphasis on cultural activities by policymakers and the media. During this eleven-year period, I edited and co-published Wavelength, a monthly New Orleans music magazine. Wavelength specialised in extended interviews with members of the New Orleans musical community, along with historical anecdote and in-depth coverage of the city’s many music festivals and cultural activities. Its readership included subscribers across the United States and in several foreign countries.

16 Additional information was obtained during a six-month visit to the city in 1996.
The writers consisted of a core of music enthusiasts, most with full-time occupations in other fields. For the most part they had spent years acquiring in-depth knowledge of the city’s music, through interviewing local musicians and drawing from their extensive record collections of New Orleans rhythm and blues, early New Orleans jazz, modern jazz, Caribbean music, predominantly from the French Antilles, and new wave. Occasionally there were articles on college rock, Texas blues, and other styles. The R&B and jazz critics often wrote historical pieces, and all reviewed new and reissued recordings. The magazine also published commentary on the local music industry, and occasionally political issues of concern to the music community.

Since local music ‘scenes’ are often the place where forms and styles of popular music develop, regional journals such as Wavelength that cover these local scenes can frequently offer unparalleled insights, yet such sources are often ignored in popular music research. As editor and publisher of the magazine, I was closely involved in many hundreds of interviews with New Orleans musicians and policy-makers, participated in music commissions and policy boards, interacted with the music and travel press and the record industry, and observed musicmaking practices in the city over time. Together, these provided me with the basis for a systematic, intimate, and perhaps unique access. Acknowledging that the transition from a journalistic setting to academic research holds theoretical challenges, when handled with care it also has distinct advantages, not least of which is observing a music community without the usual constraints of research bodies or degree pressures. This somewhat unconventional route into research might be seen as valuable in areas of study such as popular music where few texts are available and little ethnographic work has been done on musical activity in particular cities. Where a limited research period often restricts a researcher’s exposure to all but the dominant ideology of the society studied, in my position as a long-time member of the community I was able to obtain a sensitivity to voices in the community whose viewpoint might be otherwise overlooked but who may have the most to express to
the researcher. John Blacking has written of the importance of combining social context with detail over time.

From a purely practical point of view, there are conflicting needs to study a musical system both intensively in its social context and at various stages of its evolution ... The year or two that is normally allowed for fieldwork ... rarely provides opportunities for observing musical change and the sequences of decisionmaking that lead to it, and yet studies of music history can be misleading without the microscopic data that can only be obtained by intensive study of the cultural and social context of musicmaking (1992, pp. 13,14).

My experience presented an opportunity to study the musical community of New Orleans both intensively and over time. Throughout the period of research, I conducted both formal and informal interviews with individuals, many of them interviewed several times, giving me the opportunity for incorporating changing circumstances.

Despite the warning from an elder statesman of the New Orleans music community that ‘New Orleans music has always been more for doing than talking about,’17 there is still a wealth of people outside academia, many with great knowledge and intimate contact with local music, who will talk about the city’s music and this research has benefited from their generosity with their time and resources. The New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Foundation-owned WWOZ-FM radio station, which plays mostly New Orleans music as well as music that is linked with the city (blues, rhythm and blues, jazz, Caribbean, African and Allen Toussaint’s favourite, the Irish Show), has exceptionally knowledgeable disc jockeys, including poet/activist John Sinclair and locals Billy Delle, Gentilly Junior and the late Duke A Padukah. All of them have vast stores of knowledge about local musicians and recordings, as well as massive record collections. Poet and author Kalamu ya Salaam has produced some of the most thought-provoking interviews and articles on jazz. Local researcher Tad Jones has uncovered much work on the early career of Louis Armstrong. Photographer/ researcher Michael P. Smith has opened the

cultural practices of the Mardi Gras Indians and Spiritual churches to the world as well as the city; Syndey Byrd and Rick Olivier are among the many talented photographers who have documented the city’s music activities and musicians. Local musicians Earl King and Mac Rebennack (Dr. John) have the longest memories for the rhythm and blues era, as does record company owner, musician and television musical arranger Harold Battiste, now professor of music at the University of New Orleans. Little Freddie King, Mr. Cleon Floyd and Gary Rouzan have unlimited knowledge of the club scene of the 1950s from which New Orleans rhythm and blues emerged. Record engineer Cosimo Matassa is a treasure of information on the recording era of the 1950s and 1960s and his J&M studio, where Fats Domino, Little Richard, Shirley and Lee, Lloyd Price et al. scored hit after hit. Also helpful is Marshal Sehorn (owner, with Allen Toussaint, of Seasaint Studio). Local writers Jeff Hannusch, Rick Coleman (owner of an impressive collection of press photographs of local musicians from the 1950s to the present) and Jason Berry have enjoyed access to local musicians for decades.

Some of the best writers in the city are the least co-operative with researchers, and I am aware of my good fortune that many of them counted me as their friend and confidant through the years. Chief among these was local cartoonist Bunny Matthews, whose writing, as music editor of the Figaro and columnist for Wavelength and the Times Picayune, is some of the best commentary on the city’s cultural activities. Jon Newlin, John Desplas and Eric Bookhardt write with wit and wisdom on music and arts in the city. For the political side of the music industry, activists George Green and Cyril Neville (youngest Neville Brother) have insights into the power struggles that have determined musical success and failure in New Orleans. For education and the city’s public school system, Al Kennedy has done groundbreaking work. The city’s most venerated educators, Ellis Marsalis, Alvin Batiste, Clyde Kerr and Kidd Jordan, are knowledgeable and generous with their time. The city daily newspaper Times-Picayune has a Friday edition that includes the pullout Lagniappe (a Creole word meaning something extra for nothing, like a baker’s dozen), which is the entertainment supplement for
the paper and holds most of the music articles.\textsuperscript{18} Local entertainment publications *Vieux Carré Courier* (1957-1978), *Figaro* (1975 - 1982), *Wavelength* (1980 -1991) and *Offbeat* (1989 - ) are all on file in the University of New Orleans Earl K. Long Library and city libraries. All of these publications cover contemporary as well as past musical activities. Also of interest are *New Orleans* magazine; *Louisiana Life; Arts Quarterly*, published by the New Orleans Museum of Arts; *Alligator; Impact New Orleans Gay News; Jazz Festival Quarterly; Cultural Vistas*, published by the Louisiana Endowment for the Arts; and the *Second Line*, quarterly publication of the New Orleans Jazz Club. There are excellent articles on Carnival music and history in *Arthur Hardy’s Mardi Gras Guide* (published annually). The New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival also publishes an annual programme with articles on musicians and events by the best of the city’s music writers.

Sources for researchers seeking information on contemporary New Orleans music come in the unlikeliest of places, and researchers limiting themselves to historical or popular music texts will miss most of the wealth of useable information available to them. Many musicians in New Orleans are happy to act as informants for researchers, asking little more than token consideration, such as sending a copy of any resulting text, or simply a thanks and a follow-up call.

New Orleans has long been the object of many journalist ‘junkets’, and the music community of New Orleans has been inundated with requests for interviews. The annual Mardi Gras and Jazz Festival brings hundreds of travel writers and music critics to the city, all looking to interview New Orleans musicians for their stories. Often the music press complain that New Orleans sources are seldom cooperative, or require that they be paid for interviews. Musicians, on the other hand, often express their disgust at the lack of courtesy of journalists as well as researchers, particularly for taking up a great amount of their time and then not bothering to call again. New Orleans musicians often express a concern of exploitation, and tend not to differentiate between academic research and the

\textsuperscript{18}The afternoon paper, the *States Item*, folded in 1980.
popular press. Thus researchers are often linked to journalists, who are particularly criticised. The fabulous accounts, patronising attitudes and resulting texts of many journalists have led to a hesitation on the part of local musicians to talk to researchers and some very good sources have lately decided to give no further interviews.

For many of the rhythm and blues artists who feel that their careers have been supplanted by white artists, the recent rhythm and blues revival renewed their opportunities for economic recovery, but these musical progenitors often complain that they are treated as ‘museum pieces’ rather than active musicians. Some, who sense that sales and fame are priorities to the popular music media, may exaggerate their contribution in hopes of positive press coverage. Repeatedly asked questions about ‘the old days,’ musicians who consider their careers still viable have been offended by these requests and now refuse to grant interviews. As one musician told me, ‘Why should I spend hours with some guy who’s going to get paid for it, when I get nothing for it? They don’t even send me copies of their articles!’ Researchers arriving in New Orleans with preconceived notions of African-American artists as poorly educated or unsophisticated have been a continuing source of irritation for New Orleans musicians and have led many to refuse interviews with any researchers. An understanding of the problems that have been encountered in the past by the local music community should solve any access problems of researchers. Co-operation was not a problem in this research; musicians, policymakers and others involved in musicmaking were often generous with their time, providing me with intimate access, perhaps reflecting the research method of exchange of knowledge and feedback between researcher and researched that characterised the work. My personal experience of the generosity of the vast majority of New Orleans musicians to my unending stream of questions compares to that of Peter Guralnick who, in *Sweet Soul Music*, reflected on his experience with the musicians of Memphis:

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I was surprised sometimes at how freely so many of the people I interviewed were willing to speak ... what they were seeking, most of them, was the same directness and emotional truth that existed in their music. They were looking for their place in history (1986, p. vii).

Although the research concentrated on local production of culture through in-depth interviews with individual musicians rather than groups, an important part of the study deals with how these musicians interact with other groups: tourist organisations, city agencies, schools and so forth, and individuals within those groups. *Gumbo ya ya* is a Louisiana Creole term which means ‘everyone talking at once’ and is often mentioned in association with New Orleans jazz and the tradition in which various voices in a piece of music go in different directions but are held together by their relationship to each other. In researching a specific place, such as the lively music community of New Orleans, we also find that the multiple rhythms of human activity are played simultaneously. In her work on women historians, Elsa Brown has pointed out that in isolating one conversation to explore it, researchers often make it difficult to put the conversation back in a context that demonstrates its dialogue with others (1991, p. 90). She reminds us that ‘like a good jazz musician, the researcher should look for the connections that reflect the community in which history is embedded -- an improvisational process.’
Chapter One

Louisiana Historical Reappraisal and the Origins of the Assimilative Nature of New Orleans Society

Master: What do you think? Can people who play flutes or guitars or other instruments of the same kind be in any way compared to a nightingale?

Disciple: No.

M: What then makes them different?

D: I would say that the musicians have some sort of art, but the bird only sings by its own nature...

M: You believe that art is some kind of reasoned activity, and that those who make use of it make use of reason, do you not?

D: I do.

M: Whoever is unable to make use of reason cannot then make use of his artistic faculty.

D: Definitely not.

--Augustine, De musica, I, iv, 6

Introduction

In 1982, two articles appeared in US-American music magazines, both by former rock magazine Creem writers, both about New Orleans music: Brian Cullman’s ‘Letter from New Orleans’ in Musician magazine, and Robert A. Hull’s ‘Love You, New Orleans,’ in the Washington, DC, monthly music magazine Unicorn Times. Both, albeit professing widely differing opinions on the city’s music, in the end make a similar point. Cullman is less than flattering.

The music doesn’t travel well. Hell, it doesn’t travel at all. It lives vicariously through its reputation and through all the old records (October 1982, p. 32).
In his view, local piano legend James Booker plays ‘like an inspired lounge pianist in a Holiday Inn,’ record producer Allen Toussaint is ‘a lousy performer who shows serious lapses in taste,’ and rhythm and blues singer Aaron Neville ‘looks like someone who, if encountered in a dark alley, might kiss you (regardless of gender), stab you (regardless of gender) or advise you on your shampoo (again, regardless of gender).’ Describing New Orleans as an ‘insular, echt-provincial big-small-town where everyone and everything is for sale,’ he calls the local musicians ‘dumb’ and any music of quality that exists in the city ‘accidental.’ Hull, on the other hand, is effusive:

Musicians -- great musicians -- stalk the night ... the most unmolested music in America ... to hear (it) in (its) rich setting is a shock, a jolt of knowledge that makes you realise how pretentious and pathetic are the modern sounds coming out of New York and Los Angeles ... Never have I known a city to feel so strongly about its musical traditions.

He ends his analysis with this comment:

If some of the best and most beautiful and strange and heartfelt music in the world comes from here, it’s an accident. It just happened that way while God wasn’t looking (October 1982, p. 14).

As differing as these two analyses of New Orleans music may be, their conclusion, that the music of New Orleans is an accident, that the city’s musical practices are mystical or intuitive, is characteristic of much of the writing on New Orleans, and is the underlying theme in the existing literature, both popular and academic, on New Orleans music which I would like to address. Continually referred to as an aberration, an amalgam of mistakes or happy coincidences, New Orleans has been ignored by serious scholarship in several disciplines, including urban studies, US-American history and, significant to this research, popular music. Though much has been written on New Orleans, little of it contributes towards a cultural analysis of the city.

In this chapter, I will suggest that historiographic treatment of New Orleans has been a major contributor to a mythology of the city, one based on assumptions of creativity and ‘race,’ which has permeated journalistic as well as academic writings on New Orleans. Using models drawn from experiences in other places,
Historians have often been led to unsubstantiated and misleading analyses, which have become canonical. By repetition in texts, mythology has become historicised, resulting in a lack of reliable information for researchers in other disciplines. Without a historical foundation upon which to comment on contemporary patterns of development, researchers have often depended upon fiction and other popular texts. This has in turn created problems for those interested in tracing the development in New Orleans of cultural forms such as popular music. Researchers writing on the city’s music have too often depended on these often superficial historical accounts riddled with myth and misunderstanding. In other cases, unfamiliar with the cultural terrain and perhaps daunted by the complexity of the region’s social history, popular music historians have projected onto it patterns of musical practices evolved in a different context.

This chapter and Chapter Two together undertake a quite extensive examination of recent historic reappraisal and music historiography, more so than might be considered usual for research on a popular music subject, but I believe strongly that this is necessary for two reasons. Firstly, an understanding of colonial Louisiana and its development is vital to an understanding of the contemporary city; secondly, an understanding of the processes that went into the creation of the black community of New Orleans is particularly essential to an understanding of the music community that has evolved there. These processes and understandings have not been always incorporated into research on the city, and this has hindered not just work on New Orleans. As Gwendolyn Hall has written,

The Afro-Creole culture of New Orleans has had a significant impact not only on blacks of Louisiana and African-American culture in the United States, but on American culture in general (1992b, p. 60).

Disregarding the distinctive experience of the music community of New Orleans and the complicated social and ethnic history of the city has led writers to make assumptions that have clouded research on the origins and development of Anglo-American popular music. As a result, the cultural activities of New Orleans, its pedagogic and performance strategies, have been viewed as an aberration, unsuited
as a model for elsewhere. Thus, until the imbalance is redressed, the historical background is, I submit, a necessary component to any work on the city.

I seldom recognise the New Orleans that I know in many popular music texts. Just as Samuel Charters (1981, p. 148) reflected that writings on Africa were often not about the continent itself but instead merely used Africa as a marker in debates concerning Western political ideals, New Orleans has been used as a counterpoint in debates on commercialisation and authenticity in Anglo-American popular music, and by extension western society, rather than being investigated for itself. These issues have importance for the contemporary city, since further research on New Orleans is hampered by the impression given by many researchers that everything there is to know about the city is already known; on the contrary, my research reveals the contemporary city as a vast, untheorised and largely unresearched location that contains a wealth of issues and debates which challenge major assumptions in popular music research.

This realisation led me to begin this work with a search for historical documentation that put contemporary accounts into context, taking into consideration the city’s contrasting experience while avoiding allusions to the mysterious, magical or intuitive often ascribed to New Orleans by scholars and journalists alike. With diligence, careful scholarship can be located, much of it done by academics in Louisiana, who have been ignored by the broader literature. This chapter surveys some of that material.

**New Orleans and Louisiana historiography**

Since locality research benefits from a solid background in the history of a region, a survey of the treatment in US-American historiography of New Orleans and Louisiana would be an obvious starting point for research. However, investigation shows that serious historical scholarship has often ignored New
Orleans. Primary texts on the region are few,¹ and those available are often flawed. The materials and documentation necessary to a grounding in the social and political history of the city are scarce.² Information is scattered in unpublished works and theses, obscure journals and uncirculated materials. Due to its divergence from the patterns of northern US-American manufacturing cities (upon which most US-American urban studies are based), urban studies scholars have for the most part chosen to ignore the city completely. In the preface to their collection of essays entitled Creole New Orleans, urban historians Arnold Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon (1992, p. xiii) protest that, ‘Anglo-American historiography has seldom provided either the tools or the historical perspective to understand New Orleans and South Louisiana.’³

As will be discussed in detail later, despite the city’s role as a centre of North American culture practically from its founding, there is little socio-cultural commentary available on its activities and what is available is often inadequate, or quite literally based on fiction. The few available political and cultural histories of the region have focused on subjects such as wars, colonisation and exploration while ignoring other themes, such as women, Africans and other minorities. For a place so often cited in United States cultural history, a lack of useful information on the evolution of cultural practices in New Orleans seems extraordinary. As Peirce Lewis has said, comprehensive studies have been ‘narrow in scope, esoteric in topic, or dripping in saccharine -- sometimes all three’ (1976, p. viii).

¹ Some basic accounts include: Francois-Xavier Martin, History of Louisiana (New Orleans, 1837); Charles Gayarré, History of Louisiana, 4 vols. (New York, 1854-66); Edwin A. Davis, Louisiana: A Narrative History (Baton Rouge, 1961); and Bennett H. Wall et al., Louisiana: A History (Arlington Heights, Ill., 1990).
² An important exception is John Blassingame’s Black New Orleans (1973), which covers the city’s development from 1860-1880.
³ This opinion was echoed by the geographer Peirce F. Lewis in his introduction to New Orleans: The Making of an Urban Landscape, who states that he wrote the book to satisfy his curiosity about the city, a place he knew little about, and ‘judging from the dearth of scholarly writing about New Orleans, not very well known to most other American geographers either’ (1976, p. viii).
Practical problems

Some of the reasons why Louisiana’s early history has been neglected by historians are practical ones, the most obvious being that the records of the critical colonial period are in the French or Spanish language. New Orleans was never a British colony, and Louisiana was purchased by the United States directly from France. In her excellent work *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century*, Hall (1992) has catalogued some of the many problems of collecting information on early Louisianians. For example, she found that documents on every slave trade voyage from Africa to Louisiana still exist, but are housed in archives in Paris. Records on vital statistics, such as births, deaths and marriages, are inaccessible. Records on people of African descent have been neither thoroughly analysed nor published. The often quoted *History of Louisiana* (4 vols., 1854-66), by Charles Gayarré, although considered a starting point in any research on Louisiana by many historians, has been called ‘more myth than history’ by others. According to many sources, including Hall, the most impressive modern work on colonial Louisiana is *Histoire de la Louisiane Française*, by Marcel Giraud (4 vols., Paris 1953), but only the first volume has been translated from the French, and it contains little on African and Afro-Creoles.\(^4\) Contributing to the lack of social information on the colonial period is the fact that there was no newspaper in the colony before 1796. Mostly unexplored until recently are the important parish records for the Spanish period, housed in New Orleans in the Notarial Archives at the Civil Courts Building.

Documents in languages other than English are often ignored by historians in favour of translated material.\(^5\) There are several collections of published or

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\(^5\) In 1995, an application was made to the National Endowment for the Humanities by the University of New Orleans to establish a computerised database of thousands of documents from colonial Louisiana. In enlisting support, the department of history enlistment letter said ‘Colonial Louisiana has been neglected because of the difficulty involved in locating and reading documents in French and Spanish, the finding aids for which are few, far between, and inadequate. As a result, the enormous contribution which New Orleans has made to the popular culture of the United States, and indeed, increasingly, to the world is little understood,
translated documents for Louisiana history during the Eighteenth Century, but there are problems with these. In many cases, the location of the original documents is omitted and accuracy in transcription is questionable. In addition, these translations deal mainly with discovery and colonisation, while Africans, slavery, African-Creoles, social organisation and cultural activities are hardly mentioned. In the original texts can be found material on social history, family history, ethnic history, women’s history, demographic history, maritime and Creole linguistics, all of it omitted as uninteresting by past translators. For the complete picture, it is necessary to consult the original documents. However, the original documentation is scattered throughout archives in France, Spain and Louisiana, often hand-written and barely legible. Hall found the documentation for the French period, though difficult to read, more accessible than that of the Spanish period, which she found ‘massive and little explored.’ Administrative documents for the Spanish period are mainly in Spanish, but not always: most social documentation is in French, as are most of the documents from the US-American period throughout most of the Nineteenth Century and into the early Twentieth Century.

Information on slave history during the colonial era is difficult to obtain since, unlike other parts of North America, the usual sources of reference are unavailable. There are no plantation records, planters’ diaries, slave narratives, or publications on slavery available for Eighteenth Century Louisiana, and again, no newspaper until 1796. However, there exists extensive testimony of slaves and free people of African descent in court cases and of slaves listed in notarial documents from the Spanish period. Louisiana courts were meticulous in recording the African nations of origin of slaves who testify, and this could be important for researchers and musicologists tracing direct links from Africa to the new world.

The late Marcus Christian’s massive collection of material on the history of black people in Louisiana is available, but unpublished, at the Earl K. Long Library especially within the United States. This project aims to address this neglect by making colonial documents more readily available.’ Funding for the database is still being sought.
of the University of New Orleans.\(^6\) Funded by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) during the Depression of the 1930s, his work extended well beyond this period, covering many areas of black cultural history, including dance, folklore and music. Also excellent are the papers and publications of the late Henry Kmen, whose work on cultural activities in young New Orleans, particularly opera and dance, stands out as one of the first truly scholarly looks at New Orleans music. Much of his work is unpublished, but available in the William Ransom Hogan Jazz Archives at Tulane University in New Orleans.

The relationship of the French and Africans to the indigenous people in North America during the Eighteenth Century has only begun to be studied, though their interaction in New Orleans was profound and important in an understanding of the creation of the colonial society.\(^7\) The influence of the music of the indigenous people of the area on New Orleans musical styles, including drumming, is unknown.

*Reappraisal*

Very recently, there has been a major scholarly reappraisal of early Louisiana history, centred around the University of New Orleans -- for instance, Hall's groundbreaking re-interpretation of the role of Africans in the economy and culture of colonial Louisiana (1992a and 1992b), Jerah Johnson's new work on Congo Square (1991) and Jim Crow (1995, unpublished), Joseph Tregle's work on the early attempts of the United States to Americanise New Orleans (1992), and the rigorous study of New Orleans within history and urban studies by Hirsch and Logsdon (1992). Gilbert C. Din and John E. Harkins (1996) have used documents from archives in Louisiana and Spain in their work on the records of the Cabildo, New Orleans’ city government during the thirty-four years of Spanish colonial control. The Cabildo’s archival records, all in Spanish, are the most complete of any

of the Spanish colonial outposts and hold information, in lavish detail, of social life in colonial New Orleans and the extent of Spanish hegemony in the city that have been largely unexamined until Din and Harkins’ work.

A major component of my research has been the application of the findings of these scholars to the study of the music of New Orleans. This strategy has gone far to untangle many of the heretofore more puzzling aspects of the city’s distinctive career and, I believe, will become an essential strategy for researchers working in the area of Louisiana cultural histories or for those who have hitherto avoided New Orleans because of the scarcity of useable text. Although this has resulted in a work somewhat deeply concerned with historical commentary, I believe that the importance of these reappraisals of the city's past echo in the words of the New Orleanians interviewed in later chapters of this work, supplying the solid historical foundation that is crucial to an understanding of the contemporary city. In addition, its lack has been a direct cause of the marginalisation of the city’s role in accounts of the development of American popular culture.

The recent historical reappraisal of Louisiana, as outlined by Johnson (1992), has concerned itself with three areas which are especially useful: 1. the French colonial assimilationist ethos, how it contrasted with that of Britain and how it affected the development of the colonial Franco-African community; 2. the direct and continuous African influence on the early colony, including the development (and retention) of the Franco-African protest tradition and how it influenced Louisiana’s later political and social career; 3. The long conflict between the Creoles and US-Americans, the process that led to the eventual dominance of the Anglo-American community and the evolution of the ‘Creole Myth,’ as well as the effect on this conflict of the large numbers of European immigrants to the city and the ways in which the city’s cultural practices were influenced by their arrival.

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7 For information on the interaction of Native Americans with Africans and Europeans, see Gary B. Nash (1974), as well as Michael P. Smith’s work on maroon communities (1994b).
Background to colonialisation, the French colonial ethos

Although in recent years historians have begun to look at US-American colonial history less in isolation and more in conjunction with its British social, intellectual and colonial origins, historians of France’s Louisiana colony have not followed suit, continuing to analyse Louisiana’s colonial period in Anglo-American or Latin American terms. As Jerah Johnson has said, ‘Compared to the colonial histories of other parts of the United States, few of even the fundamental topics in early Louisiana history have been explored’ (1992, p. 12) and he further suggests that many otherwise puzzling aspects of colonial, as well as contemporary, social and cultural practices would be more understandable if early Louisiana were viewed as a part of the larger Eighteenth Century French colonial ethos. The Anglophone orientation of US-American historians has often neglected this aspect of colonial history, but, as Johnson has argued,

An understanding of early modern French social structure and social theory is central to an understanding of colonial New Orleans, clarifying basic questions of not just who were the original population of the region in its early years, but why these groups interacted as they did, what networks of power relationships developed, what economic dependencies emerged and how these affected social and cultural production and continue to affect the contemporary city (ibid.).

For this research, I found that an understanding of this Eighteenth Century French attitude toward society sheds light on many contemporary cultural practices discussed in later chapters, such as the complex range of social aid and secret societies; the overlapping networks of groups that cross the usual divides of gender, ethnicity and age; the resilience of neighbourhood and immigrant identities; the laissez-faire attitude toward democratic government; as well as going a long way to explain the origins of the city’s radical black tradition, which has been instrumental in shaping the modern city.

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8 See for instance Herbert Osgood (1900).

9 In this Johnson is following the conceptual framework of Louis Hartz in the Founding of New Societies (New York, 1964) in which a colonial society is read as fragment of homeland, replicating the mother country at the time of excision.
Until the end of the Eighteenth Century, French society differed from that of England in fundamental ways, in patterns that extended to their colonial possessions. In looking for ways to unify the fragmented and diverse social groups in Europe at the time, the two countries adopted very different policies. In England conformity was enforced, simplifying and segregating the social hierarchy. This left dissenters to the social order little choice but to emigrate, providing the colonists for the New England colonies, among other places. In contrast, Eighteenth Century French society, which Cobban described as ‘a sum of disunities’ (1957, vol. 7, p. 236), granted religious freedom, re-established guilds and allowed limited freedom within disparate groups -- evolving into a society made up of a multitude of fragmented and diverse social groups, each functioning with its own ‘rights, privileges, prerogatives, duties, obligations, protection and immunities’ (Johnson, 1992, p. 14). In contrast to England’s ‘impulse to homogenise,’ France achieved an ‘assimilationist tendency’ in which individuals possessed freedom to associate not only within one’s group but with members of other groups as well (ibid., p. 15). A variety of social and ethnic groupings was tolerated as long as they did not conflict with the interests of the state. As a result, and in contrast to English minority groups, fewer French groups chose to emigrate to the new world. By extension, this toleration was granted to groups in the under-populated French colonies, such as New Orleans, which were considered as fragments of France, and, using the Roman model, loyalty was cultivated by providing a grand culture (and language) that all were invited to share.

**Louisiana Indian policy**

This peculiarly French Eighteenth Century ideal of assimilated society extending to the French colonies of North America was first evident in the contrasting ways Native Americans were treated. As Hirsch and Logsdon wrote: ‘differences between the Indian policy of the French and that of the English (and US-Americans) furnished an all-important clue to explaining the situation in New Orleans’ (1992, p. 9). As early as 1627, Richelieu’s Canadian charter had suggested
that integration with the French would civilise the Native Americans, and intermarriage had been encouraged. In contrast, the English colonies saw little value in trading with the indigenous people, and thought them worthless as a labour force and a nuisance, obstructing land development. The English first pushed them out, then attempted to kill them off. When total annihilation seemed unfeasible, the reservation system was established. Throughout, the English policy discouraged contact between settlers and Native Americans.

The French, not any more democratic or humane or any less motivated by profit, had practical reasons for a policy of peaceful co-existence and ‘One Blood,’ French settlers were fewer in number than the English, and the French fur traders, in contrast to the English farmer, had little need for cleared land, and thus left the land’s inhabitants alone. But in addition to these ‘different demands’ of the two, it remains that the English and French held fundamentally different social attitudes reflecting different conceptions and assumptions about society.

The colonies of French Canada, though founded a century earlier, were similar to Louisiana in several ways: they were both modest ventures of limited purpose on a river system, generally neglected by France and cut off by European wars, often desperate for supplies, under-populated and poor. So, the French applied their Canadian experience to Louisiana, including their Indian policy (Foret, 1982, pp. 5, 29-30). The founders of the Louisiana colony were French Canadians intimately acquainted with the Indian policy of Canada. Jean Batiste Le Moyne, Sieur de Bienville, Governor of Louisiana, selected the site of New Orleans in February 1718, some one hundred miles, as the Mississippi curves and twists, upriver from the Gulf of Mexico. At the very founding, Bienville’s brother, Iberville, sent representatives or went in person to the local Native American settlements to assure them of French friendship. Calling them ‘sons of the French king,’ he bid them to become ‘one nation with the French,’ and invited them to relocate near French settlements (Johnson 1992, p. 31).
In contrast to the English colonies, which were populated by farming families, the Louisiana colony had no farmers among the settlers but rather was populated by adventurers or soldiers from the urban working class of France, who were mostly artisans or unskilled. Without farming knowledge, the colony became almost entirely dependent on the indigenous people for food. Newcomers often were dispersed to live with the Native Americans until a place could be found for them. Four times, between 1703 and 1710, the entire military garrison went to live with the local Choctaw because the colony ran out of food. In 1719, the first African slaves arrived, mostly male, mostly single. There were many marriages, blessed by the colonial government, between African men and Indian women. The church promoted these marriages for a time, as did the colonial government, a policy meant to encourage the promotion of settled farming families. In 1704, Henri Rouleaux de la Vente, the vicar general, had written ‘The blood of the savages does no harm to the French’ (Hirsch and Logsdon, 1992, p. 35), and this concept of ‘one blood’ extended to the encouragement of marriage between settlers and the indigenous people.

The Native American women were skilled in agriculture, and the enslaved Bambara brought knowledge of metal farming tools and had extensive knowledge of many crops that the Europeans were attempting to cultivate, such as corn, potatoes, melons, wheat and rice. Thus the Africans and the indigenous people had skills vital to the colony, creating a self-determination for these groups that was unheard of in the English colonies on the eastern coast of North America. This contributed to a tradition within the African-American community of negotiation for rights that, for all the historical eruptions of suppression and violence, has never been entirely repressed.

10 In 1722, the Company of the Indies moved the colony's administrative centre there. The census of 1727 listed 938 residents.

11 Of the three hundred troops sent to Louisiana before 1720, not one listed farming as an occupation (Winston deVille, Louisiana Troops 1720-1770, New Orleans, 1965, quoted by Johnson, 1992, p. 32).

12 The enslavement of the indigenous people, mostly women, continued in Louisiana until the end of the colonial period.
The notes of Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville pointed out this contrasting attitude of the English and the French toward minorities. Writing during the 1830s, on the tour of the new republic of the United States that was the basis for his book *Democracy in America* (1945 [1835]), he noted the contrasting experience of the Native Americans in the former French colonies of Canada and in the former English colonies of the new republic. In Michigan, the Native Americans spoke fondly of their former French colonisers and fearfully of the English. In Canada, he noticed that the indigenous people had not been pushed westward as in the United States, but lived in a mixed settlement pattern among the Europeans. He travelled to the former English colony of Virginia to observe slavery, then to formerly French New Orleans to contrast what he had seen in Canada and Virginia to conditions there. Calling New Orleans one section of the United States where there was a ‘third race,’ he predicted that racial mixture was the only solution to the problem of race relations after the abolition of slavery in America. ‘There are but two chances for the future,’ he said, ‘the Negroes and the whites must either wholly part or wholly mingle ... In some parts of America the European and the Negro races are so crossed with one another that it is rare to meet with a man who is entirely black or entirely white.’ But when he asked his New Orleans hosts if they would ever consider granting equality to the free blacks and was told definitely not, he said, prophetically, ‘Then I much fear that they will one day make themselves your ministers’ (Tocqueville 1971 [1836], p. 380, quoted in Hirsch, Logsdon 1992, p. 7).

Tocqueville also noticed that in New Orleans the French and US-Americans seemed to be interacting more easily than he had observed in Canada, not just with each other, but with the multitude of smaller ethnic groups that comprised the city.

**Assimilationist tendency**

As a town of several functions -- frontier market town, seaport, provincial capital and military centre -- New Orleans had a population that was always diverse and contentious. The city had been variously called ‘an enchanted abode’ by Jean Bernard Bossu; ‘turbulent’ by Vaudreuil; and ‘riotous and its citizens
debauched’ by Michel (quoted in Clark 1970, pp. 51-52). However, while the former English colonies were evolving into a segregationist social structure, the former French colony continued to grant toleration to dissenters. Equally important, disparate groups expected tolerance and rights within the larger society. This assimilationist tendency remained the custom in New Orleans through the Nineteenth Century, particularly influencing the development of the free black community, which by the Civil War was the largest concentration of free people of colour in the Deep South. Though granted no status by the power structure, free blacks in New Orleans achieved remarkable success and status and the heritage of these people continued to affect race relations and cultural activities in New Orleans into the Twentieth Century.

With the heat, disease and violence integral to slave life in subtropical Louisiana, in addition to the cruelty endemic to the condition of enslavement itself, slavery was as brutal in French Louisiana as in the Anglo-American South, and it is not meant here to portray slavery in any other way; rather to point out how the enslaved Africans used the political and economic advantages available to them in a unique situation to create a self-determination that was unheard of in North American slavery.  

From the early days of the colony the Bienville regime had ‘forged a social consciousness premised upon assimilation of the African population as members of the community with social rights and defined limits to their subjugation to their masters’ (McGowan, 1976, p. 120), a philosophy that was to influence New Orleans's contemporary career. But the idea of a ‘kinder, gentler’ slavery does not apply in this instance. The enslaved in Louisiana were granted concessions because of peculiar circumstances of numbers, farming ability and the political and economic needs of the French, not through any benevolence on the part of the French colonists.

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13 The many bloody and violent slave revolts in Louisiana in the late Eighteenth Century, such as the famous uprising at Pointe Coupée, reflect the extent to which the enslaved in Louisiana found slavery intolerable.

14 Briefly during the late 1720s and early 1730s a few black students were schooled by the Ursuline nuns. See Jean Delanglez, *The French Jesuits in Lower Louisiana 1700-1763* (Washington, DC, 1935, p. 136).
In 1685, Louis XIV had signed the *Code Noir*,\(^{15}\) which incorporated eventually millions of Africans of diverse cultures throughout the French colonial world into his body politic. Adopted in Louisiana in 1724, the sixty articles of the *Code* defined the rights of the enslaved, requiring instruction of slaves in the Catholic faith and baptism; the recognition of slave families; prohibition of the separate sale of mother, father and children under fourteen years of age; protection for slave women against rape; prohibition against forcing slave women to take mates; the establishment of slave holidays. Many of these rights were granted for economic reasons. After the collapse of the Company of India of Louisiana in 1731, the importation of slaves practically ended. Planters, unable to afford more slaves, saw the advantages of recognising and supporting stable slave families and maintaining protection of slave women, since a stable slave society and slave families offered the only possibilities for increased slave labour force.

Johnson points out how the planters, who were having trouble feeding their slaves, readily agreed to Article Five of the *Code*, which exempted slaves from work on Sundays and holidays. Later this extended to Saturdays also. Slaves could visit, hire themselves out, fish, farm, or hunt, thus becoming a self-supporting group. By the end of the French period, slaves regularly held Sunday markets on the edge of the city where they sold their crops and crafts (Johnson, 1992, p. 42).\(^{16}\) Some other features of the original *Code* were struck from the Louisiana edition, including the provision for manumission and intermarriage between slaves and slaveholders (black or white) and between free black and the enslaved, but by all evidence, the original *Code* of 1685 continued to operate in custom though banned by law.

**Spanish period**

After France’s North American empire collapsed in 1769, Spain held New Orleans until 1803. But though the Spanish were the administrators of the colony,

\(^{15}\) *Le Code Noir, Prault, 1742 Paris.* Louisiana Historical Society Publications, no. 4, 1908, pp. 75-90. The literal translation is ‘Black Code; or, Collection of Edicts, Declarations, and Decrees Concerning the Discipline and the Commerce of Negro Slaves of the Islands of French America.’

\(^{16}\) This was the place known after the Civil War as Congo Square, discussed in Chapter Two.
New Orleans remained a French colonial city, and the small number of Spanish civil servants who came to the city during those thirty-four years became acculturated as New Orleanians, rather than the other way around. Under the Spanish, New Orleans emerged as a major port and assumed an urban identity. But Spain, unable to fully assimilate Louisiana into her colonial system, was compelled to allow Louisiana to operate outside the system. This freedom, says Clark (1970, p. 12), allowed English and US-American commerce to flourish in the port city and contributed greatly to its economic progress between 1765 and 1803 when Louisiana was transferred to the United States. In addition, the city had by this time become accustomed to political governments coming and going, while affairs of society remained relatively unaffected by these external colonial changes. At the same time, the city was isolated by geography and religion from the predominantly Anglo-American culture of the surrounding US-South. Thus through changes in governments, New Orleans remained essentially a French colonial city, and the ethos of assimilation, forged through the unique circumstances of French colonial history, in contrast to the racial policies of Britain and Spain, remained the cultural context in which New Orleans grew, leaving space for the development of an independent black community not found elsewhere in North America.

Looking at the development of colonial Louisiana in a global, rather than national, context can be especially helpful, since the pressures brought to bear on its development came primarily from international, rather than national, factors. In addition, in placing the patterns of racial hierarchy and inclusion found in New Orleans against the complex political makeup of Europe and the French and Spanish colonial experience in the Caribbean, rather than the US-American colonial experience, New Orleans can be seen not as an anomaly, but as representative of the more typical three-tiered, multiracial social structure of new

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17 Many writings on New Orleans assert that the French Quarter is actually Spanish architecture. Though the city was rebuilt during the Spanish era when two great fires nearly consumed the town, architectural historian Samuel Wilson (1971, pp. 123-4) found no evidence that a Spanish architect had anything to do with the rebuilding of the city. French Creole designers replaced the old city in the French colonial architectural tradition.
world slave societies, with a class of marginal status between black and white. In this way, the US-American colonial pattern of a two-tiered racial system, with an unyielding line between black and white, could be seen as the exception (Hirsch and Logsdon 1992, p. 189).

**African Presence in New Orleans**

Having surveyed the French assimilationist attitudes toward minorities that, however repressive, left space for the development of corresponding autonomous groups, we now turn to a look at the group of Africans who came to Louisiana, their particular history, culture and how their experience contrasted with that of enslaved Africans elsewhere. New Orleans has been called the most African city in the United States (Hall, 1992b, p. 59), with Africans having a continuous and pronounced presence in the city from its founding and African, Afro-Caribbean and African-American traditions, music and folklore playing a vital role in designing the cultural landscape. Africans arrived in Louisiana with the first colonists, eventually outnumbering other colonists two to one in the early years. Although most of the Africans came to New Orleans as slaves, few had been enslaved in Africa. The first free blacks emigrating from elsewhere in the American colonies arrived in the 1720s, followed by hundreds of free blacks who came voluntarily from Maine, Massachusetts, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania and from Haiti (Saint-Domingue) after Toussaint L’Ouverture’s insurrection and victory, 1794-95. The importance of the role of these people in the formation of Louisiana society and cultural activities (and their contribution to US-American popular culture, particularly music and dance) points to the need for an understanding of who they were, what political, social and economic factors and pressures they experienced and how that differed from other US-American experiences, crucially important in popular music studies generally and New Orleans music research particularly.

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18 The revolution in Saint-Domingue led to the immigration of many Saint-Domingues to Cuban and then to New Orleans. According to Nelson (p. 152), 5,800 people arrived from Cuba in 1809, 4,000 of them free people of colour; this number later mounted to nearly 10,000, adding substantially to the free black population.
However, historical documentation of the social history of black people in Louisiana is as meagre as the historical documentation generally and has been compounded by the complexity of the Afro-Creole slave experience. As Blassingame, author of one of the few urban histories of New Orleans, has written, historical writing about Louisiana clearly proves the validity of C. Vann Woodward’s assertion that ‘the negro has been the invisible man of US-American history’ (as quoted in Blassingame 1973, p. 1). There are very few general studies to serve as guides to activities of the black community of New Orleans. But beyond the lack of primary texts, Blassingame, writing on New Orleans in the 1930s, was even more concerned that existing histories, as he put it, are ‘so romantic, or so narrowly focused on politics that they ignore economic and social development.’ The ‘selective inattention’ of historians, says Blassingame, ‘their deliberate distortion of facts about black people and lack of perspective and indispensable information makes existing texts unreliable. No one body of primary sources illuminates the majority of topics. A coherent picture emerges only after most of the pieces of the puzzle are fitted together’ (ibid., 1973, p. 2).

Slavery

Although a number of important works are available on the subject of slavery in the English colonies,19 the history of slavery in the French colony of Louisiana, including the unique experience of the enslaved community of New Orleans, has only recently been researched. Generalities on slave culture have abounded in historical works and spilled into popular music histories. These unfortunately often ignore differences in slave experience in different locations. Ira Berlin (1980, p. 44), for instance, deplores the lack of ‘temporal and spatial specificity’ in such works as Eugene D. Genovese’s Roll Jordan Roll: the World the Slaves Made (1974). Recently,

19 See for example Ira Berlin (1974, 1980), Peter Wood (1974), and others.
historians have begun to acknowledge that North American slavery evolved differently in different places.\textsuperscript{20}

Gwendolyn Midlo Hall’s work (1992a\&b) on the formation of African Creole culture helps explain the factors contributing to the different experience in the French colony of Louisiana and particularly the origins of the free black community.\textsuperscript{21} In her painstaking work on Africans in colonial Louisiana, Hall discovered some remarkable facts which are crucial to an understanding of contemporary patterns in the city. In contrast to the experience elsewhere in North America, virtually all slaves brought to Louisiana during the French colonial period came in the short period of twelve years, between 1719 and 1731, and overwhelmingly from a single region of Africa, the Senegal River basin of Senegambia, an area that Curtin called ‘a region of homogeneous culture and a common style of history’ (1975, I, 6), bringing with them an already formed (language, religion, ethnicity) Bambara culture.

The slave trade to Louisiana, organised by the Company of India, was built on existing ties between Senegal and Louisiana.\textsuperscript{22} The Mandinga were the major slave traders to the Company, selling Bambara slaves that they had captured in a religious civil war between the two groups, the Mandinga being Islamic while the Bambara fought Islam until the late Nineteenth Century. Who were the Bambara, so influential in the creation of the Franco-African culture of Louisiana? Hall relates many facts about them, drawn from contemporary accounts. Scattered


\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{21} New works on free people of African descent in colonial New Orleans include Hanger’s ‘Personas de Varias Classes Colores;’ Ingersoll’s Free Blacks in a Slave Society, New Orleans 1718-1812; Gould’s In Full Enjoyment of their Liberty: the Free Women of Colour of the Gulf Ports of New Orleans, Mobile and Pensacola and (in Spanish) Rodriguez’ La Poblacion de la Luisiana espanola.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{22} See Basil Davidson, Black Mother, The Years of the African Slave Trade (London 1961) and Daniel R. Mannix, Black Cargoes: A History of the Atlantic Slave Trade 1518-1865 (New York, 1962).}
throughout the West African savannah, they developed methods for retaining their
cultural focus despite being spread across geographic distance. With a strong
tradition of oral history communicated by jéli or bards in the form of myth and
legend, storytellers were legion among the Bambara. Musical performance was
considered a religious activity. Like the Navajo of the North American West, their
creation myths demonstrated a flexible approach to life, the ability to be
comfortable with duality and contradiction, and there was no separation between
artisanship, artistic creation and religious celebration. Thus everyday activities had
a ceremonial, religious significance that was transportable. The Bambara came to
Louisiana with a concept of sovereignty based upon control of people rather than
territory, with experience in creating new spiritual and legal communities, and with
extensive experience in self-governing organisations. Says Hall: ‘The Bambara
social organisation had flexible strength, and it travelled well’ (1992b, p. 52). In
Bambara culture, where even powerful people might be enslaved occasionally,
slavery was not associated with powerlessness. In their concept of balance,
contradiction and the unity of opposites, rebels were valued and praised as well as
conformists, and an interesting feature of Bambara culture was the custom of
innovators breaking with traditions of family and village to travel far and wide,
acquiring special powers and rewards that are eventually brought back for the
benefit of the village (ibid., pp. 54, 80).23

Hall has described the duality in the Bambara culture of badenya, or
‘mother-childness,’ and fadenya, or ‘father-childness.’ The term badenya, according
to Hall, is ‘also the term for the family compound, representing the principle of
order, stability and social conformity centred around obligations to home, village
and kinsmen’ (ibid., p. 55). It exists in opposition to the principle of fadenya that

23 This echoes the contemporary attitude toward New Orleans musicians who leave the city to acquire status
and wealth in the international music industry, and are welcomed back to the city without criticism of their
leaving. New Orleans musicians rarely criticise other locals for leaving at varying times, or for good. Not in
one interview did a musician ask ‘What did Wynton Marsalis (or Sidney Bechet, or Louis Armstrong) ever do
for New Orleans?’ in contrast to, for example, Liverpool, England, where the cry ‘What did the Beatles ever
do for Liverpool?’ is a commonly asked question.
honours the dissenter. The *Code Noir* had provided that the condition of the mother decided the condition of the child, thus supporting *badenya*, while through the restrictions put on the enslaved, essentially outlawing *fadenya*. Roach has pointed out that these Bambara, arriving in Louisiana ‘possessed of prolific arts of law and memory of their own, which, like the Europeans, had to be adapted to fit radically transformed circumstances,’ did not have the power of the Europeans to amend the law to incorporate their balancing principle of *fadenya*, the value placed on the rogue. However, they recognised that this balance might be brought out by ‘their most readily available medium of cultural recollection and innovation -- performance’ (1996, p. 58). Public gatherings had been forbidden by law in New Orleans because of fear of slave revolts, but also because of the understanding by the French of ‘the power of public performances to consolidate a sense of community, inside or outside the law’ (ibid., p. 59). However, the *Code*’s requirements for the proper observance of Catholic holy days, feast days and the rites of Christian burial provided the spaces for the Africans to adapt their African belief systems to Catholicism, thus continuing the Africanisation of Louisiana with musical celebration, dance, storytelling and rituals that, as Roach has written, ‘developed in the interstices of European laws and religious institution, creolizing them, as they creolized the African ones in turn’ (ibid., p. 59).

The homogeneity of this slave community was unique in New World slavery. Merging with the local Native American population, the community helped shape the habits of both Europeans and the later arriving non-Bambara slaves. As Hall says,

> After arriving in Louisiana, the Bambara maintained an organised language community, formed alliances with the Indian nations who were in revolt against the French, and conspired to take over the colony (1992b, p. 55).  

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24 Neumann has already established that the Louisiana Creole language was created by these early slaves and was not imported from the French islands. This was reflected in the language of the colony, where the French very early used words and phrases of Bambara, Fulbe, or Wolof origin. This language became a vital part of the identity, not only of Afro-Creoles but of many whites of all classes.
The thirty-four years of Spanish colonial control made little impact on the Franco-
African host culture, though Spain’s generous manumission policies encouraged its
growth.\textsuperscript{25} Also, these enslaved Bambara came directly from Africa (not via the
Caribbean, as is often assumed by historians) a hundred years after the first
Africans came to the English colonies.\textsuperscript{26} Therefore, their cultural practices came
directly from Africa to New Orleans, without a lengthy stop in the Caribbean
islands, and did so in the late Eighteenth Century, a period ripe with ideas of
freedom and revolt, rather than in the Seventeenth Century, when African slaves
first arrived in the Virginia colonies.

The Bambara, called the merchant princes of the western Sudan, had an
established tradition of trade and city marketing in Africa, a commercial tradition
that was useful in the new colony in interactions with Native Americans on behalf
of themselves and the Europeans, and the activity continued in the many slave
markets that evolved into markets persisting into this century, including the
market in Place Congo. So the new African migrants were instrumental in building
the city, integrating with local Native American communities, helping supply the
colony with food, and transforming this settlement from a mere French outpost into
a heterogeneous mixture of French, African and Native American.

Rafael Cassimere (1996) has pointed out how the Company of the West, the
holder of the royal charter, initially under the leadership of the enterprising John
Law,\textsuperscript{27} did not plan to employ large numbers of Africans in the city. Instead, when
the first Africans arrived, it was thought that they would be used as labourers on
the new tobacco plantations upriver from New Orleans. However, Governor
Bienville, realising the greater need of food for the colony, sent the enslaved

Heritage}. Pensacola, 1983, pp. 48-49. \\

\textsuperscript{26} To put it into a British perspective, these Africans left the Bambara kingdom about the time King George
took Queen Charlotte as his bride -- not a considerable time in that context. \\

\textsuperscript{27} John Law, 1671-1729, financier and founder of the Bank of France, was originator of the French East-India
Company, also known as the Company of the Indies, the land scheme of enormous magnitude whose
spectacular failure earned it the name of the Mississippi Bubble.
Africans, not to French tobacco planters, but to Choctaw allies who lived in close proximity to New Orleans, to help raise crops. The Choctaw treated the Africans more like hired servants than slaves. Indeed, in many respects, this slavery closely resembled traditional African slavery. So the initial acculturation of many Africans to Louisiana resulted not from Franco-African relationships, but Choctaw-African.

The destruction of the Natchez civilisation by the French in the Natchez War of 1729-31 led paradoxically to better conditions for Africans. Worried about coalitions of Africans and Native Americans, the French surrendered certain control over their slaves. Most unusually, they allowed the enslaved to control their off-hours. Thereafter, many slaves who lived in remote plantations found themselves in New Orleans at night or on the weekends. The French allowed them to develop their own market economy, which they supplied with fish, game, drift woods, or garden produce. Even after France turned over Louisiana to Spain, the Spanish could not completely restore the old discipline. Thus, as enslaved people from other areas of Africa and the New World arrived, including free people of colour arriving from northern states and the Caribbean, they entered an established culture of shared language, history, religion unique in the new world.

**Slave revolts**

Recently there has been exciting new work on the subject of slave revolts -- most notably, for the purposes of this study, J. P. Rodriguez’s work on the tradition of slave insurrection in Louisiana (1992). In the past, historians have written about slave revolts in the United States in isolation, so that they seemed of little significance, lacking a pattern upon which to base further study. In 1943, Marxist historian Herbert Aptheker shook the academic world by claiming that in fact there had been hundreds of slave rebellions before emancipation, prompting many historians since to search for evidence affirming or rejecting his findings.²⁸ Although acknowledging Aptheker’s contribution to the subject, Rodriguez also points out that, as many historians before, Aptheker erred by looking at slavery as

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²⁸ As quoted in Rodriguez, 1992, p. 1.
one monolithic institution. As Rodriguez says: ‘... few systematic studies of slave revolts and conspiracies in localised regions exist and most state studies of slavery sorely neglect the issue’ (ibid., p. 207, emphasis mine).

Rodriguez found that Louisiana was the site of frequent slave unrest, as the enslaved responded to the early Nineteenth Century’s expanding Americanisation and its accompanying threat of loss of the privileges and rights that Louisiana’s enslaved and free persons of colour had enjoyed under French and Spanish rule. In the 1840s, after Louisiana entered the Union, unrest was so widespread that nearly every plantation region of the state experienced a genuine conspiracy or outbreak of violence (ibid., p. 207). Rodriguez argues that slave revolts, though perhaps not resulting in total victory, were not ineffectual, since they created a pervasive fear of revolt by the slaveowners that resulted, by code and then practice, in a sense of racial accommodation. Fears of revolt, he wrote, ‘characterised early Nineteenth Century Louisiana society and defined slavery in that setting’ (ibid., p. iv). One reason for the lack of information on slave unrest was that state policymakers and regional newspapers never publicly acknowledged these revolts, insisting that they were stories invented by abolitionists. Rodriguez found overwhelming proof to the contrary, however, in travellers accounts, slave narratives, private correspondence, literature and local press reports.

Slavery came to Louisiana a century after Virginia and in the climate of revolution of the Eighteenth Century. Combined with the local circumstances of physical environment and cultural heritage, these factors led to the region’s staying poised for rebellion. A familiarity with this atmosphere of revolt prevalent at the turn of the Nineteenth Century puts a new light on the reasons behind New Orleans’s more permissive climate for people of colour, and is a step toward an understanding of ‘the socially chaotic conditions prevailing in the colony [that]

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29Hall has mentioned how the openness of New Orleans society has been enhanced by the ecology of the city.

30The slave revolt in the nearby French colony of Saint-Domingue (Haiti) in 1794-5 resulted in dramatic victory by the Africans. The massive influx of immigrants from Saint-Domingue to New Orleans after the revolution reinforced local fears of revolt.
contributed to an unusually cohesive and heavily Africanized slave culture’ (Hall 1992b, p. 65) from which contemporary New Orleans evolved. Myths of ‘docile’ black slaves, lacking in creativity and drive, easily duped and weak-willed, cloud an understanding of Louisiana cultural history and send the researcher down a false path that denies agency to black New Orleanians and their actions and choices, including their creative choices. The city’s permissive attitude towards people of colour evolved from a tolerance demanded rather than freely granted. By rebelling, the enslaved Africans won a small victory in defining their roles in Louisiana society, since white leaders in Louisiana came to the conclusion that permissiveness and limited freedom help prevent revolt.

**Maroon communities**

Collaboration between Native Americans and the enslaved was a further contribution to the distinctiveness of the New Orleans black community and one which influenced cultural activities that continue in the contemporary city. In the early days of the Louisiana colony, the newly-arrived Africans became adept at making profitable the swamps and marshes (*cyprières*) around New Orleans. The swamp was used by slaves and Native Americans for hunting and trapping, it supplied food, its products were used to create goods for the local slave markets, and in time of trouble it was a convenient hiding place. Native American wives of the enslaved often aided the runaways, and mixed Native American-African communities, called ‘maroon,’ sprung up on the outskirts of the city. These settlements, well armed for hunting and defence, were the refuge of families rather than single men (ibid., p. 79). Michael P. Smith has detailed how economic and family networks evolved that afforded relatively safe, strategic access to the central, urban marketplace from these communities (1994b). Those living near New Orleans increasingly participated in local market economies, bringing into town cypress logs, food, herbs, baskets and such for sale and trade. Unlike the local Native Americans, the Bambara already knew how to use metal farming tools and, as mentioned earlier, had extensive knowledge of many crops that the Europeans
were attempting to cultivate. Many of the enslaved raised domesticated cattle, sheep, chickens and pigs. New Orleans’s earliest all-Indian market, near Bayou St. John, continued throughout the Nineteenth Century, and Choctaw women sold their wares in the French Market into the 1920s, when they gradually disappeared -- not because they died out or moved away, but because they were gradually absorbed into the city’s black community.31

As New Orleans grew, maroons were able to move unnoticed into the city into areas seldom visited by police where ‘the lure of jobs and the city’s relatively open racial order made it an island of freedom and opportunity in the Deep South’ (Logsdon and Bell 1992, p. 210). By the Nineteenth Century the number of fugitive slaves in the city began to blur the distinctions between free and enslaved in New Orleans (Smith, 1994b, p. 47). For protection, blacks in the city formed mutual aid societies to provide health care, burial insurance and general support for their members, aiding in the movement between maroon and city communities. Harry J. Walker (1937, p. 33) identifies the Perseverance Benevolent and Mutual Aid Association founded in 1783 as the first formally organised association in New Orleans, and Gunnar Myrdal (1962, p. 317) also referred to benevolent societies in the 1780s. Smith links these societies to the present day Mardi Gras Indians, the social aid and pleasure clubs and other New Orleans black cultural societies deeply associated with the city’s musical practices and states:

> Many of these Maroons melted into virtually autonomous Creole municipal districts of New Orleans where enforcement of city codes was notoriously lax. These are still the principal areas where black Indian gangs can be found today (1994b, p. 47).

**Free People of Colour**

In New Orleans, before emancipation, there was a large community of black people who were not slaves. These free people of colour, or *gens de couleur*, as they

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31 For more on the phenomenon of Native American absorption into the black community of New Orleans, see Johnson (1992, p. 40), Martinez (1982), and Smith (1994b). On other maroon communities in the United States, see Nash (1974).
were called in the city, challenged some of the basic premises of the institution of slavery by their very presence. The community was made up mostly of former enslaved people who had been freed through manumission (particularly during the Spanish period and the ease of manumission, including self-manumission, under Spanish law\textsuperscript{32}); people of colour who had never been slaves, many who came to the city from the North after the American purchase; children of free people of colour; or \textit{les gens de couleur} who immigrated to New Orleans from Cuba after the Saint-Domingue (Haiti) slave rebellion of 1791.

It was during the Spanish colonial period, which began in the 1760s, that New Orleans’s free people of colour achieved large numbers, gained some political importance and matured into a community. By the end of the Spanish era in 1803, the number of free people of colour in New Orleans had grown from 165 to fifteen thousand. More than half lived on small farms outside town. Construction jobs made available in the rebuilding of the city after two great fires may have attracted a good number of free people of colour into town from outlying areas, boosting the community.

Their fragile political and social status, midway between free and enslaved, led them to band together as a cohesive group, but at the same time, despite historical writing to the contrary, church and social records show that they often interacted and associated with other groups -- Europeans, through work, service, trade and \textit{plaçage}; and the enslaved and Native Americans through culture and family (for despite the myth of all Creoles of colour having great disdain for slaves, most free blacks had relatives still enslaved and many had Native American relatives as well). Because of this unique social and legal standing, the free people of colour in New Orleans came closer to developing complete corporate status than any of the several such groups in colonial Louisiana society (Johnson 1992, p. 53).

