Remaking
New Orleans

Beyond Exceptionalism and Authenticity

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You belong here

New Orleans

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Contents

Part Two   Producing Authentic New Orleans

Part Three   What Is New Orleans Identity?

Acknowledgments

Introduction

*What Lies beyond Histories of Exceptionalism
and Cultures of Authenticity*

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"New Orleans is a world apart," notes a tourism website, "in many ways its own little city-state, part of the United States but at the same time so different from every other place in the country." Could anyone familiar with the city have escaped this truism that New Orleans is a land unto itself, and could any of us who have been enchanted with this place deny experiencing its singularity in profound ways? Within the specter of American exceptionalism, in which the United States is idealized as an immigrant country of hard workers and liberal dreamers—"a special case 'outside' the normal patterns and laws of history," as Ian Tyrrell has argued—New Orleans resides as a thing apart, the exception to the exception.[1] From the beginning of its existence as a juridically American locale, those both inside and outside the city have marked it off as anathema to broader patterns of urbanity, culture, politics, economics, and, indeed, Americanness. Placed in opposition to a nation perpetually driven by progress, New Orleans is the "city that care forgot." It can also be the "Paris of the South," the "northernmost Caribbean City," and the "most African city in the United States." That New Orleans can be all of these is what makes this place different from any other place, or the United States as a whole. Or so the story goes.

The response to Hurricane Katrina in August 2005 is a useful barometer of exceptionalism discourse and the importance it plays in the city's identity vis-à-vis the nation. "Only a sadist would insist on resurrecting this

concentration of poverty, crime, and deplorable schools," wrote veteran journalist Jack Shafer, while Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert observed from Washington, "it looks like a lot of that place could be bulldozed."[2] To be sure, the overwhelming response to the devastation in New Orleans was an outpouring of assistance, with thousands of volunteers and donors supporting rebuilding efforts and contributing their dollars and sweat to the process of bringing a major American city back from the brink. Affective cases for rebuilding were packaged under titles like *Why New Orleans Matters* and *What Can't Be Lost*. Testifying on Capitol Hill about the "strategy necessary to rebuild Louisiana," then Lieutenant Governor Mitch Landrieu, who would be elected mayor in 2010, explained to Congress, "Louisiana has an economic asset that other states can only dream of: a multifaceted, deeply rooted, authentic, and unique culture."[3] Though the calls for support ran directly counter to the desires of the conservative bulldozers, both relied upon a broadly shared perception of an inimitable city set apart from a normative America.

How is it possible that the justification given for saving New Orleans and southeastern Louisiana was not that it's a major metropolitan area, home to 1.3 million people, or the nation's busiest port system, or perhaps the key nodal point in North America's oil and gas infrastructure? From the other perspective, would senior politicians and influential opinion makers have called for the abandonment of the Bay Area following the Loma Prieta earthquake in 1989, or of lower Manhattan and northern New Jersey after Hurricane Sandy struck in 2012, or of the Houston metropolitan area inundated by Hurricane Harvey in 2017? Whether sinful or soulful, post-Katrina New Orleans was to live or die by the sword of exceptionalism, by how those in power assessed the value—not least in monetary terms—of its culture.

New Orleans exceptionalism, its raison d'être, is grounded in notions of cultural authenticity embodied in creolized cuisine and architecture, jazz and other musical traditions, community parades and black Indian processions, voodoo queens and Mardi Gras royals, public drinking and prostitution. We should state at the outset that as residents of New Orleans, each of us participates in the city's multifaceted traditions and attends to various cultural formations in our research. This book is an attempt not only to draw out other, more neglected areas of local study but to highlight the affinities between scholars, popular historians, journalists, and tourism marketers who have narrowed in on select cultural formations, masking their incorporation into the market, and thus imbuing them with authenticity as definitively local and communitarian. This cultivated rendering of New Orleans

is rooted in a nineteenth-century romantic literary tradition, continuously repackaged through the twin engines of tourism and economic development schemes, and supported by research in sectors of the humanities and social sciences that has isolated the city from comparison. Such a consensus is the result of an analytical tautology in which cultural authenticity renders New Orleans exceptional and the city's exceptionalism renders it authentic. As local musician Louis Prima observed after opening a nightclub on Bourbon Street, "People look to us for what they have been led to expect [that] New Orleans can give them."[4]

In this book we argue that the New Orleans created by this feedback loop, in which authenticity and exceptionality are perpetually reaffirmed, has obscured other possible understandings. The equation of historical exceptionalism plus cultural authenticity has been not so much imagined as conjured as an entity outside of history, outside of capital, and outside of politics. It is not our purpose to prove New Orleans's typicality or exceptionality, or demonstrate how it exists as an authentic bastion of meaning in an otherwise artificial world, or how its various social formations are in fact products of capitalist social relations, marketing constructs, or cultural appropriation. Rather, this is an attempt to move beyond these dichotomies and to ask what is hidden in their invocation. *Remaking New Orleans* is aligned with progressive scholarship in history, anthropology, political science, and urban studies that pursues how the very "New Orleansness" of New Orleans has taken root in the city's notoriously unstable terrain. The editors take inspiration from other place-based studies—Mike Davis's Los Angeles, Hal Rothman's Las Vegas, John L. Jackson's "Harlemworld"—that track the accumulative construction of cities and neighborhoods as distinctive locales.[5] The contributors go about interrogating and recontextualizing the most salient symbols of New Orleans exceptionalism (Congo Square, Creole literature, jazz, the Katrina disaster) and locating subjects that do not conform to caricatures of cultural authenticity (Vietnamese American New Orleanians, middle-class black suburbanites, pro wrestlers, philanthrocapitalists).

More than a critique of area studies or scholarship specific to the city, this book also contributes to research on exceptionalism and authenticity as theoretical concepts. When a city can exemplify nothing except itself, its uniqueness—to invoke the adjective most often applied to New Orleans—renders it an incomparable cultural island. The more holistic and inclusive New Orleans we put forth has the capacity to inform scholars working in other areas about the machinations of exceptionalism and authenticity—key concepts in the humanities and humanistic social sciences—on the ground.

The contributors in this volume show what New Orleans–as-exception can teach us about other locales, as they draw comparisons to other sites and frame specific claims to authenticity within and against legacies of intellectual thought. Ethnographic and cultural studies of New Orleans have eschewed the attendees of wrestling matches and the quotidian lives of suburban blacks in favor of Mardi Gras Indian ceremonies, Creole culinary traditions, and community parades known as "second lines" (see chapters 5, 9, 10, this volume). This focus on the supposedly authentic and relatively unmediated mirrors tendencies in anthropology and cultural studies that have been subject to sustained critique in poststructural readings. Similarly, historians of New Orleans have tended to focus on the distinctive context of the French and Spanish colonial city and its denizens, New Orleans's nodality within the American slave trade, and challenges to the black-white color line, while eliding the variety of ways in which New Orleans is part of less exceptional but no less interesting developments in urbanity, inequality, and American politics. Together, we ask what putting a city on a pedestal of distinction accomplishes in terms of civic participation, identity formation, cultural production, tourism marketing, urban planning, disaster recovery, political gamesmanship, and more.

In pursuing these themes within a discrete locale, we aim to intervene in the now robust multidisciplinary debates about New Orleans and contribute to current debates within the humanistic social sciences surrounding cultures of authenticity and histories of exceptionalism. New Orleans is a model site for tracking authenticity and exceptionalism as moving targets, seemingly rooted in place and yet ascribed to different cultural formations and subject positions over time. The individual chapters take up these and other topics, proceeding in rough chronological order from the colonial period to contemporary New Orleans. This introductory chapter is intended as a selective genealogy that tracks the accumulation of exceptionalism and authenticity over three centuries, beginning with an overview of the twin concepts as they have been theorized in the humanities and social sciences.

Theorizing Exceptionalism and Authenticity

In both scholarly and popular understandings of American urbanity, Chicago reigns as the most distinctly American city, aided in no small part through the work of the successive Chicago schools of sociology, anthropology, and political science. New York is the engine that moves the nation's finance and high culture. Boston and Philadelphia are home to that most American of

events, the Revolution itself. Cincinnati, St. Louis, Denver, Salt Lake City, and San Francisco (along with Chicago as well) are all part of the Turnerian and thus intrinsically American march west. Pittsburgh, Detroit, and Cleveland stand as symbols of industrial might in the so-called American Century. Los Angeles, as one contemporary scholar put it, is the logical outcome of the values enshrined in the Constitution.[6] As we near the third decade of the twenty-first century, the megalopolises of the Sun Belt—Atlanta, Houston, Dallas, Phoenix, and Miami—increasingly stand as interchangeable representatives of an American dream grounded in the imperatives of property ownership, mass consumption, migration, and the elusive lure of multicultural opportunity.

