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"Throw Me Something, Mister": The History of Carnival Throws in New Orleans

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“Throw Me Something, Mister”: The History of Carnival Throws in New Orleans

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
History
Public History

by

Lissa Capo

B.A. Louisiana State University, 2006

May 2011

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my parents, William and Leslie Capo, who have supported me through the years. Without them, I would have never made it this far. Thank you so much to you both.

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Abstract

Mardi Gras draws millions of tourists to New Orleans yearly, contributing to the economy of the city. Visitors soon discover the thrill of catching “throws” tossed to paradegoers by members of parade organizations’ riding floats. For tourists and locals alike, throws become the cultural currency of New Orleans during Carnival. Beads, doubloons, coconuts, cups and other throws develop an inherent value, enticing crowds. People esteem throws enough to compete for them, with varying levels of intensity, along parade routes and on the streets of the French Quarter. The purchase of throws by Carnival krewes also brings revenue into New Orleans. Scholars have written many studies on Mardi Gras, including studies on individual organizations, tourism and economy. However, no study examines the history of Mardi Gras throws. This thesis seeks to fill that void, and establishes an earlier date for the first time beads were thrown from floats.

Mardi Gras, Carnival, New Orleans, Louisiana, Throws, Tourism, Economy, Revenue, Parades, Beads, Doubloons, Coconuts, Cups, Shoes, Krewes, Rex, Comus, Zulu, Muses, Hermes, Bacchus, Endymion, Iris, Venus

The custom of krewe members tossing trinkets, called throws, to the crowds of parade watchers extends over 100 years.¹ This convention turns paradegoers into participants in the celebration; instead of passive observers, the audience forms a bond between the float riders and the audience and creates an exchange economy. The importance of throws for both New Orleans's Carnival participants and its audience deserves close investigation.

This study is an interdisciplinary study, using not only history, but also anthropology, economics and cultural studies. Utilizing economic anthropology and cultural economics, this study describes the Mardi Gras market. Carnival is such a complex topic that it cannot be adequately described using only one lens; multiple disciplines are needed to effectively capture such spectacle. As such, the scholarly language is not what is normally seen in a traditional history study. This study borrows the language of all of these rich disciplines.

The culture of exchange forms the central economy of throws, and thus the central economy of Mardi Gras. The riders exchange throws for the power the audience feeds them, while the audience gains compensation, in the form of the throws. One cannot exist without the other; there is no throwing without the catching. This tradition developed from the early days of Mardi Gras when the elite members of the krewes began riding above the masses. The Mistick Krewe of Comus used floats to get their members off of the street and above the ordinary people.² Comus's decision to parade their members on floats allowed the tradition of throwing to develop because floats are a major component of the exchange.

This culture of exchange and crowd participation has become one of the main draws for tourists, in addition to the revelry. As New Orleans developed into a tourist destination, the

¹ Many Mardi Gras parading organizations refer to themselves as a "krewe." The word krewe just means a parading organization in New Orleans.

² Wayne Phillips (Curator, Louisiana State Museum) interview by author, New Orleans, LA, April 20, 2010.

audience involvement matured and thrived. These throws have evolved into a cultural currency during the city's peak time for tourism, for both tourists and locals alike.³ Not only are the throws a central and valuable form of exchange for krewe members and recipients, but the throws become a form of economy for the city itself, by popular demand during the Carnival season. As New Orleans started to depend on a tourist-based economy, throws became a significant factor in bolstering that economy. Throws have become the main economy of New Orleans's Carnival and help to draw in the tourists who feed that same economy.

These throws, as well as the act of throwing itself, fuel Mardi Gras, which in turn, helps drive the tourist economy attached to it and generates a significant economic impact for the city. According to anthropologist Laurie Wilkie, "The socially constructed value of beads during Carnival is reconstructed each year by participants not only from Louisiana, but also by national and international visitors to the event."⁴ As the value of Mardi Gras beads became known nationwide, so did the value increase. The economy of Mardi Gras is now a large part of the economy of the city of New Orleans. In essence, throws are the currency of Carnival, and Carnival is a large part of the currency of the city.

Though the terms can be used somewhat interchangeably, Mardi Gras and Carnival in New Orleans are two different entities. Carnival is the season, beginning on January 6th, King's Day, and lasting through midnight of Mardi Gras Day, also known as Fat Tuesday or Shrove Tuesday. Mardi Gras Day is the day before Lent begins. Mardi Gras, unless it is followed by "day," can

³ Wesley Shrum and John Kilburn, "Ritual Disrobement at Mardi Gras: Ceremonial Exchange and Moral Order," *Social Forces* 75, no. 2 (1996):429, under <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2580408> (accessed February 13, 2010).

⁴ Laurie A. Wilkie, "Beads and Breasts: The Negotiation of Roles and Power at New Orleans Mardi Gras," in *Beads and Bead Makers: Gender, Material Culture and Meaning*, eds. Lidia D. Sciama and Joanne B. Eicher (Oxford: Berg, 1998), 195.

also be used to describe the two weeks of Carnival before Lent, when most of the major celebrations and parades occur.

Academic research into New Orleans's Carnival and Mardi Gras Day has increased during the last few decades. These studies have generally focused on individual parading krewes, Carnival economics, and tourism. One of the most beloved of Carnival traditions — the tossing of throws — remains absent from such scholarship. Author Errol Laborde thinks the lack of scholarship is because the media perceives Mardi Gras as hedonistic, as well as the fact that not enough people would care to read such studies.⁵ Any new studies on cultural Mardi Gras only further the field. Mardi Gras is an annual cultural experience that deserves to be studied with all of the care of other historical subjects. This study will attempt to illuminate the needed history of Carnival throws. Mardi Gras is a living, continual history that needs to be preserved for future generations.

Carnival is a custom that developed in response to the Christian religious season of Lent.⁶ The word *Carnival* comes from the Latin “*carne vale*” and is believed to mean “*farewell to flesh*,” in that Carnival is the feasting celebration before the fasting of Lent.⁷ Carnival is thought to have descended from the Greek and Roman festivals of the *Bacchanalia*, *Lupercalia*, and *Saturnalia* as either a way for the Catholic Church to gain control over the pagan festivals or because modern Carnival shares certain aspects of the festivals, such as the practices of role reversal and masquerading.⁸ These festivals centered on a loosening of constraints, with feasts, orgies and

⁵ Errol Laborde (Editor in Chief- Renaissance Publishing Company, Author) interview by author, New Orleans, LA, April 12, 2010.

⁶ Tanya Gulevich, “Carnival,” in *Encyclopedia of Easter, Carnival and Lent*, (Detroit: Omnigraphics, Inc., 2002), 51.

⁷ Arthur Burton LaCour, *New Orleans Masquerade: Chronicles of Carnival* (New Orleans: Pelican Publishing Company, 1952), 1.

⁸ Not all scholars agree, however. Scholars such as LaCour argue that the festivals of *Lupercalia*, *Saturnalia* and *Bacchanalia* all ended centuries before Carnival celebrations began and therefore have no relation to modern Carnival.

costumed masquerades.⁹ *Saturnalia*, in particular, was noted for role reversals, where slaves became the masters for the day, and vice versa.¹⁰ The *Lupercalia* festival occurred in mid-February and the *Saturnalia* festival took place mid-December.¹¹

The modern Carnival developed in the Middle Ages and became very popular in France, where the *Boeuf Gras*, or fatted cow, was introduced.¹² Other countries in Europe had their own customs, which included the time-honored feasting and partying. Some forms of revelry were naughtier than others, however. Rural people in Spain threw “oranges, lemons, eggs, flour, mud, straw, corncocks, beans or lupines at one another and people on balconies poured dirty water, glue or other obnoxious substances on the crowds below,” states scholar Tanya Gulevich.¹³ The wealthier celebrants, however, sometimes tossed cakes and pastries out of their windows instead.¹⁴ In England, people would tie gamecocks to stakes and then throw sticks and stones at them.¹⁵ European mummers, or masqueraders, would place flowers and ribbons on poles in celebration.¹⁶

The Italians, though, were by far the most mischievous, and followed the ancient Lupercalian festivals’ wild practices. According to Perry Young, an early Carnival historian working in the 1930s, “The pleasant invention of the maskers in bombarding their friends with

Arthur Hardy, “History of Mardi Gras,” *Arthur Hardy’s Mardi Gras Guide*, 2011, 31. Arthur Burton LaCour, *New Orleans Masquerade: Chronicles of Carnival* (New Orleans: Pelican Publishing Company, 1952), 1. Perry Young, *The Mistick Krewe: Chronicles of Comus and His Kin* (New Orleans: Carnival Press, 1931), 2.

⁹ Arthur Burton LaCour, *New Orleans Masquerade: Chronicles of Carnival* (New Orleans: Pelican Publishing Company, 1952), 4.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 5.

¹¹ David D. Gilmore, *Carnival and Culture: Sex, Symbol and Status in Spain* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 10.

¹² The *Boeuf Gras* is a modern version of the sacrificial rites of old, and involves the fatted “calf” street procession before the feast. Perry Young, *The Mistick Krewe: Chronicles of Comus and His Kin* (New Orleans: Carnival Press, 1931), 3.

¹³ Tanya Gulevich, “Carnival,” in *Encyclopedia of Easter, Carnival and Lent* (Omnigraphics Inc.: Detroit, 2002), 57.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 57.

¹⁵ Arthur Burton LaCour, *New Orleans Masquerade: Chronicles of Carnival* (New Orleans: Pelican Publishing Company, 1952), 2.

¹⁶ James Mooney, “The Holiday Customs of Ireland,” (*Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 26, no. 130 (Jul. - Dec., 1889), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/983181> (accessed April 13, 2011), 389.

confetti, first gave way to plaster pellets to take the place of sweetmeats, and then to eggshells filled with sand. The next transition was to pepper, and to eggshells with putrid contents, to which were added apples, turnips, eggplants, spoiled fruit and vegetables of whatever kind, and anything dirty.”¹⁷ Italians also held public executions on holidays, which led to even more debauchery. During the 16th century, the Pope prohibited Carnival in Rome, but the practice was revived by public demand.¹⁸ Carnival welcomed provisional freedom from the normal order of rank and positions, much as the ancient feasts had.¹⁹

The French custom of Carnival, or Mardi Gras, travelled with the settlers to the Louisiana Colony. When Iberville landed somewhere near the mouth of the Mississippi River on March 3, 1699, he declared the spot “Point du Mardi Gras.”²⁰ Mardi Gras became a popular celebration in the new colony. Masked balls and fetes were commonplace by the late 1700s, and eventually the masking spread to the streets; the first masked “parade” took place in 1837.²¹ The Saturnalian tradition of reversing social rankings was present in these Carnival celebrations as well. According to scholar Samuel Kinser, “The same double culture, imitating and defying white standards, was carried forward in the later nineteenth century black Carnivals in New Orleans and Mobile.”²² During Carnival, African dances were performed in European clothes and slaves sang satirical songs about their masters.²³

¹⁷ Perry Young, *The Mistick Krewe: Chronicles of Comus and His Kin* (New Orleans: Carnival Press, 1931), 3-4.

