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“ANIMAL-LIKE AND DEPRAVED”: RACIST STEREOTYPES,
COMMERCIAL SEX, AND BLACK WOMEN’S IDENTITIY IN NEW
ORLEANS, 1825-1917”

by

PORSHA DOSSIE

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Honors in the Major Program in History
in the College of Arts & Humanities and in
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University of Central Florida
Orlando, FL.

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Thesis Chair: Connie Lester, PhD

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"I have hated words and I have loved them, and I hope I have made them right."
The Book Thief, Markus Zusack

This is, quite possibly, the hardest thing I have ever done in my academic career. I took on the endeavor of writing an undergraduate thesis very lightly, and if not for the following people it would have destroyed me. To my roommates, Shantal and Nick, who talked me off the edge on many an occasion. I would not have continued this thesis without you guys. To Ana and Kiana; thank you for allowing me to voice my frustrations and also staying on the phone with me as I walked home from the library late at night. Your friendship and encouragement have been indispensable. To my family; I am a quitter at heart, but you have never let me give up. You believe in me when I don't believe in myself, and I am grateful that I have people in my life that support me unconditionally and love me so fully and completely. I hope I have made you proud.

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ABSTRACT

My objective with this thesis is to understand how racist stereotypes and myths compounded the sale of fair-skinned black women during and after the slave trade in New Orleans, Louisiana. This commodification of black women's bodies continued well into the twentieth century, notably in New Orleans' vice district of Storyville. Called "quadroons" (a person with $\frac{1}{4}$ African ancestry) and "octoroons" ($\frac{1}{8}$ African ancestry), these women were known for their "sexual prowess" and drew in a large number of patrons. The existence of "white passing" black women complicated ideas about race and racial purity in the South. Race as a myth and social construct, or as Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham explains in her essay, *African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race*, a "metalanguage" exposes race not as a genetic fact, but rather a physical appearance through which power relations and status were to be conferred.

My methodology uses race and gender theory to analyze primary and secondary sources to understand and contextualize how population demographics, myths, and liberal 18th century colonial laws contributed to the sale of black women's bodies. The works of Emily Clark, Walter Johnson, Gwendolyn Midlo Hall and other historians who utilize Atlantic history have been paramount in my research. Emily Clark has transformed the "white-black" women from a tragic, sexualized trope into a fully actualized human being, while Hall has tackled the racist underpinnings inherent in the neglect of black women's history. The writings of bell hooks, particularly her essay *Eating the Other*, establishes the modern day commodification of black women vis-à-vis their representation in media, as well as through the fetishism of their bodies by a white patriarchal system.

During slavery plantation owners could do virtually anything they wanted with their property, including engaging in sexual intercourse. By depicting black women as hypersexual jezebels, they could justify their rape, while establishing their dominance and place in the white male hegemony of that time period. For the right price a white male of a lesser class could achieve the same thing at a brothel down in Storyville at the turn of the twentieth century, for as Emily Clark argues in her book, *The Strange History of the American Quadroon*, these brothels were a great equalizer, allowing all white men to experience "...sexual mastery enjoyed only by elite planters before the Civil War." By democratizing white supremacy, the quadroon and others like her forged solidarity that bridge across all classes, while upholding whiteness and oppressing people of color at the same time.

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*"It troubles me to think that I am suited
for this work—spectacle and fetish—
a pale odalisque. But then I recall
my earliest training—childhood—how
my mother taught me to curtsy and be still
so that I might please a white man, my father.
For him I learned to shape my gestures,
practiced expressions on my pliant face..."¹*

Natasha Tretheway, *"Letters from Storyville"* (2002)

*"Put on yo' red silk stockings,
Black gal.
Go out an' let de white boys
Look at yo' legs.*

*Ain't nothin' to do for you, nohow.
Round this town.—
You's too pretty.
Put on yo' red silk stockings, gal,
An' tomorrow's chile'll
Be a high yaller.*

*Go out an' let de white boys
Look at yo' legs."²*

Langston Hughes, *Red Silk Stockings* (1931)

¹ Natasha Tretheway, "Poems from Bellocq's Ophelia," South Writ Large, February 26, 2014, accessed February 26, 2014, <http://southwritlarge.com/articles/poems-from-bellocqs-ophelia/>.

² Langston Hughes, *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes*, ed. Arnold Rampersad (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001-2004), 105-6.

INTRODUCTION

Natasha Tretheway's collection of poetry entitled Bellocq's Ophelia tells the story of a young mixed race woman living in Storyville at the turn of the twentieth century. Her white flesh denotes centuries of miscegenation, exploitation, and rape. Like her antebellum counterparts in New Orleans' famed Fancy Trade, the young woman is prized for her light skin and her sexuality. She is something to be tamed and conquered. Her body becomes a proverbial playground for white men to exercise their masculinity and dominance. To them she is nothing more than "spectacle and flesh."³ Why would someone willingly subject himself or herself to such an existence? Though fictional, the protagonist portrays the reality of New Orleans' commercial sex industry. Work for black women was limited to mostly domestic work, as laundresses, maids, cooks, nannies, etc. These jobs paid very little and were grueling workloads. Prostitution was quick money, it was consistent money, and often times it was more money. When Langston Hughes' narrator tells the black girl to "put on yo' red silk stockings, gal"⁴ he is acknowledging that black women did what they needed to survive under an oppressive system that limited their options. Racist stereotypes and oppressive systems pushed some African-American women to enter into New Orleans' commercial sex industry as prostitutes in the brothels and cribs of Storyville. They were not in fact "suited for this work," but rather, they were exploited, shaped, and packaged for white consumption. I seek now to explain their commodification.

³ Tretheway, *Bellocq's Ophelia*.

⁴ Hughes, *Collected Works*, 105.

Hypothesis

In my thesis I will answer these two historical questions: 1) In a system that rewards and upholds whiteness, how did the existence of white passing black women turn ideas about race and racial purity on its head in both the antebellum and postbellum periods? In the vein of Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, how does race as a metalanguage and as a myth affect ideas about power and status? 2) Though a number of white men railed against the “evils” of interracial sex, believing black women to be “animal-like and depraved” jezebels, interracial sex occurred all over the South, especially in New Orleans as evidenced by the large number of mixed-race persons. How did population, myth, white ideas about power, and liberal colonial laws contribute to New Orleans’ eventual commercial sex industry during the 1820s and 1830s, giving rise to a substantial fancy trade market that rivaled all others in the Deep South?

Historical Background

Referred to as “The Great Southern Babylon,” New Orleans, Louisiana’s name has been synonymous with debauchery for centuries. Originally a French colonial possession, Louisiana’s Anglo-Saxon neighbors to the north viewed the colony as a Francophone oddity that was incredibly backward when it came to race relations. Ceded to the Spanish in 1763, the Iberians liberalized a number of laws concerning the social and economic abilities of the free people of color in the colony. Couple this with a greatly disproportionate white male to female ratio and a large black female population, relationships between the two groups flourished at the end of the 18th century. These interracial relationships were, however, very much illegal and had been since 1685 as defined by Louis XIV’s *Code Noir* (Black Code). The most significant aspect of the code was its mandate against marriage between *noirs* and *blancs*. The code remained on the

books well into the 1700s, and a second version passed again in 1724. This did not stop a number of couples from engaging in relationships with one another.

Unable to legally marry, couples still lived together, raised families, and did their best to establish the legitimacy of the relationships in a society ruled by a racist, wealthy, and very powerful planter class that sought to stop their unions. Colonial records indicate that some couples were able to marry (a number of clergymen and officials were known to turn a blind eye, especially if money exchanged hands), but the overwhelming majority were not able to legalize their relationships. Interracial concubinage, whether the plantocracy liked it or not, was a mainstay through the South, especially in New Orleans, giving rise to a large mixed-race population that would come to define the city in the nineteenth century.

In 1800 France took the colony back from Spain, but ultimately sold it to the U.S. after the revolution in St. Domingue (Haiti) drove them out of the New World for good. Now a state (1812) under American control, U.S. officials worked in conjunction with the already established plantocracy to crack down on interracial sex. The planters who fought against interracial marriage were the same men that snuck into the slave quarters at night, raping and impregnating their slave women, which is in stark contrast to the consensual relationship fostered between the couples previously mentioned. The only difference: one was deemed illegal, the other a commonly accepted practice in the slaveholding South.

The free people of color in New Orleans were the wealthiest group of free blacks in the United States in capital accumulation and landowning.⁵ Much of that wealth was concentrated in the hands of a small number of families, and does not necessarily reflect the general wealth of the class as a whole. The group remained an economically important part of the South, but was impeded by its African ancestry. Defined by the following categories: Negro (Negress), Mulatto (Mulattress), Griffe, and Quadroon (later octoroon would be added to the list), Louisiana's free people of color were further separated from the slave counterparts through these categories which "determined" how much African blood a person exhibited.

Mulattos and Quadroons were in high demand when it came to entertainment and New Orleans' growing commercial sex industry. Renowned for their "oriental" beauty, and sexual abilities, these women became sexualized tropes sought after by travelers from all over the world hoping to spend an evening with them at one of their notorious Quadroon balls. The myths surrounding them and the practice of *plaçage* (the placement of free women of color with white men as a financial and social arrangement) were incredibly detrimental to black women, and in the decades before the Civil War cultivated a slave trade that specialized in the sale of young, light skinned black women for the purpose of concubinage and sex. This became known as the "Fancy Trade," and the girls "Fancy Maids."

Sold as young as twelve years of age, these girls were profitable because of their light phenotype (and perceived sexually licentious behavior) and could cost a planter as much as a

⁵ H E. Sterkx, *The Free Negro in Ante-Bellum Louisiana* (Rutherford N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1972), 89.

strong adult field hand (\$1200 and up).⁶ Owning a fancy maid conferred status onto a planter in the nineteenth century. Ornamental and expensive, his ability to purchase and “maintain” her, allowed him to prove his masculinity in a white patriarchal society. After the abolition of slavery, New Orleans’ commercial sex industry was still a hub for sex along the color line. Laws and ordinances restricting both interracial sex and prostitution during the postbellum period ultimately led to the creation of Storyville, a vice district where a man could delight in any of the fancies he could imagine. Racially diverse, Storyville held a number of brothels that catered to the white male appetite concerning black women, specifically the descendants of the famed Quadroons. Two women, Lulu White and Countess Piazza owned establishments that allowed white men to spend a night with one of these beautiful *octoroons*. The establishments, along with the others in the district were closed right before the U.S.’s entrance into the First World War. Open and unadulterated miscegenation could no longer take place in the eyes of city officials who were becoming distressed at their city’s recognition as the Great Southern Babylon.

Purpose

In this thesis I argue that racist stereotypes and myths compounded the sale of fair-skinned black women during and after the slave trade in New Orleans, Louisiana. The existence of “white passing” black women complicated ideas about race and racial purity in the South. because race as a myth and social construct, or as Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham explains, a

⁶ Eugene R. Dattel, *Cotton and Race in the Making of America: The Human Costs of Economic Power* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2009), 40.

“metalanguage,” exposes race not as a genetic fact, but rather a physical appearance through which power relations and status were to be conferred.⁷

During slavery plantation owners could do virtually anything they wanted with their property, including engaging in sexual intercourse. By depicting black women as hypersexual jezebels, they could justify their rape, while establishing their dominance and place in the white male hegemony of that time period. For the right price a white male of a lesser class could achieve the same thing at a brothel down in Storyville at the turn of the twentieth century, because as Emily Clark argues that these brothels were a great equalizer, allowing all white men to experience “...sexual mastery enjoyed only by elite planters before the Civil War.”⁸ By democratizing white supremacy, the quadroon and others like her forged solidarity that bridged all classes, simultaneously upholding whiteness and oppressing people of color at the same time.

Methodology & Literature Review

My methodology consists of analyzing secondary sources and primary sources. In January of 2014 I traveled to New Orleans, Louisiana, to look at primary source documents at some of the archives located in the city. I visited the Historic New Orleans Collection (THNOC) housed at the Williams Research Center; and I also visited the Earl K. Long Library to look at Louisiana Supreme Court cases. I examined Blue Books at THNOC under microfilm and was able to take copies of the slides home. At the Earl K. Long library I reviewed Louisiana Supreme

⁷ Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, “African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race,” *Signs* 17, no. 2 (Winter 1992): 251-74.

⁸ Emily Clark, *The Strange History of the American Quadroon: Free Women of Color in the Revolutionary Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 27.

Court cases dealing with Alexina Morrison in the antebellum period, and Lulu White in the postbellum period. I became aware of these source mainly due to articles and books written by scholars such as Emily Landau and Alecia P. Long. These scholarly articles and texts have allowed me to understand the historiography of slavery in the U.S. South, specifically New Orleans, as well as race, sex, and gender constructions. For instance, Alecia P. Long's *The Great Southern Babylon* deftly explains the history of New Orleans's commercial sex industry, in addition to the legal ordinances and laws that tried to rein it in and later dissolve it all together.⁹ Long uses influential legal cases that were judge by the Louisiana Supreme Court during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to further analyze how racism, limited economic opportunities for women—especially women of color—as well as the growth of industry, the rise of the middle class, and the growth of cross country travel allowed New Orleans to develop a tourism industry that relied on commercial sex for nearly a century.