New Orleans, on the other hand, stands utterly outside the nation's story of its urban identities. As one real estate developer and a leading light of New Urbanism put it, to understand New Orleans one must "recalibrate" to understand that "New Orleans [is] not an American city."[7] New Orleans is considered exceptional to the broader US but also to the American South and Louisiana, and to the Atlantic and the Caribbean, depending on which time and place one is writing about. This language has similarly hamstrung New Orleans itself—in politics, economics, and culture—as issues get framed around progress versus preservation, authentic versus plastic, gemeinschaft versus gesellschaft, the pastoral versus the industrial. In this way New Orleans as a city stands as the consummate other in broader narratives of modernization, development, liberalism, society, and rationality. All that makes New Orleans worthy of value and preservation is in its oppositionality to national values of progress and modernity. This antimodernism can become uneasily equated with racial primitivism, as when the performance traditions of black New Orleanians are portrayed solely as vestiges from an African past rather than complex and cosmopolitan cultural formations, or when creolism and the supposed exceptionality of interracial sex are romanticized in accounts of quadroon balls that obscure the gendered coercion inherent in *plaçage*. When a locale is so defined by such discursive idioms, it is time to interrogate the nature of those idioms within the very narratives and geopolitical flows that actualized them.

An oddly *Volksgemeinschaft* island of twenty-first-century social analysis, New Orleans continues to generate research that fetishizes collective meaning and the bonds of sociability as truly organic. The city's exceptionality rests on a vision of culture and community as authentic, making it a model site for tracking contemporary attachments to authenticity and the relationship of such attachments to changing philosophical, anthropological, and

materialist theories. In her study of "salvage ethnographers" who sought to document folk cultures against the encroaching threat of industrial modernity, Regina Bendix identifies a broader tension in searches for authenticity, which are "oriented toward the recovery of an essence whose loss has been realized only through modernity, [but] whose recovery is feasible only through methods and sentiments created in modernity."[8] Historically tied to the rise of bourgeois capitalism and the attendant estrangement of individuals from (imagined) organic communities, the very effort to capture authenticity leads to its perceived loss via processes of recognition, reproduction, and especially commodification. As Lionel Trilling summarizes this deeply entrenched fetishization of the authentic, "Money, in short, is the principle of the inauthentic in human existence."[9]

As the mystical "southern Babylon," a place seemingly preserved so we might forget to care (about a Protestant work ethic, about accruing capital, about transgressing taboos, about untended levees), New Orleans is imagined as a place of pastness, somehow predating capitalist alienation and inauthentic (i.e., state-sponsored rather than community-sponsored) social welfare.[10] A demarcated zone of festivity and excess—music and dance, food and drink, sociability and sex—is imbued with authenticity in the Rousseauian sense as a fundamental, even primal, human endeavor that is idealized as antithetical to bourgeois social expectations. The ludic spaces of Mardi Gras, of Bourbon Street, or of a musical funeral procession appear as timeless, masking their incorporation into the very market forces they appear to subvert. New Orleans "performs as a simulacrum of itself," Joseph Roach observes, "apparently frozen in time, but in fact busily devoted to the ever-changing task of recreating the illusion that it is frozen in time."[11] The city's authenticity, its originality, is in its failure to fully Americanize and modernize, by preserving not only its historic buildings but also its time-honored traditions for reasons other than maximal profit making. This creates a metric, what David Grazian terms a "symbolic economy of authenticity," in which an original, authentic experience resides at the opposite end of the spectrum from a staged, overtly commodified experience that smacks of "Disneyfication."[12]

The search for authenticity as an end goal is a fool's errand, tied to a romantic vision of meaning centered on an individualistic conception of truth through personal fulfillment. In its essential antimodernism, authenticity as value becomes, paradoxically, the highest value of modernity and beyond.[13] Manufacturing authenticity for notoriety and profit has been a time-honored occupation for generations of New Orleanians and its many suitors. Authenticating New Orleans remains an imperative for musicians, chefs, and anyone

else employed in a tourism industry that inflates authenticity within a highly curated experience economy. In this global marketing paradigm, business consultants discuss how "authenticity has overtaken quality as the prevailing purchase criterion, just as quality overtook cost, and as cost overtook availability."[14] So while the Starbucks corporation has cultivated a perception of authenticity through individual handcrafted service, New Orleans has a much longer history of "place-branding" and, as with all brands, the cultural meanings of this particular brand are organized by economic exchange.[15] The grounds of this actual city may not be manicured to the degree of Disneyland, but that is precisely what lends it salability as real.

A recurring yet submerged theme of New Orleans history is how image manufacturing in the domain of perception feeds back into reality to enhance the symbolic authenticity of cultural forms. Shannon Dawdy finds comparable levels of romanticized exoticism in other sites, such as Japan or the French countryside, but notes "what stands out in the New Orleans case is the extent to which this idiom came to be appropriated by locals."[16] A public secret among New Orleanians is that the mundanities of daily life are necessarily acted out on the theater stage of exceptionalism and authenticity; all the city is a stage and the locals are merely players. In *Ethnicity, Inc.*, Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff survey numerous sites where identities have increasingly become "*both* commodified, made into the basis of *value-added* corporate collectivity, and claimed as the basis of shared emotion, shared lifestyle, shared imaginings for the future."[17] Though they attribute this process of authentication to recent neoliberal incorporations of culture, the long history of marketing place-based identity in ways that reaffirm locals' lived experience—of being New Orleanians—is one of the many ways this particular city is more predictive than regressive.

Substantive critiques of contemporary political economy and culture are concentrated in "Predictive City?," the last section of the book. The first three sections—"Constructing Exceptional New Orleans," "Producing Authentic New Orleans," and "What Is New Orleans Identity?"—show that the city has long been at the forefront of national patterns of urban planning and place-branding, structural inequality and racialization. Beyond New Orleans, the authors suggest that the cutting edge of contemporary politics of demobilization, dislocation, and upward redistribution of wealth is the allure of social identity as the basis for representation and political constituency. They demonstrate how exceptionalism and authenticity—as a member of racial group, resident of a particular neighborhood, native of a particular place, and so on—are integral to the hegemony of capitalist social relations.

The attachment to exceptionalism and authenticity is at the very heart of neoliberalism, positing difference rather than exploitation as the central injustice of the contemporary world. This dislocation is the precise manner in which capitalism frees itself from opposition.

This collection is part of an accelerative force toward defamiliarizing New Orleans, moving beyond the celebratory mode of documenting the city's beloved traditions while leaving their status as markers of identity unexamined. We bring to the fore a speculative body of literature that has critically examined the city's identity and questioned how it has been constructed. Approached anew as a city on the forefront of national trends in urban development, New Orleans becomes a rich site for understanding the quintessential concerns of American cities, with implications far beyond the boundaries of Orleans Parish. The remainder of this chapter provides a detailed genealogy of the two interrelated and essentializing processes at the heart of this volume, the historicizing of the city's past as exceptional and the grounding of this exceptionalism in cultural formations deemed authentic.

The Grounds of Exceptionalism and Authenticity in the Colonial and Antebellum Eras

In most accounts, the founding of New Orleans in 1718 signals the literal and figurative arrival of the city's exceptional status, as a French and then Spanish colony contiguous with North American British colonies and, later, the United States. The city's place as a backwater in the French and Spanish empires allowed for improvisation and experimentation in social relations, while vulnerability to disease and hardship necessitated interdependence and intimacy. In this liminal milieu, the boundaries of racialization and sexuality looked decidedly more permeable than they would come to be in the Anglo-Protestant South.[18] In her study *Building the Devil's Empire*, Shannon Dawdy excavated how New Orleans gained a "special reputation in the early eighteenth century" and then traced how this status has "endured and become part of the lore of the city."[19] Because the seeds of exceptionalism and authenticity were retroactively planted in this foundational period, and because the chapters in this book deal only passingly with the colonial and antebellum eras, our formulation of New Orleans's *longue durée* starts with an extended analysis of the city's beginnings.