¹⁸ Arthur Burton LaCour, *New Orleans Masquerade: Chronicles of Carnival* (New Orleans: Pelican Publishing Company, 1952), 5.

¹⁹ Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), 10.

²⁰ Arthur Hardy, “History of Mardi Gras,” *Arthur Hardy’s Mardi Gras Guide*, 2011, 31.

²¹ *Ibid*, 31.

²² Samuel Kinser, *Carnival American Style: Mardi Gras at New Orleans and Mobile* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 40.

²³ *Ibid*, 41.

Anglo-Americans also brought their Carnival traditions to Louisiana once the colony was purchased by the United States. Many of the Americans who moved to Louisiana were from the Mid-Atlantic States and transported their customary observances with them.²⁴ One such custom involved the mummers from Philadelphia. Mummers would dress in costume on New Year's Eve and travel from house to house spreading cheer.²⁵ Pennsylvanians conveyed this wintertime masquerading to Mobile and New Orleans, where it merged with existing Carnival celebrations.²⁶

The structure of Mardi Gras as it exists along the Gulf Coast first developed in Mobile, Alabama. The Cowbellian de Rakin Society formed in Mobile in 1831, and by the 1840s, had developed a parade complete with floats.²⁷ Members of the society moved to New Orleans and founded the Mistick Krewe of Comus in 1857. Comus invented the word "krewe," which led to several other parading organizations using the same term.²⁸ Comus remained the only New Orleans krewe until 1872 and it is emblematic of the old line krewes. The old line krewes, founded in the late 19th century, featured membership by invitation only for elite, white males.²⁹ Comus paraded for a few short years before the start of the Civil War and did not return to the streets until 1866.³⁰

The traditional structure of Mardi Gras parades and krewes in New Orleans further developed during Reconstruction. The Civil War and post-bellum experience strongly influenced

²⁴ Reid Mitchell, *All on a Mardi Gras Day: Episodes in the History of New Orleans Carnival* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), 26.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 26.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 27.

²⁷ Tanya Gulevich, "Mardi Gras," in *Encyclopedia of Easter, Carnival and Lent* (Detroit: Omnigraphics Inc., 2002), 366.

²⁸ Arthur Hardy, "History of Mardi Gras," *Arthur Hardy's Mardi Gras Guide*, 2011, 31.

²⁹ James Gill, *The Lords of Misrule: Mardi Gras and the Politics of Race in New Orleans* (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1997), 76.

³⁰ Arthur Hardy, "History of Mardi Gras," *Arthur Hardy's Mardi Gras Guide*, 2011, 31.

the evolution of Mardi Gras giving it commercial purpose.³¹ The post-bellum holiday centered upon reconstituting and restructuring the economy of a crippled New Orleans. According to journalist James Gill, “Under the rubric, ‘The Past, The Present and the Future,’ Comus presented tableaux depicting the horrors of the Civil War and the joys of Reconciliation. The show culminated with a vision of American posterity living in harmony amid the ‘fruits of industry, science and all the peaceful arts.’”³² Several local businessmen founded the Krewe of Rex in 1872 as the monarch to rule over all of Mardi Gras and as a way to attract more visitors.³³ When New Orleans held the 1884 World’s Cotton Centennial and Industrial Exposition to help lure northern visitors, Rex played a key role parading through the Exposition Grounds, giving visitors a taste of Mardi Gras.³⁴ Carnival, always a period of revelry and fun, now also served to draw visitors to the city to help the struggling economy recover.

“The tourists who came to see the parades and attend the balls were to be considered representatives of the Northern elite who would preach understanding and reconciliation upon their return. In New Orleans they would leave not only understanding but capital as well, helping to rebuild the South,” asserts historian Reid Mitchell.³⁵ At the beginning of the 20th century, the city continued to cultivate its image as a tourist destination, with attractions such as Storyville and Mardi Gras, giving the city an air of sin.³⁶ New Orleans was also reputed for its ignoble

³¹ Arthur Hardy, *Mardi Gras in New Orleans: An Illustrated History 3rd ed.* (New Orleans: Arthur Hardy Enterprises, 2007), 5.

³² This occurred in 1866, the first Mardi Gras after the Civil War. James Gill, *The Lords of Misrule: Mardi Gras and the Politics of Race in New Orleans* (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1997), 76.

³³ Errol Laborde, *Krewe: The Early New Orleans Carnival, Comus to Zulu* (New Orleans: Carnival Press, 2007), 26.

³⁴ The Cotton Exposition took place in New Orleans from December 1884 to June 1885. J. Mark Souther, *New Orleans on Parade: Tourism and the Transformation of the Crescent City* (Louisiana State University Press: Baton Rouge, 2006), 5.

³⁵ Reid Mitchell, *All on a Mardi Gras Day: Episodes in the History of New Orleans Carnival* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), 85.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 6.

underbelly, where members of the male upper class could visit the prostitutes of the red light districts. Historian Anthony Stanonis states, “Brothels and bars unleashed men from the subdued behavior practice at home, where wives and children lived. Reform minded politicians had sought to regulate carnal pleasures by establishing the nation’s largest red light district, Storyville, but [this] reinforced the popular image of New Orleans as a harbor for wanton immorality. Male oriented attractions formed the basis of local nightlife, drawing male visitors.”³⁷ Mardi Gras furthered this image of hedonism, as the citizens gave in to the time of all out revelry before the strictness of Lent.

Mardi Gras’s reputation for merriment, as well as a revenue source, only increased the more visitors came. “The commercial potential of the annual festival was not lost on the merchants of New Orleans. By 1900 approximately 100,000 tourists flocked to the city to see elaborate processions involving [floats], horsemen, flambeaux carriers, and the maskers who posed as king, queen and court. Moreover, the riders were throwing objects down into the clamoring multitudes,” according to social historians Wesley Shrum and John Kilburn.³⁸ So the participatory element served as part of the marketing power.

Even krewes themselves became a part of the tourist trade of the city, knowing that the increasing number of tourists helped the economy of the city to expand. “In 1899, the Earl Marshall [of Rex] bragged of Carnival’s growing reputation and ‘the enormous amount of money brought into this city through the influence of [Rex’s] Carnival,’ ” Mitchell states.³⁹ The Krewe

³⁷ Anthony J. Stanonis, *Creating the Big Easy: New Orleans and the Emergence of Modern Tourism 1918-1945* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2006), 104.

³⁸ Flambeaux are men who carry torches to light the parades at night. Wesley Shrum and John Kilburn, “Ritual Disrobement at Mardi Gras: Ceremonial Exchange and Moral Order,” *Social Forces* 75, no. 2 (1996): 427, under <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2580408> (accessed February 13, 2010).

³⁹ Reid Mitchell, *All on a Mardi Gras Day: Episodes in the History of New Orleans Carnival* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), 94.

of Rex was subsidized by the railroad companies, who organized special Carnival tours of New Orleans.⁴⁰ Fliers tacked up at railway stations advertised the king of Carnival and promoted tourism.⁴¹ George Soulé's 1909 pamphlet entitled "The Carnival in New Orleans" depicted how Rex sought to expand its "noble work" of attracting tourists to New Orleans.⁴²

New Orleans even produced a set of post cards advertising the city as a favorable destination, showing mostly white and upper class figures, with the hopes of landing the exhibition of the 1915 World's Fair.⁴³ Mardi Gras had become an important part of selling the city to the tourist trade. New Orleanians determined a national audience significant for Carnival and succeeded in creating one, although Carnival never revolved solely around visitors.⁴⁴

According to historian Henri Schindler, the earliest record of modern Carnival throws dates back to Creole maskers in carriages who "tossed bonbons and flowers to ladies and children on the balconies and banquettes on the narrow streets," much in the same fashion as Renaissance maskers.⁴⁵ In the 1840s, independent and unorganized revelers threw sugar-coated almonds to the watching crowds.⁴⁶ At the end of 1871, the Twelfth Night Revelers presented a parade in which Santa Claus distributed presents to the crowd.⁴⁷ The Krewe of Rex tossed candies and peanuts in the 1880s.⁴⁸ Aside from the masked rider dressed as Santa Claus, the earliest "throws"

⁴⁰ Ibid, 93.

⁴¹ Errol Laborde (Editor in Chief- Renaissance Publishing Company, Author) interview by author, New Orleans, LA, April 12, 2010.

⁴² Errol Laborde, *Krewe: The Early New Orleans Carnival, Comus to Zulu* (New Orleans: Carnival Press, 2007), 44.

⁴³ M.D. White, "Center of the World postcard" (Postcards for the 1915 World's Fair Exposition) c. 1915, Mss. No: 1982.135.147, 1982.55.117 The Historic New Orleans Collection, The Williams Research Center, New Orleans, LA.

⁴⁴ Reid Mitchell, *All on a Mardi Gras Day: Episodes in the History of New Orleans Carnival* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), 86.

⁴⁵ Henri Schindler, *Mardi Gras: New Orleans* (Italy: Flammarion, 1997), 159.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 159.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 159.

⁴⁸ Wesley Shrum and John Kilburn, "Ritual Disrobement at Mardi Gras: Ceremonial Exchange and Moral Order," *Social Forces* 75, no. 2 (1996): 427, under <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2580408> (accessed February 13, 2010).

were not krewe sponsored and sanctioned.⁴⁹ Individual riders gave favors to the crowds, usually to family and friends, much as the krewes presented favors to guests at their tableaux balls.⁵⁰ These riders were like the kings of old, handing out favors to the chosen subjects below, as they passed through the masses in all of their finery.

A more capitalistic side of Mardi Gras developed with the formalization of throws. Schindler asserts that, “The introduction of trinkets broke this spell. They created a new kind of contact, a different exchange; the audience still watched and wondered, but the enthrallment of the spectacle was broken by these interruptions.”⁵¹ Throwing these trinkets to the crowd changed the economic aspect of Mardi Gras. Carnival became less about the power of Carnival aristocracy above the masses, and more about capitalistic exchange. Instead of the riders only needing the audience to watch, now they needed the crowd to participate. For what is giving without receiving? This participating crowd also included the tourists drawn to Mardi Gras. Thus, Carnival transitioned from a feudal model to a capitalistic one. New Orleans’s Mardi Gras was evolving into a capitalistic economy, so krewe membership and Carnival participation began to center around wealth, giving the “elite” a market.

The “throwing,” like that of the Spanish and Italian maskers before, could also be mischievous and naughty. Several newspapers of the period mention maskers throwing flour onto people dressed in their costume finery. According to the *Daily Picayune* in 1852, “There was an immense crowd present, all eager and excited, and many apparently determined to assert their right to scatter mud, flour and such missiles around them freely and promiscuously.”⁵² Even

⁴⁹ Henri Schindler, *Mardi Gras: New Orleans* (Italy: Flammarion, 1997), 159.

⁵⁰ A tableaux ball is an invitation only event, held by old line krewes every Carnival season. Ibid, 159.

