

Chapter 5

Leisure, Recreation, and the Arts: High and Popular Culture in Louisiana

William Darby, an observer of New Orleans life in the early nineteenth century, captured the ambiance of the city in one sentence: "There are few places where human life can be enjoyed with more pleasure, or employed to more pecuniary profit." Although most Louisianians—whites, African Americans, and Native Americans—worked year-round to feed and clothe themselves, they also made time to enjoy each other's company in more pleasant settings. They strolled along levee promenades and waltzed across ballroom floors. Residents and visitors of all nationalities also met at taverns and gaming tables, playing such illegal games of chance as "twenty-one" and canasta. Consequently, most of them spent time in jail with one another, too. With few exceptions, persons of all colors and classes worked and played together, by choice and necessity.

Leisure activities fostered cultural exchange. In the frontier surroundings of colonial Louisiana, Native Americans, free and enslaved African Americans, and whites commonly mingled in streets, markets, taverns, dancehalls, churches, and private homes, particularly in urban areas. There they exchanged dance steps, musical forms, language patterns, religious practices, and even social values. Persons of various races, classes, and legal statuses engaged in social—and what their society deemed antisocial—activities together, even though officials made sure that each person was aware of his or her place in that society. All contributed to Louisiana's diverse population and culture to create what remains even today a unique milieu.

Colonial Louisianians' love for music, dance, and performance continued and even flourished in the antebellum period. Newcomers and travelers to the state traced this emphasis on amusement to the Latin nature of south Louisiana, New Orleans in particular.

Long held by France and Spain, Louisiana practiced what is known as the "Continental Sunday." Like Europeans, most Catholic residents attended Mass on Sunday morning and socialized in the afternoon and evening. This recreational Sunday shocked Protestants and visitors from the North, especially New England. On one Sunday in 1821 the naturalist and painter John James Audubon observed: "The Levee [at New Orleans] early was Crowded by people of all Sorts as well as Colors, the Market, very abundant[,] the Church Bell ringing [and] the Billiard Balls Knocking, the Guns heard all around. What a Display this is for a Steady Quaker of Philad[elphi]a or Cincinnati." Another scandalized New Englander remarked of New Orleanians, "They keep Sunday as we in Boston keep the Fourth of July." In the mid-1830s Henry Didimus described New Orleans's Sunday habits to a northern friend: "It is the Sabbath! A Sabbath in New

Orleans! here the noisiest day of the week—so full of strange contrasts . . . of the grave and gay, saints and sinners, each engaged in his vocation. . . . It is not the Sabbath of New England.”

For many Louisianians—rich and poor, black and white—social diversions remained the same before, during, and after the Civil War. Resistant to change, social leaders made northern officials and businessmen conform to Louisiana customs. When in 1874 the reform legislature enacted a Sunday-closing law that affected saloons, theaters, and gambling houses, the attorney general ruled the law illegal and refused to enforce it. Political turmoil, economic downturns, and drastic changes for blacks, at least on paper, altered social life during Reconstruction, but for most whites, life went on very much as it had before the war.

Theater and Opera

Colonial Louisianians patronized the one theater that opened in New Orleans in 1792. During the Spanish period proceeds from the lottery and licensing fees for public dancehalls financed upkeep of this playhouse, called *El Coliseo* (the Coliseum). Listed in the census returns for the 1790s were comedians, musicians, and actors who performed until 1803, when city officials razed the dilapidated building that housed the theater. By the next year, however, a white Saint-Domingue refugee had remodeled and reopened the popular venue, which was segregated by color: whites sat on the lower floor and nonwhites in the balcony. As was true of most forms of entertainment, "the fullest and most brilliant audience is always collected together on a *Sunday* evening," noted traveler Christian Schultz in 1808.

Entertainment issues sometimes became the center of political struggles. In 1802 members of the cabildo confronted Governor Manuel de Salcedo with demands for a larger, more centrally located box in the *Casa de Comedias*, or theater. As the city had grown in population and economic power, the cabildo had also expanded from six to twelve members and pressed for greater autonomy and influence in colonial politics. The theater question irritated the governor, the highest crown official in Louisiana, who told cabildo members to ignore such trivial matters. Increasingly sensitive to any slights to its institutional dignity or prerogatives, the cabildo pointed to the Havana cabildo's spacious box in its playhouse. Salcedo responded by suspending and arresting four cabildo members. The theater's owners ordered it torn down the next year, thereby ending the controversy, if not the animosities it occasioned.

One of antebellum America's great theater towns, New Orleans was also the earliest, and for many years the only, city on the American frontier to boast regular opera productions. By 1840 no fewer than five theaters graced the Crescent City. Throughout the antebellum period, residents and visitors to New Orleans could attend plays in either French, English, or German.