From the standpoint of the present, social and political dynamics of race, religion, and sexuality became imbued with an exotic character in many accounts that contrast colonial Louisiana with Anglo-Protestant governance

in the United States.[20] In this dominant formulation, New Orleans appears wholly exceptional as an unruly environment that laid the foundation for the most concentrated free black population in the slave South, the burgeoning of a mixed-race Creole identity with in-between political status, Catholic social practice in a largely Protestant early republic, and the unparalleled presence of a variety of African-derived cultural practices. However, looking "seaward rather than landward," from an Atlantic perspective "where the USA is not automatically the object of comparison," as historian Mark L. Thompson suggests, New Orleans appears as but one outpost within a massive geographic and cultural swath of French and Spanish territories stretching from Granada through Florida and Mexico to California, and north to Canada.[21]

With a population just above 2,500 in 1763, early New Orleans was a relatively dense outpost of colonial elites, artisans, traders, and sailors, nestled among adjacent hinterlands of indigo and tobacco plantations.[22] Such a small city, with most interactions, economic and otherwise, taking place face to face, rendered the law of the metropole secondary to the exigencies of daily life. In her study *Race, Sex, and Social Order in Early New Orleans*, Jennifer Spear argues that eighteenth-century New Orleans was comparable to seventeenth-century South Carolina. Both sites experienced a "frontier phase," when slaves could be found in most skilled sectors of a mixed economy, before settling into a "full-blown slave society" where the master-slave dichotomy governed all social relations.[23]

With Etienne Bore's 1795 development of a technique to reliably crystallize sugar from immature cane, New Orleans entered a period of rapid and radical change. A viable cash crop led to the importation of vast numbers of enslaved people to serve the restructuring of plantations for sugarcane production. At the same time, an influx of Saint-Domingue refugees upended the demographics of the city, doubling the overall population and adding 3,102 *gens de couleur libre* to the free black population of New Orleans proper. From a population of 8,056 in 1803, New Orleans had risen to 17,242 inhabitants in its first appearance in the US decennial census in 1810, making it the seventh largest city in the country.[24] The promise of economic opportunity continued to lure "carpetbaggers" south for decades after the Louisiana Purchase. In transitioning from a colonial to an antebellum city, New Orleans gradually reinvented its political, economic, and social relations.

Prior to Americanization, New Orleans was a particular place connected to and comparable with other port cities in a sprawling intercoastal region.[25] Within an Atlantic context of cultural creolization, *mestizaje*, and ongoing negotiation between the laws of the metropole and local practices, the

only aspect of the city that stood out was how exceptional this frontier slave society appeared when "refracted by an Anglo-American lens."[26] It was, of course, the emplacement of a Franco-Latin city within an Anglo-Protestant nation that juridically distinguished its development from Veracruz, Port-au-Prince, and other Atlantic hubs. Once New Orleans was accommodated into the North American context, its status as a port city further marked it as other in comparison to the frontier slave societies and well-established plantation regimes that characterized the mid-Atlantic and Deep South.

However, emphasizing the legal and cultural structure of the plantation misses the central role that New Orleans and other port cities played in the development of the nation at large. A primary motive for the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 was control of the port, a strategic nodal point that vastly increased connections between Atlantic world trade networks and internal frontier economies. The once liminal was now rendered integral to nation building, reorienting US economics and politics to include new global markets, while reaping the fruits of one of the most fertile riverine valleys of the world. Traders expanded production along routes developed over centuries by Native Americans, with dependence on indigenous populations ultimately leading to warfare, enslavement, genocide, and deterritorialization, as happened throughout the Americas.[27] Outside the city limits, the lives of the indigenous and the enslaved were further entwined by marronage, intermarriage, and collaboration in uprisings. These activities fueled New Orleans's long-standing reputation as a cultural island, literally surrounded by swampland, but again, the delineation between urban centers and liminal frontier zones was common to many Atlantic regions.

As the sources of exceptionalism strengthened in this transitional antebellum era, the first glimmerings of some notion of authenticity or, at least, oppositionality to Yankee modernity began to be seen. Speculative hordes were "swarming in from the northern states," as the last French governor of Louisiana put it, "each one turn[ing] over in his mind a little plan of speculation."[28] It was the accounts of cultural difference by travelers and shocked migrants on the make that supplied the historical record with abundant evidence of New Orleans's otherness. A recurring trope was the high concentration and visibility of black New Orleanians: enslaved and free; African, African American, and Creole. In published travelogues, essays, and diaries, events that were common throughout the Atlantic world—ring shout dances, slaves attending the opera, free people of color operating businesses, mixed-race women consorting with European men—were recontextualized as spectacles of difference within a new national context. Observers shared a sense of

bewilderment that such a variegated racial structure existed on American soil, and opened a key fissure between New Orleansness and Americanness.

Much of New Orleans's reputation for transgression stems from a long-standing tension around the intersection of race and sex, specifically a fixation on intermixture, beginning with legal and cultural conflicts between the French and Spanish regimes and the Yankee interlopers who began arriving in the early nineteenth century. Spear argues it was through this interface that the city earned its reputation "as a site in which relationships between Euro-American men and non-European women were widespread and generally accepted." But she notes that interracial relationships were not uncommon elsewhere the US: "Although the eighteenth century saw an increase in the hostility directed towards racially exogamous relationships, these relationships—including those between white women and black men—continued to receive a measure of toleration, and perhaps even at times acceptance, well into the nineteenth century."[29] Emily Clark similarly finds "women whose racial ancestry would have earned them the color term quadroon lived everywhere in nineteenth-century America."[30] However, over the course of the nineteenth-centruy interracial sex, and especially its human results, were increasingly quarantined in New Orleans, as national narratives portrayed the city as an exotic other to a normative American experience. The imagined confinement to a single locale functioned to absolve the nation of both moral depravity and collective complicity in sexual violence and rape, while rendering invisible those consenting relationships between racially exogenous free people.

The romanticization of interracial sex and specifically plaçage has worked to obscure the economically and structurally coercive aspects of these arrangements, by focusing instead on the illicit allure and legendary beauty of the women involved. The persistent framing of these relations as voluntary or culturally authentic obscures the economic drivers and supports "the image of black women as promiscuous," which as Joy James indicates "was manufactured by white males, [and] deflected attention from racialized sexual violence inflicted by white men."[31] This racial imaginary drove a fancy trade in sexual slaves, the establishment and expansion of quadroon balls to include the invitation of outsiders, and the prostitution of light-skinned women and children. The city's reputation for sexual license, which would provide fodder for generations of New Orleans tourism marketers, was more than in part derived from a brutal history of enslavement, enforced prostitution, and concubinage fueled by the particularities of elite white leisure, patriarchy, and racialized sexual tourism.

Contextualizing Antebellum New Orleans

What has solidified into a narrative of relative laxity around the policing of racial boundaries ignores a political history that is at once far more structured and contested. As Joseph Roach argued, the image of New Orleans as a ludic space of vice masks how "transgression [is] carefully channeled into regulated conduits of time and space," such as Congo Square dances, Mardi Gras masquerades, and quadroon balls that remain "easily within the laws' reach."[32] Racial policing was written into the Code Noir and was central to Governor Vaudreuil's 1751 police regulations, as well as the brutal response to the German Coast slave uprising of 1811 and the manhunt for escaped slave Bras-Coupé in the 1830s, which the nascent police department used to justify its bureaucratic growth.[33] While claims to exceptionalism and cultural authenticity have largely presented the city's racialization in terms of tolerance and accommodation associated with a large population of relatively well-off free people of color, a counternarrative that encompasses a more diverse group of black New Orleanians has attended to the lived experience of racial domination and surveillance.

From 1808 to 1865, New Orleans was the site of the largest slave market in the US, with approximately one million people passing through its auction blocks from the upper South to the burgeoning cotton kingdom. The magnitude and significance of this second Middle Passage was "not only about Louisiana," argues Walter Johnson, but "the making of the antebellum South."[34] At the state level, a series of laws—beginning in 1807 with "An Act to Regulate the Conditions and Forms of the Emancipation of Slaves" and regularly recurring until the "Act to Prohibit the Emancipation of Slaves" in 1857—would close loopholes to manumission and *coartación*. The legislative and juridical enclosure of blacks brought Louisiana, and New Orleans with it, firmly into the legal and social frameworks of the plantation South.[35] This history of slave regimes, racial policing, and legal restriction not only contradicts celebratory portrayals of New Orleans as a site of transgression but also loosens the grip on a culture of authenticity that has made the city appear wholly exceptional.

