Recognition and Acceptance: An Examination of the Louisiana Volunteer Battalions on Line Jackson

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Recognition and Acceptance: An Examination of the Louisiana Volunteer Battalions on Line Jackson

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

by

Donald Keith Midkiff

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Abstract

This paper examines the motivators and legacy of the Louisiana volunteer units on Line Jackson during the winter of 1814-1815. Orleans Parish fielded three volunteer battalions to the final engagements: the Orleans Volunteers, and the First and Second Battalions of Free Men of Color. Two companies, Beale’s Rifles and a Baratarian artillery unit, were attached to the Orleans Volunteers under the command of Major Plauché. Each volunteer, both as an individual and as a unit, hoped to gain some benefit from military service beyond defense of their homes. This paper argues that each one sought recognition and acceptance from their community and from the republic for which they fought. The experience of Louisiana’s Creoles under both French and Spanish regimes held that military service was necessary to attain economic and social advantage. The Battle of New Orleans tested whether or not military service under the American republic provided the same benefit.

Keywords: Claiborne; Jackson; Savary; Plauché; Battle of New Orleans; Free People of Color; Baratarians; Militia.
Introduction

Modern American historians present the story of the Battle of New Orleans as a patriotic and celebratory ending to an ill-conceived and often ill-fought war. Major General Andrew Jackson is the usual focus of the story, leading his army of citizen soldiers against the professional army of a great world power. Nothing in the historical record can diminish Jackson’s role, but there is more to the story. Both British and American historians have looked at the military events surrounding the battle, yet few questioned the participation by local volunteer units from New Orleans. Theodore Roosevelt did ask the question in the last chapter of the second and subsequent editions of his history, The Naval War of 1812. Roosevelt questioned why black Creoles should volunteer to fight against what he saw as their own best interests. This paper will provide an answer to historian Roosevelt, not only about the motivation of the black Creole volunteers whom he called “pathetic,” but the white volunteers on Line Jackson¹ as well.²

Louisiana military historian Powell A. Casey noted that the Uniformed Battalion of Orleans Volunteers, although organized in 1805 under American law, could trace its origins back to “units which had existed under French and Spanish regimes.” The same could be said of the (First) Battalion of Free Men of Color. Both had come into being due to an existential threat to the young French colony from a series of Indian Wars. The only difference is that while the white volunteers grew in numbers and prestige during the American period, its black counterpart entered a period

¹ The term “Line Jackson” refers to the American defensive works constructed along the old Rodriguez saw-mill canal marking the upper property line of the Chalmet plantation.
of quasi-recognition until the state, in 1834, ended all black militia units with the repeal of the
1812 enabling legislation.³

The 1805 Territorial Militia Act made the volunteer companies exempt from compulsory
militia service required of all white male citizens between the age of sixteen and fifty, but service
in a volunteer company counted towards any current militia enlistment quota. While the law
allowed only white male citizens to register and serve in the militia, free people of color could and
did serve through voluntary enlistment in the Battalion of Free Men of Color.⁴

Four of the battalion’s five companies at the battle were composed of white Creoles from
Louisiana and Saint-Domingue. Paul Gelpi explains that the “upper ranks of [white Creole New
Orleans] society” provided the battalion’s officers while “the rank and file were members of the
[white] middle and working classes.” The fifth company of the Uniformed Battalion, the Louisiana
Blues, was composed of native and naturalized white Americans, that is, non-Creoles, and took its
name from a defunct unit, variously known as the “Volunteer Blues” and the “Battalion of Orleans
Blues,” which disbanded mid-January 1806.⁵

Troops of Antebellum Louisiana: A History of the Battalion of Free Men of Color* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana
⁴ Powell A. Casey, *Louisiana in the War of 1812* (Baton Rouge: Casey, 1963): 30; Ronald R. Morazan,
*Biographical Sketches of the Veterans of the Battalion of Orleans 1814-1815* (Legacy Publishing Company,
⁵ Paul D. Gelpi, Jr., “Mr. Jefferson’s Creoles: The Battalion d’Orléans and the Americanization of Creole Louisiana,
1803-1815,” *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* Vol. 48, No. 3 (Summer
Graham to the Secretary of State, May 8, 1806,” *The Territorial Papers of the United States Volume IX: The
640, 700, last modified May 12, 2019, accessed February 7, 2020, [https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.31210010646188](https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.31210010646188); William C. C. Claiborne and Dunbar Rowland, ed., *Official
Letter Book of W. C. C. Claiborne 1801 – 1816*, IV (Jackson, MS: Department of Archives and History, 1917,
Digitized by the Internet Archive): 32-33. Last modified May 1, 2010, Accessed February 6, 2020,
[https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nc01.arik://13960/t28923f55](https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nc01.arik://13960/t28923f55); Paul D. Gelpi, Jr., “Creole Troopers: The Battalion
da’Orléans and the Louisiana Militia System, 1803-1815.” MA Thesis. The University of New Orleans, 1994:
21-22; Gelpi, “Mr. Jefferson’s Creoles: The Battalion d’Orléans and the Americanization of Creole Louisiana,
1803-1815.”; 316.
Major Pierre Lacoste led the Battalion of Free Men of Color composed of black Louisiana Creoles. Lacoste had a long history of working with this militia going back to the Spanish period. When the Second Battalion of Free Men under Majors Louis D’Aquin and Joseph Savary mustered on December 19, 1814, the term “First” was added to the original battalion. The Second Battalion was composed primarily of Saint-Domingue Creoles. Governor Claiborne gave Joseph Savary the rank of Second Major for his work in recruiting 256 men to fight. Some contemporary sources refer to him as “Captain” Savary, but this former colonel in the French military on Saint-Domingue carried the rank of major in the Louisiana militia. Colonel Michael Fortier who, along with Major Lacoste, had served with the First Battalion since the Spanish period, was the nominal commander of both Battalions of Free Men of Color. Fortier’s declining health kept him from an active role with his command, but he did finance equipping the Second Battalion with refurbished muskets. Armed now with their own weapons, the Second Battalion mustered for duty with the American army on December 19, 1814.6