The playhouse reconstructed in 1804 was renamed the St. Peter Street Theater. Workers completed the St. Philip Street Theater in 1807, with a seating capacity of 700. Productions at both the St. Peter and St. Philip theaters were in French. The first American theater opened in 1823 on Camp Street. In 1839 German immigrants built a theater on Magazine Street in New Orleans to offer German plays. The *Théâtre de la Renaissance*, which opened in New Orleans on 19 January 1840, had an all-black cast, orchestra, and musical director. With a clientele primarily made up of creoles, the Orleans Theater had adjoining ball- and supper-rooms, which conveniently brought together several recreational pursuits in one location. A frequent performer at the Orleans Theater was Eugène V. Macarty, an African-American born free in New Orleans and trained in France.

Louisiana native Adah Isaacs Menken earned acclaim as an actress on both sides of the Atlantic. A child prodigy who spoke several languages, wrote poetry, and sculpted, Menken made her acting debut in Shreveport in 1857 at the age of twenty-two. She performed in most major United States cities, London, and Paris. During her short lifetime of thirty-three years, Menken's four marriages and divorces gained her about as much notoriety as her acting.

The French Opera House opened in 1859 on the corner of Bourbon and Toulouse Streets in New Orleans, with seating for 2,078 guests. Laborers and craftsmen constructed it in less than six months by working night and day. City authorities gave builder Etienne Villavaso permission to burn large fires in the streets to provide light for workers. Following its opening on 1 December 1859, the *New Orleans Daily Picayune* reported: "Of course, the opening of the New French Opera House was the event of the evening, and it was not a surprise to any one, we imagine to find it as full as it could hold, from the first row parquet to the very ceiling."

Popular during antebellum times, opera and theater continued to attract audiences during occupation and Reconstruction. In addition, traveling theatrical groups followed the rural-town circuit and occasionally played in New Orleans and Baton Rouge. Although considered "places of public character" according to Article 13 of the 1868 constitution, which forbade racial discrimination, operas and theaters ignored the law and retained racially segregated seating patterns. Only the severe Depression of 1873 closed the opera, as Edward King reported:

Perhaps one of the most patent proofs of the poverty now so bitterly felt among the hitherto well-to-do families in New Orleans was apparent in the suspension of the opera in the winter of 1873. . . . Opera entailed too heavy an expense, when the people who usually supported it were prostrate under the hands of plunderers, and a comedy company from the Paris theatres took its place upon the lyric stage.

Dancing

Dancing was by far the most popular form of cultural play, a sport in which Native Americans, Europeans, creoles, and African Americans alike participated. Eating, drinking, and dancing all combined at private fêtes, where according to Pierre-Louis Berquin-Duvallon, a Saint-Domingue planter and writer who lived in Louisiana from 1799 until 1802, "stupid uproar reigns . . . in the assemblage of the guests who go thither without any order. I can not accustom myself to those great mobs, or to the old custom of the men . . . of getting more than on edge with wine." He observed that such fêtes enlivened the slow, dull, inactive winter months in urban and rural areas and that all sorts of persons participated: "They have an extreme passion for dancing and would pass all their days and nights at it. . . . During the winter that passion is at its height. Then, they dance everywhere, if not with much grace, at least with great ardor; and the fiddlers are then always kept busy."

Dancing usually preceded, accompanied, or followed Native American tribal sporting events, feasts, and religious ceremonies. French soldier Jean-Bernard Bossu emphasized the "great physical activity" of Louisiana Indians that he observed in the 1750s. Their penchant for "dancing, ball-playing, hunting, fishing, and fighting, overheats them so that they perspire and thus eliminate body waste," a practice Bossu admired. With music in the background, Native Americans performed as groups, pairs, and individuals. Choctaw ball players danced in teams to the beat of drums. Their songs enlivened *toli* (*raquette*), chunky, and other stickball games and resembled the fight songs of today's college teams. Like Africans, Louisiana Indians patterned their songs in the call-response form.

Within the city and on plantations outside New Orleans slaves met on Sundays or after hours on work days to join in African and Caribbean dances. They also danced and sang during parades, religious processions, funerals, feast days, and almost any other social celebration. Slave gatherings at Congo Square, then called *Place des Nègres*, were an outgrowth of marketing activities conducted first by Native Americans and then by African Americans on this site. In addition to playing raquette and other games there, Africans congregated on the commons behind the city to participate in music and dance forms that combined elements of African, Indian, and European cultures, an "Afro-American meld" unique to New Orleans.

Such assemblages in New Orleans and on nearby plantations were so widespread as to incite official concern. Promulgated in Louisiana in 1724, the French *code noir* forbade large gatherings of slaves, especially those that attracted slaves from several plantations. Indicating an inability to enforce these provisions, Governor Miró in 1786 prohibited slave gatherings unless the master gave permission; no slaves from other plantations could attend without written permission from their masters. Miró also curtailed until after vespers in New Orleans "*los tangos, o bailes de Negros*" [slaves dances] that ordinarily convoked in the *Plaza de Armas* on fiesta days. In part, Miró responded to a pastoral letter in which the bishop denounced slave dancing in the *Place Congo*.

Throughout the colonial period Louisianians cavorted at private parties and down city streets, but toward the end of the Spanish period they began to patronize public, for-profit dancehalls where licensed operators offered gaming, drinking, and dancing in one location. In fact, these ballrooms gained such popularity that in 1800 the attorney general asked the cabildo to reduce the number of public dancehalls and subject those remaining to strict regulation. He expressed concern over growing incidents of disorderly conduct. Competition for patrons also increased. One lessee of a public dancehall for white persons, don Francisco Larosa, requested that the governor order all dances—whether they were sponsored by Larosa or not—be held in his hall.