In the decades preceding the Civil War, a cotton boom gripping the lower South made New Orleans a critical point of connection between urban centers of global capitalism and their peripheral hinterlands.[36] While northern cities set about consolidating juridically free labor, New Orleans's deepening investment in slave labor led to perhaps the city's least-recognized historical uniqueness. At the same time, New Orleans, unlike any other city in the

future Confederacy, developed a large class of white wage laborers, including huge swaths of German and Irish immigrants. The six thousand Irish who perished digging the New Basin Canal in the 1830s were a testament to both the city's uniqueness within the Deep South and the complicated nature of costs and benefits derived from perhaps the one locale in the world that could feasibly marshal large forces of slave or free laborers. By the time of the Civil War, the city would find itself four times larger than the second largest locale in the treasonous South, with a per capita income second in the nation, literally the only city worth speaking of in the Confederacy.[37]

During this boom time New Orleans was commonly viewed as less exceptional than it would come to be seen in later periods, inviting comparisons from travelers to Boston, New York, Charleston, and Savannah and, as suited a major economic center, to London and Paris. One visitor in 1853 wrote, "The French and older portions of the city have a more bald and business-like character; but New Orleans is beyond everything else a business and trading city."[38] The expansiveness of New Orleans's capitalist infrastructure runs counter to prevailing associations with antimodernism and cultural preservation, which derive from the marketability of the city as antiquated or even retrogressive.[39]

Romanticizing New Orleans

It was the events leading up to the Civil War and its aftermath of Reconstruction and Redemption that propelled the invention of a romanticized New Orleans. The alchemic reaction of race and sex swelled further in the public imagination. The elaborate literary and commercial tropes of the quadroon and the fictionalized figure of the tragic mulatto had debuted in antebellum antislavery fiction of the 1840s and were buttressed by popular histories that singled out the city as a space of sexual taboo. This literature "created a circular feedback phenomenon," writes Clark, "that fed the invention and proliferation of activities in New Orleans designed to satisfy the market for encounters with quadroons aroused by the earliest accounts."[40] In other words, the social construction of New Orleans as a perpetual colonial space not only allowed mainstream America to define itself and its values against an other, the narrative itself fueled the very transgressive practices associated with coloniality.

It was a loose aggregate of post–Civil War authors, including George Washington Cable and Lafcadio Hearn, who positioned old, quaint, and charming New Orleans against a country relentlessly committed to moral

and material progress. Whether fashioning poetic histories that glorified the city's Creole distinctiveness or exoticizing the African-derived cultural practices sustained under colonial rule, local writers cultivated a literary landscape that continues to shape the city's legibility.[41] To extrapolate from Frederick Starr's collection of Lafcadio Hearn's New Orleans writings, authors did not merely reflect perceptions of New Orleans as exceptional, they invented this very idea. Take Hearn's description in 1879 of the deep affective divide between Creole Downtown and Anglo Uptown,

> where sat, in old-fashioned chairs, good old-fashioned people who spoke the tongue of other times, and observed many quaint and knightly courtesies forgotten in this material era. Without, roared the Iron Age . . . it was the year 1878 . . . and yet some people wonder that some other people never care to cross Canal [Street].[42]

In Hearn's telling, the predominantly Creole neighborhoods below Canal Street had managed to ward off the impulses toward capitalist modernity—industrialization, rationality, and above all else inauthenticity—while Yankee values reigned supreme in the more Anglo neighborhoods Uptown (see chapter 3, this volume). Hearn's contemporaries Charles Gayarré and Grace King also brought increased recognition to local folkways, as did successors like Lyle Saxon and Robert Tallant, exoticizing and feminizing the Creole Belle on the banks of the Mighty Mississippi.[43] Writers tended to present the city's economic infrastructure as itself representative of a cultural way of life that played out as an ideological struggle between Creole traditionalists and American progressives. "Through these artistic representations," writes Dawdy, "New Orleans became a foil for the rest of the nation, an imaginary island of colonial dissipation within a country relentlessly committed to moral and material progress."[44] In contemporary New Orleans, the patina aesthetic of faded buildings and tarnished souvenirs perpetuates the impression of "the city that care forgot" while simultaneously providing the grounds for selling nostalgia in the form of French antiques, Mardi Gras memorabilia, and other uncanny commodities.

The contested figure of the Creole runs throughout diverse and sometimes competing sets of claims to New Orleans exceptionalism, and definitions of Creole identity have shifted across the colonial, antebellum, and postbellum eras.[45] After the Civil War, for instance, Gayarré and his cohort of European descendants attempted to define a white vision of Creole, declaring, "It has become high time to demonstrate that the Creoles of Louisiana . . . have not, because of the name they bear, a particle of African blood in their veins."[46]

But it was an oppositional stance to the racial purity of the Creole category, popularized by Cable, Rodolphe Desdunes, and others, that came to define New Orleans as a city of intermixture—of jazz and gumbo, of plaçage and quadroon balls—still evoked by many tour guides and historians.[47] At the close of the nineteenth century, Homer Plessy, the son of mixed-race French-speaking Haitian émigrés, was arrested for boarding a whites-only train car, and New Orleans became the nation's testing ground for the Supreme Court decision legalizing racial segregation based on the so-called one-drop rule.[48] *Plessy v. Ferguson* has become foundational for claims to the city's Creole distinctiveness. What is less discussed is how New Orleans was the battleground for remapping national racial structures into hardened categories of blackness and whiteness, and how the city itself came to adhere to those norms.

Under Jim Crow, many Creoles of color sought to retain a circumscribed cultural identity, but legally and practically their status was bound to that of African Americans. On the other side of the color line, white Catholic Creoles came to recognize common interests with Anglo-Protestants as a way of consolidating and expanding power.[49] The cultural conflict that spawned so much disagreement over the nature of Creole distinctiveness looks in practice like a papering over of an obligatory consensus about the implementation of racial, class, and political orderings.[50] Despite their antinomies, white Creole and Anglo elites colluded in their essential agreement on white supremacy and maintaining control of the expansive role New Orleans had built as the merchant city for the cotton South.

Authenticating Mardi Gras

A particularly visible example of these shared directives is the reorganization of Mardi Gras by Protestant, English-speaking white males who rose to power over French-speaking Creoles and founded what became known as the old-line Mardi Gras krewes of Comus, Momus, Rex, and Proteus around the time of the Civil War.[51] Wrapping Latin Catholic tradition in an ancestral canon of English literature and often scathing political satire, this constellation of elites would reinforce hierarchies of race, ethnicity, class, religion, and gender for over a century. It was these men who formed the central bloc that would dedicate the next decade to defeating Reconstruction via legal and political challenges and violent treason. In 1866 they were a central part of the attack on hundreds of black (and more than a few white) supporters of the Republican-backed Louisiana Constitutional Convention,

killing more than fifty and injuring hundreds.[52] The Redeemers would go on to provide the penultimate salvo to defeating Reconstruction in Louisiana in their attempted overthrow of the state government and municipal police at the Battle of Liberty Place in 1874. Throughout the imposition of Jim Crow over the ensuing two and a half decades—culminating in the disenfranchising Constitution of 1898 and continuing well after—this ruling class would help enshrine Lost Cause myths in the city's cultural consciousness.[53] New Orleans was not alone in this effort, as throughout the South there emerged a conscious project of tethering a reimagined and romanticized white identity to the paramilitary arms of the southern Democracy, such as the Ku Klux Klan and the Knights of the White Camellia. Beyond what was clearly a cross-fertilization of membership, the direct link between white terror organizations and the old-line krewes is traceable in their regalia (robes, hoods, and masks) and the inordinately ritualistic and secretive practices of their meetings, processionals, and balls.[54]

For more than six decades between Redemption and the legislative victories of the civil rights movement in the 1950s, white elites continued their dominance over political and social interests. This period witnessed a brutal segregation calcifying as common practice within the city. Events like the citywide antiblack race riots in the aftermath of Robert Charles's shooting of police officers in 1900 demonstrate that New Orleans was utterly typical of the profound violence that greeted African Americans across the South as Jim Crow came to power.[55] A history of interracial labor radicalism—including the 1907 General Levee Strike and the 1929 Streetcar Strike—stand as remarkable moments within an otherwise unbroken history of disenfranchisement and segregation that exacted a brutal toll on black New Orleanians.[56] While the size of the city and its independent black economic base allowed a certain degree of daily anonymity and removal from the harshest of Jim Crow violence found in rural areas, the difference was always one of degree on a spectrum of lived and feared brutality. The political ring that ran the city for much of these decades—the Regular Democratic Organization, or Old Regulars—combined a violent enforcement of white supremacy with the patronage of an open shop system that directed public spending toward private gain. Of course, once a year many Old Regulars removed their suits and ties and donned the costumes of Comus and Rex, suggesting that cultural transgression could easily be the flip side of the coin of white supremacy and antidemocratic rule.