Emily Epstein Landau's book, *Spectacular Wickedness*,¹⁰ solely focused on the history and construction of Storyville, the vice district built in 1898. Landau argues in her work that Storyville offered up a place where white men could act on cultural fantasies and racist fetishes, allowing them to establish and maintain white supremacy, patriarchal power and “a renewed version of American manhood for the twentieth century.”¹¹ Landau describes New Orleans'

⁹ Alecia P. Long, *The Great Southern Babylon: Sex, Race, and Respectability in New Orleans, 1865-1920*(Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005).

¹⁰ Emily Epstein Landau, *Spectacular Wickedness: Sex, Race, and Memory in Storyville, New Orleans* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013).

¹¹ Ibid., 157.

slave markets—by far the largest in the South—as theatrical affairs where white men were able to establish their manhood through their ability to purchase exceptional slaves and pay the high cost of owning them. The development of a Fancy Trade market allowed planters another way to display their manhood. The Fancy girls’ bodies became a metaphoric playground for white men. Ornamental, she sat in windows of shops and on auction blocks, dressed in ridiculous costumes and jewelry to lure potential owners.

Stereotypes, like that of the *Tragic Mulatto*¹² reinforced ideas about black women’s sexuality, and is touched on by a number of historians whose works I have read, including Emily Clark, whose book *The Strange History of the American Quadroon* analyzes the stereotypes, tropes, and racism that has misconstrued the image of the Quadroon in the greater canon of American history. Clark describes the origin of the Quadroon as a Caribbean foreigner, an exotic import that oozed “oriental” appeal and seduced good, god-fearing white men away from their wives and families. Originally only a phenomenon in Philadelphia, the influx of refugees from the Haitian Revolution brought even more of these women to the states, primarily Louisiana. Their manner of dress, light skin, and the already established racial and social hierarchies present in New Orleans made them susceptible to the Tragic Mulatto trope and a host of other stereotypes.

Defining Terms

¹² Clark, *Strange History*, 83.

A number of terms occur frequently in my thesis that should thoroughly be explained in order for my work to be fully comprehensible. I will define them, as well as mention authors who influenced my own understanding of word or phrase.

Commodification was first explained to me in Edward E. Baptist's "'Cuffy', 'Fancy Maids' and 'One-eyed Men': Rape, Commodification, and the Domestic Slave Trade in the United States." Commodification is the act of viewing a human being as an object or commodity for sale. The creation of an economy around the trade and sale of human bodies is commodification on a grand scale. In my thesis I focus on the commodification of black women's bodies in both the antebellum and postbellum periods.

The second term(s) are the five categories used to describe a person's African ancestry. **Negro** is someone with full African ancestry (or simply some who looks "completely" black). The second is **Mulatto** (a person with one $\frac{1}{2}$ African ancestry). The third is trickier: **Griffe** is someone who has one parent describe as Negro, while the other parent is **Mulatto**, giving them $\frac{3}{4}$ African ancestry. A **Quadroon** is someone with $\frac{1}{4}$ African ancestry, while an **Octoroon** is someone with $\frac{1}{8}$ African ancestry. These categories were based on appearance and not a person's actual heritage. A person could have parents who were both "Negro," but if they themselves were light in appearance could be considered Mulatto or Quadroon even. However, U.S. census records did not mark the distinctions in the same way the Louisiana did. A person was either black or white, though on numerous occasions someone who had been marked as white one year could be marked as black another year.

The next term I've chosen to define is **race**. Race is a set of ideas, notions, and formations that "produce and maintain relations of power and subordination." A social

construction, race positions groups “vis-à-vis” to one another, distinguishing physical differences in order to attribute power to the dominant group, or one that holds institutionalized power. Race is also how one categorizes one’s self. Race can be viewed as a myth, or “a formless, unstable, nebulous condition, whose unity and coherence are above all due to its function,” as described by Roland Barthes.¹³ But this doesn’t deny that race has real effects on society. It can make hair bad or good, speech patterns correct or incorrect, and make skin color ugly or attractive.

Miscegenation is the mixing of the races via sex, marriage, concubinage, and offspring. Anti-miscegenation laws like Louis XIV’s Code Noir did nothing to stop the people of Louisiana from “mixing,” giving rise to the city’s large free black population. I will not use the term frequently aside from where I believe it is the appropriate description of an act, or has been used by the sources available to me. Similar to miscegenation, **sex across the color line** describes relationships between blacks (negro, mulatto, griffe, quadroon, octoroon) and whites. It doesn’t necessarily differ from miscegenation, but in the context of Louisiana’s racial hierarchy it is a more appropriate description for the commercial sex acts that occurred in New Orleans. This term is used by both Alecia P. Long and Emily Epstein Landau, and their books have influenced my understanding of the phrase.

Patriarchy is another term I will use throughout my thesis. In the feminist tradition, patriarchy is the societal organization of men as the main agents and holders of institutionalized power. When used in conjunction with “white”, I am choosing to focus on the institutionalized

¹³ A. Leon Higginbotham, Jr., *In the Matter of Color: Race and the American Legal Process: The Colonial Period* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 5.

power of white men. **Commercial sex** is sex that occurs for a price. The Fancy Trade during the antebellum period is an example of commercial sex. Concubinage would not fall under commercial necessarily because it is more of arrangement where money does not exchange hands before or after. It is a consensual relationship born from the inability of interracial couples to marry. However, through plaçage, some of these relationships were born from an economic arrangement, though this would not necessarily fall under commercial sex either. Prostitution during and after the Civil War definitely did though, and Storyville was the culmination of years of laws passed to hide New Orleans' large sex industry.

White supremacy, or the **white supremacist structure** is the institutionalization of racism and white power in society via governmental and other political and social organizations. The South in a way is a white supremacist structure in and of itself in that white men are at the top, white women in the middle, and people of color, especially black people, are at the bottom. The **white male hegemony** is the societal dominance of white men. When I use this term, it is mainly to describe the dominance of white men in all aspects of southern life and their ability to control and dictate to people of color free or otherwise through laws and acts of violence such as lynching. **Plantocracy**, which describes the wealthy class of planters that controlled Louisiana's social, economic, and political scene during the antebellum period. **Gens de couleur libres**, or free people of color is different from people of color because the term was normally used to refer to those who were descendants of the blacks originally brought to Louisiana by the French.

Conclusion

My thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter discusses why and how the black woman's body came to be commodified, as well as the ways in which slave women resisted this commodification. I cite three distinct examples: Celia, a Missouri slave who killed

her master; Harriet Jacobs who resisted her master by taking on a white lover; and finally Alexina Morrison, a slave so light and flaxen haired she passed for white, and sued the slave trader who purchased her. I also examine the legacy of antebellum stereotypes and constructions on postbellum African-American women involved in the commercial sex industry, specifically Storyville where black women sold other black women to white men looking to enjoy something of the “Old South.”

This complicity in white supremacy allowed light skinned women, such as the madams of two very successful brothels at the turn of the twentieth century, Lulu White and Willie Piazza, to profit greatly from the system. I will explain how their use of the same stereotypes placed on them by a white supremacist system allowed them to not just benefit, but prosper. In the second chapter I examine the lives of the three most prominent madams in Storyville: Madam Lulu White, Countess Willie Piazza, and Josie Arlington. How did skin color and connections with big political bosses affect their success and ultimately their failures? To understand this I will employ primary source data from the infamous Blue Books, advertorials that displayed advertisements for brothels, cribs, bars, and other dorms sensuous entertainment in “The District.” Blue Books were essential to the prosperity of these women. Within the pages of the books they became legends of their own making. How were they complicit in the commodification of black women’s bodies in the postbellum era and the dawn of the twentieth century?

CHAPTER ONE: COMMODIFYING THE BLACK BODY, AN HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

“It is well known that New Orleans is the Sodom of the South.”¹⁴

Early New Orleans

This work, at its core, is about African-American women’s sexuality and ultimately their agency. From the institutionalization of slavery during the colonial period, white-constructed myths and stereotypes have worked together to define black womanhood in ways acceptable to heterosexual white masculinity. Simultaneously depicted as both hypersexual and asexual, black women must navigate a patriarchal world that seeks to undermine and distort the image of black femininity. In order to fully comprehend the commodification of black women’s bodies both prior to and after the Civil War, it is important to understand the historical context in which these women existed. I will examine racial hierarchy created in Louisiana by colonial laws and immigration, as well as the racist and gendered stereotypes that affected mixed race women, making them the exotic commodity of the nineteenth century.

But Louisiana was not the first colony to legislate race and sex in colonial America. During the seventeenth century Virginia was the leader when it came to the gradual debasement of blacks through its “ultimate institutionalization of slavery.”¹⁵ The state also institutionalized white male dominance in interracial sexual relations: “The legal process was tolerant of white

¹⁴ Landau, *Spectacular Wickedness*, 160.

¹⁵ Higginbotham, *In the Matter of Color*, 19.

male illicit 'escapades' involving either white females or black females, but it was relatively harsh on infractions by white females (even when involving white males) and brutally harsh on infractions between black males and white females.”¹⁶

The establishment of a white male hegemony dehumanized both black and white women. As noted by historian Minrose C. Gwin, the slavocracy “...demanded moral superiority from white women and sexual availability from black, yet simultaneously expected mistress and slave women to live and work in intimate physical proximity.”¹⁷ White slave mistresses often verbally and physically vented their frustrations on enslaved black women because of their inability to prevent their husbands' infidelity, making them complicit in the degradation and exploitation of black women within the slave system. Later on in this chapter I will explore how stereotypes, specifically Jezebel, were imposed on black women by white men, and informed white women's opinion of black womanhood and black female sexuality, thus leading to a strained and abusive relationship between the two groups that exemplified the detriment the slave system had on both the physical and psychological well-being of enslaved women. I will also explore how this factored ultimately in their commodification, as well as the steps slave women took to resist it.

Black women as slaves existed within a system established by a series of laws and de facto traditions determined in the infancy of the country, specifically the seventeenth century. For example, the 1662 Act XII (what is now referred to as the Hereditary Slavery Law¹⁸)

¹⁶ Ibid., 41.

¹⁷ Minrose C. Gwin, “Green-Eyed Monsters of the Slavocracy: Jealous Mistresses in Two Slave Narratives,” in *Conjuring Black Women: Fiction and Literary Tradition*, ed. Marjorie Pryse and Hortense Spillers (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985) 39-52.

¹⁸ Enactment of the Hereditary Slave Law Virginia
http://www.nps.gov/ethnography/aah/aaheritage/Chesapeake_pop2.htm (Accessed 04/14/2014)

declared that any child born from an “Englishman” and “Negro woman” was to take the condition of the mother.¹⁹ This was actually an affront to the English statute that stated the reverse. However, tying the offspring to the condition of the mother (most likely an enslaved black woman) allowed slave owners to maintain a labor force that reproduced itself for centuries to come.²⁰ This law is significant because it established slavery in the colony (and soon what would become the United States) as hereditary condition on the black body. The offspring of a slave woman, whether it be with a free or enslaved man, would inherit her condition, and so would their offspring, and so on. Their bodies, now defined as property to be rented or sold, were henceforth commodified by law. Other colonies followed suit with similar legislation, including Louisiana.

A small, struggling colony of provincial France, Louisiana was initially a trading colony that depended on deerskin and fishing trade with Choctaws, Chickasaws, and other tribes of the Lower Mississippi Valley. Most of the colonists were white male laborers, indentured servants, and clergymen who did not have wives or children. The colony was a commercial venture for the French crown primarily focused on luxury goods, especially animal furs. The men who came to this colony did so to get rich and to make a name for themselves before returning to France. Most did not intend to stay as circumstance and other factors prevented this. As consequence, Louisiana initially became a colony of single men and very few French women during the 1680s. Some clergymen felt that in order for Louisiana to become a thriving colony, the men had to

¹⁹ *Higginbotham*, 43.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 44.

settle down and have families, increasing the chance for productivity, growth of infrastructure, and a self-sustaining economy.²¹ However, with very few French women in the colony, who could the men marry?

Native American women became the most likely choice. Economically, the French depended on their indigenous neighbors for survival. French boys were sent into Indian villages to learn local customs and languages, and intimate relationship between the two groups eventually grew. However, marriage between white men and Indian women led to much debate among French officials who worried about inheritance, property rights and succession.²² Legal officials feared the loss of land and property to the local tribes if Native American widows were to inherit the land as dictated by French statute.

Other fears were much more racialized and focused on the potential “de-civilization” of French men who engaged in relationships with Indian women. These same fears played into relationships between white men and black women. Unlike the discussions concerning French and Indian relations, there were no public debates or calls in favor or against the unions. Instead the Code Noir of 1685 (mostly affecting French colonial possessions in the Caribbean) and the subsequent re-issue for North America in 1727, laid the ground rules concerning such interactions. Marriage between *blancs* and *noirs* was illegal and would remain so. This is important to note because in the coming centuries Louisiana would become synonymous with sex across the color, its anti-miscegenation laws hardly enforced. But sex across the color line

²¹ Jennifer M. Spear, “Colonial Intimacies: Legislating Sex in French Louisiana,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 60, no. 1 (January 2003): 87.

²² *Ibid.*, 90.

did not mean equality between the races. Those who were involved in consensual interracial relationship were still barred from marriage as dictated by the Code Noir, and were not granted property or any other type of benefits during the lifetime and subsequent death of their partner. A number of black women sought property and money bequeathed to them in the wills of their deceased white companions and were denied them in the courts throughout Louisiana's history.

