

Creating New Orleans
Race, Religion, Rhetoric, and the Louisiana Purchase

by

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ABSTRACT

Though some scholars have written about place and history, few have pursued the use of place theory in length in relation to the connections between race, religion, and national identity. Using the writings in the United States and Louisiana in the years surrounding the Louisiana Purchase, I explore place-making and othering processes. U.S. leaders influenced by the Second Great Awakening viewed New Orleans as un-American in its religion and seemingly ambiguous race relations. New Orleanian Catholics viewed the U.S. as an aggressively Protestant place that threatened the stability of the Catholic Church in the Louisiana Territory. Both Americans and New Orleanians constructed the place identities of the other in relation to events in Europe and the Caribbean, demonstrating that places are constructed in relation to one another. In order to elucidate these dynamics, I draw on place theory, literary analysis, and historical anthropology in analyzing the letters of W.C.C. Claiborne, the first U.S. governor of the Louisiana Territory, in conjunction with sermons of prominent Protestant ministers Samuel Hopkins and Jedidiah Morse, a letter written by Ursuline nun Sister Marie Therese de St. Xavier Farjon to Thomas Jefferson, and George Washington Cable's Reconstruction era novel *The Grandissimes*. All of these parties used the notion of place to create social fact that was bound up with debates about race and anti-Catholic sentiments. Furthermore, their treatments of place demonstrate concerns for creating, or resisting absorption by, a New Republic that was white and Protestant. Place theory proves useful in clarifying how Americans and New Orleanians viewed the Louisiana Purchase as well as the

legacy of those ideas. It demonstrates the ways in which the U.S. defined itself in contradistinction to religious others. Limitations arise, however, depending on the types of sources historians use. While official government letters reveal much when put into the context of the trends in American religion at the turn of the nineteenth century, they are not as clearly illuminating as journals and novels. In these genres, authors provide richer detail from which historians can try to reconstruct senses of place.

DEDICATION

To my family and Chris

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Historiographical Prologue

WHOSE PLACE AND WHERE TO BEGIN

In this thesis, I use writings about New Orleans, including correspondences and a novel, to explore place theory as a tool for understanding the dynamics between religion, race, place, and national identity in nineteenth-century America. Like many historians, I was faced with the challenge of where and with whom to begin. Since I focus mainly on Catholic-Protestant relations and the Louisiana Purchase, I organized my inquiries around correspondences between the Ursuline nuns of New Orleans and the first American territorial governor of Louisiana as well as a Reconstruction-era novel. There remains, however, a gap in the historiography of early America and the Southeast in particular regarding Native American understandings of place, which requires methodological attention and acknowledgment before undertaking my main investigation.

As is common in many aspects of American history, indigenous voices are poorly represented or, as is more often the case, silent in writings on the Louisiana Purchase. In order to apply place theory without reinscribing already existing historiographical problems, it is necessary to try to represent those voices as a starting point for discussion on various groups' understanding of New Orleans' place identity. The difficulty arises in trying to find sufficient sources that accurately represent Native American understandings and worldviews. Historians have relied largely on missionary, trader, and colonial government reports. The authors of those reports were invested in various racial, religious, economic, and imperial goals, which are reflected in their often inaccurate data pertaining to indigenous cultures. Moreover, these faulty reports rarely reflect the cultural dynamics that impacted Europeans as well as indigenous peoples. Thus, to a

certain extent, past ethnographic data may be useful but only if researchers remember that indigenous populations are no more static in their ideas and understandings than other peoples. To assume that the Choctaw or Colapissa have not changed since the early eighteenth century disregards the influence of contact with Europeans, Africans, and other indigenous populations as well as their potential for change internally.

Antoine Simon Le Page du Pratz's *Historie de la Louisiane* is less problematic than the accounts of his European contemporaries, though it still reveals racial bias. Published in 1758, the book is essentially a memoir of his travels throughout the colony from 1718 through 1734. Le Page's memoir is particularly important because he dedicates a sizable portion of his work to distinguishing among the tribes of Native Americans in the colony, providing some sense of the geographical location of several groups.¹ Although he spent most of his time among the Natchez north of the New Orleans area, he does mention the "Aquelou-Pissas," or Colapissa, who live within a few miles of where New Orleans was built. They moved to Lake Pontchartrain, though Le Page does not say whether this was forcible or by choice.² Currently, the northern part of New Orleans borders Lake Pontchartrain. Marcel Giraud's *A History of French Louisiana* also mentions the Colapissa as living in the area of Lake Pontchartrain.³

¹ Joseph Tregle, Jr., introduction to *The History of Louisiana* by M. Le Page du Pratz (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975), xvii-xviii.

² M. Le Page du Pratz, *The History of Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975), 311.

³ Marcel Giraud, *A History of French Louisiana*, vol. 1, translated by Joseph C. Lambert (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974), 73.

Place names would seem a viable starting point for an exploration of place identity; however, European explorers and early historians of America have failed to take Native American place names and their significance seriously. Explorer Pierre LeMoyne d'Iberville and his predecessors seem to have assumed the privilege of renaming sites as they encountered them rather than adopting existing Native American names. From the beginning of Europeans recording geography and history in the Southeast, Native American place names and understandings have been forcibly absent. This has perpetuated a notion of indigenous peoples as ahistorical and insignificant in the historiography of America.

In some ways, this tendency reflects aspects of later American efforts at renaming parts of New Orleans after the Louisiana Purchase. Le Place d'Armes, for example, became Jackson Square in 1814 after the Battle of New Orleans. By renaming a place, colonizers in some sense change, or at least attempt to change, its meaning as well as that which it memorializes. By failing to reflect on the implications of these processes, historians do not adequately capture the ways in which places are created partly through naming. Moreover, renaming has the potential to change the memory of a place and its identity. When government officials renamed Le Place d'Armes, they took a step in making it a more American place just as Europeans exerted control over the landscape and erased Native Americans' presence by renaming sites.

A specific example of these historiographical complexities exists in New Orleans' urban geography. Tchoupitoulas Street runs westward from the edge of the French Quarter, following the Mississippi River. The name may refer to a subgroup of the

Choctaw. It has been interpreted as meaning “those who live by the stream.”⁴

Tchoupitoulas Street was part of nineteenth-century extensions on the city. The act of naming it is complex for several reasons. Firstly, it is a Choctaw word, and evidence suggests that the Colapissa lived in the New Orleans area. Secondly, Borthelemy Lafon, surveyor for the Faubourg Ste Marie and Faubourg Annunciation, named the street.⁵ However, Lafon was French, and it is uncertain whether the name Tchoupitoulas was actually used by the Native Americans who lived in the region.

The difficulty in uncovering more about Native American place names in the New Orleans region illuminates a great deal about the disregard for Native Americans’ existence in the area before European colonization. More attention by historians is necessary to address the ethnocentric handling of places’ histories and names in order to move beyond the limitations of sources shaped by racist and imperialist agendas. Consequently, historians of early America interested in using place theory must adjust the trajectory and methods of their inquiries. Because of the lack of helpful written sources, a combination of archival and ethnographic work will be necessary to elucidate Native American understandings of place in the nineteenth century and earlier. Recent efforts such as Keith Basso’s *Wisdom Sits in Places: Language and Landscape among the Western Apache* combine traditional historical research with oral histories and a more

⁴ William Bright, *Native American Placenames of the United States* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004), 484.

⁵ Donald Gill, *Stories Behind New Orleans Street Names* (Chicago: Bonus Books, 1992), 237-238.

holistic ethnographic approach. Such pioneering works help provide a framework for shaping the questions addressed and methodologies employed in such studies.

They are also suggestive of work that remains to be done to illuminate Native American contributions to American history and historiography. Refining interdisciplinary methodological tools will lead to greater insight than can be reached through the problematic sources that led to these historiographical problems. Scholars working in place theory continue to grapple with these historiographical and methodological challenges, and this thesis is an effort, limited though it is, to advance towards a solution.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION: CONSTRUCTING PLACE AND THE OTHER

While some scholars have written about orders of women religious and priests in antebellum New Orleans⁶, few attend to the ways in which the Catholic Church and other parties created New Orleans as a place in American public discourse. This is significant because stakeholders struggled to portray New Orleans as correctly or incorrectly Christian depending on their particular agendas, demonstrating the role of “good” and “bad” religion in creating American and un-American places respectively.⁷ All of these parties, including the United States government, the Roman Catholic Church, and Protestant leaders, used notions of place to create social realities that were bound up with debates about race and anti-Catholic sentiments. Furthermore, their treatments of place demonstrate concerns for creating a New Republic that was white and Protestant. Among historical actors in New Orleans, place making was alternately a process of conflict and co-creation between and among Catholics and Protestants. In this chapter, I provide a theoretical framework as well as some historical context for my analysis of early-nineteenth-century correspondence and a postbellum novel that reveal the dialectic of race, place, and religion surrounding the Louisiana Purchase.

⁶ Even less work has been done on Southern black lay Catholics in the nineteenth century, the most noteworthy exceptions being John Blassingame’s *Black New Orleans, 1860-1880* and Cyprian Davis’ *The History of Black Catholics in the United States*.

⁷ I take my notion of “good” and “bad” religion partly from Robert Orsi, who defines the difference as an us/them dichotomy in religious studies. In the context of my study, “good” religion refers to the way many eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American Protestants construed their religion as morally correct compared to Roman Catholicism and other traditions.

When I first began research for this thesis, I expected to find clearly defined lines between religious and racial groups; however, as I will demonstrate, the history of New Orleans and the Louisiana Purchase is decidedly more complex as were the people involved. In the U.S., powerful public voices advocated the necessity of a Protestant republic and warned of the threat Catholicism allegedly posed. Many Americans conceptualized the U.S. as uniformly Protestant, making Catholics incompatible with such a vision of the nation.⁸ On the ground in New Orleans, though, the U.S. government and Catholics navigated complex relationships shaped by gender, language, race, and nationality. Defining New Orleans' place identity, then, was not a set of binary acts in which Americans viewed New Orleans in a particular way and natives another. Rather in the years following the Louisiana Purchase, people from inside and outside New Orleans became involved in creating New Orleans in conflicting ways while others co-created its identity. Jean Comaroff argues that an anthropologist's gaze is always, to some extent, prestructured.⁹ So, too, is the historian's. For this reason, I will discuss the theories and concepts that I have found most informative for my work.

The field of place theory has gained contributions from many disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, including geography, religious studies, sociology, and anthropology. Place theorists pursue a variety of questions depending on their disciplines and areas of research. These lines of inquiry include the way in which people construct

⁸ Talal Asad's work on Muslims as a religious minority in Europe is helpful in understanding how religious and regional identity become inextricable. See *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*.

⁹ Jean Comaroff, *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance: the Culture and History of a South African People* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 14.

place, the relationship between place and histories, and the effect this has on public policy. In the 1970's, geographers, especially cultural geographers, searched for a universal theory of place, and theorists took a philosophical turn, relying more on continental European philosophies, such as phenomenology and existentialism.¹⁰ Among the most important figures of this movement, Yi-Fu Tuan focused on human beings' relationships with their environments. While Tuan insists upon the importance of understanding such relationships as they occur in different cultural contexts, he sought to compile a catalog of universal human characteristics.¹¹ More recent phenomenologist Edward Casey comes to a different conclusion than Tuan. Casey argues that places are more events than things since they are collections of human experience and memory.¹² Some scholars have rejected Casey's methods. Tim Cresswell argues that Casey's methods fail to account for the process of place-making¹³; however, Casey's emphasis on memory remains significant in scholarship on place.

In the late 1980's, cultural geographers began paying more attention to the roles of gender, race, sexuality, and class in the construction of place. This led to feminist geographies that explore how places and landscapes are gendered as well as how space

¹⁰ Tim Cresswell, *Place: a Short Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 19-20.

¹¹ *Key Thinkers on Space and Place*, edited by Phil Hubbard, Rob Kitchin, and Gill Valentine (London: Sage Publications, 2004), 309.

¹² Edward Casey, "How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time: Phenomenological Prolegomena," in *Senses of Place*, edited by Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1996), 26-27.

¹³ Cresswell, 32.

influences social, political, and economic activities.¹⁴ Such explorations have led to a shift from the philosophical approaches of Tuan and Casey to a more widely accepted social constructivist approach in the last few decades.¹⁵ In this view, place is both socially constructed and central to the construction of meaning and society.

Contributions from anthropology and religious studies also inform my work. David Shorter and Keith Basso have worked on the relationship between place and history in relation to the formation of group identity. In particular, Basso's work with the Western Apache demonstrates that definitions of place must be contextually specific to account for different worldviews and sociohistorical circumstances. In some ways, scholars' efforts to define "place" reflect similar challenges faced by scholars of religion. Thomas Tweed suggests that rather than searching for a universal definition of religion, scholars should focus on formulating definitions that work best in specific contexts.¹⁶ Since place is similarly a categorical tool for analysis, definitions of place must be contextually specific as well. A strict constructivist interpretation of place would do discursive violence to some people's understandings of their worlds, especially when other-than-human persons populate them. Shorter's work on communicating objects among the Yoemem, for example, demonstrates that some peoples understand their environments in

¹⁴ Pamela Moss and Karen Falconer Al-Hindi, "An Introduction: Feminisms, Geographies, Knowledges," in *Feminisms in Geography: Rethinking Space, Place, and Knowledges*, edited by Pamela Moss and Karen Falconer Al-Hindi (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2008), 3.

¹⁵ Cresswell, 32.

¹⁶ Thomas Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling: a Theory of Religion* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 19-20.

entirely different terms from those Western mindsets scholars generally assume. Scholars are only beginning to explore understandings of places as relational rather than objects. For people like the Yoemem, a landscape may have an essential character. In contemporary contexts, negotiating understandings of place identities, especially across worldviews, presents great challenges that have yet to be explored in detail by many scholars.

The definition of place that best describes the Yoemem with whom Shorter worked does not fit the situation and people I discuss. I rely largely upon Doreen Massey's definition of place because it best helps explain what I encounter in my research. Massey argues, "places, in fact, are always constructed out of articulations of social relations...which are not only internal to that locale but which link them to elsewhere."¹⁷ This is apt in the case of New Orleans because of the history of colonization by various powers and the resulting interactions between Europeans, Africans, and indigenous peoples. The ways in which various parties constructed New Orleans in the debates surrounding the Louisiana Purchase reveal concerns that extend beyond the city itself.

The writings surrounding the Louisiana Purchase demonstrate how people construct place identities¹⁸ in relation to events and characteristics in other places. Historian Richard Callahan, Jr., argues that focusing on the Louisiana Purchase "provides one way

¹⁷ Doreen Massey, "Places and Their Pasts," *History Workshop Journal* 39 (1995): 183.

¹⁸ I use "place identity" to refer to what a person or group understand a place essentially to be.

to reposition American religious history in a global context.”¹⁹ Specifically, New Orleans and the Louisiana Purchase matter in American religious history because of the way they were figured as intricately connected to national identity and the transatlantic.²⁰ According to Anne Feldhaus, “awareness of *where* one is (or where one comes from) can become an important element in understanding *who* one is.”²¹ An understanding of one’s place is important to the formation of one’s individual identity. This can be extended to national identity as well, particularly in the early nineteenth century U.S. To form a strong national identity in the nascent period of the New Republic, white Protestants understood their identities as Americans by defining the nation as a white Protestant place and Louisiana as black and Catholic (un-American) in contrast. In the decades following the American Revolution, the nation became increasingly sectional politically. Emphasizing good religion and religiosity allowed Protestants to unite across political and economic divides.²² As I will demonstrate in my second chapter, many in New Orleans took Louisiana’s status as a Catholic place for granted until faced by what they perceived as an aggressively Protestant U.S.

¹⁹ Richard Callahan, Jr., “Introduction: A Reorienting View from the Center of the Country,” in *New Territories, New Perspectives: The Religious Impact of the Louisiana Purchase*, ed. Richard J. Callahan (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2008), 6.

²⁰ Peter J. Kastor, *The Nation’s Crucible: the Louisiana Purchase and the Creation of America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 20.

²¹ Anne Feldhaus, *Connected Places: Region, Pilgrimage, and Geographical Imagination in India* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 7.

²² James Roger Sharp, *American Politics in the Early Republic: a New Nation in Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 187.

