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Don't Be Myth-taken: The Perpetuation of Historical Myths in New Orleans Tourism

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Don't Be Myth-taken:
The Perpetuation of Historical Myths in New Orleans Tourism

A Thesis

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

Master of Arts
in
History
Public History

By

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ABSTRACT

The mythology that surrounds the city of New Orleans is expansive. In a city well known for its ghosts and culture, the tourism industry utilizes stories and mythology to entice tourists to visit the city. However, the perpetuation of myths as historical facts or as actual events to an unknowing public can cause more harm than good to the city and the understanding of its past. This essay utilizes interviews with current New Orleans Tour Guides to examine how the tourism industry in New Orleans presents mythology and historical evidence to tourists. This essay examines tours and tourism materials to better understand the industry alongside popular myths perpetuated in both the media and on tours. By utilizing tour guide narratives and their experiences this essay will demonstrate how the perpetuation of mythology in New Orleans has incorrectly informed tourists of the city's historical background.

Key Terms: New Orleans, Mythology, Tourism, Tour Guides, Ghost Tours, Oral Histories.

Introduction

New Orleans is home to many myths and legends utilized by the tourism industry and popular fiction to dazzle consumers and bring in revenue. Residents and visitors alike commonly see a tour guide standing along different streets in the French Quarter motioning up to buildings and recounting the “history” behind the location they are standing to a group of tourists, who may be unaware of the background to the stories being told. Some tour guides are known to embellish when recounting the stories that they are telling and present these embellishments as historical facts to their listeners. Among some of the most popular tours in New Orleans are “ghost tours” or ones that pose a more macabre or horror genre to the tours. These tours are referenced by guides as ones more likely to perpetuate mythology and pass off their ghostly tales as historically accurate to their patrons.

In the current age of technology and accessibility, access to knowledge is seemingly limitless. Historians have discovered a wealth of information from archives, accounts, and records about New Orleans’ past that dispel mythology about the city. Historians have the means to conduct well-documented research into the mythology and lore presented on tours as “historical information” and have written readily available documents that could be utilized by tour companies and other tourist-centered activities. In this essay, several subjects of mythology in New Orleans are discussed and elaborated on by historians who have researched and dispelled the myths. These historians’ accounts show that the tourism industry in New Orleans has the ability to present the historical perspective of the lore but in most cases chooses not to present the historical evidence in favor of the monetary gain of the sensational legends. This essay also

utilizes the accounts made by license tour guides to demonstrate how many tour companies embellish narratives for entertainment value and capital gain.

This essay presents an in-depth look at the perpetuation of mythology in the tourism industry in New Orleans by dissecting how the tourism industry developed in New Orleans by utilizing works made by tourism historians Lynnell Thomas, Anthony Stanonis, and Mark Souther. These historians document the evolution and development of modern tourism in New Orleans, and the city's increasing reliance on the hospitality and tourism industry for income. These historians cover the periods starting at post-Civil War up to the impacts on the industry post-Hurricane Katrina. Along with shifts noted by these historians, this essay also discusses the impacts that the modern film industry, known as "Hollywood South," has had on the tourism industry through television shows like *American Horror Story*.

Recent historians Kenneth Aslakson, Emily Clark, and Shannon Cosner-Love explore mythology created about historical events and figures utilized by the travel industry to capture tourists' attention. These historians present evidence showing how mythology developed, and the ways in which these legends can be dispelled both in popular culture and on tours. The work on dispelling mythology surrounding the Crescent City by these historians further demonstrates that historical information is readily available for those who are passionate about the city which reflects poorly on tour guides perpetuating exaggerated legends to their patrons.

New Orleans is home to a rich culture and expansive past that would be difficult to cover in one tour alone. According to NewOrleans.com, the city's official tourism website containing general information and suggestions for travelers, over forty tour companies exist in and around the city. The website organizes these tour companies by location and includes twenty-four located in the French Quarter alone, where the majority of the canvased tour guides provide their

tours. The large variety of tours include themes based on ghosts, food, bicycle, carriage, and many others.¹ This essay focuses on the tours highlighted by the tour guides canvased and will focus on tours occurring in and around the French Quarter.

Becoming a tour guide in the city of New Orleans is an easy task according to the testimonial of many current New Orleans tour guides canvased in this essay. The short process involves only the requirements of passing a test with general knowledge of New Orleans and a background check. After passing both elements, a tour guide receives a license and is free to find employment in the city. The tour guide is then at the liberty of the company they are employed by to be trained on how to properly present tours and narratives to the public.² Many tour companies embellish and mythologize the city's past to entertain and capture their audience's attention. This embellishment results in the continual spread of misinformation about the city's history and clouds the foundation of its' roots.

This essay sheds light on the spread of misinformation about New Orleans' history caused by the tourism industry. The dissemination is unnecessary to attract tourists and entertain them when accurate historical information on the subjects is available. This essay also highlights the tourism industry promotes the romanticism of the past and removes the historical agency many historical figures maintained. Through the canvased works of historians and interviews with tour guides, this essay argues that the perpetuation of mythology by the New Orleans tourism industry does more harm than good for the past, present, and future of the Crescent City.

¹ "New Orleans Tour Companies" Neworleans.com, accessed October 9th, 2020, <https://www.neworleans.com/things-to-do/tours/tour-companies/?skip=0&sort=qualityScore®ionids=3>.

² Grace Gilpin, interviewed by Maddie Roach, October 9th, 2020, via Zoom.

Shifts and Development of New Orleans Tourism

New Orleans has existed as a popular international tourist destination for decades. The city's culture, history, music, and food make it prime for tourists to visit and immerse themselves for their leisure and enjoyment. Tourists flock to New Orleans to experience the culture, the history, Mardi Gras, and music festivals. As such, the city relies greatly on the tourism industry to drive the local economy. The Crescent City's blending of many cultures has impacted and created an atmosphere that gives the impression of visiting a separate country within the United States.

Recent scholarly historians Lynnell Thomas, Anthony Stanonis, and Mark Souther have all examined the Crescent City's development of modern tourism. The evolution is generally classified into different historical periods. Stanonis mainly focuses on tourism in the early twentieth century. Thomas and Souther's writings generally focus on the shifts that occurred post-World War II. These historians recount how New Orleans became the modern tourist attraction of today through marketing, and promotion of historical mythology. Each historian showcases how the tourism industry has promoted legends and stereotypes within the city's history. And whereas Stanonis and Souther focus on the general tourism industry, Thomas focuses on the damaging mythology surrounding black culture and the black experience in New Orleans. This section examines how these historians' works have contributed to the understanding of the commercial development of tourism, and the subsequent exploitation of the city's historical mythology for tourist promotion.

In his book, *Creating the Big Easy*, historian Anthony Stanonis attributes the period between the First and Second World Wars to when the tourism industry in New Orleans became more professional and organized in terms of marketing. Stanonis claims that popular writers of

the time like Sherwood Anderson and Tennessee Williams contributed to the appeal of the city by providing captivating descriptions of the city in their works.³ The added feature of New Orleans in popular writings allured tourists to the city, which in turn created the need for destinations and activities to entertain tourists. The era between the World Wars also contributed to social changes that helped to propel tourism in New Orleans to be more widespread. Stanonis attributes tourism developments to the “modernism” of America, including the impacts of the First World War, and advances in technology and transportation. In addition, Stanonis argues how the emergence of a larger middle class allowed for traveling to be more accessible to Americans, which in turn brought more tourists to the city. The more widespread availability of automobiles allowed for ease of travel and citizens outside of the upper-class to own them and travel.⁴ New Orleans’ popularity also increased in this era thanks to the rise in popularity of jazz, which originated in the city in the 1910s. A growing number of jazz clubs and musicians led to New Orleans gaining the reputation of being the “birthplace of jazz,” and more tourists and artists flocked to the city to listen to and immerse themselves in the culture of jazz. Stanonis also notes the shift in New Orleans’ tour industry post-World War II. Mass tourism began between the wars but flourished drastically after the Second World War. City leaders were able to track and grasp the actual numbers behind the tourism industry by tracking hotel stays, tax revenue, and waste disposal pick-up numbers as well.⁵

Historian Mark Souther in the book, *New Orleans on Parade: Tourism and the Transformation of the Crescent City*, highlights how the shift in New Orleans tourism post wars

³ Anthony Stanonis, *Creating the Big Easy: New Orleans and the Emergence of Modern Tourism*. (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2006.) 2.

⁴ Ibid 22.

⁵ Ibid 25.

led to the city's dependency on tourism to survive, which negatively impacted the city's residents in the French Quarter especially.⁶ Souther states that because of the increase in tourists to the city, the number of new hotels in the Quarter increased, which led to the loss of more than half of the French Quarter's residential population, including nearly all of the African-American residents. With the tourism industry's move to the center of New Orleans' economy, the city's government capitalized on this shift and created new projects to even further shift the dynamics of the city to market itself more to visitors instead of its' residents. These projects headed by Mayor Moon Landrieu in the 1970s included the shift of the French Market to be more geared towards tourists and the transforming of Jackson Square into a pedestrian mall.⁷

During the 1980s, the city of New Orleans began to rely even more heavily on tourism as a source of revenue. Historian Connie Atkinson discusses this process on a podcast episode called, "Why New Orleans Leaned into Tourism" on the podcast series *Tripod: New Orleans at 300*. She explains the effects of the mid-1980s oil bust on the city's economy. During this time according to Atkinson, the city utilized the slogan, "come join the parade," which read as an open invitation for tourists to come and experience all that New Orleans offered. This new marketing slogan capitalized on New Orleans' celebration of Mardi Gras and attracted people from all over to help supplement the revenue lost from the drop in oil.⁸ Souther also discusses this shift in *New Orleans on Parade* highlighting the efforts made by the city's government to modernize the city more like Atlanta and Houston. Mayors Chep Morrison, Vic Schiro, and

⁶ Jonathan Mark Souther, *New Orleans on Parade: Tourism and the Transformation of the Crescent City*. (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2006.)