Like the Native Americans in the lower Mississippi valley, black slaves soon outnumbered the white colonial population after the first African slaves were brought to the colony in 1719 on the slave ships *Duc du Maine* and the *Aurore*. In a period of ten years (1720-1730), six thousand slaves were brought to the colony from Caribbean colony of Saint-Domingue and the West African colony of Guinea. Until the Spanish period of the late eighteenth century, blacks made up the largest part of the colony's population. Jennifer M. Spear and other historians in recent years have argued that those demographics fostered an environment ripe for interracial liaisons.²³ Spear goes further however, and posits that by solely focusing on quantifiable data like demographics, scholars have failed to acknowledge female agency and the consensual or non-consensual aspects at play in these relationships.

Louisiana's growth into a plantation economy during the latter half of the eighteenth century (by then the colony had become a colonial possession of Spain) with a focus on rice and sugar cultivation, institutionalized these relationships. The brutality of slave life and the inhospitable environment of the Louisiana frontier decimated the black male population, leaving more female slaves, creating a sex to race ratio that favored couplings between single white men

²³ Ibid., 79.

and black women. Plantation owners engaged in sexual couplings with their slaves often. Sometimes these same slave owners manumitted a slave woman and any children she had, most likely because the offspring were his own children. The growth of the *gens de couleurs libre* is in part due to this and the expansion of manumission laws implemented in the Spanish period in the latter half of the century. Concubinage between free women of color and white men became especially prevalent after the influx of Haitian immigrants from Saint Domingue between 1810 and 1825.

Free or enslaved, black women increasingly engaged in interracial liaisons with white men. Historians have cited placage as the impetus for such unions, based on the primary source evidence of the time. However, historian Emily Clark argued that the many of the primary sources were not primary sources at all; instead the infamous letters of Harriet Martineau were secondhand accounts or hearsay that wrote about in the respective writings. Neither had seen a quadroon, or attended a quadroon ball. Yet, both, based on the accounts of friends and acquaintances wrote lengthy descriptive accounts of people and events that shaped the subsequent accounts of travelers and visitors of the city. Clark believes that the free women of color who engaged in relationships with white men did so on their own terms, and not that of the misnomer placage. By understanding black female agency within these relationships, such as placage and the Fancy Trade, coupled with the effects of Jezebel and the Tragic Mulatto trope, I can gain further insight into the same constructions employed as tactics to sell black women after the Civil War in Storyville and elsewhere.

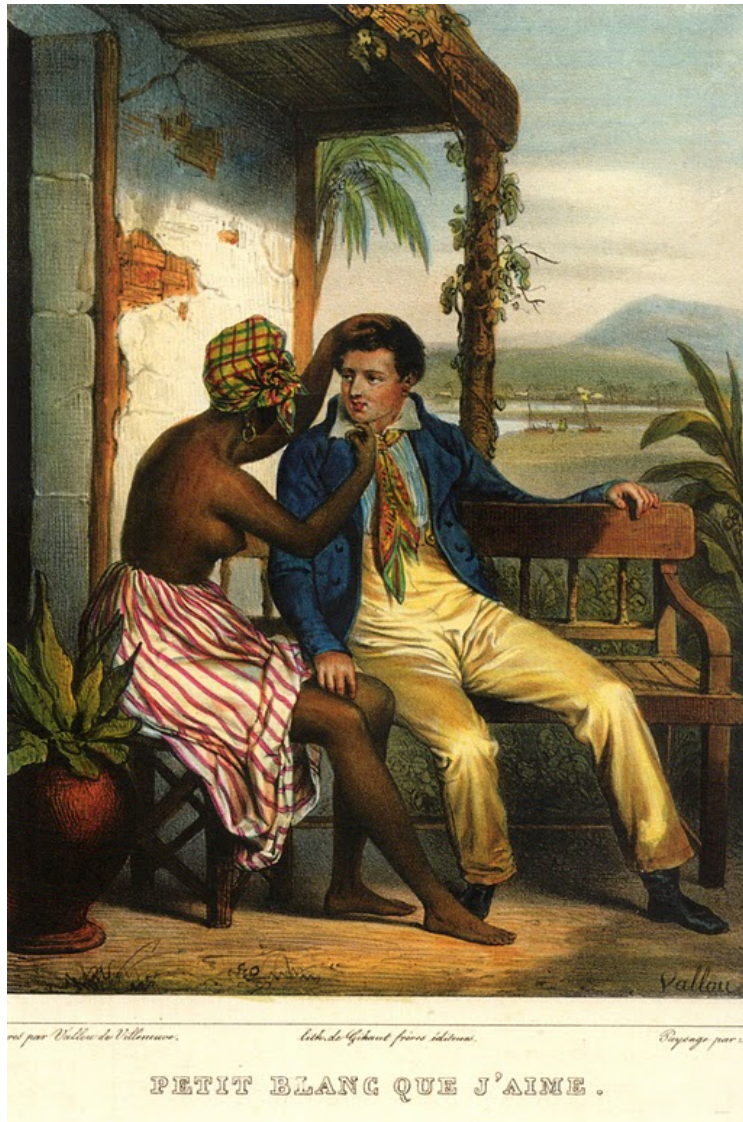


Figure 1 Julien Vallou de Villeneuve (1795-1866), *Petit blanc que j'aime*. 'Little Master I love. ' 1840, Musée d'Aquitaine

Jezebel, the Tragic Mulatto, and the Slave Market

Whites viewed black woman as “animal-like and depraved,” and malformed black women’s sexuality was based on a stereotype that was constructed to uphold a racist system that flourished on notions of black inferiority and depravity. Central to the thesis is one specific stereotype: Jezebel. Essentially, Jezebel is about legitimating the sexual exploitation of black

women and their reproductive systems. Slave rape was incredibly common, and so was the birth of offspring from such brutalized encounters. The “institutionalized pattern of rape,” as explained by Angela Y. Davis, was a means of control.²⁴ The rape of slave woman was an essential part of the institution of slavery, as it acted as a way to control slaves, through fear and the degradation of their humanity.

White women had their own complicity in the slave system and the exploitation of black women. And they, like their husbands, fathers, and brothers, forged their identity in the crucible that was the nineteenth century slave market. Within the slavocracy—and outside of it—white women maintained a privileged position denied to black women, free or enslaved. True Womanhood, a culmination of ideals and virtues brought about by the growth of industry, emergence of a market economy, as well as the “devaluation of women’s work”, and the rise of the middle class in Victorian America characterize the expectations for white women. The cutthroat world of industry and business was viewed as man’s work and was no place for women. This helped to create the belief that men alone were to enter the workforce, while women were to pursue more domestic work, maintaining the “housekeeping, childbearing, and childrearing.”²⁵

Four pillars/virtues of True Womanhood defined a Cult of Domesticity according to Catherine Lavender: Piety, Purity, Submissiveness, and Domesticity.²⁶ Piety emphasized

²⁴ Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race and Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983, 1981), 23.

²⁵ Shirley J. Yee, *Black Women Abolitionists: A Study in Activism, 1828-1860* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), 42.

²⁶ Catherine Lavender. “The Cult of Domesticity and True Womanhood.” http://faculty.weber.edu/kmackay/cult_of_domesticity.htm July 15, 2014.

devotion to Christianity. The virtue of Purity was supposed to protect women's one and only "treasure": her virginity, which on her wedding night would be a "gift" to her husband. The third virtue was Submissiveness. Women were to submit to fathers, brothers, husbands, and adult sons. A woman had to know her place and passively accept it. The last virtue, Domesticity, focused on turning her home into a refuge for her husband, a place far from the rough and tumble world of business and industry. The home was to be a place of leisure, and as a wife, a woman must complement leisure, by being a beautiful, cultured and ornate object.

True Womanhood was reserved for white women, primarily those in the middle and upper classes. Black women, even those who were free and well off financially, were denied True Womanhood on the basis of their skin color and the negative connotations that come with it, particularly their sale as sexual commodity in chattel slavery. The prevailing image of black women as promiscuous made black womanhood the antithesis to the image of purity and morality imposed upon white women by the Cult of Domesticity. "...stereotypes of black and white women were mutually reinforcing images, not simply opposites; the assumption that black women were sensual and physically strong served to buttress the notion that white women were delicate and passionless."²⁷ Stereotypes of black womanhood were meant to serve white needs. For white men it allowed justified their exploitation of black women's reproductive systems, and for white women it reinforced their "purity" and femininity.

Interestingly, in her seminal work, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Harriet Beecher Stowe reversed these stereotypes and made her black female characters far better examples of True Womanhood

²⁷ Yee, *Abolitionist*, 42.

in comparison to their white counterparts. When Eliza risks her life to save her son from being sold away from her, her sojourn to freedom is the personification of a mother's love for her child. She is of strong faith and spirit, the complete opposite of the major white female characters, especially Marie St. Clare. Marie is the antithesis of True Womanhood. She is terrible at adhering to any of the pillars of the Cult of Domesticity. She neglects her duties as a wife and mother, failing to maintain the household or even noticing the symptoms of Little Eva's illness. Marie is needlessly cruel, as exemplified by her refusal to set Tom free, even though it was her dying husband's last wish. Instead she puts Tom and the rest of the St. Clare slave up for auction at the slave market.²⁸ Though fictional, Marie had real life counterparts. She is petty and hard-hearted, and Stowe uses her as a caricature to comment on white slave mistresses in the slavocracy.

Enslaved women and their white mistresses were made to interact in close proximity, the former stereotyped by notions of sexual depravity, the latter trapped by the suffocating tenants of True Womanhood. These mutually reinforcing images shaped the context of their interactions and could lead to violent, and sometimes deadly altercations, as noted by Harriet Jacob's and other former slaves when recalling life on the plantation. These altercations usually came about because of infidelity on the part of the slave mistress' husband. Sex between white men and slave women according to historian Shirley Yee, underscored the "patriarchal structure of southern white society", as a place where white women, in order to maintain the economic and

²⁸ Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (New York: Dover Publications, 2005), 365.

social security of their elevated position had to endure the infidelity and transgressions of their husbands, even when the transgression was the rape of a slave woman.

Ultimately the vessel for the continued growth of slavery in the South, the exploitation of black women's reproductive systems was necessary in the eyes of southern planters to increase profit and maintain the slave system, even if it was through their own union with a slave. Slave women's resistance to the sexual advances of their masters manifested itself in a variety of ways, though it rarely worked. In an oppressive patriarchal system like slavery, the exploitation of black women was systemic.²⁹ White men constructed the black woman's sexuality and identity, therefore justifying their exploitation of her. Jezebel was that construction, and in the case of Celia, a Missouri slave, Jezebel fought back.

It is important to understand that while sexual abuse was commonplace across the slaveholding South, the practice was not publicly condoned.³⁰ Many Americans were aware of the widespread sexual abuse of female slaves, however most turned a blind-eye to it, becoming complicit in the exploitation of slave women. Slaves, as ruled in the Dred Scott Case, were property-not people-and were not considered rightful U.S. citizens. In a case such as Celia, black women were not given the same legal treatment as a white woman for this fact. This was the case for Celia who murdered her owner Robert Newsom in 1855. Purchased by Newsom in 1850, a year after his wife's death, Celia was purely for the purpose of concubinage.³¹ Though listed as a

²⁹ Darlene Clark Hine. "Female Slave Resistance: The Economics of Sex," *Black Women in America*. (2nd Ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.), 658

³⁰ Melton A. McLaurin, *Celia, a Slave* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 21.

³¹ McLaurin, *Celia*, 20.

cook on the 1850 census, Celia's presence on the Newsom farm consisted of repeated rape at the hands of Robert from whom she bore two children by the time she was 19 in 1855. After beginning a relationship with another slave on the farm, Celia claims that when she told Robert that he was to no longer come to her cabin, he attacked her. She struck him twice on the head, the second blow killing him. Throughout the night she burned his body in her fire. In the morning his grandson unknowingly helped Celia deposit the ashes of his grandfather elsewhere. In October 1855 Celia was convicted of murder and executed two months later on December 20. It is not known what happened to her children after her death.³²

The verdict in Celia's trial speaks to the greater notion of black woman's identity and agency in the antebellum period. If Celia, a black woman, resisted her master's advances so adamantly, to the point of killing him, how true then, was jezebel? Unknowingly or not, Celia made a revolutionary stand against her oppressor and the institution of slavery. She fought for control over her own sexuality, her agency, in a system that daily told her she was not human. For her decision she would be killed. Empowering slave women by recognizing their right to agency "would have undercut the power of the master to a degree that would have threatened the very survival of the institution."³³

Celia's case is an extreme example of slave resistance. Most slave women did not murder their masters or lead slave rebellions. Instead they employed small acts of resistance that served as individual victories rather than acts that could overthrow the slave system. However, they are

³² Ibid., 114.