Free blacks in New Orleans organized balls that attracted all sorts of persons and increased in size and frequency as the number of free blacks in the city rose. The dances allowed free persons of African descent to vent emotions and stress, provided them with opportunities to plan events over which they had primary control and responsibility, and encouraged a sense of camaraderie and group identity. Free blacks valued these public dances and continually petitioned the cabildo for permission to hold them on a weekly basis. Just as regularly, the attorney general, claiming to act in the public interest, requested that the governor and cabildo prohibit the dances. He usually did not succeed.

Two free black militia units presented one of these petitions in 1800. The men had just returned from an exhaustive victorious expedition against William Bowles at Fort San Marcos de Apalache in West Florida, and their spokesmen requested weekly dances at don Bernardo Coquet's house as a reward. To avoid interference with the white dances that took place on Sundays, free persons of color offered to hold their dance on Saturdays, from November through the end of the carnival season. Well aware that while they were away at Apalache some unsavory characters had soiled the reputation of the free black balls, the petitioners asked that city police forces patrol Coquet's house on Saturday nights to prevent disturbances. (Previous mischievous behavior included provoking arguments; chewing and spitting out vanilla beans, which produced an intolerable odor; placing chewing tobacco on women's seats to stain their skirts; and "finally, doing and inventing as many evil things as can be imagined.") The petitioners promised to reward the sergeant in charge for maintaining discipline. In closing, the petitioners noted that throughout the kingdoms of the Americas as well as of Europe, the carnival season permitted these types of diversions. The cabildo granted their request and renewed it again the following year, despite the attorney general's strong protest.

Although local authorities preferred separate dances for whites, free blacks, and slaves, residents of New Orleans often amused themselves in mixed company. Free persons of color provided the music at many white gatherings. Masked slaves and free blacks occasionally disrupted carnival balls, their identities hidden behind ingenious disguises. Officials complained that slaves attended free black balls without their owners' permission. Future mayor of New Orleans James Pitot was especially critical: "A public ball, where those who have a bit of discretion prefer not to appear, organized by the free people of color, is each week the gathering place for the scum of such people and of those slaves who, eluding their owner's surveillance, go there to bring their plunder."

Although persons of different colors and classes continued to meet on the dance floor, the general trend was toward separation of the races, particularly among females. White proprietors usually maintained separate ballrooms or at least held dances on different nights for white and nonwhite patrons. Division of services began in the late Spanish period and intensified under United States rule as territorial and state leaders tried to mold Louisiana race relations to fit those of other southern slave states. One visitor to the young territory of Orleans, Thomas Ashe, remarked:

The women, who in point of manners and character have a very marked superiority over the men, are divided into two ranks—the white and the brown. They have two separate ballrooms in the city. At the white ballroom no lady of colour is admitted.

. . . Notwithstanding the beauty and wealth of these women [of color], they are not admitted, as I before remarked, to the white assemblies. They have therefore a ball room of their own, which is well attended, and where as beautiful persons and as graceful dancing is witnessed, as in any other assemblies of the sort whatever.

White apprehensions of subversive activity among large groups of African slaves and free blacks during and after the Saint-Domingue rebellion frequently forced black dancing into back rooms or to the outskirts of the city. In 1808 traveler Christian Schultz met "twenty different dancing groups of the wretched Africans, collected together [in the rear of New Orleans] to perform their *worship* after the manner of their country."

Such gatherings became even more popular and frequent as the slave population grew during the antebellum period. Rural slaves assembled on neighboring plantations and farms and urban slaves met at market sites and other open areas to dance. Although increasingly more Louisiana slaves were born in the United States than in Africa, they retained African customs and fused them with American ones to create new African-American dance steps, lyrics, music, and instruments.

White observers and sometimes even enslaved persons themselves described slave dances. Solomon Northup, a free black man kidnapped from New York and sold into slavery in the Red River region of Louisiana, wrote about slave dances during the Christmas season:

When the viands have disappeared, and the hungry maws of the children of toil are satisfied, then, next in the order of amusement is the Christmas dance. My business on these gala days always was to play on the violin. The African race is a music-loving one, proverbially; and many there were among my fellow-bondsmen whose organs of tune were strikingly developed, and who could thumb the banjo with dexterity. . . .

. . . Oh, ye pleasure-seeking sons and daughters of idleness, who move with measured step, listless and snail-like, through the slow winding cotillon, if ye wish to look upon the celerity, if not the "poetry of motion"—upon genuine happiness, rampant and unrestrained—go down to Louisiana and see the slaves dancing in the starlight of a Christmas night.