There were two semi-independent companies of volunteers on Line Jackson as well. Both are well-known but not always associated with Orleans Parish. Captain Thomas Beale, a native American, led a sharpshooter company of 68 non-Creoles, the Company of New Orleans Riflemen, otherwise known as “Beale’s Rifles.” Since they were all either native or naturalized Americans, they could have served with the Louisiana Blues, but instead maintained an independent status both during and after the battle. The second company not often thought of as being from Orleans were the sailors of Barataria that had served with the Lafitte brothers, Pierre and Jean, both of whom now worked for Andrew Jackson. These sailors volunteered to fight as gun crews under Captains Dominique Youx and Renato Beluche. Both volunteer companies, Beale’s Rifles and the

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Baratarian artillery, came under Major Plauché’s command once they took their places on Line Jackson.⁷

Chapter 1: Political and Demographic Background

One of the unique features of Louisiana history in general and New Orleans in particular is the presence of a volunteer militia that included free persons of color. The French started the militias out of necessity, but the Spanish accepted both the white and black French companies then expanded them in what they called “Disciplined Militia.” Service in the Spanish Disciplined Militia in racially segregated companies created economic, social and political opportunities for both whites and blacks.

Evan Jones is an example how militia service helped to give a native American recognition and acceptance with Spanish, French and American administrations. Jones sailed to New Orleans from New York on a family trade venture in 1765, saw the business opportunities of the city, and sold both his cargo and his ship. After Governor Galvez captured Baton Rouge during the American Revolution, Jones joined a mounted Carabineer militia unit and, as a Spanish subject, rose through the officer ranks serving in Iberville, the German Coast, and the Second Acadian Coast of Lafourche de Chitimachas. Jones spent twenty-one years in the Spanish Disciplined Militia. His business interests prospered under Spanish rule, but in 1802 he contacted the new Mississippi territorial governor, William C. C. Claiborne, becoming the de facto American consul to Spain and American Indian agent to the Choctaws. After Louisiana’s retrocession to France, Pierre-Clément de Laussat appointed him to the city council of New Orleans under Mayor Étienne de Boré. Back under American rule, he helped found the Bank of Louisiana in 1804 and ran for Congress in 1805, only to lose to Daniel Clark.  

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The black Louisiana unit, the volunteer Battalion of Free Men of Color, traced its lineage of continuous military service back to the fifteen or so slaves the French emancipated as reward for their help in fighting the Indians of the Mississippi and Red River valleys after the 1729 Natchez Massacre of Fort Rosalie (Natchez, Mississippi today). The white volunteer militia began its lineage of continuous military service at the same time since the massacre wiped out a substantial number of the colony’s professional soldiers. The Louisiana battalion of Chosen Men (or Free Men of Color) became the “First Battalion” once the majority Saint-Domingue black Creoles entered into federal service as the “Second Battalion” on December 19, 1814.

When American government officials assumed control of the Louisiana territories, they distrusted the European and Creole population that dominated the lower Mississippi valley believing them unable to understand the American republican system. Paul Gelpi argues that we can define a Creole as “anyone of European or African descent born in the Americas” and that this conceptualization fits the common parlance and understanding of the time. In reality, the American administration in New Orleans did not see all Creoles the same, particularly those of African descent. Immigrants and refugees of Latinate extraction from the Caribbean, both white and black, brought a more fluid concept of slavery and social mobility that ran counter to the more rigid American racial system.⁹

While Gelpi’s definition is a straight-forward foundational model, it lacks a more nuanced definition of the peoples with whom the American government encountered in the new territory. Forty years of a liberal Spanish immigration policy meant that when the territory became

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American, it already had a diverse and cosmopolitan population. While appreciative of a diverse white population, the new American administrators were appalled to see a black militia parading during the transfer ceremony and requested immediate military support from the federal government to protect the territory from this menace.\textsuperscript{10}

Not ones to leave matters to chance, the officers of the former Spanish black battalion wrote a memorial to Claiborne in January 1804 pledging their loyalty to America and noted that they were “free Citizens of Louisiana.” For Claiborne, this memorial was both a relief and cause for concern. He interpreted their pledge of loyalty as a counterbalance to pro-European Creole sentiments. His concern came from their use of the term “citizen” which is not well defined in the early Constitution. How Claiborne recognized these “free citizens of Louisiana” could well have national ramifications. The cessation treaty with France where the American government pledged to grant the free people of Louisiana “all the rights, advantages, and immunities of citizens of the United States” exacerbated this issue.\textsuperscript{11} Claiborne attempted to silence his detractors by giving official recognition first to the Orleans Volunteers and the City Militia (the First and Second Regiments of the Louisiana Militia) in a public ceremony on April 30, 1804. He wrote the President on May 20, 1804 that he used old standards “formerly attached to the 4\textsuperscript{th} [U.S.] Regiment, [and] had been little used.” He presented an ensign made in New Orleans to the Battalion of Free Men of Color at a separate ceremony. Claiborne knew that recognizing the


\textsuperscript{11} “The inhabitants of the ceded territory shall be incorporated in the Union of the United States and admitted as soon as possible according to the principles of the federal Constitution to the enjoyment of all these rights, advantages and immunities of citizens of the United States, and in the mean time they shall be maintained and protected in the free enjoyment of their liberty, property and the Religion which they profess.” – Yale Law School, “Article III, Treaty Between the United States of America and the French Republic,” \textit{The Avalon Project} (2008) \url{https://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/louis1.asp}. 