I use a variety of secondary sources to understand historical trends affecting early nineteenth-century American religious history. For the purposes of this project, I count novels among secondary sources. In particular, I analyze George Washington Cable's *The Grandissimes*, a novel about 1803 New Orleans. Published in 1880, this novel qualifies as a secondary source because it retrospectively interprets and analyzes historical events and phenomena, including the Louisiana Purchase and New Orleans' strict caste system. As I will explain, literature is an important site of memory, which allows scholars to bring different voices into the conversation. This approach to literature as a historical source complements the archaeology of the mundane at the center of historical anthropological methods promoted by Jean and John Comaroff in *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination*.

I propose using primary documents to excavate people's understanding of New Orleans' place identity in the nineteenth century. More importantly, the distinctions between competing voices on New Orleans' place identity sometimes only become clear in primary source material, which has not yet been interpreted and summarized in a homogenizing metanarrative. As Wayne Fife observes, secondary source material tends to "gloss over" important individual differences that can be found in the actions of real historical actors."²³ Examining and reexamining primary sources allows for new readings that challenge metanarratives of American religious history that can overshadow and silence the complexities of race and place in New Orleans.

²³ Wayne Fife, *Doing Fieldwork: Ethnographic Methods for Research in Developing Countries and Beyond* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 28-29.

This study's use of correspondence raises the importance of using methods from historical anthropology. Historical anthropology explores "the processes that make and transform particular worlds – processes that reciprocally shape subjects and contexts, that allow certain things to be said and done."²⁴ The focus becomes actors' agency and the processes by which they shape and are shaped by their worlds. Sherry Ortner argues, "history is not simply something that happens to people, but something they make – within, of course, the very powerful constraints of the system within which they are operating."²⁵ Using this understanding of history as something people do within the confines of structure, I can better elucidate how people shaped common understandings of place identity and affected agendas accordingly. Patricia Stokowski designates these common understandings of place identity as "social places" because they are very similar across members of a group.²⁶

In order to move away from event-driven history, historical anthropologists must turn to less conventional primary documents, which reveal subtler nuances of people's perspectives. Comaroff and Comaroff propose using letters "less for what they declared than for what they disclosed as maps of the mundane."²⁷ This signals a turn in historical method away from events to everyday life. As Keith Basso demonstrates in *Wisdom Sits*

²⁴ John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), 31.

²⁵ Sherry B. Ortner, "Theory in Anthropology since the Sixties," in *Culture/Power/History: a Reader in Contemporary Social Theory*, eds. Nicholas B. Dinks, Geoff Eley, and Sherry Ortner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 403.

²⁶ Patricia A. Stokowski, "Languages of Place and Discourses of Power: Constructing New Sense of Place," *Journal of Leisure Research* 34 (2002): 372.

²⁷ Comaroff and Comaroff, 36.

in Places: Landscape and Language among the Western Apache, understandings of place can only be excavated through ethnography.²⁸ Because I cannot speak to people from the early nineteenth century or observe their lives, I must rely on clues in their correspondences to gain insight into their perceptions of New Orleans' and America's place identities and the processes by which these perceptions were formed.

The processes revealed also aid in explaining how competing histories and historicity are possible. By competing histories, I mean different groups have conflicting memories of people, events, and processes of social change. In discussing South African history, Comaroff and Comaroff express concern that "the African past would become subservient to the European present, made into the timeless sign of the 'traditional' periphery."²⁹ To understand how this had happened in previous scholars' work, they first had to recognize each party as a complex collectivity with its own historicity.³⁰ It is necessary to recognize the differences in each group's historicity and ways of remembering the past. This becomes particularly important in understanding Cable's position on Louisiana history in his fiction as well as the history to which he was writing in reaction.

Literature is a useful resource in analyzing the history of New Orleans, and it reveals much about historic understandings of place and places. This is one reason I find Jenny Franchot's work on Catholic-Protestant relations in antebellum American literature

²⁸ Keith Basso, *Wisdom Sits in places: Landscape and Language among the Western Apache* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 145.

²⁹ Comaroff and Comaroff, 33.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

particularly helpful.³¹ For Franchot, nineteenth-century American literature is of particular interest because it is a site where Rome and Africa become locations of fetishized consciousnesses and material items that are framed in illicit ways, revealing the depths of unequal power dynamics and prejudices³². These simultaneously illustrate desire for and repulsion from a religious and racial other. While my reading of *The Grandissimes* does not focus on the same aspects of Cable's writing as Franchot's, it also reveals concerns with proper ways of being religious as well as the maintenance of racial distinctions.

In addition to illustrating cultural frameworks, literary analysis complements the goals of historical anthropology in some ways. Shirley Thompson argues that literature is an important site of memory, which "allows scholars to challenge exclusionary historical practices and to introduce unlikely candidates as objects worthy of the historian's scrutiny."³³ Little besides journals and personal letters offer as rich an entrance into nineteenth-century American understandings of place as literature. Franchot contends that in *The Grandissimes* and novels like it, history becomes a body as well as a time and place.³⁴ In this sense, literature fits well within Massey's understanding of place as an

³¹ See Jenny Franchot, *Roads to Rome: the Antebellum Protestant Encounter with Catholicism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

³² Jenny Franchot, "Unseemly Commemoration: Religion, Fragments, and the Icon," in *Religion and Cultural Studies*, ed. Susan Mizruchi (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 41.

³³ Shirley Thompson, "Ah Toucouteu, ye conin vous." *American Quarterly* 53 (2001): 234.

³⁴ Franchot, "Unseemly Commemorations," 43.

intersection of time and space.³⁵ Cable's novel embodies a particular intersection, or rather a retrospective understanding of that intersection. In this respect, *The Grandissimes* is illuminating in considering various perspectives on New Orleans' place identity in the antebellum and postbellum periods.

New Orleans and the Louisiana Purchase can be fully understood only when they are placed in a transatlantic context. Two international closely related events influenced the Louisiana Purchase and elicited a variety of reactions from Americans. The first, the French Revolution, was the product of multiple economic, ideological, and social factors. Particularly after the Reign of Terror in 1793 and 1794, Federalists and Republicans became polarized.³⁶ Jedidiah Morse, a leading Protestant figure in the U.S., harshly criticized what he viewed as the dangers of Enlightenment principles leading people to violence against government and clergy. Such attitudes helped form public opinion and policy in the U.S. Many of the French arriving in Louisiana at the end of the eighteenth century, however, were loyalists to the French monarchy who sought safety from the revolutions in France and Haiti.³⁷ In this sense, Louisiana's monarchist population was growing at the same time revolutionaries were arriving from France and Haiti.

The second event, the Haitian Revolution, began in 1791. It became a menacing specter in the minds of white Americans before the Louisiana Purchase, and it remained so afterward with the influx of refugees and revolutionaries from Saint-Domingue. As

³⁵ Massey, "Places and Their Pasts," 188.

³⁶ Jon Kukla, *A Wilderness So Immense: the Louisiana Purchase and the Destiny of America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 145.

³⁷ Kastor, 27-28.

the political landscape of the French government underwent rapid changes following the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the fall of the Bastille, slaves and free people of color hoped for greater liberty and, in some cases, abolition and enfranchisement. When they were rebuffed, Vincent Ogé led the first outright rebellion against planters.³⁸ Former slave Toussaint Louverture hoped to run Haiti as a French colony free of slavery; however, after he was entrapped and sent to a prison in France, his successor, Jean Jacques Dessalines, declared independence in 1804.³⁹ Shortly thereafter, Dessalines ordered the killing of any whites still on the island.⁴⁰ Jefferson's observations on and opinions about these events put in relation to the letters of W.C.C. Claiborne reveal the deep impact this had on American anxieties over race and religion.

Both the French and Haitian Revolutions had been contributing factors to the Pointe Coupee Conspiracy of 1795, though white planters did their best to frame the planned uprising as a plot to murder planters and enslave white women, a myth which continued well into the twentieth century.⁴¹ This likely contributed to white Americans' fears of Haitians in Louisiana. To British Americans, monarchists were antirepublican and reminiscent of those they fought in the American Revolution. The Haitian and French

³⁸ Paul Christopher Johnson, "Vodou Purchase: the Louisiana Purchase in the Caribbean World," in *New Territories, New Perspectives: the Religious Impact of the Louisiana Purchase* (Columbia: Missouri University Press, 2008), 156.

³⁹ Thomas O. Ott, *The Haitian Revolution, 1789-1804* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1973), 184.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 190.

⁴¹ Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 345.

Revolutions came to loom equally threatening despite their republican goals. Each of these revolutions brought extreme violence. As a successful revolt led by slaves and freed blacks, the Haitian Revolution particularly disturbed British Americans who relied upon slavery.

The term “Creole” is significant in the history of New Orleans. The meaning of the word “Creole” changed over the course of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. Contemporary emic use is somewhat amorphous in that its meaning often depends upon context. Providing a brief history of the term, I clarify how my various sources use it. Some anthropologists argue that scholars have adopted an outsider understanding of the term which is based on white American racial anxieties of the late nineteenth century. In colonial Louisiana, however, “Creole” was widely acknowledged to mean “native born,” regardless of race or social class.⁴² This becomes evident in the writings of the Ursulines in the second chapter. The Ursulines and others in colonial Louisiana often used “Creole” in conjunction with national or continental labels, such as “Spanish,” “French,” or “African” to maintain distinctions among people.⁴³

After the Louisiana Purchase, however, increased immigration from the U.S. began causing a shift in the definition of “Creole,” which became part of a changing rhetoric of identity.⁴⁴ White Protestant American immigrants in Louisiana generally resisted

⁴² Shannon Lee Dawdy, “Understanding Cultural Change Through the Vernacular: Creolization in Louisiana,” *Historical Archaeology* 34:3 (2000): 108-9.

⁴³ Emily Clark, *Masterless Mistresses: the New Orleans Ursulines and the Development of a New World Society, 1727-1834* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 64-65.

⁴⁴ Dawdy, 120.

adapting to the language, religion, and culture of the region. This led to an ethnic definition of “Creole,” which came to mean a Francophone person of French, Spanish, and/or African ancestry who was rooted in Latin-Caribbean colonial culture.⁴⁵ White Americans further viewed Creoles as racially confused, adding the idea of racial miscegenation to their understanding of “Creole.”⁴⁶ In the Reconstruction-era U.S., Americans widely adopted this derogatory usage of “Creole.” The debates over the racialization of this word by Louisianans and other Americans become evident in Cable’s *The Grandissimes*. Another definition of “Creole” formed as a result of Louisianan free people of color trying to distinguish themselves from African American immigrants seeking a more tolerant environment after the Civil War. “Creole” became almost synonymous with these francophone people of color; however, when Cable published *The Grandissimes* in 1880, the majority of Americans outside the New Orleans area associated “Creole” with an idea of racial miscegenation.⁴⁷

In the following chapter, I examine the correspondence between the territorial governor William Claiborne and the Ursuline nuns of New Orleans. Set in the international context of the Haitian and French Revolutions as well as pervasive anti-Catholicism in American nationalist rhetoric, these letters reveal the intricacies of place, race, and religion in the U.S. and New Orleans at the beginning of the nineteenth century. U.S. Protestants and Catholics in New Orleans had understandings of each other’s

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

identities and their own based on race and religion as well as relationships between places. As I will demonstrate, each group linked the other to France with different results. Claiborne and the Ursulines' correspondence demonstrate an engagement in co-creating a New Orleans that was both American and Creole. New Orleans' relationship to the Haitian Revolution through an influx of immigrants as well as shared linguistic and religious practices shaped American approaches to the city.

While the violence of the Haitian Revolution was a relatively new memory in the years following the Louisiana Purchase, white fears of black militancy continued into the second half of the nineteenth century as can be seen in Cable's novel *The Grandissimes*. Exploring the roles of race and religion in this work illuminate several things about place. Because Cable spent much of his life in New Orleans, his depiction of it as a morally corrupt place demonstrates the multiplicity of understanding place identity beyond a simple insider/outsider binary. Cable continues to form his New Orleans by linking it to France and Haiti through language, race, and religion in addition to the symbolic narrative element of Bras-Coupé's waxen arm. The main character, a German American Protestant, stands in as a corrective to the irrationality, violence, and improper religious expression present in the city. By portraying New Orleans as opposed to American national identity, Cable demonstrates the persistence of early nineteenth-century understandings of New Orleans during Reconstruction and afterward.

Americans formed their understanding of New Orleans in relation to Haiti and othered religious practices throughout the nineteenth century, and the events following Hurricane Katrina demonstrate the presence of these same ideas in the twenty-first century. American public policy towards the city continues to be shaped by understandings of

placed formed around the time of the Louisiana Purchase. In my conclusion and epilogue, I raise questions about the applicability of place theory in historical studies and possibilities for future research on race, religion, and place in New Orleans.

Chapter 2

CO-CREATING PLACE: W.C.C. CLAIBORNE AND THE NEW ORLEANS

URSULINES

Places are created as much through interactions among groups as by groups with common interests. In this chapter, I use the correspondence between W.C.C. Claiborne and the Ursuline nuns of New Orleans to examine this process. Few historians have attended to the relationship between Claiborne and the New Orleans Ursulines. Scholarship on Claiborne tends to mention the nuns briefly at most, and histories of the New Orleans Ursulines focus on their relationship with Claiborne later in his governorship. In the most recent publication of Claiborne's letters, *Interim Appointment: W.C.C. Claiborne Letter Book, 1804-1805*, editor Jared Bradley only includes one letter Claiborne wrote to the mother superior of the Ursuline convent.⁴⁸ Historians often focus more on Claiborne's monitoring of the power struggles among New Orleans priests. This is odd given that Claiborne and the Ursulines eventually became involved on a personal and professional level as the Ursulines helped Claiborne care for his first child⁴⁹, and they participated in a co-creation of New Orleans following the Louisiana Purchase. Analyzing the related writings of Samuel Morse and Samuel Hopkins helps contextualize this process by illustrating the opinions shaping the context in which Claiborne and the Ursulines interacted.

⁴⁸ W.C.C. Claiborne, *Interim Appointment: W.C.C. Claiborne Letter Book, 1804-1805*, edited by Jared William Bradley (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002), 31.

⁴⁹ Kastor, 107-108.

As the first U.S. territorial governor of the Louisiana Territory, Claiborne was the leading American voice in the region. While he was a central figure in the early years of the American administration of the Louisiana Territory, historians have left him in what R. Randall Couch calls “the mire of Louisiana mytho-history.”⁵⁰ In the past, historians have credited Claiborne with breaking a tie in the House of Representatives to bring Thomas Jefferson into office.⁵¹ Others, however, have pointed out that this is speculation, demonstrating the difficulties of sorting out even Claiborne’s public life.⁵² Most writings on Claiborne focus on his political career in Louisiana and Mississippi, and historians often adopt a defensive tone in discussing his accomplishments in the American territories. Very little is known about his personal life, especially his childhood. Only one book-length biography has been written of Claiborne.⁵³

Since historians have been preoccupied with Claiborne’s political career, few have attended to his religious background. John Winters claims that Claiborne studied the Bible and went to church weekly while attending Richmond Academy, but Winters fails to give any details as to which Christian church Claiborne belonged. This unattributed information likely comes from a chapter-length biography written by Claiborne’s younger brother Nathaniel, which provides some clues as to Claiborne’s religious

⁵⁰ R. Randall Couch, “William Charles Cole Claiborne: An Historiographical Review,” in *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 36 (1995): 465.

⁵¹ John D. Winters, “William C.C. Claiborne: Profile of a Democrat,” in *Louisiana History: the Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 10:3 (Summer 1969): 193.

⁵² Couch, 458.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

background. According to this narrative, Claiborne was born in Virginia and attended the Richmond Academy.⁵⁴ Afterward, he entered seminary at William and Mary; however, he left the same week he began his training due to a disagreement with an usher, a type of school official.⁵⁵ Claiborne's intentions to complete seminary at William and Mary suggest Anglican affiliation, though no biographer states this explicitly.

One of the greatest challenges in writing this chapter was determining how to analyze Claiborne's sense of place⁵⁶ through generally non-descriptive business- and government-related letters. Diaries generally yield more explicit descriptions of peoples' thoughts and sentiments. The majority of Claiborne's letters available in the *Official Letter Books of W.C.C. Claiborne* addresses managerial issues in the Mississippi and Louisiana Territories during his tenure as governor of each. Consequently, he spends little time giving detailed accounts of the settings in which he found himself. One explanation may be that Claiborne does not think about a place's identity while he is in it. He is not confronted by outsiders as Louisianans are, and so he does not seek to define its essence as explicitly as someone like Cable does. I had to approach Claiborne's letters with this understanding, with an eye to the implied and unspoken and yet careful not to read into them for what I desired to see.