\textsuperscript{32} Under the Spanish regime, slaves could sue masters for freedom, if they had the purchase price (Christian, p. 3).
Although there is a large body of literature on the free people of colour,\textsuperscript{33} as Johnson points out much of it is marred by conceptions and assumptions carried over from studies of free blacks in Anglo-America -- an example of how ethnicity is often ignored in research on African-American communities. As historians have looked to the rest of the Southern United States for a model, the three-tiered racial structure of the city has been seen as an aberration, as has the permeability of the local society, a residue of the French colonial necessity of granting tolerance to dissonants in order to utilise a limited population in a hostile environment. Researchers familiar with the social order of the West Indies, on the other hand, would find New Orleans’ French colonial racial structure the norm. The immigrants from Saint-Domingue who flooded the city reinforced this system, as slave, European and free black came in equal numbers. The civil rights and privileges of free people of colour were defined in Article 52 of the \textit{Code Noir}:

\begin{quote}
... acts for the enfranchisement of slaves ... shall be equivalent to an act of naturalisation, when said slaves are not born in our colony of Louisiana, and they shall enjoy all the rights and privileges inherent to our subjects born in our kingdom or in any land or country under our dominion (Prault, 1742).
\end{quote}

The free people of colour gained in authority as well as numbers under the new Spanish colonial government.\textsuperscript{34} The Spanish administrators, worried about slave revolts after the successful revolution in Saint-Domingue and several other attempted revolts elsewhere, and anxious to lessen the power of the French planters who had opposed their take-over of the colony, stripped the planters of their policing power over local populations, including the free blacks. This made the Spanish governors guarantors of slaves’ rights, which included rights to reasonable treatment and the right to buy their freedom. Since the Spanish were few in numbers, they used the free black community strategically in positions of authority,


\textsuperscript{34} At the same time, there was a sharp deterioration in protection of the slave family under Spanish rule. See Hall, 1992a, p. 304.
including establishing a free black militia against the British during the American War of Independence. After the war, the unit was left intact and used to police slaves, find runaways, break up maroon communities, and patrol forts and city walls. Visitors from the English colonies commented with shock on seeing former slaves armed with guns in the town. With Spanish government protection, the free black community worked with the government. However, this alliance ended in 1795, when plans for a huge slave revolt in Pointe Coupée was discovered. Dozens of slaves involved in the plot were executed, and the Spanish reinstated controls, abolished the black militia, and banned any importation of slaves from the West Indies. After a few years, the fears settled down and rights were restored. The rights of the people of this class gradually increased under the Spanish regime, and remained at this point when the colony was re-ceded to France in 1803.

When the Louisiana Territory was sold to the United States during that same year, the Treaty of Cession between the United States and the French Republic declared in Article 3 that the inhabitants of the colony were entitled to ‘the enjoyment of all rights, advantages and immunities of citizens of the United States,’ and when the US-Americans arrived, the free people of colour were the first to demand recognition of their status. They were disappointed, however, as the powers and assertiveness of this group frightened and confounded US-American officials, who considered them a ‘peculiar and dangerous problem’ (Johnson 1992, p. 56). In contrast to the assimilationist patterns that were the foundations for the ‘easy movement’ between groups that so influenced cultural production in the city, the United States embraced the English patterns of exclusion. As Jerah Johnson has said, ‘The biracial UK policy was bequeathed to, and accepted by, the new US-American republic and has ever since remained the essence of United States government policy’ (1992, p. 25). However, like other foreign governments before

35 For a detailed discussion of the Franco-Spanish diplomacy with the British, see E. Wilson Lyon, *Louisiana in French Diplomacy*, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, Oklahoma, 1974.

them, the Anglo-Americans found that they could not totally impose their policies on New Orleans and the free people of colour, who in 1810 composed 29 percent of the population of the city, were a ‘fully articulated community with complex class structure, that occupied far more than the fringes of society’ (Hirsch, Logsdon, 1992, p. 192).

The free black population of Charleston, South Carolina, often a subject of academic writing,37 has been held as a model for free blacks in the ante-bellum South. However, the free blacks of Charleston were intensely colour conscious and segregated themselves from the enslaved, while the free Franco-African population of New Orleans was rooted in ethnocultural differences, not simply colour or legal status. In addition, the population of free people of colour in New Orleans was much greater than in Charleston. In 1840, the free black community of Charleston had a population of around 1,500, while in New Orleans the population was nearly 20,000. These contrasts exemplify the hazards of comparing African-American communities without taking into consideration differences, particularly ethnicity. When the elite among the gens de couleur of New Orleans wanted to express exclusivity, they organised on the basis of class and profession. Meanwhile, the non-elite among non-white Creoles produced a Société des Artisans that was hardly defined by colour at all. As Hirsch and Logsdon explain,

The New Orleans Franco-Africans, whatever the aristocratic notions of some, did not neatly categorize themselves by color; and the city’s black Anglo-Americans, with their own organisational network, similarly failed to replicate the Charleston Experience ... More important, there was outright resistance among New Orleans’ black Creoles to ascribing status on the basis of race or color (ibid., p. 193).

So, as Hall has noted and in contrast to most historical accounts, at the end of the French colonial period, as the American government took over the city, New Orleans was far from being a stable society controlled by a culturally and socially cohesive white elite ruling a dominated, fractionalised and culturally obliterated

slave population; rather, it could be seen as a town of weak European control, with loose, flexible race relations and a mobile population with an unusually cohesive and heavily Africanised slave culture.

**Conflict between Creoles and US-Americans**

Though the Spanish colonial period may have made little mark on the Franco-African culture of New Orleans, this culture was challenged by the flood of immigration into the city after the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. Free of colonial economic restrictions, the new US-American city of New Orleans was soon assimilated into the world’s largest free trade area. Banks, insurance companies and other capitalist enterprises followed Old Glory to New Orleans (Clark 1970). But the US-Americans, like the Spanish before them, found that they could not easily impose their culture and institutions on the population. European colonial governments had come and gone in Louisiana often enough to create an atmosphere of disregard for external loyalties. No matter what paper had changed hands, New Orleans was still a French colonial city.

The conflict between the Creoles and the US-Americans during the Nineteenth Century for control of the city was a major force in the shaping of the character of New Orleans. Although the US-Americans, with superior numbers, education and money, eventually won control, the contest was long, difficult and never complete. Soon after the Civil War and Reconstruction, for complex reasons, local historians began to weave myths and tales of the French Creoles and the Anglo-Americans that have played an important part in the presentation of New Orleans in contemporary fiction and popular imagination, assigning attributes (racial, cultural, etc.) to each group that distort the nature of both groups. New Orleans historian Joseph Tregle,\(^\text{38}\) writing on the origins of what he calls the Creole myth, has suggested that the incorporation of Louisiana into the United States in 1803 presented a profound challenge for the new country, the ‘infant republic’s first

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\(^{38}\)See also Joseph G. Tregle, Jr. ‘Early New Orleans Society: A Reappraisal’ *Journal of Southern History*, XVIII, February 1952, pp. 21-36.
attempt to impose its institutions on a foreign city (and its first encounter with a foreign population not enslaved or impoverished)' (1992, p. 136). That encounter with Americanisation was bitterly disappointing to the citizens of New Orleans, who initially were happy about joining the United States as a territory, anticipating that the new nation would allow diversity, especially their French language. The Creole vision, as expressed in newspapers of the day, was that they and the US-Americans could live in a shared culture from which a new people might emerge. However, the United States government, shocked at what they considered a lax work ethic, rampant illiteracy, and a lackadaisical attitude toward representative government, held off for years its promise to make the new territory a state. The US-Americans who came into the city after 1803 made it clear that there was already only one way to be a United States citizen -- one language (English), one religion (Protestant), one moral/ethical guide (the New England model) and only two races (black/white). New Orleans developed a tactical response to US-hegemony: by recruiting skilled and literate French immigrants, who continued to come to the city in the wake of the Napoleonic and Jacobean upheavals in France, the Creoles maintained the French language community and allowed New Orleans to retain its Gaelic influence after other French colonial settlements (Detroit, Chicago and Saint Louis, for example) had lost theirs (LaChance 1992). Though the Creoles were no match for the US-Americans' financial skills, they managed to keep political control of the city until the 1830s and, even after they lost majority, kept control of the state government into the mid-1840s by manipulating the state constitution and gerrymandering the legislature. This so frustrated the US-Americans that, from 1836-1852, they resorted to dividing the city into three separate, autonomous municipalities, such as had been done in Paris, each with its own courts, councils and public schools, conducted in its own languages (ibid., 1972, pp. 78-87).

39 Tregle's investigation of marriage records during this period reveals higher rates of literacy than has been attributed to the Creole community, but this was in the French language. It is more likely that the American representatives considered a lack of fluency in the English language to be illiteracy.
The Americanisation of New Orleans went beyond a struggle between Americans and Creoles, however. Despite the enormous chasms between these two groups, conflicts had always presented themselves as a sort of institutionalised division of loyalties and not personal clashes between individuals. Creoles married Americans, entered business relationships with them, and joined them in national political alliances that had no ethnic interest for either group. In addition, the massive immigration in the 1850s, which doubled the city’s population, overwhelmed any Creole-American rivalry.

**Immigration patterns**

Contributing to its socio-political culture, and often omitted in cultural histories of the region, was the unusual pattern of immigration into New Orleans. The city was the second largest immigrant port after New York, the Mississippi River becoming the gateway to the Midwest. Until the middle of the Nineteenth Century, more migrants arrived in the city from the northern United States (New York and Pennsylvania especially) than from the rest of the US-South and there were more European immigrants than North American migrants arriving in New Orleans before the Civil War.\(^{40}\) Thus this largest city in the South was populated with very few Southerners, a fact that explains why most contemporary New Orleanians lack what is usually recognised as a Southern accent in their speech. Most of the immigrants before the Civil War were from Ireland\(^{41}\) and Germany. After the Civil War, immigrant Spaniards, Latin Americans, Greeks, Dalmatians, Chinese, Filipinos and Italians (particularly Sicilians) ensured diversity of culture and kept the city cosmopolitan. The city’s distinctive neighbourhood accents, such as the ‘Brooklyness’ of the Ninth Ward, heard in the speech of Louis Prima, and the distinctive brogue of the Irish Channel, demonstrated by the speech of Dr. John and Harry Connick Jr., attest to these patterns of immigration and housing.

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\(^{40}\) See Rousey (1996) and Tregle (1992).

\(^{41}\) In 1850, all nurses at Charity Hospital listed their birthplaces as other than Louisiana, and in 1860, all chambermaids at the St. Charles Hotel listed their birthplaces as Ireland (Tregle, 1992, p. 163).
In his book on the history of the New Orleans police force, Dennis C. Rousey (1996) traces the complex ethnic tensions in the city during the Nineteenth Century, through the response of the city’s police.\textsuperscript{42} His research reveals the animosity toward German immigrants on the force in 1836, the ethnic tensions leading to an anti-Spanish riot in 1851; the political battle that led to riot and bloodshed between the Creoles and the US-Americans in the mid-1850s; and the murder of Irish-American police chief David Hennessy in 1891 that led to the lynching of eleven Italian-Americans accused of his murder.

All this points to what Tregle (1992, p. 163) called a New Orleans ethnic reality far beyond the familiar parameters of Creole-American conflict, including most significantly the co-existence for almost a century of a three-tiered Caribbean racial structure alongside its two-tiered American counterpart in an ethnically divided city, a curious happenstance that continues to influence contemporary New Orleans. As Johnson noted:

Although it would be overstating the case to conclude that the assimilatist attitude in New Orleans caused, in the sense of forced, the remarkable cultural meld that has characterized the city’s history, the existence of such a social attitude permitted and facilitated that meld (1992, p. 57).

\textit{Protest tradition}

The rise of the protest tradition in New Orleans, one that not only influenced the civil rights movement of the Twentieth Century, but has influenced and continues to influence music’s role in the city’s past and present, began to affect the young US-American city from its beginnings. Emerging out of the peculiar circumstance of a self-confident and homogeneous African population alongside an inclusive French Colonial ethos, the protest tradition was already manifesting itself as a principle of the cultural milieu from which contemporary New Orleans black society emerged as the French abandoned their colonial capital to the Americans.

\textsuperscript{42} New Orleans had the first racially integrated municipal police force in the United States, but, as Rousey (1996) details, racial and ethnic hostility ended the reforms of Reconstruction and by 1900, the police force had become ineffective and corrupt.
The consequences of US-American arrival were generally dire for the non-white population. Almost as soon as the American officials arrived, they began instituting policies that eroded the rights of the free black population. As early as 1805, just after the Louisiana Purchase, free men of colour protested against the new US-American government’s refusal to recognise their basic civil rights. For a long time Africans had been the largest ethnic group in the colony, outnumbering Europeans two to one. However, after the massive influx of immigrants from the northern United States and Europe during the decades between 1830 and 1860, the European population outstripped the non-European inhabitants, and it became easier for the US-Americans to exert their control over the black community.

Despite these new challenges, the black population, slave and free, grew even larger under US-American domination. While as a whole, life for slaves and even free blacks did not improve during the ante-bellum period, many individuals became wealthier, better educated and gained a greater degree of acceptance by the white community of New Orleans than in any other part of the United States. A slave revolt persuaded the American authorities to relent in their repressive policies temporarily and from 1815 to 1830, an economic boom enabled skilled black workers and merchants to improve their lot. In the 1830s, when increased restrictions threatened the non-white community, Creole white lawmakers in the Louisiana legislature still had enough control to have exempted many free black Creoles. More significantly, many of the Creoles of colour lived in enclaves in the city where enforcement of almost all laws was lax. Ironically, the ante-bellum ethnic, cultural and political divisions that would emerge among the white population as the city joined the United States, particularly conflicts concerning

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43 According to the 1850 census, the flood of immigrants lived in all sectors of the city, with Irish and German families the clear majority in all neighbourhoods, even, as Tregle points out, in the so-called 'American' sector, where foreign-born residents made up 51 percent of the white population (1992, p. 164), contradicting any claims to a certain sector of the city being ethnically American. Tregle also points out the only way that the downtown section of New Orleans could be called exclusively Creole would be by adding to the 'white' Creole population 'those other parts of the community which seemed to fuse with them into a kind of Latin solidarity, the foreign-born French and Mediterranean stock plus their children and the 2,070 free persons of color in the mix' which, with that accounting, would produce a total Creole presence of 56 percent of the Vieux Carré population (p. 165).
maintenance of the French language (or, for the Americans, imposing dominance of the English language), would provide the space within which the community of free people of colour could flourish (Hirsch, Logsdon, 1992, p. 98).

Although much has been written about the merging of the cultures of Creoles of colour and African-Americans at the turn of the Twentieth Century, particularly in discussions relating to the influence of this on musical styles, forgotten or ignored by researchers has been the large influx of people of colour, slave and free, into Louisiana during the ante-bellum period. Many of these people had been in the United States for long periods of time and brought with them the most durable aspects of their own society and culture. As Logsdon and Bell have written,

Their institutions and values often differed from those of the black Creoles of New Orleans, and the resulting interchange between the two communities helped shape the peculiar way of life in the city for years to come (1992, p. 209).

In 1852, when the city reconsolidated from the three separate municipalities, a period of racial repression began, and that year marked the breakdown of the sheltered and privileged order of les gens de couleur in New Orleans (ibid., p. 208). The New Orleans black community’s long tradition of organised protest against racial injustice in the United States can be traced to this period. Out of the repression of this era came a young leadership class poised to challenge notions of racial hierarchy after the Civil War. These radical Creoles were influenced by ideas coming from France and particularly by the recent applications of those ideas in other areas of the New World. Edicts issued in 1848 by officials of the Second Republic had ended slavery in the French West Indies, but had also gone beyond that to give full political rights to all black inhabitants of these islands. These young Creoles in New Orleans saw in this a possibility for a new order, based not just on freedom from racial discrimination, but for full participation for all in the American political process (McCloy, 1961, pp. 141-159).

44 In a speech, Robert B. Elliot (Louisianian, Sept. 17, 1881), told how he had learned from Creole leaders that their struggle to challenge racial subordination began in 1852.
In the rising tide of racial discrimination during the 1850s, neither Creole nor American black leaders could resist the pressure on all. By 1860, rights had disappeared and fear in both black communities ran deep. Many of the free people of colour fled to France or Latin America, and a plethora of secret organisations formed for mutual benefit and aid of those who remained. When Union forces seized New Orleans in the spring of 1862, just one year into the Civil War, a number of members of this community offered to join the Union Army. The Native Guards, a company of soldiers who had first tried, unsuccessfully, to join the Confederate Army, reorganised as the Corps d’Afrique and fought with distinction for the Union. Louisiana provided the Union army with more black soldiers than any other state, north or south (Cassimere, 1995). At first, the free men of colour joined the war to protect their rights, but eventually they came to realise that their fate was tied to that of the enslaved population. Radical Creole leaders asserted claims for black suffrage that soon set national agenda. As Logsdon and Bell have pointed out:

Nowhere did Reconstruction begin so early or advance so far in its legal changes as in New Orleans. And probably nowhere were black leaders so demanding or, on occasion, so divided in their response to the new American leadership (1992, p. 216).

After the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 and the subsequent attempt by local conservative white Unionists in 1864 to undermine the radical Creole campaign for the vote, this group of former Union soldiers sent a militant protest, demanding all rights of citizenship without regard to race or colour, directly to President Lincoln, who urged the governor of Louisiana to consider enfranchising ‘some of the coloured people, for instance the very intelligent and especially those who have fought gallantly in our ranks’ (Lincoln, 1989). Lincoln’s plea went unheeded, however, and when the Thirteenth Amendment was adopted, freeing the enslaved, the issue of black voting rights was still unresolved. To most US-Americans, freedom for the enslaved meant only that a black person could no longer be bought or sold and forced to work without compensation. However, some people, including leading abolitionists, had believed that Union victory would mean not just freedom from enslavement, but full citizenship rights for black people. African-
American leader Frederick Douglass, who had crusaded against slavery for nearly three decades, had warned that slavery would not be truly abolished until the black man had the ballot, and black New Orleanians joined this movement for universal suffrage.

In the first post-war state-wide elections in November 1865, reactionary Southern Democrats were returned to power in Louisiana. The new legislature enacted a set of laws designed to re-establish white dominance and return the newly freed slaves to a condition near to slavery. A new code adopted to govern the freedmen\(^{45}\) required all agricultural labourers to make annual labour contracts by January 10 of each year, with former masters given the right of first refusal over their former slaves. Those freedmen who refused to execute a contract would be held as vagrants and forced to work without pay on the parish roads and levees (DuBois 1935, pp. 167-169). By the summer of 1866, a coalition of black leaders and moderate whites pushed to reconvene the 1864 Louisiana constitutional convention, primarily in order to enfranchise black voters. On July 30, as a large procession of black conventioneers converged on Mechanics Hall, just off Canal Street in downtown New Orleans, a white mob of police and former Confederate soldiers attacked the marchers, killing more than forty persons, all but three of them black (ibid., pp. 464-466). This riot in New Orleans, and a similar incident in Memphis, galvanised Northern opinion against the conservative Southern white governments, and in the autumn election, the northern electorate gave the Republicans nearly three-fourths majorities in both the United States House and the Senate, firmly rejecting President Andrew Johnson’s lenient Reconstruction policy.

This Congress passed a new Reconstruction Act of 1867, returning federal troops to Louisiana and nine other Southern states to supervise the restructuring of the state governments. This act authorised the registration of all loyal male citizens, black and white, which resulted in black men making up a sixty-percent majority of the registered voters of Louisiana. The delegates elected to the

\(^{45}\) *Freedmen* was the term for the formerly enslaved African-Americans.
Louisiana constitutional convention in the fall of that year were divided equally between blacks and whites. Of the forty-nine black delegates only three had been enslaved, and most were literate men of property. One of the black delegates chaired the committee on the bill of rights. The 1868 constitution banned racial discrimination in public education and public facilities (McPherson, 1988, p. 537) making Louisiana the only state prohibiting the distinguishing of citizens on the basis of ‘race’ or ‘colour.’

The Republicans won most of the state-wide offices, including governor. The lieutenant governor, Oscar Dunn, was black as were half of the members elected to the state House of Representatives and six of the thirty-six state senators. The state ratified the proposed Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, which became a part of the United States Constitution in 1868 and 1870 respectively (ibid., pp. 537-38; 546). Thus black New Orleanians were instrumental in governing the state of Louisiana at a crucial time in its history. Radical Reconstruction began to dissolve almost immediately, however. Though elected largely with black support, the new Louisiana governor, Henry C. Warmoth, proved to be almost as conservative as his predecessors. He vetoed a civil rights bill, refused to vigorously enforce school integration and opposed enforcement of the state constitution’s equal accommodations provision, awarding patronage to white conservatives against the strong objection of black leaders.

Against this atmosphere of growing political and social repression, however, the tradition of militant republicanism, begun during the Civil War as an extension of the Afro-Creole community’s solidity and its expectation of minority rights, continued to influence the black community of New Orleans, then the South’s largest city and the fourth largest in the nation. During Reconstruction, the city’s streetcars and public schools were successfully desegregated through the organised protests of the black community, and in the 1890s, there was launched a valiant effort against state-imposed racial segregation on trains, resulting in the disastrous *Plessy v Ferguson* case.
Plessy was initiated in 1896 by the Comité des Citoyens (Citizens Committee), a group of Creoles of colour and their supporters, to test the constitutionality of segregation by skin colour. With confidence of a victory, they chose Homer Plessy, a light-skinned black man, to challenge a new law that forbade the ‘mixing of races’ in conveyances travelling from one place to another within the state, believing that the absurdity of the law would be shown when a man who could not, by physical means, be easily labelled ‘black’ or ‘white’ could be barred from public transport.

On May 18, 1896, the majority of the United States Supreme Court upheld the Louisiana law which the petitioners representing Plessy had fought against. In the majority opinion Justice Henry B. Brown stated, ‘If the civil and political rights of both races be equal, one cannot be inferior to the other civilly or politically.’ On the other hand, ‘if one race be inferior to the other socially, the Constitution of the United States cannot put them upon the same plane.’ Brown did not find the law to be unreasonable:

So far, then, as a conflict with the Fourteenth Amendment is concerned, the case reduces itself to the question whether the statute of Louisiana is a reasonable regulation, and with respect to this there must necessarily be a large discretion on the part of the legislature ... It is at liberty to act with reference to the established usages, customs and traditions of the people, and with a view to the promotion of their comfort, and the preservation of the public peace and good order. Gauged by this standard, we cannot say that a law which authorizes or even requires separation of the two races in public conveyances is unreasonable (Kluger, 1976, pp. 78-80),

Brown ignored the argument that, as before Emancipation slaves seldom used public transit at all unless accompanying their masters, there could be no long-established ‘usages and customs and traditions’ with respect to the use of public accommodations. Brown concluded that ‘if the two races are to meet upon terms of social equality, it must be the result of natural affinities, a mutual

46One of the members of the Court was a Louisianian, Edward Douglass White, who later became its chief justice.
appreciation of each other's merits and a voluntary consent of individuals.’ Apparently, Brown and his colleagues in the majority failed to see that the law prevented individuals with natural affinities or mutual appreciation from fraternising as equals in public places (Kutler 1977, p. 219). The lone dissenter, Harlan, cut to the heart of the issue:

Everyone knows that the statute in question had its origin in the purpose, not so much to exclude white persons from railroad cars occupied by blacks, as to exclude colored people from coaches occupied by or assigned to white persons ... The thing to accomplish was, under the guise of giving equal accommodations for white and blacks, to compel the latter to keep to themselves while travelling in railroad passenger coaches. No one would be so wanting in candor to assert the contrary (Kluger, p. 81).

Harlan tried to show the absurdity of the law by suggesting extreme examples that could logically flow from the same premise:

... If a State can prescribe, as a rule of civil conduct, that whites and blacks shall not travel as passengers in the same railroad coach, why may it not so regulate the use of the streets of its cities and towns as to compel white citizens to keep to one side of the street and black citizens to keep on the other?... If this statute of Louisiana is consistent with the personal liberty of citizens, why may not the State require the separation in railroad coaches of native and naturalized citizens of the United States, or of Protestants and Roman Catholics? (ibid., p. 82).

Defeat in Plessy was a terrible blow to African-Americans; the institutionalisation of 'separate but equal' was the end of the dream inherent in the Emancipation Proclamation, and the constitutional justification for apartheid in the United States, affecting particularly the South. Though the segregation laws (known collectively as the Jim Crow laws) that followed in the wake of Plessy were not to take hold in Louisiana for several years, Plessy was the judicial legitimacy for those laws. The social repercussions of segregation echo throughout any cultural history of the United States, but this was particularly bitter for New Orleans,
where the black population had fought and won many battles for self-definition and dignity.  

**NAACP in New Orleans**

Although black leaders in New Orleans were defeated in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, they did not stop their efforts, and more than a half-century later, their descendants played a major role in its overturn. As Rafael Cassimere has said:

> On the eve of the Great Depression, it seemed a settled question that segregation was enshrined forever. Entrenched though it may have been, however, there already were plans in the making to topple it. Much of the effort for overturning segregation lay at the heart of the goals of the nation’s first civil rights organisation, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

The New Orleans branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the nation’s most influential black organisation, was formally chartered in 1915, making it the oldest continuously operating branch in the Deep South. In 1918, in its own newspaper, the goals of the chapter were published:

> To obtain at least one public high school for Negroes, to end police brutality against Negro citizens, to discontinue the practice of using black women prisoners as street cleaners, and to win back the right to vote.

So in the 1920s, active political action helped bring together the largely black Catholic African-Creole and the largely black Protestant African-American communities of New Orleans, forging a single black identity that submerged ethnicity, at least partially, in the common cause of minority rights. This merging of the ethnic groups within the black community happened three decades after jazz historians dated the ‘forcing together’ of the groups (see Chapter Two) and came in an atmosphere of mutual aid and not mutual conflict.

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48 In 1895, black voters represented 44 per cent of the state total. Twenty years later they represented less than 1 per cent.
New Orleanians have retained an active role in the NAACP. Since 1915, more than a dozen New Orleanians have served on the national board of directors and many others on national committees and task forces. Over the years, the local branch has mobilised teacher salary equalisation cases, attacked the Democratic ‘white primary,’ boycotted department stores, sponsored lawsuits against the city for refusing to hire black policemen and firemen, and worked to desegregate public and private schools, public buses and taxicabs, city-owned parks and playgrounds, theatres and auditoriums. Ernest Morial, NAACP president during the turbulent Sixties, became the first African-American mayor of New Orleans in 1978. His son Marc now holds the same office and in 1996, on the hundredth anniversary of the Plessy ‘separate but equal’ decision, the younger Morial, with hundreds of locals of all ethnicities, attended a mass said in Homer Plessy’s church and held a jazz funeral for the despised Supreme Court decision.

The protest tradition in New Orleans, eventually exerting a profound influence on the US-American civil rights movement, rose out of the peculiar circumstance of a self-confident and homogeneous African population alongside an inclusive French Colonial ethos. Already manifesting itself as a principle of the cultural milieu from which contemporary New Orleans black society emerged as the French abandoned their colonial capitol to the Americans, the demand for full participation and rights resisted US-American hegemony. An understanding of the processes that have gone into the creation of this community contributes to an understanding of the musical community that evolved there, and particularly challenges ideas of homogeneous black experience in the US-American South.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued, using the findings of recent historical scholarship, that its particular history makes New Orleans an anomaly in the Southern United States, but a more typical colonial city of the Caribbean rim. In striking contrast to the puritanical English colonies, the settlement was French, African, Catholic, Latin, without democratic aspirations but with a firm belief in the value of revelry
and dancing. It was populated by adventurers, solders, prisoners, rather than families of settlers. Relative isolation maintained these differences. Established a century after the English colonies, it remained for another century an outpost of the French and Spanish empires before Napoleon sold it to the United States with the rest of the Louisiana Purchase in 1803.

 Crucially, from the point of view of its musical past and present, the black experience in New Orleans is also significantly at variance with patterns elsewhere in the United States. This includes, historically, a unique and immensely complicated system of racial structuring, with possibilities of black social mobility not available in other regions. As Hall has pointed out, research on New Orleans confirms the necessity of looking at the formation of the culture of a region in context. For instance, the experience of Africans in New Orleans questions assumptions that the enslaved could not regroup themselves into language and social communities that retained at least partly the culture of their communities in Africa (Hall, 1992a). Arriving in New Orleans under specific conditions not replicated elsewhere, the results reflect this different experience. Research on New Orleans also points out the inadequacy of looking on culture merely as a story of power and control, passed on or enforced from the ‘top’ of the social hierarchy. For instance, in the past, researchers have often looked for ways in which Africans and Native Americans adapted to European culture in the new world. Research on Louisiana points out that this kind of structuralist approach is inadequate for the study of the colonial experience, and in fact the Europeans, Africans and Native Americans who met in Louisiana were acculturated by their encounter with each other, each group bringing to the experience various cultural material, which was retained or discarded, depending upon its serviceability in the new situation. In the long, chaotic evolution of an isolated colony such as Louisiana, only the most useful and adaptable elements brought with them from their cultures took hold, and cultural activities that promoted the basic necessities of life were valued, whatever their origins. Unlike the British Atlantic colonies, which became heavily populated by Europeans and Africans during the Eighteenth Century, the intrusive population
in Louisiana, both white and black, was sparse, especially under French rule. In these circumstances, European control was relatively feeble. The heavy reliance on enslaved and indigenous peoples for skilled labour as well as for defence enhanced the bargaining power and self-confidence of the slaves. The French colonial ethos of allowing minorities some rights within the larger community contributed to the flourishing of this culture. Slavery was as brutal in Louisiana as elsewhere, but the differences in the opportunities for manumission, particularly during the Spanish period, and the unusual solidity of the language, religion and culture of the Afro-Creole community of New Orleans, as well as its large free black population before Emancipation, were powerful factors that contributed to a black community capable of independent, radical self-determination that continues to influence cultural life in New Orleans today. Political action during Reconstruction, knocked back by Plessy, forged a bond between Protestant and Catholics that overcame ethnic differences within the black community.

Every city has its own distinctive appearance, geographic setting and population profile. The distinctive features of New Orleans offer a useful contrast to the usual English colonial historical research, a historical model that is of little help in studying US-American localities that evolved under a different model. Like other early settlements in the New World, New Orleans served as the location of an intense and often violent collision of disparate cultures, a place where people from Europe and Africa met, bonded, clashed, in patterns of subordination and dominance, and intertwined their lives and customs with those of the native inhabitants. Not surprisingly, the complexities and subtleties of the city’s cultural history resulted in a way of life that differed dramatically from cultures that evolved elsewhere. By establishing an historic context within which to look at the development of the black community of New Orleans, through painstaking research made difficult by the circumstance of three nations, in three languages, governing the city during its formative years, the reappraisal of Louisiana history has shown us a community approaching the Twentieth Century more stable, more firmly
established and more militant than has been shown by other more superficial accounts.

Armed with new information on the historical factors behind the city’s sociocultural development, we may now turn to how this information might be used by those interested in tracing the development in New Orleans of syncretic cultural forms such as popular music and how these factors may have influenced the distinctive features of cultural activities in New Orleans. For example, the assimilative nature of New Orleans society, evolving from the French colonial ethos, may help explain patterns of cultural traditions that form and reform in the city. The image of an unusually cohesive and heavily Africanised slave culture evolving into a militant Republicanism during Reconstruction could undermine stereotypes of a passive, untutored black community, discovering western music for the first time at the brink of the new century and thereby challenge notions of popular music historiography and the evolution of jazz. In addition, some sociocultural adaptations in New Orleans, atypical of US-American cities generally, such as the proliferation of benevolent societies, carnival organisations, ecstatic religions and the overlapping of these, with themes of sociability, reciprocity, mutual aid and status reversal, may be seen in light of the cohesiveness of the Franco-African community and the residual traditions of membership in supportive groups that ensured power and rights (Kaslow 1981).

Pointing out the historical origin of the differences in colonial New Orleans not only contributes to an understanding of the black contemporary community, with which this research is ultimately concerned, but goes far to challenge the heterogeneity of black musical communities in the South, an assumption that has marred much of popular music histories. For instance, an awareness of the crucial role played by Africans in the survival and initial cultural development of the colony could correct long-standing stereotypical assumptions about slavery and the passive enslaved. As Gwendolyn Hall has said:

Colonial Louisiana left behind a heritage and tradition of official corruption, defiance of authority by the poor of all races, and violence, as well as a brutal, racist tradition that was viewed by its ruling
groups as the only means of containing its competent, well-organised, self-confident and defiant Afro-Creole population, but it also left behind a tradition of racial openness that could never be entirely repressed (1992a, xiv, xv).

Approaching the turn of this century, the characteristics of the black community described by Logsdon as a ‘... strain of Creole radicalism, more assertive and individual, with broader horizons and self-confidence, [which] emerged to challenge American racial conceptions and imposition of Jim Crow’ (1992, p. 261) contrast sharply with the vision of a passive, simple community subject to the whims and reacting to the dominance of a white society as pictured by jazz histories. In addition, the results of this reappraisal point to the usefulness of comparative research in the development of popular musics of the Caribbean, or other former French colonial music communities such as that of the French Antilles or Zaire, with that of New Orleans in contrast to the experience of black communities in the rest of the US-American South. The three-tiered multiracial social structure of New Orleans, unique to the United States but typical of the rest of the New World, survived until the violence of Civil War and massive European immigration dissolved the order. As segregation arrived in New Orleans, and the multi-ethnicity that had characterised the city hardened into a racial dualism that prioritised biology over culture, cultural activities involving music became an important place for debates on ownership, control and identity, a sphere for black assertiveness and resistance.

In the following chapter, I will suggest that without a solid historical foundation upon which to comment on contemporary patterns of development, researchers have depended upon fiction and other popular texts, and this has led to a mythology of the city based on assumptions of creativity and ‘race.’ The implications of this for popular music research will be discussed.
‘You know, there’s people, they got the wrong idea of jazz. They think it’s all that red-light business, but that’s not so ... My story goes a long way back. It goes further back than I had anything to do with ... I got it from something inherited, just like the stories my father gave down to me.’

-- Sidney Bechet

Introduction

Barring the music of the continent’s indigenous peoples, New Orleans has one of the longest histories of musical activity in North America, both popular and classical, sacred and secular (Jerde 1988, p. 18). The city’s passion for dancing and opera, its role as a leader in the production of sheet music, publishing and composing,¹ as well as the vast amount of musical activity in homes, on the streets and in concerts, gave New Orleans a reputation as a musical capital early in its history. Parades, dances, balls and funerals accompanied by music have been practically a daily occurrence from its earliest days, much of it taking place out of doors, and available to people of all classes, enslaved and free. As a result, music in ante-bellum New Orleans was a means of livelihood as in no other city of the South (Harwell 1950, p. 9).

Henry Kmen (1966) has written on the city’s enthusiasm for opera and ballroom dancing. The first opera was performed in 1796, and throughout the Nineteenth Century it was the only North American city to maintain an opera

¹ See Richard B. Harwell’s Confederate Music on the proliferation of music publishing during the years of the Confederacy (1950, pp. 9-11); and the records of the Historic New Orleans Collection, which has over 3,035 pieces of sheet music produced in the city in its holdings.
company continuously. By 1820, when the population of the city was only 10,000, it had eight ballrooms with capacities of over 500 people, and the city’s two full-time opera companies had presented more than 700 performances of about 150 operas. The French Opera House, opened in 1859, seated more than 2,000 and was the centre of Creole society. In ante-bellum New Orleans at one time there were three opera companies. Opera frequently was heard in association with a ball, and the divisions between ‘art’ and ‘vernacular’ music often were blurred. In correspondence and travel diaries, music often was mentioned by visitors as an integral part of the cultural activity of New Orleans, sometimes to its detriment. A Protestant visitor to the city in 1802 commented that the city’s ardour for dancing and balls was carried to ‘an incredible excess. Neither the severity of the cold, nor the oppression of the heat, ever restrains them from this amusement, which usually commences early in the evening and is seldom suspended till late the next morning ... without the least fatigue’ (ibid., p. 2). Another observer remarked that New Orleanians managed during a single winter ‘to execute about as much dancing, music, laughing and dissipation, as would serve any reasonably disposed, staid, and sober citizen for three or four years’ (ibid.). Kmen has suggested that the city’s passion for dancing and balls probably derived from a need, in a city of many languages and cultures, for a social activity that did not involve conversation. However, the enthusiasm for balls did not wane as the century progressed. When noted architect James Dakin built the new state capitol in 1880, he surmounted an elliptical glass dome onto the building for ballroom effect. As Powell has written:

In other commonwealths, the idea of marrying Xanadu to Westminster Abbey is hard to take seriously. But Nineteenth Century New Orleanians ... expected their public places to double as social arenas. Dakin had lived long enough in New Orleans to understand its rhythms. That is probably why he decided to graft a pleasure dome onto a legislative capitol (1995, p. 13).

This poses the interesting questions of what affect this might have had on opera, had this practice continued, and, in turn, of how opera may have influenced local popular music.
The city’s musical activities have been cited by popular music texts as having a profound influence on America popular music. Some examples are The Oxford Companion to Popular Music: ‘New Orleans was ideally situated to incubate jazz and there is everything to support the contention that this is where jazz grew and emerged’ (Gammond, ed., 1991, p. 292); The Faber Companion to 20th Century Popular Music: ‘Coming from the cultural melting pot of New Orleans, jazz became one of America’s and black America’s greatest art forms’ (Hardy and Laing, eds., 1990, p. viii); Urban Blues: ‘In a real sense, urban blues was a result of New Orleans meeting Mississippi and Arkansas -- of jazz meeting the blues’ (Keil, 1966, p. 20); and Rock of Ages: The Rolling Stone History of Rock and Roll: ‘The conventions of [New Orleans] jazz informed mainstream popular music through the 1950s’ (Ward, 1986, p. 8).

From this, it might be concluded that an understanding of the development and contribution of New Orleans would contribute to a better understanding of the development of American popular music. However, academic research on musicmaking in the city, with the exception of very targeted areas, is surprisingly sparse, ranging from excellent to anecdotal and romanticised. Some narrow areas have received considerable attention, while some of the more influential musical activities have been ignored. An awareness of this situation is not new. In 1944, jazz historian Robert Goffin, writing on musical activity in New Orleans at the turn of the century, said: ‘This inaccurate impression was due to a lack of dependable information as to the popular music of New Orleans.’ The reasons for this are varied and complex, reflecting problems with New Orleans historiography generally as well as wider issues of culture and representation. Few researchers have had the time to untangle the complexities associated with researching a community whose early colonial records, as we have seen, are in Spanish and French, whose ethnic patterns and colonial career diverge so sharply from the rest of the United States and even the rest of the American South. At the same time, popular music scholarship seldom takes into account ethnic differences between African-Americans and almost always fails to differentiate the Franco-African
historical context of New Orleans music from the Anglo-American musical traditions of the rest of the Southern United States. Contributing to the problem have been the agenda and prioritisations brought by researchers to the city’s music. Though these may have changed over time, the city is often utilised as a counterpoint to other arguments, rather than the subject of research in its own right. In the early days of jazz scholarship, for example, New Orleans was a useful strategy that supported the social theories of the predominantly French primitivists who were the earliest jazz critics (Raeburn 1991). Later, writing on New Orleans has been introduced into arguments concerned with authenticity in Anglo-American popular music, or into debates about the ethnic origins of particular musical styles, most especially the degree of influence of European styles on African-based musical styles such as jazz. The results are that popular music -- and particularly jazz -- historiography has contributed to a mythology of New Orleans, based on assumptions of creativity and ‘race,’ that has distorted research on American popular music and coloured contemporary accounts, as well as failing to give an accurate understanding of New Orleans itself.

Recently, some critics, most notably David Meltzer (1993, p. 3), have argued that jazz was a discourse created and maintained by ‘whites’ at the beginning of this century in order to colonise the music of African-Americans. The conflicts and debates that this imposition has engendered within the music community of New Orleans, especially the consequences of acting out this role to reap potential economic rewards through tourism, are a concern of this research (see Chapter Six).

**Popular Music Historiography**

Though the entertainment industries are the largest in the world, scholars have begun only belatedly to undertake serious studies of popular music. Recent scholarship in popular music studies has tended to follow the priorities of the emerging discipline, generally preferencing ‘global’ issues over the study of urban contemporary musical centres, with emphasis on musical product rather than performance. Barry Shank, in his work on the music scene in Austin, Texas (1994),
has written that much of the work of the popular music scholar revolves around the analysis of recordings, and that often in popular music scholarship the study of recorded music has stood for the study of popular music. Shank argues that a ‘distinction needs to be maintained in any discussion’ to prevent the reduction of performance of musical sounds to the practices of the international recording industry which contributes to the ‘ideological dominance of the concept of a music industry’ (1994, p. 203). The emphasis on recordings reinforces the production of music as product, marketed as genre and style. As Sarah Thornton has written (1990, p. 87), the criteria assigned for the historical importance of a popular cultural event are sales figures, biographical interest, critical acclaim, or amount of media coverage, which in turn support strategies of listing, personalising, canonising and mediating to order the popular past.

This emphasis on genre and styles and on the associated activities identified by Thornton has hindered popular music research on New Orleans. Many popular music studies are excellent -- as Simon Frith has remarked, ‘the best studies of American vernacular music focus on specific musical forms: country, gospel, blues’ (1996, p. 103) -- but, in emphasising music as product, studies that focus on style and genre risk underemphasising and misrepresenting music’s dependence on local situations. Musical performance in New Orleans, for instance, has often blurred the divisions between musical styles. For one, New Orleans musicians seldom limit their playing career to one type of music, and often play with many different groups. In addition, a typical repertoire of a New Orleans musical performance may fuse elements of many styles -- jazz, rhythm and blues, calypso, rumba and other Caribbean sounds, as well as soul, country and western, and various gospel and spiritual forms -- in varying proportions dependent upon the demands of the audience and circumstances of the performance. For instance, one of the city’s most popular musical groups, the Neville Brothers, is composed of four musicians with

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3 See Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno (1972), and Paul Hirsch (1969), on the record industry as standing for popular music.

4 See for example Shepherd, Wicke, Chambers, Hamm, Frith.
widely differing musical tastes outside their group performances. Aaron Neville, who has had hit records on his own and in duet with Linda Ronstadt, confesses a love for country and western music and gospel. Brother Art was a founding member of the legendary funk band, The Meters, and continues to play in that style and with a revised version of that group. Brother Charles is a talented modern jazz saxophonist, and Brother Cyril has had local success with his reggae group, the Uptown Allstars. All of them play in other combinations often, and their children and grandchildren play in all sorts of styles (for instance, Aaron’s son Ivan, who often plays with the Neville Brothers on tour, has also toured with Keith Richards and Bonnie Raitt, while Charles’s daughter, Charmaine, has a successful career as a cabaret artist featuring a popular impersonation of Louis Armstrong!).

Research on specific musical styles can deny the interactive role of music in people’s lives, narrowing the focus to just one of the many types of music encountered by people, with localities acting as mere markers. In contrast, research on musical practices within a locality can track the myriad ways music is used by a community, registering changes and continuities over time. As Finnegan has pointed out,

People choose music as a pathway because it provides a context for activities and relationships; a means for the expression of personal and collective identity and value; and because it allows for the meaningful structuring of their actions in time and space (1989, p. 2).

The inclination and preference of funding bodies for the extraordinary, with an emphasis on the dramatic, the exceptional, or the rare, rather than the everyday creation and re-creation of musical communities over time, has also hindered research. Much of the scant contemporary academic literature on New Orleans centres around extraordinary cultural practices, such as the Mardi Gras Indians\(^5\) or the ‘birth’ of jazz, rather than for instance the significance of the long, continuous development of musical practice in one place over time. As Simon Frith has

reminded us, ‘In popular music history, continuities are as significant as breaks’ (1996, p. 102).

**Popular music and theory**

Despite its often narrow focus, popular music scholarship has been home to some sophisticated cultural theory. Jazz scholar Krin Gabbard has pointed out that, while jazz criticism has steadfastly held to ‘internalist aesthetics of the classical, ignoring the extramusical aspects of jazz,’ popular music critics have engaged in a theoretically sophisticated body of scholarship. He attributes this to rock and roll’s involvement in a huge industry and ‘highly conventional sign system,’ and thus its particular accessibility to critics skilled in the theories of Foucault, Althusser, Adorno and the Frankfurt School, which engage with the theoretical issues presented by mass culture (1995, p. 3). While popular music critics often have taken into account the social, economic, technological and representational context of music, jazz has been seen by jazz critics as a relatively autonomous domain more dependent on rhythmic than social innovation (ibid.). Thus, the association of New Orleans with jazz criticism has perhaps hindered the kind of research which would have benefited from recent cultural theorising.

There are problems in other disciplines as well. Despite Kunst’s definition of ethnomusicology as the study of ‘the music of all cultural strata of mankind’ (1959), traditional ethnomusicology has seldom considered urban popular music. At the same time, traditional musicology, rooted in the study of composer and score rather than performer and performance, has often trivialised and marginalised the city’s improvisationally-based music. In addition, music theory has prioritised the study of abstract patterns associated with pitch and form over rhythm and, as McClary and Walser have pointed out, a study of rhythm is crucial to ‘account for the specific details that constitute the artistry of much African-American music’ (1994, p. 80). In consequence, New Orleans music, as Monson has said about black music

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6 Keil (1966), Pena (1985), Waterman (1990), Stokes (1994) and Cohen (1991) are among the few ethnographers who have addressed popular urban musicmaking.
generally, has usually been seen as not quite ‘other’ enough for ethnomusicology and too ‘other’ for musicology.

**Fictional accounts and the bias in academic interpretation**

As mentioned in the previous chapter, historical documentation which can help to place New Orleans’s cultural activities in context is sparse, making the task of research riddled with difficulties. At the same time, the city has been a popular setting for literature, film, art and song. In novels, poems and plays, writers have used the rituals, language and cultural icons of New Orleans. Fictional use of New Orleans abounds in US-American popular cultural texts to such an extent that preconceived notions based on these fictional texts often have biased academic interpretations of cultural events. With its Mediterranean culture and Catholicism, its history of racial ambiguity and Native American integration, New Orleans is a part of, yet distinct from, its neighbours in the US-American South, and has long served Southern writers as a location of moral counterpart to the rest of the region. Literary critical writing has explored the way the city’s distinctive culture has been appropriated by fiction writers to develop their own themes -- for instance, Bryan (1993) has pointed out the familiar ‘New Orleans as courtesan,’ the city as a metaphor for the new, decadent South (Tennessee Williams, William Faulkner, Walker Percy) or as a landscape upon which to comment on the irrationality of ‘race’ (George Washington Cable, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, William Faulkner), a device utilised by Anne Rice in her Vampire Chronicles (Bryan 1993). African folklore has contributed significantly to New Orleans culture and its myth, for example in the tales of John Henry and Stagolee. The plethora of local popular folktales concerning slaves, ghosts and plantation life often make their ways into histories of New Orleans, as does voodoo (usually called *hoodoo* in New Orleans), the mulatto theme, black Louisiana folklore, and the influence of jazz. In the 1930s and 1940s, a renewed interest of white writers in black folklore resulted in the publishing of such

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7For a more in-depth look at this, see Violet Harrington Bryan’s *The Myth of New Orleans in Literature* (1993).
books as Roark Bradford’s *John Henry* (1931) and Robert Tallant’s *Voodoo in New Orleans* (1938), works often quoted as historical sources. While Marcus Christian’s work on Louisiana black history and culture for the Federal Writers’ Project, written between 1936 and 1943 for the WPA, remains largely unpublished, the writings of white authors such as Lyle Saxon (director of the project), Tallant and Bradford forged the established written representation of New Orleans, and of African-American folklore there.

From these literary texts have emerged images of the city that mark it as an exotic site in popular imagination -- a tantalising dichotomy of beauty and ruin, openness and danger, opulence and poverty, vibrant urban core and urban decay. This image, promoted by the city’s tourism literature, represented through musical texts and certain musical styles, persists in scholarly as well as popular imagination. It also permeates academic writing on New Orleans music, colonising the American image of the city to such an extent that New Orleans has come to be largely defined by these images. For rock and roll lyricists, New Orleans has served as a location for tales of intrigue, mystery, sin, often portrayed in the past. Examples are legion: ‘New Orleans Ladies,’ ‘Stagolee,’ ‘Bojangles.’ From the Rolling Stones’s ‘Brown Sugar’ and the Animals’s ‘House of the Rising Sun,’ to Sting’s ‘Moon Over Bourbon Street’ and Dire Straits’s ‘Planet New Orleans,’ the city is used as a setting for experiences that often seem out of time, out of reach, out of tune with the mores of middle America. Films such as *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951), *Walk on the Wild Side* (1962), *Easy Rider* (1969), *Cat People* (1982), *Angel Heart* (1987) and countless others reinforced this notion in the public mind (Keith, 1984-7). Relying on these fictional accounts for historical background has been a convenient but dangerous strategy by popular music researchers that has resulted in a body of unreliable resources on the cultural activities of one of the most influential localities in American popular music.
Black music historiography

Historiographic treatment of New Orleans music has been hindered in ways that have mirrored African-American musical historiography generally, ranging from the blatantly racist to nostalgic reveries on a glorious black culture, both equally destructive. Marcus Christian, director of the Negro Writers’ Project for the WPA, commented in a hand-written note to himself on the omissions of black contribution to histories written by whites:

We soon concluded that the omission of one-fourth, one-third, or one-half of the population from the true history of the state or region had been a deliberate, purposeful act on the part of most southern historians and was at variance with all documentary data, particularly so, since that region’s whole ‘way of life’ had been predicated largely upon the presence of this one-fourth, one-third, or one-half of the total population (Christian, as quoted in Bryan, 1993, p. 103).

Black musicians in New Orleans have been portrayed as possessing a creativity borne out of instinct and natural ability, rather than acquired through rigorous pedagogic strategies of the community and individual effort. References to ‘natural’ rhythms, inherent ability and instinctive performance have pervaded New Orleans historiography, beginning with travel writers in the Nineteenth Century, reinforced in jazz criticism in the earlier part of this century, and continuing in popular literature today. Musical activities have been marginalised, talent and expertise have been subverted and black culture has been exoticised in a way that denies intelligence and agency.

In particular, popular music historiography has continued to ignore class and ethnic diversity of black Southerners and the heterogeneous pattern of black musical development in the United States, and particularly the South, which in

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8 For more on issues in black music historiography, see Meltzer (1993, p. 4), Floyd (1983, p. 48), and Treitler (1996).

9 In 1944, sociologist Lawrence Reddick listed the ‘natural-born musician’ as one of nineteen ‘principle stereotypes of the Negro in the American mind’ (quoted in Gabbard, 1995, p. 29). Examples in popular literature today, too numerous to mention here, show the endurance of this stereotype.
turn has denied the diversity of black musical expression. Current discussions on culture and identity in anthropology and ethnomusicology that have challenged the idea of homogeneous and distinct music communities have problematised these assumptions. In addition, New Orleans music historiography that has identified groups by colour, as opposed to ethnicity, has led researchers down dead-end avenues of ‘race’ that do not apply in this context, or perhaps any context. More dangerous, the attribution of certain creative predispositions to particular mythical ‘colour’ groups has surfaced again and again in jazz history, and has no place in serious scholarship.

**Dominance of Jazz**

Mark McKnight has pointed out that ‘it is the very complexity of musical life in New Orleans, both past and present, that has interested scholars in exploring the city’s cultural and musical roots.’ But this initial motivation is not sustained: ‘... most serious musical research concerning New Orleans music has in the past focused on early jazz’ (1988, p. 113). Writings on jazz have in turn been dominated by the search for its origins. In fact, jazz is often presented as the ‘critical event’ to which all the musicmaking activities of the city have been either a prelude, or an anticlimax. This ‘critical event’ has often been termed a ‘birth,’ a metaphor, says Berndt Ostendorf, which ‘tends to reduce complex dialectical processes to acts of creation’ (1979, p. 574). In fact, in its ‘creation myth,’ jazz historiography has often used Judeo-Christian messianic metaphors: New Orleans as ‘birthplace of jazz,’ jazz ‘disciples,’ its ‘crucifixion,’ ‘resurrection,’ even to the flight of jazz from its birthplace to Chicago, with echoes of the biblical flight into Egypt -- all reflecting a messianic reference. Essential to this theme of ‘birth’ is the dislocation of jazz from

10 See bell hooks (1989, p. 11) on the issue of the multiplicity of voices in African-American identity vs. an ‘authentic’ African-American voice presumed by ‘white’ audiences. This can be said for historical treatment of the American South generally. Popular music writers often have talked about Southerners as consisting of two distinct groups, defined by ‘colour’, disregarding major differences in class, ethnicity, and experience within the region which may cut across lines of ‘colour’ or ‘race.’ See for example Small (1994), etc. Also, see Keil quoted in Monson (1994, p. 288) on authentic blackness associated with class status.

any creativity that had gone before, a disruption of the music from its antecedents and the place and people who created it while exaggerating the role of certain musicians and events that occurred close to the date of 1890. In denying agency and isolating the music, this strategy reflects the reification of the ‘closed off work’ (Bakhtin 1968) embraced by western cultural critics and historians. Referring to New Orleans as ‘birthplace’ of jazz, rather than, for instance, another metaphor such as ‘the home’ of jazz, communicates an image of a temporal, passing location. In contrast, Memphis ‘home of the blues,’ Nashville the ‘home of country music,’ Kentucky ‘bluegrass capital’ accord the idea of a music that remains. References to the ‘birth’ of jazz deny an ongoing diachronic validity.

Jazz historians have been particularly enamoured with myths of the red-light district of Storyville, prostitution, miscegenation and so forth at the turn of the century, and these references continue to reinforce the ‘birth’ metaphor, with hints of miscegenation in the conception. Examples are found in many jazz histories but reproduced here is Robert Goffin: ‘... the two musical poles of African rhythm and [European] folk song fought against each other for control of the interior life of the Negro. By some strange process of osmosis, mutual influence, and fusion, the two gave birth to jazz many decades later’; ‘The birth of jazz was now imminent ... there came into the world an as yet unbaptised music’; ‘the first tragic cry of a new art’ later’ (1944, p. 21). Central to this is the idea of the light-skinned Creoles of colour joining with the darker-complexioned African-Americans in the city. But as historical research by Jerah Johnson (1992), Gwendolyn Hall (1992a&b), and others has pointed out, the absence of colour as a marker for membership as a Creole, and the easy movement between groups of freedmen and Franco-Africans has challenged assumptions that skin colour had any bearing on musical preference, an attitude that in any event resonates with the racist rhetoric of a sexual ‘other.’

In its agenda of jazz prioritisation, popular music historiography has played fast and loose with events of the Nineteenth Century, interpreting musical activities in the colonial period as if they were important solely as a preparation for
the arrival of jazz in the 1890s. Social and political events have been moved by jazz historians toward this date, while sweeping generalisations about social activities have been reinterpreted in light of their application to the origins of jazz. Thus, as will be pointed out later in this chapter, musical and dance activities in Congo Square are extended to 1890; instrument availability in the black community is attributed to the Spanish-American War of the 1890s; the impact of the segregation laws on the city is moved back in time to the 1890s; all to account for jazz.

The consequence of this treatment of New Orleans in music histories, with the emphasis on the nascence of jazz, is that the experience of the city is seen as significant only in this sense, with the city’s subsequent career of no importance. Instead of looking at continuity of musical practice, and particularly dance, that led to the evolution of styles in a particular place, and at the profound creativity of the music and musicians in that place, researchers have treated the city as a randomly chosen location in which this cataclysmic event occurred. For instance, in many texts, jazz ‘happened’ because New Orleans was a port, where musical styles merged, leaving unanswered the academic question of what does it mean for popular music studies and the history of music that it was this particular port? A similar debate is centred around H. Wiley Hitchcock’s assertion (1988) that jazz emerged wherever African and European music came into contact. As Fierher pointed out, in that case why not the Carolinas, Mississippi, Jamaica or Angola? (1991, p. 23). In these accounts New Orleans itself is treated not as the issue, but a symptom, denying the city’s musicians any agency, suggesting that if not New Orleans, it would have been somewhere else. But ports exist all over the world, and jazz did not develop in these places. If this particular place is in fact important, what significance could this have to popular music studies? For instance, could certain qualities of pedagogy and performance in the city be reproduced? Could the city be worth studying as an issue in itself?12

12 In a sense, this parallels Simon Frith’s argument related to the treatment of Elvis Presley in popular music historiography (Frith, in King and Taylor, 1996), in which he criticises academic accounts of Presley (including his own) for looking at what Presley led to, charging that in these accounts Presley is not the
Some jazz historians, among them Ross Russell (1971), have posed an argument in jazz scholarship that has denied the claim of the city of New Orleans as birthplace of jazz. While this body of scholarship contributes to the deconstruction of old ways of thinking about the city, it could be criticised for not going further; in not investigating the differences in experience and evolution of New Orleans, Russell, et al., succumb to the error of Hitchcock, assuming a sameness between this city and others, and by doing so, overlook evidence of the heterogeneous experience of black people in the United States. Ostendorf has argued that an emphasis on origins derives from a belief that cultural items are purest at the source -- an opinion, he says, that is shared by many jazz critics and musicians. He suggests that instead of an emphasis on the origins of a popular art, it 'seems altogether more promising to study the processes and patterns of imitation, travesty, and assimilation which made it possible' (1979, p. 575).

Strategy

As a master term for a specific style of music, ‘jazz’ has been used and accepted in mainstream US-American culture; however, the city of New Orleans has had an often contested relationship with the term. Its close association with New Orleans, both as a place where jazz is seen to have emerged, and as a

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13 Although many might agree with Clay Watson of the New Orleans Jazz Museum, as quoted by Jones and Chilton: ‘Jazz is probably the world’s most recognised musical term in every language, and it is equally the world’s most misunderstood word’ (1971, p. 13).