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Laine Kaplan-Levenson, "Why New Orleans Leaned into Tourism," May 19, 2016, in *TriPod: New Orleans at 300*, podcast, MP3 audio, 10:28, <https://www.wwno.org/podcast/tripod-new-orleans-at-300/2016-05-19/why-new-orleans-leaned-into-tourism>

Moon Landrieu shifted their focuses to the French Quarter and finally embraced tourism as the focal point of New Orleans' economic plan.⁹ The creation of the Greater New Orleans Tourist and Conservation Commission (GNOTCC) in the 1960s and 1970s saw more action and developed into more of a central role in marketing and assisting the development of the city to accommodate the new need for revenue through tourism. During the 1980's GNOTCC became more like their counterparts of larger southern cities like Atlanta and Houston and began catering their focuses to attracting tourists to the city and developing while still preserving infrastructure and attraction in the city.¹⁰

The next big shift in New Orleans' tourism industry came after the impact of Hurricane Katrina. Stanonis states that coverage by major news outlets of the impacts of the hurricane did not show past the impacts made to the French Quarter and the well-known tourist destinations of the city. The initial news broadcasts focused on the major tourist locations of the city like Bourbon Street, Café Du Monde, and the St. Louis Cathedral, and only after several days did the world see the true impact the hurricane caused to the city with pictures of people in emergency shelters and on residential rooftops awaiting rescue. The showcasing of these elements and the responses gathered from the world caused the New Orleans Convention and Visitors Bureau (NOCVB) to reevaluate the tourism industry. Business and political leaders opted to then showcase the city's more urban appeal that cast the city as a relic and showcase the colonial history of New Orleans as a strategy to bring back the tourism industry.¹¹ This gimmick-based tourism is what is seen today through "ghost tours" of the French Quarter.

⁹ Jonathan Mark Souther, *New Orleans on Parade: Tourism and the Transformation of the Crescent City*. (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2006.)185-220.

¹⁰ Ibid 193-197.

¹¹ Anthony Stanonis, *Creating the Big Easy: New Orleans and the Emergence of Modern Tourism*. (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2006.) 26.

In her book, *Desire and Disaster in New Orleans: Tourism, Race, and Historical Memory*, historian Lynnell Thomas explores the historic marketing of black culture in New Orleans tourism. Thomas focuses on the modern era and the development of tourism in the city surrounding the subject matters of “desire and disaster.” In her book, Thomas investigates romanticized and stereotypical racial narratives and cites how the sales of mammy dolls, voodoo souvenirs, and romantic representations of slavery have been imbedded into materials like tourism websites, travel guides, and businesses to exploit black people’s culture and history for financial gain and sources for entertainment. Thomas challenges the racial narratives in her book and reflects on the ways the New Orleans tourism industry could empower black voices and culture instead of perpetuating such stereotypes and historical mythology created by systemic racism and the culture of white supremacy.¹²

In terms of racialized tourism marketing, the city has historically catered to romanticized white notions of the historic “Old South.” The post-Civil War era led to the development of more railroads, better hotels, and more travel guides and accounts by writers of the nineteenth century.¹³ These travel writers depicted the city in an Old Southern romantic image to entice travelers to come into the city and shaped the nascent tourism industry. Post-Civil War travel writers’ travel guides showcased guided tours of the city and described the sights and landmarks throughout the city, similar to the guidebooks now. The distinct culture of the city’s residents also played a large role in the marketing behind tourism. Early tourist marketing highlighted New Orleans’ French, Spanish, and Caribbean ties, although the new formal Jim Crow laws were

¹² Lynnell L. Thomas, *Desire and Disaster in New Orleans: Tourism, Race, and Historical Memory*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014.)

¹³ Jonathan Mark Souther, *New Orleans on Parade: Tourism and the Transformation of the Crescent City*. (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2006.)

largely hidden from promotional materials.¹⁴ The city's unique French and Spanish -influenced architecture in the French Quarter appealed to domestic tourists within the United States as if they traveled to a foreign destination.¹⁵

The theme of “desire and disaster” in Thomas’s book showcases two categories that the tourism industry utilizes to market and showcase history to tourists after Katrina. The “desire” aspect would be the carefree, exotic, and taboo elements of New Orleans, and includes narratives like the famed legal red-light district Storyville, the Quadroon Balls during the nineteenth century, Voodoo priestess Marie Laveau, and the practice of the Voodoo religion. The “disaster” aspect promoted elements like natural disasters, political failures, racial inequality, and economic disasters, and specifically included topics like slavery and Hurricane Katrina by touring recovering historic African American communities like the Lower Ninth Ward. Thomas discusses how the perpetuation of black culture creates a contradiction of blackness that in some ways celebrates black culture and contributions to the city, but also perpetuates white supremacy by mythologizing and weaving tales of social inferiority.¹⁶

Thomas calls out tour guides in her book and their perpetuation of mythology and stereotypes that surround New Orleans history and culture. Thomas mentions plantation tours and how the tour guides in some cases ignore the realities of slavery and romanticize the “big houses” on plantations to repackage history for tourist consumption. These factors include the plantations selling the images of slavery in the gift shops or hosting events like weddings on their grounds.¹⁷ Thomas also discusses the ways in which walking tours in the French Quarter

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Lynnell L. Thomas, *Desire and Disaster in New Orleans: Tourism, Race, and Historical Memory*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014.)

¹⁷ Ibid 27-53.

mythologize and stereotype black culture by relying on fictitious narratives, fabricating stories, or leaving out the horrors of slavery in general on their tours. Pre-Civil War New Orleans was built largely through the labor of enslaved persons, and most tour guides neglect to mention these people or if they do, they glorify or romanticize their stories for popular consumption.¹⁸

Historian Tiya Miles also discusses how the idea of white supremacy affects the creation and perpetuation of mythology in New Orleans tourism. In the book *Tales from the Haunted South: Dark Tourism and Memories of Slavery from the Civil War Era*, Miles recounts the tours she attended ranging from Voodoo-specific tours to general ghost tours. Miles, like Thomas, attests to the ways in which the tours capitalized on and demonized black people and their culture for entertainment. Many of the topics discussed on the tours Miles attended utilized the stories of enslaved people who allegedly haunt the grounds of historic sites in the French Quarter. She details the mythology that surrounds Madame Delphine Lalaurie, the famous creole socialite, and her mistreatment of enslaved people in Antebellum New Orleans. Miles describes how the descriptions of the mythologized versions of the Lalaurie story come off as a way in which tour guides show that this intense mistreatment of enslaved people was not the norm in New Orleans but instead a rare instance, which dispels the horrors of slavery in the city and further silences the voices of enslaved people. The tourist legend capitalizes on the atrocities and horrors inflicted on these enslaved people to make money and captivate an audience when the details stated by most tour guides are exaggerated and untrue.¹⁹ Miles takes note of the lack of white male slaveholders in many stories perpetuated by tour guides concerning slavery.

According to Miles, this omission portrays men as innocent and further perpetuates a culture of

¹⁸ Ibid 53-55.

¹⁹ Tiya Miles, *Tales from the Haunted South: Dark Tourism and Memories of Slavery from the Civil War Era*. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2015) 75.

white male superiority. She states, “by sensationalizing the abuses of slavery while protecting white men from blame and by casting a doubt on the capacities of white women in positions of authority,” which in the case of Lalaurie, “popularizes the corrupt ideas about social relations from the past ideas that should be gone with the wind.”²⁰

Thomas focuses a chapter on her book discussing the shifts in tourism that came in the wake of Katrina. Much like Stanonis, Thomas discusses how the media coverage sparked a new interest in tourism to the city, but Thomas focuses more on the developments created in the industry that give agency to black voices of both the past and present. Thomas examines how the media showcased images of black people stranded on the roofs of their homes and stranded in the Superdome. The images broadcasted to the world of New Orleans demonstrated the element of disaster the city held like poverty and racism, instead of those more desirable elements of Bourbon Street and partying. Katrina forced the tourism industry to confront these images and create new narratives, ones based more on reality rather than romanticized mythology. New tours of areas affected by the storm arose and drew more attention to areas like the Lower Ninth Ward and focused more on empowering black heritage. Many new tour companies offered tours centered in black culture and dispelled the romanticized myths that had been perpetuated for so long by so many.²¹

In the 1990s, historian Joseph Tregle explored how nineteenth-century race relations and racism attributed to the mythology towards free people of color and African Americans generally. In his essay “Creoles and Americans,” Tregle examines how after the Civil War, white

²⁰ Ibid 79.

²¹ Lynnell L. Thomas, *Desire and Disaster in New Orleans: Tourism, Race, and Historical Memory*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014.) 127-157.

conservatives' racist attitudes towards the creoles of color living in New Orleans created a context in which commercial tourism portrayed the black creoles in a similarly racist view.²² This racist portrayal ties into Thomas', Miles', and Souther's books, where these historians discuss how New Orleans' twentieth-century tourism catered to romantic racist views of the Old South, and how the travel writers also romanticized their writings to increase interest for tourists to visit New Orleans. In his essay, "Creoles and Americans," Tregle discussed the ways the white creoles' false narratives towards creoles of color during the nineteenth century reflected the post-Civil War racist ideologies of non-creole people in New Orleans. The mindset of the former enslavers continued through the ideas of domestic servitude and the continuation of the white patriarchal system, which underlay false narratives and the creation of historical mythology within modern tourism.²³

Another big shift in New Orleans tourism can be attributed to "Hollywood South," the term applied to the New Orleans film industry in the 2000s and 2010s. The emergence of the city in popular television shows and movies further created a newfound interest in tourism, especially through the television show *American Horror Story: Coven*. The show's third season was set in New Orleans and showcased the city's historical mythology through its' portrayal of mid-1800s events and characters. For the younger generations like Millennials and Generation Z, the show sparked a renewed interest to visit the city and learn about the historic characters presented in the show's narrative. The series introduced younger viewers to actual historical figures like a free woman of color Marie Laveau, French-creole socialite Madame Lalaurie, and the serial murderer "Axe Man of New Orleans." The show, however, perpetuated the mythology that surrounds

²² Joseph G. Tregle Jr., "Creoles and Americans," in *Creole New Orleans* (Louisiana State University Press: Baton Rouge, 1992), 131-188.