Slaves also often had Sundays off. African Americans from the cities and surrounding countryside gathered at large expanses near the edge of town to exchange goods, news, and dance steps. In or near New Orleans two of the most popular sites were Congo Square and the "Camp," where Bayou St. John met Lake Pontchartrain. In 1819 New England architect Benjamin Henry Latrobe came upon a typical Sunday scene at Congo Square, where five or six hundred persons of African origin or descent gathered for music and dance:

The music consisted of two drums and a stringed instrument. An old man sat astride of a cylindrical drum about a foot in diameter, & beat it with incredible quickness. . . . The other drum was an open staved thing held between the knees. . . . They made an incredible noise. The most curious instrument, however, was a stringed instrument which no doubt was imported from Africa. . . . The body was a calabash. . . .

A man sung [*sic*] an uncouth song to the dancing which I suppose was in some African language, for it was not French, & the women screamed a detestable burthen on one single note. The allowed amusements of Sunday have, it seems, perpetuated here those of Africa among its inhabitants.

Fifteen years later the dances, music, and instruments had changed little, as seen from James R. Creecy's impressions of an 1834 visit to New Orleans:

The lower order of colored people and negroes, bond and free, assemble in great numbers in Congo Square, on every Sunday afternoon in good weather to enjoy themselves in their own peculiar manner. Groups of fifties and hundreds may be seen in different sections of the square, with banjos, tom-toms, violins, jawbones, triangles, and various other instruments from which harsh or dulcet sounds may be extracted; and a variety, indeed, of queer, grotesque, fantastic, strange, and merry dancers are to be seen, to amuse and astonish, interest and excite, the risibles and wonder of "outside barbarians," unskilled in Creole or African manners and customs.

Like most nineteenth-century whites, Latrobe viewed Africans and African Americans and their cultures as inferior to his own.

French citizen P. Forest visited Louisiana in 1831, a few years before Creecy. His description of slave dances at the “Camp” near Lake Pontchartrain reveal continuing African retentions, such as the use of drums to provide a beat and flags to distinguish different groups. Forest also noticed that blacks and Indians socialized together, a practice dating from Louisiana's colonial days.

Slaves, free blacks, and whites also attended more formal dances held in Louisiana's many theaters, public ballrooms, and private homes. Most places of public entertainment segregated their patrons by race. Theaters sold less desirable seats to slaves and free persons of color, confining them to balconies or galleries. As in the later part of the colonial period, ballrooms held dances for whites and free people of color in separate halls or on different nights of the week. P. Forest criticized this customary segregation, calling it a “cruel and barbarous prejudice.”

Most famous of all were the quadroon balls, at which white men met young light-skinned women of color. According to legend, free black mothers placed their daughters with eligible white bachelors (a practice called *plaçage* by the French). These men agreed to provide their *placées* with suitable housing, clothing, and spending money. Even though Louisiana law prohibited marriages between whites and blacks, several of these arrangements resulted in long-term relationships and many children. During her 1827 visit to New Orleans Frances Trollope commented on the effects of *plaçage*:

Of all the prejudices I have ever witnessed, this appears to me the most violent and the most inveterate. Quadroon girls, the acknowledged daughters of wealthy American or Creole fathers . . . are not on any terms admissable into the society of the Creole families of Louisiana. They cannot marry . . . yet such is the powerful effect of their very peculiar grace, beauty, and sweetness of manner, that unfortunately they perpetually become the objects of choice and affection. . . . The unions formed with this unfortunate race are said to be often lasting and happy, as far as any unions can be so to which a certain degree of disgrace is attached.

Patrons of the popular Tivoli, located on Bayou St. John in the early 1800s, found little or no race and class discrimination, as Thomas Ashe related:

Though the places of amusement are separate in the city [New Orleans], for the distinctions in society, still there is an assembly held every Sunday evening at the Bayou, about two miles out of town, where all the beauty of the country concentrates, without any regard to birth, wealth, or colour. The place of entertainment is called Tivoli.

**. . . I went to Tivoli, and danced in a very brilliant assembly of ladies.
The Spanish women excel in the waltz, and the French in cotillions.**

Although many Protestant churches in rural north Louisiana discouraged dancing, Acadians, or Cajuns, in the south continued to enjoy *fais-do-dos* and *bals de maison* as they had during colonial times. Entire families attended these gatherings, with the children going to sleep while the adults danced late into the night. At the *fais do-do* there would be a *parc aux enfants* or children's room where a volunteer babysitter (usually a community grandmother) would croon lullabies to "*faire dodo*" (make the children nod off to sleep). This practice gave the *fais do-do* its name. Indigenous Cajun music in the nineteenth century was a mixture of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French pieces preserved by oral tradition, along with newly composed local songs and dances.

Louisianians kept their love for dance alive, even in the most troubled of times that characterized the Civil War and Reconstruction. Like most recreational activities, the best-attended dances took place on Sundays. Louisianians hosted masquerade balls during the carnival season and masked and unmasked balls throughout the year.

Carnival Celebrations

The traditional carnival season runs from Twelfth Night (6 January) through Mardi Gras and is followed by Lent. Louisiana settlers transferred familiar European and Caribbean carnival practices to the colony, adapted them to their new environment and social circumstances, and mixed them with African and Native American traditions of religious celebration. Scholars most commonly identify such hybrid varieties of carnival festivities in or near major port cities like New Orleans.