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black militia would excite outrage with many white planters, but he felt that not doing so could inflame revolution by the black population of New Orleans. In order to ease political pressure from white citizens, Claiborne reorganized the black militia by replacing black officers with whites. The legislature showed their angst over having a black militia by refusing to recognize the battalion in the militia organization law of 1805. The lack of recognition created resentment within the Free People of Color community, and a report that the black militia planned a coup against the American regime in order to return to Spanish rule caused a deepening schism between whites and blacks. Louisiana’s legislature responded by banning the importation of black slaves from the West Indies in 1806 and banned immigration by free blacks in 1807.

A repressive slave code adopted in 1806 stripped slaves of any legal protections and an 1807 law forbade manumission to any slave less than thirty years of age. Denial of manumission to slaves younger than thirty in 1807 meant that a free man of color married to an underage slave would see his children born into slavery. Although the Francophone planter-class opposed Anglo-American domination, they agreed with the American desire to create a two-caste racial system in the territory. As a consequence, they appealed to Congress in 1809 to allow the immigration of French Creole slave owners along with any of their slaves to increase the Gallic presence as a counter to Anglo-American domination and to increase the reservoir of cheap labor for their sugar plantations. Caryn Bell explains that while the increase of white Creoles from the West Indies with republican leanings led to some easing of racial tension, it did not translate into political support for granting equality to free people of color nor recognition and acceptance for a black militia.12

12 Carter, “Address from the Free People of Color, January 1804”: 174-175; Carter, “Governor Claiborne to the President, May 20, 1804”: 240; Alexander M. Bickel, “Citizenship in the American Constitution,” Yale Law School Faculty Scholarship Series, last modified January 1973, accessed March 26, 2020,
Regional Map of 1814 – 1815 Campaign

1813 Map of Pass Chef Menteur\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{14} United States War Department, Office of The Chief of Engineers, Map, “Map of Chef Menteur from the Rigolets to Lac Borgne” (1813) https://www.loc.gov/item/2012591004/.
Detail from 1863 Military Map showing Bayou Gentilly and Road, Pass Chef Menteur and Bayou Bienvenue.

Fort Pike (above) built behind location of old Fort Petites Coquilles. Fort Wood stands at the junction of Bayou Gentilly and Pass Chef Menteur where the First Battalion of Free Men of Color built their redoubt. Also, “Baie aux Pins” (Bay of Pines) on the 1813 Pass Chef Menteur map is now listed as “Lake Saint Catherine.”

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Chapter 2: To Arms!

The repeated loss of federal troops from Louisiana to the Floridas during 1813 and 1814, along with the near constant and premature invasion alerts, desensitized and disheartened the people of Louisiana. The return of regular troops to New Orleans, the Forty-fourth and the Seventh Infantry, in late November lifted the spirits of a city on edge since the British attacked and failed to capture Fort Bowyer at the mouth of Mobile Bay (see map, page 10) in mid-September.

The American naval defeat on Lake Borgne during the engagement of December 14, 1814, made it clear to the people of New Orleans and coastal Louisiana that this time the threat was real, the alert was real. After all, British battleships and transports lay in anchor off the Louisiana and Mississippi coasts. Until the British attack on the American gunboat squadron in the shallows of Lake Borgne, a case could be made that the British would once again attack Mobile. The Battle of Lake Borgne, however, tilted the British axis of attack towards New Orleans.

Andrew Jackson replaced Major General Flournoy as the Commander of the Seventh Military District to reward him for his leadership during the Creek War of 1813-1814. Jackson arrived in New Orleans from Mobile on December 1, 1814, and moved his headquarters to New Orleans on December 2. He began a series of inspection trips around the area from Plaquemines Bend to Pass Chef Menteur (sometimes referred in the literature as “Chef Pass”). While at the Pass on December 11, Jackson had ordered the construction of a small battery beyond the Lafon plantation at the mouth of Bayou Gentilly at Pass Chef Menteur (called “Big Liar” due to the unpredictable direction of flow by the Chef Menteur River). This battery was needed to prevent the British, at the time still riding at anchor off the Mississippi Sound, from using barges to gain access through the Pass and into Lake Pontchartrain and then on to Fort St. John. The engineers
placed the redoubt on the highest ground available at Pass Chef Menteur with an excellent view across Lake Borgne, including the mouth of Bayou Bienvenue (see maps, pages 11 and 12). With the loss of the Navy gunboat squadron on the Fourteenth, this post became critical to Andrew Jackson’s ability to monitor British offshore activity.\textsuperscript{16}

The light artillery company of the Fourth Regiment of Louisiana Militia under Captain Zacheus Shaw mustered at Fort Saint John on December 15, 1814, with the remainder of the Fourth joining them two days later. Extending the Fourth Regiment’s responsibility from Bayou Saint John forward to Chef Pass kept its area of responsibility focused on the narrow plains between Bayou Gentilly and Lake Pontchartrain. The initial assignment of the Baratarians under Captains Dominique Youx and Renato Beluche to Bayou Saint John is understandable, then, since Barataria fell within the recruitment district for the Fourth Regiment. The Baratarians later redeployed to Line Jackson on December 28, the day of the British “Reconnaissance in Force” which showed that Line Jackson needed to be extended deep into the cypress swamp and the end bent back parallel to the river to prevent a British attack from turning the line.\textsuperscript{17}