As a festival celebration of transgression, Mardi Gras came to represent the pinnacle of exceptionality and cultural authenticity of New Orleans.

Today the King of Rex continues his symbolic reign as honorary mayor for a day, ostensibly sharing rule with the King of Zulu since the post–civil rights era of interracial governance (see chapters 4 and 14, this volume). However, despite its place as a central locus where exceptionalism and authenticity come together, the construction of New Orleans's signature festival as authentic and the meaning of that authenticity are moving targets. As Kevin Fox Gotham argues, "In the case of New Orleans, authenticity has always been a fluid and hybrid category that is constantly being created again and again as social movements, cultural authorities, and other groups struggle to legitimate selective and idealized perceptions of the city as fixed and immutable."[57] Later, in the 1960s, ethnic whites excluded from the old-line krewes would form their own "super krewes" such as Bacchus and Endymion, demonstrating how "a cultural form that was initially viewed as inauthentic by some segments of the local population has, over time, become redefined and recognized as an authentic expression of Carnival."[58] Embedded in this authentic tradition of transgression, then, are stratified layers of struggle over power that have sedimented over time. What began as an affinity between Catholic Lenten rituals and African-derived festival traditions was reappropriated as a display of Anglo-Protestant supremacy after the Civil War. A century later, official Mardi Gras opened up to include krewes founded by those excluded from the then-traditional power bloc, and by the 1990s several old-line krewes stopped parading rather than comply with an antidiscrimination ordinance.[59] While the authenticity of the tradition rests upon its perceived timelessness as a premodern bacchanalia, the ongoing and dynamic reinvention of Mardi Gras serves as a prism for changing social identities and political machinations over several centuries.

In the same period of heightened segregation between Reconstruction and *Brown v. Board of Education*, black New Orleanians fostered their own carnival societies, parades, and cultural traditions. Middle- and upper-class Creoles and African Americans who led the ongoing legal struggle against Jim Crow formed the Prince Hall Masons (1863), Original Illinois Club (1894), and the Zulu Social Aid and Pleasure Club (1916), which still parades before Rex on Mardi Gras day. Working-class African Americans formed "tribes" of Mardi Gras Indians, marching through back-a-town neighborhoods dressed in elaborate hand-sewn suits and confronting one another in symbolic combat. Clyde Woods connects social institutions and neighborhood networks such as these to a racial politics of resistance:

The neighborhood and ward complex of large extended families, social aid and pleasure clubs, churches, healers, businesses, schools, other organizations and clubs, brass bands, musicians, artisans, workers, labor leaders, Mardi Gras Indians and second lines provided an endless supply of community-centered leadership, development initiatives, and institutionalized planning.[60]

Jazz came to be recognized as the most celebrated cultural formation to emerge from these multifaceted and complex interactions, ultimately redefining what constituted the locally authentic in explicitly racial terms. But the development of jazz also demonstrates how musical formation and innovation were linked to other constituencies and practices in these complex spaces, indicating the expansiveness of black cultural practice and the multiplicity of blackness as a category that resisted containment within the reductive strictures of racial binarism established by *Plessy v. Ferguson*.

Jazz and the Racialization of Cultural Authenticity

In the antebellum period, the city's musical identity was defined by the sheer abundance of musical offerings, representing the ethnic heterogeneity of its inhabitants, including ballroom dance and French opera, marching bands and slave dances, street criers and organ grinders.[61] Since the early twentieth century, there has developed a broad consensus that New Orleans music encompasses jazz, blues, rhythm and blues, soul, funk, brass band, and related styles that are bound together through an association not only with place but also with race. Since emancipation, changing interpretations of New Orleans culture have been linked to differing identifications with blackness, which might refer to slaves at Congo Square, mixed-race Creoles, urban migrants from rural plantations, and other social identities that bear out the claim that New Orleans is "the most African city in the Unites States."[62]

In Melville Herskovits's paradigmatic model of acculturation, which identified African cultural retentions and calculated their variability across the New World, the United States was proposed as the nation with the highest rate of assimilation to Euro-American norms. But New Orleans was an exception where "those aspects of the African tradition peculiar to this specialized region have reached their greatest development."[63] Starting in the 1930s, folklorists such as Zora Neale Hurston and Alan Lomax came to New Orleans in search of African residues that they and others found in funerals with music, voodoo and hoodoo rites, Mardi Gras Indian rituals, and more.[64] An urban counterpart to the rural sea islands of Georgia and South

Carolina, New Orleans became a primary site for locating musical and religious practices derived from an African past. But those traditions incubated in the urban contact zone of New Orleans developed into distinct formations of modern blackness and Americanness that circulated globally. When rhythm and blues singer Ernie K-Doe famously quipped, "I'm not sure, but I think all music comes from New Orleans," he captured the status of his hometown as a source of cultural origination and innovation while also reinforcing the implicit bond between New Orleans as a musical city and New Orleans as a black city.

In relation to jazz, this linkage forged an either/or dialectic in which many historians and musicians have cast the music strictly in terms of black vernacular practices, maintained from the African-derived dances of the enslaved in Congo Square up through the musical forms of Afro-Protestant worship and blues aesthetics that served as a refuge in the afterlife of slavery. Revisionists attempting to respond that jazz was the invention of white musicians have largely and rightfully been dismissed as both virulently racist and woefully inaccurate. A more complexly entwined local history has been excavated by Bruce Raeburn and other scholars identifying an "incipient jazz community" of black American, Creole, Jewish, Sicilian, and Irish performers interacting, if not always collaborating, in the formation of jazz.[65] Without questioning the primacy of black musical practices, Raeburn underscores the city's heterogeneity and cosmopolitanism by tracing, for instance, Latin rhythms and Creole repertoires incorporated into jazz as a black art form. In this formulation, the ingenuity of jazz is in its capaciousness, which contests the Jim Crow and broader American imperative of defining race as the principal arbiter of social difference. Nevertheless, in the bulk of scholarly discourse and popular accounts, New Orleans jazz continues to be invoked in terms of vernacularism, traditionality, and cultural memory in ways that do not interrogate the ingenuity of black invention or accommodate the multiplicity of blackness as both a cultural and political category.[66]

Marketing Exceptionalism and Authenticity in the Tourist City

Starting in the 1930s, city officials and business leaders in New Orleans began to expand upon and exploit the romance generated through music, literature, food, and other cultural forms, now as a tool for the emerging mass tourism market. Earlier efforts, driven by the New Orleans Association of Commerce, had focused on a progressive, business-oriented vision in keeping with the emphasis on port and railway linkages. Transport systems were

central to the association's other major project of creating the city's first master zoning plan and would eventually align with efforts to fund the second stage of the Centroport project in the new Industrial Canal. At this initial stage, tourism offered diversification to an economy based primarily in shipping while marketing the benefits of that economy. The economic collapse of the Great Depression, a gradual retraction of shipping and manufacturing, and postintegration white flight all contributed to a massive disinvestment in the urban core. In the wake, tourism began assuming more and more significance in the city's overall economic infrastructure. This shift in political economy gave rise to the city's branding as a destination for authentic cultural pursuits.[67]

The historical materials for this refashioning were drawn from myriad sources, including the highly subjective historical accounts of Cable, Hearn, Gayarré, and others in the post–Civil War period; popular histories drawn from these accounts, like Herbert Asbury's *The French Quarter*; and folkloric studies by authors employed by the Works Progress Administration, such as Saxon, Dreyer, and Tallant's *Gumbo Ya-Ya*.[68] Lynnell Thomas has shown how popular histories have been shaped by contemporary tourism marketing as promoters' selective mythologizing of the past has reinforced notions of benign racial exceptionalism:

> [An] emphasis on selected features of these eras—such as European cultural influences, the relative freedom of New Orleans's black population, the city's laissez-faire attitudes regarding race, the social sanctioning of interracial unions, and a large population of free blacks—lent itself to the construction of New Orleans as benefitting from the most liberal and refined elements of southern culture while avoiding its most brutal, inhumane, and inegalitarian features. As a result, New Orleans was often portrayed by tourism promoters, artists, and even historians as a racially exceptional city that was not sullied by the racial tension and conflict affecting other southern cities.[69]