⁵⁴ Nathaniel Herbert Claiborne, *Notes on the War in the South; with Biographical Sketches of the Lives of Montgomery, Jackson, Sevier, the Late Gov. Claiborne, and Others* (Richmond: William Ramsay, 1819), 93.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁵⁶ By "sense of place," I mean how a person understands a place's identity.

Control of New Orleans was a pressing concern for the U.S. government in the early years of the nineteenth century. Thomas Jefferson, who was then president, pointed out to U.S. Minister to France Robert Livingston that three-eighths of the U.S.'s exports passed through New Orleans. At the news of Spain's cession of Louisiana to France, Jefferson warned "the day that France takes possession of New Orleans...we must marry ourselves to the British fleet and nation."⁵⁷ Like other U.S. officials, Jefferson viewed such a threat to the American economic stability serious enough to end friendship with France and ally the U.S. navy to Britain's in resistance. As I will demonstrate, however, Claiborne's letters reveal that although the U.S. government viewed Louisiana and New Orleans in particular as an economic necessity, it was an essentially un-American place in its racial dynamics, national ties, and religion.

Jefferson's letter to Livingston analyzed in conjunction with his First Inaugural Address reveals the government's concern with New Orleans as an integral site for trade with less attention to explicit religious issues. U.S. It also has the potential to determine the political future of the U.S. Jefferson's "First Inaugural Address" explains why Jefferson would disregard the religious state of New Orleans in his overriding concern for its role in U.S. economics and foreign policy. In the address, he encourages citizens to respect any American "enlightened by a benign religion, professed, indeed, and practiced in various forms," since all religions, he claims, lead to the same truths and love of fellow

⁵⁷ Thomas Jefferson, "Thomas Jefferson on the Importance of New Orleans," *Thomas Jefferson on the Importance of New Orleans* (January 4, 2009): 1. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed March 8, 2010).

people.⁵⁸ For Jefferson, religious orientation was not explicitly central to national identity except in moderation.⁵⁹

Protestantism became a core feature of American identity and ideals of good citizenship in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. As Emily Clark explains, white Americans experienced dislocation in the early days of the republic. However, “Protestant Christianity...retained sufficient continuities to serve as an anchor to an [American] identity otherwise in flux.”⁶⁰ In this way, Protestants could overcome many denominational differences for the sake of creating some sense of national unity. According to Peter Kastor, “the process of making the Louisiana Territory into U.S. territory – the political labor of nation building – meant shaping the space to conform to American cultural, social, and religious identity.”⁶¹ To Americanize the Louisiana Territory, the U.S. was faced with the task of transforming the region’s linguistic, religious, and cultural identities to make it a more American place.

Among the reasons behind the force of the New Republic emphasis on Protestantism was the beginning of the Second Great Awakening at the turn of the nineteenth century.

⁵⁸ Thomas Jefferson, “First Inaugural Address,” in *Jefferson’s Call to Nationhood: the First Inaugural Address*, Stephen Howard Browne (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2003), xv.

⁵⁹ Jefferson explained that he voted against the insertion of “Jesus Christ” into a preamble of the “Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom” because he was concerned that the particular placement of this phrase would endanger the rights of non-Christians in a majority Christian nation. See “The Struggle for the Disestablishment of Religion in Virginia (1776-1885)” in *Jefferson and Madison on the Separation of Church and State: Writings on Religion and Secularism*, edited by Lenni Brenner.

⁶⁰ Clark, 222-223.

⁶¹ Callahan, Jr., 3.

Often associated with the spread of revivalism, the Second Great Awakening arose partly as a reaction to Enlightenment philosophy. Jedidiah Morse was among the leading Protestant figures to point to the excesses of the French Revolution as the result of Enlightenment principles.⁶² Famous for his publications on geography, including his landmark 1789 *The American Geography*, Morse maintained a public presence throughout the decades leading up to and following the Louisiana Purchase. During this time, he was a representative voice for those fighting cultural change in the interest of maintaining a particular brand of Calvinism.⁶³ Morse's formulation of Protestantism as crucial to U.S. identity represented the feelings of conservative Calvinists in New England and elsewhere.

Moreover, Morse's *The American Geography* reveals the added significance of place in relation to ideology and theology at the end of the eighteenth century. Each region of the U.S. and territories, which would later become part of the nation had an entry which included a description of the religion of the region's residents. Louisiana, vast though it was at the time, received only one sentence concerning the fact that most white inhabitants were Roman Catholic. Morse's silence on non-white inhabitants of Louisiana implies their invisibility to whites within the U.S. as well as the normative linkages between race and religion in early place-making. The unspoken racial others were also

⁶² Robert Handy, *A Christian America: Protestant Hopes and Historical Realities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 25.

⁶³ Richard Moss, *The Life of Jedidiah Morse: a Station of Peculiar Exposure* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995), x.

religiously other to white Americans conceptualizing Louisiana. This was later reinforced by the connections drawn between Haiti and New Orleans.

Like Jefferson, Morse demonstrates more interest in New Orleans' commercial advantages.⁶⁴ Interestingly, Morse does not comment on religion in British territories. He does express disgust at the inhabitants of New Mexico and California which were Spanish territories like Louisiana at that time. For Morse, Spanish places in North America and their inhabitants had many of the same negative characteristics which Claiborne would claim made inhabitants of New Orleans unfit to be American citizens.⁶⁵ This reflects the Nativist and anti-Catholic sentiments later present in the speeches and writings of Samuel Morse, Jedidiah's son, who shaped political and religious discourse in the mid-nineteenth century.

Similarly, Samuel Hopkins, a student of Jonathan Edwards and leader of the New Divinity⁶⁶, joined prominent clergy such as Morse in creating and defending a Protestant American identity. As part of the New Divinity, Hopkins helped formulate a highly influential model of religious social reform.⁶⁷ Hopkins especially viewed Christianity "in

⁶⁴ Jedidiah Morse, *The American Geography* (New York: Arno Press, Inc., 1970), 477.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 479.

⁶⁶ The New Divinity was a movement that had its roots in the thought of Edwards and the revivalism of the First Great Awakening. This movement was very popular among clerics and college graduates in the second half of the eighteenth century. They proposed the evangelical Calvinism of the First Great Awakening as the solution to New England Arminianism.

⁶⁷ Joseph A. Conforti, *Samuel Hopkins and the new Divinity Movement: Calvinism, the Congregational Ministry, and Reform in New England between the Great Awakenings* (Grand Rapids: Christian University Press, 1981), vii.

the nature and tendency of it...opposed to slavery.”⁶⁸ In the mid-nineteenth century, many abolitionists began emphasizing the evils of slaveholders’ Catholicism as a way of attacking their religion rather than white supremacy. Catholicism was depicted as enslaving the soul in the way temporal slavery did the body.⁶⁹ In this way, Morse’s anti-Catholicism and Hopkins’ abolitionist sentiments came together in the ideology of the Know-Nothing party and other nativists.

Morse’s ideas about Protestant principles as a basis for American nationalism and Hopkins’ model of Protestant social reform influenced early- and mid-nineteenth century reformers, including Horace Bushnell and Morse’s son Samuel.⁷⁰ Samuel Morse and Bushnell’s sermons and publications contributed to violence against Catholics in the 1830’s and 1840’s as well as the creation and periodic resurgence of Nativism.⁷¹ Samuel Morse’s 1835 tract *Imminent Dangers to the Free Institutions of the United States Through Foreign Immigration*, for example, argued that Catholic immigration posed dangers to American republicanism.⁷² Such xenophobia and anti-Catholic rhetoric carried throughout the nineteenth century and was present in public discourse when Cable was writing *The Grandissimes*.

⁶⁸ Samuel Hopkins, *Timely Articles on Slavery* (Miami: Mnemosyne Publishing, Inc., 1969), 601.

⁶⁹ Franchot, *Roads to Rome*, 103.

⁷⁰ Handy, 45.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁷² See Samuel Morse’s *Imminent Dangers to the Free Institutions of the United States Through Foreign Immigration* (New York: Arno Press, 1969).

Related to this condemnation of Catholic immigration, many revivalists and Nativists drew upon anxieties over “barbarism” on the Western frontier. Lyman Beecher’s 1835 *Plea for the West* remains one of the best known examples of Nativist urgings to civilize and convert the non-Protestants at the nation’s peripheries. Beecher warns of Catholic plans to spread the Vatican’s power on the Western frontier, confirming Morse’s conspiracy theories and urging Protestants to send missionaries to the West before Catholics can overtake it.⁷³ Because New Orleans was conceived of as a Catholic place before and after Beecher published his *Plea for the West*, Protestant Americans perceived the city within the context of Beecher’s admonitions and similar rhetoric.

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, government officials often viewed supplying sufficient clergy as a given aspect of colonizing a new area. Claiborne was no exception. In March of 1804, he sent a circular to the commandants of the districts of the Louisiana Territory inquiring as to “the number and conditions of your churches.” Even more interesting, Claiborne asks if the “Citizens manifest a disposition to support, respect, and patronize regular Ministers of the Gospel.”⁷⁴ Essentially, Claiborne asks if Americans in the territory practice (presumably Protestant) Christianity by regularly attending church services and following their ministers’ guidance. This demonstrates that although Claiborne and the U.S. government’s interest in the Louisiana Territory is primarily economic, there are concerns over the state of religion and religious people in the newly acquired territory. Complicating this, Claiborne does not just maintain an

⁷³ Lyman Beecher, *Plea for the West* (Cincinnati: Truman and Smith, 1835), 117-19.

⁷⁴ W.C.C. Claiborne, *Official Letter Books of W.C.C. Claiborne, 1801-1816*, v. 2, ed. Dunbar Rowland (Jackson: State Department of Archives and History), 74.

assertion of neutrality in matters regarding religion as Jefferson does in his “First Inaugural Address”⁷⁵; Claiborne rarely mentions them unless prompted by some event or contact with the Catholic orders of New Orleans. The idea that the deployment of clergy in U.S. territories is taken for granted as a foundational step of occupation is all the more telling.

Claiborne’s inquiry as to the clergy available to inhabitants of the Louisiana Territory has roots in English approaches to colonization using the Anglican Church.⁷⁶ At the turn of the nineteenth century, however, the Second Great Awakening and a renewed zeal about the role of Protestant Christianity in U.S. government were shaping the broader public discourse. Morse emphasized the inextricable nature of Christianity with the government’s well-being. In *A Sermon, Exhibiting the Present Dangers, and Consequent Duties of the Citizens of the United States of America*, delivered in 1799, Morse warns his audience that countries in which non-Christian religions hold sway over the governments develop tyrannical leaders while the people become ignorant and wretched. This is especially emphasized as being the case in “Mohometan and Pagan” nations.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Although Jefferson regarded religion as belonging to a private domain, he acknowledged its importance for personal and public ethics. See Barbara Perry’s “Jefferson’s Legacy to the Supreme Court: Freedom of Religion.”

⁷⁶ Claiborne’s inquiry into the state of the clergy, though not particularly emphasized over his other points of discussion, is reminiscent of Roger Green’s 1662 petition to the Church of England to send more clergy to the colony of Virginia. See “Virginia’s Cure, 1662” in *A Documentary History of Religion in America* vol. 1, edited by Edwin Gaustaud.

⁷⁷ Jedidiah Morse, *A sermon, exhibiting the present dangers, and consequent duties of the citizens of the United States of America: Delivered at Charlestown, April 25, 1799. The day of the national fast* (Hartford: Hudson and Goodwin, 1799), 9.

According to Morse, American democracy could only survive in a properly Christian, meaning Protestant, nation. The government depended on the success of religion (i.e. Protestant Christianity). Even if this was not Claiborne's explicit thought process when he wrote to the commandants, it helps explain why the U.S. government would inquire into this matter when colonizing a new region in the early nineteenth century.

Associations of Haiti with Voudou, seen as an aberrant religious practice linked with Catholicism, became even more prominent and disconcerting against this backdrop.

Neither Claiborne nor Morse clarifies whether they mean Protestant Christianity specifically or Christianity in general. Claiborne refers to "regular Ministers of the Gospel."⁷⁸ It is unclear what he means by "regular." Catholic priests and women religious were already present in the territory, though, as Michael Pasquier points out, the news of the Louisiana Purchase created "ecclesiastical disarray" in New Orleans with priests and nuns fleeing to Cuba.⁷⁹ Americans considering the incorporation of Louisiana were concerned with political, administrative, commercial, diplomatic, and legal structures.⁸⁰ If anything is clear from Claiborne's request, it is that the government was also concerned with the religious structures of Louisianans. They assume that New Orleans and the Louisiana Territory in general are religiously unstable places. The religious links between New Orleans and Haiti likely exacerbated racial fears as well, especially given the connections between Voudou and Catholicism.

⁷⁸ W.C.C. Claiborne, *Official Letter Books*, v. 2, 74.

⁷⁹ Michael Pasquier, *Fathers on the Frontier: French Missionaries and the Roman Catholic Priesthood in the United States, 1789-1870* (New York: Oxford University Press 2010), 78.

⁸⁰ Kastor, 5.

Claiborne deals most explicitly with religious matters in relation to contact with the Ursulines. The Ursulines, founded at the end of the sixteenth century in southern France, arrived in New Orleans in 1727. Throughout the various stages of French, Spanish, and U.S. colonial rule and subsequent incorporation into the U.S., the Ursulines provided services to the New Orleans community, particularly through education of young women of European, African, and Native American descent.⁸¹ The Ursulines operated from a unique social location in New Orleans as well educated, unmarried free women, who included French, Creole, and Cuban sisters; however, they do not necessarily illustrate the diversity of reactions to the Louisiana Purchase among New Orleanians, especially among people of color.⁸² Through their educational apostolate, though, Ursuline nuns interacted more with a greater range of groups than many in New Orleans.⁸³ Consequently, the Ursulines' writings reflect the broader mood of Catholic New Orleanians at the time. For this reason, I take their writings as representative of the general concerns of the New Orleans Catholic community following the Louisiana Purchase. The Ursulines are also significant in that Claiborne's perception of and relationship with them would have had more potential than anything else to moderate Nativist sentiments he may have shared with Morse.

⁸¹ Clark, 1.

⁸² For more on the differing reactions to the Louisiana Purchase among enslaved and free people of color, see Peter Kastor's *The Nation's Crucible: the Louisiana Purchase and the Creation of America*.

⁸³ Because enslaved people were brought to New Orleans from many parts of West and Central Africa and the Caribbean, there was a great deal of ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity among slaves and free people of color. Many practiced Catholicism concurrently with other traditions.

In March of 1804, Sister Marie Therese Farjon de St. Xavior, then Mother Superior of the Ursulines in New Orleans, wrote to Thomas Jefferson regarding the place of the Catholic Church in general and her order specifically in the Louisiana Purchase. According to Sister Marie Therese, the U.S. government “ought to assure the petitioners of the ownership of their current property.”⁸⁴ This request might seem somewhat unusual; however, it is better understood when put into context of how other treaties addressed Catholic Church property in the Louisiana Territory. The misunderstanding that the U.S. government neglected this issue or intended to establish Protestantism officially in the territory reinforced Catholics’ trepidations about threats to the autonomy of their church. The influence of France on New Orleanian perceptions of the U.S. further elucidates the role of place and connections between places in Sister Marie Therese’s writings.

When ceding Louisiana to Spain in 1764, Louis XV made specific provisions for the protection of the religious orders of the Catholic Church, who were assured of the ability “to continue to exercise their functions, and enjoy the rights, privileges, and immunities, granted by their Several Charters of establishment.”⁸⁵ Such a specific provision might seem somewhat unusual in a treaty between two Catholic countries unless religious orders in New Orleans were concerned that their national ties put them at risk of being taken over by Spanish orders. Whatever the reason for the specific stipulations about

⁸⁴ Sister Marie Therese Farjon de St. Xavior to Thomas Jefferson, March 21, 1804, Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans, LA. All quotes that I use from this letter are my translations from the original French.