⁵¹ Henri Schindler, *Mardi Gras: New Orleans* (Italy: Flammarion, 1997), 160.

⁵² “Mardi Gras,” *Daily Picayune*, February 25, 1852, in America’s Historical Newspapers Database,

visitors were not exempt, as an article from the *Wiskonsan Enquirer* states, “There was also a very “flowry” genius along, as some of our friends who got covered with meal can testify.”⁵³ It became such a nuisance that a mayoral proclamation banned the practice in 1856.⁵⁴ The practice did not stop, however; gangs of boys still threw bags of flour at those who came in reach during the Comus parade of 1859.⁵⁵

The mischievous throwing escalated and soon it was not only flour being thrown. “Then the custom gradually became debased from the roughs taking possession of it and instead of the parade being orderly and being conducted by a respectable body of masked citizens, who were pleased to throw innocent flour on the passing crowd and dispense bonbons to their lady acquaintances, the processions were conducted in a rowdy, disorderly manner, and lime was used instead of flour, which being thrown among the rubble often injured the eyesight,” an article from the *Daily Picayune* read in 1896.⁵⁶ A few scholars believe that lime was never thrown and see this as a legend, though.⁵⁷ A puckish connection to the Carnival traditions of the past, this throwing impinged on the Carnival economy that had begun to develop with the advent of thrown baubles.

<http://infoweb.newsbank.com.ezproxy.uno.edu/iw-search/we/HistArchive/> (accessed February 10, 2011).

⁵³ Reports of such activity also surface in *Daily Inter Ocean* from Chicago and *Wheeling Register* from Wheeling, West Virginia, in America’s Historical Newspapers Database,

<http://infoweb.newsbank.com.ezproxy.uno.edu/iw-search/we/HistArchive/> (accessed February 10, 2011). “Mardi Gras,” *Wiskonsan Enquirer*, April 6, 1839, in America’s Historical Newspapers Database,

<http://infoweb.newsbank.com.ezproxy.uno.edu/iw-search/we/HistArchive/> (accessed February 13, 2010).

⁵⁴“Mayorality- Official,” *New Orleans Daily Creole*, December 3, 1856, in America’s Historical Newspapers Database, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.ezproxy.uno.edu/iw-search/we/HistArchive/> (accessed February 13, 2010).

⁵⁵ Robert Tallant, *Mardi Gras: As It Was* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, 1947), 118.

⁵⁶ “By-The-Way Chat, Little Tales Told By Members of the Talk Club,” *Daily Picayune*, February 16, 1896, in America’s Historical Newspapers Database,

<http://infoweb.newsbank.com.ezproxy.uno.edu/iw-search/we/HistArchive/> (accessed February 10, 2011).

⁵⁷ Dr. Connie Atkinson, professor of History at the University of New Orleans suggests that no lime was thrown because there are no conclusive reports of people being injured from the lime.

The elite nature of the krewes prevented many poorer men from formally participating in Mardi Gras parades.⁵⁸ Because of this, maskers began to form small clubs to parade on foot, though, none of these groups lasted for long.⁵⁹ The Jefferson City Buzzards incorporated in 1890 and became the first organized walking group to last more than a decade.⁶⁰ The Buzzards wanted to follow the example of the krewes, tossing baubles to the crowds. To minimize expenses and the weight each man would have to carry, club members instead made paper flowers and paraded them on tall poles.⁶¹ The Buzzards gave these flowers to pretty girls in the crowd, in exchange for kisses.⁶² Thus, the Jefferson City Buzzards created a new economic exchange. In this exchange, participants were on a more equal footing, though they were still not fully equal as the Buzzards were ultimately the ones who decided whether or not the exchange would occur. The maskers also received something tangible from the crowd — a payment for their services. This exchange can be seen as a precursor to the people today who flash their bodies for beads, as both the flashers and the kissers are marketing themselves for trinkets.

The old line krewes excluded African Americans and so they formed their own krewe, the Krewe of Zulu, in 1909. Incorporated in 1916 as the Zulu Social Aid and Pleasure Club, Zulu krewe traditions directly mocked the city's white elite, in the form of Krewe of Rex.⁶³ Mitchell states, "In his way, Zulu did everything that Rex did. If Rex traveled by water, coming up the

⁵⁸ Myron Tassin and Gaspar "Buddy" Stall, *Mardi Gras and Bacchus: Something Old, Something New* (New Orleans: Pelican Publishing Company, 1984), 41.

⁵⁹ Myron Tassin and Gaspar "Buddy" Stall, *Mardi Gras and Bacchus: Something Old, Something New* (New Orleans: Pelican Publishing Company, 1984), 41. Arthur Hardy, *Mardi Gras in New Orleans: An Illustrated History 3rd ed.* (New Orleans: Arthur Hardy Enterprises, 2007), 53.

⁶⁰ Arthur Hardy, *Mardi Gras in New Orleans: An Illustrated History 3rd ed.* (New Orleans: Arthur Hardy Enterprises, 2007), 53.

⁶¹ Myron Tassin and Gaspar "Buddy" Stall, *Mardi Gras and Bacchus: Something Old, Something New* (New Orleans: Pelican Publishing Company, 1984), 42.

⁶² *Ibid*, 42.

⁶³ Arthur Hardy, *Mardi Gras in New Orleans: An Illustrated History 3rd ed.* (New Orleans: Arthur Hardy Enterprises, 2007), 59.

Mississippi with an escort from the U.S. Navy, Zulu came down the New Basin Canal on a tugboat. If Rex held a scepter, Zulu held a hambone... All that Zulu did caricatured Rex, a black lord of misrule upsetting a white lord, a mocker of a mocker. Zulu was... a black Carnival parade that commented on white Carnival parades.”⁶⁴ Zulu brought the values of Saturnalia, reversing conventional roles, to the modern Carnival. Zulu subverted these roles, in part because of New Orleans’s distinct tradition of relatively "permeable" barriers, wherein the culture and physical boundaries are unclear to begin with.⁶⁵

Zulu introduced the first thematic throw of Carnival. Initially, Zulu distributed decorated walnuts, the “original golden nuggets.”⁶⁶ Fairly quickly, though, Zulu turned to coconuts instead. The coconuts were less expensive for the working men of the krewe to purchase than the beads some krewes were beginning to use.⁶⁷ Some scholars suggest that as early as 1910 some members of the krewe were handing out coconuts during their parade; at this point, the coconuts were still “hairy” (i. e., in their natural state) and would remain undecorated for several years.⁶⁸

The first mention of Zulu coconuts, however, does not occur in print in the *Times-Picayune* form until 1928.⁶⁹ The *Times-Picayune* headline reads, “Jovial Zulu King Parades Past Mayor

⁶⁴ Women were still not involved in Mardi Gras parades at this point, as the first Zulu “queens” were men in drag. Reid Mitchell, *All on a Mardi Gras Day: Episodes in the History of New Orleans Carnival* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), 151.

⁶⁵ The idea of New Orleans’s “permeable society” was proposed by Gwendolyn Midlo Hall. Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, “The Formation of Afro-Creole Culture,” in *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization*, eds. Arnold Richard Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 63.

⁶⁶ Siona LaFrance, “The Zulu Coconut,” *Times-Picayune*, February 8, 2002.

⁶⁷ Maria Montoya, “The Truth About Zulu: Ten Things You May Not Know,” *Times-Picayune*, February 14, 2009.

⁶⁸ Errol Laborde, *Krewe: The Early New Orleans Carnival, Comus to Zulu* (New Orleans: Carnival Press, 2007), 97.

⁶⁹ “Jovial Zulu King Parades Past Mayor Walker, Tossing Royal Coconut as Token of Esteem,” *Times-Picayune*, February 22, 1928, in America’s Historical Newspapers Database, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.ezproxy.uno.edu/iw-search/we/HistArchive/> (accessed January 25, 2011). “Peter Rabbit Discovers Groundhog Wandering in Search of Shadow,” *Times-Picayune*, February 22, 1928, in America’s Historical Newspapers Database, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.ezproxy.uno.edu/iw-search/we/HistArchive/> (accessed January 25, 2011).

Walker, Tossing Royal Coconut as Token of Esteem.”⁷⁰ When the Zulu King Hanno tossed the coconut to Mayor Jimmy Walker of New York, the mayor threw back a box of candy, caught from the earlier parading Rex.⁷¹ This exchange, a gift for a gift, exemplifies the value throws had accumulated. By the 1930s, the Zulu coconut had become a true Carnival hit.⁷² By creating their own form of currency, one which could not be obtained from any other krewe, Zulu enticed more people to attend their parade and therefore enlarged their share of the developing throw economy. Zulu’s influence in the cultural economy only increased as paradegoers clamored for these special throws. Catching a Zulu coconut is considered good luck, increasing the Carnival presence associated with Zulu.⁷³

The prevailing view is that the tradition of throwing beads originated with Rex in 1921, perhaps to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the krewe.⁷⁴ Several references cite the practice much earlier. Lyle Saxon, in his memoir *Fabulous New Orleans*, mentions catching strings of beads when he was a child, which would have been the early 1900s. It is unclear when it began, but by 1913, throwing beads to the watching public became common practice. The first newspaper account appeared in the *Columbus Ledger*, (Georgia), which states, “While the parades slowly pass through the streets each of the maskers on the floats have silk bags which are filled with souvenirs and are thrown among the crowds. These trinkets are eagerly sought after by the

⁷⁰ “Jovial Zulu King Parades Past Mayor Walker, Tossing Royal Coconut as Token of Esteem,” *Times-Picayune*, February 22, 1928, in America’s Historical Newspapers Database, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.ezproxy.uno.edu/iw-search/we/HistArchive/> (accessed January 25, 2011).

⁷¹ “Peter Rabbit Discovers Groundhog Wandering in Search of Shadow,” *Times-Picayune*, February 22, 1928, in America’s Historical Newspapers Database,

<http://infoweb.newsbank.com.ezproxy.uno.edu/iw-search/we/HistArchive/> (accessed January 25, 2011).

⁷² James Gaffney, “Put the Time in the Coconut,” *Times-Picayune*, February 19, 2003. “Rex to Rule Over Peak of Gay Season,” *Morning Tribune*, February 25, 1936, Record Group 93- The Klorer-Roeling Collection, O/S Folder 7, The Louisiana Historical Center, the Louisiana State Museum.

⁷³ Robert Tallant, *Mardi Gras: As It Was* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, 1947), 118.

⁷⁴ Wayne Phillips [Curator, Louisiana State Museum] interview by author, New Orleans, LA, April 20, 2010.

crowds and usually consist of strings of beads, fans, etc.”⁷⁵ The Krewe of Rex is given credit for this innovation. “Individual float riders had occasionally tossed favors in previous parades, but Rex formalized the practice with all members participating,” remarks Arthur Hardy.⁷⁶ These throws took the place of the earlier offensive materials.⁷⁷ Because of this, beads immediately became popular throws.