³³ McLaurin, *Celia*, 115.

no less significant and are evidence of slave women's fight to retain their bodily autonomy and agency. The wilderness surrounding plantations provided an escape from plantation life for those chose to runaway (including slave women who feared—or had already been—raped), as well as a source of herbs and plant that were used by “negro mamas”—women who held a special status among both blacks and whites for their specialized knowledge of plants and healing—to cure illnesses and most importantly to provide a way for slave women to take control of their reproductive systems. Slave women used cotton root to induce miscarriages. In addition to cotton root, a doctor determined that tansy, rue, pennyroyal, camphor, and cedar beans could also cause abortions.³⁴

But the wilderness was not always helpful or hospitable to slave women, and slave masters and mistresses employed fear tactics to maintain order and control over their slaves. Slave mistresses would tell slave children stories that used racist images of blacks to reinforce animalistic and subhuman stereotypes of black personhood.³⁵ Masters and mistresses did not always have to tell such stories, because the wilderness did hold real dangers, such as wildlife and often times other people. This included slave catchers who would rape and torture slaves caught in the woods. The wilderness held a number of dangers, but yielded unbelievable benefits that provided both “racial and gender power” that allowed black women to resist sexual exploitation and the ability to maintain some sort of autonomy and agency.³⁶ Running away to

³⁴ Elizabeth D. Blum, “Power, Danger, and Control: Slave Women's Perceptions of Wilderness in the Nineteenth Century,” *Women's Studies* 31, no. 2 (January 2002): 260.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 256.

³⁶ Blum, *Power, Danger, and Control*, 247.

the woods or aborting a fetus using herbs and roots were not the only ways slave women resisted the commodification of their bodies. Two women, Harriet Jacobs, and Alexina Morrison were two light-skinned slave women who sought to use their skin color to subvert the slave system and survive. Only one of them would do so successfully.

Born a slave in North Carolina, Harriet Jacobs was twelve when she was given to her deceased mistress' five year old niece per a request in her will. As she was too young to take ownership of Harriet, her father Dr. James Norcom became Jacobs' lawful owner. Norcom was infatuated with Jacobs and took to sexually harassing her from the moment she set foot on his plantation. Her mistress, Mrs. Flint (Jacobs changed the names of her master and mistress in her notable memoir *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*) was enraged by her husband's infatuation with Harriet and took to verbally abusing her. As state previously, white mistresses did not see black women as victims, but instead as competitors for the husbands' affections, as well as insatiable, hypersexual beings that would do anything to lure their spouses away from them. Jacobs writes in her narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, about the commonality of such interactions between mistress and slave woman: "I once saw a young slave girl dying soon after the birth of a child nearly white...Her mistress stood by, and mocked at her like an incarnate fiend. 'You suffer, do you?' she exclaimed. 'I am glad of it. You deserve it all, and more too.'"³⁷ If white woman remained complicit in the exploitation of commodification of black women's body, slave women had to find varying ways to resist it.

³⁷ Harriet A. Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself*, ed. Lydia Maria Child (Radford, VA: Wilder Publications, 2008), 39.

In Jacobs' case, she fought against the courtship of her master, and chose to engage in a consensual relationship with another white man, a lawyer named Samuel Sawyer. Historians have recognized that "consensual" relationships between the enslaved blacks and free whites were inherently not consensual, because they black women engaged in this relationships out of necessity. It was a necessary evil, so to speak, to survive slavery for a number of those who participated in such relationships, as was the case for Harriet Jacobs. If Jacobs was not a slave being ardently pursued by an abusive master, would she have begun her relationship with Sawyer? Probably not. But it was the lesser of two evils, and Jacobs writes in her narrative: "...it seems less degrading to give one's self, than to submit to compulsion. There is something akin to freedom in having a lover who has no control over you, except that which he gains by kindness and attachment."³⁸ Granted Sawyer did exert some control of Harriet, he being both white and male in a system that upheld whiteness and masculinity, as well as being the father of their two children. Sawyer could have purchased Harriet and her children's freedom, but chose not to. Instead after a time he allowed them to live with Harriet's grandmother. Jacobs' involvement with Sawyer did not completely solve her issues with Dr. Norcom, so she ran away, another example of slaves' resisting the slave system. For seven years Jacobs live in her grandmother's attic before escaping to the North, finally free of the abuse of Norcom and his wife. Alexina Morrison' story did not have the same redemptive ending.

Blonde haired and blue eyed, Alexina "Jane" Morrison was purchased by the prominent New Orleans slave trader James White in January 1857. Soon after Morrison ran away, and it

³⁸ Gwin, *Green Eyed Monsters*, 40.

was not until October of that year that they would meet again, this time in a Louisiana court room. Morrison claimed that she was white, and standing before a court room of observers she was, with her pale skin, light eyes and blonde hair. The same skin that made her valuable in the slave market for those seeking a special type of slave to serve their sexual fantasies, also allowed Morrison to make her bid for freedom. Her existence brought up two important questions: “Could slaves become white? And could white people become slaves?”³⁹

Morrison’s ability to pass as white afforded her the privilege of using her skin tone to construct a story about the ambiguity of her birth and upbringing, as well as use her body as evidence of her existence of a white person enslaved under false pretenses. Morrison’s skin color was not the only asset she had in her case against White. Her mannerism, her speech, as well as her behavior proved to many in the courtroom that she was indeed white. Stereotypes about black behavior and speech kept them from believing that Morrison was anything “but a white woman in distress” and not some lying Negro wench.⁴⁰ But these men’s conclusions could also been seen as a display of their own fear of white slavery. Since the institutionalization of hereditary black slavery in the colonial period, whites felt safe in the belief that would never be slaves. Their whiteness promised them freedom from such a fate. If Morrison was not a white woman, but truly a white passing individual of African descent, she threatened the very social fabric of South.

³⁹ Walter Johnson, “The Slave Trader, the White Slave, and the Politics of Racial Determination in the 1850s,” *Journal of American History* 87, no. 1 (June 2000): 13.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

The first trial ended in a mistrial, with a subsequent trial in the lower court of Louisiana ruled in favor of Morrison (10-2). However, White's lawyers appealed to the upper courts where the trial remained mired in the chaos of the Civil War. It is not known what happened to Morrison, though the 1860 census revealed that she had a daughter named Mary that very well could have belonged to her jailer. By 1862 she was back in a jail cell, sick and coughing up blood.⁴¹ Neither she nor her daughter appear in the 1870 census or any census after.

At the time of Celia and Alexina Morrison's ordeals, the trope of the Tragic Mulatto (Quadroon, Octoroon, etc.) had begun to take effect.⁴² The trope was used by a number of abolitionists to inspire sympathy and action on the part of Northerners. This near-white woman, defined by circumstances beyond her control, as well as gifted an incomparable beauty aroused writers and regular citizens alike. The trope debuted in antebellum fiction during the 1840s, later identified by Sterling Brown in the 1930s. Her construction, coupled with the jezebel stereotype assured the sale of young, light-skinned black girls in what became known as the "Fancy Trade." The sale of fair-skinned black girls for the purpose of sex or concubinage, known as the Fancy Trade, was incredibly prevalent in the Deep South, especially in Louisiana. The entire Fancy Trade was based off the sexuality of black women. In the antebellum period, New Orleans was the largest slave port in the south and also maintained the largest Fancy Trade market as well.⁴³

In *Soul by Soul* Walter Johnson makes the argument that the slave market and the traders who ran it shaped race better than anything else. The words the buyers used-*griffe*, *mulatto*,

⁴¹ Ibid., 27.

⁴² Emily Clark, *The Strange History of the American Quadroon*, 1.

⁴³ Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 118.

quadroon-preserved a constantly shifting tension between the blackness favored by those slaveholders to till their fields, renew their labor force...and the “whiteness” desired by those who went to the slave market in search of people to serve their meals, mend their clothes, and embody their fantasies. It was not just the “physical whiteness” that slaveholders looked for in their slaves, but also positive “white” characteristic, Johnson writes. Their “delicacy,” “beauty,” and “intelligence,” “were projections of slaveholders’ own dreamy interpretations of the meaningfulness of their skin color.”⁴⁴ Yet, these white passing black women were still far from white in the eyes of slave traders and slaveholders. The “one-drop” rule codified absolute racial difference on the basis of known black ancestry and maintained the slavocracy by denying the whiteness of light skinned black people. “Physical defects” such as a wide nose, bad teeth, or skin were seen as markers of blackness in light skinned slaves and were used to “mark the boundary of difference between the authentic whiteness of the slaveholders and the almost-whiteness of their slaves.”⁴⁵

Slave traders kept this in mind when they packaged and sold certain characteristics (smaller features, paler skin). It was essential to high profits. Purchasing these “near-white” women for the purpose of sexual relations and not material utility was a projection of these men’s “fancies.”⁴⁶ Fancy maids were made to dress, talk, and act the part of a southern lady. Mixed-race black girls as young as eleven were purchased by wealthy planters and businessmen at slave auctions as testaments to the man’s wealth. They were ornamental in nature and had no

⁴⁴Ibid., 156.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 156.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 115.

economic value outside of their skin-tone and sexual servitude. They were not used as field hands, or house servants. Rather, they presented to Southern society that their master could easily afford to own a slave (or two), for no other reason than to have them.

A fancy maid could cost a slave owner twice the price of a good field hand, who could cost upwards of \$1,500 by 1860. The cost of these girls ranging from \$2000-5233, said more about the slave buyer than it did the slave.⁴⁷ Because white men openly competed with one another (a slave pen or auction being the arena), they could assert their dominance over not just black bodies, but white ones as well. Their masculinity on the line, a successful slave buyer could impress his colleagues with his racial knowledge and slave acumen. Slave owners were known through the chattel they bought and owned. The body of a slave woman was the trophy marking the successful completion of the art of slave buying and white dominance.

When slaveholders went to market seeking these fancy girls, they sought out victims, Johnson assets. Their masculinity, their *identity* was dependent on the brutalized bodies of slaves. Though slave auctions could be public affairs, the sexual desire of black women while well-known went unspoken, “existing in a state of public erasure.”⁴⁸ It was to be in private that these men unleashed their sexual desires, privy only to the slave woman whom he raped. He could successfully maintain an upstanding, reputable public image of a family man, though in private he was anything but.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 113.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 115.

In recent years, scholars such as Walter Johnson, Edward E. Baptist, Emily Landau and others have enhanced our understanding of the effect race has on gender and class, especially concerning women of color in New Orleans, Louisiana during the nineteenth century. For example, Johnson posits that race is not just about social and power relations, as asserted by Higginbotham, but economics as well. Johnson's argument is rooted in the process of commodification as discussed by Baptist. Both are in agreement that slavery, as a system in relation to race, is firmly about exploitation of black bodies for profit, commodifying humans and turning them into products and using race (or racial inferiority) to validate it.

Johnson views New Orleans and its slave market as a case study of race as a byproduct of the economic slave system, because race was shaped in the crucible of the slave market.⁴⁹ Slave traders categorized and sold ideas and myths about blackness in slave pens and at slave auctions in the antebellum period. Lighter skin, more muscular frames, any characteristics based on what slave buyers sought at the market were cultivated by these slave traders in a world of their own making. Baptist is similar to Johnson in his views of the slave systems in relation to race. He goes even further however, and analyzes the process by which humans become products, known as commodification. Baptist rejects any notions of paternalism when it comes to slave trades dealings, especially concerning the Fancy trade, and focuses much of his critique on the "commodity fetishism" of black bodies sold in the trade.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Ibid., 136.

⁵⁰ Edward Baptist, "'Cuffy': Fancy Maids, and 'One-Eyed Men': Rape, Commodification, and the Domestic Slave Trade in the United States," *The American Historical Review* 106, no. 5 (December 2001): 1623.

Using Marxist and Freudian terminology, Baptist explores “the passion for slaves shared by both traders and buyers.”⁵¹ Baptist notes that commodities, inanimate or not, have desires and wants ascribed to them, and in the process become what the capitalist (in this case the slave trader or buyer) want them to be, thus they create the object (slave). Connecting Freudian theory to Marx, Baptist argues that by the nineteenth century, history, race relations, and cultural myth had structured the southern white male’s sexuality.⁵² This included fear of black masculinity and black male sexuality (known in the postbellum era as the Black Rapist or Black Beast), as well as the desire to dominate enslaved woman in order to assert their [white men’s] own fledgling sense of identity in the South’s patriarchal system. “Having once forgotten his or her creation of the’ impassioned object,’ the fetishist returns compulsively, often renewing relationships of exploitation in the process. For by doing so, he or she pleasures the self with the unacknowledged remembrance of a transgression without blame, an ambiguity controlled and fixed, a memory displaced onto and encoded in the fetish object.”⁵³

Baptist’s thesis is that the slave becomes a commodity because commodification is an act placed on the slave by the commodifier. So, while Baptist morally understands the argument by a number of historians, primarily Sidney Mintz, that slaves cannot be commodified because they are not objects, human beings were still in fact commodified and treated as such. Any argument

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Baptist, “Cuffy,” 1625.

that human beings could not be commodities fails to acknowledge the atrocities committed in the slavocracy.⁵⁴

As noted by Johnson in *Soul by Soul*, the bodies that slaveholders owned helped to define their masculinity. This is at odds with the image of the “independent Southern gentleman,” whose main ideology in life included family, honor, and God. Dependence on black female bodies was not independence, and their frail sense of manhood was, as Johnson puts it “built out of slaves.”⁵⁵ This is why, Baptist asserts, that slave traders and buyers fetishized light skinned black woman. “Fancy maids, more than other enslaved women, embodied a history of rape in the pre-emancipation nineteenth-century South, one that reveals white anxieties about dependence on blacks but that allowed white men to assert and reassert their power and control.”⁵⁶

The legacy of these Fancy Maids can be found in the Octoroon brothels of Lulu White and others of her ilk in decades following the Civil War. Octoroons were the specialty of Storyville and as modern day fancy girls, only white men could engage in sex with them. The brothels were closed to men of color no matter their class or occupation. Storyville was incredibly similar to the slave auctions of the antebellum era. Like their enslaved counterparts, Octoroons were a commodity to be consumed and exploited by white men.⁵⁷ These near white woman would profit greatly from the history of the fancy maids, granting the fantasy of domination to any white men interested---for a price.