14 According to the Oxford English Dictionary 2 (CD-ROM version 1,11 copyright Oxford University Press 1994), the word jazz, variously spelled as jasz, jazz, jasz, jaz, was first seen on a gramophone record in 1909 by C. Stewart entitled Uncle Josh in Society. (‘One lady asked me if I danced the jazz.’) Often cited is the appearance of the word in the Bulletin (San Francisco) 6 March 16, 1913: ‘The team which speeded into town this morning comes pretty close to representing the pick of the army. Its members have trained on ragtime and ‘jazz’… A definition in the Sun (N.Y.) 5 August 1917 (iii. 3/6) read: ‘Variously spelled Jas, Jass, Jazz, Jaz, Jazz and Jasz and Jascz. The word is African in origin. It is common on the Gold Coast of Africa and in the hinterland of Cape Coast Castle.’ In 1925 (September 7), the American Mercury wrote: ‘According to tradition, jazz has taken its name from Jasbo Brown, an itinerant Negro player along the Mississippi, and later, in Chicago cabarets.’ An article in the New York Times (30 June, 1950, p. 21) reports that: ‘[Etymologist] Dr. Bender was stumped by the word ‘jazz’. ... he tracked it to the West Coast of Africa, the contact point for the slave trade with colonial America. He said that the word meant ‘hurry up’ in the native tongue, and was first applied in the Creole dialect to mean ‘speed up’ in the syncopated music in New Orleans.’
description of a particular style of music associated with the jazz revival of the 1940s ['New Orleans jazz'] has combined to assure the term’s synonymy with the city. However, when the term ‘jazz’ is used to represent all the variety and breadth of music that is performed by New Orleans musicians in New Orleans, conflict arises. The term’s associations with the past and with origins, its use by different groups to mean different styles, has led to debates on its potential limitations and even some hesitation to use the term at all. For many musicians in the city, particularly those involved in playing gospel and rhythm and blues, the term as applied to the city’s music as a whole is seen as exclusionary. For some policymakers or cultural commentators who may want to emphasise the variety of music played in the city, the use of the word ‘jazz’ is seen as limiting. For others, the term has commodity value that can be packaged and sold to those who visit or buy products from the city. In some contexts, ‘jazz’ is a metaphor for the city’s music as used by outsiders: music for tourists, music for travel writers. In interviews, New Orleans musicians use the term ‘jazz’ with care and usually with modifiers, referring to a specific style; or ironically; or as a way of playing other styles. The term ‘jazz’ is seldom if ever used by New Orleanians as a general designation for the city’s music; for this, a much more commonly heard term is ‘New Orleans music.’

This hesitation within the city to use a term that is recognised as a symbol of the city’s music throughout the world could be seen as extraordinary, but because it is a symbol that has meaning for this place, it is used with care, and its use is talked about in city cultural events and strategies. Recognition outside the city of the word ‘jazz’ as a master term for the city’s music creates pressures on locals to use the word ‘jazz’ in the titles of funding applications, conferences, government and private initiatives. The consequences of this for a fair representation of the cross-fertilisation of styles in the city is a point of debate. For example, though there is funding for a national jazz park in the city, does that mean that only jazz music can

15 For more on the hesitation of many prominent African-American musicians to use the word ‘jazz,’ see Burton
be played there? What of those musicians who play both jazz and other styles, may they play there? Are educational programs funded by this group to go only to those that discuss a particular style? When not under these external pressures, jazz is seldom used to mean the city’s music in total. For example, New Orleans’s major television station has as its long-running paean to the city’s music a campaign called the ‘Spirit of New Orleans,’ featuring an ever-changing array of musical styles -- from Cajun to rhythm and blues to traditional jazz to gospel and beyond. In this context, New Orleans music is not defined as one style alone, but as an array of styles, and all of them bound up in a notion seen not as ‘jazz’ but as ‘the spirit of the city.’ This does not mean that musicians playing styles that they refer to as jazz styles use any hesitation to talk about jazz; only that musicians, and others in the community, only use ‘jazz’ to refer specifically to jazz styles and not the city’s music as a whole.

As mentioned earlier, some critics, most notably David Meltzer (1993, p. 3), have recently argued that jazz as a separately identified phenomenon was a discourse created and maintained by ‘whites’ in order to colonise the music of African-Americans, safely containing the ‘other.’ Meltzer calls jazz a ‘master term’ used by the dominant US-American culture for certain musical practices, and compares the cultural commodity and mythology that white critics called ‘jazz’ to the many styles of music, mostly unrecorded, played predominantly by African-Americans at the turn of the century. Meltzer’s interpretations reflect the thinking of many New Orleanians who resist the idea of local music being defined from the outside; following on from this thinking, New Orleans musicians could be said to be using the term ‘jazz’ with care, or ironically, as part of a strategy to reclaim jazz from that colonisation. Applying Meltzer’s ideas further, the city of New Orleans itself might be seen to have been affected by this discourse: if blackness can be

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16 Although shortened by locals to ‘Jazz Fest’, the actual name of the city’s largest music festival is the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, and the daytime events at the Fairgrounds are officially entitled ‘The Heritage Fair.’ Festival producers are quick to explain that ‘jazz’ is used in the title of the festival in its ‘widest possible meaning’ (Kennedy, 1996).
isolated to a particular geographical place, it can be contained there as ‘other’ and visited as required. Jazz’s ‘birth’ in New Orleans could be seen in this light as part of this localising strategy. If jazz was configured to serve a purpose, then perhaps New Orleans was re-configured to support that view.

These perceptions have engendered conflicts and debates associated with issues of creativity and ownership within the music community of New Orleans, especially the consequences of acting out this role to reap potential economic rewards through tourism (See Chapter Six). On the other hand, the city’s long use by jazz historians as a place wherein jazz resides\(^\text{17}\) lends the perception of the city as a place of authenticity and renewal. While this could make the city attractive for visitors and international musicians who might want to associate themselves with the city’s reputation for their own ends, some musicians see being associated with a jazz past as having little commercial effect on local contemporary music: as local musician George Porter has said, record companies ‘visit often, but don’t sign anyone.’\(^\text{18}\)

**Modernity and New Orleans Music**

In his book *The Power of Black Music* (1995, p. 136), Samuel Floyd traces the historical development of African-American musical criticism, pointing out how jazz emerged at the same time that theories of ‘modernity’ were also emerging, involving the prioritisation of the Western concert aesthetic, with music seen as text. Floyd found that during the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s, as part of a strategy to have African-Americans participate fully in the economic bounty enjoyed by white society, black intellectuals began to value the production of art forms that were more closely aligned with European high art tradition. If black Americans could show ability in ‘high art,’ it was believed, they would more quickly be accepted politically and socially by the nation. Black composers in European music, and to a

\(^{17}\) Ask any New Orleanian who has travelled or lived away from the city, and they will relate how when asked where they are from, the immediate response of ‘jazz’ follows the words ‘New Orleans’ like an echo.

\(^{18}\) Porter 1990.
lesser degree spirituals, were elevated and some jazz was tolerated, whereas blues and other expressive practices that emphasised an African-derived musical aesthetic were suppressed. This attitude, says Floyd, continued through the Chicago Renaissance (1930s) when the promise of integration created a climate of emphasis on art forms that conformed to the wider society. By the 1940s, although black classical composers had achieved some recognition, many black Americans began to decide that the American Dream was unattainable for them, and in response returned to and embraced elements of African-American myth and ritual. This was the dawn of the Civil Rights movement, and the era of the rise of bebop and the emergence of rhythm and blues. The collapse of that promise in the 1960s with the assassinations of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King led, says Floyd, to the black power movement and nationalistic emphasis on African and black expressive practices (1995).

Floyd has little to say about New Orleans itself in this particular account, but his approach is useful. Tracing the experience in the city through Floyd’s analysis, it could be said that in this century, interest in the music of New Orleans has mirrored this awakening of interest in African-American cultural practices generally. Coinciding with the emergence of the modernist aesthetic, national interest began the process of canonising New Orleans jazz, in so doing moving the practice away from the city -- which would not easily fit its parameters -- to Chicago and New York; meanwhile the emerging jazz historiography emphasised European influence and suppressed the more overt ‘African’ practices. However, the black community of New Orleans, with its long tradition of self-sufficiency and corporate status, including the belief that it could keep its own customs and traditions and still move easily within the larger group, had never felt the need to abandon totally its African-based cultural practices, such as musicmaking and secret societies.

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19 This could be seen as an impetus for the myth that the New Orleans Creole community was uniformly light-skinned, European educated, etc.

20 See Wilkinson (1994) on New Orleans jazz musicians of the 1920s not mentioning anything but their ‘French’ training, while observation of their music revealed many other influences.
Therefore, in the 1950s, as African-Americans in the rest of the nation re-embraced their African roots, New Orleans came again into the national spotlight. Critics, however, lacked an alternative cultural theory with which to look at New Orleans life and continued to see the city as an aberration; the reification processes which were part of the dominant aesthetic continued to marginalise and trivialise New Orleans cultural practices, including its musical practices.

**Historical moment**

The choice of a particular reading of history can relate to the historical moment during which an author writes; similarly, a dominating national discourse can play a major role in determining what voices are heard through published texts. In the 1880s, for instance, the northern publishing establishment was interested in reconciliation with the South after the Civil War, in order to build new markets in the recovering area. So, at that time, there was an interest in a Southern ‘positive’ image, resulting in the release of books which often recanted the cruelty of slavery. Particularly popular were those concerning the Creole myth of a gallant and cultured Creole class (in opposition to rough and uncouth US-Americans) and tales that involved ‘race’ -- light-skinned African-Creoles who fall into slavery, or ‘whites’ raised as ‘blacks’ or vice versa. Particularly influential in the 1870s and 1880s were George Washington Cable’s articles, stories and novels about New Orleans, which were widely read throughout the country. The Cotton Exposition of 1884-1885 focused national attention on the city, with a resulting abundance of newspaper and magazine articles, guidebooks and correspondence, including Lafcadio Hearn’s section on Congo Square in his *Historical Sketch Book and Guide to New Orleans and Environs* (1885, pp. 297-298). Thus, New Orleans in the 1880s and 1890s was a target for the national interest in areas other than music.

Prevailing ideologies can also play a role in the way a culture is presented in published texts, and these have influenced the study of New Orleans. Ingrid

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21 See for example the ‘Great Southern Series’ in Scribner’s, etc. (Bryan, 1993, p. 169).
Monson, writing on the exoticising of jazz and the culture surrounding it (1994), has pointed out that the earliest jazz critics, writing in the 1940s, were Francophone -- Hugues Panassié, Charles Delaunay, and Robert Goffin -- with strong relationships to the primitivist movement, and examples of the primitivist theory as applied to jazz history abound in their writing, particularly appearing throughout Goffin’s work: ‘Music has no need of the intelligence ... Jazz could touch only the primitive hearts among civilised people’ (1946, p. 2); ‘...diabolic emotion eschewed ... neutralising rational control’ (ibid., p. 3); practices by musicians were ‘sometimes anonymous and never cultured’; ‘frenzied lyricism’ (ibid., p. 5); ‘logical clarity v. subconscious,’ ‘instinctive rhythmic sense unconsciously transformed’ (ibid., p. 16). Panassié’s *The Real Jazz* reflects the same sentiments: ‘In music, primitive man has generally greater talent than civilised man’ (1973, p. 42). This kind of writing is apparent in early American jazz historians as well; for instance, Blesh: ‘With jazz, western music as we know it disappears and its composers, too’ (1958). These early jazz texts set the tone for the way that the music of black Americans was received and has been the model for the analysis of American black music since, as well as contributing to the distorting of general contemporary perceptions of African-American cultural life.²²

We can see from these examples that the city’s image has been presented in texts in ways that reproduce mythologies of ‘authenticity’ and ‘race’, situating them in a site uncontaminated by modern society, where an authentic past might be recovered; at the same time the city’s image has been used as a critique of the rapid change of culture by modern industrial capitalism. Significant for researchers depending on these texts is an awareness that the city and its music may have been interpreted in light of the writer’s ideological purposes, and would have served those purposes whether historically accurate or not. With this in mind, however,

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²² See Kalamu ya Salaam’s review of the motion picture *Bird*, in which he points out the stereotypical characterisation of morality and lifestyle of jazz musicians in the film’s depiction of Charlie Parker’s life as well as in other popular cultural images (1988). This article won Salaam the ASCAP-Deems Taylor Award for excellence in music journalism in 1989.
writers such as Gabbard (1995, p. 2) have posed the question whether, even though jazz histories are often flawed and may be grossly inaccurate, they could be examined critically in order to come to an understanding of how American culture has used and received the music of black Americans. A closer look at some specific examples of early jazz writing may be revealing. Unpacking these myths gives insight into the ways in which many of the mythologies of New Orleans music have found their way into mainstream culture.

**Case studies**

Just as the search for ‘purity of origin’ has led to the model ‘birth of jazz,’ the search for the influence of European musical forms on black music has contributed to the attempt to sort out which elements of jazz were African and which were European, and how they came to meet. This approach has led almost all historians of popular music to concern themselves with two factors seen to be crucial in the origins of jazz: African dancing in Congo Square (the influence of African music on African-Americans), and the Jim Crow laws of the 1890s (the social integration of African-Creoles and African-Americans, more specifically the influence of ‘country blues’ on ‘more refined’ Creole music, seen as more European). The following case studies trace the work of Henry Kmen and Jerah Johnson on these two themes. In addition, a shorter case study will be presented on the proliferation of military band instruments left behind by troops demobilised in New Orleans (the influence of European instrumentalisation on African-Americans). An investigation of the treatment of these three themes in popular music texts will help to illuminate why these events have been read as they have by popular music scholarship, why music historians have continued to misread these activities, and the significance of this position. At the very least, the exercise will show why researchers interested in New Orleans must use existing texts with care.

**Case One: Congo Square**

Congo Square is a place mentioned in almost every genealogy of jazz. A review of how this site has been represented in music writings will point out how a
preoccupation with the search for the antecedents of one particular genre -- jazz -- has radically affected academic interpretations of the evolution of music and dance in New Orleans. In practically all early jazz histories, and many recent ones, Congo Square is referred to as the place where, up until the 1880s, black New Orleanians performed African dances, as they were performed in Africa; according to these accounts, the dances and music of Congo Square were heard by and influenced, among others, a young Buddy Bolden (1877-1931), considered by many as the first jazz musician.

Contemporary accounts confirm that African dancing was permitted by the authorities in New Orleans from the city’s earliest days, in contrast to the English colonies, where African cultural activities were often suppressed. The most famous of these contemporary accounts is architect Benjamin Latrobe’s rich description of a visit to the city in 1819 (Latrobe, 1951, pp. 21-25, 49-51). While walking with a friend up St. Peter’s Street along Bayou St. John, on a Sunday afternoon, Latrobe heard a ‘most extraordinary noise’ that could be heard for blocks around, which he ‘supposed to proceed from some horse mill, the horses trampling on a wooden floor’ but instead he found ‘five or six hundred persons assembled in an open space or public square.’ He described the crowd as gathering in a series of clusters, with members of each cluster crowded around to form a rough circle ‘the largest not ten feet in diameter,’ with two or three musicians and two to a dozen dancers in each circle. The thunderous din that Latrobe had mistaken for horses hooves came from the percussive sounds of gourds, drums, wooden blocks and the variety of string instruments played by the musicians. Latrobe’s description is accompanied by sketches of the instruments and the people that he observed selling their wares there.

Though it has also been confirmed by contemporary accounts that dancing and music continued for many years, jazz historians have persisted in ignoring evidence as to when the practice ceased, and in doing so have contributed to the

historicising of a myth that African dance extended into the 1890s and to the moment of the ‘birth of jazz.’ Even though local historians, such as Henry Kmen (1972), have pointed out major flaws in the portrayal of activities in Congo Square, this research continues to be ignored by many popular music academics. Dominated by the quest for explanations for jazz’s ‘birth,’ generally agreed to have emerged in the 1890s, jazz historians have looked for any events that could explain its emergence at that particular point in time. It appears that activities in Congo Square have become one of the historical events altered to explain this date.

Kmen noted the error of this interpretation in his 1972 article, where he writes, ‘In book after book of jazz history, one sees the gospel of Congo Square accepted without question and often enlarged a little’ (p. 5). He traces the origins of this ‘gospel’ to three pioneering works in jazz: Jazzmen, edited by Frederick Ramsey, Jr. and Charles Edward Smith; Jazz from the Congo to the Metropolitan, by Robert Goffin (1944) and Shining Trumpets by Rudi Blesh (1946). In Jazzmen, jazz historians Bill Russell and Stephen Smith begin their essay with a description of Congo Square:

A century ago, slaves met there every Saturday and Sunday night to perform the tribal and sexual dances which they had brought with them from the Congo (1939, p. 5).

(Kmen points out that there is no record of night dancing and no dancing on Saturdays; the dances were held on Sunday afternoons.) Then Russell and Smith make the connection that jazz historians continue to make today:

The leader of the first great orchestra, Buddy Bolden, was already in his teens before the Congo dances were discontinued’ (1939, p. 8,9).24

In the preface to the book, it states ‘In New Orleans you could still hear the Bamboula on Congo Square when Buddy Bolden cut his first chorus on cornet.’ And this, says Kmen, ‘became the first article of faith in the bible of jazz’ (ibid., 1972, p. 5).

24 In Mr. Jelly Roll, Alan Lomax wrote: ‘African drumming was still to be heard at voodoo dances on Congo Square where Jelly was born (1944, p. 78). and in Jazz Masters of New Orleans, Martin Williams wrote: ‘Buddy Bolden was seven years old when the dances at Congo Square were stopped’ (1967, p. 10).
Kmen traced the origin of the myth of Congo Square to a 1936 book entitled *The French Quarter: An Informal History of the New Orleans Underworld* by Herbert Asbury in which, in a chapter on Congo Square, the author quotes at length an unnamed writer for the *New York World* who had witnessed a dance on a Sunday afternoon as late as the mid 1880s not in Congo Square, but in a back yard on Dumaine Street:

A dry goods box and an old pork barrel formed the orchestra. These were beaten with sticks or bones, used like drum sticks so as to keep up a continuous rattle while some old men and women chanted a song that appeared to me to be purely African in its many voweled syllabification ... owing to the noise I could not even attempt to catch the words. I asked several old women to recite them to me, but they only laughed and shook their heads. In the patois they told me 'no use, you could never understand it. C'est le Congo! The dance was certainly peculiar, and I observed that only a few old persons, who had probably all been slaves, knew how to dance it (Asbury 1936, pp. 252-253).

In *Jazzmen*, the authors take this description almost word for word, except that they omit reference to Dumaine Street and older people, leaving the impressions that this description refers to young people dancing in Congo Square. Five years later, in *Jazz: From the Congo to the Metropolitan*, published in 1944, Goffin reprints the same quote, this time exactly, but he adds:

After 1880 the tradition of the dances in Congo Square continued [but] came to an end when the city administration divided the place into lots. Henceforth, on Sunday afternoons, the Negroes of the town came together in an abandoned yard on Dumaine Street (p. 17).

And, he adds, Buddy Bolden 'played cornet in a local band where he learned quadrilles, polkas and mazurkas, which he played spontaneously with the syncopated inspiration of the Congo Square tradition.' Goffin believed he had found evidence of the link between Congo Square and jazz in an article by George Washington Cable, 'Dance in Place Congo,' which appeared in *Century* magazine in 1886. Commenting on the piece, Goffin said, 'For the first time, we have written proof that song tunes were an integral part of the ceremonies' (ibid., p. 27). But according to Cable’s biographer, Arlin Turner, Cable was not reporting on anything he had seen himself in New Orleans, but instead drew from Moreau’s descriptions
of dances held in Saint-Domingue years earlier, guessing that the same dances probably were performed also in Louisiana (Turner 1980, pp. 228-235).\footnote{For his description of the Congo Square dances, Cable used Médéric Louis Elie Moreau de Saint-Méry’s \textit{Description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie française de l’Île Saint-Domingue}, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1797-1798) and \textit{De la Danse} (Parma, 1801) by the same author; both were second-hand descriptions of Saint-Domingue (later Haiti) dances. As Johnson points out (p. 144) though Cable was a careful researcher, it remains that he was writing long after the dances had ceased, and quoting a second-hand account, so his descriptions should be used with care.}

In 1946, Rudi Blesh, in the influential jazz history \textit{Shining Trumpets}, wrote:

\begin{quote}
... it is a matter of record that drumming went on from about 1817 until the middle 1880s in New Orleans Circus [i.e. Congo] Square. In 1870, freshly landed slaves were at hand and African dancing and ceremonial music were still continued in Congo Square (2$^{\text{nd}}$ ed. rev. 1958, p. 157).
\end{quote}

This could hardly have been the case since the importation of slaves was made illegal in 1814 and the \textit{Emancipation Proclamation} freed all slaves in 1862. Blesh goes on to proclaim, ‘much has been made of the fact that Buddy Bolden was a boy when the Congo Square activity reached its last stages of decline in the 1890s.’ Although he can be supported in his statement that ‘much has been made of’ the Bolden/Congo Square connection, his assertion that it is ‘fact’ is less supportable.

The two histories of jazz that appeared in 1952 continue the story. Rex Harris in \textit{Jazz} reproduces the material on Congo Square from \textit{Jazzmen} (including the mistaken assertion about Congo dancing on Saturday and Sunday nights and the quote from the \textit{New York World}) as does Ulanov’s \textit{A History of Jazz in America}, but with what Kmen calls ‘a faint awareness that it was not all that simple and that there might be a historical problem here’ (Kmen 1972, p.7).

Marshall Stearns’s \textit{The Story of Jazz} appeared in 1956. A scholar and academic, nevertheless Stearns, too, uses the available texts as sources: ‘public performances by negroes in an empty lot known as Congo Square occurred off and on from 1817 to 1885.’ Stearns then goes on to give essentially, and in places exactly, the same descriptions that appeared in the previous references from the original article described in \textit{Jazzmen}. He adds Latrobe’s eyewitness account of
Congo Square in 1819, but he too uses Cable and assumes that Cable was describing events in 1886, rather than from another time and place.

Kmen ends his survey of jazz historiography on Congo Square with Gunther Schuller’s *Early Jazz: Its Roots and Musical Development* (1968, pp. 3, 4) in which Schuller acknowledges as ‘well substantiated’ the links between Place Congo and jazz, but calls for more research and documentation on the details, although he does not call into question the original thesis in *Jazzmen*. All these influential jazz histories, therefore, derive their evidence of a link between Congo Square and Buddy Bolden (and the birth of jazz) from three sources: Cable, Hearn and the unnamed writer in the *New York World*. All the other references are drawn from these three initial descriptions. Turner’s evidence shows that Cable was writing about another place, and in the past. As to the unnamed *New York World* article, Kmen gives a good case, comparing descriptions and writing style, for the writer also being Lafcadio Hearn. So, as Kmen has written, the whole story of Congo Square dancing lasting until the 1880s and being heard by and directly influencing Buddy Bolden and other early jazz musicians ‘boils down to one observer who saw a few elderly dancers in a back yard around the year 1880’ (Kmen 1972, p. 13).

Although written over twenty-five years ago, Kmen’s work, in which he points out these major flaws in the story of Congo Square, has been ignored by many subsequent popular music writings, which continue to support a particular reading of the origins of jazz.²⁶ Some authors appear to have realised at least something of the problem which arises when Congo Square activities are moved up in time; however, rather than opting for further research, they have responded to the questioning of the old story by simply downplaying Congo Square in general, and the wider significance of the Square is therefore omitted. The reason for this omission might lie in the fact that the Square’s significance is in fact ‘broader’ than

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²⁶ See, for instance Finn (1992, p. 96), who quotes Ashbury and Cable, and talks about Congo Square dancing ‘two decades after the Civil War’; Davis (1995, p. 181) who writes of Congo Square as the site of slave auctions; Turner (1994, p. 13) in the expanded edition of *Remembering Song*, first published in 1982) on African dancing in Congo Square up until 1885, and on Sidney Bechet ‘born in 1897, more than a decade after the dances had ceased.’
jazz, and, by omitting the Congo Square conundrum, jazz historians can ensure that New Orleans music and dance remain in a space where they can control it. However, researchers in New Orleans have recently shown that, through historical reappraisal, a further, in-depth look at this place -- a sacred place to the people of New Orleans -- can broaden the study of US-American popular music in general.

*The Significance of Congo Square*

With a little effort, finding more information on the evolution of the area known as Congo Square is not difficult. In Marcus Christian’s material, for instance, there are many references to Place Congo. But the point is not (or not merely) one of chronological accuracy. By keeping Congo Square’s activities reasonably close to the emergence of jazz, jazz historiography could disregard any other significance the Square might have. If we move these activities back in time, however, we can see that, as historian Jerah Johnson (1991), using Christian and other works, has shown, the significance of Congo Square goes beyond just the development of jazz to add to an understanding of the physical growth of the early city, its economic development and the formation of its social and ethnic configurations.

Important for consideration here is the Square’s role in the city’s musical development; perhaps more important, it identifies a point of origin -- Johnson says, probably the major point of origin -- of modern American dance, a practice he calls ‘as distinctly unique as jazz and yet much less studied’ (ibid., p. 120). But rather than merely shift the focus from music to dance, it is important to see Congo Square as the site of the evolution of a particular set of performance practices, in one place, over time, and to consider what this might mean for US-American history. Rather than do this, much jazz historiography has used Congo Square in a very limited way, in a search for an elusive ‘point of origin’ or in an attempt to sort out the European from African components of the music, both strategies that

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27 It is also interesting as a way to look at how the city has long used its cultural activities for economic development through tourism.
attempt to see the culture of New Orleans as bound in time and space, rather than seeing the Square as a site of a constant moving, changing performance through replacement. But, as Johnson points out, a much more useful approach would be to look at the site as an opportunity to study the continuous activities of a group of people from different cultures brought together in a certain historical space through 150 years of political and economic change, since it is a public space with a continuous, largely documentable history.

It is true to some extent, as Roach has remarked, that ‘any public market becomes a site of cultural self-invention, exchange and performance...’ But this was no ordinary market; as Roach himself continues, ‘this patch of ground on the boundary of the colonial city of New Orleans, now generally known to historians of dance and music as Congo Square, witnessed a particularly intense series of transformations and surrogations in its function as a behavioral vortex’ (1996, p. 64).

Congo Square was located outside the original city walls at the back end of Orleans Avenue, six blocks from the Mississippi River and Jackson Square in what is today known as Armstrong Park [see Appendix p. 291], and for many years it was an important site for enslaved New Orleanians of African descent. At the same time, for over a century its activities involved a large number of New Orleanians of many ethnicities and conditions. The area was not originally designed as a place of dance, but rather as an unofficial public marketplace, once a site for the feasts of the Poucha-Houmma Indians (Kendall, 1922, vol. 2, p. 679), where enslaved Africans, free people of colour and Native Americans mingled and sold their goods. Gradually, as people came together for the market, other activities evolved: dancing and singing, as well as socialising and ballplaying. It was not a landscaped area, but rather an open, grass-covered field, between the city walls and the
swampy ground leading to Bayou St. John. It was called for a while after the Louisiana Purchase ‘La Place Publique.’

As mentioned in Chapter One, for twenty years or more after its founding in 1699, France’s Louisiana colony faced starvation regularly. During its first decade, the colony depended on the local indigenous population for food and several times the colony had to be dispersed to live among the Native American communities when the food ran out. Throughout the colonial period, indeed from its earliest days, the local indigenous population marketed food to the town. At the same time, Louisiana’s *Code Noir* (1742, Paris) exempted the enslaved Africans from forced labour on Sundays and religious holidays; later this also included Saturday afternoons, giving them time to grow their own crops for market. The planters often had difficulty providing for the enslaved, and so, in moving to make them more self-sufficient, they began to assign them individual parcels of land to grow food. Other slaves fished, made baskets, or began to hire themselves out for wages and then take their wares into the market and sell them. Thus slaves came early to be recognised as having the right to make money, and use their free time virtually as they saw fit, with little or no supervision.

By the 1740s, slave peddlers had organised a market at the site of Congo Square. The enslaved population of the city at this time was about 3,000 black men, women and children (to about 1,600 of European descent). As is made clear in Hall’s work (1992a, pp. 275-313), the dominant Bambara had brought a long-established tradition of trade and city marketing with them to the New World. Here it encountered the marketing practices of the Native Americans, leading to an interaction between the communities which Johnson describes as ‘one of the most notable characteristics of New Orleans colonial history.’ Most African slaves were

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28 The name ‘Congo Square’ came late in the Nineteenth Century around the time of the Cotton Exposition in 1882, an early example of the marketing of local cultural activities for tourist consumption.

29 Although slaves were allowed to trade in South Carolina’s low country, and slaves did not work on Sundays throughout the South, only in French Louisiana were slaves recognised as having the right to use their free time as they wished without supervision. See Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black*, (Chapel Hill, 1968); Jeffrey R. Brackett, *The Negro in Maryland*, (Baltimore, 1889).
male and many (encouraged by Louis XIV’s government) married Native American women. Consequently there developed an unusually high degree of intermixing of the two groups and their cultures, a situation that by the end of the Nineteenth Century had resulted in the absorption of the local indigenous populations into the New Orleans black community.

Treme, the neighbourhood where Congo Square lay, was New Orleans’s largest and most important free black neighbourhood. Consequently, Congo Square’s Sunday crowds came virtually entirely from the Creole community. Vendors set up on Sunday mornings, and crowds of enslaved and free gathered on Sunday afternoon to trade, shop, watch the ballplay and the African dances. When the Americans flooded into New Orleans after Louisiana became a United States territory in 1803, they were fascinated and appalled to see a market run by slaves, as well as the large number of free people of colour, some bearing arms and consorting intimately with the enslaved, who themselves enjoyed an unprecedented degree of freedom of movement and action. The Sunday dances became the focus of Anglo-American concern and indignation (thus, as Roach points out, joining in the performance by ‘acting out’ their whiteness). Elsewhere African music and dance had long acculturated to Anglo-American norms or, under pressure from the Southern Protestant churches, been banned altogether. Only in Place Congo in New Orleans was the African tradition able to continue in the open.

The African and African-American dances in Congo Square continued through the 1830s and 1840s, but were pressured by the growing American influence. At the same time, the younger generation, in performing the dances of their elders, transformed the dancing and the music, while also incorporating

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30 Throughout its history, however, the city has had a uniquely mixed housing pattern, with people of varied ethnicity and affluence living side by side.


32 Kmen cited virtually all known references to African dancing in Congo Square in his Music in New Orleans: The Formative Years, 1781-1841 (1966); many of these references also note the apprehension toward unsupervised slaves.
elements of European and American styles into their dances. Through time, the market function of the place also evolved and was weakened as a result of competition from the French Market at the river, the city council’s abolition of the racquettes games and an increase in night-time crime. In 1852, the American (English-speaking) political faction beat out the French-speaking Creoles and took control of the city government. In 1856, an ordinance was adopted making it unlawful to ‘beat a drum, blow a horn, or sound a trumpet’ in the city, prohibiting public balls, dances and entertainments without permission from the mayor. The dances in Congo Square ended gradually, as the city grew physically and changed in character. There is no mention of activities on the square after 1856. From the appearance a few years later of the Mardi Gras Indian tribes and many other manifestations of African-influenced music and dance, we can assume that the musicmaking did not totally die out due to the government’s ban, but like other Creole cultural activities, such as benevolent societies, went underground to emerge later.

As Johnson points out, to have existed intact as late as 1856 was a remarkable achievement, and the factors contributing to the long survival of traditional African dances in New Orleans were major factors affecting the wider culture also: the high degree of French tolerance and accommodation in the new world to subcultures generally; the traditions of slave markets throughout the Spanish colonies, making the slave market in New Orleans a familiar activity for colonial governments (especially during the Spanish period) rather than the anomaly it appeared to the Anglo-Americans; the city’s isolation and its geographical remoteness from centres of United States after the Louisiana Purchase (1803); the extraordinarily large proportion of people of African descent in the city’s population, outnumbering the European population from 1760 to 1840; and finally the inordinate preoccupation and fascination of the city’s French Creole host culture with dancing of all kinds (1991, p. 133). The significance of this

From the early days, visitors had reported seeing a variety of dances in the Square, with French and African
historical place is that cultural activities, such as dancing, occurred long enough for an assimilation process to take place, transforming the culture of this particular group of Africans, a culture that was uniquely homogeneous in contrast to experiences elsewhere in the New World, but one which was also open to drawing on cultural activities of other Africans, Native Americans and Europeans.\(^{34}\) Here was dancing and music that owed a large debt to Africa, but as Roach has pointed out, was no longer of it, ‘living proofs of its impermanence and unforgettability ... a displaced transmission, rising, Phoenix-like, from the ashes of diaspora and genocide on the wings of song’ (1996, p. 66). In a sense, Congo Square sums up much of what is unique about the New Orleans experience. As Johnson says:

The Afro-American meld that came out of Congo Square differed primarily and importantly in that it occurred not in the rural Anglo-Saxon Protestant setting that usually hosted the transformation process, but in a French, Creole, Catholic city recently become a part of the United States (1991, p. 157).

That fact added an extra, complex step in the process. In other words, in New Orleans, in the formative stage of the particular African-American culture that emerged in that place, there was first a blending of African, Native American and French, plus German and Spanish, cultural elements. Only later was the African-American and American cultural meld of the nation at large added to the blend.

This brief case study of Congo Square demonstrates how a deeper study of the cultural practices of New Orleans can be used for broader issues than merely as footnotes in the history of jazz. It also points out the theoretical inappropriateness of applying notions drawn from Western cultural theory to cultural activities from outside that tradition. Notions of a ‘seamless history,’ or an erasure of what went before, are both inadequate for a study of the fragmentation and reassembly evident in the cultural activities of this Franco-African colonial city.

\(^{34}\) See for example Berlin’s ‘Time, Space, and the Evolution of Afro American Society’ (February 1980).
Case Two: Jim Crow Laws

A second common assumption repeated by many popular music historians is that the Jim Crow\textsuperscript{35} laws of the 1890s had a significant role in the emergence of jazz, by forcing the Franco-Africans of New Orleans to interact for the first time with the predominantly Protestant Anglo-Africans. Historian Jerah Johnson has researched this claim, and his findings point out the importance of an understanding of the complex historical and political development of the city in any study of the development of popular music in New Orleans (Johnson 1995).

Most jazz historians write -- and there is wide agreement -- that the Anglo-African group was made up of mostly enslaved people of colour who were brought to New Orleans by Americans entering Louisiana after the 1803 Louisiana Purchase\textsuperscript{36}; that after the Civil War and Emancipation, the descendants of this group continued their language, religion and musical traditions; and that they were generally less prosperous and less educated than the black Creoles, or more correctly, the Franco-Africans. There is also general agreement that during the ante-bellum decades and for nearly thirty years during and immediately after Reconstruction,\textsuperscript{37} New Orleans was less rigidly segregated than other Southern cities and ‘racial’ lines were far from rigid. This did not mean, however, that there were no divisions within black New Orleans: on the contrary, according to this interpretation, the uptown English-speaking Anglo-Africans and the downtown French-speaking Creoles of colour were essentially separate cultures. Then in the 1890s, these two communities grew together, often in the red light district of Storyville, so by the turn of the century, they were in effect one. The writers say that this blending of the music of the two groups gave rise to musical styles often

\textsuperscript{35}Jim Crow, as defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is ‘to segregate persons ethnically, to discriminate against (blacks or other non-whites); so Jim Crowing, or Jim Crowism, is the institution of segregation, the practice of ‘racial’ discrimination. See C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (1957).

\textsuperscript{36} Although some African-American free people of colour immigrated to the state before the Civil War.

\textsuperscript{37} *Reconstruction* is the term given to the period after the American Civil War, in which the South was divided into military districts and a series of Congressional writs, called the Reconstruction acts, were passed to ensure the South’s loyalty to the United States.
called New Orleans jazz. Though this is basically what happened, problems arise in the explanation which is given for why the two black communities came together. At this point, jazz writers, looking for a simple explanation for a complex situation, introduced an error in their reasoning that persists.

Johnson writes that the problem begins with Alan Lomax’s 1950 book Mr. Jelly Roll, which outlined the history of New Orleans jazz that writers ever since have used as the basis for an ever-expanding story of the evolution of jazz. Lomax noted the two different groups of New Orleanians of African descent, but in defining them in terms of colour rather than ethnicity, he planted what Johnson termed the ‘seed of error.’ Another ‘seed of error’ of Lomax, according to Johnson, was his assertion that ‘by the 1890s Creoles of New Orleans were being pushed out of their old trades and down on the social scale, and began to turn to music as a livelihood’ (Lomax, p. 79). Lomax himself gave no explanation of why this was happening at that particular time. Subsequently, popular music writers, looking for reasons for this development, noticed that 1890s was the decade when white Southerners reimposed racial segregation by means of a series of Jim Crow laws. They then jumped to the conclusion that these new laws accounted for the economic decline of the Creole community. Johnson (1995, unpublished) calls this a ‘seriously misleading error’ that has persisted in popular music academic writing, emerging from the misunderstanding of the two groups of black New Orleanians that lived in the city at that time: the French-speaking, Catholic Creoles, a group made up of free people of colour as well as enslaved, usually assigned residence in ‘downtown’ New Orleans38; and the English-speaking Protestants, said to live ‘uptown.’39 Johnson chronicles how once in print, the misconception snowballed.

38 ‘Downtown’ is the area of the city down river from Canal Street.

39 Although before the Civil War, Creoles lived in the virtually autonomous Creole municipal districts of New Orleans created in 1836, and by the 1850s, around 80 percent of the adult free male black population of the downtown districts were Creole, and around 80 percent of the same group were Americans in the uptown districts (Logsdon and Bell 1992 p. 208), by the 1890s housing patterns had become more fluid.
With each repetition, the misinterpretation, or better said, misrepresentation, became more and more elaborate and moved further and further from the mark (1995, p. 3).

Tracing the path of the historicising of myth, he cites a veritable roll call of classic jazz history texts. In 1956 Marshall W. Stearns, in *The Story of Jazz*, noting increasing racial discrimination after Reconstruction, thought he had found a connection to the genesis of jazz:

Creoles of color were hard hit. Bit by bit they were pushed out of any job a white man could use, and they lost their place in the downtown ... eventually and against their will, they went uptown and ‘sat in’ with their darker brothers’ (1956, p. 63).

In 1958, Samuel B. Charters, in *Jazz New Orleans, 1885-1957*, wrote:

In 1894, the problem was aggravated by the enactment of legislative code No 111 which included the coloured Creoles in the broad restrictions of racial segregation ... the proud, volatile Creoles found themselves forced into the uptown neighborhoods and there began an intensive struggle to maintain some sort of status in the hostile atmosphere (p. 148).

In 1959, Charles Edward Smith, in his essay ‘New Orleans and the Traditions in Jazz,’ talked of the stratified character of the Negro community, the segregation legislation which followed the *Plessy v Ferguson* Supreme Court decision, and the existence of a ‘sanctified red light district’ as crucial factors affecting the development of jazz throughout the early decades. All these developments, he said, ‘broke down barriers’ between uptown and downtown communities (Smith 1959, p. 35).

In *Jazz Masters of New Orleans* (1967, p. 10), Martin Williams mentions the ‘hard times’ Creoles had after the Civil War and the consequent combining of Creole and American traditions of music to form jazz. Phil Johnson draws in the issue of Storyville in his account: ‘Storyville broke down the color line ... between the down-

Jerah Johnson is especially critical of *Bourbon Street Black* by Jack V. Buerkle and Danny Barker, published in 1973, which he calls a ‘vast error-filled field from which subsequent writers would, time and time again, glean and repeat one mistake after another’ (1995, p. 5). For example, Buerkle and Barker write:

On April 12, 1861, the situation changed drastically with the start of the Civil War which brought to an end the political and economic influence of Creoles of color in New Orleans. Events transpired that culminated in the disenfranchisement of the colored Creoles, the destruction of their vast economic holdings, and the introduction of a newly enforced racial segregation. The Louisiana Legislative Code No. 111 designated that anyone of any African ancestry was Negro. This was irony supreme. A war that was supposed to clip the shackles from the black man had indirectly led to a new restricted class of negroes ... The change was devastating for the Creole of color; it required the laborious task of creating a new self-image. With the imposition of the Code, Creole businessmen lost large numbers of their local white customers, and real estate brokers were eased out of their property. Cultural organizations requiring financial support were dissolved. The Philharmonic Society and the musicales discontinued. Creole artisans were soon completely out of the skilled trades, but some small craftsmen and shopkeepers were able to keep operating on a minimal basis, their customers being the penniless Negroes and almost equally indigent Creoles ... Money brokers became laborers, and merchants were transformed into musicians ... Now it was necessary to play music in order to earn money ... Creoles reached out for economic stability wherever they could find it. Storyville was there ... For many Creoles of colour, playing in Storyville meant a loss of status within their own community ... Many of the ‘dark’ Negroes, though, ‘didn’t give a damn’ if it was a whorehouse they were playing in ... Storyville legitimated a ‘marriage’ between the black and tan musicians ... Each liked what the other was doing and in time their musical products came to be one (pp. 9-21).

Though lengthy, this excerpt from Buerkle and Barker is useful as it contains most of the elements of the ‘Jim Crow myth’: the assumption that Creoles of colour were

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40 As Rose (1974), Souchon (1988), and Kennedy (1996) have pointed out, by the time Storyville was established, hundreds of musicians had been playing jazz for over a decade, and the number playing in Storyville was so few, the impact of its closing was minimal.
all wealthy, with ‘vast holdings’; that they were enfranchised; that the Civil War influenced the rights of the Creoles of colour; that Legislative Code no. 111 existed and defined race; that Creoles were defined by skin colour; that Storyville was where ‘black and tan’ were forced to play together by economic necessity.

Although in *Jazz, A History* (1977), Frank Tirro’s account of Congo Square reflected much of the detail that had been ignored by others, his account of the Jim Crow laws and their influence on jazz was drawn from the erroneous accounts of others, including the 1894 date. He writes:

Then, in 1894, a restrictive racial segregation code was enacted throughout the city, which included the Creoles among those segregated. The Creoles found themselves forced to live on the other side of the tracks, and there began a very passionate struggle to maintain status in a hostile atmosphere. Where there was a tendency for black music on both sides of Canal Street to be moving toward a common polished goal before this date, there was no such attempt made after the odious law was passed (1977, p. 73).

By 1978, in *The Making of Jazz: A Comprehensive History*, James Lincoln Collier could confidently write ‘the Louisiana Legislative Code 111’ signalled the downfall of the Creoles:

Driven out of whatever positions of influence they had held, out of affluence, out, eventually, of their jobs, they managed in the end to save only shards of the old Creole culture (p. 60).

Leroy Ostransky, author of *Jazz City* (1978), also focused on Louisiana Legislative Code no 111, which, he said, ‘specified that anyone with any black ancestry, however remote, would be considered black.’ Denis-Constant Martin (1991, p. 289), in an otherwise helpful reminder to study black musics in the context in which they appear, goes on to add ‘popular rural music of Southern Louisiana and an urban Creole tradition were forced to meld [italics mine] in the late Nineteenth Century and in the process consolidated a New Orleans culture strongly influence by the Caribbean.’ The problem is in the ‘forced to meld.’ This idea persists in the more recent work of Berry, Foose and Jones (1986), in *New Orleans Jazz 1993* (US National Park Service publication), and Liechtenstein and Dankner (1993).
It is clear from these examples that attributing to Jim Crow laws an important role in the formation of New Orleans jazz in the 1890s permeates the literature and has in effect become canon. New publications continue to add more detail, projecting more consequences from events that never happened, compounding the error, which derives from what Johnson has identified as two major mistakes. The first error was in not realising that while the Franco-Africans of New Orleans were comfortable with retaining their ‘separate’ status, at the same time they moved easily within other circles without disrupting membership in the group. Thus the mistake is in the assumption that because of a number of factors, including skin colour, the Franco-African and the Anglo-Africans remained wholly separate people. The two black communities of New Orleans, the Franco-African and Anglo-African, were defined by cultural traits, not skin colour. Language, religion, social convention and experience -- all the contributing features of ethnicity -- defined the two groups, not appearance. All the evidence suggests that while these cultural differences meant the two groups were separate in some things, there was ‘easy movement’ between them. Research into the emergence of the earliest black community in the city would show that this non-linear view of the world, with its acceptance of balance, duality and the union of opposites, was part and parcel of the city’s social behaviour for the whole of its history, and though difficult for those with a European bias to understand, makes it no less real for the people in the society.

The Protestant black community that came to New Orleans from other parts of the South after the 1803 Louisiana Purchase consisted mostly, but not entirely, of enslaved people; there were also a number of people in the community who were not enslaved. They were mostly rural, and English-speaking, descendants of enslaved Africans brought to the English colonies since 1619, so this group was entrenched in almost two hundred years of Anglo-American culture. Franco-Africans, on the other hand, spoke French, were urban, and descended from French colonial slaves and free people of colour. Since the French did not bring enslaved Africans to Louisiana until 1719, one hundred years after the first enslaved people arrived in the English
colonies, there was the possibility of more residual African culture in their community than in the Anglo-African community; and, as Hall has shown (1992a, p. 29), the enslaved population was generally a highly homogeneous cultural group. Most importantly, as Johnson has pointed out, physical features were never the defining factor for inclusion or exclusion from either group: as to skin colour, most Anglo-Africans, segregated and self-segregating, were darker, but there were also a number of light-skinned people within this group. And although many of the Franco-Africans had light complexions, due to the cross-ethnicity liaisons of early colonial Louisiana, still many had dark colouring (1995, p. 16).

Nor were class and status factors. Before emancipation, both groups had slaves as well as free members, and after, both included all classes. Most were labourers, artisans, craftsmen and such. Despite claims of jazz historians that they held themselves as betters, free people of colour were intimately associated with the slave population. Most had members of their families who were enslaved -- children, husbands, parents or siblings. After the war, ex-slaves and ex-\textit{nègres libres} were one group, all free, all black. Only a few isolated groups claimed exclusivity. Deeper study of the cultural and social patterns in colonial New Orleans would inform a researcher that these groups had flexible, elastic group boundaries, disallowing the basic premise that they were ever wholly separate and that their coming together was a dramatic one.

The second major error of jazz historians concerning the Jim Crow laws, according to Johnson, is in not referring to the original source, the legislation that supposedly caused all this chaos. The piece of legislation often referred to as Louisiana Legislative Code No. 111 of 1894 was actually Act 111 of the Regular Session of the Louisiana Legislature. It was in fact not a civil or criminal code at all, and it was passed in 1890, not 1894. It simply required separate railroad passenger cars for black and white patrons travelling first class. Onerous as it was, the act did not include a racial definition, nor did it mention any definition of race from elsewhere, as writers often claim. Only two other segregation laws came out of
the Louisiana Legislature during the decade of the 1890s. One outlawed interracial marriages, while others were concerned with separate black and white waiting rooms at railroad depots. Neither of these laws included any definition of race. There were no laws that took away any special privileges or special status from light-skinned Creoles of colour, since at that time the law granted no special privileges or status that could be taken away.

During Reconstruction, federal and state acts and the Louisiana Constitution of 1868 made the segregation by race of public institutions illegal. In 1877, when Reconstruction ended, segregation was imposed in the public sector. In the private sector, however, what Johnson termed a ‘crazy-quilt pattern’ of integration developed, which prevailed long after Reconstruction (op. cit., p. 15). Some hotels, restaurants, bars, theatres, social clubs and churches remained segregated during Reconstruction and afterwards, but most remained racially mixed until the eve of World War I. Says Johnson:

The point is that during and after Reconstruction, those New Orleans organisations, institutions and establishments that deemed themselves “for whites only” excluded all African-Americans, no matter what their skin colour. Light complexions conferred no special legal status or privilege on anyone known or perceived to have any African ancestry, so Jim Crow laws didn’t “reclassify” anybody (op. cit., p. 18).

Besides, the Jim Crow laws of the 1890s did not force the two groups of African descent together. They had been growing together in a slow, gradual way since before the Civil War, and this speeded up after the war, due to several factors. The geographical divisions of uptown and downtown were never rigid, and residential patterns were altered even more as masses of emancipated slaves came into the city after 1863. The language barrier broke down during Reconstruction when English became the official language of New Orleans. The late Nineteenth Century saw a growing social interaction and marriages between Anglo-Africans

41 Acts Passed by the General Assembly of the State of Louisiana at the Regular Session, 1890, pp. 63 and 113-34.
and Franco-Africans, Louis Armstrong being one example of this ‘mixed’ marriage of Creole-Catholic and American-Protestant. It was not segregation laws that forced black New Orleanians out of professions and jobs and into music. Although there was a job squeeze in 1890, it was caused by the huge influx of Italian immigrants in the 1890s competing with New Orleanians, black and white, for unskilled work. At the same time, industrial machinery was displacing skilled workers of all ethnicities throughout the United States and Europe.

By the time the Jim Crow laws became instituted in the city, around World War I, jazz had already developed. When Jim Crow finally took hold, not around 1890s but years later, what Johnson calls the ‘easy movement of groups’ which had been so prevalent in New Orleans almost died out; so too, as a consequence, did jazz, as its most creative exponents, such as Bechet, Armstrong, Morton and Oliver, searched for more tolerant places where they were able to find again a spirit of free association (op. cit., p. 17). When jazz musicians talk about the impact of segregation laws on jazz, usually they are talking about conditions in the 1920s that drove them from the city, not the 1890s (which in any case they would not have remembered). Historians have extrapolated that the laws were in effect much earlier, moving the dates to coincide with the ‘birth’ of jazz.

The damage done by this long-standing error in the literature on the history of jazz, beyond its perpetuation of stereotypes, is its contribution to the idea that jazz was a product of racial segregation, a false assumption that could effectively seal off any fruitful future investigation of early jazz. Most importantly for popular music studies, it closes off research into the connections that led to the evolution of musical styles. As Johnson has argued:

Jazz had its origins not in segregation, but in the assimilative tradition of easy interaction of peoples that prevailed in New Orleans, undiminished by the three Jim Crow laws of the 1890s ... To understand its roots requires scholarly inquiry into the peculiar urban mix of late nineteenth century New Orleans, for it was that unique mix that gave rise to the music (ibid., 1995, p. 21).
In addition, it diverts research from other aspects of the city's development, including the joint struggles for social justice by the Creoles of colour and freedmen. Johnson further points out that not until after the Civil Rights Acts of the 1960s established a new sense of freedom in New Orleans did New Orleans jazz also re-establish itself and so begin the recent revival that is exemplified most notably in the success of the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival (founded in 1971), and the careers of Wynton and Branford Marsalis, Harry Connick Jr., Terence Blanchard and Donald Harrison, as well as the rhythm and blues careers of Allen Toussaint, Aaron Neville and the Neville Brothers.

Case Three: Civil War/ Spanish War Instruments

A third assertion, repeated many times in popular music texts, is that the evolution of jazz was facilitated by the proliferation of instruments after the demobilising of military bands in New Orleans at the end of the Civil War or the Spanish-American War. Again, in a search for origins that denies process and emphasises the ‘closed-off work,’ the story goes that these instruments, cheap or free and made available to the black musicians of New Orleans, caused a surge of musicmaking that resulted in jazz’s emergence. This implies that up until this time black musicians in the city had not been exposed to European instruments, or at least could not afford them, and the sudden plethora of instruments was a catalyst for jazz. Some sources place the instruments in the pawn shops:

Cheap instruments, left behind by Confederate Army bands, filled the pawn shops (Lomax, 1950, p. 78).

Others place the instruments in the schools and give pride of place to a different conflict:

In New Orleans, a parallel development was taking place as an excellent public school music system encouraged youngsters of all races ... to take up instruments that had been donated to the schools after the Spanish American War (Ward, Rock of Ages, Rolling Stone’s History of Rock and Roll, 1989, p. 21).

Donald Clarke, in The Penguin Companion to Popular Music, also says this happened at the close of the Spanish American War of 1898 (1989, p. 600), while
Peter Gammond, in *The Oxford Companion to Popular Music*, like Lomax, cites the Civil War (‘discarded military band instruments from the Civil War’ (1991, p. 290) and ‘relics of American Civil War’ (1991, p. 421). Buerkle and Barker, on the other hand, hedge their bets:

Both the Civil War and the Spanish American War had dumped a large number of used musical instruments into pawn shops when military and naval bands dissolved in New Orleans (1973, p. 14).

Although there is some evidence that a few instruments were made available in the city during the Civil War, through the occupying Union forces, there are no records in the school board minutes of the New Orleans public schools of any gift of instruments from the United States armed forces. In fact, according to Al Kennedy, public relations co-ordinator of the New Orleans public schools and a historian of the school system, there was no instrumental instruction for black students in the New Orleans public schools until 1903, when an itinerant music teacher, Mrs. Nickerson, was hired to teach in the black schools, and no secondary education available to black students at all during this period. As Joseph Logsdon has pointed out, at the end of the Nineteenth Century, New Orleans already had more instruments per capita than any city in the United States, and they had been available throughout the century. Soldiers from the Spanish American War were mustered out in Miami and Los Angeles, not New Orleans. The idea that the Spanish American War produced enough band instruments to make a difference in the city’s musical practices shows the lengths to which historians have gone in order to centre the crucible of New Orleans musicmaking around jazz and the 1890s.

43 Raeburn 1996.
44 The military occupation of New Orleans by Union troops and Reconstruction lasted from 1863-1877.
45 Kennedy 1996.
46 Logsdon 1996.
In looking for an explanation for the emergence of jazz, particularly in a search for the origins of jazz in European music, researchers with stereotypical ideas of black musicians, coupled with a lack of knowledge of the complex social structure of New Orleans, once again have looked for a simple explanation of how African-Americans came to be exposed to European music (or how European and Creoles came to be exposed to African music). An investigation into the social and cultural history of Louisiana points out that contacts between New Orleanians of African heritage and European music and instruments had existed for over one hundred and fifty years in New Orleans, and by the time of the Spanish American War, the Protestant African-Americans had had access to music from all groups for a generation.

Significance of this treatment

These issues of representation -- or misrepresentation -- of New Orleans are significant for several reasons:

1. **Degradation of the city’s current reputation and marginalisation of contemporary music.**

   In its emphasis on the narrow thread of jazz and what jazz led to, rather than the subsequent career of the city itself, much historiography implies that any music produced in the city before the 1890s is only interesting as historical preparation for the arrival of jazz; and in addition, once jazz is ‘born’ and gone, that any musical activity in the city not directly associated with jazz’s ‘birth’ in the 1890s, no matter how innovative, is of little or no value. This includes not only the music of the many jazz players who remained or returned to the city, but also other innovative forms which existed in the city before the 1890s or any which evolved later, such as rhythm and blues, gospel, rock and roll, up to the current repertoire. This has significance for the contemporary city’s relationship with the international music industry and tourism: record industry people or music fans who come to New Orleans with the idea that the ‘real’ New Orleans music is no longer there, find
what they expect to find, and leave the many other cultural forms unnoticed (Horn 1995). More significantly, this historic treatment of music history perpetuates the notion that jazz has left, and is now firmly ‘owned’ by others, the record industry, thus denying ownership to black musicians. So whether or not there has been an organised agenda to ‘contain’ and ‘colonise’ African-American music through the invention of a rhetorical strategy known as ‘jazz,’ historical treatment of the music’s growth and development has served as functional equivalent and has done just that.

2. The neglect of research in other areas.

As mentioned earlier, the emphasis on jazz has led to the neglect of other themes: for example, the importance of dance, rhythm and blues, gospel and other influential styles, and the contribution of women to musicmaking in the city. Draper, in 1973, decried the lack of musicological study of the music of the Mardi Gras Indians:

It is a significant repertory for it is unique to North America. The predominately leader-chorus form and the progressive variation in the solo line recall West African musical models. It is also significant for it predates the development of jazz, and being a popular repertory from the birthplace of the latter form, this music may prove to be of interest to those tracing the historical developments of American musical styles (p. 15).

Rhythm and blues as a whole has received less scholarly attention than it merits. As Arnold Shaw remarked,

Although rhythm and blues is the direct and immediate source of the rock styles that have dominated popular music throughout the world for a quarter of a century (1956-1980), its unique character, historical impact, and creative artists have received limited attention and generally have been disparaged, sometimes even by well meaning historians and scholars (1980, p. 71).

The exclusion of rhythm and blues is extraordinary, considering its importance in the shaping of contemporary popular music and the contribution of New Orleans to this genre. Many of the most influential musicians and recording artists of the period are still available for interviewing, with fascinating stories to
share on creative practices of black musicians at the zenith of segregation in the American South. New Orleans’s role as a prime stop on the ‘chitlin’ circuit,’ its triad of radio, performance and recording that attracted record companies from all over the country, make it a pivotal place in the evolution of rhythm and blues and rock ‘n’ roll. In addition, though a relatively small American city, it was home to an inordinately large number of individual recording artists -- Ray Charles, Little Richard, Fats Domino, Shirley and Lee, Smiley Lewis, Professor Longhair, Allen Toussaint, the Meters, Lee Dorsey, Aaron Neville, Lloyd Price, among a legion of others.

The reason for the academic neglect may not be hard to find: to those who frame the city as an example of ‘authenticity’ in American music, rhythm and blues is an aberration, because it embraced the capitalistic ideals of the music industry. New Orleans rhythm and blues history was and is particularly rich, making its neglect doubly regrettable. The academic accounts we do have are, in Mark McKnight’s words, ‘pitifully small’ (1988, p. 126). There are exceptions, but rare within the corpus of academically generated work: Rhythm and Blues (1978), Englishman John Broven’s pioneering study of the recording industry in New Orleans in the 1950s (first entitled Walking to New Orleans); Jeff Hannusch’s series of biographies in I Hear You Knockin’ (1990); Jason Berry, Jon Foose and Tad Jones’s collaboration Up from the Cradle of Jazz (1990) which chronicles musical families and centres on New Orleans in the 1980s; and Musical Gumbo by Grace Liechtenstein and Laura Dankner (1993), with an emphasis on rhythm and blues. These provide a basic non-academic overview on contemporary music in the city.

There is an even greater lack of research on New Orleans’s gospel choirs. Disregarding this large body of musicmaking, which has been acknowledged as directly influencing other styles, such as rock and roll and rhythm and blues, is regrettable in its own right, but also minimises women’s role and influence in music in the city: most of the hundreds of choirs are administered by and made up of women (See Chapter Six). In addition, the unique situation of gospel in Catholic churches warrants investigation.
3. Funding

The prioritisation of jazz has influenced the allocation of resources, leading to initiatives limited to that style receiving a major portion of archival and research funding from national institutions, resulting in the funding of several archives dedicated to jazz in the city, and none to the city’s music generally treading familiar ground. This division of New Orleans music by style, imposed from the outside, has had major consequences in decisions on what archival material is worthy of retention and what is lost. Valuable information that concerns rhythm and blues or other musical styles is often rejected by local archives, through the dictates of their mission statements. Much of the wealth of primary source material on gospel and rhythm and blues, for instance, is in private hands, and much has been lost through neglect, death and lack of adequate archival storage. For example, in 1994, Vernon Winslow died. As Dr. Daddy-O, he had been one of the first black radio disc jockeys in America, beginning his career on New Orleans radio in 1947, bringing the early sounds of rhythm and blues to the airways. In addition, Winslow had been a popular gospel DJ for 48 years with a personal collection of thousands of gospel records and a massive repository of gospel tapes, photographs and documents. After his death, some interested parties tried to find a local archive to house his collection, but none showed interest or were allowed by their mission statements to accept ‘gospel.’ Eventually Winslow’s daughter sold a few things, boxed up the remainder and sent it to the junk yard. This is by no means an isolated incident, and the waste of valuable resources is a result of the prioritisation of one style over another by funding and academic bodies.