After this innovation, Mardi Gras suffered a few years of set-back. The First World War caused the cancellation of the 1918 and 1919 parades. Rex was the only krewe to actually parade in 1920, though it was not much of a parade.⁷⁸ Schindler has noted that Rex’s practice of tossing beads brought verve and vigor back to Mardi Gras. “Photographs of the 1922 parade show everyone in the crowd with their arms outstretched, trying to catch the strands of glass beads and bracelets,” according to Schindler.⁷⁹

Throwing beads may have been a way for Rex to take back some of the Carnival economy that Zulu subverted from them, by giving the audience a new and greater incentive to come to their parades. Now Rex, too, had a distinctive form of Carnival currency, with a value all its own. What the Krewe of Rex could not have foreseen, however, would be that by formalizing the practice of tossing favors to the crowd, they would ultimately end up sharing that economy with the other krewes that followed them. The audience as a whole also benefitted from the new throw, since the earlier favors mainly went to people the riders knew. Scholar Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin states, “Carnival is not a spectacle [only] seen by the people; they live in it

⁷⁵ Mrs. Geo J. Burrus, “Society,” *Columbus Ledger*, February 16, 1913, in America’s Historical Newspapers Database, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.ezproxy.uno.edu/iw-search/we/HistArchive/> (accessed February 10, 2011).

⁷⁶ Arthur Hardy, *Mardi Gras in New Orleans: An Illustrated History 1st ed.* (New Orleans: Arthur Hardy Enterprises, 2001), 56.

⁷⁷ Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 256.

⁷⁸ Henri Schindler, *Mardi Gras: New Orleans* (Italy: Flammarion, 1997), 159.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 159.

and everyone participates, because its very idea embraces all of the people.”⁸⁰ Throws brought this participation to a whole new level, by creating the exchange economy between riders and catchers. Beads developed into and remain the most prevalent currency of this exchange.

Beads also helped krewes place a monopoly on the capitalistic model of Carnival, in that beads were only available through krewes. Anyone wishing to acquire beads had to go to the parades. Coconuts gave Zulu the same type of monopoly over the Carnival market. Throws, then, had become a way for krewes to improve their Mardi Gras capital.

Looking at the photographs of old parades, a desire for throws is visible. “By the 1940s, everybody’s arms are raised, but there were not a lot of throws, so you were considered lucky to get one,” curator Wayne Phillips states.⁸¹ Beads were not ordered in bulk; therefore, many people in the crowd were not likely to catch one. Numerous riders were also still giving preference to those they knew. The scarcity increased the value of the bead currency, thus increasing the economic exchange itself. The riders chose who the “lucky” individuals would be, as well as financed the exchange itself. The practice of propelling beads off of floats revolutionized the face of Mardi Gras, creating a much broader exchange, despite the small number of beads thrown.

Schindler says, “The krewes of Momus and Comus were soon tossing baubles into the night, too, and the practice became a fixture of Carnival, another custom that set New Orleans parades apart.”⁸² Carnival celebrations around the Gulf Coast soon followed the trend. Beads became an incredibly popular and much sought after item, much like Zulu coconuts. “The frenzied desire to catch these trinkets surpassed all reason; everyone reached and scrambled for them, and the most staid observer or visitor soon joined the chorus and the chase; when the delicate

⁸⁰ Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), 7.

⁸¹ Wayne Phillips (Curator, Louisiana State Museum) interview by author, New Orleans, LA, April 20, 2010.

⁸² Henri Schindler, *Mardi Gras: New Orleans* (Italy: Flammarion, 1997), 160.

necklaces were in mid-air, grandmothers and longshoremen were shown the same deference,” Schindler states.⁸³ In this way, beads further helped convert Mardi Gras throws into economic power, as now, more people, in the crowd at least, were on a more level footing seeking the new currency. Equality in the crowd came from the unpredictability of the throws being caught by the intended target. Beads were not thrown to everyone, neither were Zulu coconuts. Racial lines came into play for the float riders.

In the crowd, it is difficult to maintain lines of gender and class, while people are scrambling for trinkets on the ground. Saxon states, “... the page with a bored smile tossed a string of green beads to me. It swirled through the air over the heads of the people between us... and it fell to the ground. ... I found myself lying on the pavement as though swept under a stampede of cattle. Hands and feet were all around me but somehow in the struggle I managed to recover those beads.”⁸⁴ The beads and the active participation they provided the crowds also helped increase the already developing economy of Mardi Gras in New Orleans, which benefitted the tourist economy as well. The bead exchange economy thus became real economy.

The opportunity for women to become members of a Carnival krewe did not occur until 1922, when the Krewe of Iris was founded, entirely by and for women.⁸⁵ The krewe only organized a ball and did not parade.⁸⁶ Iris held their first ball in 1922.⁸⁷ The Krewe of Venus was founded in 1940 and the krewe staged the first all-female parade in 1941.⁸⁸ Venus

⁸³ Ibid, 160.

⁸⁴ Lyle Saxon, *Fabulous New Orleans* (New Orleans: Pelican Publishing, 1928), 38.

⁸⁵ Ball krewes are krewes which do not parade; they only stage balls. Iris did not parade for the first time until 1959. Ibid, 99.

⁸⁶ Ball krewes are krewes which do not parade; they only stage balls. Iris did not parade for the first time until 1959. Ibid, 99.

⁸⁷ “Society,” *Times-Picayune*, January 1, 1922, in America’s Historical Newspapers Database,

<http://infoweb.newsbank.com.ezproxy.uno.edu/iw-search/we/HistArchive/> (accessed January 25, 2011).

⁸⁸ Arthur Hardy, *Mardi Gras in New Orleans: An Illustrated History 3rd ed.* (New Orleans: Arthur Hardy Enterprises,

established the tradition of women asserting their power and economy over Carnival by creating their own parade. Today, many of the krewes are integrated with both men and women, thanks to the efforts of Iris and Venus.⁸⁹ These krewes helped to broaden the profile of Mardi Gras and thus helped to attract a broader audience.

A group of local businessmen founded the Krewe of Hermes in 1937, as “the patron of the visitor.”⁹⁰ “Hermes paraded on Friday night and held a ball ‘designed particularly for the entertainment of visitors.’ The krewe invited out-of-towners to its ball; people who had ‘hitherto foregone intimate contact with such events.’... Rex had done the same thing in its earliest years,” Mitchell states.⁹¹ The krewe was made up of ethnic whites, mainly Jewish, who were not able to join old line krewes.⁹² Hermes came at a good time for the city, as new wealth was needed to keep sustaining Carnival festivities in New Orleans. The capitalistic market of Mardi Gras was helped by this new infusion of wealth, allowing Carnival to become a bigger spectacle than before. Hermes created an appeal to visitors to the city through their inclusion, helping to further the tourist trade in the city, much like the later krewe Bacchus.

Shortly after Hermes first paraded, the United States entered World War II. Krewes did not parade from 1942 to 1945.⁹³ The post-war years featured a modification to the nature of Mardi Gras. Before the war, a few krewes had targeted tourists, but the decades after the war saw a boom in the number of krewes aimed at middle class locals and tourists, giving them a chance to

2007), 112.

⁸⁹ Kevin Fox Gotham, *Authentic New Orleans: Tourism, Culture and Race in the Big Easy* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 187.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁹¹ Reid Mitchell, *All on a Mardi Gras Day: Episodes in the History of New Orleans Carnival* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), 169-170.

⁹² James Gill, *The Lords of Misrule: Mardi Gras and the Politics of Race in New Orleans* (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1997), 221.

⁹³ Arthur Hardy, *Mardi Gras in New Orleans: An Illustrated History 3rd ed.* (New Orleans: Arthur Hardy Enterprises, 2007), 120.

participate in a way heretofore unknown.⁹⁴ The number of parades was also swelling. Before 1940, only ten parades existed in New Orleans; by 1960, the number had jumped to 21.⁹⁵ Travel to New Orleans was also becoming increasingly easier, enticing visitors to come. “Growing numbers of Americans, including many ex-GIs who had enjoyed their first taste of New Orleans revelry during the war, took advantage of the improved highway, rail and air travel that made the once isolated city more accessible,” historian Kevin Fox Gotham observed.⁹⁶

Rex changed the face of Mardi Gras again with the creation of the doubloon. Alvin Sharpe coined and designed the first Mardi Gras doubloon designed to be thrown from a float for Rex in 1960.⁹⁷ Sharpe’s innovation featured the theme of the parade emblazoned on the throw itself; beads, at that point, were generic for all krewes.⁹⁸ The Krewe of Rex had produced a prelude to the doubloon, though. In 1884, Rex fashioned small doubloon-like medallions as favors for the World’s Industrial and Cotton Centennial.⁹⁹ The krewe again produced medallions in 1893, but the members did not buy many over the next few years.¹⁰⁰ Doubloons can also be tied to the Greek and Roman custom of leaders having medals struck in their likenesses, which they then dispersed among the people.¹⁰¹ These medals could either be a form of advertising, or a way of conveying an idea to the masses. Either way, because of the medals’ artistic value, they

⁹⁴ J. Mark Souther, *New Orleans on Parade: Tourism and the Transformation of the Crescent City* (Louisiana State University Press: Baton Rouge, 2006), 133.

⁹⁵ Kevin Fox Gotham, *Authentic New Orleans: Tourism, Culture and Race in the Big Easy* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 171.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 133.

⁹⁷ Stephen W. Hales, *The Rex Doubloon: Commemorating 50 Years* (New Orleans: Arthur Hardy Enterprises, 2009), 1.

⁹⁸ There may be a slight exception in terms of Zulu coconuts, as some are decorated with the Zulu logo, but they are not all uniform in design, like the doubloons. Wayne Phillips (Curator, Louisiana State Museum) interview by author, New Orleans, LA, April 20, 2010.

⁹⁹ Not much is known about the purpose of the Cotton Exposition medallions, nor who they were given and/or sold to. Arthur Hardy, *Mardi Gras in New Orleans: An Illustrated History 3rd ed.* (New Orleans: Arthur Hardy Enterprises, 2007), 50.

¹⁰⁰ Charles L. Dufour and Leonard V. Huber, *If Ever I Cease to Love: One Hundred Years of Rex 1872- 1971* (New Orleans: The School of Design, 1970), 48.

¹⁰¹ Lloyd A. McLaughlin Jr., *Mardi Gras Doubloons and Medallions* (New Orleans: Elm Supply Company, 1965), 4.

were hoarded and passed down to future generations, much like modern doubloon collectors pass on their collections.¹⁰²

The doubloons that Sharpe created provided the first representation of Carnival currency shaped like actual currency. Small and coin-like, they became a physical embodiment of the economy of throws and the currency behind the economic exchange. For locals and tourists alike, doubloons became a visual and concrete symbol of the economic effect of Mardi Gras, much more than beads and coconuts had previously. Doubloons also increased the power of the individual krewes, in that people leaving their parades carried a permanent reminder of the krewes and the riders who threw the doubloons. According to Dr. Stephen Hales, the Krewe of Rex historian, “What better way for a King to delight his subjects than to shower them with money?”¹⁰³

The first doubloons appeared in 1960; however, a couple of years passed before doubloons became popular and people grasped their significance. Hardy observes, “Most of the original Rex doubloons were left in the street. As it took a while to catch on, some krewes waited five to seven years before having doubloons themselves.”¹⁰⁴ Doubloons eventually became prized above most other Carnival throws. “Doubloons created a stir. There were doubloon collecting clubs,” Laborde remarks.¹⁰⁵ According to *Carnival Panorama*, a 1966 guide to doubloons, a 1960 Rex doubloon, struck in .999 silver proof, was worth \$1500.00.¹⁰⁶ Because of their popularity, krewes started manufacturing many different kinds of doubloons and in greater numbers, which

¹⁰² Ibid, 4.