The First Battalion of Free Men of Color, which had four companies in October 1814, had six companies on December 16 when it entered federal service with a total of 353 soldiers and musicians. Jackson dealt with this overage by detaching two companies from the Battalion, sending one under Captain Ferdinand Listneau to Fort Saint Philip with two cannons and another under Major Daniel Hughes to Fort Saint John. Jackson believed that the British had to land at

\begin{footnotes}
\item[17] Casey: 14.
\end{footnotes}
Pass Chef Menteur since he had ordered the blockage of all other waterways leading inland from the sea. The next day, December 17, the remaining companies of the First Battalion set off with Governor Claiborne, Major Howell Tatum, Edward Livingston, and Captain Llewellyn Griffith’s company of Feliciana Mounted Gunmen to build a redoubt and trenchworks at the Pass. Governor Claiborne, as the commander-in-chief, had the task of leading the militia in their fight with the British. Expediency lay behind Jackson’s choice of the First Battalion of Free Men of Color for this honor of drawing first blood: they were the largest combat-ready force available for deployment. By adding Griffith’s company to the First Battalion, Jackson provided a rapid reaction force with additional stopping power with their rifles. The small fortification, with two 12-pounders installed, was completed to Major Howell Tatum’s satisfaction by December 19.

Captain Thomas Beale’s Company of Orleans Riflemen mustered into federal service on December 16 along with three of the five companies from the Uniformed Battalion of Orleans Volunteers. The remaining two companies, the Francs and Blues, followed on December 17. On December 19, the Second Battalion of Free Men of Color under Majors Louis D’Aquin and Joseph Savary entered federal service.

Louisiana under Spanish rule had welcomed a large number of refugees and immigrants to help populate its vast territory. German settlers came during the French period but intermarried with both French Creoles and Acadians (former French colonists expelled by the British from Canada's Maritimes and northern Maine during the Seven Years War). The Germans gave their

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18 The term “Mounted Gunmen” given as unit type applied to some mounted units in Tennessee and Feliciana.
19 Jackson had ordered Claiborne “to cause all the bayous leading from the ocean into the interior of the country, to be obstructed. This measure had been ordered to be executed along the whole coast, from Attakapas to Chef-Menteur and Manchac.” – Latour, *Historical Memoir of the War in West Florida and Louisiana in 1814-1815*: 74, 84; Tatum, “Major Howell Tatum’s Journal”: 104.
name to both sides of the Mississippi River above New Orleans as the “German Coast.” This region supported the Fifth Regiment of Louisiana Militia and most of its companies mustered into federal service on December 18. From the German Coast to Point Coupee is the First Acadian Coast, while the area of Bayou Lafourche and Donaldsonville is the Second Acadian Coast. This area supported the Sixth through the Ninth Regiments of Louisiana Militia of the Second Brigade of the First Division; most of which mustered in by December 25, 1814.

The First Brigade of the First Division of Louisiana militia, drawn from Plaquemines to the German Coast, responded to Claiborne’s call to arms in mid-December. Not so with the militias of the interior. The Florida Parishes, Pointe Coupee, and elsewhere north of Lake Pontchartrain were under control of the Second Division led by Major General Philemon Thomas. It appeared to Andrew Jackson that Thomas ignored Claiborne’s order of December 16 for an immediate turn-out of the militia “en mass” to defend New Orleans.21

Disgusted with the Second Division’s apparent lack of response, Jackson wrote a short, scathing letter from his headquarters in New Orleans to Major General Thomas in Baton Rouge on December 22, 1814. “Sir,” Jackson wrote, “I am informed that the orders given through Governor Claiborne [on December 16] for calling out the militia in mass [sic] in your district have not been complied with…. The Example of the Citizens here (who have turned out to a man) must be followed by the inhabitants of the Country: … give them Clearly to understand that the severest punishment will be inflicted on those who neglect their Duty.” On the same day that Jackson wrote his reprimand to General Philemon Thomas, the Eleventh Regiment of Louisiana Militia from

Baton Rouge entered federal service. The rest of the Third Brigade of the Second Division mustered in on December 23.  

The last of the Line Jackson Orleans volunteers to enter federal service were the Baratarians under Captains Youx and Beluche. Jackson had once referred to these men as bandits, but he needed their men, munitions and fighting skills now that he faced imminent invasion. Designated as a fencibles (harbor battery) company, they were added to the Fourth Regiment on December 23, 1814, at Bayou Saint John. Jackson left them there despite his taking the Orleans Volunteers and the Second Battalion for the coming night attack at the Villeré plantation.

Ignoring the Baratarian artillery unit for the moment, Jackson pulled both Plauché’s Orleans Volunteers and the Second Battalion of Free Men of Color from their positions on Bayou Saint John to rendezvous “about five o’clock” with Beale’s Rifles and every other available unit, both militia and regulars, at the old Rodriguez sawmill canal on the upper line of the Chalmette plantation, in all, almost 2300 men. Expediency once again made Jackson include the Orleans Volunteers, the Second Battalion, and Beale’s Rifles for his planned nighttime engagement of December 23, 1814. He felt they could be redeployed without compromising the defense of Fort Saint John.

Until engaging the British at the Villeré plantation, Jackson believed the units spotted on the river were part of a diversionary attack, one he would overwhelm, then return to New Orleans at the center of his defensive arc. On this matter, Jackson erred, but the audacity of his nighttime

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23 Latour: 110; Greene: 40.
offensive and the performance of American regular and militia troops under adverse conditions made the British cautious, setting the tone for the balance of the siege below New Orleans.