Other crucial research, for instance on the relationship between Caribbean music and Louisiana during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries, has been neglected due to what John Storm Roberts (1991) called the penchant of funding bodies to ‘till familiar ground,’ financing topics that have been researched previously, rather than new areas. Roberts and others have called for a general approach that takes a broader, cross-cultural view.
Ways To Overcome

To overcome some of the pitfalls of past historiography, researchers on New Orleans could do well to look for leadership to the recent historical reappraisals mentioned in Chapter One.

-- Gwendolyn Hall’s work is a reminder that it is often necessary for researchers on Louisiana to go to the original sources. The confusion in interpretation of the three case studies -- Jim Crow laws, Congo Square and military instruments -- are examples of the problems encountered when researchers depend upon other researchers’ interpretations.

-- There is a need for a commitment of time. The complex social order of New Orleans certainly requires more than a brief look for an adequate analysis. Much of the writing on New Orleans is based on short visits and superficial looks. Oral histories are available, but these are often conducted by well meaning but untrained enthusiasts.

-- More ethnographic study could certainly help to provide a more dependable textual and historical background for the study of New Orleans. In its prioritisation of global issues over local music scenes, popular music studies has offered few models with which to study musicmaking in urban settings. Work in ethnomusicology on isolated non-urban music is plentiful, but studies on the complex, overlapping musical activities in cities is scarce. The excellent works by Cohen (1991) and Finnegan (1989) have shown the depth of information that can be gleaned through ethnographic research in popular music, testing theories against lived experiences. Finnegan’s work on musicmaking in the British town of Milton Keynes has demonstrated the unexpected number and dedication of what she called ‘the hidden musicians’ in that locality, and my own experience in New Orleans of the vast networks of musicmaking that go unreported by journalists and unmentioned in cultural histories supports her work. In addition, Finnegan’s work demonstrates the advantages of looking at the city ‘holistically’ rather than through the filtered lens of genre or style. Research on music activities in New Orleans based on Cohen’s methodological strategies of ethnography and participant
observation that would allow researchers to learn about that social reality at first hand, rather than through secondary sources, would be very useful.

-- Work on cultural activities in the city has been hindered by the dominance of Western art theory in critical analysis. Finding a theoretical model that is appropriate and that does justice to African-American cultural performance would be extremely useful in looking at New Orleans, and would help avoid some of the problems that researchers have encountered in analysing and writing about the city.

**Conclusion**

In writing about New Orleans, early popular music historians were faced with a difficult task: unravelling a daunting cultural history, complex and incomplete, with little to use as source material. Unfamiliar with the social history of the Franco-African community and the city’s divergent colonial experience, trained in western musical criticism, and perhaps lacking in recognition of the very possibility of black achievement, writers searched for ground upon which they were familiar. European critical modes, unsuited to African musical styles, were evoked, while European influence and forms were emphasised.

Through the efforts of researchers willing to re-engage early texts, search out obscure colonial records, and tackle language barriers, we find a new beginning for research on New Orleans, one that opens up opportunities to listen to voices that have been heretofore silenced, those that in Marcus Christian’s words had a significant impact on this region’s ‘whole way of life.’ Armed with a useful historic reappraisal of the city, and thus a historical context upon which to comment on contemporary issues, I now turn to the search for a critical model suited to the city’s African-based musics. The next chapter will discuss how new theoretical approaches of black literary critics and black music scholars might be used to look at the music of New Orleans.
Chapter Three

Signifyin(g)

...black music is not the universal unconscious or the primitive body projected by romanticists of various stripes but rather a highly disciplined set of practices ... One of the ways of collapsing the old dichotomy that assigns intellect to European music and physicality to African based styles is to reveal the ways both mind and body are drawn up in each repertory.

--McClary and Walser, 1994, p. 76

Introduction

This chapter is concerned with the search for a theoretical model that might be used to discuss and understand musical expressive practices in New Orleans. Musical analysis as it is currently practised evolved as a way of examining western art music and may be used effectively to examine some African-American musical styles as well. However, as was shown in the last chapter, examination of musicmaking in New Orleans that has used a critique based on a westernised concept of culture -- in other words thinking of music as a set of Western texts only -- has marginalised the performance-based approach of many of the community’s musical activities. This present study emerged from an awareness of the limitations of such an approach in this context and the search for a more appropriate model. In particular, this chapter looks at the use of a critical theory that embraces improvisation, irony and doubleness -- Signifyin(g) -- and its application to an analysis of musical practices in New Orleans. This approach will not be used as if it

1 Ragtime, for instance.
had no relation to the Western tradition, but rather to point out local difference with, and against, that tradition as a concept of a received order.

The research draws on Henry Louis Gates, Jr.’s work entitled The Signifyin(g) Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism (1991) and Samuel Floyd’s suggestion that Gates’s theories might be useful in understanding African-American music (Floyd 1991, pp. 265-287). I also draw on Ingrid Monson’s very helpful work on doubleness and improvisation (1994). Monson, using Gates and Floyd in her analysis, confronts the research problem that I faced: ‘constantly aware of the dialogic and multivocal perspectives of any musical culture, yet still committed to a particular area of study ...’ how to proceed? Although her work centred on finding a way to talk about a group of musicians engaged in a particular style of music (improvisational jazz), I found it helpful in looking for a way to talk about a particular local music scene in which polymusicality is a key element.

**Henry Louis Gates, Jr.**

Other researchers in black expressive practices have agreed with Floyd when he posits that ‘traditional musicology has failed to provide useful theoretical models for understanding black music and,’ he adds, ‘perhaps any music’ (1991, p. vii) and have turned instead to literary and cultural theorists for models. One of the most significant of these literary theorists is Henry Louis Gates, Jr.. Gates’s work explored the relation of the black vernacular tradition, what he terms ‘the black person’s ultimate sign of difference’ (1988, p. xix), to the African-American literary tradition. Starting from what he felt were the limitations imposed by Western literary criticism in reading African-American literary works, his approach results in an attempt to identify a theory of criticism within the black vernacular that shapes its literary tradition, based on the principle that a literary tradition contains within itself an argument on how it could be read. By this method, he thereby escapes a Eurocentric bias in critical judgement. He based his theory on the trope of signification and Signifyin(g), using the unusual spelling of the word to emphasise that it was drawn directly from the black vernacular and to distinguish it from the
standard English signifier ‘signification,’ since the two, as Gates said, ‘have everything to do with each other and, then again, absolutely nothing’ (ibid., p. 45). In doing so, he enacted the classic confrontation between African-American culture and American culture, the confrontation of two parallel discursive universes. *Signifyin(g)*, a word used by black Americans for over a century to describe a rhetorical strategy of puns, humour and free wordplay, is a homonym of the word *signifying*. *Signify* is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as ‘To be a sign or symbol of, to represent, betoken, mean’ -- a word of order and coherence, logic and rationality; a word that means meaning itself. By use of the word ‘Signifyin(g),’ rhetoric supplants semantics, working through dialogue, reference and gesture to suggest a multitude of meanings; it can be seen as a critique of the very nature of meaning in ‘white’ English (Walser, 1995, p. 168). As Gates describes it, African-Americans ‘emptied the signifier “signification” of its received contents and filled it with their own concepts ... that stand for the system of rhetorical strategies peculiar to their own vernacular tradition’ (1988, p. 47).

Gates had noticed that a primary element of black literary practices, derived from black discursive practices, was a tendency to revise, to repeat previous works, but with a ‘spin’ on them, reflective of the wordplay of *Signifyin(g)*, and he chose the word to represent the inversion of meaning through irony and parody in many African-American literary works (ibid., p. 92). The inspiration for his theory is the trickster figure in African myth, Esu-Elegbara. In Nigeria, Benin, Brasil, Haiti and Cuba, Esu is at once the interpreter of black culture, guardian of the cross-roads, master of style and trickster. His traits are satire, parody, irony, magic, sexuality, chance, uncertainty, disruption, reconciliation, encasement, rupture and so forth. In statues, his double-voicedness is depicted by two mouths. His African-American

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2 Ralph Ellison (1964) and Houston A. Baker, Jr. (1990) are two other African-American literary theorists who have written on the usefulness of the rhetorical strategy of Signifying.

3 A *down beat* article of 7 March 1968, 38/3, read: ‘One night Billie brought the personal element into focus by “signifying,” which in Harlemese means making a series of pointed but oblique remarks apparently addressed to no one in particular, but unmistakable in intention in such a close-knit circle.’

descendant, as Gates saw it, is the Signifyin(g) Monkey, from the African-American Signifyin(g) Monkey tales. In these, the monkey is also a trickster figure, a symbol for antimediation; he tells tales attributed not to himself but to someone else in order to stir up trouble. The tales are filled with bragging, put-down, sexual innuendo, reversal of power relationships. Just as Signifyin(g) is speaking in a variety of ways, characterised by irony, needling and trickery, rather than about a specific subject, the monkey is not an information giver but a manipulator of others’ actions (Tomlinson, 1991, p. 230).

In the myths associated with these two tricksters, Gates found certain principles of formal language use and interpretation that serve as a ‘conscious articulation of a language tradition ... complete with a history, patterns of development and revision, and internal principles of patterning and organisation’ (1988, p. xxi). Gates cites the Toasts, the Dozens, Stakolee, John Henry, hip hop and rap as examples of residuals of this tradition; other examples are Bugs Bunny, the Tar Baby stories and, in New Orleans, Compair Lapin.

Marcus Christian wrote about the Lapin myth in his work on folktales of Louisiana’s enslaved people. He noted that most of the proverbs of the slaves dealt with lowly subjects such as dogs, horses, chickens and little children, the storyteller using these subjects to speak for him or herself. It was in this same spirit that the slave’s folktales made popular use of the rabbit and the goat. Christian writes:

In the days of slavery, the Negro gathered his master’s children, or his slave comrades about him and cried out, ‘Bonnefoi! Bonnefoi!’ preparatory to telling some folktale of love, cunning, treachery, or revenge. As he finished crying out his preface to the story, his audience would answer back, ‘Lapin, Lapin!’ thus implying to him that although he had exclaimed ‘Good faith! Good faith!’ they were not like the slow-witted goat, but were as wise and as cunning as Brer Rabbit, whom the Creole-speaking slaves called ‘Compair Lapin.’ After having thus made a declaration of his good faith, and upon being answered by his audience, the narrator proceeded to relate his story, which was embellished by many a ‘li di com ca,’ and ‘li fe coma ca,’ meaning ‘he said like that,’ and ‘he did like that’ (Christian, unpublished, p. 33).

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5 See Chapter One.
The Compair Lapin folktales of Louisiana frequently point to a moral, or satirise a human weakness. More often, however, they attempt to illustrate the effectiveness, cunning and craftiness of weaker insects, animals, or fowl against the boastfulness of the strong. Very often they ‘play both ends against the middle,’ and hint that one may survive, and even thrive, in a hostile environment. In most cases, they are wholesome tales in which the shrewd underdog eventually triumphs, tales in which the meek, defenceless and inoffensive little rabbit, Compair Lapin, masters the situation as the stories come to a close.

An example is the tale of the elephant and the whale who, at Compair Lapin’s urging, agreed to divide the earth between themselves, one taking the land, the other the sea, as Compair Lapin sets them in a tug-of-war against each other, making each believe that he was pulling the cow of Compair Lapin out of a bag. In another tale, the wily Lapin is again triumphant when he sets the two things he dreads most in the world, the earthworm and the elephant, against each other. After the two had fought into a state of helplessness, he finally disposes of them, later observing to his slower-witted friend, Compair Bouki: ‘You see, my friend, when two fellows are in your way, you must make them fight, then you will always save your skin.’ Thus the stories often tell of empowerment of the weak against the strong by the use of wit.

Compair Lapin is the Louisiana equivalent of the Signifyin(g) Monkey tales which would have been familiar to children raised in the Anglo-South. The duality of the Signifyin(g) Monkey (and Esu-Elegba) serves as the basis for Gates’s theory. The Monkey’s language of Signifyin(g) functions as a ‘metaphor for formal revision, or intertextuality, within the Afro-American literary tradition’ (ibid., p. xxi), a trope by which to represent black literary culture’s vernacular theorising of itself. The theory of Signifyin(g) arises from these moments of self-reflection. The Signifier is not the information giver, but rather the manipulator of others’ information, taking a mediating position between or among texts. Thus, Signifyin(g) is an

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6 Samuel Floyd recalls hearing the tales as a child in Florida (1995, p. 3).
engagement with preceding texts to ‘create a space’ for one’s own, representing strategies by which text or voice finds its place between (among) differing discourses. As Gates points out, ‘the word in languages is half someone else’s; it becomes one’s own only when the speaker populates it with his own intuition, his own account’ (1988, p. 1). So, Signifyin(g) operates on three levels: (1) it is a theme in some African-American literature, (2) it is a set of rhetorical strategies that occur throughout formal and informal black American discourse and (3) it is a black metaphor for intertextuality (ibid., p. 59).

Elizabeth Wheeler (1991, p. 196) points out what Gates recognised as the strong similarities between the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin’s theories of popular speech and the structures of black expression, declaring, for instance, that the African-American theory of Signifyin(g) is ‘fundamentally related’ to Bakhtin’s definitions of hidden polemic and parody. Bakhtin, writing in the era of Stalinist repression, would have been very aware of the usefulness of language that avoided direct confrontation and made space for the expression of powerless people.

Gary Tomlinson has suggested that Gates’ theories are particularly useful for students of black musical traditions since Signifyin(g) ‘brings into the realm of theory manifestations of African-American expressive culture that are usually excluded by Eurocentric theorising (blues, rap, the dozens, Signifyin(g) Monkey stories, etc.).’ This is important because by bringing such cultural acts into a theoretical reality, the theory of Signifyin(g) also restructures everything else in that reality, challenging the received order of what we know (Tomlinson 1991, p. 233). Tomlinson continues, ‘Gates conceived of this effect as a metaexample of Signifyin(g): by naming the black tradition from within itself, we revise and rename all the other traditions with which it (and its vernacular theory) interact’ (ibid., p. 238). From Houston Baker’s point of view the matter can be stated somewhat differently:

By truly perceiving the selectivity of our tropological models of the world, we become not only more comprehending of the things embraced by our tropes, but also more cognisant of the things excluded from them (quoted in Tomlinson, 1991, p. 234).
In this way, Signifyin(g) urges us to recognise the partiality of all theory and, at the same time, of the multiplicity of individual theories possible. As Merdinke puts it, ‘What one gets is ... a decisive critique of traditional methods of correlating the same to the other’ (as quoted in Tomlinson, 1991, p. 37).

Wheeler draws attention to the basic difference between Signifyin(g) and the classical ideals of Western art. Since the Hellenistic revival of the Renaissance, Western critics have privileged what Bakhtin calls the ‘well wrought urn, the closed off work that erases signs of its predecessors’ (1984, p. 199). In popular musicology, this is manifest whenever there is a preoccupation with composer and score, originals, the new, the ‘unique’. Bakhtin describes body imagery in the classical aesthetic:

The body of the new canon is merely one body, no signs of duality have been left. It is self sufficient, it speaks its name alone (1968, p. 317).

In contrast, Bakhtin calls the older tradition the grotesque aesthetic, an insistence on transformation.

The grotesque body ... is a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body (ibid.).

Wheeler points out that this fragmentation and reassembly describe both black music and black history, what she calls the classic modus operandi of black art: take a given form, strip it down, reinvent it (1991, p.199). For Gates, this fragmentation and reassembly have great significance:

Ours is an extraordinarily self-reflexive tradition, because of the experience of diaspora, the fragments that contain the traces of coherent system of order must be reassembled ... To reassemble fragments is to engage in an act of speculation, to attempt to weave a fiction of origins and subgeneration ... to render the implicit as explicit, and at times to imagine the whole from the part. Repetition and revision are fundamental to black artistic forms (Gates 1988, p. xxiv).

**Musical Signifyin(g)**

Samuel Floyd proposes that this literary device of Signifyin(g) might be useful as an interpretative strategy for reading black music, and indeed suggests
that this mode of inquiry could show black music a ‘much more complex and
textured art than has been revealed by traditional and inappropriate analytical
procedures’ (1991, p. 285). Floyd defines musical Signifyin(g) as more than
borrowing, varying and restating, or simple reworking of pre-existing material.
Signifyin(g), says Floyd, *transforms* the material, by using it rhetorically or
figuratively -- by trifling, teasing, or censuring it in some way, or using it for paying
homage, goading, making fun of a musical style through parody, pastiche,
implication, indirection, humour, tone- or word-play, the illusions of speech or
narration and other troping mechanisms (p. 271). As Gates (1988, pp. 48,49)
described Signifyin(g) as engaging in certain rhetorical games, so Floyd suggests
musical Signifyin(g) might show reverence (or irreverence) toward previous musical
values, thus reflecting the mutability of the expressive structures and strategies
that exist in various aspects of African-American culture.7

Other aspects of Gates’s theories relate closely to jazz, particularly in the
practice of jazz artists paying homage through performance. Gates calls parody
‘motivated Signifyin(g)’ as opposed to the use of pastiche, which he calls
‘unmotivated Signifyin(g),’ not an absence of intention, but rather an absence of
negative critique, and the relation between parody and pastiche seen as that
between motivated and unmotivated Signifyin(g).8 Says Gates, ‘The most salient
analogue for this unmotivated mode of revision in the broader black cultural
tradition might be that between black jazz musicians who perform each other’s
standards ... not to critique those but to engage in refiguration as an act of homage
... This form of the double-voiced implies unity and resemblance rather than
critique and difference’ (Gates 1988, p. xxvii).

7 Though borrowing, varying, restating, reworking of pre-existent material are not exclusively found in African-
American music, for instance being characteristic of the 18th-century Baroque tradition, these features are
frequently employed, in African-American literary and musical practice, for specific purposes of
communication, often, but not always, to project a double meaning. Gates has pointed out that this feature of
double meaning in cultural expression has a protective tendency not usually found in European literature
that might have been a necessary and useful language device for an enslaved and oppressed group to
communicate meaning while avoiding direct responsibility.

8 Rather than the terms ‘motivated’ and ‘unmotivated,’ more useful terms might be ‘critical’ and ‘uncritical,’
since pastiche, however much a reverential act, must be a deliberate one.
Floyd (1991) and Monson (1994) found ‘Signifyin(g)’ rhetorical or figurative musical devices a major feature of many black musical forms. Some examples are:

- taking the music and inverting the meaning
- reworking standards in new, innovative ways
- using quotations of tunes (or solos) within other tunes
- exaggerated, humorous references to well known music
- self criticising/self validating; response takes place during rather than after performances
- refiguration by homage -- showing respect for other musicians or musical styles
- transforming non-African-American Tin Pan Alley tunes

This mode of criticism is particularly helpful because it relates the mode of inquiry to music outside the tradition, emphasising the porous nature of the boundaries around musical communities. Although much of the music of New Orleans musicians, for instance, uses many of the conventions of Western art music and shares much with that tradition (far more than it differs), it speaks with a difference. In this sense, African-American music, rather than being seen as totally alienated and separate from European music (or an inferior appurtenance), can be seen as using it for the mental shift necessary between the two. Without the Tin Pan Alley songs, for instance, there could be no Signifyin(g) on them. Thus the two musical traditions can be seen as co-dependent and interactive, rather than separate -- perpendicular rather than parallel in their relationship (Gates, 1988, p. 49).

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In her work on hip hop sampling, Elizabeth Wheeler (1994, p. 199) identified many of the above, particularly homage, irony and blank pastiche as attitudes towards original material, for example the frequent quoting of James Brown, a revered performer of black music.

There are many examples of this in jazz: the ironic reversal of a song that literally or figuratively represents white European/American life and culture transformed into a jazz virtuoso performance: there is Miles Davis’s fondness for ‘Someday My Prince Will Come’ from Snow White; John Coltrane’s hit ‘My Favorite Things’ from The Sound of Music (with its mention of girls in white dresses, snowflakes, white winters, cream coloured ponies, etc.).
An important consequence of recognising the pervasive presence of Signifyin(g) is that, as Tomlinson puts it,

Signifyin(g) alters our view of African-American expressive traditions, bringing into sharp focus the brilliant and original riffing of one text on another that characterises those traditions and diverting our attention from the mimetic representation of a novel content, an evaluative category often overemphasised by conventional theory (1991, p. 233).

However, Tomlinson (p. 229) also warns that looking at the music only -- emphasising the musical appreciation of jazz, for instance, while ignoring the meanings behind the music, ‘the life that gave rise to it and sustains it’ -- only transfers to the study of African-American music the Western myths of the noncontingency of artworks -- a formalist view that he calls ‘debilitatingly dominant’ in Eurocentric musicology, one which privileges aesthetic transcendency, an artistic purity untouched by function and context.

**Improvisation**

In the light of Signifyin(g) theory, musical improvisation, particularly jazz improvisation can be seen to be Signifyin(g) practice that is more than an instinctive or unconscious act, but rather a highly disciplined set of practices evolving out of a complex cultural tradition. As Kerfield has noted: ‘Somehow the casual and romantic notion that jazz is generated in an entirely spontaneous manner has become deeply rooted in our society’ (1995, p. 99). However, as Berliner has written, ‘children who grow up around improvisation regard (it) as a skill within the realm of their own possible development’ (1994, p. 44). In New Orleans, children who have first-hand experience of a range of musical possibilities may see improvisation as a normal part of musical culture and a learnable practice skill rather than mysterious. Pete Martin has suggested that the ‘rare and mysterious connotation of jazz (in part due to its marginalisation in Western music) serves to obscure the fact that there is an element of improvisation in all social action,’ in most cases involving language to accomplish a satisfactory outcome (Martin 1996). Viewing musical improvisation as an example of the kind of collaborative practices
often used in social interaction such as everyday conversation helps to demystify it and may contribute towards an understanding of improvisation as an activity more ordinary than extraordinary.

Making a connection between Signifyin(g) and improvisation naturally leads to the question whether improvisation wherever and whenever it occurs (including within the European tradition) can be regarded as a form of Signifyin(g). This needs much more research. What can be said is that while the rhetorical strategies that form part of Signifyin(g) are not unique to African-American culture, they do seem to be more fundamental to it than is the case in many other cultures. Partly, this may be the result of the great importance which African culture attached to them; but what makes the practice so important in African-American culture is that these strategies, as part of expressive behaviour found in slave and post-slave American society where blacks were in a perpetual state of subordination to a dominant culture, composed a particularly fruitful ground in which to develop. They became, in effect, survival strategies, and as such acquired much more fundamental importance than similar rhetorical strategies had in most other places (Horn, forthcoming).

The Music Itself

In attempting to take the study of music away from ‘just the notes,’ studies in ethnomusicology and, more recently, popular music have begun to emphasise the social structure of musical communities. However, this approach can leave the music out while reifying the community to a stereotype. Bakhtin wrote that any theory of art must take into account three elements: the creator, the work and the perceiver. Relating this idea to music, musicologists may overprivilege the work, while sociologists may invest too much in the creator and perceivers. Bakhtin believed that art encompassed all three factors, an interrelation between the creator and audience, fixed in the work of art (as quoted in Clark and Holquist, 1984, p. 202). Prefiguring Gates’s reference to the two-mouthed Esu-Elegbara, Bakhtin (as Clark and Holquist remind us), wrote that to understand an artistic
work, we must ‘assume a Janus-like gaze in two directions at once,’ never ignoring the art inherent in the work that sets it apart from other forms of communication, but also never forgetting that art does not exist in isolation; rather it ‘participates in the unitary flow of social life, it reflects the common economic base and it engages in interaction and exchange with other forms of communication’ (ibid.).

Emphasising the conversational character of black musical performance helps link analyses of sound with its cultural context, particularly if the researcher looks at how social knowledge might be shared through performance, or how the audience may read these fragments of dialogue and respond. Also of interest is how this ‘conversation’ might contribute to the creation and reaffirmation of community within the context of performance, or, as Monson puts it, how musicians articulate cultural commentary with sound itself (1994, p. 313). The advantage of this approach is that music remains within the conversation. In addition, musical work cannot be dismissed as inauthentic or lacking cultural value because of its distance from some identifiable point of origin, since the ‘community’ that is created through mutual involvement -- audience and performer -- with the music can transcend time and geographic borders, and be composed of any individuals who bring any experience to the performance to use as capital, and who draw from the performance according to their knowledge of the myriad bits of information embedded by the musician.

In addition, the polymusicality of musicians -- the drawing from many styles -- does not preclude the musical community having a specific cultural identity, but could be seen as part of the identity of a group in contact with multiple cultural others, a group drawn together by shared social knowledge rather than traditional analytic categories, such as ethnicity, age, etc. The system by which all of these diverse musical elements are integrated and evaluated becomes the level at which one can look at cultural identity here. ‘New Orleans music,’ in this sense, might be seen not as a style or genre, but as a way of communicating between audience and musician that has meaning for this particular locality, this particular community.
Responding to a thick web of intertextual and intermusical associations, the listeners (and dancers) read these fragments of dialogue and in turn, these references set off a chain of associations that unite the listener with a community of others, depending on the degree of their familiarity or knowledge, so creating what Monson called a ‘community of interpreters’ that includes performers and audience. In performance, quoted material points to a former performance, creating a dialogue; thus an aural passage conveys, to those with the sociocultural knowledge or experience to recognise and interpret it, a relation between past performance and the present one -- not just resemblance, but transformation. Using Gates and Floyd to look at jazz performance in her study of fifteen prominent New York jazz musicians, Monson concluded:

If musicians are saying something -- musically, culturally, socially, or politically -- when they improvise, the ethnographer must consider in what ways this meaning is articulated, communicated, and perceived by musicians and their audiences (Monson 1994, p. 285).

Recognising familiar rhythms, melodies, harmonics, textures or gestures emphasises the social process of developing musical ideas between individuals, musicians and audience, the ability of familiar music to underlie a continuity of experience. Thus, through performance, an environment is created that is conducive to exploring and reaffirming a sense of community and social identity. McClary and Walser cite ‘... the ability of African-American music to bring into being or to enhance community as one of the reasons it has appealed so strongly to those who are repelled by the isolationism of modernist culture’ (1994, p. 75).

In many ways, Gates’s theory of Signifyin(g) is useful in looking at the predominantly African-American musical community of New Orleans: acknowledging that New Orleans musicians pick from everywhere avoids the notion of an isolated, marginal music community as a source of authenticity. At the same time, it avoids reifying the community into abstraction while ignoring the

11 This is recognising, of course, that for a musical detail to have meaning, at least a partial understanding of the context is needed, an awareness being a product of an ongoing social process, varying between individuals.
music, providing a way to bring sound back into discussions of musical communities, emphasising musical events as process, while avoiding looking at ‘just the music’ or looking at it as just product or autonomous object.

**Case Studies**

In order to connect the cultural theory of Signifyin(g) and the work of Gates, Floyd and Monson to New Orleans, the following brief case studies are presented. The first is of a recorded performance of a teenaged brass band, to demonstrate Signifyin(g) practice within a performance. The second looks at the life of New Orleans piano player James Booker, and at the irony, parody and reversal found in his music.

**ReBirth Brass Band**

[For this analysis, I used a recorded sample of the ReBirth Jazz Band, ‘When the Saints Go Marching In,’ from *Do Whatcha Wanna*, Mardi Gras Records MG 1003, 1989.]

During the period of research, brass band music was enjoying a popular revival in New Orleans as a new sound, based on bebop and funk, joined the more traditional brass band sounds. The revival, most notably exemplified by two bands, the ReBirth and Dirty Dozen, was sparked in a large part by the return of Danny Barker to New Orleans from New York in 1965 and his work with young people at the Fairfield Baptist Church. It was nurtured by the continuation of school bands’ participation in Carnival parades, with the resulting large body of young people with horn and drum instruction, together with the growth of the tourist industry that supported work for this kind of playing (see Chapter Six).

As these two groups recorded and began touring, other young brass bands emerged, attracting young New Orleanians, black and white, in what Jason Berry

12 See Chapter Four for more examples of Signifyin(g) practice.

13 Barker, husband of vocalist Blue Lu Barker, had been banjoist and guitarist with the Cab Calloway Band, as well as recording with Jelly Roll Morton, Charlie Parker, and Louis Armstrong.
has called the ‘strong sense of connection between rap culture and Second Lines with their spontaneous expression in the streets’ (1995, p. 33). The ReBirth were the first brass band to break into commercial black radio with their roaring horns in 1990.

Both bands Signify in their music. In the case of the Dirty Dozen, with Kirk Joseph’s tuba functioning as a percussive instrument driving them on, the band use bebop rhythm patterns to Signify on traditional and modern jazz and rhythm and blues. In the case of the ReBirth, their approach to Signifyin(g) can clearly be seen in a reading of the ultimate New Orleans anthem ‘When the Saints Go Marching In’:

- A young, teenaged band chooses probably the biggest cliché in all of New Orleans music, thus inverting the expected repertoire.
- There are quotations of other tunes throughout the piece, including a fragment of the theme song for a local rap radio program.
- The band inserts into the middle of the song the anthem of the New Orleans Saints professional football team, giving a double meaning to reference ‘the Saints.’
- Young brass bands in New Orleans, particularly this one, had been regularly criticised by the older musicians for playing too fast. Towards the end of the song, the band slows the tempo down drastically, to a dirge, as a humorous jab at their elders.
- The tune is governed by call and response, improvisations, as well as improvising on the structure of the piece, and Signifyin(g) on others in the group.
- At the very end, the call ‘who dat’ re-establishes the young people’s version and asserts their competitiveness.
- Despite its playful prefiguring, the band members did choose a song with much historical meaning to the community and their teachers, suggesting that this may reflect the band’s wish to pay homage.
• Within the performance itself, the band and its Secondliners exhort, encourage and comment vocally, while through smears, breaks and riffs the band also comments instrumentally.

This performance is a good example of the dialogic character of New Orleans music. Whereas the lyrics of a musical work can be seen to have semantic value that can be interpreted by informed listeners, here the semantic value of instrumental music can be heard, the ‘telling effect’ mentioned by Murray (1973, p. 10). The exhortative potential of the music, urging, beseeching, daring, mocking -- what Floyd calls the musical tropes of call and response -- carries with it values and cultural derivatives, implying that works of music are not just objects but cultural transactions between human beings and organised sound, ‘taking place in a cultural context fraught with the values of the original artist that requires translation by auditors’ (1991, p. 277).

The band uses its music to communicate several ideas on several levels, manipulating musical resources to speak to matters of cultural significance to themselves and their audience, commenting through musical reference. As a medium for the production of meaning and value the song may be old, but its interpretation and the performance are for a specific time and place -- the present, in New Orleans. In that sense, in that moment, it was brand new.

**Irony and doubleness in the work of James Booker**

James Carroll Booker III died of unknown causes at the age of 43 in 1983. In his short life, he was acknowledged a piano virtuoso, especially by fellow New Orleans piano players. Dr. John said ‘He was the only musical genius I’ve ever known’; Harry Connick Jr., his pupil, called him ‘The greatest musician I’ve ever heard, period.’ Master of many styles, his best known mode was a chugging motoristic one, synthesising New Orleans jazz and rhythm and blues, as well as a gospel idiom. Composer and music critic Tom McDermott, who heard Booker play only once but studied his recordings extensively, compared Booker to Art Tatum, in that they were

... both visually impaired; both content on occasion to embellish rather than improvise; both used a very personalized stride style at times;
both had an affinity for paraphrasing classical music, a result of their training; both unfathomable virtuosi, and both took a number of styles (Booker traditional jazz, gospel, rhythm and blues and boogie woogie; Tatum every style of pre-1930s jazz piano) and transformed them into something personal and breathtaking (1986, p. 15).

Allen Toussaint, Henry Butler, Dr. John, Connick and many others were influenced by Booker, but because there are so few recordings of him and he rarely headlined, he remains little recognised outside New Orleans. My association with Booker stems from my attendance at his performances over an eleven-year period as a music journalist, as well as casual conversations with him, his family and friends over the years. In a city replete with musical legends, James Booker stands out as one of the most legendary and enigmatic. Booker was classically trained and was something of a child protégé, giving concerts at the age of 6. At 11, he began appearing regularly on local radio on Saturday afternoons, playing blues or gospel. At 14, he was recording for Fats Domino’s producer, Dave Bartholomew, who realised that the youngster had a talent for mimicking other pianists. Bartholomew began using Booker to lay down piano tracks for Domino while the star was away on tour. Booker regularly filled in for more well-known pianists in live performances as well. Once during the late 1950s he went on tour impersonating Huey ‘Piano’ Smith, who disliked touring. In 1960, his instrumental record entitled ‘Gonzo’ entered the Billboard pop charts for eleven weeks. Gonzo was Booker’s nickname, from a character in the movie The Pusher. He entitled the flip side of the record ‘Cool Turkey.’ Don Robey and Duke Records missed the heroin references to these titles. He went on the road with New Orleans rhythm and blues duo Shirley and Lee at 18. At one time or another he toured with B. B. King, Lloyd Price, Joe Tex, Wilson Pickett and his friend and mentor, Little Richard.

Writer Jon Foose called Booker a ‘complex young man, sensitive and often high strung’ (Foose 1983). He was given morphine after he was hit by an ambulance at age 10. The incident was the start of a dependence on drugs that lasted all his life. In 1970, at the famous Dew Drop Inn, he was observed by a New Orleans police officer removing a plastic bottle containing a white powder from his
coat pocket. He was charged with possession of heroin and spent a year in Angola Prison (in the company of rhythm and blues legend Chris Kenner). Despite his problems, his virtuosity was well known around the city and he was a popular, if somewhat undependable, player. Booker gigs might feature outrageous behaviour along with drug- and alcohol-induced mediocrity on some nights, or moments of unforgettable brilliance on others. The only sure thing were that his gigs were never dull. His performances were distinguished by his Signifyin(g) on other musical styles, from classical to cartoon themes, other New Orleans musicians, the audience, himself.

Booker often used musical ironic comments: friends knew that when he played Beatles songs, his bad eye, blinded mysteriously while in New York on a recording session for Ringo Starr, was probably giving him pain. When he was tormented by his recurrent despair over his lack of success, the audiences would most often hear ‘Sunny Side of the Street.’ Booker said this about his performances:

> When I'm playing, I can say anything. I get in trouble when I'm talking. And the same people who listen to me when I'm playing, and clap and yell, some of them, they'll put your ass in jail if you talk to them. If you listen to me, and you want to hear, I'll talk to you. If you can't hear what I'm saying, that's OK, at least you probably won't put my ass in jail.¹⁴

At a typical James Booker performance, he might begin the evening with a Professor Longhair medley, perhaps including a quote from Bach (Allen Toussaint called Fess the Bach of Rock, a fact that would be known by most of Booker’s Maple Leaf Bar audience), then a New Orleans standard, or a Broadway show tune, and make it his own, filling it with classical trills. Woody Woodpecker signoffs (a holdover from his bebop days) might also make an appearance, and he even had special codes to the bartender to signal that he wanted a drink or to acknowledge that a friend had just entered the room. He called me ‘Alabama,’ my home state, and as I came into the club, I might hear a smattering of ‘Stars Fell on Alabama’, or ‘Oh, Suzanna,’ which would mesh so with the song that I doubt any one else heard

¹⁴ Booker 1982.
it. On these occasions, he seldom even looked up. Russell Rocke, owner of the Toulouse Theatre, where Booker often played, noticed this about Booker also:

Booker had his support groups, people who took care of him, loaned him money, got him out of jail. They wouldn’t know about each other. But he had signals in his music that let them know he knew they were there. One time Armet Ertegun [founder of Atlantic Records, a native of Turkey] walked into the Maple Leaf when he was playing. Booker never acted like he knew who he was, and I swear he didn’t look up. He was playing something, I forget what, but in the middle of it, I kept hearing this familiar tune. I finally got it, and damned if it wasn’t ‘Istanbul not Constantinople!’ 15

His legendary status grew and attracted European festival producers. In 1975 he played a music festival in Barcelona, Spain, dazzling the audience with a rocking boogie version of ‘Malaguena.’ Working to rid himself of his addiction, he had two nervous breakdowns, but finally kicked his heroin habit and a 1976 European tour resulted in two live albums. His song ‘So Swell When You’re Well’ was covered by Aretha Franklin and Fats Domino. An appearance at the 1976 New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival led to another European tour and the 1977 Boogie Woogie and Ragtime Piano Contest in Zurich, Switzerland. The album recorded there won The Grand Prix de Disque de Jazz for best live album of the year, which Booker accepted at the Montreux Jazz Festival in 1978.

These successes, however, did not translate into monetary gain. Festivals paid little, and the sheer numbers of musicians in New Orleans, along with the tradition of low or no covers, meant club work paid even less. His volatile behaviour and undependable attendance made him unsuitable for tourist bookings, where dependability is paramount. Booker’s money and health problems grew. He talked about his frustrations:

I don’t know whether to take a crap or go blind, because it’s totally beyond my comprehension why I know some of the biggest people in the world and I have not made $10,000 a week in my life and they all tell me I’m the greatest thing they’ve ever heard and the most unique thing they’ve ever heard. It’s incomprehensible to me. That [A&M

record producer Jerry Wexler -- why can't a man like that who tells me how great I am, why can't he help me? (Matthews 1983, p. 40).

In November 1983, he was dumped by companions at the emergency room of Charity Hospital where he died unnoticed.

Critics often discussed Booker’s technique, but seldom what the music might convey. Most of his critics were effusive: ‘highlighted by those nutty improvisations that Booker often made up on the spot, adding portions of everything from Mozart to Longhair along the way’ (Hannusch 1984); ‘Booker can’t be classified; literally at home playing any style of music’ (Times Picayune); ‘Last night at the Maple Leaf, Booker put on a show typical of his recent performances, moving easily from moody, wildly improvisational numbers to rollicking R&B favourites’ (Gambit); ‘Typical Booker album’s quota of extraordinary tricks’ (Fumar, 1983). Their response to Booker, dwelling on the music itself and ignoring the social, political and economic references embedded within and without the music, supports Amiri Baraka’s observation:

Negro music is essentially the expression of an attitude, or a collection of attitudes about the world, and only secondarily about the way music is made ... Usually the critic's commitment [is] first to his appreciation of the music rather than to his understanding of the attitude which produced it (1963, p. 13).

[For this analysis, I used a recorded sample of James Booker ‘On the Sunny Side of the Street’ from New Orleans Piano Wizard: Live! Rounder Records C-2027, 1987.]

Using Floyd/Gates/Monson to look at Booker’s performance of ‘On the Sunny Side of the Street’ helps reveal what significant musical, cultural and political issues might be discussed within his music. James Booker’s version of the song was recorded in Zurich, Switzerland, in November 1977. It is a song Booker performed many times, a corny pop tune rendered gorgeously. The material is not particularly complex but the melodic line is embellished throughout, jammed with blues figures

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16 A popular Tin Pan Alley tune, written by Jimmy McHugh.
typical of Booker, with a constantly moving bass line, a staple of Booker's playing. Other features are:

- Downbeats occur on beats 1 and 3 throughout.
- A backbeat occurs in the left hand on beats 2 and 4, typical New Orleans, from marching bands onwards.
- Stride technique in the left hand gives a boogie woogie feel to the piece. This was one of the few stride pieces he played.
- The melody is improvised, syncopated, with the use of triplets throughout.
- The chord structure is predominantly the same as the original, although there is an element of improvisation, using substitute chords at certain points, generally in the sixth and seventh measures of the ‘A’ section.
- The left hand provides a rock steady accompaniment to the flowing melody of the right, so bass and chords are from the left hand and melody (largely improvised) from the right.
- Much of the melody is embellished with notes from the blues scale. In the opening measure we get a flattened third against a major chord, again a typical blues.
- There is the little passage in the middle -- nothing to do with the tune, obviously something that occurred to him at the moment.
- The vocal is the nearest to the original, although there is still an elemental improvisation.
- There is a distinctive yodel at the end on ‘Sunny Side.’

Booker’s is not simply a ‘version’ or a resemblance; he has transformed, or in Gates’s term ‘Signified’ upon, the tune at several levels. He has:

- Reversed the expected presentation of the song, usually presented as a vocal performance, to a mostly solo piano rendition.
- Reworked a standard pop tune in an innovative way, in an ironic play of difference.
• Inverted the meaning: the optimistic subject of the tune is ironic, given the
  fact that Booker was in failing health, drug addicted, and impoverished.
• Inserted quotations from other tunes. Also, by pointing to another
  performance, Booker places both into dialogue.\textsuperscript{17}
• Localised the tune by duplicating the soundscape of the city of New Orleans.
  This last point requires further explanation. New Orleans has long had fruit and
  seafood vendors, who once drove wagons and now small trucks through the
  neighbourhoods, calling out to the housewives to buy their products. Booker
  localised his music by incorporating sounds from these vendors into his songs:

  I remember listening to the watermelon man: ‘I got watermelon, I got
  cantaloupe, I got okra and shrimp.’ That influenced me to write a
  certain style of music. I wrote ‘So Swell When You Well’ from that. And
  there’s another I have, ‘One Hell of a Nerve’ an it really gives you the
  sound of the man going behind the truck. The only thing that’s missing
  is the cowbell that the horses used to have. That’s the yodel you hear
  sometime.\textsuperscript{18}

  By transforming a European-American popular song into a vehicle for an
  African-American musician’s virtuosity, Booker has inverted the usual role of black
  people in a predominantly non-African-American society. Booker used his
  intelligence and imagination to transform a simple song into a vehicle for his talent
  -- drawing on a repertoire outside African-American music, Signifyin(g) on it to
  assert musical aesthetic. But Booker’s version inverts the class, race, power
  hierarchy and asserts the power of the African-American musical aesthetic and his
  individual control and power to ‘improve’ the music of white America. In terms of
  the aesthetic of African-American styles, black as well as white listeners might
  conclude that Booker’s version was more complicated, more complex. As the
  Comaroffs have pointed out (1991, p. 24), an important feature of Signifyin(g) is the

\textsuperscript{17} Booker sometimes used this Signifyin(g) feature to goad, tease, or stir up trouble in the music community, for
  instance, by playing one musician’s signature tune, and inserting a quotation within the tune of a rival
  musician or composer. This attribute of Signifyin(g) relates again to Bakhtin’s theories of speech, since
  Booker, like Bakhtin’s novelist, ‘brings together ideas and worldviews which in real life were absolutely
  estranged and deaf to one another and forces them to quarrel’ (Wheeler 1991, p. 91).

\textsuperscript{18} This yodel is repeated in ‘Junko Pardner,’ Booker’s signature version of the Junkers, the old piano anthem
  that is so much a part of New Orleans musical repertoire and could have been Booker’s epitaph.
moving, through performance, of the hegemonic message into discourse, which turns it into the ideological. Once revealed, the hierarchy of cultural values can be exposed and inverted.

Booker was very aware of this political message in his playing. Another song he often played on his club dates (it was also recorded at the Zurich session) was the Frank and Nancy Sinatra song ‘Something Stupid.’ At the end he inserts a breathtaking quotation from Rachmaninoff, showing his ability to master a Western art piece, and asking ironic questions of the Euro-American art aesthetic at the same time. Just as John Coltrane might have seen the irony in choosing to play and record ‘My Favorite Things’ with ‘girls in white dresses/snowflakes/ and silver white winters’ and Miles Davis in his choosing of ‘Someday My Prince Will Come’ from Snow White, so Booker’s choice of ‘Something Stupid,’ a vapid rendering by a white performer who had made many millions in his career, was ironic for someone who was unable to capitalise on his music -- a bit of communication that was read easily at the moment of performance by those familiar with Booker, his situation, his history: the music community, musicians and regular audience, of New Orleans at a given point in time.

Booker’s cultural knowledge extended to familiarity with European art music, blues, traditional and modern jazz, gospel, stride, boogie woogie, tin pan alley, and he drew from all of this in his musical performance, a space where contrasting ideas may co-exist. In popular music discourse, we often read of ‘black’ rhythm and ‘white’ harmony, ‘black’ talent and ‘white’ knowledge. Booker’s performance is an example of divergent cultural knowledge that co-exists in a particular individual. Instead of asking which components are ‘black’ and which ‘white’, we can ask, with Monson (1994, p. 311), in what way does Booker draw upon heterogeneous cultural and musical knowledge to articulate a particular aesthetic and ideological position in music?

Using the model of Gates/Floyd/Monson may give us a way to read Booker, not as an undisciplined, emotional, idiosyncratic player, but rather as an intelligent and imaginative user of a complex discourse, drawn from a multicultural,
heterogeneous cultural vocabulary that had meaning for him and his audience, both within and without the New Orleans black community. This way, we might see his anger and despair at his lack of recognition, at his drug problem, at being a homosexual black man in a homophobic, racist American society, inverted in his repertoire, subverted into playing, and through it, fashioning a redemptory and perhaps satisfying, however transient, response to his circumstances -- in the same way as African-Americans have historically used their discursive methods to comment upon and cope with their circumstances.

**Other examples of Signifyin(g) Practice**

Although Signifyin(g) practice is found in the music of many New Orleans musicians, it is not the intention of this study to suggest that the practice is limited to any group, place, or time. However, due to the high level of Africanisation of the city, related to its history and the self-determination and self-confidence of its black community, as well as the Creole tradition of demanding rights, including the right to public displays of creative and cultural activities, Signifyin(g) practices permeate the artistic landscape of New Orleans, and could be seen as a defining characteristic of music there. Signifyin(g) practices can be found even in the more traditional concert settings. In the following example, music has been taken from the past and reshaped, in a performance that combines the material of an early jazz pioneer with young improvisational jazz musicians.

As artistic director of jazz at the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in New York, Wynton Marsalis has expanded the centre’s jazz programming from one summer concert series to a year-round schedule, and in 1996 jazz became a full constituent of the Lincoln Center. The Jazz at Lincoln Center’s winter tour in 1996 was themed ‘Morton, Monk, Marsalis,’ combining the material of pianist Jelly Roll Morton, post-war bebop composer Thelonious Monk and Wynton Marsalis. Michael White, local traditional jazz clarinettist, was part of a line-up which consisted of mostly New Orleans natives and residents. His comments on the tour reflect his
admiration for Marsalis, a contemporary, and his attitudes on the continuity of musical styles:

The important thing about this show is that it is making bridges between the different eras of jazz. That may sound academic and simple, but actually it has been quite a problem in the jazz world as writers, fans and record companies all maintain that these jazz styles are completely separate and at war with each other. [New Orleans musicians] don't see it that way. If you analyse it musically, you can see an evolutionary process. You can’t get to point B without coming from point A. Wynton, fortunately, realises that and is looking at the whole spectrum of jazz. We’re going, in essence, from one of the earliest great jazz composers to one of the latest great jazz composers.19

White, like Marsalis, sees the tour not just as a performance opportunity, but also as an important teaching strategy:

The material bridges a big gap in the musical education of younger people who generally don’t have much contact with earlier styles. It challenges them to deal with Jelly Roll and the New Orleans tradition, to understand the whole tradition. What this is saying is if you want to try to take jazz to the next level, you can’t start in the middle -- you should go back to the beginning.

White expresses his view of playing music composed over half a century ago:

If you’re not coming in with the mindset [that it is dated] then it can be fresh and alive, and can still be approached creatively. As long as you use the guidelines for New Orleans jazz but improvise, the music stays fresh and alive.

Thus, he reflects the notion of Signifyin(g) as creating a new form from old. Echoing White, Marsalis told a journalist:

To me, that stuff [the tour repertoire] is current. All of jazz is modern. If people are up and they’re expressing their personalities through a form, then it’s modern. I don’t think it’s necessary to divide it into eras. It doesn’t have to go the same route that baroque music went (Times Picayune/Lagniappe 26 January, 1996 p. 15).

Marsalis’s insistence on playing music that is not ‘original,’ but rather drawn from the past, particularly New Orleans’s past, has been criticised by many critics as a neo-conservative stance. Interpreted from the point of view of Signifyin(g) practice

19 White, 1996.
however, it could be said that the time continuum has little to do with whether the song is old or new. When Marsalis performs it, adding his own signature, as repetition with a difference or refiguration as an act of homage, he transforms the piece into a new one that has relevance for those familiar with the values of the New Orleans community, for today, and it is, in that sense, brand new.

**Authenticity vs. Signifyin(g)**

The controversies surrounding Wynton Marsalis and other young jazz musicians who have obtained fame and success in the international jazz scene reflect the wider debates on authenticity and cultural origins, themes that, though decried by many cultural theorists, have assumed growing importance in many places as local culture has acquired the status of currency through the development of tourism and music business initiatives. As a result, certain local cultural activities may be identified as authentic and positively evaluated, while others are dismissed as inauthentic and lacking cultural value, perhaps because of their distance from an identifiable point of origin. In New Orleans, the tendency of these commercial efforts to encourage local music to be bound and packaged into distinct styles contributes to a highly charged and contested issue: the conflict between the reification/commodification of certain styles over others necessary in order to create a product to offer to visitors and the record industry, and the Signifyin(g) musical practice of displacement and transformation that is of value to this music community. Roach, in writing that echoes debates in New Orleans on the emphasis of jazz over other styles, has warned how

... improvised narratives of authenticity and priority may congeal into full-blown myths of legitimacy and origin. Selective memory blurs discontinuities or exaggerates them into a ‘golden age’ now lapsed. ‘Performance’ stands in for an elusive entity that it is not but that it must vainly aspire both to embody and replace. Hence flourish the abiding yet vexed affinities between performance and memory out of which blossom the most florid nostalgias for authenticity and origin (1996, p. 6).

Where African-Americans have had to fight a notion that they are incapable of reproducing any culture, the reification of certain ‘black’ cultural practices over
others might be understood as a defensive strategy to project a coherent and stable culture, and with it to establish political legitimacy. This strategy can be traced to the impact of European theories of nationhood, culture and civilisation on elite African-American intellectuals at the first half of this century. But theories of a unified cultural nationalism break down when applied to an African-American musical community such as New Orleans, with its specific cultural and political history which has retained and reproduced stability, self-confidence and cultural autonomy, as well as a demand for rights within the larger community. The modernist theories of the Harlem Renaissance did not dominate in the cultural milieu of this distant city, which argues that in New Orleans, as elsewhere, any attempt to create generalities about musical expression of a people must take into account manifestations of historical and cultural difference within particular places. Writing on the distinct forms of black culture produced in various other diasporic localities, British sociologist Paul Gilroy reminds us:

The unashamedly hybrid character of these black cultures continually confounds any simplistic (essentialist or anti-essentialist) understanding of the relationship between racial identity and racial non-identity, between folk cultural authenticity and popular culture betrayal (1993, p. 123).

**Conclusion**

Signifyin(g) is integral to many New Orleans cultural practices (pervading jazz improvisation, for instance) and it can be a most useful way to read its music. In addition, just as Signifyin(g) is a principle of language use and is not the exclusive province of black people, so irony, inversion and reversal obviously occur in music other than black musical styles, and Signifyin(g) can be a useful tool in looking at these as well. In turn, the critical theory of Signifyin(g) is by no means the only theoretical possibility nor the most useful in all cases. I believe, however, that it is a very useful tool in conceptualising the deeply intercultural African-American music community of New Orleans. Instead of looking at New Orleans

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20 See Floyd (1996), on the impact of the Harlem Renaissance on black cultural theory and practice.
through models drawn from experiences elsewhere, I have attempted to draw from the community itself, using critical theory from within the African-American cultural tradition to theorise on it, in the belief, as articulated by Gates, that the community holds within it a way to study it, and thus eliminating the problem of constant contrast to the Eurocentric thinking of most treatments of the city. Gates has said:

Just as we can and must cite a black text within the larger American tradition, we can and must cite a black text within its own tradition, a tradition not defined by a pseudoscience of racial biology, or a mystically shared essence called blackness, but by the repetition and revision of shared themes, topoi and tropes, a process that binds the signal texts of the black tradition into a canon just as surely as separate links bind together into a chain. It is no more, or less, essentialist to make this claim than it is to claim the existence of French, English, German, Russian, or American literature -- as long as we proceed inductively, from the texts to the theory (1988, p. xxii)
New cultural theory has presented new opportunities. As Bruce Tucker has written, traditional musicology has proven particularly unsatisfactory in the study of black music, failing to provide useful theoretical models, either forcing it into European formalist mode or concluding that it is inferior (1991, vii). Floyd has pointed out how black expressive practices (actually all expressive practices) cannot be understood apart from the social, cultural and economic context. This has special meaning for those who have found the emphasis on sales, styles, or biography in pop music scholarship inadequate to study local musicmaking practices. In addition, while analysis of African-American musical styles drawn from standard musicology may help legitimize these to the academy, it does little to help us understand the music or its attraction to many people (Walser p. 179). The theoretical model of Signifyin(g) gives us another way to look at African-American musical practices, one which recognises the music's complexity. In addition, conceding the discipline, intelligence and musical knowledge required in much of the performance of New Orleans music contradicts popular music discourse that often represents African-American musicians as relating to music in an emotional, instinctual, unmediated fashion.
Chapter Four

Signifyin(g) Practice

People spontaneously answered the traditional call of the Second Line trumpet. ‘Are you still alive?’ YEAH! ‘Do we like to live?’ YEAH! ‘Do you want to dance?’ YEAH! ‘Well damn it, let’s go!’ And the trumpet broke into a famous chorus that was maybe a hundred years old.

-- Kalamu ya Salaam (1982, p. 28)

Introduction

The revisionist approaches taken to New Orleans history, as reviewed in Chapter One, together with the critical device of Signifyin(g) as used by Gates, Floyd, Monson and others, described in Chapter Three, present new ways to think about performance-related activities in New Orleans. This chapter considers how performance, in association with certain community organisations and their accompanying rituals, contributes to the production of community self-definition. Though much recent theorising has problematised the idea of fixed and unified cultures, musical performance can reveal what anthropologist Joseph Roach calls ‘surrogation,’ in which the community continually reproduces and recreates itself through a process in which the ‘players’ in this performance of community replace other players in their roles, with all the subtle changes and at the same time the continuities that are to be expected when a new actor steps into a long-running part. As the community performs its past in the presence of others, it defines itself in opposition to other places, thus ‘performing’ its ever-evolving identity. Roach, who has called New Orleans a ‘performance-drenched city,’ argues for the

1 Parts of this chapter were presented at the Eighth International Conference of the Association for the Study of Popular Music, Glasgow, Scotland, July, 1995.
importance of looking at performances, performance traditions and the representations of performance because performance ‘so often carries within it a memory of otherwise forgotten substitutions -- those that were rejected and even more invisibly those that have succeeded’ (1996, p. 5).

Following Roach’s lead, this chapter will look at performance traditions in New Orleans and specifically at the musical performances associated with the mutual aid and benevolent societies that proliferate in the city, noting how these performances of the city’s past in its present can be read through the critical theory of Signifyin(g), and how they can, in turn, demonstrate the basic principles of that theory. In particular, this chapter will look at the defining, fundamental element underpinning musical performance in New Orleans -- the movement, marching, dancing embodied in the New Orleans Second Line tradition.

**Secret and Benevolent Societies**

The benevolent and secret societies in New Orleans have their origins in the political history of the city. As was mentioned earlier, the Franco-African community had a high degree of autonomy during the hundred years of French and Spanish colonialisation with the enslaved allowed their freedom on weekends for farming, fishing and other occupations, gathering at marketplaces in the city to sell produce and participate in complex and broad-based social and cultural activities. With the influx of American domination, however, the Afro-Creole community was increasingly suppressed and displaced by an Anglo-American society that had been the inheritors of the English colonial ethos and by the middle of the Nineteenth Century, many of these long-established cultural activities were forced underground.

The existence of secret societies for the benefit of African communities has been written about often. The importance of social aid organisations in African-American communities and their link to music has been acknowledged in historical texts also; however, their continued existence has been ignored. For instance in 1992, J. S. Roberts could write:
... slaves sought ways to organise themselves collectively in a strange and hostile environment ... by forming ethnic clubs. These clubs played a great part in preserving African music. Some moved from social to spiritual role, some acted as mutual aid societies. With the abolition of slavery, these gradually ceased to be (p. 31).

In New Orleans, with the suppression imposed by US-American domination, secret and benevolent societies were a model to be drawn on for use in new circumstances. Far from fading into obscurity, membership in these clubs has grown, particularly since the 1980s. At the same time, interest in the performance activities of these organisations has risen outside the community. I suggest these activities are growing in influence in New Orleans for two reasons:

**Economic and political factors**, including the changing classification of New Orleanians once identifying themselves as ‘Creole’ to an identification of ‘black,’ a solidifying strategy that began in the civil rights movement of the Sixties and continues. Kalamu ya Salaam (1990), Tom Dent (1990) and others have observed that the movement toward mutual aid may be a result of the black community’s disappointment with the predominantly black city government’s inability to reverse the economic plight of the city. In the worsening economic situation, many have returned to the traditional benevolent societies in their neighbourhoods for mutual support and aid.

**The appetite of the mass media and tourism industries for difference.** The electronic mass media favour dynamic cultural activities and the spectacle of the Second Line parades and Indians -- their look, sound, colour and excitement -- lends itself to their requirements. City policymakers have in fact identified these activities as important in the packaging of New Orleans as a tourist site (see Chapter Six) and, as mentioned, visual representations of the city’s public spectacles appear often in films, advertising and music videos.

Today membership in these societies reflects social class, religion or cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Although membership is said to fall into groups that either have accepted established legal and social systems, such as the Second Line marching clubs, or those that are outlaw, such as the Mardi Gras Indians, many
are members of both groups with thick, overlapping networks of relationships connecting the groups. Research that has concentrated on a particular group to the exclusion of others often misses this overlapping of membership. Documentarian and folklorist Michael P. Smith, who has studied the musical community of New Orleans for three decades, has pointed out the continued importance of these social organisations on the city’s music:

Nearly all of New Orleans music and folklife are connected and nourished by these unique religious traditions and public celebrations (1990, p. 206).

**Rituals**

The rituals associated with these activities occur within a formal structure that allows the emergence of individual creativity fixing the performance in time. Performance of ritual is always altered to some extent -- transformed in a Signifyin(g) process. Chernoff has observed how

Westerners, who tend to internalise the personal meaning of their lives, often have difficulty understanding the crucial role that ritualization plays in fostering individuality. Western ideals of freedom in relationships seem characterized by a search for newness ... see social conventions as limiting to our freedom (1979, p.160).