Initially, the racial reconfigurations of white supremacy that followed the defeat of Reconstruction were reified in deracinated discourse, but marketing strategies became more explicit about the racialized and creolized dimensions of culture over the second half of the twentieth century. City boosters have focused particularly on what they call the holy trinity—food, music, and architecture—each deriving from an Afro-Creole cultural matrix. Starting midcentury, institutions such as Preservation Hall, the Jazz and Heritage Festival, and the Historic Voodoo Museum began exhibiting black cultural

traditions primarily for white consumption. Inclusion of a jazz band, a gumbo vendor, or a Mardi Gras Indian tribe has become virtually compulsory at local festivals, but their appearance at the 1984 Louisiana World Exposition was considered progressive at the time.[70] The incorporation of the independent Greater New Orleans Black Tourism Network into the official tourism bureau in 1990 indicated a revised strategy to acknowledge "cultural diversity and heritage [as] the city's tourism equity."[71] Here we witness not simply an emerging consensus of New Orleans as the most African city in the United States but a market-driven recognition of place- and race-based culture as a source of both cultural and monetary capital. Rebranding the city as a destination for the consumption of black culture gave New Orleans a competitive advantage over other sites. It also reordered the racial implications of cultural authenticity alongside Atlanta and other Southern cities that positioned themselves to profit from emerging black middle-class tourism.

A Model Postindustrial City

The intensified branding of New Orleans as a destination for touristic consumption paralleled a nationwide shift away from urban industrialism in the second half of the twentieth century. The decline of manufacturing employment and the outmigration of labor to the suburbs occurring throughout the nation was exacerbated locally by a drastic reduction in port employment. Poor choices in structural modernization and delays in implementing technological innovations, particularly the adoption of standardized shipping containers, drastically reduced shipping-related commerce.[72] At the same time, the city witnessed a massive growth in service industry jobs concentrated in nonunion and thus low-waged hotels, restaurants, and entertainment destinations catering to tourists. The erosion of the city's tax base was aggravated by white flight to suburban Jefferson, St. Bernard, and St. Tammany parishes in the wake of the civil rights movement, school desegregation efforts, and real estate development made possible by swamp drainage and flood abatement technology. Middle-class black residents, meanwhile, concentrated in neighborhood enclaves such as New Orleans East and the gated community of Pontchartrain Park (see chapter 9, this volume).

The battles fought in and around New Orleans at the height of the civil rights era—the anti-integration riots of 1960 and ongoing fights against Leander Perez's white supremacist political fiefdom in Plaquemines and St. Bernard parishes being the most famous among countless more quotidian struggles—stand as important and decidedly unexceptional parts of a broader

Southern whole.[73] By the late 1960s and early 1970s, with the elections of Moon Landrieu and then Dutch Morial as mayor, New Orleans joined many other cities in developing an interracial political and professional-managerial class. It was this incorporation of the liberal imperatives of the Civil Rights Act within the city's Democratic machine that both marked the end of de jure segregation and legitimated the progrowth, anti-redistributive political economic imperatives that continue to characterize municipal governance.[74]

Starting in the middle of the 1970s, New Orleans took advantage of Community Development Block Grants and Urban Development Action Grants available for the redevelopment of low-income neighborhoods. As in many other American cities, leaders used the funds primarily to develop downtown economic and entertainment districts and leverage private-sector investment.[75] As Megan French-Marcelin argues in this volume (chapter 11), the imperatives of urban competition, white flight, and inner-city blight led city leaders—black and white alike—to privatize city planning and cater to the whims of developers for the purpose of luring a tax base back to the city. Ironically, in a New Orleans where architectural distinction was a key facet of the tourism economy, this strategy replicated the modernism and aesthetic blandness of revitalization schemes common to many American cities during the period, most visibly with the Poydras Street high-rises in the Central Business District (CBD). By the last decades of the twentieth century, New Orleans was exemplary of the postindustrial neoliberal city in terms of urban planning, suburbanization, economic restructuring, housing privatization, and racialized poverty and blight.

Exceptionalism and Authenticity in Contemporary New Orleans

The upwardly redistributive, federally bankrolled policies and programs begun in the 1970s were a harbinger for a feeding frenzy of privatization and investment opportunity in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, with many of the same actors simply dusting off plans that had been shelved in the Reagan and Clinton eras. In an opportunistic acceleration of the HOPE VI program of poverty deconcentration, marginally damaged public housing was demolished, and the contracts for rebuilding, maintenance, and management were given to developers such as McCormack Baron Salazar, bankrolled by the investment firm Goldman Sachs.[76] These trends were most brazenly illustrated by President George W. Bush's suspension of the Davis-Bacon Act in September 2005 that all but guaranteed that rebuilding would be done

at below living wages. As Vincanne Adams discusses in this volume (chapter 13), the rebuilding of private housing was assisted not by a WPA-style program but by thousands of volunteers, many of whom were part of a charitable economy driven by for-profit philanthropic companies. The scope of philanthrocapitalism deployed in the rebuilding efforts represented the success of George H. W. Bush's initial plan for "a thousand points of light" as a privatized alternative to a social state increasingly imagined by both left and right as inefficient and backward.[77]

Since 2005, New Orleans has more than ever revealed itself not as a cultural oddity at the periphery of the nation-state but as a prime laboratory for centralized neoliberal experimentation. For a comparative example, anyone relating Katrina to September 11, as sociologists Kevin Gotham and Miriam Greenberg have, must begin by acknowledging vast differences "in the type of disaster trigger (i.e., a terrorist strike and hurricane) and the intensity of the scale of destruction." Yet these distinctions of causality mask the reality that "policymakers and government officials responded with strikingly similar, market-oriented strategies of recovery and redevelopment," even if the effects of 9/11 on the quotidian lives of everyday New Yorkers looked nothing like the corresponding effects of Katrina on New Orleanians.[78] New York City and New Orleans resist comparison in many other ways, yet they are both paradigmatic as crisis cities, in which an event outside the business cycle prompts a recovery process that is squarely within it. If, as contributor Adolph Reed Jr. has argued (chapter 14), neoliberalism represents nothing more than capitalism freed from effective opposition, then post-Katrina New Orleans represents a national and global vanguard of social abandonment and insecurity.

Approaching contemporary New Orleans as a model neoliberal city in terms of housing, specifically the global crisis of urban real estate speculation and rent intensification, we find the historical residues of exceptionalism and authenticity at play in complex ways. The Tremé neighborhood, or the Sixth Ward, stands here as a representative example. The parts of the neighborhood between Claiborne Avenue and the French Quarter witnessed rent intensification and speculation dating back to the 1970s, following suburbanization, blight remediation, and displacement and redevelopment schemes that drained the area of many residents and resources (see chapter 5, this volume).[79] Touted as the first black neighborhood in the United States, the area became increasingly attractive to preservationists, artists, and other gentrification pioneers drawn by the area's historic housing stock and proximity to

the French Quarter and CBD. When Katrina struck, only select parts of the neighborhood were flooded, but the calamity enabled the destruction and redevelopment of the neighboring Lafitte and Iberville housing projects, while a real estate frenzy for architecturally significant homes accelerated the rebuilding process in the stretch of higher elevation along the Mississippi now dubbed the "sliver by the river."

Tremé has joined Harlem, Chicago's Bronzeville, Pittsburgh's Hill District, and Washington, DC's Shaw neighborhood in what Derek Hyra calls "Black-branding," a process by which "versions of Black identity are expressed and institutionalized in a community's social and built environments" even as the neighborhoods lose black residents to displacement.[80] This hyperlocal branding passes over the disinvestment of the late twentieth century and the historical (or current) presence of low-income residents to stitch mythical golden eras together. In New Orleans, black-branding connects a romanticized rendering of antebellum free people of color to the Jim Crow self-sufficiency of the Claiborne Avenue business district and the most respectable versions of contemporary black culture into a seamless continuum. Tremé in particular exemplifies how the global sweep of urban development schemes can be enhanced by local particularities based in race and culture. By 2012, when the Tremé 200 festival celebrated the neighborhood's bicentennial with music, parades, and food, all but one of the live music venues, bars, and restaurants had been shut down through aggressive ordinances pushed by members of the Historic Faubourg Tremé Association. Tremé's cultural and economic value depends on its continual reinscription as the country's oldest black neighborhood, while it simultaneously finds itself at the cutting edge of real estate speculation and residential displacement that make it ever more wealthy and white and devoid of the spaces that nurtured the city's cultural history.