Although not as elaborate as today's carnival, colonial customs sometimes exceeded the control of local authorities. Take for example the attorney general's anxiety in 1781. Because of Spain's military involvement in the United States War for Independence, a multitude of troops, ships' crews, free blacks, and slaves had congregated in New Orleans. With so many strangers in the city, officials found it difficult to identify the race of masked revelers, so the attorney general asked the cabildo to forbid free persons of color and slaves to wear masks or feathers and to mimic whites during the carnival season. These feathered celebrants are believed to be the precursors of Mardi Gras Indians and point to cultural exchange between Native Americans and African Americans in Louisiana, as well as to continuing West African and Caribbean *Petro-Rara* traditions. Indeed, historian Daniel H. Usner Jr. notes that "hundreds of Indians gathered [on the outskirts of New Orleans] in late winter to request gifts from officials and to join in the celebration of carnival." In the view of leading white citizens, however, such popular festivity posed a problem of public order, a complaint with which Mardi Gras revelers are very familiar today.

During the antebellum period carnival balls and parades started taking on their modern forms. Groups of maskers began using vehicles to parade around 1837, and in 1857 nineteen men established the first formal carnival organization in New Orleans, the Mistick Krewe of Comus, modeled in part on the Cowbellions of Mobile, which originated in 1831. A visitor to the Crescent City in 1846, Englishman Sir Charles Lyell, captured the masking, music, and mayhem of Carnival. For one day at least, people of many races and classes played together, seemingly to the dismay of outsiders from the northern United States:

It was the last day of Carnival. . . . There was a grand procession parading the streets, almost every one dressed in the most grotesque attire, troops of them on horseback, some in open carriages, with bands of music, and in a variety of costumes—some as Indians, with feathers in their heads, and one, a jolly fat man, as Mardi Gras himself. . . . The strangeness of the scene was not a little heightened by the blending of negroes, quadroons, and mulattos in the crowd; and we were amused by observing the ludicrous surprise, mixed with contempt, of several unmasked, stiff, grave Anglo-Americans from the North, who were witnessing, for the first time, what seemed to them so much mummery and tom-foolery.

Although Comus, the oldest of Mardi Gras krewes, suspended operations from 1862 through 1865, Louisianians resumed their Mardi Gras celebrations during Reconstruction. Journalist Edward King noted, "Carnival keeps its hold upon the people along the Gulf shore, despite the troubles, vexations, and sacrifices to which they have been forced to submit since the social revolution [Reconstruction] began." During Reconstruction several new practices made their way into traditional Mardi Gras lore. The year 1870 saw the introduction of the Twelfth-Night Revelers, and two years later Rex made his first appearance.

Many of the Reconstruction-era Mardi Gras costumes, parades, and balls contained political messages intended to poke fun at Radical policies and politicians. Most notable was that of Comus's 1873 "Missing Links to Darwin's Origins of the Species," in which members dressed as parts of Darwin's evolutionary chain, ridiculing not only Darwin's ideas but also several hated Reconstruction figures.

Those who rode in parades and danced at the krewes' balls gave New Orleans Mardi Gras an increasing elitist and secretive character. As early as 1867 the Italian visitor Giulio Adamoli observed:

No one knows the promoters. They call themselves the "Mystic Crew," a secret society whose existence is never betrayed except at this popular festival and the grand ball which follows. Invitations to

the latter are issued by the Mystic Crew without other signature, and are in great demand among ladies of the highest circles. . . . To tell the truth, this mania for secrecy seems to me just a trifle childish.

The crowds that gathered to watch the parades, however, were made up of people of all races and classes. Writing in 1874, Edward King applauded Mardi Gras in New Orleans: "White and black join in its masquerading, and the Crescent City rivals Naples in the beauty and richness of its displays."

Religious Observances

Colonial Louisianians often celebrated holy days and even sacraments with masses, processions, parties, and parades. The white merchant don Juan Antonio Lugar and his common-law wife, a free black woman named María Juana Prudhomme, celebrated their daughter's baptism with a large party in their home in 1793, with most leading white New Orleanians present. Members of the free black militia marched in the annual parade to mark the holy day of Corpus Christi. Catholics in the colony also celebrated *La Semana Santa* or Holy Week in tandem with their counterparts in France, Spain, Italy, and Germany. In 1800 Bishop Luis Peñalver y Cárdenas informed the cabildo of the hours he had arranged for Holy Week services.

It appears that weekly masses were not as popular. According to Bishop Peñalver y Cárdenas in 1795, no more than about a quarter of the population attended Sunday mass. A few years later French traveler C. C. Robin remarked that "women, Negroes, and officers of the governor's staff are almost the only people who go to church." New York merchant John Pintard wrote to his wife in 1801 that the city was defended by a series of forts named after Catholic saints, "so that the city is encircled by Saints alth[ough] it may be filled with Heretics & sinners."