¹⁰³ Stephen W Hales, *Rex: An Illustrated History of the School of Design* (New Orleans: Arthur Hardy Enterprises, 2010), 108.

¹⁰⁴ Arthur Hardy (Publisher of *Arthur Hardy's Mardi Gras Guide*), interview by author, New Orleans, LA, April 19, 2010.

¹⁰⁵ Errol Laborde (Editor in Chief- Renaissance Publishing Company and Author) interview by author, New Orleans, LA, April 12, 2010.

¹⁰⁶ Jay Guren and Richard Ugan, *Carnival Panorama: New Orleans Mardi Gras Medals and Krewes 1884- 1965* (New Orleans: Anderson Publications, 1966), 167.

oversaturated Mardi Gras. Because of such high supply, demand waned in the 1980s, but doubloons are once again highly prized throws among collectors. In fact, certain rare doubloons can command quite a high price among collectors.¹⁰⁷ At the height of the doubloon craze in 1977, a first year Zulu doubloon (1964) would sell for over \$25.00.¹⁰⁸

Modern tourism in the city developed after the 1964 Civil Rights Act liberated the hotel industry. Before the act, New Orleans was a racially segregated city, and hotel chains were hesitant to erect properties. After the act, international hotel chains started to invest in the South, which helped fund the tourism industry.¹⁰⁹ It was not a smooth transition, however. In 1965, the American Football League moved its All-Star Game to Houston following poor treatment of African American football players in the French Quarter.¹¹⁰ The first of several embarrassments for the city, racial discrimination continued to hurt tourism.¹¹¹ In 1969, policy-makers passed a public accommodations ordinance designed to desegregate the city.¹¹² The law signaled a New Orleans in which a modern tourism economy could prosper.¹¹³

In the later decades of the 20th century, the city undertook a major marketing push for Mardi Gras, and large corporations began to invest their resources in the spectacle. Corporations such as Southern Comfort and Bacardi Rum began to sponsor riders in parades, as well as make their own specialty throws with their corporate logos.¹¹⁴ Corporate sponsorship, however, is

¹⁰⁷ Jill Anding, "Doubloon Fever Spikes Anew," *Times-Picayune*, January 10, 2009.

¹⁰⁸ Arthur Hardy, "New Orleans Mardi Gras Parade Doubloons First Issues" *Arthur Hardy's Mardi Gras Guide*, 1977.

¹⁰⁹ Errol Laborde (Editor in Chief- Renaissance Publishing Company, Author) interview by author, New Orleans, LA, April 12, 2010.

¹¹⁰ J. Mark Souther, *New Orleans on Parade: Tourism and the Transformation of the Crescent City* (Louisiana State University Press: Baton Rouge, 2006), 92.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, 97.

¹¹² *Ibid*, 100.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, 101.

¹¹⁴ Kevin Fox Gotham, "Tourism from Above and Below: Globalization, Localization and New Orleans's Mardi Gras," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 29 (2005): 310.

distasteful to many Carnival traditionalists, as they believe it spoils the experience.¹¹⁵ In fact, New Orleans law bans corporate sponsorship of parades, including beads with corporate logos.¹¹⁶ The ban on logo beads is not strictly enforced, however, and krewes bypass the sponsorship law by having corporations sponsor individual floats and riders.

Gotham notes, “The establishment of “super krewes” in the 1960s and later, such as Bacchus, Endymion and Orpheus, ushered in an era of increased participation by [tourist paradegoers], larger floats and greater volume of throws — beads and trinkets that parade riders showered on revelers during festivities.”¹¹⁷ Because of this, corporations’ marketing strategies began to revolve around Mardi Gras, thus helping increase Mardi Gras economic impact on New Orleans. “Since the 1970s, however, Mardi Gras has become a year round industry with hundreds of local residents employed in float building, museums, and the production of souvenirs, books and histories of the celebration,” Gotham observes.¹¹⁸ Parade and souvenir guides of Carnival, such as *Arthur Hardy’s Mardi Gras Guide*, have become incredibly popular since the 1960s. Mardi Gras and the trade in throws have become marketing events for the city of New Orleans and its economy. Thus, Mardi Gras had fully moved into a capitalist state of mind as the celebration continued to distance itself from the old line krewes’ feudal ways.

During the 1960s, the absence of parade festivities on the weekend preceding Mardi Gras was considered a problem for businesses that benefitted from the tourist economy. In 1968, a

¹¹⁵ Carnival traditionalists are those who believe that Mardi Gras should still be like it was in the 19th century. They believe the power of Mardi Gras is in the artistry of the pageant and that commercialization, and sometimes throws, distract from the beauty and enjoyment of the parade. Wayne Phillips (Curator, Louisiana State Museum) interview by author, New Orleans, LA, April 20, 2010.

¹¹⁶ Kevin Fox Gotham, *Authentic New Orleans: Tourism, Culture and Race in the Big Easy* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 188.

¹¹⁷ Kevin Fox Gotham, “Tourism from Above and Below: Globalization, Localization and New Orleans’s Mardi Gras,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 29 (2005): 313.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, 313.

group of local businessmen and civic leaders founded the Krewe of Bacchus expressly to draw larger crowds to the city; Bacchus was the first of the so-called “super krewes.”¹¹⁹ Owen Brennan Sr. recognized the need for wider participation in Mardi Gras and thus proposed a parade to give a lift to Carnival; to do so, the founders chose to elect a celebrity monarch, a Mardi Gras innovation, for their parade each year.¹²⁰ “[The founders of Bacchus] recognized a definite need for a catalytic event to bolster what they considered a sagging public interest in Carnival, particularly on Carnival Sunday. Following evening after evening of pageantry, parade-less Sunday night became a let-down for residents and visitors keyed up in mounting anticipation of Fat Tuesday’s grand crescendo,” Bacchus historian Myron Tassin notes.¹²¹

The founders, or “young turks,” also recognized that the old line krewes’ members-only functions discouraged tourists from visiting and spending in New Orleans.¹²² According to Tassin, “Guidelines were hammered out. Bacchus would in no way be social — no court, maids, queens, dukes. No tableaux. There would be no attempt to infringe upon any aspect of the aristocratic structure of Mardi Gras. Bacchus would simply seek to become the Hadacol that would fortify this festival of festivals by making Sunday night an evening to remember by New Orleanians and visitors alike, rather than the comedown that it had become.”¹²³ The krewe would create a parade like no one had seen before, thus ensuring that Bacchus would attract visitors and tourists.

¹¹⁹ Wayne Phillips (Curator, Louisiana State Museum) interview by author, New Orleans, LA, April 20, 2010.

¹²⁰ Myron Tassin and Gaspar “Buddy” Stall, *Mardi Gras and Bacchus: Something Old, Something New* (New Orleans: Pelican Publishing Company, 1984), 59-60.

¹²¹ Myron Tassin, *Bacchus* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, 1975), 21.

¹²² Myron Tassin and Gaspar “Buddy” Stall, *Mardi Gras and Bacchus: Something Old, Something New* (New Orleans: Pelican Publishing Company, 1984), 59.

¹²³ Dudley Leblanc invented Hadacol over sixty years ago, as a “cure-all” elixir, which contained 12% alcohol. Jeremy Alford, “Dudley Leblanc and the Hadacol Boogie,” *The Independent Weekly*, December 3, 2006 under <http://web.archive.org/web/20061231231115/http://www.theind.com/cover2.asp?CID=1231528333> (accessed March 14, 2011). Myron Tassin, *Bacchus* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, 1975), 23.

One of Bacchus's mandates was that it put an emphasis on the throws, specifically beads, so Bacchus became a draw for large crowds.¹²⁴ "All energies would pour into staging, to the best of the krewe's abilities and resources, the finest, biggest, best parade with the largest and most imaginative, animated floats in the history of Mardi Gras. The number of favors, beads and doubloons tossed to the crowd would eclipse anything ever before witnessed," Tassin states.¹²⁵ Many went to the parade those first several years because of the quantity of the throws.¹²⁶

The Krewe of Endymion soon followed Bacchus's lead, and evolved from a small neighborhood parade founded in 1966 into a super krewe itself, emphasizing the throws as never before.¹²⁷ Endymion featured its first celebrity king in 1974, Doc Severinson of the *Tonight Show*, and hosted its first "Extravaganza."¹²⁸ Endymion's Extravaganza and Bacchus's Rendezvous allowed the general public entrée for the first time as participants and not merely spectators into the previously restricted world of Carnival balls. Full participation was afforded simply for the cost of admission.¹²⁹ The Krewe of Orpheus, founded in 1993, became the third super krewe, and quickly followed the path of the first two, with an abundance of throws, celebrity monarchs and an open ball.¹³⁰ The friendly rivalries between Bacchus, Endymion, and later Orpheus, to make their parades even more spectacular, drew larger crowds to Mardi Gras than ever

¹²⁴Errol Laborde (Editor in Chief- Renaissance Publishing Company, Author) interview by author, New Orleans, LA, April 12, 2010.

¹²⁵ Myron Tassin, *Bacchus* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, 1975), 23.

¹²⁶ Ibid, 23.

¹²⁷ Errol Laborde (Editor in Chief- Renaissance Publishing Company, Author) interview by author, New Orleans, LA, April 12, 2010.

¹²⁸ The Endymion Extravaganza is Endymion's version of the traditional Carnival Ball. The Extravaganza, like Bacchus's Rendezvous, is open to the general public and not only the elite of New Orleans. James Gill, *The Lords of Misrule: Mardi Gras and the Politics of Race in New Orleans* (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1997), 212.

¹²⁹ Leonard V. Huber. *Mardi Gras: A Pictorial History of Carnival in New Orleans*. Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, 1977, 66.

¹³⁰ The Krewe of Orpheus was in fact founded by a celebrity, singer and actor, Harry Connick Jr.

before. This exchange of currency encouraged those same audience participants to spend hard-earned dollars while they were enjoying Carnival in New Orleans.