On the same day that British artillery set fire to and destroyed the U.S.S. Carolina on the Mississippi River, British sailors were seen setting fire to dry grasses along the Gentilly Road near the Lafon plantation. Lacoste reported to Jackson about the British action and his expectation of an imminent attack on his position from the rear. Lacoste left a picket at the redoubt and pulled the remainder of the First Battalion back about three miles to block the Gentilly Road. Lacoste’s repositioning, while prudent, caused Jackson to send a 200-man reinforcement from General Coffee’s Tennessee Mounted Gunmen to the Lafon plantation along with orders for the First Battalion to return to Pass Chef Menteur. Seizing the opportunity to place his unit in the thick of battle, Lacoste instead petitioned Jackson to allow his command to serve on Line Jackson. Jackson accepted Lacoste’s request for redeployment, and the First Battalion entered the line on December 29.\textsuperscript{24}

Chapter 3: Recognition

An important aspect of personal and unit motivators is some form of recognition to individuals or units that display courage or meritorious achievement. This motivation can be achieved with medals, letters of commendation, field promotions or unit citations. Andrew Jackson lacked medals to hand out, but gave praise to both units and individuals of the Orleans volunteers on Line Jackson. Arsène Lacarrière Latour collected a wide range of official communications including some that touch on this subject.

On September 21, 1814, Major General Andrew Jackson, Commander of the Seventh Military District, wrote to Governor William C. C. Claiborne from his headquarters at Mobile to enlist “the free men of colour in your city” to fight the expected invasion. Jackson wrote, “They will not remain quiet [spectators] of the interesting contest. They must be either for, or against us – distrust them, and you make them your enemies, place confidence in them, and you engage them by Every dear and honorable tie to the interest of the country who extends to them equal rights and privileges with white men.” In these short sentences, Jackson offered the Free People of Color in New Orleans both recognition as equal combatants and acceptance of their equal rights with whites. Jackson’s progressive appeal goes on to say that “they will be officered by white men except the non-commissioned officers, and be placed on the same footing with other volunteers for the war.” Jackson further promises to provide any black volunteer company, battalion, or regiment so raised the same pay and bounties promised by Congress to white soldiers.

Claiborne wrote back to let Jackson know that his letter was misrouted and reached him late on October 15, and then additional delay in publication due to “much distrust” in the battalion and Claiborne gave his expectation that the legislature would block any move to extend recognition and acceptance despite any threat of invasion. Claiborne passed on the prevailing sentiment “that
in putting arms into the hands of men of Colour, we only add to the force of the Enemy, and that nothing short of placing them in every respect upon a footing with white citizens (which our constitution forbids) could conciliate their affections.” Claiborne concludes by telling Jackson that he would not expect any enlistments by Louisiana Free Men of Color, but he could well imagine possible enlistments by the black émigré population. In Jackson’s response to Claiborne on October 31, he wrote that any white angst over enlisting black troops on the American side would pale in comparison to their angst should the British recruit them instead.25

Writing to the Secretary of War on December 27, 1814, Jackson recounted his attack on the British vanguard during the night of December 23. In his report, Jackson wrote that Plauché’s battalion “behaved like veterans,” the Second Battalion of Free Men of Color under D’Aquin and Savary “manifested great bravery,” and Beale’s rifle company “having penetrated into the midst of the enemy's camp, were surrounded, and fought their way out with the greatest heroism, bringing with them a number of prisoners.”26

Jackson in the general orders of January 21, 1815, and signed by his aide-de-camp, General Thomas Butler, praised the accomplishments of individuals and units of the Orleans volunteers during the battle:

Captains Dominique and Belluche [sic], lately commanding privateers at Barataria, with part of their former crew and many brave citizens of New Orleans, were stationed at [batteries] Nos. 3 and 4. The general cannot avoid giving his warm approbation of the manner in which these gentlemen have uniformly conducted themselves while under his command, and of the gallantry with which they have redeemed the pledge they gave at the opening of the campaign to defend the country. The brothers Lafitte have exhibited the same courage and fidelity; and the general promises that the

26 Latour, “Appendix XXV.”
government shall be duly apprized [sic] of their conduct…. Major Plauché's battalion of volunteers, though deprived of the valuable services of [Marine Corps] major [Daniel Carmick], who commanded them, by a wound which that officer received in the attack of the 28th of December, have realized all the anticipations which the general had formed of their conduct. Major Plauché, and major St. Gême of that corps, have distinguished themselves by their activity, their courage, and their zeal; and the whole corps have greatly contributed to enable the general to redeem the pledge he gave, when at the opening of the campaign he promised the country, not only safety, but a splendid triumph over its insolent invaders. The two corps of coloured volunteers have not disappointed the hopes that were formed of their courage and perseverance in the performance of their duty. Majors Lacoste and Daquin, who commanded them, have deserved well of their country. Captain Savary's conduct has been noticed in the account rendered of the battle of the 23d, and that officer has since continued to merit the highest praise. Captain Beale's company of the city riflemen has sustained by its subsequent conduct the reputation it acquired in the action of the 23d.27

A resolution of the state legislature recounted the actions of the state militia and recognized the Orleans volunteers, and other militia units, writing in part:

The important position of Chef-Menteur was protected by major Lacoste at the head of his corps, consisting of free men of colour, whilst his sugar estate was set to ruin and devastation. M. Lacoste, jun[ior], his son, though deprived of the use of one arm, nevertheless shared constantly with his brother soldiers the toils and dangers of war. In town, colonel Fortier, sen[jor], contributed in a great measure to the more prompt departure for Chef-Menteur of the free men of colour, already embodied, by furnishing them, at his own cost, with such articles as they stood in need of. To him also the country owes the forming and organizing a second corps of free men of colour, to whom the brave Savary was appointed a captain. At his call, both captain and soldiers repaired to his house to be enlisted. He personally attended to the arming and equipping of them; and through his exertions that company under the command of major Daquin, was enabled to take the field and to face the enemy a few hours after its formation. M. Fortier caused also several hundred of muskets unfit for use to be repaired.