²³ Ibid 169-170.

these figures and did nothing to correct their true narratives to viewers. “The Coven” planted all three figures in the modern-day as both “immortals” and as ghosts who had risen back from the dead. Although “The Coven” perpetuated obvious mythology, the show also placed these figures in their correct time periods but showcased Marie Laveau and Madame Lalaurie as interacting with one another even though no historical evidence suggests that the two women’s paths ever crossed when they were both alive. The show further perpetuated the historical mythology surrounding these three prolific New Orleans figures, which in turn muddled and clouded the history of the city itself.²⁴

²⁴ *American Horror Story: Coven*. Season 3. Directed by Ryan Murphy and Brad Falchuk. Written by Ryan Murphy, featuring Angela Bassett, Kathy Bates, and Jessica Lange Aired from October 9, 2013 to January 29, 2014 on FX.

Historians Deconstructing Historical Mythology in New Orleans Tourism

As seen through the evolution of commercial tourism highlighted by Thomas, Souther, and Stanonis and Hollywood South, several contributing factors led to the development of historical mythology and mythological narratives embedded in the city's tourism narratives. Topics like Quadroon Balls in New Orleans and Madame Lalaurie have been sensationalized for profit, but several recent historians including Emily Clark, Kenneth Aslakson, and Victoria Cosner Love have deconstructed the mythology surrounding these topics. This section of this essay explores how these historians have traced the development and evolution of specific historic myths and legends perpetuated in tourism today.

During the nineteenth century, the publication of travel guides and travelers' journals contributed greatly to the development of historic myths in New Orleans. In their accounts of New Orleans, the travel writers often perpetuated local myths and helped develop them to legends presented today by tour companies to unknowing tourists as factual information about the city's history. The travel writers portrayed the city as a destination and romanticized the city to make their writings more attention-grabbing contributing to the mythological narratives. The narratives portrayed by these writers have been both perpetuated unknowingly and dispelled by several scholarly historians during the twentieth century.

The legend of "Quadroon Balls" in New Orleans during the nineteenth century is an example of how travel writers perpetuated a phenomenon that developed into a modern tourism myth. The term "Quadroon Balls" was used in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to describe balls or dances hosted for free women of color. Quadroon was a historic Spanish designation describing women with one-quarter African ancestry and three-quarter European ancestry. The Quadroon Balls myths have been recently deconstructed by historians Kenneth

Aslakson, Emily Clark, and Emily Landau. Aslakson, in his article, "The "Quadroon-Plaçage" Myth of Antebellum New Orleans: Anglo-American (Mis)interpretations of a French-Caribbean Phenomenon," examines the Quadroon Balls in New Orleans, and how travel writers to New Orleans perpetuated the legend in the 1800s.²⁵ Aslakson explores the mythology surrounding relations between white men and free women of color, known in the tourist mythology as "placage" relationships, and which purportedly developed at the balls. According to the Quadroon Ball and "placage" myths, these balls opened exclusively to wealthy white men and free women of color, for the latter to acquire a *placage* relationship with the white men in attendance. The term *placage* is broken down by historian Emily Landau in her book, *Spectacular Wickedness: Sex, Race, and Memory in Storyville, New Orleans*. *Placage* represented an alleged contractual agreement coming from the French word meaning "to place," implying that these women were simply objects being placed into the hands of these men. According to the myth, these agreements included amenities such as forms of money, homes, or gifts. The alleged agreements also ensured that the man provided for any child produced through the relationship. At the balls, the men and women met and perhaps eventually entered a legally binding contractual agreement that set up a relationship arrangement providing the free women of color with amenities in exchange for their companionship and sexual favors.²⁶

Aslakson recounts the biases in play for twelve travel writers including Thomas Ashe, Karl Bernhard, James Davidson, Weimer Eisenach, George William Featherstonhaugh, John Latrobe, Harriet Martineau, Frederick Olmstead, Christian Schultz, Amos Stoddard, James

²⁵ Kenneth Aslakson, "The "Quadroon-Plaçage" Myth of Antebellum New Orleans: Anglo-American (Mis)interpretations of a French-Caribbean Phenomenon," *Journal of Social History* 45, no. 3 (2012): 709-34, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41678906>

²⁶ Emily Epstein Landau, *Spectacular Wickedness: Sex, Race, and Memory in Storyville, New Orleans*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2013.) 60-66.

Stuart, and Louis Fitzgerald Tasistro, all of whom wrote about Quadroon Balls in New Orleans in the early nineteenth century. Aslakson compared the travel writer's narratives to illustrate how they conflict with one another and created the mythology surrounding this topic of New Orleans' past. Out of these travel writers, Aslakson found that only one actually claimed to have attended a ball and to have witnessed the revelry firsthand. Before visiting the city, the travel writers had already been exposed to the stories and rumors of what occurred at Quadroon Balls.

Aslakson argues that these traveler writers prioritized the entertainment value of their story over-analyzing the evidence behind the subject matter. The travel writers relied greatly on local lore, previous travelers' narratives, and artistic license, not on the more pressing matters of racial and gender relations in the 1800s.²⁷ Aslakson breaks down how travel writers describe the *placage* relationships, and how their descriptions varied from writer to writer. Some claimed that the relationships were set up as temporary and casual, being a means of exchanging sex for financial security at the moment but not long term. Other writers claimed that the *placage* relationships were a life-long commitment. When it came to the amount of money exchanged in these arrangements, writers also varied with figures ranging up to fifteen hundred dollars a year given to these women in different forms.²⁸

The conflicting narratives created by these travel writers that lead to the mythology surrounding Quadroon Balls are heavily based on stereotypes reflecting existing racist and sexist perspectives prevalent during the nineteenth century. The white supremacist disdain towards interracial marriages and mixing of races during the time period heavily shaped the myth to

²⁷ Kenneth Aslakson, "The "Quadroon-Plaçage" Myth of Antebellum New Orleans: Anglo-American (Mis)interpretations of a French-Caribbean Phenomenon," *Journal of Social History* 45, no. 3 (2012): 709-34, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41678906>

²⁸ Ibid. 4

showcase how in the nineteenth century the only way a white man would associate with a woman of color would be with her in place as property or an object. White women assisted in the development of rumors that contributed to the myth's narrative. Such white women held racist ideas that black women were seductresses, and the relationships between women of color and white men were purely sexual. The myth was heavily contributed to by people who did not want to believe that these women of African ancestry possessed any form of agency.

Historian Emily Clark in her book, *The Strange History of the American Quadroon: Free Women of Color in the Revolutionary Atlantic World*, also argues how travel writers contributed to the development of the Quadroon Ball myth, and she uses their accounts to dispel mythology that surrounds them. Clark argues how the Saint Domingue immigrant Albert Tessier promoted the first Quadroon Ball in 1805 as an elegant affair with no masking. Later during the mid-1800s, the balls evolved into tourist and naval attractions where attendees wore masks. The shift occurred according to Clark, due to the popularity of traveler's writings on the subject and the increase of tourists and naval workers to the city. Due to the travel writers' publications, the city saw an increase in tourists seeking to attend these balls, and which further perpetuated the mythology. Clark describes how other writers that attended the balls after the shift in clientele like John Latrobe described the actions of the women of color at the ball as if they were, "passing their life in prostitution" and that they were unmasked unlike others to, "show their faces as merchant samples to entice purchasers." This comment inferred the shift of the ball's clientele reflected the evolution of the quadroon-*placage* relationships more seeded in prostitution than that of a kept woman like the myth stipulates. Clark includes these accounts to show how the balls developed over time into more of a tourist-centered attraction. Clark further

argues that these women may have utilized the balls as ways to gain financial stability, thereby acknowledging the women's agency and humanity, unlike the travel writers.²⁹

Aslakson and Clark both utilize Albert Tessier's original advertisements of the Quadroon Balls in 1805 as evidence of the myth further being perpetuated. Tessier, in found evidence, never used the term "Quadroon Balls," but instead referred to them as balls for free women of color. Tessier's balls led to the development of more in the same nature around the city that would then develop the term "Quadroon Balls."³⁰ Clark's and Aslakson's evidence dispels the historical inaccuracy created by the travel writers to the city. Aslakson suggests that the fact that these recurring balls advertised in the newspaper as open to the public suggest that they were not the form of ball respectable women would attend to find a suitor. As shown in *The Times-Picayune*, seven separate advertisements were placed for the Quadroon Balls that took place over the span of eighteen days.³¹ He then compares the debutante balls that occurred around this time period to the Quadroon Balls here to draw this conclusion. Where the debutante balls were invite-only and usually occurred once a year for women to meet a possible suitor, the Quadroon Balls occurred twice a week and were open to any white man who could afford admittance.³²

²⁹ Emily Clark, *The Strange History of the American Quadroon: Free Women of Color in the Revolutionary Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 172-176.

³⁰ Kenneth Aslakson, "The "Quadroon-Plaçage" Myth of Antebellum New Orleans: Anglo-American (Mis)interpretations of a French-Caribbean Phenomenon," *Journal of Social History* 45, no. 3 (2012): 709-34, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41678906>

³¹ *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans, Louisiana), December 19, 1844: 3.; December 22, 1844: 3.; December 24, 1844: 3.; December 25, 1844: 3.; December 26, 1844: 3.; December 27, 1844: 3.; December 31, 1844: 3.

³² Kenneth Aslakson, "The "Quadroon-Plaçage" Myth of Antebellum New Orleans: Anglo-American (Mis)interpretations of a French-Caribbean Phenomenon," *Journal of Social History* 45, no. 3 (2012): 712

Beyond the myths surrounding creole women of color, French creole women such as Madame Delphine Lalaurie are also demonized in tourist mythology. Some historians have researched and deconstructed mythology surrounding her as well, but this mythology is still capitalized on by the tourism industry by retelling incorrect and sensational narratives concerning Madame Delphine Lalaurie. The legends surrounding Lalaurie are frequently utilized on walking tours in New Orleans as ways to entertain and inform tourists about New Orleans' past. Lalaurie was a resident of the city during the early 1800s. She lived with her family and their enslaved servants on the corner of today's Royal and Governor Nichols streets, and the legends claim she abused and tortured the enslaved people. Madame Lalaurie and her family are used as a major topic on most ghost tours but, the narratives spun by the tour guides often conflict with one another. In the book, *Mad Madame Lalaurie: New Orleans' Most Famous Murderess Revealed*, historians Victoria Cosner Love and Lorelei Shannon analyze many past narratives that contributed to the mythology that surrounds Lalaurie.