The building of the Superdome in the early 1970s further changed the face of Carnival. The Superdome was created for both the New Orleans Saints and New Orleans Carnival.¹³¹ Endymion, followed soon by Bacchus, paraded through the Superdome shortly after it opened.¹³² By 1975, float builder Blaine Kern had planned “a giant block party” in the Superdome, consisting of several parading krewes joined together to celebrate Mardi Gras.¹³³ New Orleans was becoming a tourist destination as never before. The super-krewes’ escalation in the number of throws encouraged other krewes to follow suit. A *Times-Picayune* article from 1974 states that the Krewe of Zeus, founded in 1957, promised to become Jefferson Parish’s first ever super-krewe, with larger floats and more throws.¹³⁴

The beads have their own distinctive history. It is unknown where the first glass beads, from the early 1900s through the 1930s, were manufactured. The only surviving glass beads today date from after WWII because of the delicate nature of the beads. The first surviving glass beads thrown during parades, were manufactured in WWII Japan; later, Czechoslovakia manufactured beads, also glass, during the 1950s and 1960s.¹³⁵ These glass beads lasted through the 1960s, before plastic beads started to appear.¹³⁶ Local legend suggests that an ordinance was

¹³¹ J. Mark Souther, *New Orleans on Parade: Tourism and the Transformation of the Crescent City* (Louisiana State University Press: Baton Rouge, 2006), 163.

¹³² James Gill, *The Lords of Misrule: Mardi Gras and the Politics of Race in New Orleans* (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1997), 156, 212.

¹³³ John Alan Simon, “Newcomer Dome Meets Old Man Mardi Gras,” *Times-Picayune*, August 24, 1975, in America’s Historical Newspapers Database, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.ezproxy.uno.edu/iw-search/we/HistArchive/> (accessed February 10, 2011).

¹³⁴ “Zeus, Proteus Parade Tonight,” *Times-Picayune*, February 25, 1974, in America’s Historical Newspapers Database, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.ezproxy.uno.edu/iw-search/we/HistArchive/> (accessed February 10, 2011).

¹³⁵ Wayne Phillips (Curator, Louisiana State Museum) interview by author, New Orleans, LA, April 20, 2010.

¹³⁶ Arthur Hardy (Publisher of *Arthur Hardy’s Mardi Gras Guide*) interview by author, New Orleans, LA, April 19,

passed against glass beads, because of the danger of them breaking in crowds as they were thrown (the Japanese beads broke especially easily) but there is no evidence of any such local restrictions.¹³⁷ Rather, it is likely that political turmoil in Czechoslovakia in the 1960s, as well as the development of plastic, a sturdier and cheaper substitute, prompted the change.¹³⁸

The change to plastic beads helped super krewes like Bacchus and Endymion throw more than ever before. The more expensive glass beads were heavier to transport and more breakable, so paradegoers before the changeover were lucky if they caught one strand, unlike the bags of plastic beads that parade crowds go home with today. In the late 1950s, paradegoers could ensure that their the child did not leave the parade disappointed by keeping a strand of beads hidden in their pocket, in case their child did not catch one.¹³⁹ From an early age, New Orleans children are taught to wave their arms high in the air as floats pass and yell “Throw me something, Mister!” A 1968 souvenir Mardi Gras magazine, published just before the days of the super krewes, states, “What a thrill it is for a little boy or girl to actually catch one of the ‘throws!’ ”¹⁴⁰

Plastic beads were also much more affordable, at a time when krewes were starting to pass those expenses on to their members.¹⁴¹ Phillips notes, “The priorities of spending changed. The krewes were starting to put more on the individual members financially, so the members started

2010.

¹³⁷ There have, however, been ordinances passed that prohibit the throwing of Zulu coconuts and spears, because of the potential danger to the crowd. The Krewe of Zulu themselves, also strongly reinforce this policy, as each coconut can weigh up to two pounds, and when thrown, have seriously injured people. Arthur Hardy (Publisher of *Arthur Hardy's Mardi Gras Guide*) interview by author, New Orleans, LA, April 19, 2010.

¹³⁸ Arthur Hardy (Publisher of *Arthur Hardy's Mardi Gras Guide*) interview by author, New Orleans, LA, April 19, 2010.

¹³⁹ The practice was exhibited by retired University of New Orleans archivist Clive Hardy when he brought his children to parades in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Michael Mizell-Nelson (Historian, University of New Orleans) interview by author, New Orleans, LA, March 8, 2011.

¹⁴⁰ Mrs. Victor H. “Sunny” Schiro, “Throw Me Something, Mister!” *Mardi Gras: In New Orleans* no 6, 1968.

¹⁴¹ Wayne Phillips (Curator, Louisiana State Museum) interview by author, New Orleans, LA, April 20, 2010.

spending more on throws.”¹⁴² The cut rate prices of plastic beads made it feasible for riders to purchase more throws, as the super krewes began to heighten paradegoers’ expectations.

The change to plastic beads also helped to further cement the capitalistic nature of New Orleans’s Mardi Gras. True capitalism requires a mass market and mass consumption, which plastic beads provided. Though the earlier glass beads had opened up the market greatly, plastic beads provided the means for much greater consumption by the masses. Plastic beads not only affected an economic change on Carnival, but also a marketing one. Super-krewes were now able to infuse Carnival with sustaining wealth, creating their own mass market and mass consumption. This drew even larger crowds to the city and opened Mardi Gras up across class lines, in a way not seen since the early days in New Orleans. Plastic beads revolutionized Mardi Gras, giving Mardi Gras a mass market and cultural capital as never before.

This modern facet of throw culture, where everyone leaves the parade with sacks full of goodies, has transformed parade traditions. Float builders have had to build new thirty-ton chassis to support all of the throws.¹⁴³ Because of the increase in throws, people can now be pickier about which throws they want to pursue. When people feel they have been slighted, by being thrown the “cheap beads,” they will sometimes throw the beads back at the rider, or not even bother to pick them up at all.¹⁴⁴ Often, after parades pass, piles of the lesser beads can be seen lying on the street. One of the more remarkable traditions that developed out of this tendency is the annual pelting of the Krewe of Bacchus’s Kong family. The krewe has three rider-less floats,

¹⁴² Wayne Phillips (Curator, Louisiana State Museum) interview by author, New Orleans, LA, April 20, 2010.

¹⁴³ Dave Thier, “Bead Recycling Program Gives New Life to Carnival Throws,” *AOL News*, March 11, 2011 under <http://www.aolnews.com/2011/03/11/bead-recycling-program-gives-new-life-to-mardi-gras-throws/> (accessed March 14, 2011).

¹⁴⁴ Beads usually fall into one of three categories: cheap beads, good beads, and pearls (the best). Laurie A. Wilkie, “Beads and Breasts: The Negotiation of Roles and Power at New Orleans Mardi Gras,” in *Beads and Bead Makers: Gender, Material Culture and Meaning*, eds. Lidia D. Sciama and Joanne B. Eicher (Oxford: Berg, 1998), 195.

made up of the Kongs, whose only purpose now seems to be as target practice for those dissatisfied with their beads. Every year, when the Kong floats pass by, the crowd excitedly grabs the “cheap beads” they did not want minutes before, and tries their aim at the floats.¹⁴⁵ Bacchus thus allows the crowd to rid themselves of their unwanted currency without hurting anyone on an occupied float by hurling the beads back immediately. This reflects a sophisticated banker adjustment in the Carnival economy.

Mardi Gras cups are another of the most popular throws of the parade season. Corrado Giacona II invented the “throw cup” in 1980 and the cups were an immediate hit.¹⁴⁶ According to a local journalist, “Within three years of those first cups, everybody was throwing them.”¹⁴⁷ Throw cups reproduce the theme or royalty of each parade, which make them another souvenir of Carnival. Gina Giacona Lynch, the daughter of the cup’s inventor and the Vice-President and COO of Giacona Container Corporation, refers to the cups as “New Orleans fine crystal.”¹⁴⁸ Throw cups are so popular because they prove to be useful year round, long after the parades have finished, unlike most throws.

Doubloons, beads, and krewe-specific throws are sought after items and there is often debate about which one is the better throw. Other throws are popular, such as cups and stuffed animals; however, the earlier three seem to be the most desirable. The enticement of Mardi Gras, in a sense, began to center around the specific throws themselves, and the social values these throws afford the revelers, which helps increase the desire for tourists to come to New Orleans for

¹⁴⁵ The remake of the King Kong movie in 1976 could have been the inspiration for the floats. Sometimes people get caught up in the spirit and throw even “good” beads at the Kong floats. Traditionally, getting the beads to land in King Kong’s mouth is the sign of a true marksman. This is also a reflection of the abundance of throws.

¹⁴⁶ Gina Giacona Lynch (Vice-President and COO of Giacona Container Corp.) email message to author, New Orleans, LA, March 14, 2011.

¹⁴⁷ Judy Walker, “Throw-Cup King,” *Times-Picayune*, March 17, 2011.

¹⁴⁸ Giacona Lynch was quoting New Orleans television personality Frank Davis. Gina Giacona Lynch (Vice-President and COO of Giacona Container Corp.) email message to author, New Orleans, LA, March 14, 2011.

Mardi Gras. One of the main aspects of tourism, after all, is the souvenir business; and what better souvenir is there than a piece of the currency of Carnival itself?

The Krewe of Muses, a relatively new, all female krewe, has elevated the signature throw tradition to a new level. One of the largest and most powerful krewes in Carnival, Muses was founded in 2000. Muses's own version of a signature throw borrows from the Zulu coconuts. The members use glitter to decorate old shoes which have become incredibly popular.¹⁴⁹ The first year that the krewe threw their signature shoes, in 2005, they had prepared over a thousand hand decorated shoes.¹⁵⁰ According to Captain Staci Rosenberg, "Our ultimate goal is to contribute to the rich history of Mardi Gras."¹⁵¹ This "rich history of Mardi Gras" includes, of course, the currency of Carnival. The fact that their throws are so popular gives them a commanding presence within the Mardi Gras economy. In fact, it can be said that because the krewe's currency is so popular, they have a broader crowd base for the ritual of exchange and therefore a higher Carnival capital. Muses, with their lavish throws and floats, should be viewed as a fourth super-krewe, giving paraders a total of four nights of overabundance. Muses, along with other 21st century krewes, have helped broaden the types of signature throws.

This sense of overabundance of throws has continued and taken a new direction in the 1990s and 2000s. Most krewes now want "specialty" throws to toss. The trend has become "named" throws. Every krewe wants to have something with their name and/or theme on it, other than doubloons and cups.¹⁵² "Among the new items flying off floats this year are smart phone covers, light-up barrettes, insulated lunch bags, vuvuzelas, luggage tags, fly swatters, electronic

¹⁴⁹ Arthur Hardy, *Mardi Gras in New Orleans: An Illustrated History 3rd ed.* (New Orleans: Arthur Hardy Enterprises, 2007), 101.

¹⁵⁰ Karen Sommer Shalett, "A Rully Big Shoe," *Times-Picayune*, February 2, 2005.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² Michelle Krupa, "Krewes' Oohs and Ahs," *Times-Picayune*, March 2, 2011.

pinwheels and sunglasses with separate flip-up visors for each lens,” according to local journalist Michelle Krupa, writing about the 2011 season.¹⁵³ Muses had thirty items displaying its own logo in 2011 and it leads in the creation of innovative throws.¹⁵⁴ The increasing popularity of these new throws helps to increase the economic impact of Mardi Gras as well, as the more riders spend on beads, the more return New Orleans sees.