However, as Renato Rosaldo has asserted, ritual in fact represents a ‘busy intersection’ in which anything can happen. ‘In contrast with the classic view, which posits culture as a self-contained whole made up of coherent patterns, culture can arguably be conceived as a more porous array of intersections where distinct processes criss-cross from within and beyond its borders’ (1989, p. 20). Thus, rather than being static, these rituals are constantly changing and moving, forming and re-forming the identity of the community through performance. For musicians, confidence in the ongoing ritual gives them the confidence to enhance creativity, not just by replicating the music that has gone before, but by transforming it into something uniquely their own.

Richard Schechner calls performance ‘restored behaviour,’ or ‘twice-behaved behaviour,’ always subject to revision and never happening exactly the same way
twice, even though in some instances the ‘constancy of transmission across many
generations may be astonishing’ (1988, pp. 36-37). From this perspective, the
musical activities of New Orleans, far from being static, unchanging, or unmoving,
can be seen as constantly changing and fresh with meanings for the contemporary
city.

**Localised performance**

Michael P. Smith has identified five types of social organisations which are
basic to New Orleans music: the ecstatic churches, jazz funerals, the Mardi Gras
black Indian gangs, the neighbourhood music clubs and the social aid and pleasure
societies (1994b, pp. 43-74). These various types of association, coming out of the
inner city black working-class neighbourhoods, are important components of the
social organisation of the community, briefly crystallising fluid social networks
around specific activities, functioning to promote the social integration of a
community by facilitating the establishment of intersecting networks through bonds
of camaraderie, friendship and mutual aid.

The most well known of these cultural practices outside New Orleans is the
**jazz funeral**, the ritual distinguished by brass bands that play dirges as they
follow the hearse to the cemetery, and then celebrate the deceased’s ‘sporting life’
with rousing music after the body is ‘cut loose.’ Architect Benjamin Latrobe
described funeral parades in New Orleans as early as 1819, but the roots of the
burial customs of the city predate that, influenced by African burial societies,
Catholic ritual and the geological situation of the city (seven feet below sea level)
which necessitates burial above ground.

Probably the most colourful and exciting of the secret and benevolent
societies are the **Mardi Gras Indians**, groups of black working class men who at
Carnival dress in elaborate outfits of their own making and whose music has
directly influenced New Orleans rhythm and blues musicians -- Smiley Lewis, Allen
Toussaint, Professor Longhair, The Dixie Cups, Fats Domino, the Neville Brothers
among others.
The **ecstatic churches** of New Orleans and the musical styles associated with them are an often overlooked but primarily influential source of the city’s musical life. Gospel music of the Protestant and, more unusually, the Catholic churches of the city, always influential within the black community, has had more widespread exposure lately, largely through the annual New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, where the gospel tent is one of the festival’s main attractions.

Little recognised outside the city of New Orleans are the **social aid and pleasure clubs**, benevolent societies which sponsor the autumn Second Line parades. Working within the established social and legal system, they do not perhaps have the same element of excitement and the exotic as the more outlaw black Indian gangs, although there are members who participate in both.

Many of the mutual aid organisations often revolve around the ubiquitous **neighbourhood bars** that proliferate in the black neighbourhoods of the city, which are themselves important sites of networking and community, forming a variety of functions relevant to social organisations. For instance, the Mardi Gras Indian practice sessions often meet weekly, attracting scores of neighbourhood people to the bar that acts as headquarters of the tribe. The bars are also often the final stop of the jazz funeral and the finale of a social aid and pleasure club parade. Largely a male domain (although some female customers are usually present), they are described by Kaslow as ‘semi-private men’s clubs which cater to an established clientele for whom the bar becomes a nodal point in their social networks’ (1981, chap. 5, p. 29).

All these activities consist of overlapping networks that reflect differing interests and needs associated with social class, religion, ethnicity and gender. However, associated with each -- a defining aspect, it might be said -- of these practices, is what in New Orleans has come to be called the Second Line, a metaphor for participation and integration of audience into the performance experience. The term ‘Second Line’ is used in a variety of ways by New Orleanians, but generally it is used as Smith defined it: ‘the incorporation of dance and music in a ritual, often parade, format that often but not always includes the dressing up,
and sometimes masking, of the principal participants' (1994b, p. 48). Samuel Floyd has linked the Second Line to the ring shout, which he calls the ‘foundation of Afro-American music’ (1991, p. 266). Actually a dance, the shout was an activity of enslaved African-Americans said to be directly related to Africa (Courlander 1963); in the shout, Floyd says, ‘music and dance commingled, merged and fused to become a single distinctive cultural ritual’ (1991, p. 267). Describing the ring shout as varying from locale to locale, but basically consisting of participants starting out in a circle, walking, swaying, then dancing, Floyd cites Krehbiel’s contention that the shout was actually a march; it was circular in order to keep the dancers in the same area.

The ring, says Floyd, straightened out in New Orleans because of the necessity of the participants to move to a far-off cemetery (1991, p. 267). The historical relationship between the shout and the Second Line, however, is not my main concern here. Whether directly or residually connected to West African musical practices of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries, and to whatever degree influenced by Louisiana Native Americans who were totally absorbed into the city’s black community during the Nineteenth Century, Secondlining is a cultural practice that has meaning for contemporary New Orleans. Second Line parades accompany restaurant openings, the entrance of the football teams onto the field, the arrival of celebrities at the airport (including popes and presidents). Emerging from the black working class neighbourhoods but cutting across ethnic, social and class lines, Secondlining encourages a relationship between musician and audience that has influenced the city’s musicians and musical styles in the past and present. That relationship can be one of esteem, as New Orleanian Vernel Fournier, drummer for the Ahmad Jamal Trio and Nancy Wilson, observes:

One of my greatest rewards in playing music is if I’ve got such a groove going that I get someone in the audience to start second lining. That’s just like a doctor’s degree or a medal of honour. That’s what I was raised on. You hear the music; if it’s good, everybody partakes (Salaam 1985).
Some New Orleanians feel that participating in a Second Line is showing respect for the culture of the city. One prominent musician is particularly critical of musicians in the community who would not participate:

I wouldn’t say that I have an advantage over anyone because I’m from New Orleans, but I will say that I understand more of music because I am from here. My parents embraced the music and taught me not to think I was above the music. I don’t think it’s happening so much now, but in the Sixties and Seventies there were certain people who had this attitude that they were above a certain type of music and they didn’t participate. They don’t know how to Second Line, and not knowing how to Second Line is very hard to do in New Orleans, but some musicians weren’t very social, because they didn’t have that kind of situation at home, so they didn’t respect that part of the culture. Today everybody Second Lines.2

This ability to generate intercultural communication as well as operate as a self-definer of community makes these practices worth a more detailed examination. Using Signifyin(g) theory, drawn from observations and ethnographic research, I will now look at three of Smith’s five practices: a jazz funeral, the social aid and pleasure clubs and the Mardi Gras Indians. A survey of the ecstatic churches is included in the Case Study in Chapter Six and the neighbourhood bars are covered within the discussion of the Mardi Gras Indians.

**Jazz Funerals**

Jazz funerals are often held for New Orleans musicians. Some are special occasions attended by thousands, but anyone whose family or friends hire a band and get the word around can be buried ‘with music,’ the local term for the occasion of a jazz funeral after the church rites. Traditionally, however, these are held for men only. Pianist ‘Sweet Emma’ Barrett, a scion of the Preservation Hall for decades, had no jazz funeral. Her family and friends said that she had ‘always believed in the traditional ways, and didn’t want one.’ More unorthodox funerals were given to Buddy Bolden one hundred years after his death, King Tutunkhamun

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2 Harrison, 1996.
upon his exhibit at the city’s art museum and the unpopular Supreme Court
decision *Plessy v Ferguson*, on its centennial year.

At a typical jazz funeral, the band waits outside the church or funeral home
for the family to come out after the service. As mourners collect, the band begins to
play slowly, usually a traditional funeral dirge. The Second Liners march, slowly,
dancing and dipping to the beat, their feet seldom leaving the pavement. If the
gravesite is too distant to be reached by foot, the mournful music lasts until a
message is sent through the crowd that ‘They’re gonna cut the body loose,’ followed
by shouts of ‘Open it up,’ meaning for the people in the front to move so that the
hearse can come through. At this point, the family and friends of the deceased go on
to the cemetery, as the band and Second Liners give the body a last salute, with the
traditional call of the Second Line trumpet, and often the strains of the traditional
song, ‘Didn’t He Ramble.’ The Second Liners who are not following on to the
gravesite will parade in a joyous, exuberant march to a local tavern to toast the
deceased and drown their thirst with their sorrow.

If the gravesite is part of the parade route, the mournful music continues to
the grave, and the body usually is ‘cut loose’ after the service, when the family
accompanies the Second Liners out of the cemetery in a joyous celebration of the
‘sporting life’ of the deceased. As the parade passes through the neighbourhoods, old
and young come out to join, whether acquainted with the deceased or not. Some
people just dance from their stoop, while others come down and join the swelling
ranks of the parade.

In 1990, I observed a modest funeral of an elderly musician, held at a
Claiborne Avenue funeral home, just under the expressway ramps of Interstate 10.
A young brass band had volunteered to play *gratis* because the family could not
afford to pay. About fifty mourners waited in the parking lot. As the family left the
funeral home and the coffin was loaded into the hearse, the band members, two
trumpets, a tuba, a trombone and a drum, struck up a funeral march learned from
a Smithsonian Folkways recording of turn-of-the-century New Orleans funeral
dirges. The band’s manager had said that the teenaged band had sought out the
recording, explaining that they wanted to learn some of the old music, ‘because the old people like it.’ An older man from the deceased’s social aid and pleasure club, dressed in a black suit with a bright purple ribbon across his chest and his hat in his hand, led the march. With the family walking in front of the hearse, the procession started slowly down Claiborne Avenue. The weather was in the high 80s (F) and the humidity was very high. As the procession passed, some neighbourhood people stopped to watch and some others joined in. Also following along were a tourist with a video camera and a local photographer. Some passers-by in cars stopped along the side of the road to watch and others drove around the procession in attitudes varying from caution to impatience. After a half-hour march, on a signal, the band’s trumpeter blew a salute and the mood suddenly changed. Second Liners began to dance in individual, athletic fashion and one young man climbed to the top of the hearse, dancing on its roof as the vehicle slowly drove down the street. The widow, walking behind the hearse with her children, raised her white handkerchief to the sky and began dancing in earnest. After a few more blocks, the hearse turned, the family climbed back into their cars and the vehicles took off for a cemetery at the other side of town. The Second Liners continued marching and dancing as the band continued to play. A police car arrived and two policemen asked the crowd to disperse. After a little talk back and forth, many of the Second Liners went into a bar on the corner, as the band remained outside playing in the parking lot, surrounded by Second Liners who continued dancing. After a spirited cutting contest between two horn players, the crowd slowly dispersed.

A jazz funeral may demonstrate many examples of Signifyin(g) practice, the most striking being the duality in the simultaneous display -- of joy and sorrow, of celebration and despair, in homage to the death and the life, spiritual and sporting, of the deceased -- inherent in the legacy of double voicedness of Esu-Elegba. The participation both of those in the community who knew the deceased and grieved on a personal level, and of those who did not know the dead but who celebrate and grieve for a life of one of its members, emphasises the community celebration of
breaks and disruptions, the fragmentation and reassembly of the community, through the performance of lives within it.

The musical performance of the funeral mentioned in this research is filled with Signifyin(g) moments: a young band choosing old tunes as an act of homage to this particular elderly musician and his family, as well as to all New Orleans musicians who have preceded them; the repertoire of the music, which included some of the tunes that the musician had played in his lifetime; the cutting contest at the end of the funeral, a musical version of the wordplay of Signifyin(g); the ‘send-off’ tune of ‘Didn’t He Ramble,’ a toast to his ‘sporting life’ and the duality of spiritual and sporting lives co-existing in one individual, Signifyin(g) on his church membership as well as his participation in the honky-tonk nightlife of a New Orleans musician.

The jazz funeral is a ritual that varies with each event, not a static and unchanging tradition, but a constantly reinvented one, made individual by the preferences of the deceased, his or her associations, family and neighbourhood. This acceptance of change in cultural activities could be seen as a defensive measure and the durability of cultural activities in the city could attest to the effectiveness of this strategy.

Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs

Many of the expressive practices associated with Secondlining occur out of doors, in street parades, and the grandest of the street parades are those of the social aid and pleasure clubs. Like most New Orleans musicians, Louis Armstrong participated in these Second Line parades.

To watch those clubs parade was an irresistible and absolutely unique experience ... I had spent my life in New Orleans, but every time one of those clubs paraded I would Second Line them all day long (Armstrong 1954, p. 133).

On consecutive Sundays in the fall, clubs with names like the Money Wasters, the Scene Boosters, the Gentlemen of Leisure or Young Men Olympians parade and dance through their inner-city neighbourhoods over routes as long as
ten miles, each club, with fifty to three hundred members, dressed in its own distinctive attire, with suits costing into the hundreds or even thousands of dollars. All during the year preceding the parades, the members hold fund-raisers such as dances, picnics and so forth to cover the costs of suits, marching bands and the thousands of dollars in municipal fees, for unlike the Mardi Gras Indians, these benevolent societies register with the city for official parade permits. Funds left over are available for the social aid of the members and community. For example, one club financed lighting on a neighbourhood playground. Another provided the funds for a food booth at the jazz festival to ensure further funding for a church. The funds are used for medical crises, funerals, financial support for needy families and so forth. The hiring of bands is one of the largest expenses incurred by the clubs; some clubs hire as many as eight bands to accompany a parade. Bands are essential to the event, because joining the clubs on their route will be hundreds, often thousands of Second Liners from within and without the community, who dance along with the club members and musicians.

The parades, therefore, consist of the club members, the bands and the Second Liners. The members of the club, usually wearing bold-coloured suits, are preceded by banners, embroidered insignia that mark the club’s date of origin. Some clubs carry decorated umbrellas, or ribboned baskets, which they twirl in the street and leap over as they dance. Others wear beaver hats and carry canes. The bands, predominantly brass bands, range in styles from the traditional jazz band to the newer bands influenced by bebop, such as the Dirty Dozen, and the even younger generation of brass bands, such as the ReBirth, who are influenced by rap, hip hop, traditional jazz and rhythm and blues. A typical line-up is trumpet, trombone, tuba, snare and bass drum, alto and tenor sax. For more traditional groups, a banjo, clarinet, or guitar might be included. In interviews with professional musicians in New Orleans, playing in many different genres, nearly all began their musical education in these street parades.

The Second Liners, the parade’s ‘participating audience,’ are the non-members of the clubs, but usually residents of the neighbourhoods (joined by the
occasional tourist, journalist and passers-by), who dance and march along with the bands, often carrying percussion instruments or bottles, sticks, whistles or other noise makers. The Second Liners are as integral to this public spectacle as the club members and the bands, and as necessary for the music. A ‘third line’ might be said to be the observers, tourists, press, neighbours, who watch the event from the periphery.

Signifyin(g) musical devices are a major feature of performance in the Second Line parades, and many examples of Signifyin(g) can be identified. In a parade, the bands draw from a relatively small repertoire of familiar tunes, but improvise and use the music to create a space for the individual dancers to expand -- using irony, teasing, cajoling, inserting quotes from pop songs, commercials, football fight songs and so forth, to comment on what has happening. Larry Trevigne, who regularly plays for the social aid and pleasure club parades, said:

We like to put in bits from what’s the latest on the radio, although a lot of that doesn’t lend itself to horns, so you have to limit it. The younger kids like it, though. We might play a bit of a song that has to do with what’s going on. Like one of the dancers might get wild, and we put in a little bit that says something. Or one of the ladies might really be getting into the spirit of the thing, and we might play a little bit to get her going.  

This way, through the music, the bands articulate and comment upon matters of cultural significance to themselves and their audiences. The familiar songs act as reaffirmation of community, and draw in new ‘members’ who may recognise or read what the musicians are saying. Thus the performance is community creating, identity forming. Meanwhile, the Second Liners exhort, comment, encourage the bands, judging the performance within the performance, the musical performance theorising on itself. As Kirk Joseph of the Dirty Dozen band says:

We never know exactly what we’re going to play till we get there. The dancers, the Second Liners, let us know what they like, and what they don’t, real fast. Things happen within the Second Line. We know the

3 Trevigne, 1992.
basic songs we’re going to play, but the rhythm, the mood, all comes from the Second Liners, and what’s happening at the time.4

Thus the creation of the music in the Second Line parades is connected to the music's function; the use of the music is central to the musicmaking process. The audience participates in the creation of the music and is important in the selection of what music is played. The dance and Secondlining of the audience -- the shouts, whistles, rudimentary instruments and movements of the dancers -- influence and supply the rhythm for the musicians. Here, participating is important, not watching. This is not Adorno’s ‘passive observational activity’ which, he said, ‘seems to complement the reduction of people to silence, the dying out of speech as expression, the inability to communicate at all’ (1981, pp. 119-132), but rather this is engaged participation. As some dancers dip and soar in the air, spinning and whirling in a mesmerising show of athletic prowess, other Second Liners tentatively move their bodies along with the procession, caught up in the flow of people and music. The individual performance of the dancers occurs within the framework of the parade, with the movement of the band and Second Liners down the street. Personal creativity occurs within the wider action of the group, as in jazz improvisation, heir to the Second Line.

The styles of costume, music and dance change from year to year, as the participants -- musicians, members and Second Liners -- absorb influences from everywhere and, in turn, incorporate them into the cultural fabric, in an ongoing process of creative expression. Thus, through performance, an environment is created that is conducive to exploring and reaffirming a sense of community and social identity.

**Mardi Gras Indians**

Carnival in New Orleans begins officially on January 6, Twelfth Night, and runs into February or March, culminating on Mardi Gras Day, the day preceding Ash Wednesday and the Lenten season. Parades have become an annual feature

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since 1857; however, celebrations of the season predate this attempt of the incoming US-Americans to organise and institutionalise Mardi Gras. Celebrations had been carried on in an impromptu and exhilarating style by the French-and-Spanish colony for years, and there is a record of a Carnival parade as early as 1827. Masking and costuming have been a part of the festivities from the beginning.

Today Mardi Gras organisations span the gamut of social class, some sponsoring elaborate formal balls and street parades, some more modest dinner dances or truck parades. But for all classes, the Mardi Gras season is a public statement of the social structure of the city. Black New Orleanians have traditionally maintained separate Carnival associations and functions, but within the black community these events have been further divided by social strata and value structures. For instance, Creoles of colour stage traditional balls modelled after the elite white society balls, presenting debutantes, perpetuating a Creole ideal. These balls are declining in importance in reflection of social change in the forms of the decline of a separate Creole identity or opportunities to join ethnically integrated krewes. However, for some they continue to hold social importance.

There are hundreds of other Carnival organisations for the black community, ranging from those that hold grand balls to more humble social and pleasure clubs. One of the most spectacular groups of Carnival organisations are the Mardi Gras Indians. Known primarily for their brilliant costumes, the Indians are not actually Native Americans, but people of African descent who mask as Indians on Mardi Gras Day. Every year, as a million extra people come into this city of a half million population, only a very few will see this spectacle, as groups of working class African-American men masquerade as Native Americans from the US-American

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5 The Mardi Gras Indians are referred to within the group as ‘Indians’ and though it is common for outsiders to refer to what the Indians do on Mardi Gras Day as ‘masking’, their faces are actually the only parts of their body not covered. The Indians, in fact, call what they are doing as ‘playing the game.’ And though their group designation is usually referred to as ‘tribes’, the Indians themselves call their groups ‘gangs.’ They are not gangs in the usual sense, although they do refuse to register their activities with the police, in contrast to other carnival organisations. The language associated with the Indians is as diverse as other aspects, but it is also considered a breach of courtesy in New Orleans to use the Indians’ own terms, and ‘Mardi Gras Indians’ distinguishes them from Native Americans, who could be understandably offended.
Plains, parading through some of the poorest New Orleans neighbourhoods. Dressed in elaborate outfits with thousands of stones, beads, plumes and feathers hand sewn into their costumes, they sing, dance, and chant in a tongue all their own in a call and response pattern that challenges the spectators to respond. As they ‘march’ or actually stroll singly, sometimes at quite a distance from one another, down a route of their own design, they chant about their beauty and bravery while at the same time looking out for competing tribes who may challenge them in an aggressive show of wordplay, competing in looks, dances or singing ability. Surrounding each tribe is a large group of Second Liners, mostly people from the tribe’s neighbourhood. More than support singers and dancers, these are active participants in the performance, armed with percussion instruments of all kinds and answering to the call of the Big Chief. They form a chorus in response that echoes down the street, linking the marchers.

On Mardi Gras Day, the Indians seem to emerge spontaneously within the black neighbourhoods, abiding by a route designed by their chief to pass friendly bars or houses for refreshment. To ‘catch the Indians,’ one must be lucky or an insider. On some Carnival days, a thorough search will be fruitless and on others, a turn of the corner and there they are, majestically decked out, posing for the myriad of cameras that seem always to be able to find them. The parade, often beginning at the Big Chief’s house, lasts usually from sunup to sundown. Sometimes members have stayed up for several nights preceding Mardi Gras Day, with last minute sewing and preparation. In consequence, the parade may end early if the maskers become exhausted with the long hours, the long route and heavy costumes weighing on tired shoulders.

**History**

The history of the Indians is largely unknown beyond the oral tradition. The Creole Wild West, established about 1885, is the oldest surviving tribe and most researchers date the emergence of the tribes from the late Nineteenth Century.
However, in *Acts and Records of the Cabildo*, the Spanish colonial body, dated January 19, 1781, the record reads:

> Because of the great multitude of troops and crews from the ships (due to the state of war between Spain and England) and the great number of free Negroes and slaves in the city, the Attorney General recommends that all kinds of masking, the wearing of feathers, gathering at the local taverns and public dancing by the Negroes be prohibited this Carnival season (Brock, 1982).

Until the 1950s, competition between tribes was often violent, sometimes lethal. Indians carried knives, shotguns and hatchets, and Carnival Day was a time for settling old grudges on the battlefield -- an area now the site of the Superdome. The songs of the Indians often contain references to past Indians who died on the 'battlefront.' City officials stopped the violence by threatening the abolition of 'masking Indian' (as it is known) and this gang warfare was replaced by a symbolic ritual of encounter in which tribes confront each other verbally and visually, the most elaborate suits and skill in dance becoming the key way to show superiority over others. A tribe that is vanquished, by tradition, must bow down. Boasts of 'we won't bow down' occur again and again in Mardi Gras Indian songs.

Although some elderly Indians will give their own accounting of the distant history of the tribes, in interviews, most Indians will only go back as far as they or their parents remember, despite pressure by journalists and researchers to tell more. As one chief told George Porter of the Meters:

> All of the tribes of today were tribes before; young people bring them out now but the old people did it, you know, before we did. It just was handed down to us. So it goes back into the Thirties and the Forties when Mardi Gras was for Rex [the white king of Carnival], and was not in our communities, that the Mardi Gras Indians dressed and paraded through their own territories and areas. The only white people that knew about us were the white people who lived in the neighbourhood (Porter, 1990, p.24).

The chief has seen the evolution of the instruction of young maskers, with secrecy tied up in the past to safety:

> Of course, today we practice in bars. When I was a kid, we used to practice in backyards. It was likely private because they were teaching
the young people, you know, the traditions and the things to do and how we did it. You had to know how to protect yourself (ibid.).

**Organisation**

Though the focus of masking Indian is Mardi Gras, the Indians maintain a year-round alliance, each tribe linked to and representing a particular neighbourhood, and linked to other tribes through a tribal council that settles disputes and creates policy. There is a history of uptown versus downtown tribal rivalry, though this is fading as housing patterns are becoming more diverse. In their songs, Indians still refer to going ‘downtown’ or ‘uptown’ to challenge rival gangs.

Despite reports to the contrary, there is always great movement and change within the tribes, with tribes dissolving and new ones forming often. A charismatic leader emerges and asks new members, usually his own age, to join, or a group decides to form a tribe and selects a chief, and often takes the name of a disbanded tribe from the neighbourhood. The vast majority of Indians are men ranging from about 15 to 60 years old. Selection is by ability of members to create a costume and commitment to the values of the group, friendship based on mutual aid. This often consists of ‘being there’ financially for a fellow member. There are different roles and offices within the tribe. In the parade, usually the spyboy (scout) starts the line of march, watching out for the approach of competing tribes, then the flagboy, with the gang’s flag, then a wildman or witch doctor or medicine man whose jobs are to keep the crowds back from the second and third chiefs, then the queen(s) and at the end of the line is the Big Chief, sometimes followed by a trail chief.

**Function**

Participation is constantly shifting. Often people mask for a few years, then drop out, usually for financial reasons or because they cannot commit the necessary time. Men will mask just long enough to establish prestige with the

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6 The cost of the material involved in making the suits could reach several thousand dollars.
neighbourhood and then retire. However, ‘retired’ Indians have a far from casual relationship to the tradition and usually speak with reference to spiritual values of masking. Just as the membership ages with the chief, and new tribes evolve, the function of the organisations change as the membership ages. For young Indians, the group functions primarily as recreational associations. As these men mature, the organisations assume additional functions, serving more practical purposes, and the social entertainment comes to be seen as having secondary importance. The networks of members act as a mutual aid society and support group, organising memorial services for deceased members, providing burial insurance, and so forth.

Writings on the Indians often mention their ‘lawlessness’ and defiance in contrast to other groups, but my research indicates that members of Mardi Gras Indians are often members of other volunteer associations or benevolent societies. These plural memberships provide some of the multiple connections which integrate networks into interlocking, as opposed to radial, forms. In other words, rather than seeing the association as a homogeneous, bordered-off unit having a particular set relationship to the larger society, it might be more useful to see it as individuals using their participation in different associations to represent divergent attitudes toward society which co-exist within the one individual. For example, membership in the Indians, with its display of proud resistance to domination and refusal to ‘bow down’ to local authority, does not contradict membership in a social aid and pleasure club, with its careful adherence to city ordinances. Both may fill a need within an individual, and represent his or her complex relationship to city authority. At the same time, while actual membership, strictly defined by regular paying of dues, or sewing of costumes, may be limited to certain individuals, the ritual and social activities of the organisations involve a much wider sphere of neighbourhood residents, so that each association’s influence extends beyond its membership.
Sewing

Preparation for Carnival involves community and individual effort all year. Indian suits, highly decorated with feathers, rhinestones, pearls, sequins and beadwork patches, are worked on year round. Sewing often takes place in collective meetings, where technique is shared, as are beads and other decorative materials and assistance. Though it is accepted to get help from a designer, particularly with the patches, each Indian does all the sewing on his own suit, including the intricate beadwork; use of sewing machines is considered cheating. Each masker sews a new suit, in a new colour, each year. Part of the fascination of the Indians’ display is the knowledge that the costumes, with their elaborate head-dresses and amazing beadwork, will be worn only once more, on Saint Joseph’s Day, then disassembled.

Music

The musical preparation for Carnival by the Indians starts several months beforehand, during the season of the fall social aid and pleasure club parades. On Sunday evenings after the parades, there will be eight to ten practices going on around town with fifty to a hundred people in attendance at each practice. ‘Practice sessions’ are really performances held at the tribe’s headquarters bar. A typical ‘practice’ evolves as the night goes on. Early in the evening, men and women will dance, in a relaxed atmosphere. Later, the dance will become more competitive and there will be ‘dance-offs’ between individual men or clubs. As it gets later, the dancing and competition get more serious: three on three, two on two, then one on one.

Weekly practice sessions are an attraction for neighbourhood people and the numbers swell as Mardi Gras approaches. A leader sits in the centre of a circle,

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According to Chief Donald Harrison Sr., of the Guardians of the Flame, the Indians began parading at night on St. Joseph’s Day, the traditional Italian holiday celebrated by the Sicilian community of New Orleans, in 1963. ‘Every corner had an Italian grocery store, and they’d be celebrating, visiting the St. Joseph Day altars through the night.’ Thus Catholic holidays provide space in contemporary New Orleans for African-American cultural practices, as they did in the past.
surrounded by members, former members and Second Liners, as songs, which might last an hour, are worked out and performed. All kinds of percussion instruments, including beer bottles, accompany the songs and everyone is welcome to join in on the responses. The practices are not strictly structured -- people wander in and out, visiting, drinking and socialising. Singing of the repertoire and dancing involves several times the number of actual tribe members. One song might last an hour, which encourages the maximal group participation since the leader sings and others sing chorus after each new phrase by the leader. Children play outside, joining in to sing along with the chorus. All are welcomed to participate in the music with soundmakers. Women are seldom involved directly in the Indian practice or masking, except in the role of ‘queen.’

Women participate more as facilitators -- by supplying resources for the suits or financial support. The neighbourhood bars where the practices are held are primarily a domain of men; women do attend, but almost never does a wife come to the bar with her husband.

The Indians draw from a basic repertoire of around twenty songs, but constantly improvise, add and delete (see Appendix). All tribes sing all songs, changing words to incorporate distinctive histories and features of their own group. This ensures repetition but places a premium on improvisation. Despite reports to the contrary, new songs are popular and are incorporated often. Some of the songs reported in academic journals as ‘ancient’ are actually only a few years old, according to the chiefs. The distinctive patois used in many songs has its roots in French and Spanish, but the translation of most phrases is lost to history and most often-used phrases may have several interpretations. The language of the Indians has been used to mark their distinctiveness, separating them from outsiders while binding them into a group defined by inside knowledge.

8 The Indians’ queen is often a friend or relative of the chief, an honorary position usually but not always bestowed on a girl much younger than the chief, almost never the wife or girlfriend, but rather the daughter of friends or neighbours.

9 At the practice sessions, non-neighbourhood people, particularly non-African-Americans, are not invited, with very rare exceptions. In contrast, when Indians play commercially, performances are often integrated ethnically, and Indians work with non-African-American musicians often on recordings and tour.
Omitted from much of the writing on the Indians is their musical performance outside the Carnival season. Particularly since the 1970s, in conjunction with a renewed interest in New Orleans musical styles and the emergence of the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, some of the tribes have developed the commercial viability of the music, and now perform in night-clubs, march at neighbourhood celebrations, or perform their music on stage at international festivals as well as touring the United States and abroad. Indian groups have performed at Carnegie Hall, on television specials and for the tourism industry at conventions and events. Several tribes have recorded albums ranging from live recordings of actual practices to reshaping the lengthy chants to a three-minute mainstream radio format. Some have incorporated electronic instruments, trap drums, saxophones and outside composers, but have maintained the percussion instrumentation and the antiphonal song style characteristic of community performances. In addition, they have collaborated with non-Indian local musicians, transforming the music into rhythm and blues or funk styles which have wide public appeal. Within the tribes there are subtle changes in roles when performing outside the boundaries, fluid as they are, of Carnival. In the context of a commercial gig, the chief’s role evolves from leadership-by-permission to bandleader and boss. In addition, the suits worn on these occasions are usually not the suits worn at Carnival, but old suits kept for the occasion of performance.

*Signifyin(g)*

Examples of Signifyin(g) practice permeate the performance of ‘masking Indian.’ Fragmentation and reassembly are most graphically acted out in the making of the costumes, literally dissembled each year, revised and reassembled -- a metaphor for the Signifyin(g) process itself. Parading through the roughest ghettos of the city in the most elaborate of costumes strikingly points out the duality and contradictions, the beauty and despair, of life in New Orleans. The encounters between tribes are classic examples of the competitive word-play
inherent in Signifyin(g), the importance of the vernacular demonstrated in that a tribe can be defeated by losing this vocal battle.

In their music, the Indians draw on a fading French language, nonsense rhymes, old songs and new to assemble a constantly changing language. They display homage to Native Americans, but with a signal difference -- still incorporating clichés and stereotypes ('Big Chief Wants Plenty of Firewater,' etc.), Signifyin(g) on the tradition of homage and the impotence of ethnic slurs. In the seriousness with which the members commit time to practice and sewing, and observe traditions of the day, yet are open to having their music recorded and sold for commercial purposes, the Indians exhibit an ease with the usually warring concepts of tradition and commercialism. This duality of seriousness and playful refiguring is reflected in the term ‘playing the game,’ the phrase used by the Indians for the very act of participating in a cultural activity that requires financial and time commitment, skills and dedication.

Although, as Lipsitz has pointed out, across the world Carnival is celebrated by a wearing of costumes, forming secret societies, speaking a specialised language and celebrating a fictional past, the Mardi Gras Indians are distinguished by their use of conventional forms for unconventional purposes, Signifyin(g) on the New Orleans white carnival celebration. Using tools available to them -- music, costumes, speech and dance -- they pick and choose from many traditions to create performance and narratives, fashioning an identity of their own. Rather than portraying ancient traditions -- the most popular themes for other Carnival krewes -- they dress each year as Native Americans, reminding us of a history of social oppression. While portraying a stance that is neither white nor black, they contradict a dualism that defines people as one or the other. And rather than a view of an ideal utopian future, a common theme in Mardi Gras, the Indians emphasise solidarity in the present. However, each individual Indian may also belong to networks that flow across boundaries of musical style, locale and ethnicity. A case study on two Big Chiefs and their musical careers will demonstrate the range of the Mardi Gras Indian performance experience. A discussion of a performance of the
Indians with a modern jazz group demonstrates Signifyin(g) practice in the merging of musical styles within the performance.

**Case Study: Two Chiefs**

Monk Boudreaux and Bo Dollis\(^{10}\) are two of the most popular Indian chiefs in contemporary New Orleans. Joseph Pierre (Monk) Boudreaux, chief of the Golden Eagles, was born in 1944 and began to mask as a Mardi Gras Indian while still a child. His father masked, and at about four or five years old he became aware of this ‘remarkable thing his father did every year around Carnival time.’ He remembers many of the tribes from his childhood: from Uptown, the White Eagles, Golden Arrows, Black Eagles, Wild Tchoupitoulas, Wild Magnolias, Cheyenne Hunters and Golden Blades.\(^{11}\) Indians, says Boudreaux ‘basically marched in their own communities.’

Boudreaux and Bo Dollis were childhood friends. Boudreaux’s neighbourhood had the White Eagles and Bo Dollis’s neighbourhood had the Wild Magnolias. So, Monk says, all the little boys who were hanging out with Bo and Monk decided that they would split up half and half; four went with Monk and four went with Bo, and this was the beginning of two new tribes, the Wild Magnolias and the White Eagles [later the Golden Eagles]. About his best friend being chief of a competing tribe, Boudreaux says:

> We were friends, we are still friends, we will always be friends. That’s how close of friends we are. We do things like this to blow off steam: it helps. Who’s going to be prettiest today; we’d argue about that. ‘I’m going to be prettiest.’ ‘Yeah, I’m going to be prettiest,’ and just go back and forth. We’re getting ourselves ready for the day (Porter 1990, p. 25).

Emile ‘Bo’ Dollis, was also born in the 1940s; his father was from Baton Rouge and his mother from a French speaking Creole family in St. Martinville, Louisiana. Dollis grew up in Central city, a run-down commercial/residential

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\(^{10}\) Boudreaux and Dollis 1992.

\(^{11}\) Names of tribes often reflect the ethnicity of the members: White Eagles, Creole Wild West, Golden Star Hunters = Franco-African heritage; Black, Wild = African-American.
uptown neighbourhood behind the grand St. Charles Avenue mansions. Dollis began attending Sunday night Indian practices in a friend's back yard while in junior high school. In 1957 he masked for the first time with the Golden Arrows, not telling his family he was involved with the Indians, sewing his costume at a friend's house. Later he was discovered by his father, who recognised his son in the street underneath a crown of feathers.

Boudreaux and Dollis were two of the first to experiment with merging Mardi Gras Indian music with other forms. In 1973, they joined forces with a funk-soul back-up band for the first commercial recording of the Indians and since that time have often added musicians to their call-and-response chanting on record and live performances. They have also individually recorded their own albums. In 1990, as he prepared to record another album, this time for Rounder Records, Boudreaux talked about the tribe’s music:

I plan on putting three new songs toward the new album. There’s a lot of new songs that we rehearsed three to four days a week for quite awhile to put the songs together. Some songs every Chief can’t sing, so they change them: like ‘Hold Him Joe, and Dunk Him In The Water,’ or ‘Shoo Fly Don’t Bother Me,’ they all get sung different by each tribe. They all get worked out in the back yards, or at least they used to; most of them now get worked out in bars. Yet we sang because we enjoyed them. It meant something for us. It told stories of some of our other brothers, some of our brothers that are no longer with us, like ‘Brother John’ and other songs (ibid.).

Dollis, whose latest recording is also on Rounder Records, and was also released in 1990, has become one of the city’s most popular chiefs (there is a likeness of him in Ripley’s Believe It Or Not wax museum) both for his costumes and for his singing, improvising well with a voice that has been compared to Sam Cooke. Dollis and Boudreaux have appeared on the recordings of others, also, including Robbie Robertson’s Storyville album. In the last few years, they have toured Europe and South America, as well as appearing with Robertson on television shows such as Saturday Night Live, The Tonight Show and an internationally televised guitar special, filmed in Spain.
‘Taking a form and mixing it with another form’

In 1995, in New Orleans, Bordeaux and Dollis performed with Astral Project, one of the city’s premier modern jazz units. The performance was hailed as a bold experiment, placing two musical forms together, the call and response chanting of the Indians and the improvisational jazz and jazz instrumentation of the group. Transformation and inversion of tunes is common in jazz, but this was a difference -- the Indians would not only supply the material, but perform. Held in the shrine-like theatre in the Masonic Temple, the unrehearsed session began with the jazz band performing, the saxophonist beginning the set with an improvised call on his horn, reminiscent of an Indian chant. Then the Indians (including Geechee, a famed local Indian percussionist who performed with mallets on a bass drum) appeared in their costumes. The Indians began with some traditional songs -- “Shallow Water,’ ‘Handa Wanda,’ ‘Two Way Pak E Way,’ and others, with shouts. The band surrounded their singing with one or two chord percussive vamps that gained exuberant momentum. The saxophonist and the guitarist worked jazz and soulful blues solos into the mix. At other times, they chimed in with filigrees and ambient sound effects. Astral Project’s drummer John Vidacovich had no trouble joining Geechee in percussion duels and the bassist easily locked into rhythmic pattern. The pianist, David Torkanowsky, held it all together, pounding on a tomtom with his right hand, grabbing piano chords with his left, calling for cues and fades like a quarterback at the scrimmage line. Occasionally he closed the keyboard lid and drummed on the piano with his hands. The jazz group would fall into simple grooves, letting the chanting lead the way, then launch into unison passages drawn from tunes played in other contexts.

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12 Astral Project is Tony Dagradi, saxophonist; Jim Singleton, bass; David Torkanowsky, keyboards; John Vidacovich, drums. These musicians play most often with other groups and their own groups, but come together occasionally as this unit. DaGradi is a professor of music at Loyola University, Singleton was once bass player for Gatemouth Brown, Vidacovich is the drummer on Professor Longhair’s Crawfish Fiesta and Torkanowsky produces rhythm and blues as well as jazz recordings, and often plays with Latin and flamenco performers.
The Indians also showed their virtuosity with improvisation. At one point, when a jam threatened to dissolve into chaos, Dollis recognised a chord change and belted what became an ecstatic version of the Mardi Gras Classic ‘New Suit,’ his scratchy voice reminiscent of Otis Redding, and ending with a free-form story/prayer -- ‘We came from a far-off land’ with dramatic taps on his tambourine. On a Mardi Gras classic, ‘Handa Wanda,’ the keyboardist experimented with a gospel motif before the closing choruses took on the feel of traditional jazz. As the crowd danced in the aisles, he carried Geechee’s bass drum and the drummer grabbed a snare to march the band offstage in a climactic Second Line, that was mirrored in the audience.

The performance had many Signifyin(g) features, including: taking a form and mixing it with another form; homage; inversion; making a variety of interpretations available, within the scope of the audience. In addition, the performance acted out the solidifying and community reaffirming aspect of two very different musical groups playing together. In this performance, the Indians crossed ‘boundaries’ of neighbourhood and musical style to merge their music with another style. The ‘traditional’ (though constantly changing) Mardi Gras Indian songs were known to the jazz players, common currency at Mardi Gras, sung and chanted by the Indians on their Carnival Day parades, and echoed in the juke joints where variations of the songs are part of most New Orleans musicians’ repertoire. By skilfully quoting and improvising on the music of the Indians, Astral Project demonstrated their knowledge of music beyond the confines of jazz. At the same time, by having no trouble holding their own with some of the city’s most noted improvisational jazz musicians, the Indians showed that they are sufficiently proficient in musical forms and styles, and demonstrate their knowledge of music as wide-ranging and sophisticated. The audience was an integral part of the event, judging the performance within the performance, and responding by Secondlining, performing their encouragement and approval of the evening’s music.

Much academic work done on the Indians, in using them as a strategy to discuss issues such as authenticity in Anglo-American music, often portrays the
people as an isolated, uneducated, simple lot, living desperate lives in an urban
ghetto, instinctively or magically producing the pageantry of Carnival Day. In my
own research I have interviewed many Mardi Gras Indians and have found that
often the people I meet bear little resemblance to that stereotype. I have found that
most of the Indians, despite reports to the contrary, are employed, most often in
skilled labour. Some are school teachers, and there are construction workers, postal
employees, professional musicians and merchants within the group. The Indians'
music is highly complex, requiring skill and dedication as well as years of practice
to perform correctly. The costuming is an art that has been recognised by such
organisations as the Smithsonian Institution as a valued US-American art form.
The rock stars who have collaborated with Indian groups comment on their
virtuosity and professionalism (Sinclair 1991). Though many members are poor,
the musical quality is rich, due to the high value the community places on musical
skills and the resulting pedagogic strategies.

Language, costume, dance and music are assembled in a colourful and
musical collage to create the art of the Mardi Gras Indian. In the same way, the
participants select this organisation as well as many others to shape the art of
identity as a member of the New Orleans community, using different groups and
associations to represent divergent attitudes toward society occurring within the
individual. As Abe Sturgis of the White Eagles told Maurice Martinez:

And the beautiful part about playing the game is that no two people
can express themselves the same way. Everyone is feeling what they
feel, and it’s all basically a proud thing, and a happy thing; it’s a sad
thing, a joyous thing ... It’s all these things combined (1982, p. 23).

Conclusion

As part of life in New Orleans, ritual music and dance communicate a
complex collection of relationships, identities and social realities, constructed
internally as elements of similarity or difference, and externally as a communal

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ideology of African-American cultural values to inform non-African-Americans. Rights are asserted with songs and dances; performance on the street maps out a political presence, as well as a musical performance. This suggests that the Second Line parades are not merely ‘nostalgic rendering[s] of a mythical past,’ as Lipsitz (1990) said of the Mardi Gras Indians; performance doesn’t just ‘reproduce past meanings,’ but it is also a generating source of community, where meanings are negotiated and identities and structures decided, and where people transform themselves from individuals to members of a group. McClary and Walser have warned that:

> In the ongoing struggle to have black music perceived as music, black culture recognized as culture, black people respected as people, it is tempting to pursue projects of legitimation that treat the body as a stumbling block in the way of full appreciation of black artistic achievement. It would be unfortunate if questions concerning the body were to disappear from writing about African-American music, especially at this moment in cultural studies (1994, p. 78).

They suggest that a balanced approach would be to find a way to look at the music’s roots in African spirituality and ritual, its physical as well as intellectual aspects, and its relationship with the cultural industries without reducing the music to just one of these. The study of New Orleans music, so often ignored or overbalanced toward a search for a point of origin of styles, would certainly be enriched by this approach. Taking their suggestion, we will now turn from an emphasis on Signifyin(g) practice and ritual to an investigation of the city’s pedagogic practices and then to the relationship of the city’s musicians to both local and international music industries.
Chapter Five

Horizontal and Vertical Integration

‘When people live in a cultural repository such as New Orleans, they do not need to be taught the culture. They need education in the means to express the culture.’

--New Orleans jazz educator Alvin Batiste

Introduction

In 1990, Time Magazine, the most widely read news magazine in the United States, featured Wynton Marsalis on its cover, proclaiming Marsalis, and other young New Orleans musicians, such as Terence Blanchard, Donald Harrison, Marlon Jordan, Harry Connick Jr. and Marsalis’s brother Branford, as heralds of a ‘New Jazz Age’ (Time, 22 October 1990). Marsalis’s subsequent appointment in 1991 as jazz artistic director of Lincoln Center, and the musical programme that he has established there, makes the Center arguably the focal point of jazz in the 1990s and reinforces Marsalis’s place in the middle of debates and controversy about jazz. So, not only are young musicians trained in New Orleans achieving success on the national jazz scene, but they are being touted by jazz critics as becoming involved, for good or ill, in the future of American jazz. This would seem to call for a closer look at the community that nurtured and produced these players. What factors are important in this emergence of a growing number of influential young New Orleans musicians? What strategies were employed in their musical instruction and what can these strategies tell us about music education? How do the young identify the roles they will play in the New Orleans musical community and

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1 As quoted by Al Kennedy, 1996.

in what way do they fill the roles of those who have gone before? At the same time, few young New Orleans musicians have been successful on the pop music charts, and so one must also ask: What in the informal and formal musical instruction of New Orleans youngsters may prepare them for success in the field of jazz but not pop? And what does this tell us about the requirements of the popular music industry?

The last chapter looked at some ways that the community of New Orleans invents itself by performing its past in the presence of others, defining itself in opposition to other places, through musical performance. This chapter will look at how the role of musician and the musical values of the community are taken up by young New Orleanians and particularly how they may gain musical acumen through exposure to music both within and outside formal instruction. To do this, I have chosen the ‘horizontal-vertical’ distinction as my organising principle, since these terms are useful in talking about the distinction between the values and requirements of the locality and those of the international recording industry, and since they describe an intersection, rather than two phenomena running parallel, thus emphasising the relatedness of the two ‘worlds.’

**Horizontal integration - pedagogical strategies**

A survey of formal training alone tells only a part of the story of how the New Orleans music community passes down its musical traditions to the young. Before formal schooling begins, most New Orleans young people have experienced music in many settings. The music education of New Orleans musicians consists of a complicated system of informal and formal instruction often beginning in the home, neighbourhood, and/or church, and then augmented by the schools and private lessons.

Christopher Wilkinson has pointed out parallels in music instruction between West Africa and New Orleans in the first three decades of this century (Wilkinson 1994, p. 25). He takes what Kwabena Nketia (1973) has identified as central features of the education of young musicians in Ghana and compares these
with New Orleans, concluding that whether or not it can be proven that they were
directly derived from Western Africa, the extensive musicmaking in the city created
the ‘functional equivalent of that of many west and central African societies’
(Wilkinson 1994, p. 34). Though my research does not directly engage with the
‘filiation or innovation’ debate of the extent of cultural remainder between Western
Africa and the New World, previously in this thesis it has been pointed out that
factors such as the relatively late colonisation of Louisiana and therefore the arrival
of the enslaved people almost a century after the initial arrival of Africans in the
English colonies, together with the homogeneous ethnicity of the Africans brought
to colonial Louisiana, could have provided the environment for more retention of
African cultural forms than in other places. Wilkinson avoids this debate, however,
by proposing that the cultural environment of New Orleans at the turn of the
century, regardless of the level of historical consciousness, facilitated an essentially
African approach to music education as discussed by Nketia (1973, p. 87). This
approach was distinguished by the long, slow absorption through exposure to
musical situations, and the centrality of active participation. In addition, Wilkinson
names other West African approaches to musical education that had their
counterpart in New Orleans: an extended family structure; substitution for their
mentors in performances; and affiliation with social or secret organisations.

In what he called ‘an anomaly of significant proportions,’ Wilkinson notes
that the extensive formal training of many of the city’s jazz musicians who came of
age in the early Twentieth Century, modelled on the Paris Conservatory methods,
could not have prepared them for the task of creating the ‘more or less
spontaneously improvised, swinging music in a unique tonation characteristic of
New Orleans jazz’ (1994, p. 27). On the contrary, he concludes, it was the equally
complex pedagogical strategies which, if it cannot be proven that they were the
direct cultural retention of African music, could be termed their ‘functional
equivalent.’ However, like so many academics who engage with New Orleans,
Wilkinson limits his concerns to the period surrounding the ‘birth of jazz,’ and
concludes:
Just as the Crescent City would by the end of the 1920s cease to have exclusive title to music known as jazz, so too would the educational processes associated with this music change. It would seem that at the juncture where swing replaced New Orleans jazz as the prevailing style of music, distinctly African musical pedagogies became even less apparent as well (1994, p. 40).

Wilkinson’s comments follow the pattern of researchers seeing New Orleans as existing only in the past and related to jazz only. In my research, New Orleans musicians playing in a variety of styles often described their musical training in very similar terms to Nketia’s model. Interviews with contemporary New Orleans musicians confirm that these pedagogical strategies, though often outside the boundaries of formal musical training, are nevertheless complex, learned, and ongoing. Emphasising only their musical education within structured formal lessons denies the complexity and importance of musical training available to many New Orleans children outside the formal, and opens the way for myths of musical competence based on ethnicity rather than learned behaviour.

Applying Nketia’s model to contemporary New Orleans, it is apparent that the city’s musical environment continues to provide the context for

- the slow absorption through exposure to musical situations, in public spaces, which would allow a child to learn how the music is used, as well as to internalise the rhythmic character of the music
- the centrality of active participation in activities such as Secondlining, following public parades and marches, singing in church and joining open community musical performances, enabling children to acquire the varied repertoires and practices of the community
- musicmaking within the family and extended family, with opportunities for exposure to musical rehearsals in the home, as well as to role models of family members who are musicians
- affiliation with social or secret societies such as Mardi Gras Indians, social aid and pleasure or other Second Line clubs
and, in conjunction, formal teaching by mentors, family members, or school.

Each of these deserves closer examination in the context of the pedagogic experiences of contemporary New Orleans musicians.

‘Slow absorption through exposure to musical situations’

In interviews with contemporary New Orleans musicians, many comment on how as children they had been ‘totally enveloped’ in music, often in outdoor settings. Many factors contribute to this, not least of all the climate of the city, where doors and windows are often open, and seldom is weather too inclement for outdoor cultural activities. Jazz musician Earl Turbinton talked about his neighbourhood in the 1950s:

At the end of my street was a place called the Blue Eagle. Whenever my mama would send us to the store to get something, they would have people like Guitar Slim, Gatemouth Brown, B. B. King, Bobby Bland playing away. On weekends, bands would come through the street on the back of flatbed trucks, advertising dances and circuses. The man next door played records of Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie (Berry, 1981, p. 23).

Outdoor parades occur throughout the year, from large and organised to small and serendipitous. Added to that, the immigrant populations of Mediterranean and Irish Catholics brought with them the tradition of feast days and their accompanying outdoor parades, which include music. Most notably, children in New Orleans are exposed to the music of bands that accompany the nightly parades during the long Carnival season each winter leading to Mardi Gras, the last indulgence before the Lenten season.

The city’s tourist industry provides situations where musicians play outside for visitors, especially in the Vieux Carré district. In the many public parks and on the riverfront, musical entertainment can be heard on regular occasions. In addition, the churches are a place of intense musical activity, available to people of all ages. Ed Blackwell, who during his long and successful career was drummer for
jazz greats such as John Coltrane and Ornette Coleman, believes this exposure to music influenced his work:

I think growing up in the culture that is New Orleans has a very big part in the way I approach the drums. For one thing, in New Orleans I was around a lot of music every day, all the time. Music from the parade bands, music from gospel groups on Sunday that would set up on the corner with a tambourine, a guitar and a set of drums, music from all different aspect. Dixieland or whatever, rhythm and blues (Salaam 1988, p. 35).

As pianist Amasa Miller describes it,

The way music is timed is the most important thing about its feel. Kids in New Orleans grow up surrounded by that distinctive rhythm -- they can't miss it.³

This long, slow exposure to musical situations would serve to ‘educate’ not just those who go on to professional careers as musicians, of course, but the entire community. As Herlin Riley, drummer with Wynton Marsalis, notes:

There are so many people here who never even considered themselves musicians, but still have this certain flair and feel and knack for making music (Cataliotti, 1984, p. 20).

The abundance of music in the city has often been noted by travel writers, such as British journalist Nik Cohn:

Not all the music in New Orleans is great, but there is so much of it, in such a dizzying range of forms, that it sweeps you away regardless. It comes at you from every angle, flooding out of bars and churches and passing cars, courtyards, and balconies, brass band parades and steamboats cruising on the Mississippi, and a myriad backstreet dives. Music here is not a sidebar, something boxed and apart, but the city’s lingua franca, as integral to its being as celebration, and loss, and the smell of the steam heat...hard to remember any place or time when music did not surround me, swallow me whole (9 January 1994, p. 6 Style & Travel, *Sunday Times*).

Despite the author’s somewhat florid description, his observation of a city where music can be heard regularly out of doors, argues that the conditions exist for a

³ Miller 1986.
long, slow absorption of music in many settings, a situation that could be seen as an important, but overlooked, contributor to the education of New Orleans musicians.

‘The centrality of active participation’

Closely linked to the exposure to musical situations of young people in the city is their opportunity for actual participation. In the previous chapter, the city’s Second Line parades were described. Many New Orleans musicians talk about how as young children they participated in these parades by jumping in, dancing behind the bands, tapping on bottles, small drums, or tambourines. In these situations, whether commenting with instrument or body or voices, listening involves actively participating, commenting within the performance, rather than passively listening, seated in an audience. Before they receive any formal musical training, many New Orleans children have been allowed, and encouraged, to follow along with funerals, parades, and carnival, acquiring exposure to musical values of the community. As writer Ben Sandmel has said:

You talk to almost any musician raised in New Orleans, from a jazz musician to rapper, and you’ll end up talking about the Second Line parades, jazz funerals, neighbourhood joints or the Indians (Smith 1992).

The tourism industry provides an opportunity for active participation by young performers. The streets of the French Quarter are seldom without young people playing in pickup bands for tourists, and these groups know that the younger player, despite his or her lack in musical expertise, often draws the biggest tips. These children recognise early on the repertoire that is most successful with the visitor, but often add their own tunes, and playing on the streets, an activity decried by some music instructors (see Chapter Six) is seen by others as an opportunity to practice and refine their musicianship. Harry Connick Jr. was one of many New Orleans youngsters to take advantage of tourist places for their first introduction to musical performance. He recalled:

I was playing on Bourbon Street when I was 13 years old. I would get in about 2 in the morning, sleep a few, go to school, and be back on the
gig for 8 p.m. It was great, having that money in my pocket, and people knowing I was playing with the cats downtown.⁴

The many talent contests held in New Orleans also have served to introduce young musicians to professional performance. Art and Aaron Neville, Irma Thomas, Frankie Ford, Earl King, and Dr. John are some New Orleans musicians who first took the stage at movie theatres at children’s matinees.

‘Musicmaking within the family and extended family’

A central place for learning music for many New Orleans musicians has been the home and extended family. New Orleans artists recall hearing music in the home from their earliest years. Jazz saxophonist Earl Turbinton recalls his mother singing ‘all the time’ around the house.⁵ Windham Hill recording artist Henry Butler remembers his father’s extensive record collection and his mother’s piano playing.⁶ For the children of musicians, rehearsal in the home is a common way for young people to be introduced to music and, in reflecting on their early childhood, many in the New Orleans music community mention family rehearsals as an especially rich learning environment.⁷ ‘The family tradition in jazz has been one of the most important vehicles for carrying on the music from the early days to the present,’ says Dr. Michael White, a clarinettist and professor of jazz history at Xavier University: ‘In the old days, many families used to play for recreation. And out of that tradition came several important New Orleans music families and musicians. Many of the musicians playing today are related to or come from musical families.’⁸ Clarinettist and music professor Alvin Batiste remembers rehearsals in the home and how they influenced his nephew, CBS recording artist Kent Jordan:

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⁴ Connick 1989.
⁵ Turbinton 1976.
⁷ The extensive kinship networks within the musical community of New Orleans are explored by Berry, Foose and Jones in Up from the Cradle of Jazz (1990).
Kidd Jordan and I married sisters. We were in school together and we were always people who practised a lot. When a new baby came, they’d put the baby in the crib, the ladies would go shopping and we would practice. When we looked up, Kent Jordan was playing flute. He had been hearing his daddy play saxophone and his uncle play clarinet when he was in his mama’s womb (Salaam, 1985).

**Family Tree of Jazz**

The significance of kinship networks for music was well illustrated in 1990, when the Louisiana Jazz Federation sponsored a concert entitled ‘The Family Tree of Jazz’ featuring three of the city’s many musical families: the Paulins, the Adamses and the Frenches. Their experiences are typical: Ernest ‘Doc’ Paulin, admitting to being in his eighties, has been leading a brass band since 1927, with his sons Ricky, Aaron, Duane, Scott and Roderick joining the group as they grew old enough to march. ‘I’ve trained them on that jazz. I take hold of them and get them the right way.’ His family band has been together for about 22 years, adding siblings as they matured musically. ‘They’ve all been playing since they were big enough to hold up an instrument.’ His sons play in other bands as well. The Pin Stripe marching band’s magical clarinet work is by Rickey Paulin, the eldest son. Paulin’s youngest son, Roderick, born when Doc was nearly 60, is a saxophonist with the ReBirth Brass Band. Ironically, one of the characteristics of the band is that it lacks a clarinet. The ReBirth, mentioned in Chapter Three, are a popular component of the city’s brass band revival, which has been singled out as a radical departure from traditional brass band music, yet as Jason Berry has said, ‘the striking fact is that the dynamics behind today’s brass band revival -- as opposed to another upsurge of rock, rap, or R&B -- lie in the conscious effort of one generation to hand down a tradition to the next’ (Berry 1995, p. 36). The youngest Paulin comments on his musical education by his father and mentors:

Just being around him was a lesson. He showed me lots of things, and playing the funerals and parades with him, that was inspiring. He’d always have rehearsals in the house. My musical training got focused
in college, at SUNO, where Kidd Jordan taught. Kidd became like a
second father to me. He introduced me to John Coltrane’s music and
that got me going. I listened to Coltrane, I listened to him. And I said I
got to play that too. For six years I spent 14 hours a day practising
alone in a room, blowing (Berry 1995, p. 31).

So Roderick’s musical inspiration came from his immediate surroundings – his
father, his teacher -- and through the recorded music of John Coltrane. In addition,
like many musicians in New Orleans, he refers to his mentors using family
metaphors, such as ‘second father’ for his relationship with his teacher.

The legendary bandleader/banjoist Albert ‘Papa John’ French fathered
another set of musicians. His eldest son Bob played trumpet in 1951 with the Saint
Augustine High School marching band, considered to be the best school marching
band, but switched to drums three years later and has played them ever since. In
1954, he formed his first band, a rhythm and blues group that included Art and
Charles Neville and James Booker. Later, French joined rhythm and blues legend
James ‘Sugar Boy’ Crawford’s band. Today, French leads the traditional jazz band
started by his father. His brother George is a bassist who is widely known on the
local jazz and R&B scene. ‘Bob plays traditional jazz and I play music,’ laughs
George. ‘That’s the way it’s supposed to be,’ counters Bob. ‘Somebody in the family
has to keep the tradition, and somebody has to go out there and make something
new out of it.’