Church fathers constantly strove to attend to the moral character of New Orleans's notoriously decadent, disparate population in whatever way possible. Church-sponsored attempts to direct behavior included planned festivities that enticed parishioners into the church and away from "depraved" forms of recreation. For the spiritual benefit of the town the bishop in 1796 arranged to hold a fair (*feria*) in the cathedral on Sundays during Lent. He urged town magistrates to attend these fairs and establish a commendable standard of conduct for the hordes of people expected to attend. Cabildo members agreed to attend but on an individual basis rather than as a body; nonreligious activities filled their Sundays, too. Apparently parishioners preferred to be entertained rather than subjected to pious preaching in their church, and their spiritual keepers recognized this preference. More than one visitor to New Orleans admired "the policy of such an accommodating system of religion, which, while it provides for the *salvation of the soul*, takes care it shall not interfere with the more important *pleasure of the body*" (Schultz, 1808).

In some cases the general populace assumed responsibility for regulating moral conduct. This censuring took the form of a charivari, a noisy, masked demonstration designed to humiliate wrongdoers in the community. Neighbors often staged a charivari when there was an age or wealth disparity in a marriage: an elderly or rich man marrying a very young or poor woman, or vice versa. Such a marriage upset the usual order and withdrew an otherwise eligible and prized member out of the pool of single persons. Society thus demanded retribution in the form of public embarrassment, money, and foodstuffs.

Few direct references to charivaris exist for colonial Louisiana, but at least one woman sought relief from the experience. In 1803 Luisa Julia Saulet, the widow Lambert, married Luis Chobain, apparently considered a desirable mate by others in the community. As a widow, Saulet wanted to avoid "the merriment of a charivari" and asked the ecclesiastical tribunal for dispensation from the three required marriage banns. The tribunal granted her request. One year later Luisa de la Ronde, the widow of don Andrés Almonester y Roxas, married a man seven years younger than she. Disapproving locals subjected the couple to a three-day charivari. Widow Almonester curtailed the spectacle by forfeiting a large sum of money to the crowd, who in turn donated it to the orphans of New Orleans.

Musicians

African and European music came together on the streets and in ballrooms, creating what historian S. Frederick Starr calls a "musical democracy." Music accompanied or was the centerpiece of most forms of entertainment in New Orleans, from opera to theater to parades. This cultural atmosphere nurtured musical talent, blending different musical traditions and performance styles.

Among Louisiana's most famous musicians and performers was New Orleans native Louis Moreau Gottschalk. He was the first musician from the United States to win worldwide praise and recognition for his compositions, many of which were based on Creole, African-American, and other native Louisiana melodies. Gottschalk's father was a Jewish immigrant from England, and his mother was the daughter of Saint-Domingue refugees. He trained in New Orleans and Paris and toured Europe, the United States, the Caribbean, and Latin America. One of Gottschalk's most famous pieces is *Bamboula*, a composition influenced by songs he learned as a child from his maternal grandmother and his African-American nurse, both Saint-Domingue refugees.

Edmond Dédé, the son of two free persons of color from the West Indies, was also one of New Orleans's leading musicians. Born in New Orleans in 1829, Dédé studied the violin there and later in Mexico, England, and France. He conducted the classical orchestra of L'Acazar in Bordeaux, France, and returned to New Orleans for a number of performances in 1893 and 1894. Before his death in Bordeaux in 1903, Dédé wrote more than forty compositions. Other free black performers who gained recognition during the antebellum era included Eugène V. Macarty, a pianist, and Basile J. Barès, a composer

and pianist. Barès was for many years considered New Orleans's leading composer of dance music.

Among the many touring attractions that performed in Louisiana was the renowned "Swedish Nightingale," Jenny Lind. Accompanying Lind on her grand American tour was her manager, P. T. Barnum of circus fame. People from all over the Mississippi Valley converged on the Crescent City to hear Lind sing. Between mid-February and early March of 1851 Lind gave thirteen concerts that netted a total of \$87,646.12, not including proceeds from the eighth concert, which went to various New Orleans charities.

Adelina Patti was another beloved singing star who came to New Orleans on tour. Born in 1843 in Spain to Italian parents, she made her first professional appearance in New York when she was only seven. Three years later, she performed at a New Orleans concert. In 1860 she returned to the city and at the age of seventeen debuted at the French Opera House, where she became the focal point of the 1860–61 opera season. Patti made her farewell tour of the United States in 1904.

[Making an Appearance: Promenading, Shopping, and Dining](#)

In imitation of their European role models, Louisiana colonials liked to stroll through parks and along thoroughfares in the evenings and on Sundays, where they socialized with family, neighbors, and visitors. Walking and riding along the banks of the Mississippi and the Carondelet Canal and on Bayou and Metairie Roads, New Orleanians enjoyed cool evening breezes, picturesque scenery, and chats with acquaintances all dressed in their best attire. Early nineteenth-century visitor Christian Schultz lamented the absence of public gardens in New Orleans but noted that "the Levee after sunset is crowded with company, who having been confined all the day to their houses, seldom miss this favourable opportunity of breathing a little fresh air." Sunset signaled recreational activity, wrote Thomas Ashe: "The instant the luminary sets, animation begins to rise, the public walks are crowded; the billiard rooms resound; music strikes up, and life and activity resume their joyous career." Revelers most likely ignored the Spanish-period curfew that began at 9:00 P.M. during winter months and 11:00 P.M. in the summer.