New Orleans’s Mardi Gras has become a globally recognized event. The Disney Corporation has even gotten into the act, replicating “Mardi Gras” at their theme parks. In turn, Universal Studios now does the same. International corporations specifically schedule their New Orleans conventions to coincide with Mardi Gras. The plastic beads and other throws have become a global market unto themselves.¹⁵⁵

These plastic beads, while once manufactured in Hong Kong, are now made in China, by workers earning less than \$65 a month.¹⁵⁶ According to documentary filmmaker David Redmon, “Roger [Wong’s] father started the factory in Hong Kong in 1962, where a free market economy existed. Roger returned to mainland China in 1984, when its government had opened its economy to capitalism.”¹⁵⁷ After they are produced at the factory, the beads are then shipped off to distributors, such as Beads by the Dozen and Accent Annex, who then sell them to the krewes and their riders. Some protest at the petro-chemical nature of the beads, as well as the exploitation

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Gwen Filosa, “Mardi Gras Throw Orders Rising, Krewe Captains Say,” *Times-Picayune*, February 1, 2010.

¹⁵⁵ David Redmon, *Mardi Gras: Made in China*, DVD, Produced and directed by David Redmon, Carnivalesque Films, 2005.

¹⁵⁶ In comparison, the flambeaux carriers, who collect money from the crowd as they march (though their position is mostly ceremonial these days), can make a small fortune each parade from the money tossed by the watching crowd. David Redmon, *Mardi Gras: Made in China*, DVD, Produced and directed by David Redmon, Carnivalesque Films, 2005.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

of Chinese workers, but few paradegoers pay any notice. Most of the members of the crowd have no concern for where the beads originate.¹⁵⁸

Some corporations have doubloons specially printed with coupons or discounts on them, much the way that corporations use their logos on beads to advertise. The most notable of these doubloons was the one made for Popeye's Chicken in 1976. Popeye's founder, Al Copeland, reported six years later that because of the 100,000 doubloons tossed, over 250 tons of chicken had been sold.¹⁵⁹ In 2003, the Krewe of Argus tossed special blue doubloons featuring artist George Rodrigue's "blue dog." The person who caught the gold doubloon was able to redeem it for one of Rodrigue's prints, worth over \$1,000.¹⁶⁰ Thus, throws really do become currency, in that they are sometimes assigned a promotional value. Such corporate involvement is not sanctioned by old line krewes.¹⁶¹

Although they understand the role that free enterprise played in the evolution of New Orleans's Mardi Gras customs, Carnival traditionalists greatly dislike the capitalism and commercialism of Carnival.¹⁶² Traditionalists feel that the capitalistic market damaged Mardi Gras. Nevertheless, this capitalist economy of throws and tourism keeps Mardi Gras afloat today. Without the increasing commercialization of Carnival, neither the krewes, nor their riders, would likely have the means to maintain the spectacle that the traditionalists love. Many of the old line krewes still parading today claim to have not given in to commercialism, thus, remaining true to Mardi Gras's roots. Many have not taken on corporate sponsorships; they have, however, all

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ J. Mark Souther, *New Orleans on Parade: Tourism and the Transformation of the Crescent City* (Louisiana State University Press: Baton Rouge, 2006), 156.

¹⁶⁰ Elizabeth Mullener, "Hot Throws," *Times-Picayune*, February 26, 2003.

¹⁶¹ Arthur Hardy (Publisher of *Arthur Hardy's Mardi Gras Guide*) interview by author, New Orleans, LA, April 19, 2010.

¹⁶² Carnival traditionalists refer to the old line krewe period, from the 1850s to the 1960s, as the Golden Age of Mardi Gras. This is not the oldest version of Mardi Gras, however.

succumbed to the economy of throws and tourism, by spending and throwing more, to retain an aspect of their Carnival power in a new age.

The average spending has increased dramatically. In a 1955 *Times-Picayune* article, local journalist and author Pie Dufour stated that the average rider spent about \$35.00 dollars on throws, but many spent well over \$100.¹⁶³ Today, the lower end of the average cost, in beads, for a rider is now about \$500; however, some riders have been known to spend thousands of dollars on their throws alone — all to just ‘throw’ them away, often to complete strangers.¹⁶⁴ Today, the average Krewe of Orpheus rider spends around \$1,100 on throws, though some spend up to \$5,000, aside from krewe dues.¹⁶⁵ The average Krewe of Rex rider, by conservative estimate spends \$1,000 to \$2,000 on throws, in addition to krewe dues.¹⁶⁶ As the economy of Mardi Gras’s parades increased the amount of beads that people were catching, so the tourism economy of the city seemed to increase. “The consumption of Mardi Gras beads... has been retooled for mass production and mass consumption,” Gotham states.¹⁶⁷ The increase in beads and throws allowed the city’s dramatic increase in market economy.

As far back as 1939, Mardi Gras was counted as the biggest business in New Orleans, in that it put more money into “all-round unrestrained circulation” than any other business.¹⁶⁸ Mardi Gras as a business has only continued to grow, especially for those in the throw industry. “For some area businesses, this routine dispatching of cheap plastic has the gleam of gold,” according to

¹⁶³ Pie Dufour, “Mardi Gras Quiz Time,” *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans: February 13, 1955), page 44, in America’s Historical Newspapers Database, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.ezproxy.uno.edu/iw-search/we/HistArchive/> (accessed February 10, 2011).

¹⁶⁴ David Redmon, *Mardi Gras: Made in China*, DVD, Produced and directed by David Redmon, Carnavalesque Films, 2005.

¹⁶⁵ The author surveyed over 100 Orpheus riders on March 7, 2011.

¹⁶⁶ Stephen W. Hales (The Krewe of Rex’s Historian) email message to author, New Orleans, LA, March 16, 2011.

¹⁶⁷ Kevin Fox Gotham, *Authentic New Orleans: Tourism, Culture and Race in the Big Easy* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 179.

¹⁶⁸ Perry Young, *Carnival and Mardi Gras in New Orleans* (New Orleans: Harmanson, 1939), 54.

a local journalist.¹⁶⁹ Giacona Lynch states that the throw business generates tens of millions of dollars each year and the amount of orders her company is receiving are not slowing down.¹⁷⁰ “Membership numbers and throw orders aren’t just steady, they’re rising, said several krewe captains, whose faithful riders will each plunk down at least \$1,000 in throws alone,” states *Times-Picayune* writer Gwen Filosa.¹⁷¹

Beads By the Dozen, another local throw supplier, is just as busy. Dan Kelly, the company’s founder, says they import more than 8 million pounds of plastic a year and do more than \$10 million a year in business.¹⁷² According to journalist Allan Katz, “The fact is that Carnival has become a center of the Metro New Orleans economy, creating jobs — designing and building floats, selling throws, creating costumes, working in the tourism industry — and in effect, becoming an industry unto itself.”¹⁷³

Economist James McLain has conducted several studies on the economic impact of Mardi Gras on both Orleans and Jefferson Parishes. Between 1987 and 2000, the last year he analyzed, his findings document a marked difference in the spending and revenue for Mardi Gras. A dramatic increase is visible in the total amount spent, the total revenue, and the number of visitors to New Orleans. The overall revenue resulting from Carnival in New Orleans jumped from \$11,890,528 in 1987 to \$55,734,383 in 2000.¹⁷⁴ The economic impact from Mardi Gras was \$275

¹⁶⁹ Kathy Finn, “Beads as a Business,” *New Orleans*, February 2011, 46.

¹⁷⁰ Gina Giacona Lynch (Vice-President and COO of Giacona Container Corp.) email message to author, New Orleans, LA, March 14, 2011.

¹⁷¹ Gwen Filosa, “Mardi Gras Throw Orders Rising, Krewe Captains Say,” *Times-Picayune*, February 1, 2010.

¹⁷² Kathy Finn, “Beads as a Business,” *New Orleans*, February 2011, 46.

¹⁷³ Allan Katz, “Economy of Mardi Gras,” *Arthur Hardy’s Mardi Gras Guide*, 1991, 42.

¹⁷⁴ James McLain, *The Economics of Mardi Gras- 1987* (New Orleans: Carnival Krewe Civic Foundation, Inc., 1988), 3. James McLain, *Mardi Gras 2000: It’s Economic Impact* (New Orleans: The Mayor’s Mardi Gras Advisory Committee, 2001), 1.

million in 1987 and reached over a billion dollars in 2000, and it continues to grow.¹⁷⁵ “But most important, of course,” McLain notes, “is the year-round economic impact for the city, whose tourist industry benefits from New Orleans’s image as America’s city of revelry.”¹⁷⁶

Source: James McLain’s Mardi Gras economics reports, 1987-2000.

Year	Total Direct Spending for Orleans Parish	Throw Spending for Greater New Orleans area	Total Throw Revenue for Orleans Parish	Total Revenues Generated for Orleans Parish	Number of Tourists Staying in Hotels for Orleans Parish	Number of Day-Tripper Tourists for Orleans Parish
1986	\$239,200,000	-----	\$192,283	\$11,890,528	231,000	524,000
1987	\$275,299,500	\$9,075,000	\$197,832	\$14,323,327	264,800	591,400
1999	\$455,649,171	\$15,600,000	\$118,936	\$49,706,694	488,733	1,880,000
2000	\$1,056,100,000	\$9,900,000	\$123,750	\$55,734,383	985,890	2,240,000

The driving factor behind all of this attention to Mardi Gras tourism is, of course, New Orleans’s economy. Mardi Gras spending has hit an all-time high, but so has the return on the investment, since the tourism push of the late 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. According to Tulane professor Paul Spindt, “For every dollar the city spends, it gets \$4.48 back. That’s not a bad investment. Any time you’re getting that kind of return, you’re doing pretty good.”¹⁷⁷ The cost of the throws for riders, as previously stated, has dramatically increased as well.

Once in New Orleans, the beads become a kind of currency unto themselves, as do the other throws. Riders’ disperse throws to the waiting crowds of paradegoers, who then wear them to show what they have accumulated. The throws amassed show off the wealth of the recipient, using the seasonal currency of Mardi Gras and the city of New Orleans. According to Shrum and Kilburn, “In the sacred world of Carnival the central motivation and the need for associated

¹⁷⁵ James McLain, *Mardi Gras 2000: It’s Economic Impact* (New Orleans: The Mayor’s Mardi Gras Advisory Committee, 2001), 1.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 27.

¹⁷⁷ Ian McNulty, “Bead Counters: Carnival’s Economic Impact” in *New Orleans* 44, February 2010, 30.

performances remain constant. However, the motivation is transferred to the accumulation of ritual currency that has special value of a limited time. The most significant tokens, or ritual objects, are long strings of plastic beads, which acquire worth exclusively during Mardi Gras.”¹⁷⁸ Once Carnival is over, the beads, for most people become worthless again, and can often be found decorating the streets. However, like “garbage pickers” found in dumpsters around the world, one finds people collecting the rejected beads from the streets as well as using poles to pick beads from the branches. These throws will often be recycled through use in future parades.