Brothers Placide, Justin and Gerald Adams have been playing music in New
Orleans for more than 45 years, beginning their musical careers in a family band,
with their mother, Dolly, who played several instruments, and her brothers,
trumpeter Lawrence Douroix and trombonist Irving Douroix. In the 1940s, the
family worked all the local gambling casinos. After their parents and uncles died,
Placide played with rhythm and blues pianist Eddie ‘Bo’ Bocage, Gerald with jazz
bandleader Freddy Coleman, and Justin as a session player at Cosimo Matassa’s

9 Southern University of New Orleans.
famous J&M studio.\textsuperscript{11} Brother Placide now heads the Onward Brass Band. ‘New Orleans is just one big jazz family,’ said Placide.

This family network extends outside the family and the music community is often referred to in family terms. Herlin Riley, drummer with Wynton Marsalis’s band, thinks the ‘family’ of local musicians encourages a broader repertoire:

I feel very fortunate coming from these surroundings whereby you have a chance to hear so many different kinds of music. New Orleans being a ‘little big place’ everybody knows each other and all the musicians around town are like a family. It gives you a chance to play and be exposed to different kinds of music. Everybody’s doing something different (Cataliotti 1984, p. 20).

‘Affiliation with social or secret societies’

The family’s and extended family’s social networks often include social aid and pleasure clubs, the church, the lodge and so forth, making for a dense, overlapping network of musical exposure and opportunities (Kaslow, chap. 5, p. 1, 1981). The host of voluntary associations -- social or secret societies -- in the black community of New Orleans have a high degree of what Laumna (1973, p. 8) called ‘multistranded relationships’ -- multidimensional interactions of family, social class, ethnicity, place of residence and other factors of common interest. The incidence of these relationships among members of these associations could be seen to outline, in some measure, the parameters of ‘community’ itself, as the proliferation of associations represent a fundamental feature of the social organisation of the black community of the city, acting as a strategy for maximising social resources. For instance, as mentioned in Chapter Four, members of Mardi Gras Indian tribes spend up to six months of the year preparing for carnival, thus involving the participants in a series of organisational and interpersonal encounters over time.

\textsuperscript{10} Both the Frenches and the Adamses have ties to Louis Armstrong. Bob French’s uncle played with Armstrong and Placide Adams’s granduncle, Manuel Manetta, who taught Jelly Roll Morton, was one of Armstrong’s best friends.

\textsuperscript{11} Working five or six recording sessions a day in the 1950s, Justin’s big guitar sound can be heard on Little Richard’s ‘Lucille’ among many other hits.
‘Formal teaching’ - music education in the public schools

As has been pointed out in previous chapters, the extensive historical literature on the origins and development of musical style in New Orleans focuses almost exclusively on jazz and its ‘birth.’ The small amount of work on the transmittal of music has centred around young musicians who have apprenticed to more accomplished musicians, or music teachers who gave private lessons in the community. Other than fanciful tales of gifts of band instruments to the schools by the military, there is almost no information on the role of the New Orleans public school system in the growth and perpetuation of the city’s musical life, although this role has been profound.13 Throughout the Twentieth Century, New Orleans public school music teachers, through their individual efforts, have forced an often uncooperative institution to take its place in the formation and reformation of an urban musical culture, making the school system key in the network through which New Orleans music has been transmitted from one generation to the next, even if at times its primary contribution has been to provide employment for musicians as teachers, often in subjects other than music.

At the beginning of the century there was only minimal music instruction offered to African-Americans in the public schools of New Orleans and no high school instruction of any kind for black pupils until McDonough 35 opened in 1917. However, minutes of the New Orleans school board and interviews with musicians of the period point out that informal training did occur between instructors with a musical background and their pupils.14 In 1903, the superintendent of education directed an art teacher, Mrs. Nickerson, to ‘teach music, without extra pay, in the coloured schools.’15 Nickerson’s husband, Professor Nickerson, owned the Nickerson Music School, a centre for formal instruction in the period. By the 1920s, music

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12 See Chapter Two.
14 Minutes of the New Orleans Public School Board are available at the Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans.
15 Minutes of New Orleans public school board, 1903, University of New Orleans library.
began to be taught in the black schools in an informal, volunteer way, with free after-school music programmes and mentoring arrangements, where local musicians would come into the schools to perform or teach. In the 1930s, parents at Lafon School raised money to hire Professor Nickerson to teach instrumental music after school.

The music allowed in the schools was closely monitored. In 1922 the Orleans Parish School Board prohibited jazz music and dancing in public schools. Although this was largely ignored in white schools, it was upheld by black educators. Al Kennedy, historian of the New Orleans public schools, relates how venerated musicians Red Allen and the Humphrey Brothers played jazz music on their school yard at lunch time, but the music taught in their school music classes was ‘straight-up music.’ Although, as Kennedy says, the ‘quiet debate’ about jazz in the schools has been going on at least since the 1920s, with some people deeming it inappropriate and others regarding it as the American art form and eager to have the children introduced to it, jazz continued to be discouraged in most of the black educational institutions in New Orleans into the 1970s (1997). In the 1950s, rhythm and blues was also banned. Though the public school system was not sanctioning teachers to teach popular music during this period, many teachers encouraged the careers of their pupils, often bridging the gap of conflict between European musical forms and jazz or rhythm and blues. Musicians often mention how their teachers emphasised that fundamentals of music are applicable to all styles, encouraging them to be interested in all types of music, though emphasising that each style called for a particular time and place where it was appropriate.

Although often credited by New Orleans musicians as instrumental in their development, public school teachers have only recently begun to be publicly recognised for their work. In 1995, the Louisiana Jazz Federation presented its first Jazz Educator Award to retired band director and music teacher Yvonne Busch. Though Busch was never formally allowed to teach jazz or rhythm and blues in her classrooms during the years from 1951 to her retirement in 1983, the former pupils who came to Café Brasil to honour her made up a formidable roster of performers of
avant-garde jazz and New Orleans rhythm and blues. Among her pupils were James ‘Sugarboy’ Crawford, Tony Bazley, James Rivers, James Black, Porgy Jones, Alvin Thomas, Nat Perrilliat, John Boudreaux, George Davis and August Fleury. Busch was also adviser to the Hawketts, the R&B group founded by Art Neville. Musicians who did their student teaching alongside Busch included Clyde Kerr Jr. and Ellis Marsalis and many of her former pupils are now teachers in the public schools. Like many of her colleagues, Busch was a professional musician throughout her teaching career and taught music outside the schools. In addition to her job as teacher, she gave music lessons in the evenings at a local instrument store alongside Willie Humphrey and Louis Barbarin and was a trombonist with William Houston’s Big Band (*Louisiana Weekly*, October 16-22, 1995, B-3). Busch is an excellent example of how educators in the public schools, despite limitations on their teaching, were instrumental in the popular careers of their pupils.

The attitude toward popular music in New Orleans public schools has changed in the past few years, paralleling in part the inability of the city to finance public school music education, and the concomitant growth of private and volunteer sector supplemental funding, programmes and teachers. Reflecting this change in attitude is a statement of the superintendent of New Orleans public schools commenting on a ‘music in the schools’ programme financed and sponsored by the Louisiana Jazz Federation:

The Jazz Federation has created a unique opportunity for our children to experience this city’s cultural gift to the world, jazz, in both an educational and entertaining presentation (May 1995).

Today jazz and rhythm and blues musicians are welcomed in the public schools and musicians booked to play the Jazz Festival or in concert locally are often invited into the schools in formal and informal settings. Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis, Sun Ra, Doc Cheatham, Little Richard, Willie Dixon and Joan Baez are only a few of the musicians who have spent the day in New Orleans public schools, performing and answering questions for the youngsters, and Wynton Marsalis holds master classes for youngsters frequently. Sometimes individual teachers use their
connections to enliven their own music programme. Sue Hall, a teacher at Lafayette Elementary School who also books bands at the Palm Court Jazz Café, produces an annual music festival as a fund-raiser for the school’s music programme in which musicians such as Dr. John or Doc Cheatham perform in the old, cramped school cafeteria. As Al Kennedy relates, ‘Those kids get some amazing talent going through there three, four, five times a year because a teacher knows how to access it’ (Kennedy 1996).

Musicians sometimes have contributed to the schools in other ways. Kennedy relates how jazz musician Pud Brown adopted Lafayette Elementary School and often would repair instruments for the children. Clyde Kerr Sr. wrote marching arrangements for several music teachers, and his daughter remembers him buying up old instruments for the schools from junk shops,

...taking them home, beating them out with a hammer, using his little brazing torch to fill in the holes. That’s more common than you would imagine (Kennedy 1996).

She also recalls musicians volunteering to help in the classroom:

Family networks intercepted with school networks. If somebody’s sister taught at a school, or a cousin, friend, or neighbour, they would come in and do it. And that’s the fun part, because the musicians, I think they really get a kick out of it (ibid., 1996).

**Case Studies - Outside the system**

Despite this growing support for music in the schools, music education has suffered along with other civic programmes in the deteriorating financial situation of the city, and cuts to music programmes have put music instruction in jeopardy. This has made music programmes financed outside the school system especially important. Increasingly, music continues in and around schools supported by community and corporate funding and maintained by local musicians who give their time to teach, in paid and voluntary capacities. As funding has come from the community, the community has had more say in what musical styles are taught. For example, when Ellis Marsalis left New Orleans in 1990 for the University of Virginia, the local Coca-Cola bottlers established the Coca-Cola Endowed Chair in
Jazz (and the position of director of Jazz Studies) in order to bring him back to the city, and thus the study of jazz was assured at the University of New Orleans.

The following are some examples of music education within the public schools that are partially or fully supported outside the school system: the first is a public school music programme sponsored by the school’s participation in Carnival and volunteerism; the second is a music school which is part of the public schools, partially financed by a non-profit organisation; and the third is a music school that is outside the public schools, wholly financed by a private organisation; and a music programme that is supported by a private organisation but held within the public schools. Ironically, the failure of the public school system to fully support music education has opened opportunities for the control of pedagogic strategies to shift to the concerns of the instructors and more closely mirror the concerns of the community.

**Live Oak Middle School**

It could be argued that the biggest impetus for learning music in New Orleans is Carnival, the season that leads up to Mardi Gras. Between Twelfth Night (January 6) and the night before lent (Mardi Gras, or Fat Tuesday), a varying period of several weeks, the almost seventy official Carnival krewes, or clubs, hold parades along a variety of routes through the city, each of about three miles. A krewe will hire as many school bands as it can afford, paying a fee negotiated between the school system and the krewes. Some of the super krewes such as Endymion, which draws a crowd of up to one million paradegoers, will use up to fifty bands. These are usually drawn from the New Orleans public school system and surrounding areas. The children practice all year for the privilege of marching before up to a million spectators. Some of the schools will march in as many as a dozen or more parades, sometimes two in a day. A closer look at one of the school bands that marches on Mardi Gras Day and the Carnival period leading up to it exemplifies the ways that dedicated educators working with limited budgets manage to keep a programme of music education in their schools, and points out
how, despite a lack of funds, school administrators and the community may prioritise music in the schools.

Live Oak Middle School is a public school for approximately 380 children from eleven to fourteen years of age, situated in the Irish Channel of New Orleans. Most of the children are African-American, and come from families of incomes well below the poverty line, the majority living in the St. Thomas housing project. Almost half of the children in the school are involved in the band, which has 85 to 90 players and another 80 children participating in the groups that proceed the band in parades: a dance team, a pep squad, a drill team and majorettes. The band instructor, a practising musician who plays with the Neville Brothers and other groups, is given about $500 (£330) per year from the school system for his entire budget. Out of this must come uniforms, instruments and sheet music, not nearly enough to meet the needs of the band. Although a neighbourhood music store offers to sell new instruments to the principal at cost and on a ‘pay us when you can’ basis, the school rarely can afford new equipment even at this generous price. After paying for the buses that the band must use each Carnival season to transport band members to the parades, the school principal uses any remaining money left from that amount paid to the band by Carnival krewes to personally scour pawn shops to purchase used instruments for the band. In addition, he persuades businesspeople to give him money for needed equipment. After a school board official taunted him for the ‘ragged’ condition of the Live Oak band, the principal demanded $500 from a friend to buy the school ‘as gorgeous a banner as the best school in New Orleans’ to precede the band in the Carnival parades.

Our children are from as poor and violent a neighbourhood as you can get. They walk over bodies to come to school sometime -- they tell me about it. It takes me weeks to get over a funeral -- and these children have to deal with this all the time. I think they are amazing. And they deserve the chance to play. The school system gives us nothing.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{16} Marino 1995.
Live Oak uses a teaching position designated for an ‘exploratory’ teacher to pay the bandleader. The school could fill this position with a music, speech, language, or African-American studies teacher, but the principal believes that the children will get more out of a music teacher.

What could they do with a language? We chose a music instructor and we are extremely lucky to have him. He’s dedicated and loves these kids. Every summer he gives a three-week minicamp for the kids who will be coming to us in the fall, at no charge to them. And he doesn’t get paid. The school system has no money for this. This year, he worked right through Thanksgiving holidays. The janitors don’t even do that. I try to hold some of the money that we get from the krewes for him, so he can get a little extra for all the extra work he does, but it’s very difficult.

The principal is proud of ‘his kids’ and brags about their abilities and worth, though he is a strict disciplinarian and demands respect.

We have talented kids here. We have a twelve-year-old girl singer who’s going to NOCCA, and she’s so good she’ll make you cry. Fats Domino’s grandson came here; Professor Longhair’s grandson, too. He was in the band. Lots of them can read music and they have trouble reading from books. But to be in the band they have to keep up their books, and they will do it. And a funny thing is, even the emotionally disturbed, and behaviour disordered, they are great in the marching band. We have a boy -- you have to tie him in a chair sometimes. But in the parades, he’s leading the band with his drum. The children need this band.

He brings art pieces to his office, and has remodelled the band room with volunteers, so that the children have ‘a nice place to be for at least a little while in their day.’

Their parents may come in the first time drugged up, drunk, but they are going to see a nice, clean place. It shows I respect them, I respect their children. So they respect me. I respect the talent of these kids, and they know it.

I am very familiar with the Live Oak School (which the children call ‘Jive Oak’), since for over a decade my office was only a few blocks from the school. The French windows in my uptown office in New Orleans were open most days (even closed they were no barrier to the sounds of the neighbourhood), and every
September around 3 p.m. through those windows came evidence that again some of the children of Live Oak Middle School had decided to forego their free afternoons, take up the battered musical instruments supplied to them by the New Orleans public school system, and play in their school band.

The boys and girls had a varying degree of proficiency, but many could hardly play at all, and the collective sounds drifting through my window from Constance Street were, to be honest, dissonant and fairly horrible. Each afternoon, the dreaded 3 o’clock would arrive, with the collective banging of drums and honking of horns in a cacophony of sound that never seemed to arrange itself into any known tune. In New Orleans, September is still uncomfortably hot and humid, and Live Oak School is not air-conditioned. The children, day after day, would sit in a sweltering classroom, blowing, pounding, making noise as I sat at my window, trying to block them out.

September inevitably becomes October, still sweltering, but usually, around Halloween, I might find myself humming a tune, and realise to my shock that it was a tune the Live Oak band had been playing. And I had recognised it. In a few weeks, the sounds would be coming clearer from the direction of Live Oak School as the children practised marching around their block, the sound shifting as they turned corners. Shouts from the band director told of confusion in the rank and file. Brakes screeching told of confusion in neighbourhood traffic patterns.

In winter, the unceasing humidity of the New Orleans climate makes a day with an otherwise mild temperature damp and cold, and when the December rains set in, I felt sorry for the little ones. But with strong hearts they braved the weather, and sometime during the end of January, I watched as the band marched around the block with only a few wobbly columns, and the tune and the step seemed almost at one.

Carnival arrived, and as I stood on the street curb one night pointing out the floats and the marching bands to a visitor from California, suddenly, by the flambeaux’s lighted torch, I saw the new banner, emblazoned ‘Live Oak School.’ No parent could have felt more pride in those little musicians as they strutted down the
street, playing and swaying to a funky tune their benevolent bandleader had transcribed for them from the radio. I pointed them out to the visitor. ‘Yes,’ the woman said, ‘these kids down here in New Orleans, they can just naturally play.’

What this anecdote says about racist stereotyping, and how it does injustice to the talent and drive of the children of the Live Oak School band is not the subject of this chapter, however. What combination of encouragement, reinforcement and self-determination would cause an inner-city youth, a member of a community with a poor education system and a desperately poor economy, to take up a difficult and disciplined activity such as musicmaking? A graduate of Live Oak, now a professional musician who often works as a studio musician for the Massachusetts-based Rounder label, told me why he had played in the Live Oak band.

From the time I was a baby, every year my mama took us up to the corner of Third and St. Charles every night during Carnival to watch the parades. Those school bands would march down the streets, row after row of really serious faces, dressed up like Roman legions marching through -- I’ll never forget how they looked. And the drums - - you could hear them coming for blocks away, really scary and serious. The St. Aug band, with those purple uniforms and gold helmets and braid, with all their Secondliners following them along the sidewalks. And when they would start up playing -- man, I’ll never forget it. And everybody saying ‘It’s St. Aug’. I knew if there was any way, I was going to do that someday. Live Oak was a start to that dream. Everybody was going to see me marching down that street with those fine uniforms on.18

The school marching bands at Carnival are images of music that a New Orleans child first sees, and sees repeatedly, year after year. In choosing music, a child chooses an activity that brings prestige and respect from his whole community. The child sees the parade route lined with literally hundreds of thousands of people from all walks of life -- locals from their neighbourhood, visitors from all over the world, who have come to hear the bands. The self-confidence and pride engendered in playing music in a public school band is seen by people such as

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17 The Saint Augustine (Catholic) High School band is said by many to be one of the most consistently excellent of the New Orleans school marching bands.

the Live Oak School principal to justify efforts to provide music instruction, despite limited resources.

**NOCCA**

The New Orleans Center for Creative Arts (NOCCA) has been called by the city’s daily newspaper ‘The Garden Where Artists Grow (*Times-Picayune*, D-1 Sunday Jan 26, 1996). Founded in 1974 as part of the New Orleans public school system, NOCCA provides training in music, dance, theatre, and the visual arts, with an emphasis on teaching an appreciation for both the European classical tradition and for New Orleans popular music, such as jazz. Its two-hundred-fifty pupils from tenth through twelfth grades (usually 15 to 18 years old) attend the school part time, while also attending their regular traditional high schools. Pupils must maintain good grades, and there have been occasions where some of the most talented musicians were sent back to full-time regular schooling when their grades slipped below standard. Admission to the school is by audition, with school officials identifying potential NOCCA pupils at an early age. NOCCA is supported in the community by Friends of NOCCA, a private, non-profit group, that works to provide the school with what the impoverished local school board cannot. For instance, the Friends raised over $5 million toward a $23 million rebuilding project in 1996.

Though graduates of the school include Harry Connick Jr., Donald Harrison, Branford Marsalis, Terence Blanchard, and Wynton Marsalis, as well as several current members of the New York Metropolitan Opera Company, the directors of the school emphasise that from its founding, the school’s goal has not been ‘starmaking.’ In fact, the founders of the school have articulated their fears that the great success of the school’s first graduates might harm their primary goals of the school. This philosophy continues with the new chair of the music department, Stephen Dankner, who says, ‘It’s about providing an opportunity for excellence. The discipline it takes can be applied to any other endeavour’ (ibid., 1996).

This desire is echoed by the pupils. Fifteen-year-old saxophonist Arnold Little, touted by his teachers as having potential for a promising career in show
business, says that any thoughts of ‘making it big’ would only ‘get in the way, trivialise the very meaning of my studies at NOCCA.’ Little, who began his love of the saxophone when he heard a saxophonist perform at his church, says of his main goals: ‘I want to be the best I can be, I want to improve my skills and have fun in the process.’ This attitude is supported by his teachers, such as musician and jazz instructor Clyde Kerr Jr., teacher to alumni such as drummer Jason Marsalis [brother of Wynton and Branford] and trumpeter Nicholas Payton, who locals project will follow his mentor Wynton Marsalis to jazz fame. Kerr says of Little: ‘He has what it takes, but he’s not thinking about it, which is good. The key is to come here and strive to be the best artist you can be and not get caught up in the glamour of becoming a star.’ Students seem to echo their instructors. Vocal student Jennifer Bason, 16, says:

We’ve been ingrained with that philosophy, and it’s good. I’m training to be the best opera singer I can be, but I am studying music therapy along with my vocals. I know I want to sing, but I also know I need something to fall back on just in case. I’m not doubting myself, but it may take time, and I want to have all the time in the world. It’s a great place to go to school. Everyone is focused. The teachers see to that. And there’s no telling who you’ll see here. You may see Branford Marsalis in the halls one day, and someone from an opera company another. I had my own recital a couple of weeks ago and sang thirteen pieces (ibid., 1996).

Andrew Baham is a fifteen-year-old trumpeter who wants to be a music educator.

You feel like you’re in a professional environment here. They expect you to be focused, and professional. There’s always someone to help you out when you’re down, either a teacher or someone from the community. It’s very supportive (ibid.).

Since the beginning of NOCCA, teachers such as Bert Braud, Ellis Marsalis and Clyde Kerr Jr. have encouraged NOCCA graduates to return to the school as mentors to young musicians in order to close the gap between the classroom and the professional music world. Today, a parade of successful NOCCA graduates return to spend time with the students there and in other public schools, encouraging a vertical integration between the international recording and touring industry and the local music scene. This connection has been an integral part of the urban music
network that links the New Orleans public schools to the larger music community. At the same time, encouraging horizontal integration between the young musician and their community are the school's partnerships with such groups as the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra, the New Orleans Opera, the Greater New Orleans Youth Orchestra, and the Greater New Orleans Suzuki Forum. In addition, pupils perform for a variety of community events, in schools and nursing homes, and at the annual New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival. Dankner says this expands the opportunities for pupils and the musical community at large. ‘A lot of de-mystification of the arts has to happen for them to thrive in the community.’

**Jazz Fest Foundation Heritage School**

The Heritage School, funded by profits from the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, was founded in 1990 to ‘perpetuate the tradition of jazz in New Orleans by educating young musicians on jazz composition, style, and repertoire.’ Jazz Festival Foundation Executive Director Wali Abdel-Ra-oof talks of the school as a way for the non-profit Jazz Fest to ‘give something back to the community.’ An outreach programme of the foundation whose goal is to ‘keep music alive,’ the school’s governing committee includes Ellis Marsalis, Germaine Bazzle, Harold Battiste, Alvin Batiste, and several other talented artists. The late Danny Barker was a founding committee member. Instruction is directed by Kidd Jordan, who has performed avant garde jazz locally and internationally throughout his career. Additional instructors include Jordan’s son Kent, a jazz recording artist in his own right, and other talented local players. Chosen by open audition, the pupils are granted scholarships to the school. The total budget for the school is about $100,000 (£60,000) a year. Although most of the pupils are fourteen to sixteen years old, some are as young as Nadir Hasan, nine, and Safiyy Abdel-Ra’oor, eight, both drummers. As Nadir says, ‘We are young, but we are good.’ Safiyy adds: ‘We will learn a lot more before we’re through, though. Mr. Jordan will see to that.’

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19 Dankner 1996.
20 From Jazz and Heritage Foundation promotional material, 1996.
Though Jordan cannot hide the pride he has in his young pupils, he is tough when it comes to letting them know that his class isn't just about playing music. ‘The main thing is to get some knowledge going. Playing music is all right, but some people play too much and don't get enough technique.’ A feature of his teaching is that the pupils are exposed to a variety of styles to ‘give them an idea of the different kinds of music.’ Jordan thinks the pupils shouldn't stay at the school indefinitely, however. ‘Some will go on to NOCCA. I want them to go on, to have some other experiences. When I started the school that was my main intent, because sometimes people can stay with one teacher too long.’

‘Jammin’ with Jazz’

Programmes to incorporate music and local musicians into the public schools have grown in the last few years. In 1992, Louisiana Jazz Federation director Jason Patterson and public school teacher Cherice Harrison-Nelson developed ‘Jammin’ with Jazz.’ This is an educational touring programme, emphasising audience participation through what the directors call ‘informances’ in which music ensembles teach Louisiana music history through performance. The goal of the programme, says Patterson, is to ‘plant the seeds for future audiences. The hope is, when (the children) grow up, they will have bigger ears for jazz.’ With the support of the State of Louisiana’s Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Louisiana State Arts Council, and the Louisiana Division of the Arts, the programme targets school children from kindergarten to sixth grades (age 5-12), but occasionally performances are given for high schools, senior citizens, and neighbourhoods.

21 Jordan, 1996.
22 Harrison-Nelson is daughter of Donald Harrison Sr., Big Chief of the Guardians of the Flame Mardi Gras Indian tribe and sister of Donald Harrison Jr. (see Conclusion).
23 Patterson 1996.
The musical programmes are varied. ‘World of Rhythm’ with the Charmaine Neville Band is a world tour of the musical influences on New Orleans, featuring African, Caribbean, European, and South American music and instruments using music to teach history and geography. ‘The Centennial Jazz Band’ takes the children on what is termed ‘a musical journey through the stages of jazz development’ introducing them to the music of New Orleanians Buddy Bolden, Jelly Roll Morton, Joe ‘King’ Oliver and Louis Armstrong. ‘The Brass Band Tradition’ features parade marches, jamming, and a mock jazz funeral with the children active participants, showing the history of the New Orleans brass band from its traditional past to the popular new forms of brass bands. The Mardi Gras Indian tradition is explained from its African/Native American origins to its contemporary musical fusions with jazz and funk. In ‘Women of Jazz,’ traditional jazz and blues are performed from the repertoire of Bessie Smith, Billie Holliday, and New Orleanian Blue Lu Barker, and the role of women in New Orleans music is discussed. In this ‘informance’, the children are invited to learn how to scat sing and then join in a rousing Second Line parade.

**Observations of pedagogic strategies**

In this research, I had the opportunity to observe many of these types of programmes, varying from a jazz poetry event at an elementary school in the poorest district of town, led by a local musician who once played behind Langston Hughes, to a ‘master class’ of Wynton Marsalis teaching several hundred youngsters the basics of rhythm in the Mahalia Jackson Theatre of the Performing Arts. In most cases, despite the youth of the students, the teachers treated them with an air of professionalism. An incident in a meet-the-musician programme in early elementary school was typical. A few of the children were called up on the stage, where the visiting musician gave them each a noisemaker: a bottle, a drum, something to beat out a rhythm. After giving instructions to the rest of the class,
the instructor turned to the children standing on the stage and said, ‘Now, musicians, you stand to the left.’ The children, until that moment roughhousing and giggling, suddenly realised that he was talking to them, recognising that they were the musicians. They solemnly lined to the left, looking expectantly at him for direction. Named ‘musician,’ they assumed a role that separated them from their peers, made them special, and distinctive. The perception was not lost on the teacher, who commented, ‘They will never forget this day, when they were called “musicians” for the first time. You saw it yourself, in their faces.’

Also pervasive in the teaching of music was the emphasis on a young musician’s identification as a particular instrumentalist, rather than as a band member. This was reflected in the interviews with professional musicians, when time and again, the question ‘When did you get into music?’ was answered by the date that the musician first took up an instrument or began singing. Not in one interview did a musician mark the entry into music as when a group or band formed. An example is this extraordinary reply from Nicholas Payton, interviewed when 14 years of age: ‘I didn’t get into playing the trumpet until I was five.’

Chernoff has observed that a feature of West African pedagogy noticed in his research was the withholding of praise on the part of instructors (1979). A noticeable feature of New Orleans music instruction, observed in schools and mentioned in many interviews, is the holding back of praise from young players, a teasing or stern remonstration that they are ‘not ready’ and then, after the pupil has entreated the teacher or mentor, the reluctant allowing of the pupil to sit in. Teaching respect for music and elder musicians could be seen as a way to articulate continuity, engendering respect for self later on. There are other parallels in music instruction in contemporary New Orleans and West African pedagogical strategies.

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26 This identification contrasted with the experience in Liverpool, England, where in interviews musicians most often identified themselves with their current band, and marked their entrance into music as the date their first band was formed.

Wilkinson (1994, p. 36, 37) mentions how music teachers of the Southern Ewe were also commonly professional musicians. As has been seen in these case studies, many of the formal instructors in New Orleans are also professionals, and the ‘professional atmosphere’ is often mentioned in the classroom situation.

Just as a musical performance is never quite the same from one performance to the other, so the values of a community, passed down from one generation to the next, are never transmitted or received exactly as in the generation before. Thus, the pedagogic strategies used in teaching young New Orleans musicians will not be exactly the same as were experienced by their teachers. However, there is evidence of a high degree of retention of these strategies in this city through the years. The way that young musicians are prepared for a career in music, along with the musical instruction in the homes, the ubiquity of music outside the home and the support of the public schools, as well as the willingness for musicians to come back into the schools to mentor and teach all point to the continued value of music in New Orleans, and could be said in that sense to distinguish it from other places.

**Vertical integration - New Orleans meets the record industry**

Although New Orleans has its share of rock bands with dreams of recording success in Los Angeles or New York, the vast majority of musicians in New Orleans in the 1980s and 1990s develop their music for consumption locally, for a community that uses music in most of its innumerable social occasions. Band membership in New Orleans is informal and shifting, and one player may play with several different groups (and a variety of styles) even within one week. The 1992 New Orleans music directory listed 1,358 groups, each with an average of four members, although many of these groups are duplications. A review of music listings over a twelve-month period in 1988 showed that twelve musicians had played in a total of seventy-four configurations, and during the two-week period of the 1988 New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, four of the musicians had played
with an average of seven different configurations of musicians. An example of this: in the popular New Orleans punk band Sexdog of the late 1980s, the bassist was most known for his work in rhythm and blues, the guitarist had been with several rock ‘n’ roll bands, the drummer played modern jazz, and the lead singer performed regularly with traditional jazz groups. Another example is the Neville Brothers. Probably the most successful New Orleans band of the 1980s and ‘90s, the Neville Brothers were made up of Charles Neville, who played modern jazz saxophone in his own and many other local groups; Aaron Neville, who has a successful solo career as an R&B singer, including a number one Billboard chart hit with Linda Ronstadt; Art Neville, founding member of the Meters, New Orleans pre-eminent funk band; and Cyril Neville, whose reggae band, the Uptown Allstars, were a popular club fixture. All four brothers continued their individual playing throughout the successful group career.

Some musicians see this practice of playing in a variety of styles and groups as detrimental to getting signed by record companies. This opinion was echoed by a local musician who has had recording success internationally:

There’s different factions of how musicians perceive music should be played. I mean, I like to do them all at certain times, because music is like moods -- sometimes I might be in the mood just to be really serious, sometimes I want to have some fun. Sometimes I might want to dance or whatever, which is bad for marketing. Record companies, they want you to be one way, it’s easier to market you that way, but I’m my way [laughter], which is always a problem. I mean, that’s one of the problems I think that the guys have. In New Orleans, a lot of musicians coming up here, they play in all types of bands. If you love different types of music like we do, it’s hard for somebody to say ‘Okay this is the greatest music, you have to play this all the time.’ We say to them ‘You say it is great, and I believe it’s the greatest music, but you know, I want to do this, too.’ I mean, if you go to the movies and you only see one kind of movie all the time it would be quite boring, and if some one forced you to read one kind of book all the time, even if it was

28These figures were derived from Wavelength Magazine music listings, January 1988 to December 1988, and the 1988 New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival Programme, supplemented by interviews with musicians, who played a variety of styles, including rhythm and blues, traditional and modern jazz, Cajun, and rock ‘n’ roll.
Shakespeare, you’d be bored to death. So I feel the same way about music.\textsuperscript{29}

Musicians often spoke of coming together as individual musicians, without rehearsal (‘it just happens’), the music conceptualised as an expression of the group as a whole for the moment of performance only, after which the group identity is not seen as something that continues to exist. This is an interesting contrast to what Cohen described in her study of Liverpool rock groups where the band’s own distinctive sound was conceptualised as a ‘fixed, unchanging identity,’ though it was also considered important for the band to develop and progress through time (1991, p. 186). This way in which music is used in a place like Liverpool, in contrast to New Orleans, underlines how musicmaking is reflective of the needs and uses of the community of people who make it; in this instance it could also be seen as reflective of the premium on individual authorship of finite texts drawn from the European tradition in Liverpool in contrast to the Signifyin(g) practices of African-American-based musical performance in New Orleans. It may also be reflective of the different economic pressures of the two localities: of the perception of the importance of maintaining a group membership aligned with the requirements of the recording industry in Liverpool, in contrast to the necessity of individual mobility within the predominantly performance opportunities presented in New Orleans. Finnegan, discussing rock bands in Milton Keynes, noted

The very fact that the band had its own title gave its players a mark of unity and shared purpose for both themselves and outsiders (1989, pp. 21-22).

This naming of the group could also be seen as a closure, marking the group as a ‘finished product,’ on the one hand packaging it for easy wholesaling by the recording industry, and on the other, denying its evolutionary status. In contrast, patterns in New Orleans would allow a flexibility useful in an area where to be labelled is to narrow employment opportunities, and is reflective of what Chernoff wrote describing Western African musical performance:

\textsuperscript{29} Harrison 1996.
The music works more by encouraging social interaction and participation at each performance than by affirming a fixed set of sanctioned concepts or beliefs (1979).

**The Recording Business**

It is in the relationship with the international recording industry, the vertical integration of our model, that the music community of New Orleans bring into discourse those issues of power and ownership submerged in its horizontal integration. Hesitant to release its hold on its cultural commodities to a predominantly white recording industry, the community has developed strategies of protection and support that include the proliferation of local myths of a predatory industry, a tradition of mentoring of less experienced musicians by those locals with some success in the industry, or the insistence on working as much as possible with New Orleanians and sometimes family members in recording projects, all strategies to retain control of creative output. Some cultural observers in the city believe that young New Orleans musicians who may be proficient in many styles may choose a jazz recording career because, while there are generally smaller profits to be made with a successful jazz album, it is thought that there is generally less control exerted over jazz recording artists than the career and repertoire management of rock music.

The conflicts involved in recent years in the building of a local music industry might be reflective of this thinking. Musicians who were initially suspicious of initiatives framed by business leaders that had as one of their goals encouraging an international recording industry to work locally, have become more supportive of later initiatives emerging from a predominantly black city government with an emphasis on local control of production (see Chapter Six). In addition, the emphasis on musical production in New Orleans outside of the recording industry (such as the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival), the

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30 For many years in Los Angeles, New Orleanian Harold Battiste, who achieved great success in the recording industry, ran what he termed a 'soft landing' program, where he and other New Orleanians living in Los Angeles would take under their care those who had come from Louisiana to work in the industry.

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growing opportunities in the tourist industry, as well as the number of musicians who return to New Orleans from careers in the industry to teach in local educational institutions, could be seen as reflective of the properties of the tourist, performance and educational aspects of musicianship which allow ownership to be retained locally.

The discourse surrounding issues of control and ownership is often couched in terms of a recording industry ‘preying on local talent’, and/or seeing the city as a ‘cultural colony’ of the recording industry, with a model of the plantation or slavery. Thus the discourse is often a racialised one. A common notion among the musicians interviewed in this research, part of the ‘warnings’ to young musicians, is that working successfully with the recording industry is difficult, if not impossible, and one of the most pervasive opinions expressed in interviews with New Orleans musicians of all ages, including those with a fair amount of personal success, was a scepticism that the rewards of a recording career, except in rare instances, are sustainable and justify the sacrifice. George, a musician who achieved quite a bit of fame in the 1960s, speaks from his experience:

If you don’t watch out, running around trying to be a great success in the recording aspect of the music industry, then god, it’ll run you insane, and drive your wife and family insane, to a point you can’t have one, and you find what you wind up doing is you lead this very disconcerting existence that really hurts you and your playing. Because you don’t have someone to worry about you, someone you can belong to, over and beyond your playing buddies, your fellow musicians, and then you don’t have to come home and you don’t have to get up and take the kids to school, you don’t have to get to work at a certain time, you don’t have to do all those things that ground you and keep you sane. You can kind of wallow in your self pity, and that’s when your playing really gets bad. You need to have this grounding, this balance, to be a musician.31

Thus the demands of the recording industry are set against the ideals of family and community, and seen as threatening not only to one’s ability as a musician but even to one’s sanity. In addition, for this musician, the very requirements of the

31 Porter 1990.
‘recording aspect of the music industry’ oppose his views of what is needed to be a musician.

Pervasive in the collective mythology of New Orleans music are stories of talented local musicians, particularly in the early days of rhythm and blues, who achieved a measure of success in the sense of ‘hit records,’ yet ended up in severe financial straits. The appeal of ‘making it’ in the recording industry is perhaps coloured by these stories, which traverse the local music community and are often presented as warnings to younger musicians. Tied up in a discourse of ‘race’ relations, incidents are recounted in many interviews of publishing rights stolen, albums reissued in Europe or Japan without consent, royalties that never arrived. The notion that agreements with record companies should be approached with great care has led to the claim by some recording companies that the city’s musicians have lost opportunities to record. One such example is a celebrated New Orleans drummer who consistently demands such a high rate that he is seldom hired, even for top recording sessions. ‘They just won’t pay me what I’m worth,’ he says, while a famous record producer who has tried to employ the musician on several occasions in the past has said, ‘I’d like to use him, but he has priced himself right out of the business. I can get the top rock drummers in the world for less than him. He just won’t believe me -- he insists that I’m trying to rip him off.’ For others, a sense of distrust has led on occasion to a loss in profits. Keeping control of royalties is an especially contested subject. A celebrated Louisiana musician refused an agreement to accept royalties in payment for his work on Paul Simon’s smash hit album *Graceland*, demanding instead that he be paid in cash, ‘up front,’ and as a consequence, missing out on receiving royalties from one of the best-selling records of all time; but he did not trust Simon, or the record company, to give him money later, and did not regret his decision.

The issue of ownership of creativity extends to the relationship with the international touring and festival circuit. Due to the exorbitant cost of flights to Europe during the summer festival season, booking agents prefer to bring headliners only and supply a local European back-up group. Many New Orleans
musicians refuse to agree to this. For instance, rhythm and blues recording artist Irma Thomas will not tour Europe without her own large band, not trusting promoters to furnish her with good musicians. Although many booking agents complain that in taking this position, New Orleans musicians are making it difficult for most European festival promoters to hire them, local musicians counter that this is the only way to control the way their music is presented. As Thomas says, ‘I'm not going over to Europe and play with some shoddy band and then have them say Irma Thomas didn't give them a good show. Enough of those promoters come up with the cash, I don't miss very many summers in Europe.’

The way that festivals and tours handle reimbursement (at the end of a tour or on the day of a festival performance) is also a source of conflict. Rhythm and blues legend Snooks Eaglin has garnered a reputation for being ‘difficult’ by festival promoters and record companies because his wife insists that he is paid for anything -- from a television appearance to a European tour -- in cash, in her hand, before he leaves New Orleans. His wife, however, says that too many times in their early years together, Eaglin would not be paid. She equates payment with respect. ‘If you’re playing free, you’re a slave. They can go and disrespect somebody else. Snooks Eaglin is going to be respected, or he is not going to entertain them.’ These strategies of insuring ‘respect’ and ‘controlling the way their music is presented’ might also be interpreted as wise moves in the global confusion of recording, but also maps onto the city a peculiarity separating it from other locations, and perhaps clouding the decisions of recording companies or festival organisers to sign musicians from the area. As one recording company executive was asked how her company managed to deal with New Orleans, she replied ‘Very carefully.’

Talk of the dangers of being ‘ripped off’ when venturing outside the city marks distinctions made by New Orleans musicians between New Orleans and other localities, most often music industry centres. For example, Dr. John observes:

That’s how Detroit got their big start. They imported Wardell [Quezergue] and Smokey [Johnson] and all these cats from New Orleans and held all their ideas and for ten years there was a good twenty or thirty percent of Motown Records’ music that was New Orleans influenced ... Their contribution was made little by them just using a piece of something, it became distorted; and that was what the American public heard as what funk was. Later when they heard the real shit from New Orleans, it didn’t have the impact on them that it should. This is to me a crime (Scott 1981, p. 13).

Many musicians blame a negligent local government for the lack of national chart success. In interviews with New Orleans musicians of all ages, the city is often described as a place of creativity that is undervalued by its municipal authorities. ‘An untapped gold mine,’ one singer called it, and the term became a slogan for the city’s music association and other local music initiatives in the 1980s. New Orleans often is referred to in ways that characterise it as blameless, fragile, warm, trusting, misused and preyed on by an unscrupulous industry. Musician and record producer Mark Bingham:

This is not a slow time for New Orleans music, just New Orleans music business. In fact, this town seems to breed the all-time number one sleaziest entrepreneurs who ever crawled on their fat bellies across the face of this earth. The music is fine, it’s these subhuman business creeps who have destroyed the musicians’ ability to get the music out of New Orleans and into the world. So many players in this town have been ripped off that many simply Do Nothing rather than get robbed again. While New Orleans musicians are known to be laid back, it’s time for things to change (1985, p. 8).

At the same time, lack of success in the music business is often blamed on the local musician’s own inability to ‘take care of business.’ Here is Dr. John again:

It’s like a part of the tradition of New Orleans to not be a good businessman or to be a worse businessman than the average cat. (Scott, 1981, p. 13)

Cyril Neville, the youngest Neville Brother, agrees, and poses the education of the local musician as a defence against a predatory industry:

Everybody knows that the New Orleans musician has the reputation of being the baddest musicians in the world, but the worst businessman. What we want to instil in the younger musicians, and maybe in some of our older brothers too, is that you’ve got to sit down and learn the
business. This is not just a question of where I'm going to play my music next. This is a struggle for survival (Karp 1986, p. 30).

So Neville positions control of cultural product as control of identity, the very ‘survival’ of the community drawn up in its ownership and control of its music.

The main idea is to preserve our identity. I hate to see what happened in the 1960s happen again, where all these out of town businessmen move in, set up their little shops, rip everybody off, and then split again (ibid.).

This hesitancy to turn over control of their music could be seen as reflective of a hesitancy to relinquish what for these African-Americans is a seldom-experienced power in US-American society. Within the realm of music, they have inverted the expected economic structure of their everyday lives in the United States. As musicians, they are acknowledged by the recording industry as having a product within their control and dominance that is in demand by the wider society. After such an accomplishment, it could be easily understood why the ownership of the cultural product may be seen as difficult to relinquish to the predominantly white recording industry.

‘Planet of New Orleans’

All through the 1980s and into the 1990s, national rock musicians such as Linda Ronstadt, Robbie Robertson, Paul Simon, David Byrne, Mark Knopler, John Fogerty, Bob Dylan, Elvis Costello, Jimmy Buffet, Rita Coolidge, Randy Newman, Maria Muldaur, and a host of others have chosen to record in New Orleans, utilising New Orleans musicians, and sometimes using the city itself as the theme for an album. Many of these are successful musicians from the 1960s and 1970s, non-African-Americans whose motives might include a belated acknowledgement of black contribution to their success, or in some cases a desire to profit from interest in New Orleans to give impetus to a flagging career. As few journalists will turn

33 A song recorded by Dire Straits, written by Mark Knopler (©1991, Phonogram) after his visit to the city to produce Randy Newman's album Land of Dreams.
down a trip to New Orleans financed by the recording companies, setting an album in New Orleans is a guaranteed way to get publicity for an artist.

The use of the city in this way shapes the international impression of the music community, reinforcing stereotypes of the city as a site of authenticity and underappreciated virtuosity, often situated in the past. Recording artists often cite their admiration for the contribution of the musical community to popular music’s ‘roots’. Thus the city comes to the attention of the rock audience in this reference of authenticity and virtuosity. At the same time, in appearing to selflessly use their influence to help bring a deserving community to international attention, they succeed in attracting media attention for themselves. The promotion departments of record companies, always looking for an angle by which to sell a record, have used New Orleans as an exotic backdrop, and in this context have every motivation to portray the city in as exotic a frame as possible. Journalists, usually welcoming a chance to include New Orleans’ musical past in their articles to add colour to the interview, also most often couch the city in terms of ‘exoticism’ and ‘otherness.’

Conflict develops when expectations are raised in the local community that this attention by the record company and music media will result in further exposure and recording success. But often, the very emphasis on the music of New Orleans as ‘exotic’ conflicts with the priorities of major record companies which are looking for mainstream talent. At the same time, the perception by the industry, fuelled by its own promotional departments, is of a musical community that is existing, however ‘authentically,’ in the past, while the industry’s directive is to choose music that will sell in the future. The local community has a difficult time taking advantage of the publicity, and may find that with all the flattery, often all that will come of the encounter is the use of the musicians as a source of material, the city’s musical past as inspiration and as a selling tool.

Particularly with the growing success and popularity of the annual New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, and with travel writers and visitors to the city reporting back on the lively music scene, some record companies have encouraged their A&R representatives to find exploitable talent in the city that ‘has that New
Orleans sound.’ One A&R rep from a major record label says, ‘What they want is a young band that sounds like the Meters, feels like the Nevilles, but looks like the Osmonds.’

Ivan Neville, young son of Aaron Neville, keyboardist for Keith Richards, says ‘They don’t know what they want. They want me to play “Hey Pocky Way” all day long’ (1988). On the other hand, other recording industry officials have openly wondered why talented New Orleans musicians don’t try to follow musical trends, shaping their music to what the majors are looking for. ‘We don’t look at where they come from, but we just haven’t seen a band down there ready to be signed. We have to have a group that we know who they are, how long they’ve been together and so forth. There’s a lot of talent down there, but right now, they’re not trying to slay us.’

The biggest conflicts between local musicians and the record companies are often centred around debates on ‘commercial’ music. Although musicians want their music to succeed, the term ‘commercial’ is represented as a bland, unchallenged style of music in opposition to the practices of the local community. Musicians often mention pressures to ‘commercialise’ their music, and the contradictory attitude that if they were allowed by the record company to make less ‘commercial’ recordings, they would be more successful. George Porter, bassist for the legendary Meters is now approaching his fifties. Discussing his recording session for his debut album on Rounder Records, Porter admits some trepidation with the way Rounder’s producer was guiding the recording.

There was a certain air ... a couple of songs took on a different kinda feeling than what I wanted, y’know. I thought that [the record company] might be opening a can of worms that I wasn’t necessarily into. A couple of the cuts have got this commercial feel about them. I really didn’t want to get a record out there that was commercial then

34 Confidential memo from a major label to author, 1989.
35 ‘Hey Pocky-Way’ is a version of a traditional Mardi Gras Indian song reworked into a pop song by the Neville Brothers (and many other groups).
36 Bentley 1995.
37 Perhaps as legendary for their lawsuits against their earlier agents and recording studios for allegedly cheating them of their royalties as for their reputation for being one of the most sampled of all bands.
all of a sudden I got to be like everything else you hear on the radio. I was worried about that, but some of the other tracks we were working on started taking on a very nice air. They weren’t commercial songs, but they felt good, they danced good, and they could be ‘new’ commercial songs -- selling big time. So then I started feeling a little safer, not like ‘God I’m gonna have a top 40 record.’

Though one might think that Porter would be grateful at the chance to do a solo album at this stage in his career, and willing to please the record company that is taking a chance with him, the conflict between the pressures to produce what the recording industry wants, and what the musician wants to create, is very much on Porter’s mind.

Of course the record company would love for me to have a top 40 record, my wife and everybody else who’s gonna spend the money I make. But I’ve always been afraid of being a top 40 artist, because I don’t like top 40 music. It seems too programmed. There’s a sameness to it. I want to make music that everybody gets off on, that’s me.

So, in this convoluted way, Porter expresses his concerns about keeping control of his music, without compromising his way of expressing himself through his music. He uses the terms ‘top 40’ and ‘commercial’ as a style of music, reflecting his concerns with issues of creativity and hesitancy to barter control for commercial success. For a musician who has sought success in the recording industry for decades, this may seem a puzzling attitude, particularly to the record company. However, in the context of the way Porter was taught music and the meaning and value of music to his community, his attitude may be more understandable.

**Case Studies**

The case histories of two young New Orleans musicians illustrate the experience of many young people in the city who choose to become musicians, both in the horizontal integration with New Orleans -- how they become aware of music, learn their instrument, and begin a professional music career -- and in their attempts at vertical integration -- in their dealings with the national record industry. They point up attitudes of the young people to the music industry to their city, and their teachers.
New Orleans trumpeter Leroy Jones's story is not unlike many in the New Orleans music community in the late Twentieth Century. Born in New Orleans in 1958, Jones began playing trumpet at the age of eleven. He points out that he was born in the Lower Ninth Ward, thus identifying himself as being from a poor district of the city. He was first ‘inspired and instructed’ by his trumpet-playing music teacher, Sister Mary Hilary. By the end of one year he was playing well enough to lead the Fairview Baptist Church Christian Band, a group initiated by the Rev. Andrew Darby and directed by two elder statesmen of the New Orleans jazz scene, Danny Barker and Charlie Barbarin, Sr. Barker, a venerated local musician and a long-time member of Cab Calloway’s orchestra, remembers that Jones’s home on St. Denis Street was the centre of activity for the neighbourhood’s musical youth.

I used to walk down the street and listen to Leroy and his friends playing rock music, and I got to thinking that they should be playing jazz. Leroy could play with sense, not just foolishness.

Before long, the Fairview Band, under Barker’s guidance, began playing local parades and concerts, including the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, and winning national and international attention, including engagements at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC, and a BBC broadcast. Though raised a Catholic, Jones was influenced by what he terms the ‘Baptist’ music of his neighbourhood.

I’ve always had the church in my music, and then we used to sit in church and watch those gals singing gospel, you know, the soul ...

So Jones was exposed to music at an early age, through church. In 1974, he left the Fairview Band in the ‘hands of younger musicians’ and formed his own Hurricane Brass Band, which played for the Smithsonian Institute of Folklore Festival as well as intermission sets for Quincy Jones concerts. The seemingly incongruous

38 These case studies are drawn from interviews conducted for an article for Wavelength magazine, April 1984, and subsequent interviews with Jones and Severin in 1988.

39 Barker’s comments also point out a generational difference. Here, a respected elder musician identifies Jones and his friends as young people who could be guided to a career in what he defines as playing ‘with sense’ (jazz, or learning to read music) versus ‘with foolishness’ (rock).
combination of contemporary funk and New Orleans street jazz did not faze Jones, who views all music as a kind of organic whole.

I don't believe in cutting myself off from the latest sounds. I like Michael Jackson, I like some of the things Grover Washington is doing. I like a lot of the pop groups.

By the end of 1976, Jones turned down a scholarship to Loyola University School of Music (‘my learning comes from being around other musicians’) and began playing with Lee Bates, a Bourbon-Street-based jazz-rock and rhythm and blues band. An ill-fated (ill-managed) tour through Florida ended in Jones coming home broke, but more knowledgeable of the touring business. He was hired by Hollis Carmouche’s ‘Jazz Cajuns,’ a bebop group. Jones complains that this group kept getting replaced on Bourbon Street with ‘white bands that played Dixieland.’ Ironically, he says, his time on Bourbon Street landed him the reputation as a ‘Dixieland’ player, which he feels hurt his reputation as a ‘serious’ player with the New Orleans musical community.

In the 1980s, Jones played extensively throughout Europe and Asia, including a year’s stint in Hong Kong, but he has no plans to leave New Orleans permanently. Rather than record industry success, Jones expresses his goals in terms of improvement in his playing, with a lifetime, rather than temporary, music career.

When people think of a trumpet player, they often think of somebody who’s gonna blow them out of the damn window. But it can be played delicately, and that’s the type of trumpet playing that I want to explore. I want to play with total logic and continuity. I’ve only been playing for fifteen years. I’m still practising. I’m looking forward to where I’ll be ten years from now.

In contrast, Chris Severin, also born in 1958, took advantage of more formal training in music. The son of big band drummer Wilfred ‘Crip’ Severin, he first remembers playing drums when he was nine years old. His switch to a guitar was inspired by seeing Elvis Presley on television. At 14, he was in a neighbourhood rock band called Viet Nam. His high school band instructor, Alvin Thomas, told him to ‘quit playing junk’ and introduced him to music theory and ‘a wide range of
music genres.’ While still in high school, Severin encountered vaunted jazz
instructor Alvin Batiste, who ran an after-school programme at Beauregarded School.

Mr. Batiste brought his students down from Southern [University 
Baton Rouge] -- drummer Herman Jackson, bassist Julius Farmer 
[who has made a successful career as a jazz session player in Italy], 
and [Windham Hill recording artist-pianist] Henry Butler -- and would 
hold clinics with us. Mr. Batiste was giving us fundamentals but when 
they performed, they would play jazz. I got interested in jazz. That 
was ninth grade.

The next year, the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts opened. At NOCCA, 
Severin was strongly encouraged to learn to play acoustic bass.

By the time I graduated [at 17] I was well on my way in the music 
world. I had been playing gigs with James Black, Ellis Marsalis, Henry 
Butler. I knew I was going to be a musician and at the same time I 
didn’t know whether I was going to college, so I figured I might as well 
join the musicians union. I joined just before graduating high school. 
Next thing I know I was playing with everybody. During that period, I 
also played with Willie Metcalf. He was always trying to introduce the 
young musicians to a lot of the greats.

After graduating from NOCCA, Severin went to Southern University New Orleans 
(SUNO) where he studied under another of New Orleans’s most admired jazz 
instructors, Kidd Jordan.

That was a whole other experience. I got a chance to play in a big 
band. I got a chance to study my harmony more. I studied under 
pianist] Roger Dickerson out there. Everything was more advanced.

Deciding that he ‘didn’t want to be a school teacher,’ Severin left school to 
work as a professional musician after over three years in a five-year curriculum, In 
1979, with instruction from the best of New Orleans teachers and players behind 
him, he made a major effort to achieve success in the record industry with the band 
Windjammer. He landed a major recording contract with MCA, had a song that 
reached number 18 in London, and then, he feels, was ‘undone by the demands of 
the music industry.’

I think the industry was afraid of our sound ... We were always in 
conflict. The company always picked what we thought were the 
weakest tracks for the singles. As a matter of fact, the song that was
hot in London was not picked by the record company. The people in London listened to the record, picked that track, and it hit.

Note how Severin identifies the decisionmakers in London as ‘people’ as opposed to the record company’s anonymous presence.

Music is a strange business. There came a point where it wasn’t even about the music. It was about appearance, how we looked. They wanted us to look a certain way. We were trying to figure out what was the best music to make available to the public and the company wanted us to make music that sounded like what everybody else was doing.

Severin describes the conflict between his interests and that in the record company:

We want to communicate with the people. The record company’s interest was in creating a product, the band, that could be sold in a package. You know the Windjammer experience taught me the difference between jazz and popular music. In jazz, you can go back and play a song twenty years old and it can be a smash, because it’s all about music in jazz. Rock music is all about marketing.

All the training that New Orleans could give young Severin did not prepare him for working with the rock recording industry. For him, New Orleans music is a specific sound, and is unlike other musics.

There’s something special about New Orleans music. Even though the industry tries to shut our music out, New Orleans music is still loved by everybody. We played on a programme with Wynton [Marsalis]’s new band in Yoruba. When Herlin [Riley] kicked off that second-line beat, everybody jumped up like they had been listening to that music all their lives. The people down there just went wild. People are starting to realise there’s something special about New Orleans music. The two feel [2/4] that New Orleans musicians have is different from everywhere else.

Severin is now a popular and successful bassist locally, called to play all kinds of music, for recordings and live performances.

At this point in my career, I don’t want to do my own band because I’m so successful as a sideman. Whenever I started my own bands, I got so many calls from everybody else, that I would end up putting my own project on the side.
The horizontal integration of these two New Orleans musicians into the New Orleans musical community was accomplished through years of a relationship to music on several levels: the home, the neighbourhood, the church, their peers, their elders. This ubiquity of musical relationships encourages the attitude that a career in music is a lifetime occupation, with an emphasis on individual achievement linked simultaneously to a community voice. Though Jones and Severin admit that they have had little success in integrating their music vertically with the requirements of the record industry, both feel nevertheless that they have successful careers reflecting the values and requirements of the community that taught them music. Meanwhile other New Orleans musicians, by a variety of negotiating strategies, have been able to successfully engage the national and international scene, while at the same time retaining deep roots with the city, and their experience points out the various conflicts and benefits of working in both worlds. Other New Orleans musicians have done this at various stages in their careers -- many have left the city as young people, made their mark on the industry, and returned to New Orleans to take up playing and teaching locally. These include such notables as Harold Battiste, who, after a successful career in recording and musical direction for several hit television variety shows in Los Angeles, returned to New Orleans as professor of jazz studies at the University of New Orleans while continuing his playing career. Also at University of New Orleans in the Coca-Cola Endowed Chair in Jazz, and director of Jazz Studies, is Ellis Marsalis, father of Branford and Wynton, who is active as a jazz pianist, leads his own jazz group, and is featured on several recordings, including Courtney Pine’s 1989 release *The Vision’s Tale* and son Wynton’s 1990 release, *The Resolution of Romance*.

**Conclusion**

The new generation of young New Orleans musicians has been taken through a complicated system of informal and formal instruction often beginning in the home, neighbourhood, and/or church, and then augmented by the schools and private lessons, effecting a horizontal integration that has helped to shape an
extraordinarily vibrant community of musicians as well as informed audiences. Evaluating the distinction between the values and requirements of this local music community and those of the international recording industry has pointed out how the two both connect and conflict.

Though discussions of creativity and compromise permeate any reading of musicians and their relationship to the international recording industry, the experience of these New Orleans musicians indicates how struggles over issues of control and ownership can reflect localised concerns, in this case long local experience in the importance of diligence in the demand for rights, juxtaposed against an industry with little motivation to take into account local sensitivity. In addition, central to the musical education of young New Orleanians is a grasp of the professionalism necessary to maintain control of their creative pursuits. Along with a pervasive atmosphere of local misgivings toward the recording industry, it could be said that this ‘demystifying of the industry’ encourages a self-confidence and demand for rights that could be interpreted within the industry as unnecessarily obstreperous. Thus in the often rocky vertical integration of local musicians with the wider music world, New Orleans musicians struggle to maintain creative control. In negotiations with the recording industry, this has been achieved more readily in the jazz recording world, but as Lincoln Center Jazz Director Wynton Marsalis’s career attests, New Orleans has often sought to make its way by colonising rather than capitulating.