27 Latour: “Appendix LXIX.”
No sooner was it reported that a British squadron had arrived on our coast, than the uniform companies of the militia of New Orleans, under the command of major Plauché, and captains P. Roche, St. Gême, Hudry, White and Guibert, and the rifle corps under the command of captain Beale, who had some time before tendered their services, were placed at the bayou St. John, to which point it was expected the enemy would attempt to penetrate. It was from that position those gallant companies marched, with the rapidity of lightning, to the plains of Villeré, on the 23d of December, at the first appearance of the British. They travelled nearly twelve miles with wonderful rapidity, and fought with a bravery and resolution that would have done credit even to experienced soldiers.28

Recognition for Captain Thomas Beale brought additional duties during the post-combat portion of the battle when Andrew Jackson turned to him as both informant and enforcer of military discipline.

On March 6, 1815, Andrew Jackson wrote to Captain Beale asking him to report on his recent encounter with Governor Claiborne at a Ball held in February. Jackson wanted Beale to relate any information that might show Claiborne’s participation in what Jackson called a conspiracy to encourage “desertion of my troops from Chef Menteur, and mutiny within the city.” Beale wrote back the same day reporting “the Governor observed to me that great dissatisfaction prevailed with the troops in the Army and in his opinion, he would see in less than six months, greater commotions among the People here than has ever taken place in any part of the United States.” Beale added that Claiborne confided to him that Jackson had upset the legislature as well. Two days later, Jackson’s aide-de-camp, General Thomas Butler ordered Captain Beale to arrest state judge and the second in command of his rifle company, Lieutenant

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28 Latour: “Appendix LIX.”
Joshua Lewis, on a charge of abetting mutiny by issuing a writ of *habeas corpus* during a time of declared martial law. Jackson later rescinded the arrest order for Lieutenant Lewis.29

The Louisiana legislature on March 18, 1816, recognized the contribution of the black Creole battalions by awarding death benefits to surviving family and pensions to veterans who served on Line Jackson. The legislature awarded eight dollars a month to Charles Savary, the father of Bitton Savary who died trying to render aid to wounded British soldiers on January 8, 1815. The legislature awarded the same monthly pension to the family of Joassin Regnir, also killed in action, the following year. Wounded veterans received between four and eight dollars a month depending on the extent of their injuries. The typical pension or death benefit awarded by the legislature was eight dollars a month to veterans or family of the black Creole battalions. This made the pension given to Joseph Savary in 1819 for five years and then renewed for four more years so outstanding at thirty dollars a month.30

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29 Jackson, “Jackson to Thomas Beale, March 6, 1815,” *The Papers of Andrew Jackson*, vol. III: 301. Jackson had maintained a state of martial law over New Orleans and kept the Louisiana militia in the field despite his January 19 declaration of victory below New Orleans, a victory celebration and mass at Saint Louis Cathedral on January 23, and American newspaper accounts, confirmed by the British, that a peace treaty existed. (The British had delayed their departure while waiting on a supply ship with enough provisions to let the fleet reach Havana.)

Chapter 4: Acceptance

Proclamations, legislative stipends and speeches by political leaders help measure a person’s or unit’s level of acceptance. For the volunteer battalions on Line Jackson, one of the easiest to measure is the change in the political relationship between the United States and the Baratarians. In the words of Andrew Jackson, they went from “hellish banditti” before he arrived in New Orleans to “privateers” in his address to the troops in January 1815.

President James Madison published a proclamation on February 6, 1815, to the Baratarian veterans that, on the recommendation of the Louisiana legislature, he granted a full pardon for all past offences against the United States due to their having “exhibited, in the defence of New Orleans, unequivocal traits of courage and fidelity.”

Joseph Savary still mustered in federal service, along with other officers of the First and Second Battalions, wrote to Andrew Jackson on March 13, 1815, asking for help in dealing with the prejudice and harassment encountered by all of them after the battle. The letter from these leaders of the Free People of Color veteran community reads as follows:

The Volontiare officers of Colour of the Bataillion of St. Domingo, have the honour to expose to his excellency, that they fully satisfied with his behaviour towards them; they are however uncertain, whether they have done enough to deserve his approbation though always zealous in serving the United states attentive to her call and ready to fly to any post which may be assigned them to defend a country which has given them an asylum — they take the liberty to recommend to his paternal care the following petition.

As we hope shortly to enjoy the benefit of peace after a hard & short Campaign, they humbly beseech his excellency to take in consideration the state in which they will find themselves, as soon as the laws of this state will

31 Latour, “Appendix LX.”
take their ordinary courses, being exposed to the most humiliating vexations.

If it pleases your excellency to grant to each of the supplicants a guaranty of their *personnes*, or a protection which will put them beyond a prejudice which always existed in this country towards them. It will please his excellency to grant it in a manner which he may think most proper either by his organ or that of the president of the United States. This act of Justice will save them from future insult.

There is no documentary evidence that Jackson ever replied to Savary or any of the co-signers of this petition.