As with the aftermath of the Civil War, when a romantic literary tradition made the master narrative of exceptionalism and authenticity common sense, the aftermath of Katrina has galvanized New Orleanians into a deeper recognition and drive for preserving culture under the aegis of disappearing authenticity. The broad national and international presence of New Orleans as an icon of cultural distinctiveness—made famous by its increasingly high-profile musicians, the reception of David Simon's television series *Treme*, its celebrity chefs, and the revival of hip forms of Southern gothic centered in and around the city like *True Blood, True Detective*, and *Beasts of the Southern Wild*—only serves to further place New Orleans and south Louisiana in the role of alien and exotic other (see chapter 7, this volume). The exceptional

status of the city, the cultivated patina of its built environment, and the endurance of local cultural traditions has helped attract tens of thousands of new transplants to neighborhoods such as the Tremé, spiking housing costs and sparking an intense (and ironic) debate about the sustainability of New Orleans's exceptionality under the threat of homogenized modernization (see chapter 6, this volume).

The city's development focus has come to include efforts to attract a Richard Florida–style creative class and a desperate hope to retain them. The young urban-rebuilding professionals, social entrepreneurs, high-tech innovators, and others entering this urban laboratory constitute a demographic raised in an age when market-based and high-technocratic solutions to social problems are hegemonic.[81] Mainstream publications, universities like Tulane, and scores of politicians thus revel in a wave of entrepreneurial efforts that have pushed the city onto Forbes lists. Coworking spaces and business incubators have proliferated, most emphasizing a social-entrepreneurship model that offers a heady appeal to the nearly half of local start-up leaders who are alums of one of the nation's dominant education reform organizations, Teach for America.[82] The majority of the post-Katrina creative class has moved into neighborhoods such as the Warehouse District, CBD, and Bywater that are not as steeped as the Tremé in discourses of historical exceptionalism or architectural authenticity. A proliferation of condominium buildings and short-term rental units accommodates a mix of transplants and tourists who may or may not share an investment in the New Orleansness of their surroundings.

Exceptionality still maintains an important allure in the aftermath of the levee failures, especially in a good deal of writing intended for mass audiences.[83] It has become somewhat of a biannual rite of passage for the nation's newspaper of record to send a travel or style reporter or, even better, enlist a recently transplanted New Yorker to parachute into New Orleans and send back exoticized dispatches with titles such as "Love among the Ruins." The formula is straightforward: interview a handful of young artists/musicians/chefs about the city's post-Katrina transformation, add in a couple of eerily lit snapshots of decaying buildings or exotic "creatures" like Mardi Gras Indians, make sure to pay homage to a different pace of life, untrammeled by the trappings of upper-middle-class work prerogatives, and above all convince the reader that New Orleans is unlike anywhere else in America.

While filming the show *Treme* in 2010, David Simon told the *New York Times Magazine*, "Lots of American places used to make things. Detroit used to make cars. Baltimore used to make steel and ships. New Orleans still

makes something. It makes moments."[84] Yet, unlike the relative prosperity of the postwar steel industry in Baltimore, where Simon based his previous series *The Wire* and *Homicide*, a livable wage based on creating moments has largely eluded New Orleanians and others throughout the US. The great and telling exception is New Orleans's perceived plastic evil twin, Las Vegas, where the success of the Culinary Union Local 226 in unionizing hospitality workers has produced at least the skeleton version for what such an economy and politics might look like.[85] There is more than a little irony to the fact that New Orleans—a city that incessantly pays homage to its culture bearers—does decidedly less to ensure their prosperity than a city, also built on moments, that wears mass production, inauthenticity, and a sense that the customer is always right on its sleeve. Yet, in this regard, New Orleans completely typifies a broader American experience (above and beyond Las Vegas) that has for centuries devalued labor that does not produce material commodities. The inequalities caused by this history are especially apparent in postcontainerization, post–oil bust New Orleans, where the economic dislocations are felt primarily by those whose labor is not defined as valuable and who have no institutional mechanism to shift such definitions. This creates a conundrum whereby the primarily black, low-income culture bearers whom the city depends upon to entice tourists and their dollars are potentially priced out and pushed out of the new New Orleans. As with much of what we have presented in this admittedly sweeping and selective history of a single city, we submit that this place with an obsessive dedication to its past is uncannily predictive of the future.

Conclusion

Americanist scholarship has stubbornly clung to the idea that research into its collective endeavor illuminates some essential Americanness, that the corpus of, say, American economic history illuminates a national story and indeed a national identity.[86] In the same way that American historical and literary scholarship has often unconsciously posited an exceptional America, much scholarship and reporting on New Orleans has sought some essential essence, something that defines the city as a whole. In this way, New Orleans has existed as a singular subject unlike any other American city. We would ask if this New Orleans has been continuously reimagined in a discursive feedback loop that constantly reaffirms its exceptionality. An ethnography of brass bands in post-Katrina New Orleans does not have to be a story about

New Orleans as singular entity; it can also be a story about labor exploita-
tion and racism in an urban environment defined by deep contingency and
context. Likewise, a social history of African Americans and working-class
whites in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century New Orleans might
be about circular migration, political economy, interracial sociability, and
real estate development defined by a plethora of local, national, and global
currents rather than anything essentially New Orleans.

Just as New Orleans has been isolated as a singular subject, its cultural for-
mations have frequently been frozen as fixed and timeless. A long tradition
of both scholarly and popular ethnography has produced a vision of New Or-
leans as containing a unique and static culture, a vision deeply informed
by marketing strategies. Because of its position as a locale defined by its ex-
oticism, research on culture bearers within the city has called for various
iterations of classical ethnographic informancy. As Aaron Nyerges details
in this volume (chapter 3), Alan Lomax's 1938 interview of Jelly Roll Mor-
ton stands as one classic example. But the broader anthropological stance
assumes New Orleans is a place with a singular meaning that can only be
parsed by close ethnographic contact with natives (see chapter 6, this vol-
ume). It becomes a place to be either saved from the supposedly encroaching
imperatives of bourgeois values—as in so much cultural and architectural
preservation rhetoric—or, alternately, to be documented before the natives
and their practices go the way of so many premodern cultures before them.
And like classical Western ethnography, such an analytic style is intellectu-
ally predicated upon proving exceptionality and distinctiveness vis-à-vis an
imagined, modern world.

As contemporary commentators as diverse as Betty Friedan, C. Wright
Mills, and David Riesman argued, and more recent scholars ranging from
Doug Rossinow to Daniel Rodgers to David Harvey have shown, middle-
class America has searched for meaningful experience in the face of the
bogeyman of conformity, bureaucracy, and the meaninglessness of mass
culture since the atomic age. T. J. Jackson Lears writes, "Seekers of authen-
ticity often lack any but the vaguest ethical or religious commitments. Their
obsession with 'meaning' masks its absence from any frame of reference
outside the self. . . . What begins in discontent with a vapid modern cul-
ture ends as another quest for self-fulfillment—the dominant ideal of our
sleeker, therapeutic modern culture."[87] New Orleans provides an authentic
playground for this existential crisis of modern culture and thus power-
fully replicates the broader cultural and therapeutic logic of contemporary

capitalism. The irony of so many homages to the city's authentic character is that this very notion of the city as oppositional to the standardization of contemporary life is, in fact, integral to the very success of its place-branding. New Orleans sells moments moored in individualized self-fulfillment and disconnected from any larger political or ethical constituency other than vague references to an indeterminate and singular community.

Moving beyond the dichotomous frameworks of exceptionalism and authenticity requires greater attention to the multiple temporalities of social life. As an example, how might we understand the resurgence of a self-conscious New Orleans culture after Katrina? There is the long history of invented tradition and imagined community that looks remarkably similar across space and time, especially when said imagined community is perceived as under threat. There is the meaning that New Orleanians invest in their practices and the range of cultural expressions legitimized as authentic, shaped by and increasingly in concert with the prerogatives of touristic culture (see chapter 14, this volume). There is the growing economic value in cultural distinction, not simply in regard to tourism but real estate and style, an outgrowth of the broad trend toward niche commodity production in postwar mass culture. New Orleans, as countless travelogues of the post-Katrina era make clear, represents the forefront of such distinction. That these distinctions are indicative of New Orleans does not mean they are entirely unique to New Orleans, rooted in a singular locale, or unchanging over time. Further, an analytic lens that dynamically accounts for difference is not the same as one that statically identifies exceptionality.