The book recounts testimony made by a tour guide on a ghost tour. The guide mentioned the many ways in which Lalaurie allegedly mutilated enslaved people. The guide also recounted how Madame Lalaurie chased an enslaved girl through the house with a bullwhip, which led the girl to jump from the third-story balcony and exposed the first instances of Lalaurie's treatment of her enslaved people to the public. The guide mentioned that after the event, Lalaurie stood before a judge who confiscated her enslaved people and fined her. Then the guide described how Lalaurie got them back by having another family member purchase them and give them back to her. The guide then recounted the mythology surrounding the night of the fire in 1834, stating that it was rumored that the grandmother of the little girl who jumped may have purposely started the fire while chained to an oven in the house. According to the guide, when

the firefighters arrived at the scene Lalaurie, was more concerned with getting her valuables out of the house. Subsequently, a mob of people formed and questioned where the enslaved people were. When the firefighters found the padlocked attic and got in, according to the guide, they found the sights of many mutilated enslaved people. Many of which had been disfigured, operated on, and left in horrifying conditions. The guide then went on to describe how the Lalaurie family fled that night to Mandeville and then never returned to New Orleans alive. The guide claims that Madame Lalaurie's body was returned after her death to rest in St. Louis Cemetery No.1.³³

At the conclusion of this chapter, Love and Shannon stipulate that the tour guide's account was not all to the story of Lalaurie and that more historical evidence has been unearthed. They mention that all the information recounted from the guide is just, "stuff of New Orleans legend." Love and Shannon tell the reader, "if you want to know the real story turn the page."³⁴ Love and Shannon utilize court records, correspondence, medical records, and travel records to deconstruct the mythology surrounding the tourist narratives being perpetuated. Love and Shannon point out Madame Lalaurie's husband is often omitted from the narratives, when in fact, Dr. Louis Lalaurie practiced as a medical doctor and was more likely to have been the one performing the alleged "medical" procedures and mutilations upon the enslaved people claimed to have been found in the attic the night of the fire.³⁵ Love and Shannon even use court records to show a history of abusive behavior performed by Louis Lalaurie when Madame Lalaurie filed for separation from Louis under the pretenses that he, "beat and wound her in the most outrageous

³³ Victoria Cosner Love and Lorelei Shannon, *Mad Madame Lalaurie: New Orleans' Most Famous Murderess Revealed* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2011), 11-20.

³⁴ Ibid 20.

³⁵ Ibid 35.

and (illegible) manner.” They also note that the date of the court hearing for the separation was on the same day that the Lalaurie’s petitioned to free one of their enslaved people.³⁶

Love and Shannon then utilize a deposition made by Judge Canongo in court concerning the day of the fire that includes details that describe how the enslaved people were found that night. The deposition mentions how many enslaved people were found chained up, some with shackles on their feet and one woman with a very heavy collar-like chain around her neck. One enslaved woman was found with a deep wound in her head. Dr. Lalaurie was at the scene and when questioned by a Mr. Guillotte if Dr. Lalaurie had any more “slaves in his garret,” Dr. Lalaurie replied in, “an insulting tone,” that, “that there were persons who would do much better by remaining at home than visiting others to dictate to them laws in the quality of officious friends.”³⁷ The statement made shows that there were reportedly no enslaved people found in the attic area with horrid mutilations that the tour guide mentioned, and that no reported mob of people chased the Lalauries out of town. This account was also published in the *Bee* newspaper in the April 12, 1834 edition.³⁸ While the scene described by the witness statement was not one of complete horror as described by the tour guide in Chapter One, the treatment of these enslaved people was still horrifying, and the statements made by Dr. Lalaurie of no concern for the enslaved people still stuck inside of the home while the fire burned reveals that Dr. Lalaurie deserves more responsibility for the mistreatment of the enslaved people in his home than he receives in the mythological narratives presented on the subject.

Love and Shannon feature an entire chapter at the end of the book on stating the “myth” that surrounds Madame Lalaurie and then the “fact” following it up. Examples of the mythology

³⁶ Ibid 37.

³⁷ Ibid 38-39.

³⁸ *New Orleans Bee*. April 11-12, 1834.

used include the myth that the enslaved girl fell from the balcony after Madame Lalaurie chased her around with a bullwhip. The facts about the myth then presented by Love and Shannon stipulate that no evidence has been discovered to show this alleged incident took place. No death certificate or court records document the death, despite that the lore associated with the incident stipulates that witnesses reported the incident. If witnesses reported the incident, then at the least a civil case would have taken place and been documented.³⁹ To further dispel the mythology surrounding the night of the fire, Love and Shannon highlight once more the statements made and the deposition by Judge Canongo.

Along with this evidence to dispel the mythology surrounding the night of the fire, Love and Shannon trace the literary sources and evolution of the myth through several books, including Jeanne DeLavigne's book, *Ghost Stories of Old New Orleans* (1946), which first sensationalized the alleged atrocities committed against the enslaved people in the attic. DeLavigne's book documents for the first time the myth that some of the enslaved people had inflicted upon them being, their intestines extracted and knotted, being covered in honey and devoured by ants, and having their brains stirred with sticks. Love and Shannon stipulate that DeLavigne's stories could have been the result of artistic embellishments or the author heard stories from local lore.⁴⁰ To further negate the mythology surrounding the intense mistreatment of slaves in this manner the statements of Judge Canongo indicated that seven slaves were pulled from the building all showing signs of malnourishment, being beaten, and being chained. Love

³⁹ Victoria Cosner Love and Lorelei Shannon, *Mad Madame Lalaurie: New Orleans' Most Famous Murderess Revealed* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2011), 93.

⁴⁰ Ibid 94.

and Shannon also highlight that police records in New Orleans go back as far as 1834, and their research at the Louisiana State Library shows no documentation of the incident.⁴¹

Travel writers to the city assisted in the development of the mythology that surrounds Madame Lalaurie as well. Harriet Martineau, who also wrote about Quadroon Balls in the early nineteenth century, wrote about Madame Lalaurie during her travels also, though she never met the woman. Martineau retells the story in, *Retrospect of Western Travel in 2 Vol.*, published in the 1840s, where she described many points of the mythology that has since been dispelled by historians like Love and their findings. She recounts the story of the little girl who jumped from the balcony, claiming to have heard the tale firsthand from a neighbor. Martineau states that event was investigated, and Madame Lalaurie was found guilty of mistreatment, which we know was not the case with no present police or court records found. Martineau recounts the story of how the Lalaurie family fled the night of the fire and were chased down by an angry mob, which again has yet to be backed up by proper documentation.⁴² Martineau's account of her travels occurred five years after the events of the fire took place and can be viewed as second-hand and hearsay. Being a travel writer and a tourist to the city demonstrates how Martineau was more interested in writing an entertaining narrative rather than a factual one. Martineau's accounts went on to be used as evidence of the events that transpired and assisted in the current perpetuation of the Lalaurie mythology.

Renewed interest in the historic legends of Madame Lalaurie, Marie Laveau, and the religious practice of Voodoo has developed since the release of *American Horror Story's* third

⁴¹ Ibid 94.

⁴² Harriet Martineau, *Retrospect of Western Travel in 2 Vol* (London: Saunders and Otley, 1838).

season “Coven” in 2013. The series further perpetuated the mythology surrounding these subjects and created new tourist narratives to develop more entertaining storylines. Show creators Ryan Murphy and Brad Falchuk used the mythology surrounding Madame Lalaurie, Marie Laveau, and Voodoo and expanded it to create the storyline set in both the nineteenth century and in 2013. Both characters were portrayed as immortal due to different Voodoo spells, which perpetuates the stereotype that Voodoo was rooted in “black magic” instead of a religion with its’ own practices. The show depicted Marie Laveau practicing Voodoo, and her raising the dead and creating blood-thirsty zombies at her control, controlling people’s minds, and stealing babies to give to a Voodoo spirit to remain immortal. All these practices are rooted in stereotypes created by mass media to downplay and undermine the religion of Voodoo and create a bad image surrounding it rooted in racism. The show used this mythological interpretation of Voodoo for its shock factor and to create a more exciting story.⁴³

The show exaggerated even the already existent mythological narrative of Madame Lalaurie, initially created by travel writers and years of tourism. *American Horror Story* used dramatic license to alter the mythology surrounding the alleged young girl who jumped to her death from the balcony. In the 2013 show, the young girl jumps to her death after Madame Lalaurie discovers the new baby’s father is Dr. Lalaurie, and Madame Lalaurie then kills the baby to use its blood as a skin treatment. Another mythological narrative shifted for entertainment was the night of the fire. In the show, the fire never happened and instead, Marie Laveau poisoned Madame Lalaurie and made her immortal. Laveau then led a mob of people to the house, and the mob then killed the Lalaurie family, except for Madame Lalaurie, by hanging

⁴³ *American Horror Story: Coven*. Season 3. Directed by Ryan Murphy and Brad Falchuk. Written by Ryan Murphy, featuring Angela Bassett, Kathy Bates, and Jessica Lange Aired on October 9, 2013- January 29, 2014 on FX.

them off the balcony. Laveau then buried the now immortal Madame Lalaurie in an unmarked grave to lay immortally until she would be uncovered in the modern age. The final myth the show created was that the current site of the former Lalaurie mansion was turned into a museum to showcase the history of Madame Lalaurie, which has never occurred at the site of her former home.⁴⁴

These works by Aslakson, Clark, and Love and Shannon illustrate how current scholarship attempts to counter the historical misinformation being spread by the tourist industry. Through court documents and other legal records, these historians dispel mythology and present a more historical narrative based on research that still presents an interesting story. These historians, amongst others, reflect a new age in which historical truths are valued and can be utilized to properly learn about and from the past to not repeat similar mistakes. This recent scholarship helps to pave the way for a shift in the tourism industry in New Orleans to focus on accurate historical accounts and give more agency to the voices of the past in their stories of the present.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

Continued Perpetuation of Mythology Through Tourism

Despite the prevalence of accurate historical scholarship that dispels many of New Orleans' most notorious legends, myths, and characters, the city's tourism industry continues to promote the misinformation of the past legends. Today, one finds that hotels, tour companies, and many guides willingly sensationalize these past legends for entertainment and ignore the historical truth. This section presents an analysis of the current tourism sector as it relates to perpetuating or challenging different historical myths about the city of New Orleans and presents an examination of both tour company advertisements and interviews with operators and licensed tour guides. The section utilizes information gathered from the years 2019-2021 and utilizes eyewitness testimonies to present evidence on how the tourism industry in New Orleans continues to perpetuate mythology for capital gain.