⁸⁵ Louis XV to D’Abbadie, Director General and Commandant for his Majesty in Louisiana, in *Official Letter Books*, v. 2, 141.

religious orders, they were not provided for in the Louisiana Purchase Treaty. Instead, the third article of the treaty ensures freedom of religion in less specific terms.⁸⁶ As I will demonstrate, Catholic Louisianans seemed either to be unaware of this or not to think it specific enough to protect the clergy and women religious.

For the Ursulines, a promise of freedom of religion was not an obvious guarantee that they need not worry about government intervention in their convent. New Orleans had been a Catholic city since the French first established colonial rule. During Spanish rule, the colonial government of Carlos IV placed restrictions on Protestants in the Louisiana Territory. Catholic mass was the only public worship permitted, and the marriages and baptisms of all Christians had to be officiated by priests.⁸⁷ Essentially, Catholicism was the only legal public expression of religion. The Ursulines and other Catholics in New Orleans took it for granted that the city was a Catholic place. Perhaps this is one reason Sister Marie Therese draws on Americans' version of New Orleans' place identity in her letter to Jefferson rather than espousing her own. As many Protestant Americans viewed their religion as a central aspect of the place identity of the U.S., New Orleans Catholics understood their city as being culturally Catholic.⁸⁸ Because New Orleans' Catholic identity was self-evident to them, they did not feel the need to dwell upon this articulation

⁸⁶ "Louisiana Purchase Treaty: Treaty between the United States of American and the French Republic, April 30, 1803," in *A Wilderness So Immense: the Louisiana Purchase and the Destiny of America*, by Jon Kukla (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 351.

⁸⁷ Kukla, 134.

⁸⁸ By describing New Orleans as "culturally Catholic," I refer to the fact, which Tregle and other historians have pointed out, that many creoles were not particularly devout, but they were proud of their Catholic traditions and identified strongly with them. For more, see Tregle's "Creoles and Americans."

of New Orleans place identity. This stands in contrast to the way Americans advocated New Republic ideology, focusing on the Protestant nature of the nation. It may be that the inhabitants of New Orleans did not feel the need to search for a stabilizing identity around which they could unite.

News of the Louisiana Purchase, however, forced the inhabitants of New Orleans to consider their place identity more carefully as well as to think about the place identity of the U.S. Part of this process involved constructing the U.S. in relation to France. Public figures such as French Colonial Prefect Pierre Clément Laussat helped solidify the connection between the U.S. and France in the minds of Louisianans. In framing the Louisiana Purchase as a transaction to strengthen a friendship between the nations, Laussat also tried to convince Louisianans that they were fortunate to be objects of the trade in which they had no voice.⁸⁹ New Orleans Catholics did not take comfort in being a tool of such an alliance. For some time after the Louisiana Purchase, there were political conflicts in New Orleans between Louisianans and newly arrived U.S. government officials including rumors of a plot to overthrow Claiborne's administration and return the territory to Spain.⁹⁰ Laussat, however, dwells upon a point that was probably least likely to comfort the sisters and other concerned Catholics. Laussat figures Louisianans as "the beloved pledge of friendship between the two Republics, which cannot fail to grow stronger every day and will contribute so powerfully to their

⁸⁹ Pierre Clément de Laussat, November 30, 1804, Favrot Family Papers, Louisiana Research Collection, Tulane University.

⁹⁰ Tregle, Jr., "Creoles and Americans," 139.

common peace and prosperity.”⁹¹ Laussat wanted Louisianans to understand their place identity as pacific and unifying, since he viewed it as a necessary component of maintaining good relations with the U.S. Given the violence and recentness of the French Revolution, however, those in New Orleans began to construct the U.S. as a place similar in its sentiments toward religion, or at least Catholicism. In addition, Laussat’s focus on unity and friendship disguises concerns about Haitian violence by striving to create a peaceful territory where some feared rebellion.

The Louisiana Purchase took the inhabitants of New Orleans by surprise, and the terms of the treaty were not widely known. Rumors spread throughout the city that the U.S. government would seize Catholic Church property and expel religious orders. These rumors eventually reached the Ursulines’ convent, compelling Sister Marie Therese to write to Jefferson.⁹² In the “Louisiana Purchase Treaty,” between the U.S. and France, authors made unspecific provisions in which Louisianans were “protected in the free enjoyment of their liberty, property and the Religion which they profess.”⁹³ Though this does not address religious orders specifically, it guarantees Louisianans some basic Constitutional rights regarding religion in the interim between the U.S. taking over the territory and its incorporation into the Union. James Monroe argued for applying the Bill of Rights to Louisianans without granting them immediate citizenship. This included a

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Mary Teresa Austin Carroll, *The Ursulines in Louisiana, 1727-1824* (New Orleans: Hyman Smith, Book and Job Printer, 1886), 31.

⁹³ “Louisiana Purchase Treaty,” 351.

specific mention of Louisianans enjoying freedom of religion.⁹⁴ It is unclear whether Monroe and others included this as a particular goal for Louisiana because of the perceived otherness of Catholicism or because it was a standard approach to incorporation. Clearly, though, the Ursulines felt they could not take their safety in a New Orleans ruled by Protestant America for granted.

With the Louisiana Purchase, control of the Diocese of Louisiana and the Floridas transferred from the Spanish Diocese of San Cristobal de Habana, where it started in 1793, to the authority of the bishop of Baltimore.⁹⁵ The American Catholic Church was still a mission church under the direction of the Propaganda, the Vatican congregation in charge of missions, when it absorbed the Diocese of Louisiana and the Floridas.⁹⁶ John Carroll, the first bishop of Baltimore, struggled to build solid foundations for an Americanized version of the Catholic Church.⁹⁷ Scarce clergy forced parishes to rely heavily on laypeople for organization, and there were frequent debates about changes to liturgical practices through the use of the vernacular in mass and other means.⁹⁸ Power struggles among priests in New Orleans continued well after the Louisiana Purchase while Carroll and his successors continued to develop an effective means of organizing clergy and laypeople.

⁹⁴ Kastor, 43.

⁹⁵ Pasquier, 58.

⁹⁶ Jay P. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to the Present* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1985), 106.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 111.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 113-115.

Before this, however, priests and women religious left New Orleans in 1802 when Spain ceded the Louisiana Territory to France. The Ursulines' Mother Superior St. Monique, Sister Marie Therese's predecessor, was among them.⁹⁹ According to historians of the Ursulines' order, the violent anti-clericalism of the French Revolution frightened clergy and women religious.¹⁰⁰ This violence also disturbed American Protestant clergymen. Morse emphasizes that "the Clergy have been among the first victims to that sanguinary revolutionizing spirit which now convulses the world."¹⁰¹ Despite the general disgust at the treatment of Catholic clergy abroad, Protestant Americans did not extend these feelings of sympathy to Catholics coming through immigration or incorporation, as was the case with the Louisiana Territory.

Catholics' flight to Cuba reveals even more when taken in the context of Laussat's announcement of the treaties between Spain and France as well as France and the U.S. Laussat emphasizes the inhabitants of the Louisiana Territory will have "the enjoyment of freedom and the exercise of their own religions" according the U.S. Constitution.¹⁰² This was likely intended to comfort people such as the Ursulines' Mother Superior, who mistrusted French rule, no matter how temporary, as well as the U.S. Mother Superior St. Monique and the women religious and clergy with whom she went to Cuba did not wait

⁹⁹ Henry Churchill Semple and Marie Madeleine Hachard, *The Ursulines in New Orleans and Our Lady of Prompt Succor: a Record of Two Centuries, 1727-1925* (New York: P.J. Kenedy and Sons, 1925), 58.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹⁰¹ Jedidiah Morse, *A Sermon*, 14.

¹⁰² Pierre Clément de Laussat, November 30, 1804, Favrot Family Papers, Louisiana Research Collection, Tulane University.

for Laussat's assurances before leaving New Orleans in 1802. Laussat may have been so careful to emphasize the security of the Catholic Church in 1803 partly because of the reaction of the religious in the previous year.

Despite assurances such as Laussat's, Sister Marie Therese's letter indicates similar fears resulting from the Louisiana Purchase. She does not take her order's safety or that of church property for granted. For the Ursulines, it seems there was a difference between freedom of religion and specific clauses protecting established religious orders. This wariness demonstrates the ways in Catholic New Orleanians constructed America's place identity in relationship to France. Unlike the U.S., which identified Catholicism and other aspects of New Orleanian culture as French, New Orleanians connected the U.S. with French anticlericalism and violence. Though they utilize different understandings of France in constructing place identities, both demonstrate the inextricability of place identity from international contexts.

Concern over the security of the Catholic Church and its property was not isolated to New Orleans. In April of 1804, Claiborne wrote to Julian Poydrass, Commandant of Point Coupée, approximately one hundred twenty miles northwest of New Orleans, directing the commandant "to assure the Citizens of your District that they have my entire approbation to choose their Clergymen."¹⁰³ This statement from Claiborne reveals how ubiquitous were Catholic fears that the U.S. would dismantle the Catholic Church in Louisiana. It also suggests that Louisianans suspected the U.S. of trying to impose Protestant Christianity on the territory's largely Catholic population through control of

¹⁰³ W.C.C. Claiborne, *Official Letter Books*, vol. 2, 83.

clergy. This recalls Claiborne's inquiry to commandants as to the state and number of clergy when he first took office as governor of the Louisiana Territory. If it seemed unclear then whether the U.S. would try to impose Protestantism officially, Claiborne was attempting to elucidate.

Claiborne also wrote directly to the Ursulines to assure them of their security in New Orleans. In Claiborne's first years in office, he exchanged various courtesies with the nuns. Written in April of 1804, the first letter from the Ursulines included in *Official Letter Books of W.C.C. Claiborne* is an address in the form of a poem. The Ursulines send good wishes for Claiborne's health from the convent where "meek Religion bears a placid sway." In referring to themselves, the nuns emphasize humility and calm. When describing their good wishes for Claiborne, on the other hand, they use robust language of "unfading Laurels" and the "uninterrupted roll" of time.¹⁰⁴ The language is gendered in such a way that the nuns appear passive as Claiborne bounds forward in a masculine way into a triumphal future.

This is not to claim that either the nuns or Claiborne assumed that the power dynamics were so easily determined as that between a Protestant governor and a group of Catholic women. Claiborne is careful in all of his correspondences to the Ursulines to stress how valuable they are to the New Orleans community, particularly regarding their education of young women. Early in his administration, Claiborne thought poorly of people in New Orleans, accusing them of being ignorant, frivolous, and lazy – in short, poor candidates

¹⁰⁴ "Address from the Nuns of the Convent of St. Ursula," *Official Letter Books*, vol. 2, 86.

for citizenry in the U.S. He presented education as a solution.¹⁰⁵ The Ursulines, then could be of service to his desire to condition good citizens. In his response to the Ursulines' first address, Claiborne assures them that he esteems their order as well as their religion and "the patriotic object of your institution – The Education of youth."¹⁰⁶ Education is patriotic precisely because it conditions young women to be good Americans, or at least Claiborne is hoping for as much. In a letter to Secretary of State James Madison, dated two days after Claiborne's response to the Ursulines, Claiborne again underscores the importance of the Ursulines' educational apostolate and considers them "very useful Members of Society."¹⁰⁷

Concerns about the un-American nature of New Orleans and its inhabitants underlie addresses made to and by Claiborne. Peter Kastor describes "a fundamental reconsideration of nation and citizen" that took place as a result of the Louisiana Purchase.¹⁰⁸ Claiborne and other American officials spent a great deal of time trying to solve the problem of how to make Louisianans good citizens of America. In an "Address from the Citizens of Wilkinson County in the Mississippi Territory," the speaker congratulates Claiborne on his success in convincing Louisianans to "embrace principles of the American Government" and checking "the rising impulse of opposition."¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Julien Vernet, "Petitions from Peripheries of Empire: Louisiana and Quebec," in *The American Review of Canadian Studies* 38:4 (2008): 498.

¹⁰⁶ W.C.C. Claiborne, *Official Letter Books*, vol. 2, 86.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 90.

¹⁰⁸ Kastor, 3.

¹⁰⁹ W.C.C. Claiborne, *Official Letter Books*, vol. 2, 111.

Clearly, the speaker sees Louisianan ideals as something to be overcome and transformed in order to incorporate the territory successfully into the U.S.

It is doubtful that Americans actually believed Claiborne had accomplished this by the time the address was written in the spring of 1804. While the overall tone of the address is celebratory, the mention of opposition amongst Louisianans hints at the real struggles occurring in attempts at incorporation. New Orleans residents, in particular, actually “assaulted incorporation in all its forms” for several years after the Louisiana Purchase by preserving their linguistic and religious practices.¹¹⁰ Claiborne assured the citizens of Wilkinson County that “there is nothing I more ardently desire than to see our new Brother’s *universally* attached to the principles, and the perpetuity of their Union with the United States.”¹¹¹ Clearly, Claiborne struggled to win New Orleanians’ affections, and like other Americans, he viewed this reaction as a rejection of American republicanism. The anti-Catholic attitudes prevalent at the time likely played a role in this understanding of New Orleanians’ inability to adopt U.S. principles. Many federal officials were convinced that Catholicism impeded republicanism.¹¹² According to Nathaniel Claiborne, his father, who fought in the American Revolution, instilled his children with republican ideals, which Nathaniel claimed William still held at the time of his death.¹¹³ Claiborne’s letters to Madison and his concern over fashioning Louisianans into good republicans corroborate this portrayal. Claiborne would have been familiar with the

¹¹⁰ Kastor 56.

¹¹¹ W.C.C. Claiborne, *Official Letter Books*, vol. 2, 112.

¹¹² Kastor, 61.

¹¹³ Nathaniel Claiborne, 93.

popular rhetoric deriding Catholicism as irreconcilable with republicanism. When “the Barriers against Popery, erected by our Ancesters, are suffered to be destroyed,” John Adams reflected, “the great Securities of the People, should be invaded, and their fundamental Rights, drawn into Question.”¹¹⁴ Meanwhile, the Catholic Church’s presence in New Orleans provided a route for foreign intervention despite the anticipated separation from European affairs. New Orleans’ place identity remained ostensibly foreign through its inhabitants’ connection to an un-American religious institution.

According to Kastor, one reason conflict between American officials and Louisianans took place was that ideas of citizenship were different in colonial Louisiana and the U.S. due to the fact that Louisiana had a more complex caste system of people of European, African, Native American, and mixed ancestry, making the lines less clear between citizens and aliens.¹¹⁵ Although this system was certainly oppressive to people of color, it was not as clearly binary as American understandings of whites as citizens and black Americans as slaves or part of a vague category of “not-citizen.” The Ursulines themselves illustrated this ambiguity. In 1802, their New Orleans convent comprised of four French, fourteen Creole, and nine Cuban nuns.¹¹⁶

Among the Ursulines’ services, Sister Marie Therese emphasizes their role as educators of free women of color. At the time of the Louisiana Purchase, the Ursulines

¹¹⁴ John Adams, *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, vol. 2, ed. L. H. Butterfield (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1961), 3.

¹¹⁵ Kastor, 29.

¹¹⁶ Clark, 273.

educated young French women and free women of color.¹¹⁷ Although Sister Marie Therese does not explicitly explain that in her letter to Jefferson she is speaking of women of color, historians assume that she is speaking of this student body rather than about the white women they taught.¹¹⁸ According to Sister Marie Therese, the Ursulines saved these girls “from the horror of vice and infamy” in order to raise them up “in the ways of Religion and virtue” and to make them into “happy and useful citizens.”¹¹⁹ Here Sister Marie Therese not only appeals to what she perceives as a U.S. sense of self-righteousness but also to New Orleanians’ contested positions as productive citizens of the U.S.¹²⁰ Since many Americans viewed Catholicism as an impediment to republicanism, Sister Marie Therese frames it instead as a tool for incorporation. This opens up room for Claiborne and the Ursulines to create New Orleans together rather than in fundamentally conflicting ways.

Claiborne’s letters from his first years as governor illustrate the pervasiveness of the rhetoric of the un-American, but this is not as evidently the case about Louisianans if one takes Sister Marie Therese’s letter to Jefferson as representative of New Orleans Catholics’ sentiments in 1804. She does not use a language of the un-Louisianan,

¹¹⁷ Cyprian Davis, *The History of Black Catholics in the United States* (New York: Crossroads, 1990), 72.

¹¹⁸ Semple and Hachard, 61.

¹¹⁹ Sister Marie Therese Farjon de St. Xavier to Thomas Jefferson, March 21, 1804, Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans, LA.