Storyville and Selling the Black (White) Body

⁵⁴Ibid., 1626.

⁵⁵ Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 115.

⁵⁶ Baptist, *Cuffy*, 1643.

⁵⁷ Landau, *Spectacular Wickedness*, 118.

On March 10, 1857, the New Orleans City Council enacted “An Ordinance Concerning Lewd and Abandoned Women,” which became known as the “Lorette Ordinance,” named after the prostitutes who worked near the Notre Dame de Lorette in Paris. The law became the first attempt by a city government to coordinate prostitution in the United States. While the law cordoned off an area specifically for prostitution in order to not encroach on the more respectable parts of the city, the real purpose was to funnel some of the profits into the city’s coffers.⁵⁸ Between 1857 and the creation of Storyville in 1897, the city council passed eight new revisions to the Lorette law, all attempting new measures to regulate, control, and most important profit from the city’s prostitutes. With the creation of Storyville, the city had all but given up its crusade, and embraced New Orleans’ most popular vice.

Historians, Alecia P. Long, and Emily Epstein Landau, have recently acknowledged that following the Civil War, New Orleans began to exploit its reputation as a sinful, decadent city. Formerly the largest slave market in North America, New Orleans began to cultivate its image as a destination for indulgence and sex tourism to rival any other city in the United States. Known for its acceptance of sex across the color line throughout its history, prospective patrons flocked to the city from all over the world to experience all that it had to offer---colored prostitutes included. And as Emily Clark notes, the quadroon/octoroon were considered the most desirable women of African descent, and therefore were “the most libidinous of all.” The city’s history as

⁵⁸ Judith Kelleher Schafer, *Brothels, Depravity, and Abandoned Women: Illegal Sex in Antebellum New Orleans* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009), 159.

a place ripe for sex across the color line allowed the octoroon to become the center of New Orleans' sex industry in the postbellum period. Storyville was her home.

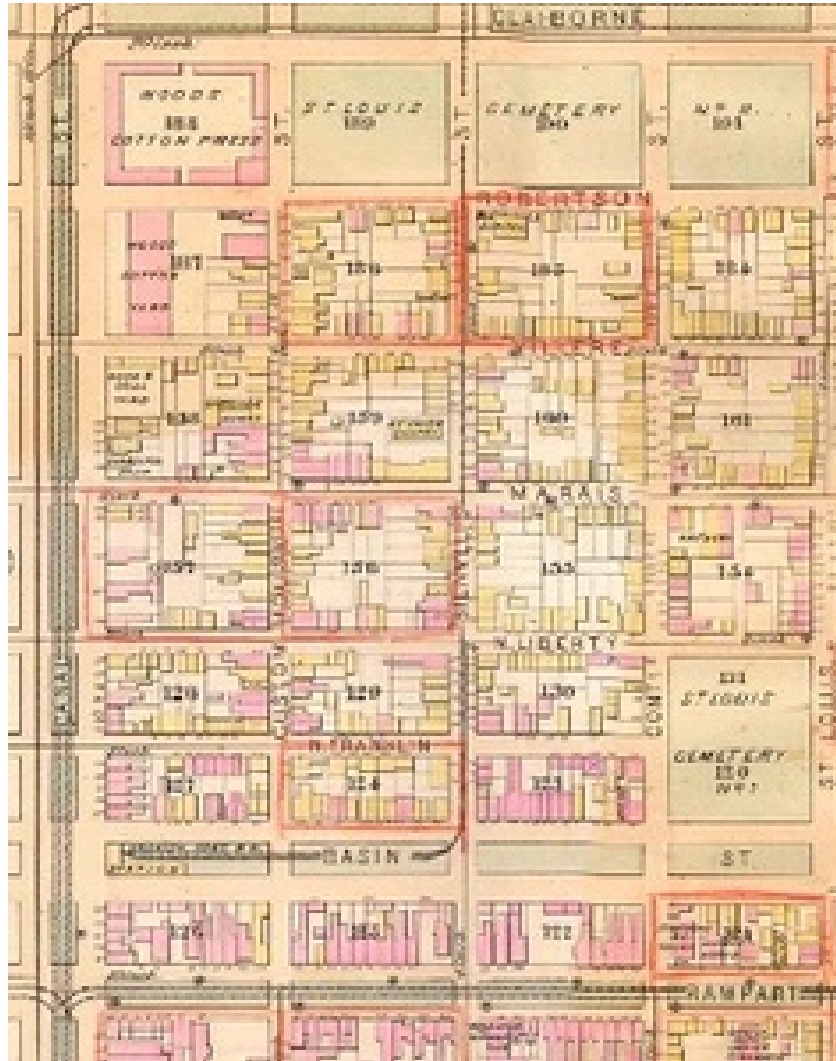


Figure 2 Map of Storyville, the Red Light District in New Orleans 1898-1917. Reprinted from the Historic New Orleans Collection at the Williams Research Center.

With this in mind, the creation of Storyville in 1897 was nothing more than a way for New Orleans to both control and most importantly *profit* from the commodification of the racialized sex for which it was so famous. Ordinance No. 13,032 did not legalize prostitution in

New Orleans, rather it created a sixteen block area in which prostitution was legal. It was bound by the streets of Robertson, Basin (later Customhouse), Iberville, and St. Louis and adjacent to the French Quarter. Establishments ranged from “cribs” small rooms that contained nothing more than a mattress, and extravagant brothels that held some of the most beautiful and expensive artwork and furniture in the South. Originally referred to as The District, many began to derisively refer to it as “Storyville” after Sidney Story, a city official responsible for the legislation that created it. Storyville was a red light district created by, and for, white men only. The sexual appetite white men had for near-white black women still existed, though the slave pen and slave markets did not. The commodification of black women’s bodies would continue in the cribs and brothels of Storyville, bringing innumerable wealth to the city and brothel owners alike. The white business and politicians were not the only benefactors of Storyville. A black woman named Madam Lulu White became so wealthy from her enterprise in Storyville and the luxurious jewels and clothes it afforded her, that she became known as the *Diamond Queen*. But Lulu White was not all that she seemed.

The most notorious madam of Storyville, Landau argues that White’s success may have been heavily due to her mastery of manipulating the images of the tragic octoroon, the licentious jezebel, and the domination of black women’s bodies by the white slaveholding class during the antebellum period.⁵⁹ White was able to efficiently manipulate the white supremacist system and benefit from the detrimental stereotypes placed on women of color. Her racial ambiguity and sexual power rewarded her the ability to circumvent the limitations of being a women of color in

⁵⁹ Emily Epstein Landau. *Spectacular Wickedness*, Baton 132.

the nineteenth century South, turned the trope of the tragic octoroon on its head, and understandably incited insecurity among the wealthy, white power players of New Orleans. If this white passing black woman could beat the system, couldn't others like her do the same? This threatened the white male hegemony present at the time.

But who was Lulu White? Born to a colored housekeeper and white father, Lulu White does not appear in the census until after her establishment of the Mahogany Hall octoroon brothel in Storyville after 1897.⁶⁰ Her residence on Basin Street and new identity do, however, appear on the city registry in 1888 as a "colored boardinghouse," with five female residents besides White herself. Even then the area had been known for its "gilded places" that housed the immoral delights of prostitution.⁶¹ It can be inferred that White had already begun her foray into the commercial sex industry, but her enterprise would not have been geographically legitimated until the creation of Storyville.

In 1890 she moved to a Customhouse Street property where she stayed until 1898. In 1894, White may have planted a story in the papers about her "true" origins. This story in the *Mascot* is important because it signifies White's already skilled mastery of manipulation and self-promotion, as well as her ability to exploit the media in New Orleans, which was central to her business' success.⁶² As reported in the *Mascot*, Lulu White lived primarily with her white

⁶⁰ Ibid., 135.

⁶¹ Ibid., 136.

⁶² Ibid., 136.

father, a Wall Street broker in New York until his tragic and untimely death, after which she inherited the property at No. 166 Customhouse Street.⁶³

In one fell swoop, Lulu established herself firmly as the tragic octoroon, but with a postbellum twist. Her father, though white, was a Northerner and a capitalist, a far cry from the now impoverished Southern plantocracy. And as Landau writes, White's father and the men like him were exactly the investors Southern boosters wanted to invest in the image of the New South. White effectively exploited the sexualized images of black womanhood and it allowed her to grow and expand her business into what became the most infamous brothel in Storyville for nearly two decades.

White's other madam contemporary was the 'Countess' Willie Piazza who ran another successful octoroon brothel in Storyville. Born to a black mother (who was most likely a slave before the Civil War) and a white father of Italian descent, Piazza was born in 1865 and grew up in Mississippi. While in Mississippi, Piazza engaged in prostitution and would bring her practice to Storyville around 1900.⁶⁴ Her residence on the aforementioned Basin Street was prime real estate and her business was incredibly profitable. Like Lulu White, Piazza manipulated the antebellum imagery of white dominance over black bodies as well as the tragic octoroon trope. And also like Lulu White, Piazza re-imagined the Octoroon as not simply a racial category, but a purely sexual one that implied centuries of miscegenation and rape in order to continue that sale of black women's bodies.

⁶³ Ibid., 138.

⁶⁴ Long, *The Great Southern Babylon*, 197.

In Louisiana, the centuries of racial mixing made necessary the categorization of people of African descent to better maintain the South's white supremacy structure. Octoroons were persons of African descent deemed to have one-eighth African blood, however the features attributed to the near-white octoroon (pale skin, light eyes, dark hair) were merely aesthetics that offered no real indication of a person's true ancestry. Both Lulu White and Countess Piazza's racial backgrounds were ambiguous; this allowed them to don the cloak and privilege afforded to octoroons. By making octoroon a sexual category, they were able to cultivate antebellum images into a successful business strategy for much of their stay in Storyville.

Octoroon as a sexual category still relies very much on mythmaking and stereotypes of black womanhood. Octoroons were the specialty of Storyville and as modern day fancy girls, only white men could engage in sex with them. The brothels were closed to men of color no matter their class or occupation. Storyville was incredibly similar to the slave auctions of the antebellum era. Like their enslaved counterparts, Octoroons were a commodity to be consumed and exploited by white men.⁶⁵ "Storyville trafficked in the fantasy of the slave market, the exercise of absolute power over another human being-even if only for the evening."⁶⁶ As Long notes in her work *The Great Southern Babylon*, "Octoroons were supposedly refined and cultured, sophisticated and cosmopolitan, but their physiological make-up promised something of the rapacious sexuality attributed to those with colored skin." As women of color, octoroons were still considered to be animal-like and depraved in their sexuality

⁶⁵ Landau *Spectacular Wickedness*, 118

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 188.

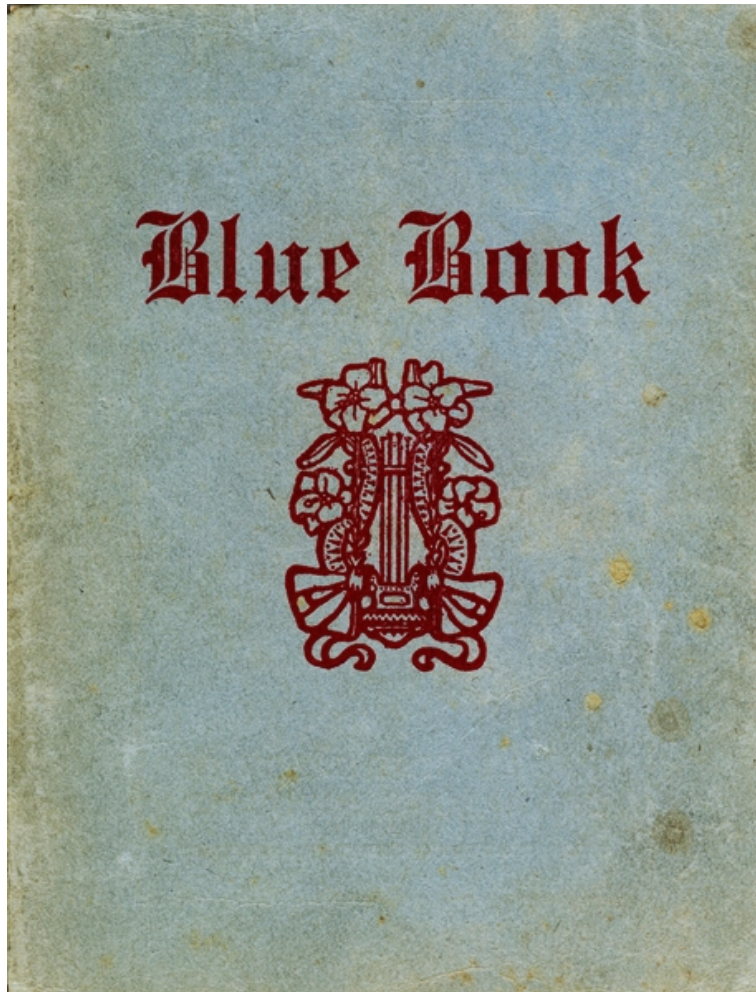


Figure 3. Blue Book published between 1911-1915. New Orleans Blue Books (1897-1917). Reprinted from KnowLA The Encyclopedia of New Orleans, Louisiana 2002.