During the antebellum, Civil War, and Reconstruction periods, Louisianians and their guests continued to take evening walks along the banks of rivers, canals, and bayous. They also promenaded through parks and streets. Residents in both cities and the countryside visited the houses and plantations of relatives and friends. In 1867 Italian visitor Giulio Adamoli vividly described the pleasure of sauntering about New Orleans:

It is delightful to sit in a café and sip lemonade . . . and to see ladies in grand décolleté at Bellanger's, the fashionable refreshment place in Canal Street, taking ices after the theatres. But above all, I delight to mingle with the gay crowds that stroll through the parks on Sunday,

through the restaurants of the city and its suburbs of a late afternoon, and pack the theatres and places of refreshment every evening until far into the night. . . .

Canal Street, the principal thorough-fare, need not shrink from comparison with the best boulevards of Europe. Down its whole length extends a belt of lawn, adorned with beautiful flower beds. The sidewalks are thronged day and night with happy people of every color, whom it does one's heart good to watch.

Louisiana residents and visitors also socialized at numerous stores located in rural and urban settings. Even with their resources reduced by the Civil War and Reconstruction, Louisianians loved to shop. For those of high standing, both black and white, shopping was more of a social than an economic activity, a time to see old friends and make new ones, to show off new clothes, carriages, and servants, and to watch all the other people browsing from store to store. Shopping, noted Edward King, seemed to bring out even the most secluded mistresses of the house: “For it is the shopping hour; from eleven to two the streets of the old quarter [French Quarter in New Orleans] are alive with elegantly, yet soberly attired ladies, always in couples, as French etiquette exacts that the unmarried lady shall never promenade without her maid or her mother.”

Their love for fine food also undiminished by economic woes or Reconstruction politics, residents and visitors to Louisiana continued to keep its many fine, famous restaurants in business. Travelers consistently remarked on the area's unique food and service. Giulio Adamoli recalled: “We wound up for breakfast at Victor's, one of the numerous French restaurants [in New Orleans]. It shares with Moreau's, the St. Charles, the Cosmopolitan, and the Pilgrim, the reputation of being the best dining-place in the town.” On a similar note, Edward King praised

aristocratic restaurants, where the immaculate floors are only surpassed in cleanliness by the spotless linen of the tables; where a solemn dignity, as befits the refined pleasure of dinner, prevails, and where the waiter gives you the names of the dishes in both languages, and bestows on you a napkin large enough to serve you as a shroud, if this strange melange of French and Southern cookery should give you a fatal indigestion.

Ball Games and Other Amusements

Louisiana colonials borrowed what became the popular creole game *raquette* directly from the ballgame Choctaw players called *toli*, even retaining the custom of team songs. This sport resembled the northeastern American Indian game of lacrosse. Spectators of all nationalities gathered at the city's common grounds, now known as

Congo Square, and at the country resort area of Metairie to watch white, black, and Native American teams compete in what is most likely the oldest team sport in Louisiana. In the words of Pierre Clément de Laussat, the colonial prefect sent in 1803 to receive Louisiana from Spain and govern the colony for France:

The Negroes and mulattoes, in groups of four, six, eight—some from the city, others from the country—challenged each other to *raquette des sauvages*. I was invited to one of these contests, where bets rose from five to six hundred piastres fortes [each equivalent to one United States dollar]. Each team distinguished itself by ribbons of motley colors. The game was dangerous. Rarely did it happen that there were no accidents, no arms or legs broken.

Raquette remained a popular spectator sport in Louisiana throughout the nineteenth century, until surpassed by baseball. Ads from early nineteenth-century newspapers occasionally listed raquettes among imported goods for sale. In most parts of the state interest in the game as a spectator sport vanished after Native Americans stopped playing it about 1900.

Also popular, at least in the colonial era, was the Native American game of chunkey. Like raquette, chunkey was largely a spectator sport, with only two players, rather than teams, actively taking part. Numerous excited onlookers wagered sums on each game's outcome. A description of the playing field and action follows:

Almost every early Indian town in Louisiana had a chunk yard, a smooth, well-worn space about one hundred feet long and ten to twelve feet wide. One player rolled the stone, and as it moved, one or both players threw sticks, their object being to hit the stone, strike the opponent's stick, or to come to rest nearer the stone after it had stopped rolling. The playing sticks were about five feet long and an inch wide, and rings were cut around them several inches apart. These helped measure the distances involved in scoring the game. (Kniffen, Gregory, and Stokes, 1987)

Visitors to Louisiana regularly commented on the love that persons of all social stations possessed for recreational sites that combined billiards, card games, alcohol, dance, and prostitution. They gave the numerous taverns, billiard rooms, inns, and dancehalls of New Orleans and other colonial towns plenty of profitable business. This leisure activity also kept urban police forces busy, too, because much of it was illegal and required regulation.