¹²⁰ According to Kastor, the Ursulines eventually succeeded in gaining the Jefferson administration’s support in ways the divisive male clergy of New Orleans did not. Americans came to view the nuns as peaceful and central to harmony in New Orleans (216-217).

suggesting that New Orleanians may not have formed their place identity in contradistinction to the U.S. The inhabitants of New Orleans understood the U.S. as religiously other and not part of “us,” but the Ursulines demonstrate more of a concern with learning how to navigate that difference than how to define New Orleans in opposition to it.

Eventually, New Orleans Catholics faced challenges to their autonomy not only from Protestant Americans but from foreign Catholics as well. In the 1810’s and 1820’s, French missionary priests held an opinion of New Orleans not that different from Protestant Americans. They pointed to vanity and irreligious attitudes that they attributed to the alleged “liberalization of morality in the aftermath of the French Revolution.”¹²¹ If Catholics from Europe took this attitude toward New Orleans, it was all the more important for the Ursulines to position themselves and aspects of New Orleans Catholicism favorably in the eyes of the U.S. government given their vulnerable gender and racial and religious ambiguity. Again, this demonstrates how New Orleans was constructed in relation to France. In this instance, the French Revolution plays an important role here. The Ursulines connected the French Revolution with anticlericalism and their conception of American place identity. Instead of making this association between the French Revolution and the U.S., French missionary priests regarded New Orleans as unfavorably influenced by the changes the French Revolution brought.

¹²¹ Pasquier, 80-81.

To some degree, Sister Marie Therese implicitly participates in “divergent place discourse,” which is “created by people engaged in social interactions.”¹²² She draws on presumed American constructions of New Orleans place identity as sinful to convince Jefferson to let the Ursulines continue their work at their convent in the city. Even as she appeals to this image, however, Sister Marie Therese presents the Ursulines as an integral, virtuous aspect of the city’s character. Having “renounced the world with its pomps and vanities” to serve the community,¹²³ the Ursuline sisters comprise a distinctly Catholic, redeeming aspect of New Orleans. Sister Marie Therese indirectly seeks to alter America’s vision of New Orleans’ place identity if only enough to convince Jefferson that the city would be at great moral peril without the sisters. Ensuring high moral standards speaks to Claiborne’s early critiques of the character of Louisianans and suggests that a Catholic presence was actually necessary to shape the republic.

In the early Republic, Catholic femininity fundamentally opposed American Protestant womanhood by embracing a group of unmarried women acting relatively independent of male authority in the service of the public.¹²⁴ According to Barbara Welter, antebellum Protestant women were supposed to cultivate purity, piety, submissiveness, and domesticity. Unlike Catholics, however, Protestants interpreted this as leading to life in a traditional family.¹²⁵ In the view of Protestant Americans, Catholic

¹²² Stokowski, 380.

¹²³ Sister Marie Therese Farjon de St. Xavier to Thomas Jefferson, March 21, 1804, Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans, LA.

¹²⁴ Clark, 223.

¹²⁵ Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860,” in *American Quarterly* 18:2 (Summer 1966), 152.

women who chose to become nuns rejected this model of womanhood, making them anomalies. The convent was seen as an antifamilial project that endangered women's virtue.¹²⁶ At a time when the moral well-being of the Republic was thought to rest with women¹²⁷, many Protestants viewed Roman Catholic female piety and convent life threatened the stability of the nation.

The Ursulines did not fit the archetype of American womanhood that reigned in the early nineteenth century. In his collected letters from 1804-1805, Claiborne wrote more about the Ursulines than he actually wrote to them. Through Claiborne's comments something may be derived of the way in which gender figured in the type of subjects he hoped to form. After Sister Marie Therese Farjon de St. Xavier wrote to Jefferson, Claiborne sent the nuns a print "as a Memento of my great respect for [your] venerable Order."¹²⁸ Claiborne may have been signaling to the Ursulines that they need not worry about the security of their position in New Orleans at least not to the extent that they write to the president. Again he emphasized the nuns' "exemplary conduct and dignity."¹²⁹ In correspondences with Father Patrick Walsh, Claiborne complements the Ursulines' "innocence, virtue, and usefulness."¹³⁰ All of these characteristics point to a desire for female subjects who will be submissive and helpful to him in establishing an

¹²⁶ Franchot, *Roads to Rome*, 157.

¹²⁷ Lora Romero, *Home Fronts: Domesticity and Its Critics in the Antebellum United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 15.

¹²⁸ W.C.C. Claiborne, *Official Letter Books*, vol. 2, 231.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 203.

American New Orleans. His reaction to their direct contact with Jefferson, however, demonstrates an understanding that the Ursulines were not going to help him unless they were sure of their own security in New Orleans.

In attempting to form properly pliant American subjects, Claiborne's concerns over race became increasingly prominent as the Haitian Revolution drove European, Euro-Caribbean, and black refugees to New Orleans. Claiborne and others in the American administration viewed these people as threatening. Claiborne's letters to Madison echo Morse's similar derision of alleged secret societies seeking to undermine American spirituality and political stability. As refugees began arriving in New Orleans from Haiti, Claiborne expressed concern that "many of the Emigrants are men of desperate characters, and revolutionary dispositions. Against the machinations of these incendiaries the chief Magistrate of Louisiana must be on his guard."¹³¹ Shirley Thompson attributes such attitudes to fears that people of color would incite the local population of color with stories of Toussaint-Louverture and other Haitian revolutionaries.¹³² From Claiborne's letter, this fear appears to be caused partly by the Haitian Revolution but also a continuation of fears of French conspiracy in North America.

Claiborne's concerns about Haiti reflect an ongoing conversation in the U.S. about the island nation's revolution. Jefferson expressed concern about the events on Haiti since they began in 1791. As conflict continued, Jefferson grew increasingly alarmed about the

¹³¹ W.C.C. Claiborne, *Official Letter Books*, v. 2, 88.

¹³² Thompson, *Exiles at Home*, 5.

impact it might have in the U.S. In a 1793 letter to James Monroe, Jefferson demonstrated fear that the Haitian Revolution would inspire slaves in the U.S. to follow a similar path.¹³³ Jefferson reiterated this anxiously in 1797, declaring that if something were not done soon, “we shall be the murderers of our own children.”¹³⁴ Two years before the Louisiana Purchase, Jefferson began expressing the same apprehensions Claiborne would about refugees’ intentions among the enslaved population of the U.S.¹³⁵ Claiborne’s comments and unease about the Haitian Revolution and its refugees then reflect broader tensions in U.S. domestic and foreign policy as well as racial and religious concerns. Jefferson referred to the former slaves as “cannibals of the terrible republic,”¹³⁶ suggesting stereotypes about African-derived religions influenced American views of the revolutionaries as barbaric.

Claiborne returned to the idea of citizenship frequently regarding the immigrants from the Caribbean. While Claiborne was never completely forthright with his concerns over Louisianans’ ability and desire to acculturate into the U.S., he openly denounced the immigrants in his letters to Madison. He “fear[s] the majority of them will be useless if

¹³³ Thomas Jefferson, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 26, edited by Julian P. Boyd, Charles T. Cullen, John Catanzariti, and Barbara B. Oberg (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), 503.

¹³⁴ Thomas Jefferson, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 29, edited by Julian P. Boyd, Charles T. Cullen, John Catanzariti, and Barbara B. Oberg (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), 519.

¹³⁵ Thomas Jefferson, *Thomas Jefferson Writings*, edited by Merrill Peterson (New York: Library of America, 1984), 1098.

¹³⁶ Thomas Jefferson, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 31, edited by Julian P. Boyd, Charles T. Cullen, John Catanzariti, and Barbara B. Oberg (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), 22.

not bad Citizens.”¹³⁷ It is interesting that American officials saw such revolutionary attitudes as threatening to American principles given how short a while before the U.S. had conducted its own revolution. Even though Claiborne demonstrated strong distaste for white Louisianans’ dependence upon slavery, he finds the idea of racial equality disturbing, especially in light of the immense violence of the Haitian Revolution.¹³⁸

Despite his apparent disapproval of the slave trade, Claiborne’s policies betray a fear of contact between whites and people of color. In March of 1804, he directed commandants to prevent slaves from walking in public without passes “or from trading among themselves, or with free people without permission from their owners.”¹³⁹ Claiborne’s need to issue this directive implies that people of color, free and enslaved, participated in trade for personal reasons before the U.S. took control of New Orleans. Americanization rejected this ambiguity sometimes characterizing interracial relations in New Orleans.

Beyond imposing a binary system of racial classification, policies such as Claiborne’s illustrate what Thompson identifies as the standardization of the categories of free person

¹³⁷ W.C.C. Claiborne, *Official Letter Books*, v. 2, 5.

¹³⁸ Paul Johnson argues that the American way of remembering the Louisiana Purchase as a result of Thomas Jefferson’s strategic diplomacy and Lewis and Clark’s intrepidity erases Haiti and its own founding story from the history. He discusses the ways in which Haiti and America’s nation-building stories converge and “lean against each other.” This again demonstrates the ways in which people build their place identities and others’ in connection with one another. See Paul Johnson’s “Voodoo Purchase: The Louisiana Purchase in the Caribbean World” in *New Territories, New Perspectives: The Religious Impact of the Louisiana Purchase*, edited by Richard Callahan.

¹³⁹ W.C.C. Claiborne, *Official Letter Books*, v. 2, 72.

and slave to a degree that left the status of free people of color increasingly uncertain.¹⁴⁰ In the early period of U.S. rule, Claiborne did not view the free population of color as an immediate threat to stability in New Orleans. He may have been concerned that they posed a risk to the city's perception and acceptance within America's place narrative as it was defined by race. Consequently, Claiborne assured Madison that the free people of color were "well attached to the present Government and that it will only be necessary to have recourse to advice, to induce them to decline...publicly manifesting any disquietude."¹⁴¹ As Claiborne's letter suggests, free people of color generally attempted to integrate into the national and local to protect the few rights they had in colonial Louisiana even as slaves rejected attachment to nationality as it was presented to them.¹⁴² Still, Claiborne did not entirely trust the free population of color to resist those who sought to incite them as he went on to reassure Madison that he would use more dramatic means to quiet them if necessary.¹⁴³

The negotiations among New Orleans residents and other Americans as represented in the contact between the Ursulines and Claiborne would develop in various ways throughout the nineteenth century. Haiti and Europe would also continue to figure into the place identity various groups constructed for the city, maintaining its status as un-American despite early efforts at a kind of co-creation of place. Fears of refugees from

¹⁴⁰ Thompson, *Exiles at Home*, 81.

¹⁴¹ W.C.C. Claiborne, *Official Letter Books*, v. 2, 235.

¹⁴² Kastor, 13.

¹⁴³ W.C.C. Claiborne, *Official Letter Books*, v. 2, 235.

Haiti and the potential inspiration the Haitian Revolution may become persisted as the nation continued on the tumultuous path to the Civil War. Cable's novel *The Grandissimes* demonstrates the way these intersections of race, place, and religion influenced ideas about New Orleans and American identity in the decades following the Civil War. The novel demonstrates that despite the Ursulines' efforts to promote a positive image of Catholic citizens, New Orleans' racial and religious identity remained problematic for a white Protestant formulation of American national identity.

Chapter 3

RE-MEMBERING NEW ORLEANS IN *THE GRANDISSIMES*

While Claiborne and Sister Marie Therese's letters suggest a division between New Orleans insiders and outsiders and efforts to mediate both parties' desires for the city, the fiction of George Washington Cable demonstrates that understandings of place identity cannot be classified into clear binary categories. In this chapter, I explore the ways in which the notion of place is used in creating social fact in Cable's *The Grandissimes* (1880). This novel centers on the experiences of a German American immigrant to New Orleans at the time of the Louisiana Purchase. As I will explain, Cable's novel and reactions to it illustrate the ways in which constructions of place identity reveal concerns over race and religion. In the case of New Orleans in particular, articulations of place identity become strategies for defining American national identity as white and Protestant at the time of the Louisiana Purchase and Reconstruction both of which punctuated critical periods in the development of American national identity. This has broader theoretical implications for understandings of the competing histories of places and the legacies of those histories. Cable's novel and reactions to it also demonstrate the legacy of racial and religious ideology shaping the U.S. at the turn of the nineteenth century.

Cable was born in New Orleans in 1844. At this time, the Creole, Irish, and Italian populations were largely Catholic, but in the American quarters of the city, evangelical Protestant churches and their congregants were increasing in number and influence. Some residents continued to practice Voudou as well.¹⁴⁴ In his youth, Cable was a strict

¹⁴⁴ Arlin Turner, *George W. Cable: a Biography* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1956), 6.

Calvinist like his parents. He objected to theater and breaking the Sabbath.¹⁴⁵ By the 1870's, Cable had transformed to the extent that he now approved of reading fiction, and after the publication of *The Grandissimes* in 1880, his views grew less dogmatic.¹⁴⁶ Cable retained many aspects of his Calvinist heritage. During a joint reading tour with Cable in 1885, Mark Twain wrote to a friend of the extreme annoyance Cable's piety caused him. Given Twain's volatile personality and frequent attacks on religion, though, this is unsurprising.¹⁴⁷ Cable also emphasized the importance of Christian values in education and rearing children. In New Orleans, he spent fifteen years supervising a mission school for blacks at his local church, the Prytania Street Presbyterian Church. In his youth, Cable had considered entering the ministry, and he published various tracts on studying and teaching the Bible. When he moved to New England later in his life, he joined the Edwards Congregational Church in Northampton and organized its Bible study.¹⁴⁸

Cable's position on religious groups other than his own was not always clear. Cable openly criticized Protestant evangelical conservatives in his collection of stories *Old Creole Days* as well as in the articles he wrote for New Orleans newspapers. He viewed

¹⁴⁵ Griffith Thompson Pugh, *George Washington Cable: A Biographical and Critical Study* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1979), 6.

¹⁴⁶ John Cleman, *George Washington Cable Revisited* (London: Prentice Hall International, 1996), 128.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 102.

¹⁴⁸ Pugh, 51-2.

conservative evangelicals as distastefully uneducated.¹⁴⁹ He did not openly criticize the beliefs and practices of Catholics so long as he found their goals to be respectable, and he occasionally attended Catholic churches during his travels.¹⁵⁰ He even condemned a proposal to make religious training mandatory in public schools as an attack on Catholics and Jews.¹⁵¹ Ironically, however, Cable's avowed stance of religious tolerance does not reflect in his portrayal of Catholics in *The Grandissimes* in which Catholicism is depicted as an undesirable and foreign Other.

Cable spent most of his life in the city working in the customhouse and, after the Civil War, for local newspapers in addition to writing fiction.¹⁵² As with many of his essays, short stories, and novels, Cable wrote *The Grandissimes* to criticize the hypocrisies and prejudices of New Orleans society. While this would seem to place Cable comfortably in the position of the "insider" depicting New Orleans, he narrates the story largely from the third person limited perspective of a German American immigrant whose linguistic, racial, and religious identities are set in stark contrast to the inhabitants of New Orleans. This literary technique complicates an insider/outsider binary in senses of place that might otherwise be supposed. Though this binary seems to hold up relatively well in the contexts of Claiborne's writings and that of the Ursulines, it is not useful when considering a New Orleanian writing from the perspective of a foreigner to Louisiana.

¹⁴⁹ Cleman, 45.

¹⁵⁰ Turner, 277.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁵² Michael Kreyling, "Introduction," in *The Grandissimes: a Story of Creole Life*, by George Washington Cable (New York: Penguin, 1988), xi-xiii.

From a methodological perspective, however, it is helpful because undermines the idea that everyone from a place has the same understanding of that place and reveals that factors of personal identity, such as race, class, religion, and gender, influence versions of place identity so that there are often multiple insider perspectives on a particular place.