In the following chapter, these attitudes and values of the local music community will be contrasted to the goals and aims of recent strategies in New Orleans that have used music to market the city for urban regeneration and tourism.
Chapter Six

Music on the Agenda

‘African-American music -- however much it owes to its African heritage -- cannot be explained simply in terms of oral traditions and the sedimented memories of particular communities. It has also been shaped profoundly by its contact with mass mediation.’

Ingrid Monson (1994, p. 79).

Introduction

A study of musicmaking in New Orleans cannot ignore the ways that it is intimately related to the economic activity in the city. From the community’s earliest days, the musicians of New Orleans have lived with the contradictions between the music’s liberating potential and profit motivation. In the familiar pattern of undervaluing African-American musics, this mix with market pressures has caused much of the music of the contemporary city to be read only as commodity. But as Monson, says ‘those wishing to avoid commodities would have to bail out of music history in the Sixteenth Century, before the printing press began to influence musical tastes’ (1994, p. 281).

This chapter is about the role music plays in the way New Orleans is identified and packaged for economic development, focusing on music’s role in urban regeneration strategies, as well as how music is used by the city for place marketing through tourism and cultural exchange. The implications of these strategies for the city’s musical community are reviewed. These initiatives and debates could be said to emerge from the struggle of the city to maintain control over its cultural industries, and the more localised conflicts within that larger struggle. These

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1 Parts of this chapter were presented at the conference on Contemporary Perspectives on US Southern Culture, University of Warwick, Coventry, England, 21-22 September 1994 and published as Atkinson 1996.
conflicts go to the very heart of the city’s identity, and thus, who makes the decisions about the marketing of the city’s cultural products is of extreme importance to the community.

Monson (1994, p. 286) has pointed out that the notion of subculture as applied to African-American musical communities is problematic because the predominant direction of influence in American popular music in the Twentieth Century has been from African-American musical communities to the European-American. Therefore, in the realm of popular music, African-Americans invert the expected relationship between what Slobin (1993 p. 81) called superculture and subculture. Monson continues:

... music has been an arena in which African-Americans have not only asserted an independent cultural identity but also have had non-African-Americans acknowledge their leadership in the form of emulation ... (ibid., p. 300).

This cultural inversion is of extreme symbolic importance in African-American communities such as New Orleans, but in the economic relationship it does not usually follow and thus conflicts can and do arise. Public policy initiatives involving the commodification of local music have been the site of such conflicts. This puts music on the agenda in issues of power and control.

Realising, as Monson has pointed out, that what is observed in music is likely to recur in other domains of cultural activity (ibid., p. 284), this chapter will also be concerned with what strategies emerge to preserve control of musical expression by the members of the music community as well as with how conflicts are resolved and negotiated, perhaps leading to a better understanding of the myriad ways that black New Orleanians have negotiated for their rights in a racially biased nation. Three case studies are presented: the creation of the city’s music commission, to exemplify how the changing demographics of urban America may play a role in the prioritisation of cultural activities such as music in urban regeneration; a comparison of four music industry initiatives, to demonstrate how music may reflect wider political and social issues; and a review of the career of a
contemporary musician who performs for tourists, to demonstrate how conflicts between local musicians and the tourist industry may be negotiated or resolved.

**Music Business: The city gets involved**

In the early 1990s, the economic impact of music and entertainment in the United States was being widely acknowledged. The magazine *Business Week* called entertainment the ‘leading growth industry of the country’ and calculated that the entertainment and recreation industries added 200,000 workers to the US-American work force in 1993, ‘a stunning 12% of all new employment.’

Europe and Japan used to mock America by calling it a ‘Mickey Mouse’ economy. Well, they’re right. By any yardstick, Mickey and his friends have become a major engine for US economic growth (*Business Week*, 1993).

In the State of Louisiana, the economic impact of music was also, if somewhat belatedly, being acknowledged, due in part to the efforts of the Louisiana Music Commission to pressure the state to compile statistics on the impact of music.² Policymakers are often reluctant to embrace the arts and cultural industries as a base for economic regeneration, perhaps because of their unfamiliarity with these industries as compared to more traditional industries, such as manufacturing. However, the arts are often a substantial, if overlooked economic force. For instance, in 1994, the Louisiana State Department of Economic Development released a report that the economic impact of the music business in Louisiana was $1.906 billion. This was an increase from the findings of a 1990 study by Dr. Tim Ryan of the University of New Orleans that had assigned music a $1.4 billion impact. Jobs in the industry, outside that of musician, had risen to 47,549 (38,000 in 1990) and tax revenues to $83 million (up from $52 million). Wages in the music industry were estimated at $562 million. New Orleans’s share of this $1.906 billion was reported as $1.25 billion. This meant over 30,000 new jobs.

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² Formed during the second term of Governor Edwin W. Edwards, the Louisiana Music Commission (LMC) is an agency of the State of Louisiana, with commission members appointed by the governor, serving without financial recompense.
jobs for the city, over 66% of the total of new jobs in the state. Local taxes on music stood at $30 million, with state taxes $53 million and federal $76 million. The 1994 New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival alone had an economic impact of roughly $140 million. The number of national and international visitors to the festival in 1994 had exceeded 350,000.

This economic good news drew a surprising response at the state level. In 1995, the newly elected Republican governor of Louisiana stripped the Louisiana Music Commission of its budget and replaced thirteen of the fifteen commissioners. As to the reason for this curtailing of funding, Commissioner of Administration Raymond Laborde, in a blunt statement to the press, spoke for the governor:

The commission should be financed by the music industry rather than the state (Times Picayune 20/2/95).

Thus the State of Louisiana reversed a policy of involvement in the growth of a state music industry that dated to the 1970s, when Louisiana became the first in the United States to establish a state music commission. This reversal and the economic, political and social reasons behind it, reflect music’s position in the centre of political debate.

An immediate reason for the state’s position was that it was reflecting the political climate of the times. During the mid-1990s, state governments in the United States were under extreme pressure, as the federal government continued the Republican Congress’s mandate to ‘shrink’ the national government by turning over more fiscal responsibilities to the states. With extremely limited resources and growing liabilities, state governments were looking for places to trim budgets. The music commission was a target since it was closely identified with the former Democratic governor and, despite its success, had often been criticised by the music media and some members of the New Orleans music community as being composed of cronies of the governor, mostly attorneys and music agents, who were given a state budget to ‘wine and dine’ music executives for their own benefit (Samuels, 1983). In its defence, commissioners argued that the nature of the music industry called for entertaining and maintaining social contacts with the national industry.
in order to attract booking agents and national record industry people to the area, due to the geographical isolation of the state from the national record industry, which is concentrated mostly in Los Angeles and New York. Thus, the misunderstanding over how the industry works resulted in confusion over whether the commission ‘did its job.’

In addition, the state government’s attitude toward the music commission was generally held to be reflective of the competition for resources between the city of New Orleans and the state of Louisiana, a typical situation where the large urban metropolis, situated in a relatively rural state, is thought to drain funds from the rest of the state. As the primary beneficiary of music industry income was the city and the music industry was seen to be situated in the city, the state denied responsibility for maintaining the industry and as a state representative said:

They [New Orleans] make the money off the industry, let them pay for it. They say music is such a big moneymaker, why should we in Hahnville have to use our tax money to finance it? We don’t even have good roads, hospitals. That’s New Orleans’ problem. If they want it, they can pay for it.3

Though indeed most of the income from the music industry falls to New Orleans, music contributes to the economy of other areas of the state as well, particularly the French-speaking area known as Acadiana, the home to Cajun and zydeco music, and the state’s withdrawal of support is seen by many as detrimental to their growing local industry. Some Acadiana musicians see this as a reflection of the conflicts between city and state government that have little to do with the economics of the music industry. A Cajun musician and part-time recording producer agrees:

Not saying the commission’s ever done much to help the Cajun music industry anyway, but it’s a real insult. We’re known everywhere for music, the state is. They advertise all over to come to Louisiana for Cajun music and New Orleans music and then they won’t put a penny toward it. We’re hurt because of New Orleans. These legislators don’t want a penny of state money to go to helping out New Orleans and

3 Sacks, 1995.
we’re hit in the crossfire between the state and the city. New Orleans is Democrat and has a black government. Louisiana has a Republican governor. The mayor of New Orleans supported the wrong man for governor -- fact, he supported a woman -- so here we are.  

Others in Acadiana are less worried. A musician and festival organiser from Lafayette feels ‘it would be nice to have state support,’ but, she continues:  

We in Cajun country have always been on our own. We have our own local music industry, we’ve always had little recording studios around here. And we have our own connections with festivals around the world. Our tourism industry works well with the state. We in the music side don’t depend on the state government, so we’re not hurt when they don’t help us out.

There has been little public articulation of the idea that ethnic difference between city and state may affect funding (the city of New Orleans is overwhelmingly black, both in its politicians and population, while the state government is overwhelmingly white), but in private this was cited as a major factor in conflicts over allocations of resources and support for the music industry. The experience of Louisiana points out how national political pressures can affect state and local government and, in turn, local cultural industries, and it shows how music has been implicated in debates in Louisiana on representation and regional identity.

### Background to city policy

In New Orleans, as has been shown, music has been an acknowledged part of the city’s social identity; however, it has not been part of its economic development plan and, even in the heyday of jazz in the 1920s, the city has never been actively involved in developing a relationship to the recording industry. The evolution of the pop music industry also bypassed New Orleans. In the 1950s, as streams of hits came out of New Orleans from such rhythm and blues stars as Fats Domino, Little Richard, Lloyd Price and others, the record companies that produced

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4 Hebert, 1995.  
5 Giraud, 1996.
the music were largely from other areas of the country, mainly the recording cities of Los Angeles and New York. The local music industry remained small and fragmented, with little support or interest from the city’s business leaders or politicians. As legendary New Orleans studio owner Cosimo Matassa said,

... record companies were running from all over the world to record something in New Orleans, [but] nothing was left after that because we didn’t wind up with a home-grown industry (Broven 1978, p. 85).

Musicmaking was not considered an object for public policy. Rather, for most New Orleanians, local music has been representative of their perceptions of the quality of life available to them as New Orleans residents, part of private life and celebration, what the Creoles would have called ‘lagniappe,’ a little something extra, for free. As an arena primarily for black participation and creativity, New Orleans music was reflective of the racial divide of the city and not a priority of the predominantly white city government.

During the 1970s, conflict emerged when Mayor Moon Landrieu (later the United States Secretary of Housing and Urban Development) set about bringing New Orleans into the New South, encouraging a carefully constructed image of a progressive southern city with its symbolic icons: the ultra-modern Superdome, a covered stadium that dominated the New Orleans skyline; and the construction of skyscrapers along Poydras Avenue, occupied by many of the major oil companies increasingly working the Gulf of Mexico offshore oil business. A major symbol of the ‘new city’ and its new priorities was One Canal Place, built by the Shah of Iran’s Aramco bank on the French Quarter side of Canal Street, blocking the sightlines of the French Quarter to the sky and disregarding a half-century of physical conservation of the old Quarter. A plan for a six-lane riverfront expressway, to be built through the historic French Quarter, was only narrowly defeated. However, much of Landrieu’s vision was carried out. His efforts brought issues of the city’s identity to the fore, as some leaders of industry and government saw the city’s

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6 The model was Atlanta, which had successfully created such an image, resulting in a business boom, an international airport, etc.
reputation as a place of music and celebration flaunting their efforts to represent New Orleans as a modern urban American city. This issue was highly contentious, provoking a duality between the cultural life of the people of New Orleans, with their strong tradition of celebrations and *joie de vivre* and the policies of their government officials, who saw this way of life as anti-business.

This lifestyle was most notably represented by Carnival, whose influence was seen as a particular liability in attracting business. Music, emerging from the rituals of organisations often associated with Carnival and social aid and pleasure societies, was expected to maintain itself with no help from city government. At the same time, through the 1950s and 1960s, there was no move on the part of the black community to let go of the ownership and control of their cultural activities. There were no music organisations pushing for representation within the city government and no organised move for music policy.

In the 1977 mayoral election, the political landscape of New Orleans changed dramatically as the city elected its first black mayor, Ernest Morial, whose pride in his racial heritage and militancy in fighting racism was only overshadowed by his commitment to the transcending of racial distinctions in the city (Hirsch 1992, p. 306). Morial’s election was a result of many factors including the impact of the United States Voting Rights Act of 1965, which had caused sweeping changes in voting and registration laws across the US-South and steadily increasing black political clout. At the same time, in large part because of the influx of oil company employees who preferred to live in suburban areas, there was a shift to a growth of suburbs largely outside the corporate limits of the city, creating for the first time a more segregated housing pattern within the city limits of New Orleans and resulting in a higher black majority of voters and more black representation in city government. In addition, Morial, called by Hirsch (ibid., p. 318) ‘the last of the

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7 This attitude is reflected in the fact that Carnival was not promoted by the city as a tourist attraction.

8 Reflective of this attitude was the city’s Amusement Tax. Despised by musicians and local music industry, the five per cent tax on musicmaking had been instituted at the turn of the century to pay for the cleanup after a travelling circus, fair, or minstrel show, but was later redefined and levied against any establishment that had live music on the premises.
radical Creoles,’ possessed an inclusive political philosophy that attracted more white voters than his more militant black opponents.

As Mayor Morial began his first term, determined to establish a biracial city hall, he took over a city that was firmly in the oil business. As the 1980s dawned, Louisiana was riding high on profits from her natural resources. Oil was selling at $32 a barrel and Louisiana’s offshore reserves were being fought over by the major oil companies. Louisiana’s system of social welfare, set up in the 1930s by the ‘Every Man A King’ governor Huey Long, ensured that this bonanza would be shared by all. People moved into the state from all over the country to work and New Orleans got a boost of customers for her oil services industries.

Then, in the summer of 1985, oil prices dramatically and suddenly plummeted to $10 a barrel. New Orleanians watched helplessly as every day the Times Picayune announced the price falling lower and lower. By the next year, the state, with a tax base founded on oil revenues, was in a desperate situation. The unemployment rate in Louisiana rose to 13.6 percent in June compared to the national average of 7.3 per cent. The figures would have been higher except for the large number of people, mostly oil industry workers, who left the state to search for jobs elsewhere. In one year, the tiny state of Louisiana had lost 21,800 jobs in oil, 16,000 in construction, 13,800 in manufacturing, 6,400 in services. The state, dealing with a huge deficit because of this devastating loss of revenue, slashed money to the cities and New Orleans in turn had to slash its spending -- on fire fighters, police, schools, and streets. The situation was bad and getting worse. New Orleans’ second black mayor, Sidney Barthelemy, faced a crippling economic situation. Her citizens often refer to Louisiana, both fondly and derisively, as a ‘banana republic.’ The dependence on a one-crop economy has been a feature throughout her history: first Big Cotton, then Big Sugar, then Big Oil. In its historic role as broker between production and resource, the city neither produced the products, nor sold them, rather depending on natural resources gathered elsewhere.

9 Statistics provided by the Department of Commerce, State of Louisiana, 1994.
to be sold elsewhere. Oil, like cotton and sugar before it, provided the jobs in service industries, made the banks rich, its taxes supported the government. And when Big Oil collapsed, the local economy collapsed with it. The local newspaper was not the only voice that reasoned ‘It is time to investigate a more diversified economy’ (Times-Picayune editorial, January 8, 1986).

In the United States, chambers of commerce, though membership organisations, often fill the role as the pivotal organisation for the identification and recruitment of new industries to an area. It would be assumed, therefore, that the New Orleans Chamber of Commerce would be central in determining what could take Big Oil’s place. However, the changing demographics of the 1980s put the city’s interests and its plans in conflict with those of the Chamber and this conflict helped put music on the agenda of city government in its plans for urban renewal.

In 1983, the Chamber of Commerce of New Orleans changed its name to the Chamber, the River Region, in response to the flight of many of its constituents to the suburbs and surrounding parishes and the resulting decision to widen the scope of the Chamber to retain a viable membership.¹⁰ Chamber publicity documents explained the name change as a way to make the Chamber a regional complex, ‘undertaking strategic planning on a regional scale.’ Soon after the name change, the Chamber sponsored a fund-raising strategic planning vehicle, called Metrovision, that brought leaders of the area together to forge a ‘vision of the future of the region.’ However, as Eric Cager, the first director of the New Orleans Music Commission, observed, this initiative was criticised by the city government for being dominated by leaders of industry from outside the city and by its lack of black representation:

Metrovision only proved to the city government what people had already suspected, that the Chamber’s interests had moved more and more to outside of the city of New Orleans, and the Chamber was interested in the opinions of businesspeople and government people

¹⁰ In Louisiana, the governmental subdivisions are called parishes rather than counties.
outside the city and it was less and less an industry agency that involved themselves in the needs of municipal activities, inside the city of New Orleans.\footnote{Cager, 1993.}

Metrovision produced a document that was hailed by the Chamber as ‘a vision of New Orleans’s future.’ This had repercussions for the city’s music, since, as Cager pointed out,

The music industry, which resides ninety percent within the city of New Orleans, received one paragraph in the 300-page Metrovision document. The city became even more convinced after that that music industries in the City of New Orleans would never get any help from the Chamber.

So in the 1980s, faced with the crash of the oil industry, the abandonment by the Chamber and threatened bankruptcy, the new city government and local businesses decided to take a look at entertainment as a possible way to pull the city out of a big economic jam.

Local music industry initiatives

Out of this changing political and economic climate in the late 1980s, several initiatives for economic development based on popular music emerged. What follows is a study of four of these initiatives which were attempted in New Orleans between 1987 and 1990: one from a city government, one from the local music industry, one from the business community and one from musicians. A look at these initiatives is helpful in tracking how debates between various groups involved in local music reflect the wider social, cultural and economic environment of a community. It will also help to explain the conflicts that grew out of efforts to co-ordinate and structure the music industry.

NOMC

In 1987, the City of New Orleans Music Commission was founded. The timing of the creation of this commission, its peculiar funding scheme and the relationship of the city to the commission illustrates music’s role in the changing...
political, social and economic situation of urban New Orleans. Largely in response to the failure of the Metrovision document and with the encouragement of the various music initiatives in the city at the time, the city government took action. Unlike previous city governments, this one knew the industry, had connections with music educators, musicians and local festival organisations. The mayor’s assistant for internal relations said, ‘We decided that if there was to be any growth in the music industry, it would have to be initiated by the city itself.’

The New Orleans Music Commission (as well as the New Orleans Film Commission) was created by act of city council in 1987 and consisted of one paid officer and nine unpaid members, one appointed by each of the seven city councillors and two by the mayor. However, no funds were available for the marketing and operation functions of the commission. Then, in 1991, the city administration, still unable to fund the commission through its depleted budget, looked to find funding where ‘new funds were being generated and new efforts were being initiated,’ in what Mayor Barthelemy called ‘another well, since the old well has already been ninety-nine percent committed’ (Times-Picayune 5 April 1991). The commission, as a detached agency of city government, was empowered to receive outside funds and a plan was devised wherein the music commission was funded by the New Orleans Tourism Marketing Corporation (NOTMC), an economic development initiative created to market the city to the ‘discretionary tourist’ which had identified music as important in this effort. With the advent of a dedicated $100,000-per-year grant from the NOTMC, the music commission’s writ, as mapped out by the initial city council documents, was to help various efforts in the city that also enhanced the viability of the tourist industry. Thus, tourism was inextricably linked with music initiatives. However, many of the commission’s projects dealt in a basic way with education and training on the music industry, both performance and recording. Among the projects initiated by the commission in its first two years was

13 NOTMC is discussed in more detail in this chapter, part II.
The Cutting Edge Music Business Conference, an annual industry event that brought national recording, legal and touring executives to the city. The conference was held in conjunction with the Music Business Institute, a month-long period of nightly courses on various aspects of the music business, sponsored by the commission. Other commission projects included a music project incubator, which assisted non-profit groups in organising events; neighbourhood entertainment industry job fairs, co-sponsored with the Jazz and Heritage Foundation; an arts in education program; the Black Music Hall of Fame; and the Jazz Centennial celebration.

The New Orleans Music Commission was one of the first in the United States after the Texas Music Association and the Austin Music Commission. Nashville followed New Orleans in 1991. The growth of local music initiatives has been attributed largely to a shift in popular music to the global in the late 1980s and the attempt of cities to find ways to compete within this international music framework. The experience in New Orleans may point out an additional reason for this growth of music initiatives in the United States during this period. As industry moves from the inner-cities to the suburbs, through factors such as commercial property costs, ‘white flight,’ fear of crime and educational differences between the inner city work-force and the suburbs, many large US-American cities might turn to the cultural activities and preoccupations of the remaining predominantly black population for economic regeneration. In turn, predominantly black music communities, under certain circumstances, may be more willing to work with and relinquish control to black city governments. This racialises local music industry initiatives in these places, pitting the regional industries against the local for resources and local musicmaking against the international recording industry for ownership and control. For those African-American communities where music has been an integral part of the community’s identity, this situation could have powerful repercussions on the way the city’s music policy is acted out. In New Orleans, the continuity of minority group rights within the larger community has
permeated these conflicts and created opportunities and integration that might contrast with experiences elsewhere.

In the 1980s, the local music industry and the city joined in several initiatives to bolster local music potential, with mixed success. Debates emerging from these schemes, especially concerning ownership and control of musicians’ cultural output, often led to an impasse, although out of the activities of these initiatives networks were formed that achieved some success.

**NOME**

In 1987, the year that the NOMC was founded, a letter appeared in the local paper, written by Jason Berry, a local writer and music researcher, entitled ‘Music: The Neglected Industry’ (*Times-Picayune*, 1987) in which he evoked the success that New Orleans musicians had achieved at the recent Grammy awards (led by Wynton and Branford Marsalis, Harry Connick Jr., Dr. John, Terence Blanchard, Aaron Neville and various film soundtracks composed by local musicians) and posed a question of why, with all this national recognition for New Orleans musicians, the local authorities had not considered music as an economic base for recovery. Although Berry did not make specific suggestions on how a local city government could take advantage of the success of these musicians, his letter was the cause of much comment and attracted the attention of a group within the city’s Chamber, the River Region, predominantly young entrepreneurs who were committed to the downtown area of New Orleans and frustrated at the Chamber’s ‘abandonment’ of the city. The group, led by an art gallery owner and a real estate broker, initiated a canvass of local people involved in music to find out the potential of music as a basis for an economic renaissance. The group invited those whom they identified as key people in the music community, as well as government and business leaders, to come together at the Chamber offices to discuss common ground.

The stormy first meetings took the sedate business leaders and government officials by surprise. The ‘music people’ were a disparate group -- from experienced music professionals to those new to music business or associated in some peripheral
way with the music scene. Given a chance to have their thoughts heard by the city’s power brokers for the first time and with no unified agenda, they appeared a clamorous, competitive, sometimes hostile group. At the same time, representatives from the Chamber, unfamiliar with the nature of the industry, submitted suggestions for development that were seen as threatening to existing small musical industries, such as the establishment of a ‘state of the art’ recording studio, competition to the mid-sized studios already in the city, or a band and services guide, which would have competed with a successful existing one published by a local music magazine. On the other hand, there was little understanding within the music community of the nature and the extent of help that the business community could furnish. The music group was dominated by studios, managers and music attorneys who would be best served by a growth in the recording side of music. A vocal subgroup represented community events and there were many references to the city’s Amusement Tax and the chances of its repeal. The handful of musicians present expressed suspicion and fears of exploitation by local business.

Meanwhile, business leaders were not reassured that the music community had the professional acumen to handle large investments from their sector, nor did they reach an understanding of how local investment could produce dividends. ‘We’re not a charity,’ said a local bank representative. ‘We have to be convinced of what we’re investing in and how it will produce a return’14 Neither group seemed committed to a united effort. A firm attempt to address these tensions might have helped clarify sensitive areas of conflicting perspectives.

After a while, the group within the Chamber, tired of the infighting and confused as to what role it could play (‘or,’ as one member put it, ‘if indeed these people even wanted our help’), lost interest and suggested that the group might go its own way. The New Orleans Music and Entertainment Commission (NOME) became an independent body that existed for four more years with varying success, the most noteworthy being a Mayor’s Conference on Music, held in 1988 and again

in 1989, in which panellists from the local and national music industry discussed such topics as record deals, music law, copyright, dominated by recording industry. The conference presented an opportunity for musicians inexperienced in the music business to meet some A&R representatives and learn basic information on the record business; however most of the interaction between the city and the industry occurred outside the conference. The social agenda was enlightening: at the lunch break, bankers, politicians and representatives of large businesses dined with record executives from the major labels, while local music people were left with sandwiches.

The conference pointed out problems within NOME -- its lack of focus, its failure to reach a consensus, the lack of partnerships, the racialised nature of the group (overwhelmingly white). Significant by their absence were the musicians, representatives of the Second Line organisations, the festivals, the churches and the educators. Although there were black attorneys, politicians and commissioners present, there were few black musicians.

The progress and dissolution of NOME pointed out both the hopes and the conflicts of the people involved: the hopes that the city’s music could bring jobs and be the basis for economic regeneration and the conflicts that music engendered in the perception that it ‘belonged’ to certain groups, or that certain groups could market it more successfully than others, as well as the tensions between the recording and live performance sectors of the local music industry. Both hopes and conflicts point out the importance of music to New Orleans, a source of economic opportunity and identity that made it an arena of heated and prolonged debate, reflecting larger debates on the city and its representations.

There was conflict from the beginning concerning the basic aims of the commission. Some members, citing NOME’s charter from the Chamber, insisted that it was for music business people, defined as those involved in local businesses that concerned themselves with recording, such as the small record companies, studios and attorneys, promoters and agents. The founder described it as a ‘business advocacy group, not another cultural organisation.’ NOME, these argued,
was not the place for fledgling songwriters to bring their songs, or musicians to expect to get help getting signed to a record deal. Others strongly argued that musicians had for too long been ignored in policymaking in the city and musician development should be an integral part of the organisation.

Meanwhile, although there was guarded interest from some musicians, most of those consulted were not very interested. A consistent effort to enlist prominent musicians to the board of directors failed. Their careers could not be helped or hurt, they said, by a group of business people who, though with perhaps the greatest of intentions, knew nothing about their business. The comments of the wife of a local musician reflected the general attitude of musicians.

New Orleans musicians are looking for record contracts, or touring contracts, or live gigs at international festivals, or steady gigs in town. Those people don’t know A&R people, they don’t book festivals. The best way they could help would be to bring in some jobs into the city, help the city’s economy generally and the music will take care of itself. If people have some extra change in their pockets, they will go out to hear music, buy a record, even take up an instrument, or get their kids some lessons. That’s the best way to help this city.  

In the meetings arranged by NOME between the city policymakers, business leaders and music community, there was an atmosphere of tension and conflict, as people who had worked for decades in the local music industry felt that an agenda had been imposed upon them without their input and any objection would put them in a position to lose favour with the business leaders. The impact of NOME, however, was that it focused for perhaps the first time the attention of the media and the city government onto the city’s music industry and created a forum for debate on goals and strategies. It encouraged links and alliances between the music community of New Orleans and other cities, for example Liverpool, which was twinned with New Orleans through the efforts of NOME and particularly Austin, which served as a model for New Orleans and, through its invitation to New Orleans to participate in its SXSW music industry conference, helped establish links with other ‘music cities’

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such as Dallas, Memphis, Seattle and Minneapolis that were useful in identifying issues and contributed to the city focusing its efforts. NOME helped point up to locals the conflicting needs of the local industry, especially the tensions between those who would establish connections with the national record industries and those who were involved in local musical performance. Seldom confronted were other factors, such as the differences in ethnicity between the leaders of the music organisation and the musicians.

One of the association’s achievements was supporting the creation of a city music commission as a permanent branch of city government, acting as a liaison with the music community and keeping music concerns on the city’s agenda. The various music associations that came into being at this time joined with NOME in this appeal and gradually the city government agreed, as it began its own initiatives for economic development. However, in its four years of existence, NOME did not succeed in getting the despised five per cent Amusement Tax taken off the books. Times were too tough and despite lip service to live music, the city needed the tax money too badly. Although NOME failed to forge a consensus between business and music, it did offer a meeting ground for people to network their ideas and talk out their frustrations. When it disbanded in 1991, several other groups, more narrow in focus, formed to take over its more scattered agenda.

**FONOM**

In 1989, news reports that New Orleans and Louisiana musicians were estimated to have sold between $100 and $200 million of albums internationally, including Aaron Neville’s gold solo album and Harry Connick’s gold for the soundtrack *When Harry Met Sally*, sparked another music business initiative, this time by a group of business people, both in and out of the music business, led by a prominent black attorney. Called the Friends of New Orleans Music (FONOM), their launch material stated that their primary concern was the ‘lack of a substantive music industry in a city with such a vast music reputation ... how can this rich New Orleans asset be maximised?’ (Rodney 1989) The discourse was
similar to that which inspired the founding of NOME: ‘money being made off our music elsewhere,’ and a determination to keep resources in the hands of local exploitation.

The group, building on NOME, determined to use a more ‘organised’ approach to setting and achieving goals. Attracting some of the key people from the NOME organisation, which had become splintered and was rapidly dissolving, the group began to meet weekly in an informal setting for discussions on common ground and planning a course of action. With the presence of prominent black business leaders on its board, FONOM got the ear of Mayor Barthelemy and the City Council and the perception was that the music community was more open to FONOM and its leaders than NOME had been.

Out of an initial series of meetings came a plan for a weekend retreat/seminar with the aim of developing a consensus among ‘diverse elements of the local music industry.’ Called the New Orleans Music Congress, the retreat was co-sponsored by the Chamber, the City of New Orleans, The Louisiana Music Commission, The New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Foundation and seven local universities.

The FONOM members determined to hold the congress at Southeastern Louisiana University, some fifty miles away from the city, in order to ‘reduce distractions’ (and ensure a committed participation). However, with no convenient public transportation, this served to effectively block participation from those who could not afford to travel. Attendees were advised that the meeting would be run on a very controlled basis by a professional facilitator in the manner of a goal-setting seminar commonly held in many industries. Over a hundred participants gathered to discuss the ‘focus question’: ‘How Can the Music Industry Become a Major Contributor to the Economy of the New Orleans Region?’

The conference was split into three sessions. The first consisted of five ‘team’ configurations brainstorming their individual visions. (My team consisted of, among others, a former mayoral candidate, a Rastafarian musician, an academic, a booking agent and a journalist.) With tight time controls on discussion, arguments were of
necessity held to a minimum and a ‘vision’ was negotiated quickly. When the teams convened in a plenary session, one ‘common vision’ was formulated, articulated as ‘A Full Service New Orleans Music Industry,’ composed of nine attenuate divisions, with 23 ancillary projects. This formed the foundation for strategic planning.

The second workshop, entitled ‘Challenges/Opportunities,’ gave participants a chance to access the present situation; what factors were blocking and which were supporting the movement toward the ‘common vision’ of a full-service music industry. The consensus of both business and music representatives was that the biggest block (‘challenge’) to achieving the ‘common vision’ was inadequate recognition of music as a good business investment. Other perceived stumbling blocks were negative attitudes of the community, such as a lack of confidence, poor government/industry interface, a poor local economy, the fragmentation of the music community, a lack of business professionalism, and the geographical separation from major markets.

There was almost total consensus, however, on what existing factor supported the ‘common vision’: the universal recognition of and demand for New Orleans music was named as the chief positive factor for any New Orleans music initiative. Throughout, this was the one basis for agreement that cut across power struggles and diverse agenda -- the participants’ perception that the city’s music was extraordinary and appreciated outside the city.

The third workshop (held on the second day after an evening’s entertainment and various late-night informal discussions) was a final brainstorming session where strategies were mapped out to move toward industry development: showcasing the local music industry (Louisiana Music Awards, hosting an international convention of festival producers, etc.); developing educational opportunities (University music consortium, educational exchange programs, accredited music industry courses); expanding the infrastructure (building production, distribution, manufacturing, educational facilities); expanding channels of communication (music industry/bankers workshop, annual state of industry report); utilising the political process (developing music political action committees,
appointing city music ombudsman, creation of an enterprise zone); and increasing total industry awareness.

This structured approach, using familiar corporate processes of goal assessment and facilitation, controlled the anarchy that had ruled those first meetings of NOME and, in turn, created an environment that was more familiar to the bankers and politicians present. Though some of the music industry people complained that the forum was too structured, the consensus seemed to be that the approach had allowed all the participants to help form the agenda, rather than goals being imposed on any group from above. The general feeling was that the results were satisfactory, that the goals chosen were worthy ones and achievable. By 1992, many of the activities had been attempted and a few successfully, such as establishing an entertainment law section of the Louisiana State Bar Association.¹⁶

NOMO

Though FONOM gained more interest from local musicians than NOME, both had their detractors in some areas of the community. Leading the opposition was New Orleans Musicians Organised (NOMO), an organisation of black musicians led by Cyril Neville, the youngest Neville Brother, who actively objected to NOME and ‘other white organisations.’ Centred around a discourse of ownership of the music, NOMO’s promotional material stated ‘who keeps the record of the past is a concern in the music community.’ NOMO was a grass-roots organisation of New Orleans musicians whose goal, according to their publications, was to ‘deal with the minds of the young New Orleans musicians’ by giving workshops on the ‘business of music’ but the pamphlet goes on to say:

The other, equally as important, aspect of NOMO is the accurate documentation of our heritage and the survival of our culture. The recording of the past needs to be looked at and authenticated to eliminate the gross misstatements and inaccuracies that are accepted as truth simply because they exist in books and magazines. Then we will carefully record the contemporary cultural situation to assure the correctness of our place in history. There are means available to us

¹⁶ However, the facilitator complained afterwards that she was never paid the agreed-upon fee.
that past New Orleans artists never had. Musical performance will be recorded and the social impact will be written and published by the people being documented -- the musicians.

Some of New Orleans’ greatest talent has come and gone and never received the chance to release all the music they had to give. Some were not listened to, some were not heard enough and went unrewarded. We think about PROFESSOR LONGHAIR, GUITAR SLIM, JAMES CARROLL BOOKER III and very, very recently, GERALD TILLMAN and we say ‘NO MO!!!!

For NOMO, the music organisations were seen as a means for ‘white’ control to wrest music away from the predominantly African-American producers of the music. Others in the music community outside NOMO shared doubts about the new music organisations such as NOME and FONOM. Jason Patterson, proprietor of Snug Harbor, a modern jazz club, told the *Wall Street Journal* that he believed these doubts were justified:

There’s a history of past exploitation and dues still have to be paid. The younger musicians suspect NOME of wanting to use, not support, them and the older ones are sceptical. So many organisations have come and gone (11 February, 1990).

This attitude, sometimes articulated as a fear of exploitation, was acted out through non-co-operation, as the music community held onto control of its production through non-participation in city music organisations.17

**Music as natural resource**

When city and business policy towards music changed, the official language about music changed, from terms that implied and invoked images of the past, to those that spoke to economic potential and music’s role as part of the culture of the people.18 Where previously the city’s music had been seen as a sign of an anti-work attitude, it began to be represented as a defiance in the face of adversity,

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17 During this period of economic crisis there were pressures on music organisations such as the musician’s union to hire only local players, making it difficult for groups coming into the city to play in local clubs and events. The rise of the tourism industry has created pressures for a relaxing of these policies, but local feeling still supports the exclusion of ‘outside groups’ (Cager 1996).

18 See Stokes (1994, p.3) on the importance of looking at ‘language about music’ and the ways in which it is used.
representative of the city’s resilience and its distinctiveness from other American cities, an important consideration in promoting a local sense of difference.

As business in New Orleans began to look at the potential of aligning the city to the recording industry, the model was oil and the discourse continued to be about the retrieval of local resources and the city in its historic role as broker between production and resource. At a conference sponsored by NOME for business and political leaders, NOME’s co-founder used the language of the oil companies:

Music is an asset we tend to take for granted, yet it is something the city is famous for all over the world. So this is a resource we need to utilise more strategically.19

Framed this way, however, local ownership was not a priority. The business leaders were looking for the industry to come in and take over, as had the oil industry. Within this framework, the economy of music making would shift away from its traditional association with social aid clubs, neighbourhoods and live performances to one with the modern production of recordings, while talent, metaphorically represented as a resource (oil), would be exploited (refined) by outside interests. This would necessitate the producers of music turning over their product to ‘middlemen.’ But this was not to happen.

For many New Orleanians, the debate on music and its ownership extended beyond the boundaries of a local music industry to embrace perceptions of themselves as individuals, their urban environment, their state and government. As well as a musical form, New Orleans music was representative of a way of life whose influence was felt over the entire city, interrupting urban life with a statement of power from the residents showing that the structured modes of urban American living can be interrupted by the local -- from traffic disrupted by a Second Line parade, to a language shaped for localised meanings, to a work cycle disrupted by Carnival. This was not a power to be released or given away without a large amount of debate. With black control of government came a call for the development of local means of exploitation. So resource management became caught up in issues

of local control. In addition, while these initiatives were aimed at developing to some extent local means of exploitation of the national recording industry, they were still seen as ‘white’ colonisation in this context. The long tradition of demand for minority rights and ownership of cultural capital in the black community of New Orleans, which became politicised during this period, exemplifies a pressure perhaps not present in other local communities.

FONOM, the more structured local initiative, emphasised the common ground of both business and music interests -- the community’s shared belief in the uniqueness and worth of its music and music making -- and allowed at least some consensus to be built among all participating parties. This approach seemed more conducive to dialogue between the business/political interests and the music interests in this case than the creation of a commission such as NOME which the music community perceived as imposing an agenda without consulting or understanding existing industries. These tensions were exacerbated because of the fractured nature of the city’s music industry, with many small businesses vying for a shrinking market and the inevitable conflict and competition of a small community in a depressed economy.

These initiatives seemed to point out the lack of a dialogue between the local music industries and the power structure of business interests and policymakers that reflect issues of ethnicity, class and values that are usually submerged in the hegemonic. However, the decision of the city’s business and government to investigate music and the music industries for urban regeneration brought together groups that might usually never interact. Thus music raises issues that might be buried in other fields, revealing societal tensions that might be usually suppressed, moving the hegemonic into the open, where it can become ideological and argued. As the Comaroffs have written:

Once something leaves the domain of the hegemonic, it frequently becomes a major site of ideological struggle. Even when there is no well-formed opposing ideology, no clearly articulated collective consciousness among subordinate populations, such struggles may still occur. But they are liable to be heard in the genre of negation --
refusal, reversal, the smashing of idols and icons -- and not in the narrative voice of political argument (1991, p. 27).

Unless the unspoken barriers are revealed and cleared, it will be very difficult for a consensus to be made between groups, and battles might be fought over non-issues that no amount of agreement will solve.

Through the experiences of FONOM and NOME, it became clear that in developing a music policy, a consensus should emerge from the local music industry of what it needs that local policymakers could provide; for their part, policymakers need to be aware of what policies or projects could be deleterious to existing musical industries before an agenda for economic development is proposed. The work of the organisations showed that establishing common ground, respecting existing musical institutions and businesses while reassuring business and political interests of the investment potential of music industry are the first steps in working towards a viable local music policy. However, NOMO and NOMC were reminders that music reflects issues in the wider society, issues that must be addressed before consensus can be made -- such as issues of class, gender, age, ethnicity. In New Orleans, these were the racialised nature of the music organisations (white) and the musicians (black), unmentioned but impossible to ignore in the colour of the bodies present in the boardrooms and performance stages of the city.

City policy

The New Orleans Music Commission continued under the new mayoral administration of Marc Morial, the son of the city’s first black mayor and heir to his Creole ideal of a city that transcends racial distinction. A restructuring of the commission reflects the new priorities of the new mayor and his administration toward its cultural industries. An April 1994 report from the mayor’s transition team on entertainment emphasised its priority with the new administration.

Support for the entertainment industry in the public and private sectors of New Orleans is inadequate and grossly unequal to the economic impact and opportunities of this important sector of economic development (‘Report, Mayor Marc Morial Transition Team Task Force on Entertainment,’ April 1994).
The mayor’s office reasserted the importance of a paid music officer to represent the interests of music to the city. Quoted in the mayor’s literature on music policy was the following:

The potential magnitude and importance of fund raising, liaison among multiple departments and Innovative interaction with local, state and federal agencies, requires an ongoing administrative presence in every Mayor’s office (Arts, Tourism and Cultural Resources’ published by the National Association of Local Arts Agencies, February 1993.)

After taking office in 1994, Mayor Morial established the nation’s first Mayor’s Office of Tourism, Arts and Entertainment (MOTAE) as part of the city’s department of Economic Development, Policy and Planning ‘to stimulate greater co-operation between and within these industries and to promote and develop new projects, jobs and initiatives.’ This consolidated approach grew out of the April 1994 report ‘Program for Economic Progress’ by the mayor’s Economic Development Transition Team which stated that ‘entertainment, the arts, sports and tourism are intertwined in their economic impact, resources and relevant public and private agencies and entities.’ The two commissions, music and entertainment as well as film and video, were placed under this office. The focus of MOTAE, according to the mayor’s office, was ‘to develop more co-operative strategic planning and marketing’ and to continue the process of ‘professionalising the two commissions.’

The city did not establish a separate commission for the arts, rather MOTAE works in a co-ordinating role for the myriad arts and tourism entities already currently operating in the city, which included the Arts Council of New Orleans, the Greater New Orleans Convention and Visitors Bureau, the New Orleans Tourism Marketing Corporation, the Greater New Orleans Black Tourism Network and the New Orleans Sports Foundation. MOTAE develops mayoral policy in regards to these organisations, as well as supporting the missions of these entities. The main impetus for this combined office overseeing tourism, arts and entertainment emerged from suggestions of the tourism and arts sector of the new mayor’s
transition team, who felt there needed to be greater synergy between industries, including the elimination of duplicate services and more strategic marketing.

The goals of the new composite office as stated by the mayor reflect the importance of music in economic plans of the city:

- seek new economic development projects related to arts, tourism and entertainment
- research and track new technology and media to ‘better position New Orleans to take advantage of informational superhighway and other new media’
- develop educational and training opportunities for those working in arts, tourism and entertainment
- review and participate in actions that improve cable television’s community access system
- lobby for and support major efforts that contribute to growth and development of tourism, arts and entertainment
- secure and formulate major events, Grammies, sports competitions
- promote communication between entertainment, cultural and tourism communities with existing tourism organisations.

The centralising of music policy to the predominantly black city government and away from predominantly white businessleaders has led to an atmosphere of partnership and co-operation unheard of in the relationships between New Orleans music community and policymakers. Although a large number of musicians profess indifference to or lack of belief in the efficacy of music initiatives, most of the mayor’s office projects are staffed with musicians on directorial boards and management councils.

Music’s positioning strengthened in MOTAE when its first director left and the music officer was named the director of MOTAE while retaining her position as music commissioner. Excerpts from letters of support for the music commission attached to its budget request in 1995 reveal the wide range and multiracial voice of the various agencies that work with the city’s music commission. The Black
Tourism Network evoked the ‘deep awareness and need for the commission to promote multicultural/ethnic experiences emanating from the city of New Orleans ... more specifically musical traditions and heritage of both the city and the state.’ The Arts Council of New Orleans emphasised ‘the importance of establishing a strong foundation for the development of arts tourism ... provide tourists with information, bring more visitors to arts events and the creation of products designed to bring tourists to arts events.’ The New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival called on ‘the need to invigorate the local music and entertainment industry, which will boost our city’s economy.’ A music educator remarked that the ‘key to economic salvation and growth is to adequately support and develop the musical traditions that make us different from any other place in the world.’

These excerpts point out some ways that different groups see the city’s policymakers as using New Orleans music -- to promote a local sense of difference, as a product for tourism, as an engine for economic regeneration and to provide a multicultural experience.

**Creativity and compromise: New Orleans Music and Tourism**

If tourism is chosen to be a major currency earner, it would appear to be impossible to avoid the detrimental effects on local culture.


Despite such dire warnings, policymakers in many localities have embraced tourism in their economic development and urban regeneration planning and towns and cities that may have lost their traditional industries have opened their local cultural activities to outside visitors. Music has been identified by many cities as important in what Robins has termed this ‘race between places to create distinct place identity’ (Robins 1991, p. 38) and policymakers in many places have chosen to use their local music to attract tourists. For many of these cities, music plays an important role in the development of a distinct culture and provides a context for personal and collective identity. What are the consequences of the commodification
of these regional musics on traditional music practices and local identity? Moreover, to what degree are the musicians passive or engaged players in these activities?

This section will deal with the part music plays in the packaging of New Orleans as a tourist site and the consequences of tourism initiatives on the city’s musical community. An understanding of how conflicts between local musicmaking and the requirements of the city’s burgeoning tourist industry are resolved or negotiated points out factors seldom mentioned in tourist research, which often portrays local musics as passive victims of tourism strategies.

Wallis and Malm’s caution appeared in their pioneering study of the influences of the international recording industry on local recording practices in a number of small countries (1984, pp. 293-4), but a comprehensive international study on tourism’s influence on local music has yet to be done. This section will address a few of the kinds of issues that may be raised in such a study, using as an example the New Orleans music community and its relationship to the tourist industry in that city. New Orleans’ particular historical identification with music and the resulting expectations of people who visit there, as well as the determination of the city’s tourist industry to exploit a particular musical image to attract tourists, make the city’s musicians and their activities, social relations and interactions an interesting focus in observing the processes through which ideas of locality are formed, negotiated and reformed. While there has been extensive study of the impact of literature on the way cities and places are recognised and accepted and on the influence of literary images on the portrayal and development of culture,²⁰ the relation between musical images and place recognition has rarely been studied. Often overlooked, music is a powerful conjurer of place, as music’s role in television, filmmaking and advertising will attest. Cohen has called music a ‘unique and important resource in the constitution of place and local subjectivity’ (1992, p. 6).

People invest intensely in personal, cultural and national identities through music. Music is said to capture the essence of a place. Music is frequently thought of as culture-specific and sounds are often identified in place terms: Texas swing, the Hawaiian guitar, the Liverpool Sound and so forth (Shepherd 1993, pp 171-206). New Orleans, a notion partially constructed through popular music, films and other cultural material mentioned previously, has come to evoke an image of a certain ribald way of life that persists and influences the expectations of people who visit there. In the present century this image, derived from a distinctive social history, bound up with myth and reinforced from the outside, has been in its turn embraced by the city, rejected and more recently embraced again as a means of economic development through tourism.

Imagining New Orleans

New Orleans holds a unique place in the US-American landscape. Probably the most Africanised city in the United States (Hall 1992a) with its French and Spanish, rather than English, colonial background, its Mediterranean culture and Catholicism, its racial ambiguity and Native American integration, it is often portrayed as a part of, yet distinct from, the South. Surrounded by water -- the huge Lake Pontchartrain to the north, the Mississippi River to the west and south and lakes and marshland to the east -- New Orleans is geographically situated on an island, more accurately in a bowl, seven feet below sea level, with a series of levees holding back the recalcitrant Mississippi River from finding its way through the Atchafalaya Basin to the Gulf of Mexico. These natural boundaries that separate the city geographically from the rest of Louisiana, the South and the nation and reinforce its ‘separateness’ in the public imagination. Its cultural activities, derived from its African, Italian, Spanish and French intrusive population, flourished unchecked in this isolation and merged with that of its indigenous people to produce rituals and cultural events largely unique to the United States, such as the Second Line parades, jazz funerals, Mardi Gras Indians and Carnival mentioned earlier.
Visitors to the city’s old French Quarter, the chief tourist area, can imagine themselves visiting another more dangerous, more romantic time and place. The many Hollywood films that have portrayed New Orleans as the location of unusual wickedness or sin (*Blue Angel, Angel Heart, Interview with the Vampire, Walk on the Wild Side, Kid Creole, A Streetcar Named Desire*) have prepared the visitor for preconceived notions of the city as a place veiled in mystery and the French colonial architecture of the Quarter, its narrow streets, iron-lace balconies and lush courtyards, reinforce this perception. Duality and contrasts strike the visitor forcefully: the infamous privateer Jean Lafitte’s blacksmith shop lies down the street from the strip joints and gay bars of Bourbon Street and just blocks from the Ursuline Convent. Close by, Pirate’s Alley runs alongside the oldest cathedral in the United States -- iniquity and Catholicism sitting comfortably side by side. Visiting New Orleans, therefore, gives the tourist the chance to play out fantasies of sin and danger from the safety of the balcony of a Holiday Inn, or through the window of an air-conditioned tour bus. In contrast to the rest of the South, the city’s long history of racial mixing has resulted in a population of all colours and hues and racial identity is often blurred. For U. S.-Americans, the exotic look of the people contribute to the sense of being in another country, another place in time.

The climate and festive inclinations of the city of New Orleans conspire to open events to the out of doors. The streets are still often the place of music and celebration, of day-to-day interaction and commerce. ‘Private’ cultural celebrations, such as neighbourhood jazz funerals and parades, place no physical boundaries between locals and tourists. Entertainment spills outside buildings onto the sidewalks and courtyards of the Quarter, extending the tourist space to include the streets and ‘banquette.’ Street bands can be heard for blocks and music clubs leave their doors wide open. Tourists watch and listen from doorways, out onto the sidewalk, as well as inside the clubs. Liberal drinking laws allow outdoor drinking, extending the ‘tourist space’ into the streets, but music also is used to assist in

21 A New Orleans term for sidewalk or pavement.
marking spaces where revelry is permitted. Music serves as a signal that a space is open for occupation. In the French Quarter, where the music stops, tourists hesitate to venture.

In the mid-1980s, as the city government and private interests in New Orleans began to take tourism more seriously, the riverfront was targeted as a tourist area. Riverside warehouses, once a part of the port, were brought down to create a park and an aquarium was built by the city as part of its riverfront development. Music is used to lure visitors to the new riverfront tourist space. The riverboat *Natchez* blares out familiar tunes (‘Waitin’ for the Robert E. Lee,’ ‘Way Down Yonder In New Orleans’) on its steam calliope, creating a corridor of sound that tourists can travel, marking out and extending their space from the Quarter to the river. Bands play on bandstands by the riverbank, street musicians serenade visitors on the ‘Moonwalk’ that runs atop the levee and concerts are held at the Spanish Plaza at the riverside, using the river as a backdrop for the music. Debates between the city council and developers over the use of a park on the opposite side of the French Quarter have included reference to there being no music to ‘draw the tourists to this side of the Quarter.’

**Background: music and city tourism policies**

This association of the city with music is not new. With one of the longest histories of musical activity in North America, the image of New Orleans has been bound up with music from its founding. Early visitors often commented on the abundance of music in the city. In 1802, a visitor remarked, ‘New Orleanians manage during a single winter to execute about as much dancing, music, laughing and dissipation as would serve any reasonably disposed, staid and sober citizen for three or four years’ (Kmen, 1966, p. 6). At the beginning of this century, New Orleans’ role in the evolution of jazz gave the city an international association with that musical style which persists. However, for decades policymakers attempted to distance New Orleans from its association with jazz’s early days, an association which was thought to hurt business and to project an immoral, salacious lifestyle.
In the 1940s, city policymakers reversed this strategy and adopted the romanticised image of the city as the ‘birthplace of jazz’ to attract tourists. As Bruce Raeburn has pointed out,

Jazz pilgrims joined with locals to institutionalise a policy of ‘enlightened’ conservation and preservation of the city’s jazz heritage (1991, p. 5).

This interest in the city’s music, however, developed along limited lines. Promotion of city’s music was organised into ‘safe’ cultural channels, such as traditional jazz museums, archives, newsletters, performance halls and festivals, while the Franco-African performance activities, still alive in the black neighbourhoods, were unsupported and ignored.

In the 1950s, New Orleans regained the national musical spotlight, with stars such as Fats Domino, Lloyd Price and Little Richard heralding the new age of rhythm and blues and rock ‘n’ roll. But despite this limited success, the attractions for visitors remained focused on jazz and New Orleans continued its policy of emphasis on its jazz heritage to the exclusion of other musical activities, the city satisfied to play the role as hospitable, but detached, host to jazz pilgrims. In addition, the city’s location in, but not of, the conservative Bible Belt ensured it as a travel destination for Southerners out for a good time. For instance, the city is a popular site for events such as the regional and national sports competitions in which sports fans of southern state universities ‘follow their team’ to New Orleans. For these events, Mississippians, Alabamans or Georgians coming to watch their team play, for example, in the Sugar Bowl on New Year’s Day can be assured that there will be thousands of ‘their own’ walking the streets of the ‘exotic,’ and perhaps a little unnerving, French Quarter.

In the midst of the 1970s offshore oil boom, the city’s tourism initiatives were confined primarily to convention trade and the city’s ribald reputation, considered detrimental to attracting business, was seen as hindering plans to develop the city into a top convention destination. The city concentrated on building convention facilities such as hotels, a convention centre and the 80,000-seat Superdome and
attracting national political and sports events. Convention business grew, as the city proved to be a favourite destination of convention travellers, due to its mild winter climate, its new conference facilities and its reputation as a place of celebration. However, there was little planning or marketing of the city for tourism by business or government and even during Mardi Gras season there were empty hotel rooms.

Then, in the mid-1980s, finding the oil industry in a downward spiral, the convention centre only partially booked and new hotels standing half-empty, the hotels passed a self-imposed one-dollar-per-room tax to finance the New Orleans Tourism Marketing Corporation. Its brief was to market the city to the discretionary tourist -- the non-convention visitor. This commitment to tourism as a major part of its urban regeneration plans placed New Orleans in competition with other cities in attracting people for entertainment and leisure activities and the marketing group commissioned research to discover what distinctive quality of the city would be the most competitive. This research indicated that discretionary city travellers list ‘excitement’ most often as the goal of their travels and the images of New Orleans as a city of spontaneous celebration, sin and frivolity fed into this. To best represent this attitude of celebration, the tourism marketing board decided to once again exploit the city’s music image, this time for tourism. And the city, as Roach has written, ‘somehow constructed itself as the nation’s libido’ (1996, p. 231).

By the mid-1980s, tourism had become the primary income producer of the city, with a resulting new interest by policymakers in the hitherto neglected music community and the potential role of the city’s musical reputation in attracting visitors and conventions to New Orleans.

The hesitation of the marketing corporation to use the city’s already existing international reputation for music reflects the reluctance of policymakers in many places to use music for economic regeneration. Only when expensive marketing research data confirmed that music was effective for business did they relent. Although basing their advertising largely on the music of the black New Orleans neighbourhoods, the tourism marketing board couched the city’s distinctiveness in
terms that did not refer to the city’s African-American, or Franco-African culture and heritage. Slogans such as ‘America’s European City’ and ‘the city that care forgot’ used on tourism brochures carefully avoided direct references to the African contributions to the city’s cultural difference. The text of local tourist brochures, what Roach has called ‘some of the most bizarre promotional literature in the history of American boosterism,’ supports a view of the city as feminine and French.

The tourism marketing initiative was highly successful. The marketing corporation found that in their television and radio advertising, New Orleans music was most effective in creating a celebratory atmosphere. As the marketing board’s director put it:

Music is integral to our marketing plan. Our theme is ‘come join the parade’ and all our television and radio spots use New Orleans music. It is the best way to show the whole ambience; the whole spirit of the city is summed up in its music.22

According to the United States Travel Data Service, visitor spending due to music has a total impact of $593.6 million on the New Orleans economy in 1996, almost 20% of total annual visitor spending. Said a Greater New Orleans Tourist and Convention Commission report in May 1992. ‘For tourism officials, these figures are important. The history and culture of New Orleans music are key elements that attract visitor to the city.’

A goal of the marketing corporation is to engulf the visitor in the ‘New Orleans experience.’ From the airport, where the only music played is that of New Orleans artists, through the taxi ride, where the cab drivers (graduates of a city-run two-week course in tourist relations) regale the visitor with stories about music legends, to the street musicians in Jackson Square, the goal of the city’s marketing plan is that the visitor’s experience is framed and grounded in music. Instead of encouraging tourists to come and be entertained, therefore, the tourist is invited to participate, ‘join the parade.’ This promise of participation creates a different kind

of expectation for the tourist and travel and convention booking agents responded. Faked jazz funerals, Mardi Gras balls, ‘spontaneous’ brass band parades have become regular features of convention and hotel entertainment, recreating the city’s cultural activities for the visitor’s enjoyment. Thus the New Orleans experience is defined through musical performance and these cultural activities, usually performed in the street or in black communities, are moved indoors.

As the marketing commission invites visitors to ‘come join the parade,’ the implications of these marketing policies for local business, musicians and residents have been varied. Attempts to attract discretionary tourists have been successful and some businesses have prospered, especially the larger hotels. There is anticipation in some quarters that this tourist strategy will contribute to increased employment opportunities for musicians (through convention jobs, more entertainment venues and greater demand for music in restaurants and events) and at the same time complaints that distinctive music making practices are changing with the inclusion of ‘outsiders.’

Implications of tourist policies on local musicians and residents

Many cultural critics have declared tourism detrimental to creativity in locations of distinctive musical activity. Wallis and Malm wrote:

All along the line, tourism appears to provide short-term employment advantages but leaves cultural disadvantages. The tourist hotels attract talented musicians who have to play a repertoire suitable for the majority of tourists who come to relax, not to learn the intricacies of [local musical traditions] ... Few government[s] seem to be concerned about the cultural dangers of tourism. Even those individual officials who expose concern find it hard to affect the situation. The need for foreign currency gets first priority -- the tourists must be given the entertainment it is assumed they want (1984, pp. 293-94).

These and other commentaries on the impact of tourism on regional musics make assumptions that are hard to justify, given the porous nature of musical communities, often portraying the notion that a local culture could be fixed and

23 See for instance Boissevain (1993), Tsartas (1992), Wickens (1994) and other on the negative impact of tourism on local musics.
bounded, vulnerable to outside corruption. In addition, these studies are frequently lacking in ethnographic research to assess the social implications of tourism in particular places. Although recently much has been written on tourism, especially in geography and cultural studies, there is perhaps surprisingly little on the effects of tourism on local and cultural identities and almost nothing on the role of music and musical tourism on the images of cities and places and the significance of those images on the people who inhabit and the people who visit those places. Questions that could be asked in such a study could include some of the following: Are musicians passive pawns in the tourism game? Or are they actively involved in how their music is represented? What patterns emerge in the presentation of local music for tourism in specific places and how does this reflect greater patterns of acculturation, power and consumption? As a place for stimulating many different interests, cities are places of attractions for a great variety of purposes. Tourism research reveals that the power of a city to attract visitors lies predominantly in a city’s image, and this image communicates expectations and acts as a filter on the tourists’ perception and degree of satisfaction. Consolidating this acquired image is often the primary purpose of the tourist experience, while hotels, restaurants and shops become secondary accessories (Simeon and Stazio, 1996).