(after all these octoroons hawked by White and Piazza were still prostitutes), however they sold the fantasy of a genteel, classy, and demure lady. Both White and Piazza's girls always dressed in the latest fashions, and were known to have talents outside of the boudoir, including music, art, dance, and other types of performance as described in one of Storyville infamous Blue Book advertorials.⁶⁷ They were published in-house by the "unofficial mayor" of Storyville Billy News,

⁶⁷ Ibid., 207.

a former police reporter. The Blue Books were normally pocket-sized and housed information concerning the race of the madams, the type of brothel they operated, as well as the sexual acts performed by their girls.⁶⁸ Octoroons received special consideration in the books, separate from even the other black women. I will discuss this further in the next chapter.

The octoroon as a sexual category also “orientalizes” black women. An example of this can be found in another advertisement for White’s Mahogany Hall establishment: “The are always ten entertainers, who recently arrived from the “East,” some being well known to the “profession,” who get paid to do nothing but sing and dance.”⁶⁹ These were most likely not women from the “East,” but simply mixed race women who donned the stereotypical clothing associated with odalisques (a concubine in a Turkish harem). This act was nothing more than the exploitation Orientalist images that had plagued mixed race women in the Atlantic World for centuries.

As explained scholar Emily Clark explains, the trope of the tragic quadroon (octoroon) had an orientalist element that depicted mixed race women as sultry exotic beauties, slaves to circumstance and their own rapacious sexualities. Clark draws on literary comparison to assert her point. She analyzes the work of Joseph Holt Ingraham a nineteenth century author, whom she argues was one of the first to truly Orientalize the quadroon, turning her into a tragic literary fodder for abolitionists to use in the anti-slavery crusade---as explained in the previous chapter.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Pamela Arceneaux. “New Orleans Blue Books.” In *KnowLa Encyclopedia of Louisiana*, edited by David Johnson. Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities, 2010-. Article published on November 23, 2010. <http://www.knowla.org/entry/734/&view=article>

⁶⁹ Blue Book, 1969.19.9. *The Historic New Orleans Collection*. The Williams Research Center.

⁷⁰ Clark, *Strange History*, 132.

The quadroon characters in his stories were described as brunette, and olive-skinned, with “large-orbed, jet black eyes.”⁷¹ Ingraham’s quadroons’ physicality also included pearly teeth and small, fine hands and feet with elegant carriage of the body. Their eyes and complexion were to be the primary indication of the African ancestry and set them apart from the other women of color in New Orleans. In addition to this, Ingraham makes use of the veil, further othering the quadroon, associating her with the “traditional garb” of Western Asia and the Middle East.⁷² The orientalism of the quadroon/octoroon figure is significant because the process of associating black women with the odalisques and Circassian women (northern Caucasian women renowned for their beauty and sold as concubines in Istanbul), establishes quadroon/octoroon as a sexual category and therefore a sexual commodity to be sold and profited from.

Indulgence in the postbellum counterparts of this mythic trope was the specialty of both White and Piazza. However, as the nineteenth century came to a close, the twentieth century would prove much less fruitful for the two, as well as the other colored madams of Storyville. Progressivism, the politics of respectability, and a global war challenged the power and influence of White and Piazza, proving that the privilege of racial ambiguity did not negate racial injustice. In the eyes of the white male hegemony, White and others like her were still black women---and uppity black women at that. Their influence, wealth, and reputation would not save them, or their businesses when in 1917, the city of New Orleans made the decision to segregate Storyville,

⁷¹ Ibid., 137.

⁷² Ibid., 137.

declaring it an all-white district. The colored brothels were to be moved north of the district, to a more dangerous and volatile area.⁷³

In the postbellum era the tropes and mythmaking of the past helped to continue the commodification of black women's bodies, this time in the vice-district of Storyville. For the right price any white men could relive the power and dominance of the antebellum planter. Sex with black women, especially octoroons, was attractive and enticing because the octoroon was a symbol of generations of indiscretion, rape, and white male power. The ability to dominate black women decades after the abolition of slavery was something that could not be passed up.

White and her counterpart Willie Piazza continued to exist as symbols of the reliance on antebellum fantasy and manipulation, which gave them the illusion of real power and influence in a white supremacist system that employed any tactic necessary to maintain the status quo and keep black people in their "rightful" place. Willie Piazza died in 1932 at the age of 67 from health complications at her Basin Street residence.⁷⁴ Lulu White, the former Diamond Queen and the talk of New Orleans was jailed on numerous occasions during the 1920s.⁷⁵ Her health ailing, she died a year before Piazza in 1931.⁷⁶ White died poor and in relative obscurity, the tale of the Tragic Octoroon complete. In the next chapter I will more thoroughly examine White and Piazza as case studies along with Josie Arlington, a prominent and very powerful white madam. Arlington is especially important because she did not employ black women at her establishments,

⁷³ Landau, *Spectacular Wickedness*, 190.

⁷⁴ Long, *The Great Southern Babylon*, 174.

⁷⁵ Landau, *Spectacular Wickedness*, 195.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 197.

and serviced the same clientele as White and Piazza. Most significant, however, is that Arlington was able to maintain her wealth and exist successfully in the system, which neither White or Piazza was able to do long term.

Also, in the next chapter I will use Blue Books to understand and illustrate the ways in which the advertorials were complicit in the negative construction of black womanhood and the sale of light skinned black women after the Civil War. While a number of historians have examined the Blue Books, they have failed to examine the books as tools for black women's oppression. I make the claim that the Blue Books functioned in sexualizing and othering black women, selling the black body to white men after the slave trade through antebellum stereotype and myth.

CHAPTER TWO: THE MADAMS OF STORYVILLE, A CASE STUDY OF LULU WHITE, COUNTESS WILLIE PIAZZA, AND JOSIE ARLINGTON

“The contents of this book are facts and not dreams from a “hop joint.” You will now find the boundary of the Tenderloin District commonly known as Anderson County or Storyville...this is the boundary in which the lewd women are compelled to live according to law.”

How to be Wise, Blue Book of Storyville (1900)



Figure 4 Postcard showing Basin Street circa 1908. Courtesy of the Journal of American History, Through the Eye of Katrina, Special Issue (2007)

At the turn of the twentieth century New Orleans was fraught with crime and political corruption. Known as the “Gilded Age,” the period was a time of social reform and rapid changes both economically and culturally for the United States. Big city bosses and political machines were rampant across major U.S. cities and New Orleans was no exception. Men like Tom Anderson and Henry James Hearsey bribed and solicited money and favors to climb up the

political ladder, securing positions in the Louisiana state senate and even Congress. In debt from what historian Joy Jackson refers to as the “carpet bag regimes of the Reconstruction era”⁷⁷, the city struggled to repay its debt, as well as repair its commercial industry and struggling manufacturing sector. Municipal leaders sought out solutions to the New Orleans’ ills, which also included a high crime rate, disease outbreaks, and a large prostitution population. “Respectable” New Orleanians were especially offended by what they viewed as the encroachment of lewd women on their neighborhoods and homes.

One alderman’s solution was to create a district where prostitutes and the criminals who engaged with them could be separate from the rest of the “decent” population. And in 1897, this proposed legislation became a reality through Ordinance No. 13,032 which created a district in which prostitution was legal in the city of New Orleans. Though “The District” was created in order to segregate vice, there was much more to it than that. At the crux of the matter was race, and racial segregation. The legacy of Louisiana’s three-tier racial caste system had blurred the lines of race in the state, and at the turn of the century reformers would make sure that the borders between black and white, decent and indecent, the modern and the antiquated were clearly defined. The New South had to become a place of reputable governance, a place of economic strength that would attract northern investment, but most importantly one where the vice of amalgamation was no longer in the public eye. But old habits and traditions of the past

⁷⁷ Joy J. Jackson, *New Orleans in the Gilded Age: Politics and Urban Progress, 1880-1896*, 2nd ed. (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana Historical Association in cooperation with the Center for Louisiana Studies of the University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1997), 68.

die hard, and the lure of sex across the color line was never so strong in the aftermath of the Civil War than it was in the brothels and cribs of Storyville. The city of New Orleans would simultaneously lambast sex across the color line and profit from it. Because in the age of modernity, immeasurable wealth, and the dawning of a new century, what else was a city and its people to do?

The Mayor and Mistress of Storyville, Tom Anderson and Josie Arlington

In the introduction to the 1900 Blue Book entitled *How to Be Wise*, the author mentions that the district is “commonly known as Anderson County.” The eponymous Anderson was a businessman and politician who represented New Orleans’ Fourth Ward in the Louisiana House of Representatives. This area happened to include Storyville. Anderson was a political force to be reckoned with and under his patronage were a number of police officers, businessman, and politicians—including a number of mayors of New Orleans. His magnanimity towards the inhabitants of his “county” was very well known, especially towards brothel madams, the most famous of which was Mary Deubler, better known as Josie Arlington. Very little is said about Josie Arlington in the Blue Books, though not for a lack of her power or influence in the District, rather her reputation spoke for itself, and minimal advertisement was necessary. Arlington after all was the most powerful madam in the District, and the mistress to the mayor of Storyville himself, Tom Anderson. Anderson appears twice in the books, one an advertisement for his saloon the “Stag,” which was opposite of the St. Charles Hotel on Gravier Street. His other advertisement was for his annex. Advertisements such as these were numerous in the books, as they were distributed at places where many men frequented—barbershops, bars, etc.—which was the target audience for the books in the first place.

The “blue” in Blue Book was in reference to the fact that the books were directories, more than the books having a blue cover page, as some of them did not. One of the books was entitled the “Tenderloin 400” to denote that those brothels listed inside were the crème of the crop in Storyville.⁷⁸ Those prostitutes working in the small, desolate cribs were not at all mentioned. Madams however received top billing and Josie Arlington was one of them. Arlington’s name is in all caps (ARLINGTON, JOSIE) in the directory, which lists Madams by street address and racial category (W=White, Oct. =Octoroon, and C= Colored). Arlington was in good company at her Basin St. residence, which also housed the likes of Madam Lulu White-- who was only two properties away at 235 Basin St-- and Willie Piazza whose Octoroon Club was located at 317 Basin St. Most of the esteemed and prosperous brothels of Storyville were located on North Basin Street. It was there, at the brothels and bordellos, where white men could exercise their dominance over black bodies, especially at establishments like White and Piazza’s.

Basin Street was the main artery of Storyville, as well as its entryway for those looking to experience all that the famed Sodom of the South had to offer. Arlington dominated the white trade for years. Her four-story bordello, with its dozens of bay windows, and a domed cupola and elegant fireplaces in every room, offered enough delights to satiate any and every man that visited with her girls. Arlington’s residence offered sex circuses and her girls (between 10-20 depending on the season) excelled in the kinkiest of specialties, limited only in the scope of the

⁷⁸ According to Arceneaux, the “Four Hundred” was a term coined by Samuel Ward McAllister in 1888 to described the American elite. Pamela Arceneaux “Guidebooks to Sin: The Blue Books of Storyville,” *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 28, no. 4 (Autumn, 1987): 399.

patrons' imagination. Arlington prospered and profited at 233 Basin Street for ten years until the residence sustained extensive damage from a fire in 1905.⁷⁹ With the help of her lover and friend Tom Anderson, Arlington was able to move a few properties down and set up shop at the Anderson Annex (henceforth known as the Arlington Annex once she took residence). Arlington would use her connections with the elite and powerful of New Orleans time and time again to stay in business and to maintain her power.

In 1906 Arlington contacted her friends at the police department to teach the high society ladies who decided to attend the “Ball of the Two-Well Known Gentlemen”—which was frequented by Storyville prostitutes—a lesson. The women were interfering with Arlington’s business and she would rectify the situation in a very direct, humiliating way. On her call, the police raided the ball and arrested every woman that did not have a prostitutes’ registration card. The women were roundly embarrassed for all of New Orleans’ high society to see which was Arlington’s intent.⁸⁰ Arlington may have been the owner and proprietor of a “bawdy house,” but she exhibited fierce agency in the face of class and respectability constraints. She would not allow her choice of profession to dictate how people treated her.

I believe it’s important, however, to view Arlington’s power and influence as the result of racial and sexual privilege afforded to white women, regardless of their class or socioeconomic status. As a woman, Arlington faced discrimination on the basis of her sex. Through her

⁷⁹ NOLA Encyclopedia

⁸⁰ James Gill, *Lords of Misrule: Mardi Gras and the Politics of Race in New Orleans* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997), 167-68.

sexuality and business acumen she was able to navigate a patriarchal system that was by and for white men (a lot of the time with their help). However, her whiteness played a role in this as well. As a white woman Arlington was at the top of the racial hierarchy present in Storyville and New Orleans as a whole. White women were the only women afforded “true womanhood,” even if they, like Arlington were engaged in acts deemed immoral and unladylike.