At a basic level, all places and cultural formations are different: they are produced by a series of contingent events and processes that occur over changing temporalities and in diverse contexts. While we can recognize that Omaha, Newark, Cleveland, Oakland, and New Orleans are all different from each other, with distinctive histories and internal cultural formations, to single New Orleans out as exceptional implies an essential similarity between the other four. Generations of scholars located in and around the city have made this precise move, either consciously or unconsciously. In so doing, a variety of other histories have become marginalized, not the least of which being the political, economic, and social processes, powers, and inequalities that exceptionality, along with its intellectual handmaiden, authenticity, have masked. The essays that follow are united in their attempt to break out of the intellectual confines of these dichotomies. They posit a city not of cultural essences and singular histories but of diverse peoples,

meanings, and practices that are always contingent, rife with conflict, and grounded in social, political, and historical contexts of multiple temporal and geographic scales.

Notes

1 Tyrrell 1991, 1031.
2 Shafer 2005.
3 Mitch Landrieu to House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, US House of Representatives, October 18, 2005, http://www.columbia.edu/itc/journalism/cases /katrina/State%20of%20Louisiana/Office%20of%20the%20Lieutenant%20Governor /Landrieu%20Congressional%20Address%20Accountability%2010-18-2005.pdf.
4 Quoted in Campanella 2014, 138.
5 Davis 1992; Rothman 2002; J. Jackson 2001.
6 Weinstein 1996.
7 Andres Duany, quoted in Curtis 2009.
8 Bendix 1997, 8.
9 Trilling 1972, 124. See also Michaels 1998.
10 The "southern Babylon" reference is in Long 2004.
11 Roach 1996, 180.
12 Grazian 2003. On "Disneyfication," see Souther 2006.
13 Lears 1981; Halttunen 1982; Lasch 1978.
14 Gilmore and Pine 2007, 5.
15 Banet-Weiser 2012.
16 Dawdy 2016, 52.
17 Comaroff and Comaroff 2009, 2, emphasis in original.
18 On rogue colonialism, see Dawdy 2008 and Powell 2012. On racialization and sexuality, see Spear 2009.
19 Dawdy 2008, xv.
20 Hall 1992a; Powell 2012; Usner 1992.
21 Thompson 2008, 306.
22 Dawdy 2008.
23 Spear 2009, 56.
24 Census of the City of New Orleans, exclusive of seamen and the garrison, American State Papers: Miscellaneous 10:364, appears with the notation: "N.B. This census appears to be incorrect, as, by some unaccountable mistake the number of free people of color in the second district is not included; and, on the whole, the population is thought to be underrated." It is worth noting that the slave population enumeration for the second district is considerably higher than for surrounding districts.
25 Vidal 2014.
26 Clark 2013, 130.
27 The deep reliance on slave labor for nation building and capital expansion rendered New Orleans a slave society, distinct in Ira Berlin's categorical terminology from a society with slaves such as Baltimore or St. Louis. Berlin's taxonomy of slave societies and

societies with slaves allows New Orleans to be distinguished from both Baltimore and St. Louis in this regard. Nonetheless, despite the importance of slavery to the surrounding plantation economies and its centrality to the internal slave trade itself, while more important than in either of the aforementioned cities, slave labor was nonetheless an ancillary part of the internal urban economy within New Orleans. Indeed, New Orleans's exceptional character has thus seemingly foreclosed possibly fruitful urban historical comparisons between the three cities of roughly equal antebellum size.

28   Laussat (1831) 1978, 103.

29   Spear 2003, 76.

30   Clark 2013.

31   James 1996, 142.

32   Roach 1996, 252.

33   On racial legal regimes, see Gross and de la Fuente 2013. On Congo Square, see Evans 2011. On the slave uprising of 1811, see Rasmussen 2011. On Bras-Coupé, see Wagner 2009, 79–115.

34   W. Johnson 1999, 18.

35   Spear 2009, 219.

36   W. Johnson 1999; A. Rothman 2005; Marler 2013.

37   Nystrom 2010, 7.

38   Quoted in Stanonis 2006, 5.

39   See Dawdy 2016, e.g., 51.

40   Clark 2013, 149.

41   Fertel 2014. On exoticizing African-derived cultural practices, see Wagner 2009; Sakakeeny 2011b.

42   Hearn 2001, 147.

43   On literary tropes of exceptionalism, see Eckstein 2005; Lightweis-Goff 2014.

44   Dawdy 2016, 56.

45   On the history of "Creole" as a racial designation in Louisiana, see Tregle 1992. On the assimilation of Creoles, see Hirsch 2007.

46   Charles Gayarré, "Mr. Cable's Freedmen's Case in Equity," *New Orleans Times-Democrat*, January 11, 1885, 3. See Fertel 2014.

47   Yet in Ronald Walters's (1973) classic understanding of the Northern ideology of Southern eroticism, New Orleans was but one part of a long tradition of Southern exoticization that served to legitimate Northern free-labor ideology. Richard Campanella (2008, 161–67) argues that New Orleans was the only city in the US to produce its own ethnicity, Creole. Yet if we widen our gaze to south Texas (Tejano), the broader Southwest (Chicano), individual states like Hawaii and California (Hapa) as well as perhaps even other individual cities like New York (Nuyorican) and Miami (Miami Cuban), New Orleans and south Louisiana look decidedly unexceptional in regard to the production of ethnicity. John Blassingame's social history of black New Orleans life in the two decades following the victory of the US Army in New Orleans, despite being to this day the most sophisticated such history, also suffers from this romanticization of a variety of practices associated with this image of New Orleans. Ironically, his conclusions, as befits the generation of 1970s urban social historians of which he was a part, largely demonstrates New Orleans as exemplary of other urban patterns (Blassingame 1973).

48 Domínguez 1986.

49 Arnold Hirsch (2007) suggests that group identity of Creoles of color dissolved gradually from abolition until the post–civil rights period.

50 Powell 2012; Roumillat 2013.

51 Gill 1997.

52 Hollandsworth 2001; Reynolds 1964.

53 Powell 1999.

54 Parsons 2005. On the flip side of this white supremacist history, the regalia and organization of the city's black high school marching bands, prevalent in the contemporary era in nearly every traditional carnival krewe, evoke the Reconstruction-era marching companies that Julie Saville has argued "attemp[ed] to form disciplined solidarity across plantation boundaries." Indeed, for the historically attuned onlooker, watching the St. Augustine High School Marching Band lead off the Rex parade on Mardi Gras day can appear as a contemporary pageant of Reconstruction-era paramilitary conflict (see Saville 1996).

55 On Robert Charles and the riots, see Hair 1976.

56 On the general levee strike, see Arnesen 1994. On the street car strike, see Mizell-Nelson 2009.

57 Gotham 2007a, 205.

58 Gotham 2007a.

59 Gill 1997.

60 Woods 2017, 91.

61 Kmen 1966.

62 Hall 1992b, 59.

63 Herskovits 1941, 245.

64 Hurston 1931; Lomax 1950.

65 On the "incipient jazz community," see Raeburn 2009a.

66 On black vernacular music in New Orleans, see Floyd 1991 and Brothers 2006. For a revisionist claim of the white invention of jazz, see Brunn 1960.

67 Stanonis 2006.

68 Asbury 1936; Saxon, Dreyer, and Tallant 1945.

69 Thomas 2014, 7.

70 Gotham 2010.

71 Quoted in Thomas 2014, 45.

72 See Mah 2014.

73 Fairclough 1995.

74 For a sustained interrogation of the politics of race and redistribution during the Great Society era and its aftermath, see Germany 2007.

75 Brooks and Young 1991; French-Marcelin 2015; chapter 9, this volume.

76 T. Adams 2014.

77 V. Adams 2013; chapter 12, this volume.

78 Gotham and Greenberg 2014, x.

79 Crutcher 2010.

80 Hyra 2017, 75.

81 Campanella 2013.

82 Hendrix 2015.

83 See Duany 2009; Watts and Porter 2013; Solnit and Snedeker 2013; Cowen and Seifter 2014.

84 Mason 2010.

85 H. Rothman 2002. See also Orleck 2005.

86 See Tyrrell 1991.

87 Lears 1981, 306.