As an American Protestant actively writing and publishing in the second half of the nineteenth century, Cable would have been familiar with the various revivals of Nativism that took place during his lifetime, first in the 1840s and 1850s then again as he was writing *The Grandissimes* in the early post-Reconstruction era. Jedidiah Morse's son Samuel Morse perpetuated his father's anti-Catholic rhetoric as a leading voice for the Native American Democratic Association, an anti-Catholic and anti-immigration party which put candidates in various offices in the 1830s and 1840s.¹⁵³ Samuel Morse later supported the Know-Nothing party, a Nativist group that elected eight governors by the end of 1855.¹⁵⁴ In his widely read *Imminent Dangers to the Free Institutions of the United States through Foreign Immigration*, he accused Catholics of blindly following their priests to the point of treason. He also warned that Jesuits presented a particularly dangerous threat since they conspired to build an empire for the Pope within America while infiltrating American political parties.¹⁵⁵ Voices such as Samuel Morse's dominated American politics in Cable's youth, and in the 1850's, a branch of the Know-

¹⁵³ Kenneth Silverman, *Lightning Man: The Accursed Life of Samuel F.B. Morse* (Westminster: Alfred A. Knopf Inc., 2003), 139.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 337.

¹⁵⁵ Samuel Morse, *Imminent Dangers*, 13-15.

Nothing party established itself in New Orleans under the direction of Charles Gayarré, one of Cable's most vocal critics.¹⁵⁶

Although Cable was born over forty years after the Louisiana Purchase, he published *The Grandissimes* during a similarly uncertain time in America's national identity, the Jim Crow era. Cable's portrayal of race relations in *The Grandissimes* can be read as a critique of racial discrimination during the post-Reconstruction era, which because of resurgent legal discrimination and violence against blacks became known as Jim Crow. During Reconstruction and Jim Crow, as Edward Blum notes, racial equality and justice continually eluded Americans.¹⁵⁷ Instead, in the postbellum period, Americans became preoccupied with who constituted the reunited "nation," which also included a debate about who did not. This discussion focused on immigration patterns and especially the status of former slaves. Protestants in the North and South worked to revive ethnic nationalist ideologies in which racial, religious, and gender categories defined citizenship.¹⁵⁸ Cable, then, wrote *The Grandissimes* in the late nineteenth century when the nation was facing a crisis similar to the one in which his novel is situated.

Due, among other things, to the sugar cane industry in the southern part of the Louisiana Territory, slavery was prevalent before the Civil War. Both whites and free people of color owned slaves. Even the Ursulines, like other religious orders, were

¹⁵⁶ Thompson, *Exiles at Home*, 36.

¹⁵⁷ Edward Blum, *Reforging the White Republic: Race, Religion, and American Nationalism, 1865-1898* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 3.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

slaveholders.¹⁵⁹ This is reflected in *The Grandissimes* in the fact that two “quadroon” characters, including a former slave, own slaves. Despite his characterization of New Orleans as an oppressive place for blacks, Cable ignores the seeming hypocrisy of a former slave owning another person. Instead, he focuses on the plight of free people of color. This may be because he intended the novel to critique the treatment of black Americans during Reconstruction and Jim Crow. It is also likely that he (consciously or unconsciously) expected readers to identify more with the tragic nobility of the light-skinned “quadroons.” Although race relations in New Orleans were more complex and porous than in other parts of Reconstruction America, equal participation in democratic processes and education remained out of reach for many blacks.¹⁶⁰ Moreover, morbidity and mortality rates were higher among blacks than the rest of the population due to poor housing and lack of medical care.¹⁶¹ Race riots and racial violence also continued to plague the city after the Civil War.¹⁶²

Readers in Louisiana received Cable’s first novel very differently than his Northern readership, which largely embraced the novel. Many New Orleans natives, on the other hand, reacted very harshly. Angered Southerners published several pamphlets accusing Cable of renewing stereotypes about the region. One anonymous author charged Cable

¹⁵⁹ Clark, 161-2.

¹⁶⁰ John Blassingame, *Black New Orleans: 1860-1880* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 210-14.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 163.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 177.

with miscegenation with the famous Voodoo priestess Marie Laveau,¹⁶³ implying that he was seduced by the religious and racial Other and had been corrupted. A reviewer in the *New Orleans Times Democrat* attacked Cable by refuting the idea of cultural hybridity in Louisiana. The reviewer established his people as linguistically pure in order to assert their past, present, and future racial purity.¹⁶⁴ Cable's representation of different Louisiana French dialects raised questions about racial and cultural hybridity that upset those who preferred to maintain white supremacy and purity. The mixing of languages in *The Grandissimes* implies multiracial status in supposedly white families who do not acknowledge ancestors of color or their ancestors' participation in the sexual subjugation of people of color. As I will later suggest, these readers' varied responses to Cable's novel reflect racial and religious politics as well as different understandings of New Orleans' place identity.

Cable's efforts to trouble the idea of racial purity through linguistic structures can be better understood in context of historian Charles Gayarré and the Know-Nothing Party in New Orleans in the mid-1800's. As a leader of the Know-Nothing Party in Louisiana, Gayarré led a campaign against cultural and political contamination from foreigners.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ Franchot, "Unseemly Commemoration," 45.

¹⁶⁴ Thompson, "Ah Toucoutou," 248.

¹⁶⁵ It is important to note that the Know-Nothing Party arose specifically in opposition to Catholic immigration to the U.S. French-speaking Louisianans formed an anomalous section of the pro-English, anti-Catholic Know-Nothing Party in the South. Shirley Thompson points out that in the process of Americanization, Know-Nothing rhetoric became a vehicle for merchants, evangelical Protestants, and native-born white laborers to further their interests in a wider political arena. For more, see Shirley Thompson's *Exiles at Home: The Struggle to Become American in Creole New Orleans*.

Fears of religious and especially racial contamination underlay this xenophobia.¹⁶⁶

Gayarré published his *History of Louisiana* to depict race relations and divisions in colonial Louisiana as unambiguous in his attempt to create what he viewed as a racially pure Louisiana.¹⁶⁷ In similar efforts to Gayarré's, some scientists sought to align the cultural category "Creole" specifically with the racial category "white."¹⁶⁸ This suggests that others questioned Creole racial purity. New Orleans leaders like Gayarré and white Americans from other parts of the U.S. began to confuse previous Louisiana folk definitions of "Creole" with white racial anxiety.¹⁶⁹

Even as Gayarré and pseudo-scientists tried to assert the white racial purity of Creoles, free people of color began appropriating the label to assert an ethnic identity and social position distinct from new migrants of color arriving from other parts of the U.S.¹⁷⁰ Certainly, if Americanization represented the imposing of a binary system of racial classification,¹⁷¹ native New Orleanian understandings of race did not parallel those of

¹⁶⁶ Thompson, *Exiles at Home*, 36.

¹⁶⁷ Nine years before Gayarré published his history, Robert Baird released *Religion in America: or, an Account of the Origin, Progress, Relation to the State, and Present Condition of the Evangelical Churches in the United States, with Notices of the Unevangelical Denominations*. Baird's tome demonstrates the typical approach American historians took to Catholicism at that time. Speaking about the acquisition of Louisiana and Florida, Baird assured readers that although the Roman Catholic population of the U.S. increased considerably, Protestants would not let them gain too much power (271).

¹⁶⁸ Thompson, *Exiles at Home*, 37.

¹⁶⁹ Dawdy, 108.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 109.

¹⁷¹ Thompson, *Exiles at Home*, 81.

the U.S. Cable opens *The Grandissimes* with a direct assault on Gayarré's history by referencing the elite Grandissime family's Native American ancestry. Although Cable's novel is a reaction to ideas such as Gayarré's, some literary critics argue that Cable may be indebted to Gayarré's multi-volume work as a source for writing the novel.¹⁷² Consequently, Gayarré's concern with racial purity influences Cable's depiction of New Orleans' place identity.

As I explained previously, literature provides a particularly revealing source for exploring past conceptions of New Orleans' history and place identity. Franchot contends that in *The Grandissimes* and novels like it, history becomes a body as well as a time and place.¹⁷³ In this sense, literature fits well within Massey's understanding of place as an intersection of time and space.¹⁷⁴ Cable's novel embodies a particular intersection, or rather a retrospective understanding of the intersection, of time, geography, and racial and religious politics. In this respect, *The Grandissimes* is illuminating in considering New Orleans' place identity in the antebellum and postbellum periods.

Discourse plays a critical role in this creation of New Orleans' place identity through literature. Cable's novel is a form of re-remembering, an act of reconstructing the past according to his ideologies. According to Patricia Stokowski, the systems by which people speak and write their social, natural, and cultural landscapes represent an objective reality in that they are communicative behaviors through which people actively create

¹⁷² Kreyling, xii-xiii.

¹⁷³ Franchot, "Unseemly Commemoration," 43.

¹⁷⁴ Massey, "Places and Their Pasts," 188.

place realities.¹⁷⁵ A social understanding of a place is created through Cable producing writing about New Orleans and his readers consuming this production. The way in which Cable writes and has his characters converse about New Orleans helps to shape and extend to a wider public the particular nature of the social understanding of New Orleans' place identity. Viewing this place identity as constructed rather than an accurate reflection of some essential nature provides a mode of analyzing the process of this construction and the reasons for it as well as the factors that subsequently influence its discursive deployment in political situations.

The way in which Cable portrays New Orleans is significant and reflects concerns over race, religion, and national identity that are the legacies of rhetoric from earlier in the nineteenth century. Massey argues a place's identity is continuously being produced.¹⁷⁶ In the case of Cable's novel, a particular version of New Orleans' place identity is being reproduced for readers' consumption. This place identity stands in for what the United States should not be. In this version, New Orleans is exotic, unenlightened, and un-American. It is "a thick mist of strange names, places and events" into which people, Cable's readers included, are allured.¹⁷⁷ Most significantly, Cable's New Orleans is a site of strict, complex racial hierarchies that are unjust and unsustainable.

¹⁷⁵ Stokowski, 373.

¹⁷⁶ Doreen Massey, "A Place Called Home?" *New Formations* 17 (1992): 14.

¹⁷⁷ George Washington Cable, *The Grandissimes* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), 20.

Cable's production of New Orleans' place identity through writing also raises the issue of the reader's participation in the process of constructing place. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau argues that consumption, in this case reading, is a form of production.¹⁷⁸ Like renters, readers "make comparable changes in an apartment they furnish with their acts and memories."¹⁷⁹ In the act of reading, people inevitably interpret and reshape what is written, though not necessarily in an essential way. Based upon pamphlets and other reactionary writings, historians can see that readers of *The Grandissimes* generally interpreted the novel as a challenge to Louisianan civility and racial purity; however, this interpretation led to different reactions. Some New Orleanians were so enraged "that a veritable flood of abuse and damnation swirled around [Cable] in newspapers, pamphlets, and public meetings."¹⁸⁰ Northern readership reproduced Cable's version of New Orleans' place identity by drawing on already present ideas about the unwholesomeness of Catholicism, which affirmed Cable's portrayal in their minds. Protestant newspapers admonished New Orleanian immorality which could be attributed to the Catholic nature of the city.¹⁸¹

Cable goes about constructing his New Orleans in several ways. *The Grandissimes* opens with a masked ball, immediately creating a tone of mystery and establishing a picture of lavishness and recalling the theatrical diversions Cable's earlier strict

¹⁷⁸ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, translated by Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 31.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, xxi.

¹⁸⁰ Tregle, Jr., "Creoles and Americans," 131.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 148-149.

Calvinism forbade. The New Orleans natives' customs and manners shock, perplex, and frustrate the main character, Joseph Frowenfeld. A white German American Protestant immigrant, Frowenfeld is "an American by birth, rearing and sentiment, yet German enough through his parents."¹⁸² Frowenfeld's immigrant status speaks to demographic changes in New Orleans throughout the mid-nineteenth century. Between 1847 and 1857, approximately 350,000 foreign-born immigrants entered New Orleans. By 1850, foreign-born immigrants and non-native U.S. migrants comprised 57% of the population, helping to make New Orleans the fifth largest city in the U.S.¹⁸³ Cable came of age amid these drastic demographic shifts and would have encountered migrants and immigrants who found the city strange as Frowenfeld does.

From first introducing the character, Cable establishes Frowenfeld as an ethnic and religious outsider, later shown to be a corrective, to New Orleans. He becomes an apothecary after being stranded in New Orleans when his family dies. Cable constructs his narrative in a way that intends readers to identify with Frowenfeld and his experience of New Orleans as alien. This includes being a speaker of Standard American English in a place where most people spoke French, some spoke Spanish, and many spoke Creole. Cable identifies nine versions of French spoken in New Orleans, all of which are associated with race and class status in various ways.¹⁸⁴ Frowenfeld's failed attempts at

¹⁸² Cable, 10.

¹⁸³ Sandra Frink, "'Strangers are Flocking Here': Identity and Anonymity in New Orleans, 1810-1860," in *American Nineteenth Century History* 1:2 (June 2010): 156.

¹⁸⁴ These versions of French range from "unprovincial French," or that of the aristocratic upper class, to the "Creole French of the gutter" (Cable 2, 274).

decoding New Orleans society through its language enhance the city's alien, exotic air. In fact, he does not attempt to learn any version of French, seemingly content to let New Orleans remain largely othered.¹⁸⁵

Cable's treatment of French as un-American echoes Claiborne's treatment of the language as well. Claiborne distinguishes the "American and French Languages."¹⁸⁶ In Claiborne's estimation, it seems, English is American, making French categorically un-American. Interestingly, Claiborne does not actually use the term "English language" but rather "American." While it is arguably true that American English is a different language than British English, this depends largely on the definition of "language." In the popular sense in which Claiborne seems to use the word "language," there is no indication that he thought about it in these terms. Rather, English is synonymous with American. Cable never depicts Frowenfeld trying to learn another language, as though that would challenge his identity as a true American and foil to New Orleanian vice.

Cable identifies different versions of French with different racial groups, which in turn become linked to religion. Voudou and allusions to Africa stand at the forefront of Cable's tools used to exoticize New Orleans. African chants and the sounds of dancing in slave yards sound faintly in the streets at night.¹⁸⁷ Cable describes Congo Square, where slaves gathered, as reminding passersby "of its old barbaric pastimes."¹⁸⁸ In *The*

¹⁸⁵ It is interesting to note that readers are made to assume that Frowenfeld can identify different versions of French even though he does not know the language. Still, different versions of French become markers of race and class for Frowenfeld and Cable's readers.

¹⁸⁶ W.C.C. Claiborne, *Official Letter Books*, vol. 2, 236.

¹⁸⁷ Cable, 121.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 246.

Grandissimes, slaves and free people of color, all of whom speak various versions of French, practice Voodoo. Through the connections between “barbaric” places, such as Congo Square, and Voodoo, Voodoo comes to be figured as barbaric, reinforcing New Orleans’ alienness. Even through Congo Square’s name, Cable reminds readers of formative connections between New Orleans, Africa, and Haiti.

Significantly, in addition to Cable’s close association of Voodoo with barbarism and violence, its practice is ultimately a feminine endeavor in *The Grandissimes*. Generally, only women are depicted performing Voodoo rituals. This feminization parallels the nineteenth century treatment of Catholicism as feminine in Protestant American literature. By emphasizing the materiality of Catholicism, Protestant writers claimed a renewed virility for Protestantism.¹⁸⁹ They also demarcated the boundaries of Catholic and Protestant spirituality.¹⁹⁰ As I will explain, Cable especially links Voodoo and related objects to the Haitian Revolution and the stories it inspired. In feminizing Voodoo, he creates a threatening model of non-Protestant femininity that draws too much upon symbols of the violent masculine revolutionary disposition of Bras-Coupé whose story develops Cable’s religious and racial themes.

Cable’s portrayal of black characters’ practices as uncivilized reflects ethnological theories of the nineteenth century. Although his stance on the injustices after the Civil War would indicate a disavowal of pseudo-scientific theories that claimed blacks were not human, he ultimately presents the kinds of stereotypes Frederick Douglass criticized.

¹⁸⁹ Franchot, *Roads to Rome*, 71.

¹⁹⁰ Franchot, “Unseemly Commemorations,” 40.

In his 1854 address *The Claims of the Negro, Ethnologically Considered*, Douglass accused “Southern pretenders to science” of creating theories to justify slavery.¹⁹¹ To these people, African religions indicated a stalling in the evolutionary process.¹⁹² Cable’s treatment of Voudou and Congo Square reveal the influence of these theories on Cable’s attitudes towards the black population of New Orleans.