White women had to adhere to a life that transcending sexuality and instead focused on respectability. Of course there were some exceptions to the rule. Nineteenth century ideology focused on a virulent male sexuality that, if necessary, had to be indulged by prostitutes. Men had to contain themselves around their wives and other respectable women. Josie Arlington was not one of those “respectable” women, but was still privileged as a white woman. However, if Arlington allowed black men into her bordello as patrons instead of musicians and entertainers, or if she herself engaged in sex with black men would she have been able to exercise the power and influence that made her the most powerful white madam in Storyville? It is doubtful. Sex between white women and black men did occur in the South, as well as the rest of the United States, dating back to the colonial period. But it was criminalized and heavily enforced, unlike the laws that prohibited sex between white men and black women. The thought of black men and engaging in sex with white women was inconceivable to white men and threatened not only their masculinity but the very social fabric of the South. Black men would be lynched and gunned down on the basis of interacting inappropriately with a white woman. If Arlington had consensual sexual relationships with black men she would have been thrown off her pedestal of True Womanhood and thought mentally ill, her name disparaged in the streets of New Orleans.

Unlike Arlington, White and Piazza, whether light skinned, or white passing, were still black and both faced the duality of sexual and racial discrimination. Black women's sexuality was viewed as inherently hypersexual and "beyond their conscious control—animal-like and depraved."⁸¹ Arlington's enduring success and prosperity continued even after her death in 1914 and speaks to the power and privilege of being white in the Deep South. Piazza and White's success while fleeting, is important to study. Baring the brunt of racism and sexism, these mixed race women maintained a "contingent but profitable position in Storyville throughout its existence."⁸² Ultimately with the close of Storyville in 1917, the two octoroon madams would be unceremoniously out of business. Their small victories over a white supremacist system during the consolidation of Jim Crow, however, is no less relevant, as seen in the court cases of Willie Piazza, who refused to see her business and property wrongly taken from her. The Countess of the Octoroon Club fought for her existence when the city of New Orleans sought to erase her and those like her from collective memory.

The Countess at Court: The Court cases of Willie Piazza

Municipal leaders had hoped that the creation of Storyville would consolidate and confine sex across the color line to a small, manageable area within the city. But New Orleans' reputation as the mecca for interracial liaisons was hard to shake. Tourists and residents alike flocked to Storyville to indulge in all that it had to offer, including its specialty: octoroons. Octoroons were a curiosity believed endemic to Louisiana—even though miscegenation occurred all over the United States, especially during the colonial period. Marketing themselves as "one

⁸¹ Long, *The Great Southern Babylon*, 206.

⁸² Ibid., 193.

generation whiter” than their quadroon counterparts, octoroons tried to be two races of women within the same body. “Simultaneously white and ‘colored’...they promoted themselves as the best of both worlds.”⁸³ Refined, educated, and cultured, their white skin and respectable demeanor belied their more “true” nature, one that stereotype and antebellum myth had infused with an animalistic and insatiable sexuality. For white men looking to cross the color line to experience sex with a woman of African descent, Octoroons provided the familiarity of white skin, but the erotic appeal of something new. For one looking to experience the sexual mastery of dominating a black woman in similar fashion to white slaveholders of the antebellum period, Willie Piazza’s Octoroon Club could provide that and more.

At her residence on North Basin Street, Piazza and her girls sold good times, entertainment and the “amber fluid.” Piazza’s girls are described as “the most handsome and intelligent girls in the Tenderloin district...---they are all cultivated entertainers—for singing and dancing they have no equal.”⁸⁴ The word choice here is significant. “Cultivated entertainers” denotes a dignified and cultured quality in Piazza’s girls that separates them from the rest of the “colored” prostitutes in Storyville. Octoroons were supposed to be black in sexuality, but white in manner and behavior. This is what Piazza and the other octoroon madams of Storyville sold to their prospective buyers, the best of both worlds.

The romanticized image of the Octoroon placed them above darker skinned black prostitutes. This replicated a microcosm of the tripartite racial caste system endemic to

⁸³ Ibid., 206.

⁸⁴ Blue Book, THNOC acc.no.1969.19.6 1905.

Louisiana. The privilege of their light skin and sordid history would not protect them when reformers began to push Jim Crow legislation during the first two decades of the new century. However, two centuries of tolerance for sex across the color line was an institution in New Orleans and created a buffer against Jim Crow for the time being. Dismantling sex across the color line would take more than a few protests from indignant reformers like Philip Werlein. President of the city's Progressive Union, he declared war on the inhabitants of Basin Street, with particular emphasis on Piazza and Lulu White. Their very existence troubled Werlein. Werlein believed that by removing the "negroes" from Storyville, the city could have room for all the white prostitutes in the city, thus cleaning up prostitution around the city and simultaneously ending illicit interracial sex in the city for good. City leaders ignored Werlein's calls for reform. Storyville was highly profitable, and the "respectable" businessmen and politicians had a claim to the wealth the district provided to them. Some owned businesses, or property within the boundary. Evicting hundreds and even thousands of women would bode well for neither the city nor its leaders' pockets. Not until 1917 did leaders begin to sever their ties with the women of Storyville. Lucrative contracts from the federal government were at stake. The Negro prostitutes would have to be removed for good.

In January of 1917, the Commissioner of Public Safety, Harold Newman, began an aggressive campaign to clean up the crime-ridden city. One of his first actions was to forcibly move prostitutes who were caught working outside of Storyville into its boundaries. His next order was to separate Storyville into two independent vice districts, one black the other white. Newman was backed unanimously by the city council—which no doubt had already begun the

process of soliciting federal military contracts—and Ordinance 4118 passed the council in early February 1917.

As an octoroon, Piazza's black ancestry placed her firmly in the black category, and like the rest of the black prostitutes and madams in the district, she too would have to vacate her property come March 1. But when March 1 came, Piazza refused to vacate the premises. Police officers tried to remove Piazza and her boarders but to no avail. Did Piazza use one of her connections to stop the police from forcibly moving her and her girls from the property? It is very likely, however there is nothing in the historical record that shows this. As one of the wealthiest madams in Storyville, black or white, Piazza no doubt had connections, but they still would not be enough to stop the courts from charging her with operating an illegal brothel as a black prostitute in an all-white district. Initially Piazza pleads not guilty, arguing on the grounds that she was not really an octoroon (she lied about her ancestry because she believed marketing herself as an octoroon would make her business more profitable), and therefore not a black woman. However, in order for her to fight the charges against her she instead decided to sign a notarized affidavit that stated that she was, in fact, of African descent.⁸⁵

On March 13, Piazza and four of her boarders attended a hearing. Piazza was found guilty and ordered to pay a fine for every count against, or she would instead be jailed for up to sixty days. Other women of color (including Lulu White) also filed suit against the city. Piazza's refusal to go quietly had inspired the other black women in the district to fight for not only their

⁸⁵ From research done by Alecia P. Long, census records indicate that Piazza was born in Mississippi sometime after the Civil War. Her mother was most likely a slave prior to emancipation. Her father was an Italian from the Northeast that soon left Piazza and her mother after the birth of her youngest sibling.

property, but their livelihoods and very existence in a space that was now being forcibly taken from the. The city wanted to (and did) profit from Storyville, but then do away with it once other economic opportunities presented themselves.

Piazza appealed to the Louisiana Supreme Court. Her lawyer was Nathan H. Feitel. Feitel argued that Ordinance 4118 was overtly discriminatory and therefore unconstitutional. But what is important here is his use of the Tragic Octoroon to separate Piazza and her girls from their darker skinned sisters. He argued that they were not “common colored criminals” and that to group respectable colored women with “...the degraded and criminal class of negroes” was unlawful. It is essential to understand the distinction between “good negroes” and “bad,” Within that separation is the intersection of wealth and power. Piazza was incredibly wealthy, owning multiple properties in Storyville aside from her Octoroon Club. She was also well connected. Her brothel and the clientele she kept were the *crème de la crème*. These men were wealthy businessmen and politicians; men of status and power. Piazza and her girls advertised themselves as more than just common black prostitutes. They were musicians, artists, and dancers. To be deprived of her property and forced into the confines of a smaller, all black district with women who she shared nothing in common with, not even skin tone, was something that she presumably saw as beneath her. It is easy to forget that while Piazza led the charge against the first case of sanctioned residential segregation in the city of New Orleans, it was in her own interest.

Piazza would win her case, but not on the grounds of her race. The court established that the city council had the right to abolish house of ill repute, but it could not dictate where

prostitutes could and could not live, and that by doing so it had overstepped its authority.⁸⁶

Piazza's case could have gone the other way. Though wealthy and connected, her gender and occupation placed her at a disadvantage in the court system. So did her race. Piazza was, for all intents and purposes, a black woman and would never be seen as equal, no matter how light she was. The privileges she was afforded as an octoroon would all but dissipate as the city—and the South—continued to strengthen Jim Crow. The end of Storyville marked the decline of the Octoroon as an erotic symbol in New Orleans (though she would live on in cultural memory through film and books). In the new Jim Crow South, there was no room for white passing black women and the threat they now posed to white supremacy. Our next madam is proof of that.

Queen of the Demimonde: Madam Lulu White, the Handsomest Octoroon in America

There were a number of prominent madams in Storyville, but it was Lulu White who would become known as the most notorious of them all. White irked something in the New Orleans elite that placed her in a special category separate of the others. It was mostly due to her wealth and success, and the way she carried it. Boisterous and garish in manner and appearance, White was force to be reckoned with in Storyville. And she knew it. White's Mahogany Hall was located on the previously mentioned Basin Street. Her location on Basin Street indicates that prior to her residence on Basin Street, she had already gained wealth and the necessary political and business connections. According to Landau, Assistant City Attorney George Washington Flynn helped White to finance and purchase the property on Basin. On July 3, 1897 White

⁸⁶ Ibid., 220.

purchased it \$1550 cash.⁸⁷ She then demolished the structure and began building what would become known as the infamous Mahogany Hall.



Figure 5 Lulu White's Mugshot (1920). Reprinted from KnowLA, the Encyclopedia of Louisiana

Mahogany Hall only serviced the wealthiest of white men. This inspired an attack on White's girls at the hands of disgruntled working class police officers who were upset that they could not afford the girls at the more expensive brothels.⁸⁸ The officers put powder a vomit inducing powder in the beer the girls were drinking. They were hoping to humiliate them. This interaction boiled down to an intersection between race and class. The officers were indignant

⁸⁷ Landau, *Spectacular Wickedness*, 144.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 152.

that prostitutes—and black prostitutes at that—had the ability to make them feel emasculated and slighted. To feel empowered they had to not only humiliate the girls, but cause them bodily harm. The power they felt in that moment, in the ability to dominate these girls, and subject them to pain at their discretion—and for free—was necessary for them to assert the masculinity and authority, thus preserving their dignity. The fragility of their egos owes itself to the remnants of Victorian sexual ideology and white supremacy. White's presence and agency threatened the status quo in the South. She had to be taken down a peg. City officials would find a way to do just that. They closed Storyville.

Once Storyville closed White's power disintegrated very quickly. Her race and occupation were derided in the local papers, and she became a laughingstock. White continued to do business, however, until around 1918 when two investigative officers find that she was still operating a brothel at her Basin Street residence. She was taken to court on federal charges for operating a brothel within five miles of a military installation. On November 29, 1918, she was tried and found guilty in a court of law. The judge sentenced her to a year and a day in a federal prison.⁸⁹ In poor health, White appealed for leniency. Twelve days before he signed the Treaty of Versailles, bringing World War I to a close, President Woodrow Wilson pardoned Lulu White.⁹⁰

For the rest of the 1920s and up until her death in 1931, White ran into many legal troubles and was in and out of jail. Storyville once acted as a stage for White's octoroon

⁸⁹ Ibid., 193.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 195.

performance, but the curtain had closed. The self-described “handsomest octoroon in America” had gone from having the “largest collection of diamonds” in the United States to panhandling on the street. It is odd that White had so many connections within



Figure 6 The Girls of Mahogany Hall, Blue Book. Reprinted Courtesy of Hidden from History: Unknown New Orleanians. Emily Landau http://nutrias.org/exhibits/hidden/hiddenfromhistory_intro.htm

the city, yet once Storyville closed she had not a friend to lean on. Her connections with Tom Anderson, police superintendents, businessman, and other men with power were for naught. Josie Arlington was long dead, and Piazza had managed to save enough money to survive after the close of Storyville. But White was a different story. She had long relied on the subordination and debasement of the black body, it should have been no surprise that without the power of

antebellum stereotype and myth, she would be destroyed by the very oppressive system she had upheld. Her power was transitory. The fantasy she had constructed within the confines of Storyville was met with the reality of a new era: Jim Crow.

CONCLUSION: THE BASIN STREET BLUES

*“All, you old-time queens, from New Orleans, who lived in Storyville
You sang the blues, try to amuse, here's how they pay the bill
The law step-in and call it sin to have a little fun
The police car has made a stop and Storyville is done...”*

Farewell to Storyville, Spencer Williams

On April 6, 1917, the United States entered into the World War I as allies of the British, French, and Russia. The country's entry in the war fostered an economic boon for New Orleans' overall economy. An influx of military encampments brought soldiers, sailors, and other military officials to the city. The military establishment feared their men contracting venereal diseases from the infamous prostitutes of Storyville. The War Department sought to penalize and control prostitutes to limit the spread of sexually transmitted infections. The Commission on Training Camp Activities (CTCA) had the authority to suppress prostitution in the cities and communities surrounding military training camps through the Selective Service Act Section 13, which outlawed any and all forms of prostitution within five to ten miles zones around each military encampment.⁹¹

Mayor Behrman was like other city leaders who feared losing the economic profitability afforded to them by Storyville. Behrman even traveled to Washington D.C. to meet with the Secretary of War Newton Baker in August of 1917. Baker allowed the district to remain open until Behrman's plans for patrols of the district went into effect. Two months later in October, Behrman received direct orders to close the district for good. A month later on November 12,

⁹¹ Long, *The Great Southern Babylon*, 227.