On the occasion of the first anniversary of the invasion, Governor Claiborne wrote to the commanding officer of the U.S. Army garrison in New Orleans on December 20, 1815. His letter requested the loan of field pieces to help add a dramatic presence to the ceremony.

Several militia Corps of this City, with grateful recollections of the triumphs of their Country, design to parade on the twenty third of the present month, the anniversary of the first defeat of the late Invaders of Louisiana. Among these Corps is [Major Plauché's] battalion of Orleans volunteers, for whose use I request of you the loan for and during Saturday the twenty third Instant of two pieces of field Artillery with their necessary appendages. This brave and Patriotic battalion having borne an honorable portion the conflict they design to communicate, you will I am persuaded take a pleasure in meeting my request, if the convenience of the service presents no obstacle.  

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33 William C. C. Claiborne and Dunbar Rowland, ed., *Official Letter Book of W. C. C. Claiborne 1801 – 1816*, VI (Jackson, MS: Department of Archives and History, 1917, Digitized by the Internet Archive): 397, last modified May 1, 2010, accessed February 7, 2020, [https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc2.ark:/13960/t86h4h63w](https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc2.ark:/13960/t86h4h63w).
Conclusion

The terms of Article 3 of the 1803 Franco-American cessation treaty made people like Evan Jones from New York, Étienne de Boré from Saint-Domingue who arrived in Louisiana during the Spanish period, and Bernard de Marigny de Mandeville from Louisiana citizens of the United States affording each of them the “rights, advantages and immunities” of the Constitution. The Article does not delineate between black and white “inhabitants of the ceded territory” and, despite Claiborne’s assertion to the contrary, the Constitution did not prohibit black citizenship. Constitutional or not, no one in a position of authority to extend citizenship to black Creoles, not the president of the United States nor the governor of the territory and later the state, would do so. This reluctance became codified in Louisiana law as labor-hungry sugar planters sought ways to eliminate free blacks and brought back the worst elements of the old Code Noir to Louisiana.

White Creoles had the advantage of wealth and power to exercise in the new state. They faced the challenge of assimilation into an Anglo political and linguistic world, but the bounty of new refugees from the revolution and civil war on Saint-Domingue in 1809 and 1810 insured the French language a place in the daily life of New Orleans. Making common cause with native American slave owners also provided white Creoles with the political power to limit the freedom and power of their black Francophone countrymen. Recognized by the 1803 treaty as citizens, their acceptance by native Americans like Andrew Jackson remained their last obstacle to full integration.

The long colonial history of Louisiana under French, Spanish and American rule had shown Creoles that serving in the military provided a vehicle for acceptance and advancement.
Creoles, whether black or white, took pride in and encouraged military service in whichever government prevailed.

Faced with a lack of acceptance and slipping recognition, free Black Creoles felt they had only one choice, one chance to reverse the trend and gain recognition for themselves as citizens. They were a proud but desperate people. Military service had served them well under the French and the Spanish. Recognition and acceptance as contributing citizens of their state and of the American republic should, they hoped, reverse the recent spate of laws that stripped them of their dignity and full participation in the political and social world around them. Serving their country in time of war should have brought more than a dozen years of pensions from the state while legal and social discrimination grew ever more prevalent and became codified in law. They had practical goals. They hoped their fight for recognition and acceptance would lead to more liberal race relations and laws that would see an increase in free people of color in New Orleans and Louisiana. They fought for the acquisition of full and equal citizenship alongside their white Francophone countrymen. It is only in the failure of their country to recognize the personal sacrifice and lasting contribution to our national dignity and sovereignty by these black Creoles that Theodore Roosevelt should apply the word “pathetic.”

Rodolphe Lucien Desdunes, a black Creole New Orleanian, worked as a customs officer and journalist for and member of *L’Union Louisianais*, a French language publication and civil rights organization. He fought in the Battle of Liberty Place and helped found the *Comité des Citoyens* in 1890 which pushed for and fought through the courts as “Plessy versus Ferguson” that became the basis for the Supreme Court’s “separate but equal” 1896 decision.34

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Below is the introductory essay to Chapter 1, “Les Créoles de couleur libres,” by Rodolphe Desdunes from the 1911 publication of his anthology, *Nos Homme et Notre Histoire*, and the companion poem “La Campagne de 1814-15” by Hippolyte Castra. The original essay and poem are both in French. The English translations are included here in their entirety because not doing so lessens their impact. Desdunes came from New Orleans as did the pseudonymous soldier Hippolyte Castra who, in hiding his identity, gave authorship to every black soldier that fought alongside Andrew Jackson. The poem, as Desdunes pointed out, was handed down as part of the Afro-Creole literary tradition. The essay and poem show that any injustice as grave as that suffered by this community in the aftermath of the Battle of New Orleans can and will produce a rancor remembered and felt by the generations that followed.35

“Les Créoles de couleur libres et La Campagne de 1814-15” – Rodolphe Desdunes:

One cannot make mention of the memorable campaign of 1814-15, without remembering that the freemen of color fought there, side by side, with the other soldiers of General Jackson.

At that time there were three classes of colored men in Louisiana: the children of the soil, those who came from Martinique and those who came from Santo Domingo. Being all Creoles, however, they lived on good terms and united in all circumstances as if they had been from the same place and from the same family: as people still newly arrived in a country always do.

There was a community of origin, of language and of mores between them, but above all, having to undergo the same fate, they always met in the way of misfortune, and their confidences had to be similar in all respects.

At the approach of the English, General Jackson appealed to all the inhabitants without distinction, but at the same time, he did not fail to address in particular the patriotic pride of the colored men, whom he invited to take up arms.