In view of the historiographic treatment of the city in popular music texts, as discussed in Chapter Two, this encouragement of visitors to ‘enjoy the moment,’ the ‘eternal present’ of New Orleans could be limiting, seen as linked to an assumption that this present has a special past, a past frozen in time, dissociated from the production of locality through cultural performance of a past in the present. Ironically, the recent reappraisal of the city’s historical past and the evolution of its cultural activities could be linked to a more complex present, one that would give visitors the perception that the city could not be consumed in one visit, but, due to its ever evolving and changing cultural activities (in contrast to a fixed and authentic single past that is repeated and reproduced) might be a place to be seen again and again and never the same, a multifunctional city serving a multipurpose user’ (Ashworth 1989, p. 45). In order to initiate a circle between economic growth
and cultural growth in the city, an inflexible, anachronistic concept of merely conserving the asset must be overcome, in order to assign not only an educational role to cultural assets but also a dynamic and economically productive role (Simeon and Stazio, 1996, p. 393).

For places such as New Orleans, where music plays an important role in personal and collective identity and in the development of a distinctive culture, what are the implications of these initiatives for local musicians and how do they affect the musicians’ images of themselves and their city? This could be framed in the question, how do city tourist initiatives affect Signifyin(g) practice? In an interview on BBC radio before his 1993 Proms performance, Wynton Marsalis told a reporter, ‘I wasn’t into jazz as a kid. I thought it was just shaking your butt for the white tourists in the French Quarter’ (Marsalis 1993). Marsalis’s comments reflect the sometimes-contentious relationship between the tourism industry and local musicians and the conflicts that can arise when tourism strategies include packaging complex local cultural activities and rituals for sale.

In discussing a wide range of topics, New Orleans musicians often talked about tourism and its implications for the future of the city’s music and how musicians interact with the tourist industry. The way that New Orleans musicians negotiate with the industry points up ways that through music, issues of political, social and economic identity, as well as creativity and ownership, can be addressed. Even Wynton Marsalis, despite his early hesitancy to ‘shake his butt for the tourists,’ eventually did get into jazz, but on his own terms. Anyone familiar with the man and his music would agree that those are very uncompromising terms indeed.

**Locals talk tourism**

Gary Rouzan is a 41-year-old African-American New Orleanian, a printer by trade, who, with his friends, often patronises the Glasshouse, a music club in his neighbourhood. He is bothered by changes that he has noticed since visitors arrived to participate in local musical activities. In 1986, the Glasshouse was a tiny, rundown...
club in what is called the 'back 'o' town' area of the city. Every Tuesday night, the Dirty Dozen (one of the most popular of the new bebop oriented brass bands) would play.

At the Glasshouse, they don’t charge to go in. It’s just a neighbourhood joint. But the man who owns it told them they could play there, pass the hat around, you know. They were just starting out. For the Dozen, you see, their crowd, only the guys dance. The women sit and cheer them on. The dancing gets rowdy, you know, with the guys jumping up in the air and dropping to the floor and spinning around, twisting.24

As the Dirty Dozen began to gain popularity, some journalists (including British DJ Andy Kershaw) ‘discovered’ the Glasshouse and, says Rouzan,

Tourists started coming in cabs. They’d join in the dancing, women and men. Pretty soon, at the Glasshouse, the men and women dance together, just like everywhere else (ibid.).

The contrast in economic circumstances of many of the locals with the tourists, who are often fairly affluent, makes any such encounter fraught with potential conflict. The invasion of local space -- neighbourhood bars, parades, events -- and the marking of tourist space (and its consequential exclusion of some locals by admission fees and ticket prices) are, though typical situations, still examples of how the local voice could be drowned out by the sound of the cash register.

The experience here reflects typical problems pertaining to the excessive numbers of tourists visiting certain areas and the effects of such visits as outlined by Boissevain (1994). These problems generally relate to the loss of privacy when visitors in search of cultural experiences cross thresholds to penetrate local places of cultural exchange: the cultural deterioration of a place due to excessive tourist visits which are instrumental in transforming locals into entrepreneurs or pricing them out of the area, thus converting a living cultural attraction in to a museum; the development of hostile attitudes by locals who may feel exploited and ignored due either to policies of cultural commodification or to particular behaviour and attitudes of tour operators and tourists; the inability of public authorities to charge

tourists with fees for ‘consuming’ a large part of local culture, except in cases of entrance fees for museum visits (Boissevain 1994, as quoted by Komilis, 1996, p. 233). On the other hand, some musicians feel that the tourist industry fits uniquely into musical practices that already exist in New Orleans. In the view of one musician who has achieved a great deal of success both in the city and nationally:

It’s [tourism] given musicians a place to play. Yeah, you can’t usually make it as a full-time thing. But in New Orleans, music has always been a part-time job. Louis Armstrong played all over town, yes, but he also had a job in a mattress factory. Lee Dorsey had all those hits, but he still had his car body repair shop, through it all. And where do you think Aaron Neville got those big ole arms of his? That was from the docks. He worked the docks until his music hit the big time, which only took about thirty years. He never quit singing and he never quit working to support his family.25

A city music commissioner agrees:

Playing for tourists can be a way to prepare yourself for the general music industry, for recording purposes. It is a strategy that will work if it’s done right. I tell people all the time, working with music in New Orleans is the best part-time job in the world. It is much better than Burger King, you know, it is so much better than doing all those other things. You work four hours and even on a poor scale you get 100 dollars [£66] for the four hours. I don’t know many part-time jobs that pay 25 dollars [£18] an hour. I talk to people all the time in other places, like at South by Southwest26 who want to be in the music business and I ask them, why don’t you have a day job?27 and they say well no, it just can’t happen like that. I have to do my music full time.

A local musician who manages a record store contrasts local musicians’ attitudes to day-jobs to attitudes of musicians in other places.

That attitude is very common across the country and it is an interesting thing because here, we don’t see it like that. I don’t see why you couldn’t do them both, but their perception is that ‘to be a musician I have to be a full-time rock or jazz musician; I couldn’t compromise myself on doing that, working at it part time.’ But to me it sounded like they were saying they just would not get up at eight

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26 A large, regional music conference in Austin, Texas.

27 Barry Shank (1995, p. 163) discusses the attitude of Austin musicians to the day job in a chapter entitled ‘The Day Job: To Not Have To Work.’
o'clock in the morning. Of course maybe that's why in the industry as a whole a musician has a life expectancy of about seven years, when in New Orleans you play all your life. These people here are professional musicians, even though they may work at different jobs. They play music every Saturday and Sunday and then some of them are playing maybe two or three times a week. So they get an opportunity to mature a music style, they get a chance to be able to become much more at ease with what they're doing. Instead of playing for seven years and talking about it for the rest of their lives, or trying to regain that seven years for the rest of their life, or having that seven years kill them, here they play thirty years and they're always playing and that is just being honest. Who is one of the new stars of the New Orleans musical scene now? Harry Connick Sr., and he is in his sixties. He's in the park riding his bike, singing songs, I'm telling you he is out there and he is at the piano and he is singing, not necessarily half bad. The tourists love him and he is still the D.A. He does gigs three or four nights a week now. And Frank Minyard, he is still playing, playing all the time. They look for opportunities to play and tourism provides those opportunities. And if they get a hit and make it to the big time and they're the next Michael Jackson, that time they spent working another job isn't going to hurt them at all.

Dewaine, a 23-year-old horn player who has received a lot of local media attention, has recorded with local rock and roll bands, plays locally at clubs and works at a local radio station during the day.

It depends on what you think it's all about. If music is about getting that big hit, well ... Where in New Orleans, being a musician is, you know, say on a Sunday I am playing in churches in the morning and then I go over and play Commander's Palace (restaurant) for a brunch and then I might have a gig laid on at night and over the time period of the day, I've played music for about eight to ten hours and I have made x number of dollars and that is fine. On Saturdays, I might play Saturday night at House of Blues with a rock band, or R&B band, or behind some big name who came to town and needs a horn player, or sometimes I might play Saturday nights with this guy Mickey Easterling and his orchestra and you know that is cool and we play for hours and I get the standard union scale and that's not bad at all. And then there may be a wedding in the afternoon. On Friday nights I am

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28 District attorney of New Orleans, father of Harry Jr.

29 New Orleans coroner.

30 Cager 1996.
there playing a function, say a convention gig or a gig at Tipitina’s; they both pay, the tourist gigs pay more. I played the other Saturday afternoon at the airport. These people wanted a band to meet a plane. It all adds up. It’s all music.\textsuperscript{31}

Some musicians believe tourism brings financial rewards that can compete with recording success. This attitude, prevalent in many interviews, contrasts sharply with that of other research. For example, Shank has written of the lure of life on the road for a young Austin musician, the romanticism of the lone travelling musician, rooted in the mythic origins of the state of Texas (Shank 1994). For others, leaving home in search of recording success has meant escape from a small town (Gray, 1996, p. 219) or escape from urban poverty or alienation (Cohen 1991). The differing experience described by some New Orleans musicians points out how local conditions may alter the relationship of musicians with the recording industry. Perception of internal support and mutual aid within the community versus external hazards of life outside the community, perhaps derived from stories passed down about the road experience of black musicians in the South throughout the segregationist 1950s, mapped onto a racialised notion of the perils of dealing with a white recording industry might make life on the road and signing with a record company not the idyllic dream that it could be for those in other situations. George, a musician who achieved fame, if not financial success, through his recording career in the 1970s, speaks from his experience.

Can you make money in the tourism industry? Yes, but you have got to really work at being a part of what they’re doing and in reality you may be able to get to that point of say $50 (£33) an hour, which is not bad in New Orleans for any job, for a four-hour set on a Sunday playing from eight till twelve. You still got time if you want to go to church in the morning, to catch the Saints\textsuperscript{32} with your kids in the afternoon. Well if you do this on Saturday and Sundays every week, that’s $400 (£264) a weekend that you are making extra. So this is like an addition of $1,600 (£1,056) a month and this four hours that you have just gotten into the groove of doing and then of course the extra weddings that you might play and the thing you might play in the

\textsuperscript{31} Claren 1996.

\textsuperscript{32} The city’s professional football team.
evenings and you see also this kind of playing, the tourism stuff, is over by midnight or 11 o’clock, they don’t really go on late at night. So you could go on to play a club, since music starts so late in the clubs, or you could go home and be home for 11 o’clock. That’s the kind of thing a lot of people never realise, that tourism gigs end early.

Believe me, 999 times out of 1,000, in the long run it pays better than if somebody gets signed and goes off to Los Angeles, for sure. And this is year in and year out, not just the couple of years or even more of a recording career. And every year or two you can get time off to go to Europe in the summer for a festival. Like Joe Simons, he plays on the riverboats. He has twenty-five standard gigs a week and he is home at ten o’clock every night if he so desires. His band plays Mr B’s [restaurant] for brunch every weekend, he also has the riverboats seven nights a week and he does other gigs around town. Now he is making very very good money, let me tell you.33

For others, the lure of the road and the promise of a contract are still primary. One musician who was signed for a short time with a small label, leaves his options open:

   The way these tourist gigs work, they want a group to play sometimes a year in advance, so they don’t know exactly who’s going to be there. The guy who got the gig will just guarantee that a band will be there playing a certain thing, unless it’s the Neville Brothers or Fats [Domino] or somebody. Then, if you’re on the road, somebody else will just get the gig. You don’t have to choose, really. And nobody’s going to give up a tour, or even three months on the road with Harry [Connick] or Mac [Dr. John], to be around for a tourist gig.34

Tourist research often cites the tourism industry as encouraging musicians to perform that material which supports a particular view of the city. This research, however, seldom uses ethnographic data to determine what role a musician may play in determining what repertoire may be played for tourists. How does the determination of musicians to maintain creative control over their music balance the powerful incentive of economic gain in a depressed economy? The majority of musicians interviewed confirmed the notion that the tourism industry required that the musicians play a certain kind of music. One bandleader put it this way:

33 Launay 1990.
They don’t require that you do anything; they are just not going to hire you if you don’t play what they want to hear. They only hire the group that will play that kind of music, so they don’t tell you to change and they’ll hire you -- they don’t care that much about you. We have lots of bands, they can choose somebody else. So no, they are not going to tell you that they don’t want you to play whatever, blues, rock, Irish ditties. They’ll say they just want to hire your band. But if you don’t play what they expect you to, you won’t get hired again.\(^{35}\)

However, the range of music that is required by the tourist industry is often described as broad and may be a factor in the way New Orleans musicians hesitate to refer to themselves as a player of a specific style. Another group leader explains:

> It goes this way: They’ll say, ‘I need a blues band, you are a jazz musician, I'm not telling you that you got to be a blues musician, I want to tell you I only hire blues bands. So I’m not telling you to change your life ambitions, I was just saying this is why you are not hired.’ So yes, musicians do feel held back by the way they have to play. But that’s also why most everybody plays most every way here, so you don’t have those categories attached to you that can keep you from getting hired. These conventions use all kinds of music -- Cajun, jazz, rock. You just let it out that you’re a drummer, or a trumpet player and you’re ready to play. So the situation with tourism causes the musicians to have to be broad based.\(^{36}\)

So, rather than limiting the creative control of musicians, the way that tourism works in New Orleans might be seen as encouraging proficiency in a range of styles. Along with other factors mentioned earlier, such as the proliferation in the city of opportunities for young New Orleans musicians to play a variety of styles in a variety of settings -- marching music in the school bands, gospel music in churches, dance music in clubs and so forth, the demands of tourism for difference could support and encourage a musician to play a range of styles.

An interesting theme in many interviews set up the contrast between producing good music and being paid for it and producing music only for money, without emphasis on playing well. Seldom did musicians equate the idea of being paid with that of selling out. As one musician explained it:

\(^{35}\) Hall, 1996.

\(^{36}\) Smathers 1996.
It's not whether you get paid for it or not. Believe me, you can play better with a full stomach. Yes, you can play crap and get paid for it, but not for long around here. That's not the thing at all. It's what's your priorities. If it's just money, you won't last. You have to deal with the music and deal with yourself and your pride in yourself. You have to demand what you're worth, but you have to be worth what you demand to live with yourself.\textsuperscript{37}

**Brass Band Controversy**

There is general agreement that tourism provides opportunities for young people to play, but there are conflicting opinions about how this affects their future prospects. A high school music instructor believes that playing music for tourists helps the young musician's career, as well as being an activity that contributes to the socialisation of a child into the community:

Music requires discipline and especially commitment. It is very hard to be a young musician training to be a professional musician. There is that initial burst of talent, where people say a child is going to be great well he may be very good at eight years old, but by twelve, they have to move beyond the very good eight-year-old status, to having to make a commitment. That's when the training comes in. Those who practice, they are better musicians. It becomes a thing of time, a thing of hours. It is a solo activity, it is an activity about developing the individual and it is an individual effort and that is what kids don't have any more in this country, in lots of places; they run in packs, getting into trouble. So music is a great social engineering tool for the city of New Orleans and it has always been a great social engineering tool. Here music has been used as a gang that kids got involved with, to develop a sense of who they are.\textsuperscript{38}

In addition, his opinion is that tourism provides opportunities for acquiring skills and keeping up in the competitive field of music:

You also have to be able to improvise; New Orleans music is a music of improvisation, so at one point or other you have to step out from the crowd. You have to make your statement, inside, of what is the overall group statement. So the tourism industry provides a place for all this to happen and for young people, they can play on the streets, in the Quarter and get that practice in and also make a pretty good piece of

\textsuperscript{37} Robicheux 1992.

\textsuperscript{38} Kerry 1989.
change. You can get hired for these afternoon events and on the weekend, while you’re still in school and make some pocket money. Look at Harry Connick Jr. He was playing on Bourbon Street when he was 13, 14. But you have to be able to compete. You have to keep your level of musicianship up or the tourist will just walk down to the next group. But playing, the more you play the better you are as a musician and the tourist industry gives lots of opportunity to play.

At the same time, there are doubts about the staying power of these opportunities afforded young people. Teachers in local university music departments, including Ellis Marsalis, father of jazz giant Wynton Marsalis, have expressed worry that young musicians, given the opportunity to make a little money playing for tourists, will not continue their education and their talents may be stifled at a young age by their dropping out of jazz studies available in local institutions.

Yes, they’re cute playing out there at 12, 15 years old. But how cute is that same musician at 35, when he hasn’t progressed and doesn’t have a diploma because he dropped out of school to work for the tourists?  

One of the city’s music commissioners agrees:

I am not a big proponent of these thirteen, fourteen, fifteen year old brass bands going overseas during school time. To me that does not help our music industry, does not help our community. It is not economic development either, because these kids take the place of adults who require a decent rate of pay. And what will we have ten years or twenty years from now? When a 15-year-old determines he is a professional musician, he can gig, but say he gets hurt, can’t travel, can’t do it anymore. Then you’ve got a 35-year-old with a tenth grade, eighth grade education, who can’t get a job because he doesn’t have any sort of education.

On the other hand, others, including a member of the local public school board, disagree with this notion:

It’s easy for some people to say all children should go to college and all young musicians should take college jazz studies, but the reality is that college is not an option for many young New Orleanians. Playing music, at any level, is an honourable and fulfilling occupation especially with the limited options available to many young poor

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40 Cager 1996.
people in an urban area. And, speaking as a musician myself, I believe playing for years only improves musicians ... So just because a young person begins to play early, outside the institutions of learning, because of the opportunities given by tourism, that doesn’t necessarily mean that that young person won’t have a long and successful career. It happens all the time. That’s a case of ‘let them eat cake.’ Well, ‘let them go to college to study jazz’ may sound like an idea for everyone, but frankly, it’s not.41

Case Study: Gospel and Tourism

The following case study traces the implications of tourist strategies on the music community of New Orleans through the experience of one New Orleans musician.

A distinctive feature of New Orleans music is the linking of secular and sacred domains (Kaslow 1981, p. vi). Although seldom mentioned in popular music texts, New Orleans has a large and extremely active gospel community. The city contains the largest African-American Catholic parish in the United States and was one of the first places where gospel was performed within Catholic churches (Jackson 1993, pp. 38-44). With a few exceptions, such as New Orleans’s Mahalia Jackson, New Orleans gospel groups get little exposure outside the city. Gospel DJ Wilson Howard says,

These are regular people with jobs who are close to their communities and their families. Most of them don’t do it to make money and they don’t have the same freedom of movement as other entertainers so they can’t uproot (ibid., p. 40).

Despite its immobility, gospel continues its popularity in New Orleans. Recently, the local newspaper Gambit has said:

All signs point to gospel music in New Orleans continuing to gain a firmer foothold among its musical cousins in the city and becoming more important to the economic growth of the city (Askew 1994, p. 16).

This is because gospel choirs have become part of the tourist industry’s strategy to ‘recreate the New Orleans experience for the visitor.’ One of the city’s premier

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41 Kennedy 1996.
gospel groups, the Zion Harmonizers, had fifteen convention appearances in a two-and-a-half-week period in 1994. Beverly Gianna of the New Orleans Convention and Tourism Commission says:

New Orleans welcomes approximately 600 thousand international tourists a year and gospel music, as one of the major original American art forms, is a compelling draw for many of those visitors (ibid.).

Thus, gospel music has been targeted as an attraction to use in the city’s competition with other US-American cities for the lucrative international visitors market. Gospel in New Orleans has a long history of performance in a secular environment, perhaps due to the permeability of the New Orleans musical community, as well as the influence of the city’s less restrictive Catholicism on this fundamentally Protestant musical practice (Jackson 1993, p. 41). Dan Ackroyd’s House of Blues, Tipitina’s and other music clubs have gospel nights or gospel Sunday brunches, as do several of the hotels. The sight of thousands of festival-goers in full festival gear, drinking beer and crowding into the gospel tent, is a common if incongruous site at the annual New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival.

‘We’re Not Some Backdrop’

One of my long-time informants is Lois Dejean, a gospel singer and leader of a gospel youth choir in New Orleans. Dejean is an African-American widow, mother of four and grandparent of thirteen children, who all sing. Born to a large Protestant family, Dejean describes herself as ‘Baptist, but all denominations, really.’42 Her parents were from a small community outside New Orleans. She describes her mother as having some French, Spanish and Native American heritage.

My grandfather was blue eyed, very fair and real nice hair. My grandmother was darker, had some Indian in her. My mom had these high cheekbones, pretty hair and she married my father who was just an ordinary man.

42 This and all further quotations are from several interviews with informant held in 1990-4.
Her father, a carpenter, became a preacher. He was a gospel quartet singer and taught her brothers to sing ‘quartet.’ He also taught Dejean and allowed her to sing her first solo in his church when she was five years old. Dejean performed for many years with her sisters and nieces. Today, she and her daughters and son are a successful family gospel group. Another group consists of Dejean, her children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews and siblings. One of her daughters has toured with rock musician Boz Scaggs. She says:

The goal of [our group] was to keep the family together. When you sing together with your family, I don’t care how bad your kids are, it keeps this pull in them.

Although a Protestant, she was choir director at the prestigious Greater St. Stephens Catholic Church. She now leads a choir in a very poor neighbourhood miles from her home ‘because they have a greater need and the talent there would be lost.’ She is also a member of several neighbourhood social groups, church organisations, works as a civil servant for the city and is a member of the city’s music commission. At 54, she entered college with her grandson. She is now working on her master’s degree.

From a small amount of money left to her when her husband died, she formed her first choir, composed of children from the poorest neighbourhoods in the city. She believed it was important for them to perform within the city and to travel, so, with no funds, in her words she ‘bullied’ local and state officials and politicians for money for concerts and tours. Through these efforts, the choir has travelled to Central America and Europe.

Dejean takes great pride in the success of her choirs and in the belief that gospel music and singing keep the youth out of trouble. She sees music as an entranceway to the political process and uses music to appropriate political favour. She often lobbies city councillors, mayors and members of Congress to support her projects. On a visit to New Orleans, United Nations ambassador Andrew Young was approached by Dejean.

I saw him resting under a tree. Before I was finished with him, our choir was picked to go to the UN mission in Central America.
Although a member of what many would call a discriminated underclass, Dejean, like many gospel musicians in New Orleans, displays a remarkable sense of patriotism. Commenting on her trips to Central America with her choir, Dejean says:

When I got back, I thanked God we live in America. The children could see how well off we are. I got home and kissed my rickety chair and thanked God for America.

She is proud of her political connections and her success in gaining their acknowledgement of her efforts on behalf of her choir and gospel. Scattered through her conversation are references to ‘the heritage,’ music as a resource belonging to the community, an integral part of community identity. ‘Gospel is a part of New Orleans’s heritage,’ she says, ‘a part of the culture of the people. We have a responsibility to take care of it.’ In this way Dejean, and many New Orleans musicians, refer to ownership of the music and responsibility for the way music is used.

For Dejean, music provides a way of expression of herself and her faith. At the same time she uses music as a way to reinforce family unity, contribute to her community, participate in the political process and construct various social networks that shape her notions of locality -- community, region, nation. In conversation, Dejean describes her music in a series of oppositions: north/south, home/away, gospel/jazz, inside/outside. Her ideas on her country, her region, her city, her faith, her music are all described in opposition to other countries, regions, cities, faiths, musics. Here, Dejean contrasts Chicago (a northern city) from New Orleans: 

Well, for one, there’s more organisational middle management support there [in Chicago]. But New Orleans has the best musicians and best music anywhere, because we are unique in what we do. [How are we unique?] The way we are raised here. The way we feel about one another here. In Chicago, people pass you and don’t speak, there is a coldness. Everybody is on their own -- not saying in musical terms, but in the way they live. You know how it is here. If you visit New Orleans, you got to go to fifteen people’s houses to eat. In Chicago you go to one person’s house and you can’t stay there that long. But here, you don't
have to know nobody. In Atlanta, same thing, they don’t know you ... well, it’s gotten a little different in Atlanta since so many people have moved there from New Orleans. If anybody comes here from anywhere, a foreign country, we say, ‘oh, bring him over the house, we’ll cook up some red beans. I think basically we believe in the principle ‘I am my brother’s keeper’ here more than away. We are more closer ...

Dejean’s attitudes to racism in the city also distinguish it from other places.

Well, we have a whole lot of underlying racism here, we’re no different in terms of that, but I can more readily deal with it here than I can away, because if people are cold from the offset, you can’t get past a point. But here, I’ll tell you what I got my mind to say, I can demand what I want. I can do it and go about my business. It is up to the person here.

Dejean works to get her music (gospel) included in the initiatives of the wider music community. Unlike many of the city’s musicians, she welcomed city music initiatives. In the 1980s, when several music organisations were formed, she joined them all. ‘I will not let gospel be left behind,’ she said. As a member of the city’s music commission, she demands that in the wording of city ordinances and various initiatives the word ‘group’ is substituted for ‘band’ so that gospel groups will be included. When applying to the National Endowment for the Arts, she was advised to omit the word ‘Jesus.’

I said I will not. We have to learn to respect each other’s beliefs. The First Amendment gives me the right.

Like most New Orleans musicians, she is willing to commodify her music, but on her own terms. Her activities are distinguished by continuing negotiation and demands for her rights for herself, her music and the young people with whom she works. This extends to her work with the tourist industry. Various tourist and convention planners regularly hire Dejean and her group to sing. She is anxious to do this, but within certain parameters. She demands high rates from the tourist industry, though when performing elsewhere her group plays free most of the time (‘it’s not right to charge churches’):

A lady called me the other day. She said she wanted gospel for her convention, what could she get for $250. I said ‘a solo’. They got enough money to give a convention, they’ve got enough money to pay us right.
She is concerned that her music be presented with respect and is careful about how the event planners use her groups. Dejean has been asked to perform in what she refers to as some ‘strange’ situations, for instance, riding down an escalator in a hotel, or singing on the levee as a riverboat is loaded for a corporate function. How does she feel about performing gospel in all these different contexts? ‘Wonderful, because it shows the music’s versatile.’ However, there are limits. She will not hesitate to reject a job if she feels the group is being used for anything but its music. For instance, her groups do not wear robes.

They’re bogged down in their head that a good singing gospel group’s got to have robes on. It doesn’t make sense. They don’t want it to be in church, and yet they want you to put a robe that represents it. Robes don’t sing, people do! We’re not some backdrop. Nobody asks Patti LaBelle what she’s going to wear when she sings.

Like many New Orleans musicians, she isn’t supported financially by her music, but she would like to be. For example, she would like to become a booking agent, specialising in booking gospel for conventions. Although most of the tourist industry in New Orleans is locally owned, she talks of the industry in terms of ‘outsiders,’ and complains that the tourist industry doesn’t connect with the musicians.

Their network doesn’t hook up with ours. They have their people, we have our people. They book some kind of old gospel group, then when they don’t work out they say ‘gospel doesn’t work.’ I want to be their point person. I’ll hook up their networks with our network. If they want a duet, I’ll get them the best. If they want a two-hundred-voice choir, I can get them the best. They need to be on that point-person system.

Thus, she, like many New Orleans musicians, sees herself in conflict with the decision-makers in the tourist industry. Her efforts to integrate her music into the city’s mainstream economy and its politics, reflect her efforts to integrate herself into the these--on her own terms, however.

As a member of a complicated social, kinship and political network, Dejean is typical of many of the hundreds of New Orleans musicians with whom I have talked. She uses music networks to provide coherence, status, stability to her life.
She demands her rights as a member of a group (gospel) within the New Orleans music community and the larger community’s political, economic and social worlds. Her assertiveness as a representative of her music, again, not atypical in the New Orleans music community, reflects her belief that her music is the heritage of her people and community and as such she feels a responsibility to ensure that it is respected. New Orleans and music are interrelated concepts in her world, a context for expression of a collective and personal identity and she lives in these worlds.

In music-related scholarship, the emphasis on chart performance, record sales and genre overlooks people such as Dejean and in doing so misses what Ruth Finnegan, in her study of music making in Milton Keynes, refers to as the ‘hidden musicians’ (Finnegan 1989). Also, the emphasis by scholars on styles such as jazz and rhythm and blues in New Orleans denies the participation of women, who for example are active in gospel in all phases, including organisation and administration.

**Conclusion**

Music is a field of endeavour in which black New Orleanians have exerted considerable influence and leadership and had this achievement acknowledged internationally. Although in New Orleans music has a long history of being intimately related to the economic activity of the city, it has only recently become part of public policy. Recently, the city’s commitment to tourism and the interest of business and government in music business initiatives have placed music firmly on the economic regeneration agenda.

For many New Orleanians, music is not only an activity that brings pleasure to the community, and some economic rewards, but through performance is central to the creation and maintenance of the community itself. Through providing a means of acting out their past in their present, through a process of constant change and repetition, music is central to the community’s identity. For New Orleans musicians, music provides a place for personal and collective accomplishment, status, belonging. As policymakers have become involved in marketing the city’s
cultural activities for tourism and business, the conflicts that arise show how music can be a place wherein wider debates on ownership and control may find expression.

The hesitation of that community to turn over the responsibility for the production and dissemination of musical images of New Orleans to institutions outside the community, or choose certain institutions over others, is in these circumstances understandable. The strategies that have emerged to preserve that control of music expression, as well as to resolve and negotiate conflicts, point out the self-confidence and demand for rights that has characterised this African-American community from its earliest days.
Conclusion

‘New Orleans is the reason we make our music.’
-- Charles Neville, The Neville Brothers

Researching New Orleans holds special challenges. Whilst cultural critics and the popular press have often framed the city as a museum, fixed in time, my experience reveals it as a place of constant movement and renewal, where a self-confident and determined Franco-African community has embraced change, duality and contradiction, promoting a versatility that perhaps has contributed to the survival and durability of their complex cultural activities in an urban setting while those of other US-American cities have faded.

Just as Gates has said that a literary tradition holds within it its own mode of inquiry, my search was for a way to study musicmaking in New Orleans that is drawn from the values and concerns of the community itself. Positioning the musicians and members of the community as experts in their own lives and cultural practices, I sought a way to listen to their stories using critical theory from within the African-American cultural tradition to theorise on itself. This has done two things: first, it has allowed the voice of the people of the community to prevail; and second, it has set up a contrast between the way the city has been treated in historic and academic accounts and the account that the people involved in musicmaking there give of the city and of themselves. Both of these may give additional insight into historiography. In addition, drawing from the community itself eliminates the constant tendency towards a Eurocentric mode of inquiry prevalent in most treatments of the city. Following on with this notion, the
conclusion of the thesis will be drawn from the words of a New Orleans musician, using themes introduced in earlier chapters to read the meanings in his words.

**Donald Harrison**

Although Wynton Marsalis is probably the most prominent example of a New Orleans musician who has kept local ties while achieving success internationally, there are many others, such as Terence Blanchard, Henry Butler, Branford Marsalis, Harry Connick Jr., and Donald Harrison.

**Horizontal and Vertical Integration**

The career of Harrison, who has been mentioned previously in this research, offers a good case study of the professional development of jazz musicians in New Orleans and draws upon several notions of how a New Orleans musician evolves in a contemporary setting. Jazz saxophonist Harrison came to international attention with Terence Blanchard in the Art Blakey band, and continues to draw favourable reviews from New York jazz critics.\(^1\) While maintaining this successful career as a jazz player in New York, Harrison lives several months of the year in New Orleans, working in a mentoring programme sponsored by the New Orleans public school system. He moves easily between these worlds, picking and choosing associations and groups that fill particular needs: in New York challenging his ability to compete in a world that values innovation, and in New Orleans, reacquainting himself with the musical values of his hometown and passing them on to local schoolchildren. Harrison is an example of a New Orleans musician who has attempted to integrate both vertically, with the national jazz community and recording industry, particularly through the New York jazz scene, and horizontally, through keeping close ties with the city of New Orleans, his teachers, and local players. Though he lives in New York and travels and plays widely throughout the

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\(^1\) See for example ‘Scott and Harrison: Young Lions of Be-Bop,’ New York *Times* 4 August, 1991, H22; Nat Hentoff ‘The Young Saviours Of Old Jazz’; Peter Watrous ‘Old Jazz is Out New Jazz is Older.’ New York *Times* 31 March 1994, c11L.
country, Harrison believes in the distinctiveness of the New Orleans musical experience.

I always realised that here the music came up from the neighbourhoods. The thing that is unique about New Orleans is that it is a place where the culture has survived -- in America. It is not happening in any other place besides New Orleans as far as music is concerned. You go to New York, there is no music that has lasted through the whole culture for a hundred years. Chicago either. Nowhere, where the whole city, from the youngest to the oldest, from the richest to the poorest, are in touch with the music. Not in America.²

Harrison does not, however, define the city’s musical ‘culture’ as related to a specific style of music.

Oh no, that wouldn’t make any sense anyway. People here know what I mean by their culture, and people in other places know theirs. Here, it’s got a lot to do with music and how it’s used. And as long as that’s important to the people here, it will be here.

Recently there have been numerous attempts to challenge the notion of ‘authenticity’ in cultural forms. Debates on authenticity in music permeate cultural criticism, and music scholars in New Orleans have been at the centre of many of these discussions. However, and perhaps surprisingly, although New Orleans itself has often been used in debates concerning authenticity in music, the topics that preoccupy those involved in these debates seldom arise in interviews with New Orleans musicians. For the people concerned, change is not a contradiction in their culture, but rather its systematic condition. Local musicians embrace change and the wider global music arena while at the same time they often distance themselves from it. Questions concerning ‘creativity,’ ‘authenticity’ and ‘innovation’ are often countered with responses that reject these notions, assertions that on the one hand, no matter how ‘traditional’ the music, it is always changing, and no matter how ‘innovative’ the music, it is never totally original. This approach, which permeates conversations with local musicians of different ages, playing in many styles, shows how the community might at the same time provide a place for both conformist and innovator:

² This and all following quotes from Donald Harrison are from an interview with the author, May 1996.
both those who would maintain cultural forms (while acknowledging that no musical form is ever exactly replicated from age to age, person to person) and those who would seek to be innovative (while at the same time knowing that innovation never comes out of a vacuum, but always to some extent draws from what went before). This reasoning, with emphasis on balance, duality, and unity of opposites, might be seen as the defining characteristic of ‘New Orleans music.’ This way of looking at music contrasts with one that makes claims to rejecting all to do with the past, or which argues the importance, or even existence, of musical authenticity. Harrison describes the differing roles that he sees to be available to the city’s musicians -- those of innovators, and those of ‘guardians of the flame.’

Yes [the music] is evolving, but at the same time, it’s still the same. I mean, if you go hear Dejean [the Olympia Brass Band], they still have things that they are doing, and you can go to Preservation Hall, there’s a lot of different factions, it’s not just one faction. And when you go to hear the Dirty Dozen or the ReBirth, they’re doing something different with it, so you have all the generations. And a lot of the younger players, they understand how to play with the older guys, so there’s a tradition there.

Harrison outlines the basic training of a New Orleans musician, what Paul Berliner has called the ‘dynamic interplay between tradition and innovation’ (1992):

At first you start and you have to learn how to do it the way it was done before, and then you take it somewhere else. So that tradition is there and that’s why it’s evolving, but it’s still the same. You have people who are changing it and turning it around like myself and some of the other guys, and then you have the guys who are keeping the tradition the way it always has been.

Thus Harrison reflects a complex view of tradition, demonstrating his belief that individuals bring their own perspective to the music, according to their own particular evaluation of experiences.

New Orleans is a traditional place but we also have to understand that there’s nothing new under the sun, it’s always got your own unique spin on it. Each individual lives a lifetime and each individual has certain experiences so therefore they can expound upon those experiences, so each individual brings something new. Even if I was trying to imitate exactly what someone else did I could never do it. I
could never sound exactly like Charlie Parker. It would always have some kind of nuance on it that was me.

**Pedagogy**

Harrison believes that in a large degree he absorbed his ideals of music by actually being around musicians ‘and listening, hopefully, to the wise things that they told me and trying to implement them into my life.’ Nationally, he lists Art Blakey as a chief influence, along with Roy Haynes, Miles Davis, and Dexter Gordon. Locally, he says ‘hundreds of musicians have taught me: Kidd Jordan, Ellis Marsalis, Alvin Batiste, Clyde Kerr, Doc Paulin.’ Harrison discusses his evolution as a musician:

Initially I identified with the people who played my instrument. Charlie Parker and John Coltrane were my chief influences early on. But then you have to deal with all instrumentalists, all types of music, very seriously, in order to grow. For me, everything is serious. If I hear someone playing I listen, I get a little from that, or if I hear someone playing anything, even a kid singing, I'll listen intently. I'll just stop right around and have a listen to everything.

In New Orleans, Harrison works in the schools, composing and teaching youngsters the fundamentals of music. He talks of the value of being physically in New York and New Orleans.

I just come home and do my work and go back to New York and hang out for a while -- I’m living in two cities at one time. I spend time here, then I spend time in New York. Right now I’m doing a residency for the ‘Meet the Composer’ programme, so I have to be down here to honour that commitment. Then I go to New York and play with the cats, I honour that fulfilment. The residency is great because I get to be home more, I get to play with guys, talk to guys more intensely. Coming to New Orleans before was a quick, brief thing and I really was not here. I’d come for maybe a week or so, every five months or something but now here it’s like I’m really here. It’s hard on my body; I’m very tired all the time, but I think it’s worth it, because I’m getting so much from both places.

Besides teaching, being in New Orleans gives him the opportunity to compose and play with local musicians.
At the residency I write music and, for instance, today I talked to three classrooms, little kids, talking about jazz and what it’s like to be a musician, what my life is like. I get to talk to a lot of people about the music, I talk to a lot of people about their experiences, and I write songs about them. The kids get to see me work, see how it’s done. Also I get a chance to play more down here with different guys, young guys.

Harrison talks about how he draws on a variety of sources for his playing, and in turn, about how he hands down his knowledge to youngsters.

From the musicians that have gone before, I think whatever I get from them, it becomes part of me. I hear different things and I can say, I got that from Bird, or wherever. Certain things that I can understand from what he was doing that I have ingested, so to speak, will become part of my subconscious, because anything you do to a certain level becomes part of your subconscious, and you can just call it up when you’re playing music. Certain things will come out, certain things you forget that you’ve learned. I like to use this for teaching the kids, ‘You should know the music as well as you know your ABCs.’ You don’t have to think about your ABCs, it just part of you. If you study music enough it will come like that. It takes a lot of diligent practice and study. You don’t think about it, it’s just there, and it comes out when you need it.

His description of his music education reflects several of the precepts described earlier, including the professionalism expected of a young player and the notion that he represents the larger community in his playing.

A lot of New Orleans musicians, especially the teachers, all have their different ways of doing things and different thoughts about the music and they’re very, very strong on their ideas about the music, as far as those guys like Ellis [Marsalis] and Kidd [Jordan]. Alvin Batiste, he’s more ‘this is what I do, everybody do their thing,’ but they all were trying to instil in me to reach a higher level, be as good as you can be in practice and really give it your all and that’s what they imparted into us as young musicians -- give it your all, and do your best. Don’t ever let the level drop, don’t drop the banner, so to speak. Always be on a higher level. And believe me, they will come tell you, Kidd Jordan will come tell you ‘you haven’t been practising have you?’ He’ll come listen to you, sit in the audience, and then tell you what you have to work on. I love them for it, though.
A feature of Harrison’s education, mentioned by other New Orleans musicians and reflective of Chernoff’s description of West African pedagogic methods, was the withholding of praise from the student.

Not a lot of encouragement to get a big head, no. They just absolutely demanded excellence, but you’d never get too much encouragement. It was like ‘Yeah, you can get up on this stage with me, but you bother me. Once you get it together, then we’ll see.’

Like many other musicians in the city, Harrison began his career with a school band, and had the support of his family, including the gift of his first instrument. His formal education consisted of several teachers in the public schools, all of whom required a personal commitment to the music.

My father bought me a saxophone when I was in the junior high school marching band. When I went to NOCCA, I studied with Ellis [Marsalis] and Kidd Jordan and they were instrumental, especially Kidd Jordan, in telling me you have to practice. Kidd Jordan is probably the most instrumental in getting me to be very serious about what I was doing, because if I didn’t practice he would leave me in his office for five hours and make me practice. He’d say, ‘So you didn’t put in the time this week? So you’ll make it all up today.’ My throat would be cracking and he’d come in and say ‘Can I hear it? Okay, you keep getting it until you get it and then you can leave out.’ But it was great and that’s what got me together to really be intense and practice. Any great jazz musician has to put in a great amount of time just practising. To proceed to proficiency, those guys have to put in a lot of time. People don’t realise that, that it’s a lonesome, lonesome task to develop and learn an instrument on a high level.

Harrison’s NOCCA experience echoes other NOCCA graduates in the treatment of the pupils there, with its emphasis on professionalism.

School was great. We were treated as adults in high school by the music teachers. They taught us as though we were in the real world, and I think that gives you an edge. I started going to NOCCA when I was in the eleventh grade. You have to take care of business like you’re on a job -- you have to practice, you have to be ready when you come there. You have to do it, there’s no getting around it or you can go, because why waste your time? I agree with that practice. These are formative years, and you could be doing something else instead of wasting your time messing around with music. Because once you get in the real world it’s so difficult to get a job, even if you can play. At
school, I just wanted to learn how to play, and hey, I was just, give me more, that’s not enough, give me more!

Signifyin(g) Practice - 'Indian Red'

Each year at Carnival, Harrison ‘masks Indian’ with his father, Donald Harrison Sr., who is chief of the Guardians of the Flame (demonstrating again the diversity of membership in the Indian tribes). In 1995, Harrison recorded the Mardi Gras Indian standard 'Indian Red' in a modern jazz style (available on WWOZ on CD Sounds of New Orleans Series, volume one). The song is an anthem, sung traditionally at the beginning and end of Indian practices and on Carnival Day. Harrison’s version, recorded for a compilation compact disc distributed by the Jazz and Heritage Festival, was extremely well received in the New Orleans musical community and was used by local radio station WWOZ to open and close its broadcast of the 1996 Jazz Fest. As one WWOZ disc jockey said,

It was the most moving thing I’ve ever heard. It’s his father’s song -- a Mardi Gras Indian song, and we all know that. But he did it with such love, such respect, in his own style. He was saying ‘I respect you’ to all of us. And ‘Indian Red’ is a killer song, anyway.³

Harrison speaks of the dual inspiration for the song between the tradition of his father and his New York influences.

Well, my thoughts were to take certain elements and use what I know about modern jazz, then bring them to a higher standard artistically while retaining the feeling of what I grew up with. It was very important that I grew up with this music, so I could retain a feeling of it, and it is also very important that I got a chance to play with all the guys who are great modern jazz musicians. So there’s a balance, there is a certain balance that I try to achieve with the music. The way we did it was in the first place it was done in the modern context with a Second Line feel, that was an Indian blues with a modern feel, with modern colour changes and a modern harmony, and still retaining the feeling, the original essence of what’s it’s all about.

This commercial treatment of one of the Indians’ most important songs presented no difficulty to Harrison’s father.

³ Graham 1996.
He doesn't have any problems about it -- it's just that on Mardi Gras Day it's supposed to be a certain way and that tradition has to be held and only certain other people who really know the game can come out at that time of year. The only people who can come to practice -- who can be an Indian at practice -- are the Mardi Gras Indians. It’s a very private club and as long as they have those ideals and they stick by their guns, and they have people around who are in power like my father and any of the other big chiefs who believe in that way -- as long as they are around and maybe the younger guys believe in the same way they come up later on, years down the line and still have those ideals, they won't change. But that's not to say it’s not changing, it’s always changing. Guys do different things, the songs, the routes, the costumes, who's masking from year to year, guys have one type of feather in the ‘40s and another in the ‘50s, it changes. My father is trying to add some kind of new feather now.

So Harrison expresses the contradictions that often emerge in discussions with New Orleans musicians, where change and continuity are drawn up into one performance practice, a glance in two directions at once.

**Signifyin(g)**

In ‘Indian Red,’ Harrison drew from many experiences to create a song that can be understood on several levels -- Signifyin(g) on his father’s music and New York jazz, and open to interpretation in various ways by people conversant with various aspects of the song.

‘Indian Red’ is a Mardi Gras Indian spiritual. That’s what it means to me. There are many different levels of interpretation. I wanted to capture the feeling of what the Mardi Gras Indian tradition means. Like I said, it is a spiritual song so I wanted it to be spiritual -- with the flavour of New York. If you didn’t understand what the Indians were about, you still will be able to relate to it from a jazz perspective, if you understood jazz. If you understood spirituals, you’d relate to it from that. And that’s what ‘Indian Red’ comes from, having a lot of experiences in the Baptist church, with the Indians, with the modern jazz musicians, and the R&B musicians and being able to put all these experiences into something and draw from there, and then everybody who comes from those other places, they can relate to it from their own experiences, and then you give them something else from the other places you’ve been. That’s what New Orleans musicians have always done. They’ve been able to take diverse things then put them together and draw people together. The bottom line with music is to
bring people some kind of joy, hope, love, peace. If you understand Indians, if you understand New Orleans music, if you understand modern jazz, R&B, then you can hear all those things, and it gives you a deeper understanding and it gives you a deeper feeling for music.

So, for Harrison, music as played by New Orleans musicians carries within it a mechanism for its own criticism, a reflexive potential that can convey a variety of meanings to those with the cultural information to read it.

**Historical appraisal: European versus African influence**

Harrison speaks of the evolution of the city’s music as a sharing of an African-derived style, drawn on by a series of people for different uses through time, rather than as one essential sound, passed down unchanged.

You can just imagine, back to Congo Square -- and imagine that when they went home the people who couldn’t make it there, they heard the music of the people who had been there and they’d take it and it stuck and it grew into different elements -- the Mardi Gras Indians probably took some of it, jazz musicians probably took some of it, and now here we are.

In discussions on the European influence on jazz, Harrison echoes most of his contemporaries in New Orleans:

There is an influence of it but it’s music that is from an African-American perspective, definitely. I mean, if it was European we wouldn’t have syncopation. If it was European we wouldn’t have the blues. If it was European so many things that are African in nature, like the soloist stepping out -- if you’re doing a chant, in African music one person takes the lead and everybody’s underneath them -- the group improvisation, all those things are African.

In placing African styles at the centre of the city’s music, Harrison also acknowledges the European influences.

In other places, a lot of the stuff [African music] just died. It wasn’t allowed. But it was allowed in some form or fashion to grow here and still be heard. That’s what New Orleans is about. I would presume, New Orleans is one of the most African places in the Western hemisphere. Now, I think the French have a great influence here -- architecture, a lot of influence on the food, and the music -- when you listen to zydeco, when you listen to Cajun music, the rhythms and the
instrumentation, and all the things that have played a big part in Louisiana, too, you draw from all sorts of things.

Having pointed out the European forms in African-based styles, he also points to the improvisation inherent (and often ignored) in European classical music.

Some of the old classical guys used to improvise too. Bach -- I mean that figured bass is improvisation, it’s like reading chord changes. The rule’s to let you know something, ‘Oh that’s the root position, okay,’ and then you can do what you want, play your melody. Figured bass, it’s almost the same as playing jazz, the concept of it to me. But I think that with African rhythms, because Africans have syncopation, and the use of different colours on notes, the blues sound and different harmonies, you can play a melody and have the freedom in the music to colour it in any kind of way you feel like colouring it, and even though this is the style, you can still go out of the style and do something that works. With European music it’s a certain style you have to improvise in and you can’t change. If you’re playing Mozart there’s just a certain group of people that really understand how to play Mozart, so to speak. And they play it the way that it’s supposed to sound and then they love to put their interpretation to Mozart’s certain sound, but there’s certain things you can’t do. In jazz you can do what you want.

When it is pointed out that some people write that New Orleans music is distinctive because the city is a port and all kinds of influences have come through it, and that the innovative music of New Orleans sprang from an equal merging of African and European styles, Harrison suggests that an agenda of racial ‘one-upmanship’ may be at work in downplaying the African element in the city’s musical history.

Anyone who makes that argument, history will prove them wrong. Sometimes people want to make things so that they can feel better about something, because they have some kind of funny hang-up or problem. So they try to rewrite things, or change it a little bit so they can feel comfortable by saying this is this, when it is really something else. But history has a way of proving all people like that wrong. So it’s best to just go ahead and say what it really is, and not try to prove something that is false. Because history will bear it out whatever it is, history will bear it out.
Vertical Integration

On the distinction between ‘art’ music and popular’ music, Harrison evokes his mentor Art Blakey on the musicianship necessary for playing jazz:

Jazz musicians often have a lot of respect for classical music, and a lot of them are proficient at being classical musicians as well. Art Blakey used to say this. If there are any doubters they can try it. You can take a jazz musician, and you’ll notice a jazz musician can play most styles of music. But musicians from other types of music cannot get on the bandstand with jazz musicians and be proficient stylistically and really deal in the jazz world the way the jazz musicians can deal with other worlds. Maybe they should think about that.

Harrison constructs and represents himself and others in musical terms -- music as arena in which he and his community have asserted an independent cultural identity. As presented by Harrison, the goal of the youngster learning music in New Orleans is to develop his or her own approach while accepting the constraints of the model. This initially involves attempting to emulate mentors, integrating the young musician into the norms and values of the community, then a personal contribution in the changes inevitable as musicians translate their life experience into their music.

Each individual has to look inside himself when he plays and he has to go back and study the tradition, and that is a never-ending challenge, to learn as much as possible about great musicians who went before us. But there is something that you also have to realise. All the great musicians had ideals and their ideals were to be themselves after they learned the tradition. And that is why Charlie Parker was great, because he told of his experiences through the music. Duke Ellington was great, not because he imitated anybody, but because he played what he felt, and those are the musicians that history will bear out as being great musicians -- those who had the highest level of proficiency as far as understanding the music and being able to play their instrument and understanding the times they lived in, and taking all those elements and channelling them through their lifetime and being able to relate all of that in a very cognisant way through their music -- history will bear them out, and it really does. If you don’t do that, history will treat you very unkindly, because music has certain ideals and you have to deal with them, you really have to deal with them.
Music on the Agenda

Harrison expresses a common attitude of many of the city’s musicians toward musical success, articulating a view that looks to the quality of the music to attract an audience, rather than any effort by local policy; it is a view that is not opposed to, but is rather ambivalent about, the impact of the city’s initiatives on musicians:

With me, I never worried about whether the city was promoting it or not. I just did things, and if they wanted to come on board they came on board. Each musician or each person who’s doing something has to find it in their heart. And if the system is with them, be happy, and if not, if you really believe in it then just do it and keep doing it the best you can. Art Blakey used to tell me ‘If you do something that’s worthwhile the world will come to your door.’ That’s what I try to do, something that’s worthwhile. For myself and my contribution -- my little corner of the world -- this is what I do, this is the way I do it, this is why I do it, I’m having a ball doing it, if you want come have a ball with me, come on.

When he discusses the consequences of the city’s tourism policies, Donald Harrison articulates this balance between making music ‘for the love of it’ and making music that is only for the money:

It will only bring in some money and maybe some people will change, but as long as the majority of people still feel the same about what they’re doing and the reasons that they’re doing them, if you’re doing it for the love of what you are doing, then nothing changes. If you’re doing it for the love of money then it will become something else that has nothing to do with anything but making a fast buck.

Harrison is not worried that tourism or recording success will significantly affect the local emphasis on performance.

That’s why I don’t think anything changes when people come here, tourists, outside people, because, it’s like if you go to Jamaica, reggae is there, and some people make big hits and some people don’t, but the culture is so strong in Jamaica that it’s not going anywhere. And you go to some places in Europe, like in Ireland, there’s their culture, and I don’t see how someone getting a hit off it, off the sound, or somebody doing something commercial, is going to affect the culture as long as the people are into it, the people at the grass roots level. If the people that are keeping it alive are there, and the people love it, it’s going to stay there.
When discussing changes with new technology and changes in the music industry, and the consequences of those changes for New Orleans, Harrison talks, not in terms of commercialism versus a ‘folk authenticity,’ but rather in terms of commercialism versus a duality that is inclusive of commerce and tradition:

It all rests upon the people who are part of the culture, what their ideals will be and what they want to do with what they have, and the thrust of the direction they want to take it. If they want to take it and just make money with it, it changes. If they understand the balance of how to do something new, and still calling back and doing the things that are truly out of the tradition, maybe changing it a little bit or keeping it the same or whatever, well, that’s the way it’s been around here for a long time. We’ll just have to see.

* * * * *

Though every city varies in physical appearance, demographic profile, economic, political and social history, New Orleans has had a pattern of development distinct from the rest of its immediate neighbours in the US-American South, with an African-American musical community that has developed out of conditions exclusive to that place. Like other early settlements in the New World, New Orleans was a place of cultural mix, where people from Europe and Africa intertwined their lives and customs with those of the native inhabitants. The fact that the resulting way of life differed dramatically from those that evolved elsewhere demonstrates the infinite variety of cultural choice when people of different cultures come together. Since those early days, the city has been invented and reinvented by processes associated with social, economic, and political factors both within and without the community. Given a theoretical model that opens up space for the city’s cultural practices to be read, researchers might find within its musical practices the values and beliefs of a community that texts have failed to reveal.

Through performing their past in the present, with the shifts and variations that might be expected in any long-running performance with many changes of
players, the people who produced the city of New Orleans and its musical styles worked within those patterns taught to them, and at the same time, through economic, social and political pressures, continued to create new patterns of living and creative activity. Meanwhile, the performance and pedagogic practices of New Orleans echo with long-past memories and re-memories, challenging historical texts, celebrating survival through music.
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Appendix

Transcription of Mardi Gras Indian Song ‘Two-way-pak-e-way’
by the Golden Eagles Mardi Gras Indian Tribe

An Indian practice recorded live at the H&R Bar by Rounder Records 1988, Monk Boudreaux, lead vocal, tambourine; Larry ‘Big Crip’ Boudreaux, vocal, conga; Johnny ‘Quarter Moon’ Tobias, vocal, tambourine; Kenneth ‘Skeeter’ Bruce, vocal tambourine; Norwood ‘Gee-Chee’ Johnson, vocal, bass drum; Henry ‘Penney’ Singleton, vocal, conga, Lawrence ‘Lil Crip’ Adams, bottle, cowbell, vocal; Gerald ‘Lover Lu’ Sazon, tambourine, vocal.

Begins by Big Chief Monk Boudreaux calling out (background responses not transcribed):

Injun, Injun is you ready? [Bras Coupe] no say no tell no lie,

4Words in parentheses are my phonetic spellings of Indian terms. The direct translation of these to French or other dialects, if indeed they are all derived from past languages, are lost to history and the pleasure of the Indians to be obscure in their communications. For instance, two-way-pak-e-way, the spelling selected by the recording company on this example, is thought by many to be actually ‘Tuez bas qu’ou est’, and translated ‘Kill anyone who gets in the way’ (Sinclair, 1988, p. 23).
'Cause Mardi Gras coming will you be ready to die?
'Cause we're going downtown by the battlefield
(Cou-fe) boy they're talking when they're jumpin' when they lost the wagon wheel

But I'm a little bitty boy when that morning came
And I was jumping, shouting, lord have mercy I went to raising cain.
But mama told me when I left home that morning
She said 'My son, you better give up boy don't give no warning
'Cause they'll be jumping [coo-fe no fe] boy when the morning come
Please lord have mercy don't shoot your pistol don't shoot your gun.'

But I'm a little bitty boy and from way Uptown
And when they meet me Mardi Gras morning I know I won't bow down
Now Spy Boy hollerers say now what did he say, yea?
He was a little bitty boy [coo-nay-foo-nay-gota-fiyo] but he got killed anyway

I said now take me down on the battlefield
And when you meet them that morning lord have mercy you better not kneel
But they might take your crown and set it on fire
And they might run your ass dead in the bayou-land

[Changes into driving call and response]
[Big Chief calls] We gonna take 'em Downtown [Indians' respond] 'two way pak e way
Early in the morning (two way pak e way) Early that the morning (two way pak e way)
I say drums are ringing ya'll (two way pak e way) From way downtown (two way pak e way)
And they walk all around (two way pak e way) with hole in the ground (two way pak e way)
Their spy got fiyo (two way pak e way) their flag got fiyo (two way pak e way)

I say Spy Boy, (two way pak e way) hoop and holler now (two way pak e way)
I say Flag Boy, (two way pak e way) hoop and holler now (two way pak e way)
I say what you holler bout (two way pak e way) what you holler bout (two way pak e way)
They say look over yonder (two way pak e way) they say look over yonder (two way pak e way)
Say here they comin now (two way pak e way) here they comin now (two way pak e way)

I say two way, (two way pak e way) two way pak e way (two way pak e way)
I say two way, (two way pak e way) two way pak e way (two way pak e way)

They sing everybody (two way pak e way) I say What they sing about ? (two way pak e way)
They sing everybody (two way pak e way) I say What they sing about ? (two way pak e way)
I say two way, (two way pak e way) two way pak e way (two way pak e way)
I say two way, (two way pak e way) two way pak e way (two way pak e way)
I say nobody bow, (two way pak e way) nobody run (two way pak e way)
I say [Coo] got the hatchet, (two way pak e way) I say I got the gun (two way pak e way)
I say Spy Boy, (two way pak e way) hoop and holler now, (two way pak e way)
I say Flag Boy (two way pak e way) hoop and holler now (two way pak e way)
I say let's go way Downtown (two way pak e way) I say don't turnaround (two way pak e way)
They die in the morning (two way pak e way) they die in the morning (two way pak e way)

I say nobody run (two way pak e way) don't nobody kneel (two way pak e way)
Then spy went to hollering, (two way pak e way) then flag went to wallering
I say Spy Boy (two way pak e way) what they holler 'bout (two way pak e way)
I say Flag Boy (two way pak e way) what you wallering 'bout (two way pak e way)
He said look over yonder (two way pak e way) He said look over yonder (two way pak e way)
He say here they comin ya'll (two way pak e way) Say here they comin now (two way pak e way) You
want any trouble? (two way pak e way)
I say Bar no trouble now, (two way pak e way) I say Bar no trouble now (two way pak e way)
I say it's trouble I come for (two way pak e way)
Dyin' in the morning (two way pak e way) dyin' in the morning (two way pak e way)

Spy don't want to go (two way pak e way) and Flag don't want to go (two way pak e way)
And I wave my battle now (two way pak e way) And I wave my battle now (two way pak e way)
I say take me down (two way pak e way) I say take me down (two way pak e way)
And if trouble come (two way pak e way) I say nobody run (two way pak e way)
And if trouble come (two way pak e way) I say nobody run (two way pak e way)
He's dyin that morning (two way pak e way) dyin that morning (two way pak e way)