1917, Storyville was officially closed. In order to maintain the lucrative military contracts local officials had to concede to the federal government. Personal ties and financial connections with the women of Storyville were not strong enough to defy the federal government and the loss of wealth and accolades for the city.

As a place where white men could dominate black women in the name of sexual mastery and white supremacy, Storyville is important to study not only as a physical space, but as a fantasy fully actualized during a time where the remnants of slave society permeated all aspects of daily life for those living in the South. Wealthy white men held power during the antebellum period that they viewed as unjustly taken from them. Their former slaves were now in the eyes of the federal government equal and rightful citizens of the United States. Through fear mongering, intimidation, and violence, whites would disenfranchise blacks and institutionalize racism in local and state governments in order to maintain some semblance of the old order.

The consolidation of Jim Crow during the end of the Gilded Age and its transition into to the Progressive Era created more constraints on blacks living in the Deep South. Virulent racism had always been an institution in Louisiana, but so had sex across the color line. Sex between white men and black women in the Louisiana was well known and ‘tolerated’ (though not always ‘accepted’) prior to the Civil War evidenced by New Orleans large mixed race population. The ability to dominate black women in the slave market and plantation would end with the Civil War, but in the brothels and cribs of Storyville, the imagery of fair skin and insatiable sexuality would be used to sell black women up until WWI.

Storyville provided a space where people could “...break free from the constraints of civilized morality, it also allowed them to take a vacation from the requirements of Jim Crow

while maintaining the pretense that white supremacy and racial segregation were absolute necessities in their home communities.”⁹² Storyville was a playground for white men to live out their fantasies and express their masculinity. Access to Storyville was controlled by and limited to white men. Sex with black prostitutes especially, allowed them to relive a trip to the slave market. In a brothel or bordello they could view their commodity, examine it, and then purchase it. In Storyville the antebellum slave market was alive and well, but this time the proprietors were black women.

They were very few jobs outside of domestic work for black women following the Civil War. Sex work offered steady income that far surpassed a week’s work as a maid or laundress. Black women from all over the South came to Storyville, viewing it and the city of New Orleans as a place of economic opportunity. From Mississippi alone, nearly 2,000 African American migrated to New Orleans in the early part of the 1890s. Willie Piazza was one of them.⁹³ She and Lulu White would become the two most powerful black women in Storyville. As a student of history, I felt compelled to research and further examine those two women because historians have largely ignored the personal lives and contributions of black women in our country’s history. Lulu White and Willie Piazza were able to, for a time, circumvent and successfully navigate a white patriarchal world. Their ability maintain self-efficacy and agency in the face of crushing Jim Crow laws and virulent racism speaks to their character, as well as their privilege as light-skin black women living as Octoroons and the romanticized history they represented.

⁹² Ibid., 198.

⁹³ Ibid., 199.

Examining their lives during Jim Crow can allow us to better understand how black women found ways to survive in the face of an oppressive reality.

Ultimately, segregation and government contracts would win out, and their power in the district would all but dissipate, especially for Madam Lulu White. But as many historians note, prostitution did not end in New Orleans once Storyville closed its doors. Some of the same brothels continued to operate (turning away any man in uniform), and others operated elsewhere in the city. Not until the 1930s when the municipal government tore down the famous bordellos on Basin Street and erected low-income housing projects for whites did Storyville truly close its doors for good. But in New Orleans where the mystique of Storyville, its commercialized history as the birthplace of Jazz, and the tales of raucous good times live on in cultural memory. Even now, in the twenty-first century, people continue to flock to New Orleans to shake free of the mundanity of everyday life, and to experience the freedom of sexuality and expression the city is so famous for. The infamy of Storyville and its inhabitants is still very much alive and won't soon be forgotten. It's so hard to say goodbye.

*“No use complaining, blue sky's follow rain, the cold, old rain
No use complaining, blue sky's follow rain, the cold, old rain
Just say farewell now and get your one last thrill, your one last thrill
Just say farewell now, farewell to Storyville.”⁹⁴*

⁹⁴ Spencer Williams. “Farewell to Storyville.” <http://www.metrolyrics.com/farewell-to-storyville-lyrics-billie-holiday.html>

APPENDIX

Annotated Bibliography

Cheung, Floyd D. "Les Cenelles and Quadroon Balls: 'Hidden Transcripts' of Resistance and Domination in New Orleans, 1803-1845." *Southern Literary Journal* 29 (1997): 5-16

This article details the weakening power of the wealthy, mixed race middle class present in New Orleans at the turn of the nineteenth century, as well as the institutionalization of the so-called Quadroon Balls in New Orleans cultural memory. Using a collection of poetry (Les Cenelles) written by a group of creole men in the early half of the century, Cheung analyzes the change in New Orleans' power structure after Louisiana came under American control.

Chopin, Kate. *Desiree's Baby*. <http://www.katechopin.org/pdfs/desirees-baby.pdf>

A short story about a wealthy white couple in Louisiana. The wife is a woman of unknown origin (having previously been adopted off the street by white parents). She gives birth to a clearly mixed race baby and becomes the shame of her husband and family. Distraught, she takes her baby and runs off into the surrounding wilderness. The story ends with the reader learning that it is her husband, not she, that is of black ancestry. The story tackles the construction of race in the American South, specifically Louisiana.

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

In her book, Clark examines the Ursulines living in New Orleans during early colonial New Orleans. These Catholic nuns were able to maintain a level of self-sustaining wealth and power through the social services they provided, especially to blacks, both enslaved and free. They threatened the encroachment of white male patriarchy on the Louisiana territory at the turn of the nineteenth century.

Clark, Emily. *The Strange History of the American Quadroon: Free Women of Color in the Revolutionary Atlantic World*. The University of North Carolina Press, 2013.

Clark examines the intersection of race and gender to dispel myths about the history of the Quadroon in American cultural memory. Viewed as a "delicacy" of New Orleans and the Caribbean, the Quadroon was a sexual oddity that was sold both prior to and after the

Civil War for the delight of wealthy white men. Clark tackles the Quadroon's origins in American history, and what her existence says about not just New Orleans, but identity and sexuality in American history as well.

Clinton, Catherine, and Michele Gillespie, eds. *The Devil's Lane: Sex and Race in the Early South*. New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 1997.

A collection of essays and articles about sex and race in the colonial and antebellum American South. The authors explore legal cases, murders, sexual religious ceremonies among other things to recreate the world of seventeenth to nineteenth century Southern life. Essays that were particularly helpful were those about Louisiana, especially Gwendolyn Midlo Hall's essay on free women of color in Spanish New Orleans.

Couch, R. Randall. "The Public Masked Balls of Antebellum New Orleans: A Custom of Masque Outside the Mardi Gras Tradition." *Louisiana History* 35 (Fall 1994): 403-431. The article recounts the origins of the public masked balls of New Orleans, their institutionalization in Creole culture, and their relation to free women of color and the infamous Quadroon Balls of the 1820s, '30s, and '40s. Randall examines the decline of the balls during the 1850s and 1860s, and then their resurrection as a Mardi Gras staple during Reconstruction and beyond.

Dabel, J. E. "My Ma Wen to Work Early Every Mornin'": Color, Gender, and Occupation in New Orleans, 1840-1860." *Louisiana History*, Vol. 41, No. 2. 217-229 (Spring 2000). Examines the special burden faced by free women of color in the antebellum South due to their race and gender. Black women were limited in the scope of their occupations because of their race and gender, and many became cooks, maids, laundresses; domestic jobs that involved subservience and dependence on white families for survival. Dispels the myth that New Orleans gens de couleurs were a monolithic entity.

Harris-Perry, Melissa. *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2011.

Perry's book analyzes the stereotypes that plague contemporary black women in today's society. Most of these stereotypes have antebellum and reconstruction era origins, specifically Jezebel and Mammy. This work is essential to my thesis in that it allowed

me to see and understand the far-reaching ramifications of those stereotypes on not just black women in Storyville at the turn of the twentieth century, but on black women in modern day America.

Higginbotham, A. Leon Jr. *In the Matter of Color: Race & the American Legal Process: the Colonial Period*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.

Higginbotham looks at law and the legal system in colonial American and how it shaped race and racial identity for African-Americans. The chapter that was particularly helpful to this thesis was “Virginia. The Leader” because it detailed the institutionalization of slavery on the black body, as well as legality for interracial unions which set the precedent for other colonies and eventually the United States as a whole.

Higginbotham, Evelyn. “African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race.” *Signs* 17, no. 2 (Winter 1992): 251-74.

Higginbotham discusses the limitations of women’s history and African American history because both have not adequately examined black women in the context of American history. Higginbotham challenges historians to bring race more prominently into their analyses in order to examine race as a construction through power relations are to be conferred.

hooks, bell. “Eating the Other.” in *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. Boston, MA: South End Press, 1992.

Feminist scholar bell hooks seminal work, “Eating the other” argues that interracial sexual couplings act as a way for white men to assert the masculinity and power over brown and black bodies. This modern day interpretation is similar to arguments made by other historians, namely Emily Clark, who argues that sex with black women in Storyville allowed white man to experience sexual mastery akin that seen in the antebellum slave market.

Hughes, Langston *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes*. Edited by Arnold Rampersad. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001-2004.

I used Hughes poem, “Red Silk Stockings” as an epigraph at the beginning of this thesis. I felt that it was an appropriate choice because the character Hughes is speaking to is

clearly a woman of a certain circumstance, and her engagement with a white man may be because of economic hardship or another difficult circumstance. Hughes sardonic tone when he writes “and tomorrow’s child be a high yaller,” comments on the potential offspring of such a union and the hope for a better life because “ain’t nothin’ to do for you, nohow round this town.— you’s too pretty.”

Jackson, Joy J. *New Orleans in the Gilded Age: Politics and Urban Progress, 1880-1896*. 2nd ed. (Baton Rouge, La.): Louisiana Historical Association in cooperation with the Center for Louisiana Studies of the University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1997.

Johnson, Walter. “The Slave Trader, the White Slave, and the Politics of Racial Determination in the 1850s.” *The Journal of American History* 87, no. 1 (June 2000): 13-38. Accessed September 12, 2013.

Johnson details the legal cases of Alexina Morrison a white passing slave who sued her slave owner for her right to freedom because, she argued, that she was a white woman. Blonde haired and blue eyed, Morrison’s case spoke to the greater notion of race, and racial identity in a very racially messed up South.

Landau, Emily Epstein. *Spectacular Wickedness: Sex, Race, and Memory in Storyville, New Orleans*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013.

Landau examines the lives, laws, and legal cases that created the infamous vice district of Storyville in New Orleans, Louisiana. Landau discusses two prominent Storyville madams in her book as well, Josie Arlington and Lulu White. These powerful women defied definition in their own separate ways and their stories are important cases that examine the intersection race, sex, gender, and occupation in the Gilded Age and Progressive era.

Long, Alecia P. *The Great Southern Babylon: Sex, Race, and Respectability in New Orleans, 1865-1920*. Louisiana State University Press, 2005.

Long’s work examines the history of prostitution in New Orleans, Louisiana, as well as relationship between women of color and white men, something the city was well known for as the “Great Southern Babylon.” Long also wrote at length of Storyville and its most infamous madam, the Queen of the Demimonde, Lulu White. Long also talks about the

end of Storyville during the United States' entrance into the First World War and what it meant for the district's inhabitants.

Schafer, Judith K. *"Open and Notorious Concubinage": The Emancipation of Slave Mistresses by Will and the Supreme Court of Antebellum Louisiana*. Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association, Vol. 28, No. 2. 165-182 (Spring, 1987).

Schafer's articles discusses the difficulties faced by slave women involved with slave masters as well as free women of color who were intimate with white men. Because their unions were not seen as legal by the law, they and any offspring they had were at the mercy of a racist legal systems that benefitted their partners other family and they in turn were left with nothing.

Spear, Jennifer M. *Colonial Intimacies: Legislating Sex in French Louisiana*. *The William and Mary Quarterly* 60, no. 1 (Jan. 2003): 75-95. Accessed September 11, 2013.

Spear details the origins of interracial sex in the Louisiana colony under French control during the seventeenth and eighteenth century. She examines why unions between Native American and French women were viewed as more suitable than those between French men and black women. Spear argues that French colonial policy was used to control and police sex and sexuality and would ultimately fail.

Sterkx, H. E. *The Free Negro in Ante-Bellum Louisiana*. Rutherford: Associated University Press, 1972.

This work is a detailed account of the lives of free people of color in antebellum Louisiana. Broken into social customs, culture, economics, etc., it is a richly researched history of Louisiana's prominent black population, its successes and failures, as well as their interactions with one another and the white population. There is some discussion about placage, quadroon balls, and the fancy trade which made this book essential to my thesis.

Trethewey's, Natasha. *Bellocq's Ophelia: Poems*. Saint Paul, Minn.: Graywolf Press, 2002.

I used an excerpt from one of Trethewey's poems from her work *Bellocq's Ophelia*. The collection of poetry is centered around a young mixed race girl who goes to work in an Octoroon brothel in Storyville. Because my work is particularly focused on these white

passing, mixed race women, I felt it fitting to use a poem that encapsulated the core of my research.

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