Within the hospitality industry, some hotels rely heavily on ghost stories and Quadroon Ball mythology to entertain and attract tourists. Both the Bourbon Orleans Hotel and the Haunted Hotel NOLA utilize stories based on these legends to bring in guests. The Bourbon Orleans Hotel is often cited as the site containing the ballroom where Quadroon Balls took place in New Orleans. The hotel utilizes the mythology that surrounds these balls that took place in the nineteenth century as an advertisement on their website. As of 2021, the hotel has had a display case in their lobby containing "artifacts" that came from Quadroon Balls. The hotel also features the myth on their website under their history tab about their ballroom. The hotel quickly glances over the myth on their web page by only displaying one sentence about the Quadroon Balls and mixing it in with other balls and operas that occurred at the site.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ "THE ORLEANS BALLROOM AND THEATRE" Bourbon Orleans, date accessed September 23rd, 2020, <https://www.bourbonorleans.com/the-hotel/history/orleans-theatre-ballroom>.

The Haunted Hotel NOLA utilizes the story of The Axe Man of New Orleans, a historic serial murderer from the early twentieth century, for promotion. The hotel claims that the famed murderer lived at the hotel where he worked as the handyman. This claim has no proper evidence to support except for the handyman of the time being a possible suspect. Although the crime remains unsolved, and the identity of the Axe Man was never definitively proved, the hotel relies on this mythology to bring in guests. On their website, the hotel also claims that a few years ago they discovered a bloody axe in the attic of the hotel that they believe to have belonged to the Axe Man. The hotel now displays that axe in the lobby for all to look at along with the note the Axe Man sent to local newspapers for guests to observe.⁴⁶ These New Orleans hotels utilizing these historic legends demonstrate how mythology is being used in New Orleans in the tourism industry to bring in revenue under the guise of history and spread misinformation to tourists of the city.

The mythology surrounding certain events and persons in New Orleans history is also heavily perpetuated by tour guides today. Despite recent historical scholarship on the histories of Madame Lalaurie, the Quadroon Balls, and *placage* relationships, many tour guides continue to utilize mythology to create entertaining narratives for tourists. Just like the Haunted Hotel NOLA continues to use the mythology surrounding the Axe Man of New Orleans, tour guides and tour companies use misinformation to romanticize the past and make a profit on these myth-based narratives, tour guides and tour companies use misinformation to romanticize the past and make a profit on these myth-based narratives and travel journals. To better understand how New

⁴⁶ “About Us” The Haunted Hotel NOLA, date accessed April 15th, 2021, <http://hauntedhotelnola.com/about-us/>.

Orleans tour guides have presented historical mythology as historical evidence one must look to the companies and the tour guides themselves.

Walking tours in New Orleans follow many different routes depending on the tour type, location, and guide. Tours can be formatted differently based on the company and what the specific tour guide giving said tour wishes to discuss. The format followed by a canvased ghost tour (referred to as Canvased Tour 1) of the French Quarter began at Armstrong Park and ended at The Haunted Hotel NOLA, though the guide informed the group that, on occasion, the tour ends at the Lalaurie Mansion. Canvased Tour 1 brought the group to Armstrong Park to discuss Congo Square and the mass lynching of Italian Americans that occurred on the property. The next stop was the site of the former residence of Marie Laveau on St. Anne Street, where the guide discussed Laveau's life and New Orleans-specific Voodoo. The tour then proceeded onto the corner of Ursuline and Chartres Streets to discuss the mythology of Jacques Saint Germaine, "the Vampire of New Orleans." The tour then moved onto the Lalaurie Mansion, where the guide presented both the historical evidence mentioned in Love and Shannon's book alongside the myth. Finally, the tour ended at the Haunted Hotel where the guide discussed the Axe Man of New Orleans.⁴⁷ Canvased Tour 1 presented both the myth and the historical evidence surrounding most narratives presented, unlike another canvased tour that did not.

Another ghost tour (referred to as Canvased Tour 2) of the French Quarter canvased relied heavily on the mythological accounts to entertain the patrons. Unlike Canvased Tour 1, Canvased Tour 2 portrayed the mythological narratives as concrete accounts and not myths based on perpetuation. This tour began at Muriel's Restaurant on Jackson Square, where the

⁴⁷ "Canvased Tour 1" Ghost Tour of New Orleans, April 13th, 2021.

guide encouraged the group to take photographs in hopes of catching a legendary ghost on camera. Then the tour went to the Pharmacy Museum to discuss Dr. Dupas who the guide claimed murdered hundreds of enslaved people. The tour then moved onto the Royal Orleans Hotel where the guide recounted the cannibalistic story of Zach and Addie which took place in 2006. The story is based on the events that transpired post-Katrina when Zach suffered a mental break and murdered Addie in a barbaric manner. A few weeks after the murder, Zach committed suicide and left a note confessing to his crimes. The guide gave very gruesome and untrue details, like Zach eating parts of Addie which was untrue. The next stop on the tour was Marie Laveau's House of Voodoo, which the guide cited as the site of Laveau's former home, another historically incorrect claim. The tour then moved onto the Lalaurie Mansion where the guide told the mythologized story of Madame Lalaurie, which included more gory details. At the final stop of the old Ursuline Convent, the guide informed us the first vampires of New Orleans lived there, and who were women known in legend as "the casket girls," who immigrated from France during the eighteenth century.⁴⁸ Canvased Tour 2 based the entirety of their tour on mythology and presented the myths as historical narratives to their unknowing group of tourists. This tour demonstrates how tourism has capitalized on sensational legends and perpetuated the myths to acquire revenue from unknowing audiences.

Among current New Orleans tour guides, Grace Gilpin offered her insights concerning her experiences surrounding the training and practices of tour guides in New Orleans. Originally from Baton Rouge, Gilpin is a current licensed New Orleans tour guide who has lived in New Orleans for over four years. She is currently a student at the University of New Orleans majoring

⁴⁸ "Canvased Tour 2" Ghost Tour of New Orleans, April 10th, 2021.

in Film. Gilpin discussed her own experiences with the process of becoming a New Orleans tour guide and the general steps one would take to go through the process of becoming one. Gilpin's primary interest is in giving "ghost" tours of the city, which are widely based on myths and legends. Her testimony reveals her experiences as a tour guide, while her views on the perpetuation of mythology, and the separation of myths from historical evidence provides insight into the current state of New Orleans tourism. In August of 2019, Gilpin began the short process of training as a New Orleans tour guide. Gilpin shared that the process of becoming a licensed tour guide is rather easy and quick. First, one must simply pass a test on general information about the city and get hired by a tour company. To prepare for this test, Gilpin was suggested to read the supplemental material suggested by the New Orleans' Tour Guides Association, she however did not.⁴⁹ The supplemental material would be the book, *Beautiful Crescent: A History of New Orleans* by Joan B. Garvey and Mary Lou Widmer. The book has been updated several times by editors Kathy Chappetta Spiess and Karen Chappetta.

Beautiful Crescent is regarded on the back cover to be, "the definitive guide for travelers and the recommended text for tour guides throughout the city" but, the book itself could use updating. *Beautiful Crescent* also comes heavily recommended by Barbra Robichaux, the board president of New Orleans' Tour Guides Association, calling the book "a gift to visitors and locals alike." The book itself is broken up into twelve chapters and begins with the Ice Age and forming of the city of New Orleans then goes on through its discovery up until the BP Oil Spill of 2010. Garvey and Widmer exclude a bibliography from the book as well and cite no sources throughout. This lack of source documentation shows the reader that the book has been written

⁴⁹ Grace Gilpin, interviewed by Maddie Roach, October 9th, 2020, via Zoom.

for a general audience, and it cannot be considered a formal scholarly history. The book rarely goes in-depth about a given subject, but instead gives the reader a barebones synopsis of a given topic. The section on Voodoo appeals to the myths created on the subject and never refers to Voodoo as a religion but simply as a “dominant force among the black population.”⁵⁰ The utilization of this book as the recommended literature for tour guides demonstrates how those training to be tour guides in New Orleans are provided with little historical or scholarly recommendations about the city, which would not allow them a broad historical overview of the city. *Beautiful Crescent* also demonstrates its’ poor formatting and lack of details through the description of the Quadroon Balls within its text. The information about Quadroon Balls is located in the chapter titled, “Progress in a Period of Peace” under the subtitle of “Free Men of Color.” The information listed here, however, also includes information about free women of color and lumped the two subjects together on fewer than two pages.