Some people go to extremes to get the best haul of Mardi Gras currency — namely beads — and are willing to flash and expose body parts for the better ones. “A ritualized linkage between long beads and nudity was established no earlier than the mid-1970s and spread so rapidly that there is no firm evidence of a unique origin,” Shrum and Kilburn observe.¹⁷⁹ The flashers are driven by the competition for the wealth of Mardi Gras and their desire to display their superior position in the cultural economy.¹⁸⁰ During Mardi Gras, beads are the main form of wealth, and those who control the wealth have the ability to attempt to control others.¹⁸¹ Wilkie notes, “The central focus is public disrobement, a ritual interpreted in terms of cultural codes involving market relations, gender and hierarchy. What seems to be mere debauchery is an expression of moral commitment to an economic system in which conventional notions of gender and hierarchy are deeply imbedded.”¹⁸² In a sense, flashers are willing to briefly sell their body in order to acquire

¹⁷⁸ Wesley Shrum and John Kilburn, “Ritual Disrobement at Mardi Gras: Ceremonial Exchange and Moral Order,” *Social Forces* 75, no. 2 (1996): 429, under <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2580408> (accessed February 13, 2010).

¹⁷⁹ Wesley Shrum and John Kilburn, “Ritual Disrobement at Mardi Gras: Ceremonial Exchange and Moral Order,” *Social Forces* 75, no. 2 (1996): 430, under <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2580408> (accessed February 13, 2010).

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 434.

¹⁸¹ Laurie A. Wilkie, “Beads and Breasts: The Negotiation of Roles and Power at New Orleans Mardi Gras,” in *Beads and Bead Makers: Gender, Material Culture and Meaning*, eds. Lidia D. Sciana and Joanne B. Eicher (Oxford: Berg, 1998), 202.

¹⁸² *Ibid*, 423.

Carnival wealth. According to historian Joseph Roach, “The ritualized adornment of ‘Bead Whores’ is a stunning condensation... [of] the creation of an auction community motivated by the transformation of gifts into commodities.”¹⁸³

The value of these throws is prized by these women so that commercializing themselves during Mardi Gras is no longer an issue.¹⁸⁴ In fact, these women have created their own economy of Mardi Gras — that of choice. Shrum and Kilburn assert, “Here participants gain control over the exchange, making possible the exercise of personal choice in negotiated transactions.”¹⁸⁵ The crowd participating in the exchange of wealth by watching a parade simply does not have the measure of choice that the flashers do. The women who flash do not see themselves as morally bankrupt; rather, they see themselves as taking control of their own bodies.¹⁸⁶ Flashers, by taking capitalistic control over their bodies, have asserted a level of economic independence in Carnival that is matchless.

Companies such as *Girls Gone Wild*, who film flashers and sell the footage, trade on this economic capital and have helped make this French Quarter tradition mainstream. This facilitated a change in the national perception of New Orleans’s Mardi Gras. Flashing has also helped to draw the attention of the earlier mentioned sponsorship corporations and helped to bring even more tourists’ attention to the city.¹⁸⁷ Thus, once again, the ritual currency of Mardi Gras

¹⁸³ Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 256.

¹⁸⁴ The word “women” is used because while there are some male flashers, by and large it is a female economy. Wesley Shrum and John Kilburn, “Ritual Disrobement at Mardi Gras: Ceremonial Exchange and Moral Order,” *Social Forces* 75, no. 2 (1996): 434, under <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2580408> (accessed February 13, 2010).

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 435.

¹⁸⁶ Laurie A. Wilkie, “Beads and Breasts: The Negotiation of Roles and Power at New Orleans Mardi Gras,” in *Beads and Bead Makers: Gender, Material Culture and Meaning*, eds. Lidia D. Sciamia and Joanne B. Eicher (Oxford: Berg, 1998), 207.

¹⁸⁷ Kevin Fox Gotham, “Contrasts of Carnival: Mardi Gras Between the Modern and the Postmodern,” in *Illuminating Social Life*, ed. Peter Kivisto (London: Pine Forge Press, 2007), 293.

helped to develop and developed in accordance with, the tourism economy of New Orleans. In this way, the capitalism of flashing has become a female economy of Mardi Gras, which the tourism market feeds by providing a willing labor pool.

One of the older methods of determining Mardi Gras's economic success was by examining the size of the trash left behind. This trash is composed of discarded throws, usually ones that people missed or dropped, and empty beverage and food containers. These dropped throws do not have the same value as throws that are caught in the air. Likewise, once the parade and/or Mardi Gras is over, even the caught throws no longer carry the same worth. Local journalist Ian McNulty states, "We don't place any value on [the throws], so when we take them home, they might get lost or thrown away and they don't mean anything to us [afterwards]."¹⁸⁸

While the throws have great meaning during Carnival, enough so that people will fight over them to determine the right of possession, once Mardi Gras is over, they go back to being just cheap plastic objects; their value as currency for the city is for a limited time. The better beads and specialty throws, though, do continue to hold value. According to Gill, "The crowds competed ferociously to catch the throws, reaching frenzy..."¹⁸⁹ Author Robert Tallant tells of a parade he witnessed where a man from the crowd attempted to grab beads from a rider before he had thrown them. "The masker jumped to the ground, swung his left, and sent the greedy spectator crashing to the pavement, then ran and reboarded his float, all without moving his mask an inch."¹⁹⁰ Yet, just a few weeks later, such throws will lose most of their economic value to the city until the next Carnival season.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ James Gill, *The Lords of Misrule: Mardi Gras and the Politics of Race in New Orleans* (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1997), 10.

¹⁹⁰ Robert Tallant, *Mardi Gras: As It Was* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, 1947), 204.

Some people, and krewes, recycle throws to use at later dates (such as for other parades). Krewe of Iris rider, Allie Drouant, states that she will save any throw she catches that does not have a logo or another krewe's emblem on it to "re-throw" during Iris. She seeks out these throws because buying new throws is very expensive.¹⁹¹ Riders of truck parades often do the same thing. Truck parades are parades wherein the riders design and build floats on flatbed trucks. These floats are homemade and pulled by semi-trucks. Members are usually organized by individual floats, which ban together every year to parade. During the 2011 St. Patrick's Day parade in Metairie, Louisiana, about a week after Mardi Gras, riders were re-throwing goods they had caught in previous parades, sometimes from years before.

Also, non-profit organizations, such as Arc of Greater New Orleans and St. Michael's Special School, have bead recycling programs. Every year, they collect beads and then mentally challenged adults and children sort the beads, which are then resold to fund these charitable programs.¹⁹² In the instance of recycling, Carnival currency retains a value long after Mardi Gras, though this currency is worth less than the brand-new, hottest throws.

Those unfamiliar with New Orleans customs and ways often ask why people on the floats would give things away for free, and why the crowd goes crazy for these throws.¹⁹³ An extraordinary exchange goes on between the rider and the people — the relationship and the power of giving someone what they want; it becomes all about the moment of acquisition or withholding. According to Phillips, "There is something about riding on a float and looking down on people —

¹⁹¹ Allie Drouant (Krewe of Iris rider) interview by author, New Orleans, LA, March 4, 2011.

¹⁹² Dave Thier, "Bead Recycling Program Gives New Life to Carnival Throws," *AOL News*, March 11, 2011 under <http://www.aolnews.com/2011/03/11/bead-recycling-program-gives-new-life-to-mardi-gras-throws/> (accessed March 14, 2011).

¹⁹³ Wayne Phillips (Curator, Louisiana State Museum) interview by author, New Orleans, LA, April 20, 2010. Errol Laborde (Editor in Chief- Renaissance Publishing Company, Author) interview by author, New Orleans, LA, April 12, 2010.

the masses begging for cheap ridiculous things. It is an overt feeling, that goes all the way back to the first float based parade — Comus — who had decided that Mardi Gras was getting out of hand, so they created floats to get their members off the ground — above the people and the crowd.”¹⁹⁴

This exchange of power between the rider and the crowd is a relationship of give and take. Being on a float is a privilege, granted to a select few, that makes the people riding want to spend money to uphold the tradition and to have the power to make the exchange.¹⁹⁵ “Thus, paradegoers are anything but passive onlookers; they taunt, beg and chastise the masked riders for their generosity or stinginess with throws; in fact the phrase, ‘Throw me something, Mister!’ has become synonymous with the crazed excitement of a Mardi Gras parade,” McLain notes.¹⁹⁶ Regardless of the reasons, throws are what make Mardi Gras for New Orleans.

Mardi Gras throws have a long and venerated history, dating to the days of Reconstruction. Throws have developed into an essential part of the celebration, and are imbued with value by both tourists and locals alike. In their poem, “The Throw’s the Thing,” Brod Bagert and Charlie Smith show how important throws have become. The poem states,

“In the hands of a rider the beads are all pearls,
Riches and prizes for good boys and girls.
But custom is hard to transmit or explain
So just accept this, the main rule of the game:
The value goes down
When the throw hits the ground.
The catch is the thing
On the run on the wing.
It’s easy to wait till the crowd settles down,
To skulk in the back

¹⁹⁴ Wayne Phillips (Curator, Louisiana State Museum) interview by author, New Orleans, LA, April 20, 2010.

¹⁹⁵ Wayne Phillips (Curator, Louisiana State Museum) interview by author, New Orleans, LA, April 20, 2010.

¹⁹⁶ James McLain, *Mardi Gras 2000: It’s Economic Impact* (New Orleans: Mayor’s Mardi Gras Advisory Committee, 2001), 21.

And pick beads off the ground.
 But you're missing the point,
 The throw-something rule:
 Catching's the prize,
 The throw's just the tool.
 So next week in Sheboygan
 Your neighbors will ask
 Why you risked life and limb
 For some hideous mask?
 Broke your hand catching beads
 Worth five dollars a gross,
 And vied with your children
 For who caught the most?
 So puh-leez
 Don't tell your friends on the country club scene
 How you beat up old ladies and ruptured your spleen
 Catching beads!
 Silly trinkets now gathering dust.
 Ah, you must have gone crazy,
 Temporarily nuts!"¹⁹⁷

From the mid-19th century, the throws have converted New Orleans's Carnival from merely a series of parades to a moving theater of participants — locals and tourists, rich and poor, insider and outsider. Mardi Gras throws, in all their various incarnations, are the glue which holds the Carnival economy together. As New Orleans cultural commentator "Pie" Dufour remarked in 1966, "There are no two ways about it, given the floats and the riders; it's the throws and the crowd that makes a Carnival parade."¹⁹⁸ This culture of exchange, for the city's Carnival currency, is what helps New Orleans survive and see another Carnival season.

¹⁹⁷ Brod Bagert and Charlie Smith, "The Throw's the Thing," in *Throw Me Somethin' Mistuh! The Mardi Gras Book* (New Orleans: Juliahouse Publishing Company, 1995), 26.

¹⁹⁸ Pie Dufour, "Ingredients Set Our Parades Apart," *Times-Picayune*, January 30, 1966, in America's Historical Newspapers Database, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.ezproxy.uno.edu/iw-search/we/HistArchive/> (accessed October 2, 2010).

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