Like black Louisianans, Native Americans figure in conflicting ways in *The Grandissimes*. Cable traces the lineage of two aristocratic families, the Grandissimes and Fusiliers, whose feud is at the center of the novel, to a Natchez woman.¹⁹³ Agricola Fusilier, a character who stands in for the voice of white supremacy in the novel, publicly embraces this lineage while denying equally truthful claims of his relationships to black and biracial people.¹⁹⁴ Although the Natchez was one of the larger tribes in the area and feature prominently in Charles Gayarré’s *History of Louisiana*, from which Cable drew much of his background material, Cable’s choice of the Natchez has other historical significance. In 1729, the Natchez led an attack against the French colony in Natchez, Mississippi, then part of the Louisiana Territory.¹⁹⁵ The Louisiana Territory, then, is an unpredictably dangerous place in Cable’s novel. When the two families who descend from the Natchez move to New Orleans, the city becomes a more concentrated site for

¹⁹¹ Frederick Douglass, *The Claims of the Negro, Ethnologically Considered* (Rochester: Lee, Mann, and Co., 1854), 15.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁹³ Cable, 27.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁹⁵ Hall, 100.

this turbulence that Cable suggests results partly from the unacknowledged multiracial status of the hypocritical upper class. In this respect, characters shape New Orleans' place identity in *The Grandissimes*.

To Frowenfeld and, supposedly, most readers, New Orleans natives behave irrationally regarding religion and race. They also carry out their elaborate code of honor to the point of irrationality. Frowenfeld goes as far as to claim explicitly that New Orleans is “in arrears to the civilized world.”¹⁹⁶ He later blames this incivility on New Orleans' distance from the “enlightened centres” of Europe and the Northeastern United States.¹⁹⁷ This reinforces the descriptions of the practices of people of color as barbaric and exotic. Frowenfeld eventually serves as a corrective to some of these problems by bringing two half brothers into an interracial business alliance.¹⁹⁸ Cable is insisting upon the necessity of American intervention in New Orleans society by calling upon the image of the United States as it should be through Frowenfeld.

The way in which Cable describes Catholicism and Voudou through Frowenfeld's Protestant lens becomes instrumental in depicting New Orleans as unenlightened. In the nineteenth century European American mind, Voudou did not qualify as a religion. Rather, as Joseph Murphy explains, Voudou came to be (and continues to be) portrayed as “black magic” in American popular culture, reducing a complex religious culture to

¹⁹⁶ Cable, 183.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 197.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 353.

images of “black magic” that “invite ‘us’ ...to contrast” magic with religion.¹⁹⁹ A harsh value judgment is implicit. While Murphy is not speaking about Cable specifically, his assessment is applicable. Cable depicts Voodoo and Catholicism as incomprehensible Others. Because Frowenfeld is an apothecary, some characters mistake him for one who sells charms and performs Voodoo ceremonies. When a local man explains to Frowenfeld why a woman asks him for herbs without known medicinal qualities, Frowenfeld is taken aback and calls her a witch.²⁰⁰ Voodoo is never taken on its own terms but always framed as superstition and, in some cases such as the one mentioned above, witchcraft. Cable’s New Orleans becomes both unenlightened and dangerous. Counter to Cable’s professed intentions, this serves to justify the marginalization of blacks.²⁰¹

Despite Cable’s criticism of legal infringements upon Catholics’ rights, Catholicism comes to be a similarly sinister and misunderstood force in *The Grandissimes* in part because of its implied proximity to Voodoo and Haitian slave revolt. In telling the story of Bras-Coupé, the rebel slave whose tale²⁰² reflects white American fears after the

¹⁹⁹ Joseph M. Murphy, “Black Religion and ‘Black Magic’: Prejudice and Projection in Images of African-Derived Religions.” *Religion* 20 (1990): 324.

²⁰⁰ Cable, 68-69.

²⁰¹ Murphy, 333.

²⁰² In *The Grandissimes*, Bras-Coupé is a slave who revolts against his masters. As punishment, his limbs are cut off, and he dies (Cable 219-252). Later in the novel, Clemence, a slave woman, is found carrying a waxen miniature of Bras-Coupé’s arm when on her way to kill a white man. Franchot argues that making Bras-Coupé into a relic simultaneously depoliticizes his story and precipitates violence against Voodoo, which I explain later (“Unseemly Commemorations,” 51). The waxen arm serves a symbol of Haitian militancy, which inflamed and frightened many Americans at the time of the Louisiana Purchase.

Haitian Revolution in 1802, Cable explains that Bras-Coupé was “beyond the reach alike of the lash and the Latin Bible.”²⁰³ Roman Catholicism is not only a party to slavery, but it is an ineffective method of enforcing it. Frowenfeld, the only Protestant voice in the novel, advocates abolition, disassociating Protestantism from slavery despite its historic connections to lines of justification for the slave trade. Bras-Coupé becomes closely linked to – almost conflated with – Voudou when a slave woman is foiled in her attempt to cast a charm using a waxen miniature of his severed arm. Nevertheless, Cable resists portraying Voudou as a tool of resistance against unjust racial structures and maintains its status as backwards and superstitious. Instead of an instrument of resistance or liberation, Voudou becomes a site of great irrational racial violence and implies a model of womanhood made threatening by its association with the Haitian Revolution.

The waxen arm of Bras-Coupé serves as a symbol of Haitian militancy, suggesting that the violence of the Haitian revolution could be contained only by more extreme white violence.²⁰⁴ These aspects of the narrative increase the instability of New Orleans’ racial and religious identity. They also demonstrate the continuity in white views of the Haitian Revolution from Claiborne’s administration into the post-Reconstruction era and beyond. Fears of the influence of the Haitian Revolution on slaves only increased in the years after the Louisiana Purchase leading up to the Civil War. In 1811, a well-organized army of slaves carried out the largest insurrection in American history in New Orleans and the surrounding plantations inspired, according to many accounts, by the success of

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 245.

²⁰⁴ Franchot, “Unseemly Commemorations,” 52.

their counterparts in Haiti. Claiborne and, after the Civil War, Gayarré set about rewriting the events of the rebellion to justify planters' violence against the slaves.²⁰⁵ Gayarré's *History of Louisiana* was widely read. Since Cable drew on it for *The Grandissimes*, the novelist was influenced by a particularly negative portrayal of the Haitian Revolution and its effects on Americans.

Religion also constitutes a large part of why New Orleans' place identity is distinctly un-American. Especially in the context of the domestic sphere, Cable explains, the "true Creole was, and still continues to be, properly, yea, delightfully un-American."²⁰⁶ At the time of the Louisiana Purchase and during Reconstruction and Jim Crow, many Protestants were disturbed by the uncertain state of America's national identity. Cable's treatment of Catholicism and Voudou simultaneously parallel and challenge those nationalist assertions of American identity as white and Protestant. Frowenfeld notes that New Orleans "has a language and religion different from that of the great people of which it is now called to be a part."²⁰⁷ The city inhabitants' use of various forms of French and adherence to Catholicism and Voudou present (at times seemingly insurmountable) challenges to the integration of the region and its inhabitants into the

²⁰⁵ Daniel Rasmussen, *American Uprising: The Untold Story of America's Largest Slave Revolt* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2011), 205.

²⁰⁶ Cable, 117.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 197.

white Protestant English-speaking²⁰⁸ United States. Cable, then, reinforces the idea that New Orleans' place identity is irreconcilable with that of the United States.

Cable implies that all of this results from New Orleans being far too confused a mix of European and African cultures. Detailing the fate of the Gradissime family, who loses its wealth at the end of the novel, Cable explains, "their old Spanish-colonial ferocity was gradually absorbed by the growth of better traits."²⁰⁹ Cable implies that the descendants of Spanish Catholics are inherently savagely oppressive. Moreover, people of African descent demonstrate irrational savagery. At one point, a Congolese²¹⁰ woman bites Frowenfeld without cause.²¹¹ Only Frowenfeld, the German American Protestant, demonstrates clear reason consistently. Even the least violent Louisianans practice Catholicism and Voudou, which incite violence in the novel. Again, traits and social manners common among the majority of characters establish New Orleans' otherness.

At this point, it becomes unclear whether Cable depicts New Orleans as un-American primarily because of its heavily institutionalized race- and religious-based oppression.

Cable's construction of New Orleans' place identity as racist reflects a critique of

²⁰⁸ The imposition of English on the mostly French-speaking inhabitants of the Louisiana Territory caused many tensions and legal problems, which are reflected in Cable's depiction of people's fears over the statuses of their land titles and business contracts, written in French. Many Louisianans did feel that the United States government was overlooking language rights when it acquired the Louisiana Territory, and they expressed their anxieties (Bailey, 363-5). The linguistic realities almost seem too much for Cable's readers; he must even anglicize some French names (Cable 88).

²⁰⁹ Cable, 435.

²¹⁰ There are several instances in which Cable describes slaves as "Congo" or Ethiopian, but it is unclear how or why he makes this distinction when he does. Furthermore, he only gives these specifics when talking about women slaves.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 263.

Reconstruction and Jim Crow in the larger American context in the postbellum era. It would make little sense, then, to construct the American nation as a racially just place earlier in the same century. Yet, Frowenfeld, who stands in for the white Protestant United States, serves to correct the racist, superstitious practices of New Orleans inhabitants. Cable, therefore, is suggesting prescriptive notion of national, religious, racial, and place identities for the United States. Each is defined over and against the flaws of the New Orleans of *The Grandissimes* in a process that Massey would describe as “negative counterposition.”²¹² At the turn of the nineteenth century, New Orleans stood in for what America was not, thereby implying what America was. In an 1882 address, Cable went as far as to argue for a “No South,” an erasure of regional identity to be replaced with a single model of the American.²¹³ During Reconstruction and Jim Crow, Cable argues that the New Orleans of *The Grandissimes* stands in for what America should not be, a racially unjust religious other. Frowenfeld represents Cable’s vision of non-regional American identity, but he is inextricably linked to the North and Europe, demonstrating the impossibility of Cable’s “No South.”²¹⁴

The relationship between the place identities assigned to New Orleans in Cable’s novel and the rhetoric surrounding the Louisiana Purchase demonstrate that places’ identities never form independently of larger historical forces. According to Massey,

²¹² Massey, “Places and Their Pasts,” 189.

²¹³ Kenneth Warren, *So Black and Blue: Ralph Ellison and the Occasion of Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 58.

²¹⁴ Like scholars and activists before and after him, Ralph Ellison criticized the evasion of Southern identity as a failure to confront the truths of America’s past. See Kenneth Warren’s *So Black and Blue: Ralph Ellison and the Occasion of Criticism*.

“places...are always constructed out of articulations of social relations...which are not only internal to that locale but which link them to elsewhere.”²¹⁵ In the nineteenth century, various parties constructed New Orleans’ place identity in relation to racial and religious ideologies, which formed dominant concepts of American national identity in the New Republic and the postbellum era. This reveals the tensions of social relations between the postbellum North and South, whites and blacks and Protestants and Catholics throughout the nineteenth century. This New Orleans has as much or more to do with racial and religious politics at the national level as it does at the local level. Religious politics and international tensions also connect New Orleans’ place identity to the legacy of the Protestant Reformation in Europe through the conflict between Catholicism and Protestantism in *The Grandissimes*. It is not surprising that Frowenfeld claims ancestry from Germany, the center of reason in the Reformation and Enlightenment.

In addition to figuring New Orleans as unenlightened, Cable and others characterize the city as a racial and religious other for political purposes, though those purposes varied depending on the period and peoples’ political dispositions. Although Cable had a seemingly divergent view on race from those whom he critiques, he relies on many of the same racial and religious stereotypes. In *The Grandissimes*, the racial, religious, and linguistic complexities of New Orleans society are exoticized and scaled down to regional quaintness. They become digestible for the assumed (largely Northern) white Protestant readership. According to Franchot, Cable goes as far as to destroy the religious other in a scene in which a slave woman, standing in for Voudou, is tortured to

²¹⁵ Massey, “Places and Their Pasts,” 183.

death.²¹⁶ The religious other cannot survive intact if New Orleans is to become “American,” meaning white and Protestant. This logic underlies both Cable’s argument and that of those who argued against racial and religious equality at the time of the Louisiana Purchase.

Through the various techniques I have discussed, Cable characterizes New Orleans as unenlightened, and un-American. By viewing literature as a form of re-membering the past, it is possible to understand *The Grandissimes* as an embodiment of a particular intersection of space and time in two distinct but interrelated historical dimensions. First, Cable’s novel reveals national religious and racial politics at the time of the Louisiana Purchase. In Cable’s critique, the narrative accomplishes the same end for Reconstruction and Jim Crow. Cable deploys New Orleans’ place identity as a primary tool of this critique. The relationship between place identity and understandings of place’s past is dialectical, while both are informed by national, religious, and racial politics.

²¹⁶ Franchot, “Unseemly Commemorations,” 50.

Chapter 4

USING PLACE THEORY IN HISTORICAL STUDIES

The rhetoric in letters, sermons, and fiction surrounding the Louisiana Purchase is an important site for exploring the formation of American national identity in relation to place, race, and religion. After the Louisiana Purchase, people struggled to determine what Louisiana would be, changing what it would mean to be American in the process.²¹⁷ In the New Republic, Protestant Americans proposed a particular brand of Christianity as central to American identity and republicanism. Furthermore, whites enforced a strict binary in race relations in which all people of color were non-citizens. White Protestant American constructions of New Orleans and New Orleans Catholics' versions of U.S. place identity illustrate these dynamics at work.

Many Americans constructed the U.S. as a white Protestant republic in contradistinction to a racially ambiguous Catholic New Orleans. According to Feldhaus, people differentiate regions by opposing them to others.²¹⁸ In New Republic ideology, the U.S. formed its national identity in opposition to Louisiana's place identity. Consequently, officials, such as Claiborne, depicted New Orleans as Catholic and racially ambiguous. In Claiborne's estimation, this did not provide conditions for Louisianans to become good citizens of the U.S. Instead, in the minds of Americans, New Orleans' religious and racial identities posed more of a threat because people of color could be incited to violence by Haitian refugees and Voodoo. It is less clear from Sister Marie

²¹⁷ Kastor, 3.

²¹⁸ Feldhaus, 211.

Therese's writings how she and other New Orleans Catholics might have defined New Orleans' place identity in contradistinction to that of the U.S. Writing at the end of the century, Cable reinforces a stereotypical image of New Orleans as a racially ambiguous, linguistically and religiously other place. He accomplishes this by setting the sole American character in *The Grandissimes* in contrast with the locals, particularly in his language, religion, and views on abolition.

Claiborne and the Ursulines' correspondence and Cable's *The Grandissimes* illustrate the multiple ways in which people construct place identities in relation to other places. For Claiborne and other Americans, New Orleans' French, Spanish, and Haitian ties influenced it dramatically. More closely tied to France in its tastes, customs, habits, religion, and language,²¹⁹ New Orleans appeared monarchical and anti-republican. Claiborne's distaste for slavery, however, did not engender sympathy for refugees from Haiti, no matter what their race. Instead, Americans viewed the specter of Haitian militancy as a constant threat to the stability of racial divides. The New Orleans of Claiborne's letters is unstable and un-American.

As an integral part of New Orleans Catholic life, the Ursulines frame their understanding of the U.S. in relation to the French Revolution. Like other Louisiana Catholics, they associated the U.S. with the violent anticlericalism and dispossession in the French Revolution. This suspicion was likely increased by officials, such as Laussat, who framed the Louisiana Purchase in terms of strengthening an alliance between France and the U.S. Ironically, both the U.S. and New Orleans associate the other with France

²¹⁹ Kukla, 31.

for very different reasons. Sister Marie Therese also demonstrates some understanding of the U.S.'s perception New Orleans. By framing her order's mission as one to mold good citizens, she provides a counter-racial, religious, and gender image and addresses Claiborne's concerns about the city's potential as a part of the Union, though their understandings of citizenship may have been different.

Cable presents the richest picture of New Orleans, also connecting it with France, Spain, and Haiti. Through his classifications of different types of French, Cable demarcates varying racial and class identities for his characters, some of whom demonstrate stereotypical irrationality and cruelty. Perhaps most significantly, even as he presents an argument for racial equality, Cable creates a tangible sense of the danger posed by Haiti through the graphic description of Bras-Coupé and the death of Clemence. All of these foreign elements position New Orleans in opposition to Frowenfeld, who embodies "American" race, religion, and language. Using Frowenfeld, Cable also indirectly enriches American place identity by linking it to Germany through Frowenfeld's heritage. In this way, Cable constructs the U.S. in part with what he viewed as the rational, civilized characteristics associated with Germany as the center of the Protestant Reformation, a revolt against the "superstition" and supposed anti-republicanism of Roman Catholicism, and Enlightenment.