Gilpin thought *Beautiful Crescent* was “a little arbitrary” calling it “a history book that is very disputed by New Orleans Tour Guides for its’ accuracy.” She believed the book to be rather long and contained little of the information included on the test. The book focused more on New Orleans history whereas the test included maybe five questions about general New Orleans history. Gilpin believed that the test, although easy to pass, does nothing to qualify one to be a tour guide in New Orleans due to a wealth of so many kinds of tours throughout the city. She, being more focused on New Orleans ghost tours, saw the test as obsolete since her subject area of expertise was not included on the test. Without reading *Beautiful Crescent*, Gilpin still moved

⁵⁰ Jan B. Garvey and Mary Lou Widmer. *Beautiful Crescent: A History of New Orleans*, 9th Edition. Edited by Kathy Cappetta Spiess and Karen Chappetta. Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, 2017.

forward in the process of becoming a tour guide by scheduling and taking her test at New Orleans City Hall. She passed easily without the help of *Beautiful Crescent* and received her tour guide's license after paying a small fee. The test consisted of only twenty questions. The information on the test ranged from the locations of certain statues and monuments to naming the New Orleans' neighborhoods and placing them on a map. The test had very basic New Orleans history knowledge that she believed to be easily passable to anyone who has lived in the city for a couple of years. After passing the test, she had to pass a background check through the state to be able to receive her license. She believed that the requirements enabled the tour guide license applicant to "prove to them (the New Orleans Tour Guides Association and the city) that you (the interested tour guide) were willing to do something to become a tour guide because none of it (the process) was difficult."⁵¹

Once receiving her license, Gilpin sought out employment with a tour company. Her first job she found on LinkedIn, and the company interviewed and gave her a position. Gilpin first worked for a company (referred to as Tour Company A) but left shortly after being hired. She detailed her experience. Upon getting hired, Gilpin entered their training process for new tour guides, which involved her shadowing a current tour guide on a tour. During the training, the tour guide gave Gilpin advice, such as being told to "explicitly lie to the customers," and that the tour guides believed that "the people on the tour were there to be entertained and not to learn history." Gilpin felt that this advice was unethical. Which led her to not continue to train with this company, because of their "lack of respect for the history and the truth of the city." Gilpin recounted the embellishments created by the tour guide she shadowed. An example centered

⁵¹ Grace Gilpin, interviewed by Maddie Roach, October 9th, 2020, via Zoom.

around the story of the Lalaurie Mansion, where the tour guide referred to the myth that, “a slave jumped from the second story to their death alerting the police to come,” which is not backed by any historical evidence or accounts. The company emphasized that they should “find the most interesting story and go with that one instead of telling them to base it on police reports or actual records of the time period.” In contrast to her current employer, Gilpin recounted the story based on the information in the police reports during the time of the incident. Another story this tour guide at Tour Company A embellished and mythologized was the story behind Zach and Addie. The company directed Gilpin to “lie about,” this story and the night the murder took place, even though the story is “easily searchable on the internet because it was in 2005.” The company’s endorsement of historical inaccuracy led Gilpin to find a new tour company, especially given the context of Zach and Addie’s story and the heartache it created for the people of New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.⁵²

Gilpin is currently employed by a second company (referred to as Tour Company B), that conducts ghost tours in New Orleans. Tour Company B’s training for Gilpin also involved her shadowing other tour guides and recording their audio for instruction. The company provided Gilpin with reading materials and suggested articles and documentaries to look over to help provide Gilpin with a better understanding of the history and myths covered on her intended tours. These materials mainly consisted of historical books specific to the stories being told along the tour route instead of general New Orleans’ history books like *Beautiful Crescent*. Tour

⁵² Ibid

Company B also recommended that Gilpin listen to several podcasts, and to read newspaper articles written about the stories, which helped provide her with more first-hand accounts.⁵³

Tour Company B, according to Gilpin, allows their tour guides to copy one another's tours, but also allows their tour guides to write their own scripts for their tours based on the current tour information, their personal interests, and other information in their gathered content. Once Gilpin compressed her script, the owners of the tour company checked it for historical accuracy. Gilpin then performed the tour for the owners and following their approval, she completed the training process and started giving unsupervised tours through their company. Gilpin felt more comfortable being with Tour Company B, because she believed with this company, "you have to tell the truth." The company focused more on presenting the customers with a historical narrative of the stories of New Orleans. Gilpin liked that this company gave her "all the facts" but also, allowed her the freedom to write her own script and add in additional information about smaller topics and stories that may have been present along the tour route in the French Quarter. Tour Company B provided her "a more structured learning experience," and more freedom to use her own voice on tours.⁵⁴

While Tour Company A showed no intent to differentiate myths from historical accounts to patrons on their tours, according to Gilpin, Tour Company B had their tour guides structure their tours around both myths and historical evidence. Gilpin said that Tour Company B had their tour guides begin with the historical accounts and evidence available on the current stop of the tour. Then, after presenting the historical information, the tour guides could "round the story

⁵³ Ibid

⁵⁴ Ibid

out,” with any myth or lore that surrounds the topic they are presenting to their tour patrons. The myth behind the story is prefaced with the fact that the interpretation has been derived from local lore. Thus, this process allowed for a clearer presentation that allowed for the separation of the facts from the more disputed myths for the patrons, and still provided the more entertaining story portions of the subject.⁵⁵

Gilpin, being a tour guide and New Orleans resident, became well versed in the stories included on most tours in New Orleans. With the prior knowledge of tour subjects, she witnessed other tour guides from different companies present inaccurate information when on tours. Gilpin claimed that “Everyone is just saying different things, and there is no one really checking each other.” Furthermore, “No one is fact-checking each other and a lot of it is just done for entertainment value.” Gilpin also included her own experiences with New Orleans’ tours as a patron, and outside of her perspective as a tour guide. She recounted times where she took visiting out-of-town relatives on New Orleans-centered tours in the French Quarter and witnessed the tour guide having little concern for historical accuracy. Gilpin recounted that once on a tour being conducted on a carriage ride, she spoke with the tour guide who conducted the tour and he admitted, “They are people trained in driving the carriages and not trained in giving tours.” According to the carriage driver, giving tours is, “the second part to them.” She stated that a lot of the tours, with ghost tours especially, are, “lying for entertainment.” Gilpin wanted it noted importantly that, “the customers know this, and they do not care and are only trying to have fun.” She, however, as a tour guide and citizen of New Orleans, believes in differentiating

⁵⁵ Ibid

myths and lore from historical information when conducting her tours and portraying the tour content as close to their historical narrative as possible.⁵⁶

The owner of another tour company, Libby Bollino of Lucky Bean Tours, offered further insight on tour companies in New Orleans. Bollino provided insight into how walking tour companies in New Orleans work both from the perspective of the owner and the point of view of the tour guide and their experiences having been on both ends of the job. Bollino started Lucky Bean Tours in 2016 after she had been a tour guide at several other companies and wanted to give tours that she had more interest in giving, rather than set scripted tours at other companies she worked for.⁵⁷ The company, according to Bollino, is “very small” and “in a huge sea.” Even though they have remained small, she believed that their smaller size worked to their advantage, up until the impacts of the COVID-19 virus, which had shut them down for a while. They are currently still operating but currently not at a profit, hosting only smaller group tours with people who have quarantined or traveled together and show no symptoms of the virus. She is hopeful however that once, “we emerge on the other end of it we will be in the same place, or if not even better than before.”

Bollino's initial interest in becoming a New Orleans tour guide came from her previous careers as a bartender and a teacher. As she got older, Bollino wanted to stop tending bar and pursue something else. She took notice of a class being offered by Delgado Community College on becoming a tour guide and, “took it as a sign.” Once she completed the class, she called the first company she could find, (referred to here as Tour Company C), they had her train by

⁵⁶ Ibid

⁵⁷ Lucy Bollino, interviewed by Maddie Roach, January 19th, 2021, via Zoom

shadowing tours. Then a few weeks later she became a tour guide at their company. She believed that becoming a tour guide, “combined her interests” of “telling a story and conveying information in an entertaining way.” Bollino stated that being a tour guide made her feel, “like I did when I was a teacher on the best days, entertaining guests and showing our hospitality as a city like I did when I was a bartender, but without having to deal with drunk people and without having to deal with parents, just doing the good parts of it.” She preferred being a tour guide to both being a teacher and a bartender, she stated because, “it’s so refreshing because the customers are on vacation, they’re happy, they’re just wanting to have a good time.”

Bollino stated how she started her own tour company to provide a tour geared more towards quality over quantity. In prepping for a small group tour, Bollino requests information from patrons on their preferences and interests, when they book in advance. This preparation ensures that the tour guide may anticipate possible questions that may arise and maintain historically accurate information. Bollino, when it comes to hiring tour guides for her company, believed her company does so differently than others. She has never had to advertise positions available like other companies have on websites like LinkedIn, where Gilpin found listings. Bollino claimed, “most tour guides are contract workers or 1099 workers, most tour guides are not exclusive to one tour company.” Therefore, most of the tour guides that she has working for her are ones she has met either working for past companies or ones she notices on the street that she, “has a good feeling about them.” She will then get to know that person, and if they seem like a good fit, will ask them to do tours for her company.

After the tour guide is hired and trained, Bollino suggests the guide keep a binder of their information and materials. Bollino carries along her binder with visuals on tours. She believes

that images of historical figures and maps enable patrons to visualize portions of the tour that may not exist anymore. She keeps these historical resources along with images of the impacts of Hurricane Katrina on the city to show patrons the sites of flooding and the damage caused to the city. By keeping a binder, she can refer to any historical articles and other pieces of historical evidence gathered to present a more historically accurate tour. She heavily believes in tour guides telling the stories that they like the most. She states, “If you like them then you’ll tell them well, if it’s nothing that speaks to you then it’s not going to be a good tour” which also benefits the historical accuracy of the subject matter

Concerning suggested readings and materials, Bollino did not suggest *Beautiful Crescent*. Much like Gilpin attested in her interview, Bollino remarked that the book, “was originally published in the ’80s, and it was probably okay just as a skeleton that needed fleshing out.” Bollino states, “it’s been edited and over-edited; that it’s just plain incorrect. And the research has shown otherwise.” She does however give credit to the women who wrote it back in the ’80s because, “it was a fairly comprehensive history of New Orleans with what they knew at the time, no internet just being able to go to the library with what you can find, it was probably good at the time.”

When it comes to mythical versus historical narratives, Bollino personally starts off tours stating which of the two are being presented. Although she prefers to conduct historically based tours through her company, on occasion she has given ghost tours. Such tours she states, “are very myth-based, in its essence, it has to be a myth because it’s a ghost tour it has to be a myth.” She tries to get patrons to understand, “this is like sitting around a campfire telling ghost stories like it’s fun,” but not historical. On her historically based tours, she believes that if it is a well-

known myth, it can be included but it must be presented as such. “Otherwise, we are just spreading the untruth because history is even more fascinating than any myth that anyone else came up with.” As an example of when approaching myths on her tours, Bollino spoke on how she presents the “Corn Stalk Fence” myth. She informed me of the way many present the information of the myth as factual stating, “the man who used to own this fence was from Louisiana and his wife was from Iowa, someplace they used to grow corn. And then they’ll say he had this fence commissioned, so she could look out at the fence and see the cornfields of her home state.” She claimed that tour guides would tell this story as if it was the truth for many years. But then she states, “the tour guides would shift their narrative to say, “according to legend” as if that would cover all bases.” She, however, presents the narrative when approaching the story that, “tour guides used to say this, but that was untrue the fence was actually out of a catalog out of Philadelphia.” She tries not to spread myths to her patrons. And if she is unsure, she admits so and then researches the subject to stay as historically accurate as possible.