The flattering words in which this appeal was made left no doubt about the views of the general-in-chief. He was convinced that men of color had the right to defend the attacked soil, and that the American government made a serious mistake by refusing to receive them under the flags.

The illustrious soldier's encouraging statement, accepted in good faith, aroused great enthusiasm in everyone, for no one doubted that it had been made with frankness and sincerity. The patriots of color therefore responded in great numbers to this call. Their service in the Chalmette campaign was of undeniable value from the point of view of the interest and honor of the nation. After the battle, General Jackson congratulated them, noting that their conduct had exceeded his expectations. But there ended all the reward.

These men whose loyalty and service had been so solemnly recognized, however, continued to live in all the disadvantageous conditions imposed on them by the country, as if they had accomplished nothing for the latter. They had to be content with the honeyed words they had been given before the action and the pompous but empty praise they received after the victory. Later, these praises were changed even into cowardly innuendos, into malicious slanders. So, it was fair that these unsung heroes would complain about such ingratitude.

It is true that by a late action, the government granted them the title of veterans and granted them a slight pension; but their civil status remained the same: a modification of the Black Code, which gave them the right to live, to enjoy, to possess, to succeed.

Because of his state of dependence even the Creole of color could not command respect; he became an object of hatred, contempt or injustice according to the whims of the moment. All its rights were precarious, they were modifiable or revocable according to the good pleasure of the governing class. Hippolyte Castra was one of these unrecognized citizens, these repulsed heroes, he shared with them the bitterness of the disappointments experienced.

The population needed a cantor; she rightly found him in this man who could be compared to Roget and Dubois.

Castra had the fine talent of singing the courage, the valor and the fidelity of this superb Creole phalanx. He did not forget to claim for her the place of honor that she deserved to occupy at the banquet of triumph, but which was denied to her by injustice and prejudice. We owe Castra all our gratitude, and the best way to pay off our debt to him is to precisely preserve his patriotic composition. Here is the full text [of La Campagne de 1814-15 by Hippolyte Castra] as it exists in the notebooks of our families:
I remember that, one day, during my childhood,
A beautiful morning, my mother, while sighing,
Said to me: “Child, emblem of innocence,
You do not know the future that awaits thee.
Under this beautiful sky you believe you see your country:
Renounce thy error, my tender son,
And believe above all our beloved mother….
Here, thou art but an object of scorn.”
Ten years later, upon our vast frontiers,
One heard the English cannon,
And then these words: “Come, let us conquer, my brothers,
“We are all born of Louisiana blood.”
At these sweet words, and embracing my mother,
I followed you, repeating your cries,
Not thinking, in my pursuit of battle,
That I was but an object of scorn.
Arriving upon the field of battle,
I fought like a brave warrior.
Neither the bullets nor the shrapnel,
Could ever fill me with fear.
I fought with great valor
With the hope of serving my country,
Not thinking that for recompense
I would be the object of scorn.
After having gained the victory,
In this terrible and glorious combat,
All of shared a drink with me
And called me a valiant soldier.
And I, without regret, and with a sincere heart,
Hélas! I drank, believing you to be my friends,
Not thinking, in my fleeting joy
That I was but the object of scorn.
But today I sigh sadly
Because I perceive a change in you;
I no longer see that gracious smile
Which showed itself, in other times, so often
Upon your honeyed lips.
Have you become my enemies?
Ah! I see it in your fierce looks,
I am but an object of scorn.
This poignant poem expresses both a community’s pride in military service and an honest desire to fully participate in their nation. The poem notes the recognition and acceptance that a soldier shared with his fellow veterans regardless of race until the growing weight of racism and ever more restrictive laws belittled the worth of Free People of Color and then pushed them aside. The Uniformed Battalion of Orleans Volunteers; however, continued to grow in size and importance until it grew large enough to take a new name, the “Louisiana Legion,” in 1821. Meanwhile, the Battalion of Free Men of Color was unable to muster a full complement of soldiers in 1825 to honor a visit to the city by General Lafayette.36

Whatever distrust had once existed between white Creoles and Americans in Louisiana ended with the Battle of New Orleans. The planters, bankers, tradesmen, shopkeepers, factors, and other occupations and professions held a common pride in the victory won by Major General Andrew Jackson with the help of the Orleans Battalion of Uniformed Volunteers. Military service had served this portion of the New Orleans population well with both recognition and acceptance. The black Creole militias of the First and Second Battalion did not fare as well. Beginning in 1829, the state of Louisiana enacted a series of restrictive and punitive laws aimed at limiting the traditional rights of Free Persons of Color. New laws sought to isolate and render mute this community by forbidding them freedom of speech. Then under the Louisiana militia bill of 1834, Free Men of Color could no longer serve in a militia, not even a volunteer one, no matter how professional their demeanor, since they were not recognized as citizens of the state or the nation.37

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37 McConnell: 103-104.
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Theses and Dissertations

Vita

Donald Keith Midkiff received his Bachelor of Arts (BA) from the University of New Orleans (UNO) in 1978. He turned from academic pursuits to computers to support his wife and baby daughter. His long-delayed love of history pushed him to research and write a historical novel (*New Orleans Besieged*) that was accepted for publication by a Louisiana publishing house in 2011. He is also a contributing author of two chapters in an anthology on the Battle of New Orleans from 2014 titled *The Battle of New Orleans Reconsidered*. He retired from Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center as a Database Administrator (DBA) in 2014. After retirement, he became a licensed tour guide and developed a Battle of New Orleans French Quarter Walking Tour for the Friends of the Cabildo which was well-received. He joined the Master of Arts (MA) in History program at UNO in 2016.