The differences in details among letters and fiction raise the issue of what types of sources are most useful in applying place theory. The degree to which historians can discern historical actors' senses of place depends a great deal on the type and amount of detail provided. Official letters and records often require the historian to read with a particular lens. Because Claiborne's letters address government business of a military,

economic, or political nature, he does not give explicit details about his surroundings. Instead, the letters must be read with an eye to what is unsaid as well as the context from which Claiborne comes to New Orleans. Sermons of leaders in the Second Great Awakening, such as Hopkins and Morse, also help make sense of Claiborne's position on New Orleans as an un-American place in its religion, language, and culture. Sister Marie Therese's letter does not explicitly convey a sense of place either. Rather, one must consider the broader context of Catholic reactions to the cession of Louisiana to France then the U.S. The correspondence between Claiborne and the Ursulines must be analyzed in relation to the dynamics of race, gender, religion, and nationality at work at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

One must remain careful, however, not to read too much into texts. While Sister Marie Therese's letter to Jefferson illustrates a distinct understanding of the U.S. as religiously other, there are few clues as to her perception of New Orleans' place identity. Claiborne's letters depicted New Orleans as un-American in contradistinction to American racial politics, language, and religion. Sister Marie Therese does not offer clear comparison between the regions to demonstrate whether or not she defines New Orleans, or Louisiana in general, against the U.S.

Literature presents a much clearer source from which historians using place theory can draw. It is usually intentionally infused with detail about place to construct a sense of place for readers. While this can occur in the description of settings, authors often construct place in less direct ways. In *The Grandissimes*, Cable uses language to engender a sense of New Orleans as un-American, creating an air of the exotic with different versions of French in dialogue. He also does this through descriptions of New

Orleanians' foreign characteristics as well as through symbols. The waxen arm of Bras-Coupé serves as a powerful reminder of New Orleans' connection to Haiti and the threat to American values whites perceived from refugees in 1804 and the foreign in general in 1880. Such a symbol could not be so easily invoked in official letters and public documents. Certainly some omissions from Claiborne's letters were striking. In particular, in the letters I analyzed, he does not mention Voudou, an aspect of New Orleans life that figured prominently in *The Grandissimes* as one of the great evils of New Orleans. Since Claiborne shows preoccupation with other aspects of New Orleans morality, specifically in the inquiry to his commandants about whether inhabitants have sufficient clergy, it is odd that he would not mention this particularly un-American characteristic of the city.

As historians refine their approaches to and application of place theory, some terminology warrants attention. Synthesizing Cable's novel, the histories of the Louisiana Purchase and Reconstruction, and place theory calls for a reformulation of place identity. Not many scholars have defined place identity, though an increasing number employ the term. In natural resources and outdoor recreation management, Lynne Manzo defines place identity as "those dimensions of the self that define the individual's personal identity in relation to the physical environment by means of a complex pattern of conscious and unconscious ideas, beliefs, preferences, feelings, values, goals and behavioral tendencies."²²⁰ This definition relies entirely on individual

²²⁰ Lynne C. Manzo, "Understanding Human Relationships to Place and Their Significance for Outdoor Recreation and Tourism," in *Understanding Concepts of Place in Recreation Research and Management*, ed. Linda E. Kruger, Troy E. Hall, and Maria C. Steifel (Moscow, ID: University of Idaho Press, 2008), 139.

experience and psychology without acknowledging society's role in shaping them. It is ultimately inadequate for explaining place identity in relation to history because it ignores the social aspects of place as well as the ways in which histories become embedded in places. When thinking of place identity in relation to history, then, it would be more useful to think of it as the characteristics of a place as assigned by groups and individuals. It should be understood that place identity, like the past of a place, is multivocal.²²¹ A place could have many identities depending on people's interpretation of its past. This more dynamic understanding of place identity explains how groups can share a common understanding of a place's identity, which Stokowski designates as "social places."²²²

Such a reformulation also opens up room in which historians can explore how these identities have been deployed for various political and religious reasons, such as in the case of New Orleans. Stokowski's theory of power and place complements Massey's work on place and past. Stokowski explains, individuals and groups have the ability to discursively manipulate places towards their desired ends.²²³ In the case of *The Grandissimes*, Cable depicts New Orleans negatively to make a case for racial equality and toleration in postbellum America. Although he discursively reinscribes racial and religious stereotypes in his efforts, he attempts to use the place identity he creates for New Orleans as a tool for forwarding his agenda. The way in which he uses place, then, is not unlike the way white American Protestants used it in the early nineteenth century to

²²¹ Massey, "Places and Their Pasts," 184-5.

²²² Stokowski, 372.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 374.

define a white Protestant national identity. Neither Claiborne nor the Ursulines manipulate place explicitly, but both are involved in negotiations of power over control of place identity.

Place theory applied to the right sources becomes an important tool for reconstructing “territory,” or cultural terrain, when historians might otherwise be left with maps. In a plenary lecture at the 2010 meeting of the American Academy of Religion, J.Z. Smith explained that he preferred to take “the map over the territory.”²²⁴ Smith was referring partly to his call to scholars to end the study of religious traditions *sui generis*; however, the point of place theory and historical anthropology is to better understand the territory as it was to various groups of people and what bearing that has on the territory as it is now perceived. This is especially true if there can be no universal theory of place; scholars must study how place operates in different geographical and socio-historical contexts. The question of sources becomes particularly important here since recovering historical actors’ senses of place can be an entry into reconstructing territory.

Work on the intersections of place and history, especially competing histories, raise many questions regarding power relations in the present. As Massey explains, “the description, definition and identification of a place is...inevitably an intervention not only into geography but also, at least implicitly, into the (re)telling of the historical constitution of the present.”²²⁵ Our understanding of places in the present are informed heavily by their pasts. The version of its past that “wins out” determines how

²²⁴ J.Z. Smith, “Reading Religion: a Life in Scholarship,” American Academy of Religion, Hyatt Regency, Atlanta, 31 October 2010.

²²⁵ Massey, “Places and Their Pasts,” 190.

contemporary events unfold and how groups interact with one another. These understandings legitimate contemporary social structures and future actions.²²⁶ In a similar process, Cable retells New Orleans' past in *The Grandissimes*, giving a description of the city in the early nineteenth century intended as a critique of the failures of Reconstruction. This description of New Orleans' past also creates a history that competes with the one Gayarré presents in its challenge to Gayarré's assertion of white racial purity and supremacy.

Place theory becomes important to understanding the ways in which histories are used. For Keith Basso, place-making consists of retrospectively explaining historical material, which culminates in a posited state of affairs. This resulting universe of objects and events comprises a place-world in which "notions of the past are brought into being."²²⁷ The versions of New Orleans and the U.S. constructed by Claiborne, the Ursulines, and Cable are the results of the interpretation and appropriation of various histories. Notions of the past manifest to become social fact. For this reason, it is important to explore the extended debates surrounding the Louisiana Purchase in order to understand the ways in which perceptions of places and their histories continue to be embedded with notions of race, religion, and American national identity.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 185.

²²⁷ Basso, 5.

Chapter 5

EPILOGUE: LEGACIES OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY PLACE-MAKING IN THE CASES OF HURRICANE KATRINA AND HAITI

With the destruction wrought by Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans once again entered America's national consciousness, and the legacies of nineteenth-century understandings of the city became visible in media coverage and the federal government's response to the disaster. Some scholars have begun shifting attention from New Orleans' otherness in relation to the Louisiana Purchase to examining it through the lens of the events following Hurricane Katrina. Few, however, have considered the role of religion or the legacy of attitudes towards Haiti in these assessments. A cursory review of recent scholarship on race, place, and Hurricane Katrina readily reveals a need for more research on connections to American religious history as well as Haiti's silent role in these developments. I conclude by proposing some future areas for development in place theory in religious studies in light of this discussion.

A few scholars have begun using place theory as a tool for analyzing the developments in New Orleans during and after Hurricane Katrina as they relate to race and economics. In "Putting the Ninth Ward on the Map: Race, Place, and Transformation in Desire, New Orleans," Rachel Breunlin and Helen Regis address these issues most directly. They consider what they explain as subaltern methods of place-making by displaced residents of housing projects after Hurricane Katrina and describe the process by which the Ninth Ward became a metaphor for all impoverished, flooded

neighborhoods in New Orleans.²²⁸ Central to their argument is the concept that communities claim geographical and social space not through legal ownership but through particular performances. In this case, Breunlin and Regis describe the way black residents of the Desire housing project claim space and create place through second line parades organized by social clubs.²²⁹

Such performances are important for understanding place-making in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. Breunlin and Regis note that Americans from other parts of the country seemed surprised at “the reality of a majority black city.”²³⁰ According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 67.9 percent of respondents in New Orleans identified as Black or African American.²³¹ This statistic represents the respondents who selected one race and those who identified with this category in addition to others, demonstrating the continuing complexity of race in New Orleans. Breunlin and Regis, along with scholars and activists in various areas, argue this affected the way those outside New Orleans treated the city in 2005 and afterward.

Although few scholars of religious studies have engaged the events following Hurricane Katrina, Charles Long’s analysis of the Louisiana Purchase provides some

²²⁸ Rachel Breunlin and Helen A. Regis, “Putting the Ninth Ward on the Map: Race, Place, and Transformation in Desire, New Orleans,” in *American Anthropologist* 108:4 (2006): 748.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 749.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 748.

²³¹ U.S. Census Bureau, “New Orleans city, Louisiana,” ACS Demographic and Housing Estimates: 2005-2009, http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/ADPTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=16000US2255000&-qr_name=ACS_2009_5YR_G00_DP5YR5&-ds_name=ACS_2009_5YR_G00_&-lang=en&-redoLog=false&-sse=on

clues as to how legacies of nineteenth-century anxieties over American national identity carried into the twenty-first century. According to Long, New Orleans is necessary for understanding American civil religion²³² just as control of the mouth of the Mississippi was necessary for developing a coherent political and economic order in the early years of the republic.²³³ Long concludes his essay by encouraging scholars to make “New Orleans into more than an authentic American city” in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.²³⁴ This indicates an acknowledgement of the anxieties over race and national identity that surrounded the Louisiana Purchase as well as the continuing presence of those concerns in the twenty-first century. It also suggests that New Orleans’ place identity still makes it other in a way some may want to alter.

When considered in light of the debates over whether or not to rebuild New Orleans, it becomes clear that many Americans do not view the city as significant to American culture and identity. If New Orleans reveals anything about American civil religion, it may be that many Americans still view the country as a white Protestant nation, though in a less explicit way than Jedidiah Morse and later Samuel Morse did in the nineteenth century. Consequently, the debates over rebuilding often centered on the city’s

²³² It should be noted that Long is not referring to Bellah’s formulation of American civil religion. Rather, Long sets forth a framework of the U.S. as having an “Aboriginal-Euro-African culture.” By doing this, Long hopes to shift focus from an additive history of the U.S. to a view of American history and culture as being effected by these three groups in all aspects (206).

²³³ Charles H. Long, “New Orleans as an American City: Origins, Exchanges, Materialities, and Religion,” in *New Territories, New Perspectives: the Religious Impact of the Louisiana Purchase* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2008), 219.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 222.

distinctiveness, which Breunlin and Regis argue refer to its otherness.²³⁵ Moreover, in a 2005 study of racial attitudes in responses to Hurricane Katrina, more than twice the percentage of black as white respondents agreed that Hurricane Katrina held lessons about racial discrimination in the U.S., highlighting the difference in many white and black Americans' interpretations of the disaster and responses to it.²³⁶

The role of Haiti as an aspect of Americans' twenty-first-century perceptions of New Orleans' identity becomes clearer in light of remarks on and responses to the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. Television host Pat Robertson attributed the disaster to a pact between the Haitian people and the devil.²³⁷ Though Robertson articulated an extreme viewpoint on the events in Haiti, his show drew over 860,000 viewers each day in the 2004-2005 viewing season, suggesting that a sizable number of Americans share his viewpoint or at least listen to it regularly.²³⁸ American perceptions of Haiti continue to be embedded with notions of the interconnection between race and "good" religion.

Haiti's founding myth, promoted by dictator François Duvalier, includes a Voodoo ceremony, which various Haitian leaders have linked with Haitian identity since the

²³⁵ Breunlin and Regis, 744.

²³⁶ Erica M. Czaja, "Katrina's Southern 'Exposure': the Kanye Race Debate and the Repercussions of Discussion," in *Seeking Higher Ground: the Hurricane Katrina Crisis, Race, and Public Policy Reader*, edited by Manning Marable and Kristen Clarke (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 203-4.

²³⁷ Andrew Zajac, "Pat Robertson links Haiti quake to pact with devil," *Los Angeles Times*, January 13, 2010, <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/jan/13/world/la-fg-haiti-robertson14-2010jan14>.

²³⁸ "Religious conservatives claim Katrina was God's omen, punishment for the United States," *Media Matters for America*, September 13, 2005, <http://mediamatters.org/research/200509130004>

1920's. This is different from Robertson's rhetoric, which is similar to that of the U.S. Marine Corp during its occupation of Haiti from 1915 to 1934. By explaining the Haitian Revolution as a fiendish product of Voodoo, supporters of the occupation delegitimized slaves' reasons for overthrowing French rule of Saint-Domingue.²³⁹ Over fifty years after Cable published the story of Bras-Coupé in *The Granddissimes* and more than a hundred years after the Haitian Revolution and Louisiana Purchase, Americans still expressed fears of and contempt for Haitian independence as a threat to white racial and moral order.

Consequently, it also appears that this history has shaped the U.S. foreign policy and military action towards Haiti that influenced reactions to the 2010 earthquake. As mentioned above, the U.S. occupied Haiti from 1915 to 1934, during which time the U.S. installed a president pliant to U.S. demands, dissolved the Haitian legislature, and put in place a new constitution more favorable to foreign investment.²⁴⁰ Throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, U.S. newspaper accounts continuously depicted Haiti as a mysterious country plagued by poverty and disease. Scholars attribute the near death of Haiti's tourism industry to inaccurate portrayals of Haiti's AIDS crisis.²⁴¹ Moreover, journalists and filmmakers insist upon the pervasiveness and bizarre

²³⁹ Johnson, 161-2.

²⁴⁰ Mary A. Renda, *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 10.

²⁴¹ Amy E. Potter, "Voodoo, Zombies, and Mermaids: U.S. Newspaper Coverage of Haiti," *The Geographical Review* 99:2 (2009): 210.

spectacle of Voudou in the country.²⁴² Combined with Americans' general ignorance of U.S. involvement in Haiti, these factors serve to perpetuate and legitimize social inequalities.²⁴³ The ways in which journalists and other Americans constructed Haiti has influenced American attitudes towards the country, demonstrating the importance of place identity in international relations.

The connections between reactions to Hurricane Katrina and the historic treatment of Haiti by the U.S. suggest a possible trajectory for place theory in historical and religious studies. Firstly, continuing the development of understanding places as formed in relation to other places, more work needs to be done on New Orleans as a Caribbean city. Debates over rebuilding the city after Hurricane Katrina reveal that some still view New Orleans' American identity as suspect. Before the Louisiana Purchase, the city was more culturally and economically tied to Saint-Domingue and Cuba. Further exploration of the legacies of these connections could elucidate the marginalization of New Orleans in American history and policy.

Analyzing New Orleans through the expansive lens of Caribbean history likely would demonstrate continuing real and imagined connections between New Orleans' religious landscape and that of Haiti, at least one that exists in the minds of many Americans. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, Americans have used perceptions of the evils of Voudou as justification for the erasure of and strategically forgetting about Haiti and New Orleans. Examining this process further could reveal a great deal about the

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 224.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 210.

ways in which governments construct, deconstruct, and marginalize places for reasons of race, religion, and economics. This line of questioning could further illuminate the process by which Native Americans, their place names, and their senses of place have been left out of the history of the Southeast. Such a pursuit of the connections between these concepts could also elucidate past, present, and future policy decisions concerning New Orleans and Haiti.

Perhaps most significantly, these questions suggest that the dynamics between race, place, religion, and memory provide an alternative approach to historical and religious studies that could move beyond the purely additive. Using such a framework would take scholars beyond narration of events to more thoroughly explore the dimensions of American national identity and the influence of centuries-old debates on contemporary thought and actions. In order to do this, however, scholars using place theory must address the voices and insights typically marginalized in the historiography of American religion.

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