When asked if tourists to the city on her tours are there to just be entertained or to learn about the city, Bollino believed they want to learn about history. She claimed, “the ghost tours are there to be entertained, if you were to take a group on a ghost tour maybe one person wants to truly learn but the others just want to be entertained.” She believed that on her daytime historical tours the patrons are there to hear the history and be exposed to the culture of the city. “It’s not necessarily about the history but about the culture. Why is New Orleans interesting; why did I want to come here? What is it about this place that is different from other places? And if you can find the right guide, that guide through stories will help you get the culture and give you that understanding of what makes it (New Orleans) so unique.”

Sean Steele is another New Orleans tour guide interviewed. Steele works as a tour guide predominantly in the French Quarter and has done so since 2017. He is currently a graduate student at the University of New Orleans majoring in history. He has worked for one tour company (referred to as Tour Company D). Sean became interested in becoming a tour guide after being a Pedicab operator for a while and then switched to tour guiding for steadier pay. Steele took similar steps as Gilpin to acquire a license. Very similar to Gilpin's testimony, Steele found the city's exam easy, especially if you are from New Orleans. He became employed by Tour Company D by inquiring about open positions at the company. He started working after a brief audition and interview. Tour Company D provided paid training which involved shadowing guides on tours for around two weeks. Steele informed me that Tour Company D does not provide scripts unlike others canvased, the tour guides are free to make their own scripts based on their interests and the interests of patrons on their tours. Working with ghost tours his only restriction is that he must visit the Lalaurie Mansion.⁵⁸

Steele stated in the interview that, "being a tour guide is more like being an entertainer than being a historian. I try my best to make sure everything I am saying is right, but you are competing with the French Quarter for people's attention. So, you have got to win that competition." He claimed, "It's more about being a good entertainer than it is about being a man who's teaching history." Steele believed that most people are not in the city to learn about history, but to be entertained. Some common myths Steele has heard used by other tour guides on tours in the French Quarter are the myths surrounding the "Romeo Prongs" which are pointy prongs on top of many columns of houses in the Quarter that are in place to keep birds from nesting on them, but the mythology told by tour guides is that the prongs have been there to keep

⁵⁸ Sean Steele, interviewed by Maddie Roach, April 9th, 2021, via Zoom.

men from climbing them to spy on young women during the nineteenth century. Steele has heard guides tell gory details of men being castrated by the prongs as they climbed them.

Steele also touched on how Voodoo is mythologized on tours he has overheard while working in the Quarter. He avoids recounting the mythology surrounding Voodoo, and instead, he presents the realities of the subject to his patrons. Steele also on occasion has seen other tour guides claim that Marie Laveau's House of Voodoo was her former residence. Another story he frequently overhears that is shrouded in mythology is the story of Pirate's Alley that runs right by the Louisiana State Museum's Cabildo. He informed me that this story of pirates fencing and conducting illegal activities in the alley is based on mythology since a police station right nearby reduced the odds of illegal activities occurring. Steele claimed that his favorite story to tell on his tours is the mythology surrounding the vampires at the Ursuline Convent.

Steele tries to, "draw the line at an ethical place," when giving tours. He stays away from topics that he does not feel comfortable addressing or that are not, "his place," to bring up on tours. Steele stated he would never discuss the stories of *placage* while on a tour. He believes that the stories are, "too complicated to condense down to five minutes," and that they are one of the more harmful ones he has heard. Steele claimed that the stories many guides tell romanticize the relationships, and they tell the narrative in a way that clouds the actuality of the relationships and dispels the women of color's experience. Steele also does not tell the stories that surround Zach and Addie, because "Zach and Addie are a little too recent to turn into entertainment." Steele stated, "saying something about someone from the 1700s versus saying something about someone from when I was alive and who still have family around is less than appropriate entertainment." On his tours, however, Steele believes certain topics must be addressed that many other tour guides glance over. He claimed, "there are people who give entire New Orleans

tours and never once mention slavery, they will go through as though that was not a functional aspect of the city's core at the time." He believes, "if you are going to talk about New Orleans these subjects (slavery and enslaved people) have to come up."

When asked if, as a tour guide, he believes that there is any historical accuracy to be upheld on the tours, Steele stated, "it depends on which tour he is given." On ghost tours, he understands that "people just want to be entertained," but on more history-based tours of the city, Steele researches and provides information to be the most historically accurate. He believes providing the most historical and truthful tour possible is morally required, but on certain tours like ghost tours, "it's more acceptable to be more loosey-goosey with it." But he feels vindicated as long as he makes an effort to be historically correct.

An interview with another New Orleans tour guide who will be referred to as Guide X provided a great deal of information on the perspective of being both a historian and a tour guide in the city. Guide X has a master's degree in history and has worked in the history field as a professor, but after 2012 switched careers and became a tour guide in the city primarily giving ghost tours, cemetery tours, and true crime tours in the French Quarter. He thought it would be, "a fun thing to do," that involved history. He also took the steps to receive a license by taking the exam at city hall. Guide X read over *The Beautiful Crescent* like many other guides, but from the perspective of a historian, he found the book lacking in parts. Guide X in school specialized in military history and claimed, "the section on the War of 1812 was the worst I had read anywhere." He suggested for readers to, "read with a grain of salt." The training process he went through at the tour company he works for (referred to as Tour Company E) was similar to Gilpin's experience in that Guide X shadowed a few tours and was given a script to utilize. From there, Guide X slowly began presenting two to three stops alongside another guide before

operating a tour solo. Guide X, however, received no supplementary readings to go along with his training process and claimed, “reading beyond the general information as a tour guide is almost detrimental to you if you are doing ghost tours, the more facts you learn it is going to be difficult to do the tour.” Guide X stated, however, that, because he believes in ghosts, he can give a ghost tour, although many other tours he has encountered or overheard while working in the Quarter are, “absolute horse crap.” Guide X stated, “it’s tough to hear them as a historian, and sometimes the scripts they give you are incorrect,” he threw out his script and uses one that he created himself. Guide X’s tour is labeled as “family-friendly” although he believes, “New Orleans history is not family-friendly for the most part. We talk about slavery, deaths of slaves, prostitutes, which, when presented on a tour, I refer to a special friendship because I can’t say prostitute in front of a kid.” This censorship factor is one that Guide X dislikes about the tour he gives.⁵⁹

When presenting tours, Guide X prefaces his tours with the fact that, he is a historian and not a storyteller, and that he sticks more to the historical narratives. Guide X used the Lalaurie Mansion as an example of a site on his tour that he sticks to the historical narratives, rather than presenting the mythology like many other guides he has encountered. Guide X, much like Love and Shannon, informs his patrons of the historical narrative of the night of the fire that the enslaved people were not found in the attic in the gory conditions, but instead elsewhere in the home. He goes into detail that the fire began in the side building where the enslaved people lived and where many of them were found. Guide X brings along with him on his tours some copies of the historical newspapers that detail the night of the fire, as proof to his patrons of the events that occurred, compared to the mythology that surrounds the narrative. On occasion Guide X has had

⁵⁹ Guide X, interviewed by Maddie Roach, October 15th, 2021, via Zoom.

patrons come up to him after the tour to discuss the mythology surrounding the Lalaurie family, and in these cases, Guide X gives his patrons suggested reading to learn further about the history.

Another legend Guide X encountered is the story of the “Sultan’s Palace” a large residence at the corner of Orleans and Dauphine Streets. This legend was originally on the script provided to him, but he removed it from his tour due to the lack of historical evidence. The story focuses on a man who claimed to be a Turkish Prince who is murdered at the home, but Guide X claims no evidence backs up this myth. Guide X also discussed the mythology that surrounds the Haunted Hotel NOLA, and the claims that the Axe Man of New Orleans lived there. He stated that the owners were, “smart, knowing that many people have seen ‘American Horror Story’ and they know the character.” Guide X also claimed that the Hotel’s pamphlet stated that the Axe Man, “killed hundreds of people,” when in fact he did not. Guide X witnessed tour guides reference the Hotel as the location where the Axe Man lived or committed murders, but because the crime is unsolved and the murderer was never caught, no historical evidence links the crimes to the hotel in any way. Guide X viewed this practice as dangerous to New Orleans’ historical past because the hotel and mythology spread false narratives to unknowing tourists. Another myth frequently overheard by Guide X is the mythology surrounding Dr. Dupas and the Pharmacy Museum. Guide X overheard other tour guides claiming that Dr. Dupas murdered hundreds of enslaved women and conducted hundreds of experiments when the logistics of this would be improbable.

Guide X also discussed how tour companies currently operate amidst COVID-19 guidelines. Tour groups must stay at least fifty feet apart from other groups currently, which he claims is hard to do especially around the Lalaurie Mansion. Tour guides have interrupted his tours and even yelled at him that he is not the proper distance away from other tour guides, even

when he arrived at the location first. Guide X found that lately, other tour guides have been hostile and territorial of areas. Before Guide X was a tour guide, he witnessed two tour guides outside the Lalaurie Mansion arguing with one another over the space as well.

Guide X works with another guide who presented mythology as historical evidence on tours. The colleague also claimed to patrons on his tours that he is a trained historian, even though he did not go to college. This other guide, according to Guide X, does not read books on the subjects being presented to provide the patrons with accuracy, and this misrepresentation bothers him as a trained historian.

Guide X underscored the importance of portraying the narratives on his tours as historically accurate as possible. Justifying his philosophy, Guide X stated, “we don’t need to elaborate on New Orleans’ history, we have some weird, interesting, fascinating, dangerous and sometimes uncomfortable history that we don’t need to elaborate or bull shit about it and its truly unfortunate that people rely on mythology because I believe it is interesting enough.” He stated, “You don’t need a costume, you don’t need a top hat, just stick to the history.”

Tour operator Mikhala Iversen, a woman of African and European descent, founded All Bout Dat Tours LLC in New Orleans in 2013 to provide a fix for the void in the lack of African American history tour experiences in New Orleans.⁶⁰ Her company offers tours on Black Heritage and New Orleans Jazz. Iversen founded her tour company according to the All Bout Dat Tours LLC’s website in order to, “create what she could not find: An African American tour of Black life in New Orleans Louisiana.”⁶¹ When speaking with Iversen, her passion for her company and her tours was immense. Agreeing with historian Emily Clark, Iverson believes race

⁶⁰ Mikhala Iversen, interviewed by Maddie Roach, March 29, 2021, via Phone

⁶¹ “About.” All Bout Dat Tours LLC, accessed March, 2021, <https://www.allboutdat.com/about>.

relations and racism played into the dynamics and mythology surrounding the Quadroon Balls and *placage* legends. When she spoke about the free women of color during the nineteenth century and their connections to the Quadroon Balls, Iversen spoke on another myth related to the appearance of the free women of color. Iversen brought up the important detail of the objectification of these women for their appearances, and how they are portrayed as “exotic” and their skin complexion is referred to as lighter but still noticeably of African descent. Where the women’s skin complexion being lighter may have been the case for some of these women, Iversen made it important to note that not all the free women of color at the time period appeared in this way. According to Iversen, many women were “*Passé Blanc*,” meaning these French Creoles of Color were lighter-skinned and appeared as Caucasian, “white-passing.” Women that were *Passé Blanc* were also free women of color that are left out of the narrative because they do not fit into the “exotic” nature of the Quadroon Balls. Iversen then also touched on the topic of the light-skinned freemen of color. The mythology of the Quadroon Ball assumes all attendees were rich white men, when free men of color, who were *Passé Blanc*, could have attended.

All Bout Dat Tours LLC also directly mentions on their website their mission to, “inspire, heal, motivate, educate, and entertain all our visitors with the opportunity to learn the importance of resistance resilience and a spiritual life, honoring the past understanding the present, so we can shape the future.”⁶² The company’s dedication to both honoring the past and educating the present showcases the format of how tour companies could be run with the objective of preserving the culture and history while also weaving entertaining stories. Their goal is stated as, “to authentically represent Black history and the treasures of the birth of African American

⁶² “About,” All Bout Dat Tours LLC, accessed March, 2021, <https://www.allboutdat.com/about>.

music -Jazz.” This goal demonstrates that the company makes it their duty to ensure accuracy to their patrons. Iversen also spoke on how she, as the founder of the company, assists other guides in keeping their tours historically and culturally accurate by suggesting reading frequently. Many testimonies listed on the website affirm the company’s aspiration of educating and historical accuracy.⁶³

Along with canvassing All Bout Dat Tours LLC’s website, a few other tour guide companies in New Orleans websites revealed a great deal of information about the challenging or promotion of existing myths and attitude towards historical accuracy in tours. For example, the website for the tour company Hottest Hell, a ghost tour company, conveys through their website their desire to provide a more historically accurate portrayal of the city. On their “about us” portion of their website they directly attest that if you come on one of their tours expecting gimmicks and embellishments, “you’re likely to be let down.” The website states, “If we share stories of legend or lore, we’ll tell you in advance. They can be fascinating as all hell, and in some cases, could be accurate, but we’re not interested in presenting them as documented facts. If you want embellishments about our town, just binge watch *American Horror Story: Coven*.” State under their section of what to expect from their company is, “exhaustively researched,” stories, really showing their dedication to presenting the patrons with historical stories separated from myths and lore. In the company’s biography about themselves, they mention their mission statement and why the company operates how it does. Their website states that they have deepened their research over the years and tweaked their delivery of stories on their tours.

⁶³ “Testimonies” All Bout Dat Tours LLC, accessed March, 2021, <https://www.allboutdat.com/testimonies>.

Hottest Hell claims to offer historically correct tours as a New Orleans tourism business model, and also to stop the “spread of misinformation and a general lack of regard for the city’s reputation,” when it did not seem like a priority to other companies.⁶⁴

In contrast to Hottest Hell, many tour companies simply aim for entertainment. For example, the website for the tour company Witches Brew contains no mention of the word “historical” anywhere. The site instead mentions that the tour guides with the company are “experts” on local lore. The website heavily plays up the “hauntedness” of New Orleans and even informs patrons that they may see “a famed vampire,” while along on their tours. By looking into their website, the company is not trying to hide their lack of historical evidence on the subject matters they are presenting. The company focuses more on the theatrics and entertainment factor behind their tours. The website features reviews of their tours and “ghosts caught on camera” in place of sources used or historical evidence.⁶⁵ The website includes a link to their blog where they post stories and also post stories of different ghosts and haunted phenomena in New Orleans. The stories, however, are not backed by historical evidence and are presented theatrically. The website cites no sources and includes no historical evidence of any kind.⁶⁶

Haunted History Tours is one of the oldest and most popular ghost tour companies in New Orleans. The inclusion of the term “history” in the company name shows a semblance of

⁶⁴ “Hottest Hell: About Us” Hottesthell.com, accessed October, 2020, <https://www.hottesthell.com/about-us>.

⁶⁵ “About Our Haunted Tours” Witches Brew Tours, accessed October, 2020, <https://witchesbrewtours.com/about-our-haunted-tours/>.

⁶⁶ “Haunted New Orleans Blog” Witches Brew Tours, accessed October, 2020, <https://witchesbrewtours.com/haunted-blog/>.

hope that the tours are based on historical evidence. The company claims on their website to be, “Mildly theatrical, hugely historical, and thoroughly entertaining” which shows their testament to crafting a tour based around historical evidence.⁶⁷ Under the website's FAQ page, they claim, “These are tours based on real events in the city’s history.” This statement, however, provides some stipulation that their stories are “based on real events,” which without the notice on the tour, could slip by to patrons as historically accurate.⁶⁸

The website for Lucky Bean Tours focuses heavily on showcasing the passion their tour guides hold. Unlike the other two company’s websites, Lucky Bean specifically includes biographies for their tour guides while showcasing their specific interests. The website features their six types of tours including ones geared specifically towards children and family. The tours are promoted as historical just as Bollino attested, and the website even features self-guided tours. The website heavily encourages patrons to reach out and provide their interests so they can craft a tour. The company even offers a literary tour for schools to bring students on based on the books they are reading for class. The website is very easily navigated and provides the user with clear and laid out information. Information provided in Bollino’s interview is further attested on the website and put together nicely.⁶⁹

Based on the testimonies from current tour guides and the canvassing of hotels, tours, and other tourism materials one can see how mythology has continued to be perpetuated by the

⁶⁷ “Home: Haunted History Tours, New Orleans Ghost Tours” Haunted History Tours, accessed March, 2021, <https://hauntedhistorytours.com>

⁶⁸ “FAQ” Haunted History Tours, accessed March, 2021, <https://hauntedhistorytours.com/faq/>

⁶⁹ “Lucky Bean Tours, New Orleans Walking Tours” Lucky Bean Tours, accessed March 4th, 2021, <https://www.luckybeantours.com>.

tourism industry for capital gain. Although the canvased tour guides all attested to their dedication to portraying historical narratives and differentiating mythology from historical accounts, they have witnessed other tour guides and companies doing the opposite. This section demonstrates the different means by which the tourism industry capitalizes on the mythology of New Orleans, but also provides insight into how this dynamic could change. With current historians dispelling the mythology of the city and dedicated tour guides like Bollino, Gilpin, Guide X, Iversen, and Steele, the tourism industry has the means to rely less on perpetuating mythology and move more towards accurate historical accounts.

Conclusion

Based on the gathered information from historians and current tour guides canvased, historic mythology in the New Orleans tourism industry is perpetuated as historical facts to tourists. The tour guides canvased in this essay make an effort to present more historical-based accounts to patrons on their tours, but many like Gilpin and Guide X witnessed other guides' and companies' blatant disregard for the historical past. These other tour guides and companies have wrongfully educated many about the city of New Orleans, and in many circumstances restricted the historical agency of persons of color especially throughout the city's history. Thomas and Miles in their respective books highlighted how the perpetuation of mythology in New Orleans by tour guides promoted a culture of white supremacy and patriarchy and turned slavery into ghost stories. These factors highlight the damages to society and social history that tour guides create when they utilize mythology and lore instead of historical evidence in their narratives of subjects especially concerning topics like slavery and Voodoo.

Recent scholarship attempts to deconstruct these myths perpetuated by tourism and to set the historical record straight. But these historical truths are often overshadowed by more attractive stories and media. These historians researching and developing scholarship on the legends and myths surrounding the Crescent City have deconstructed the legends so that we as a society can learn and grow from understanding the truths. The romanticization of the past, as discussed by Thomas and Souther, reflects a resistance to truth and understanding of historical facts. This unwillingness to embrace historical fact continues to perpetuate the ideals of white male supremacy. Although many tour guides believe that tourists are on their tours simply to be entertained, one's social duty should be to learn and grow.

Along with these points, historians have also dissected and dispelled the inaccuracy of travel writers as a source for historical evidence. These travel writers had many biases at play which was pointed out by Aslakson, Clark, and Love. Many of the men and all of them being of European descent gave them the perspective of the privileged and allowed for their depictions of New Orleans to be through the lenses of white supremacy and fetishization of black culture. The travel writers romanticized the city and created a tourist-centered attraction of New Orleans, while they played up the events for entertainment value. This commodification of tourism mirrors many of today's tour guides. The mythology created by historic travel writers to the city continues to grow and be perpetuated by tour guides of the city on their tours as shown by the interviews presented in this thesis. Tour companies like that of Tour Company A, where Gilpin was formally employed, continue to misinformation promoted by travel writers and play up the entertainment and shock value of the narratives.

This issue of perpetuating mythology by tour guides in the city of New Orleans is also attributed to the standards in tour guide training and licensing. Tour guides who are less scholarly adept lack the proper guidance on how to educate themselves on proper sources beyond *Beautiful Crescent*. The lack of qualification when earning a tour guide's license, as attested to by Gilpin, shows that the most basic knowledge of the city is required to acquire a license. But the tour guide or the company should provide more scholarly information. This disparity in credible training raises the issue of how many tour companies are dedicated to historical accuracy, or if a company is willing to tell their guides to make up narratives on the spot. To avoid this issue, the city of New Orleans could require better training for guides, or at least require training from scholarly books with well-cited and researched knowledge of the city. Without the proper dedication by tour guides and companies to differentiate myth from historical

evidence, most tour guides become like the travel writers of the nineteenth century by romanticizing the city's past and spreading sensationalized stories as factual history to an unknowing public.

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