A 1771 municipal law and a 1778 royal decree prohibited games of chance in public establishments in which persons also transacted business, such as taverns, inns, and houses. In 1786 Governor Esteban Miró reiterated the provisions of these laws and also

imposed a curfew; police patrols could arrest anyone seen on the streets of New Orleans after nine o'clock in the evening during winter months and after eleven o'clock during summer. According to one observer, James Pitot, in the 1790s, however, the "government is aware of and permits all of that; and woe unto the minor official who would want to stop it." Besides, wrote Berquin-Duvallon, police patrols probably could not make out furtive shapes slipping along the city's streets, where "lanterns . . . , placed only at each cross-street and consisting of three small lights on winter nights, illumine for only ten paces and leave all the rest of the space in total darkness." Despite official disapproval, Louisianians continued to play, and retailers scrambled to meet their demand for cards. Two gross of packs of playing cards, for example, were included in the inventory of don Luis Ducret, a merchant who died in 1770 on his way back from a trading expedition to Saint-Domingue.

In the early 1790s Governor Carondelet intensified official raids on taverns and billiard halls. Police patrols usually arrived at the suspected institution at night and barged into a back room to find several "*gentes de todas clases y colores*" (persons of all classes and colors) drinking and playing prohibited card games or participating in raffles. Most offenders escaped through back doors, but the police often caught at least one free black person. In March 1791 the sergeant major snared three whites, one slave, and one free person of color. He later discovered two white soldiers in hiding and the owner of the billiard hall, who was fined fifty pesos and released. The others spent ten days in jail.

Five months later the intendant, acting on a tip, inspected a billiard hall and tavern operated by Juan Freyre, known as Juanico el Gallego, where he found "*negros, mulatos, paisanos* [peasants], *artilleros* [artillerymen], *y soldados del Regimiento.*" The intendant arrested Freyre, a white corporal, a white hospital employee, and a free man of color named Francisco Livaudais. Freyre paid a twenty-five peso fine and the others an undisclosed amount of money, but Livaudais possessed no goods and thus had to serve a jail sentence of ten days. During a 1792 raid the sergeant major seized an unusual prize: the distinguished citizen don Diego de Silveyra. One year later officials discovered fourteen or fifteen persons playing cards at the house and shop of a young shoemaker, Agustín Díaz. They apprehended four whites and a free black named Pedro Larronde, age fifty. A patron at Díaz's shop, the free black Matheo Cotilla, testified that he had not seen anyone playing twenty-one or canasta that night. Larronde admitted to playing cards but stated that he had not recognized anyone else who was playing. He most likely withheld information to prevent the arrest of his accomplices and to ensure a position at gaming tables in the future.

[D r i n k i n g a n d G a m b l i n g](#)

Most wealthy New Orleanians and their guests could afford to partake of liquor, games, and illicit sex in the privacy of their own homes. For example, listed in the inventory of goods belonging to Jean Baptiste Prevost, agent of the Company of the Indies who died in 1769, were a marble-top table on a gilt pedestal, backgammon and cribbage boards, and two walnut card tables with roebuck feet. Even "gentlemen,"

though, amused themselves, Chritian Schultz noted, with "billiards abroad, and cards at home, or at some appointed house; and it is said they are generally too much attached to the bottle after dinner."

Long before Europeans arrived in the Mississippi Valley, Native Americans routinely gambled on the outcome of sporting events and games of chance. All sorts of games and sports—raquette, chunky, wrestling, footracing, archery, and guessing, dice, and hoop-and-pole games—called for risks on the part of players and spectators alike. In their love for fun the colonists and Indians of Louisiana were very compatible.

It seemed that everyone in Louisiana, and especially the port city of New Orleans, imbibed with great frequency, a thirst that has not abated in modern times. Ships entering the port carried wine, beer, rum, taffia, brandy, whiskey, and fine liqueurs from Europe, the West Indies, and the British North American colonies. These spirits arrived in barrels, so residents commonly kept a supply of empty bottles handy. A Spanish military and political official, don Francisco Bouligny, at his death in 1800 had in his cellar four hundred bottles of red wine from Bordeaux, one hundred bottles of white wine and various liqueurs, and two hundred empty bottles. The estate inventory of the free black Francisca Montreuil included 350 empty bottles, and that of Catalina Chenal, widow Linguetau, 30 empty bottles. By the end of the colonial period a few distilleries produced taffia and beer locally.

Colonial governments taxed and regulated the taverns, billiard halls, and inns that relieved the thirst of travelers and residents alike. Local authorities tried to protect the public from adulterated or sour alcohol, keep spirits out of the hands of Native Americans and blacks, and at the same time raise revenues from licensing fees. As early as 1717 the French promised to punish those who sold alcohol to Native and African Americans, but this and subsequent provisions—including limiting the number of taverns operating in New Orleans—failed to check abuses.

Spanish officials also attempted to control the proliferation of drinking establishments through licensing and policing. They, like the French, found that enterprising individuals dodged such limitations by operating illegal watering holes. In need of funds to run the city, the New Orleans cabildo finally abandoned efforts to restrict the number of taverns; they instead concentrated on quality control and issued greater quantities of more expensive licenses to raise revenues for patrolling and prosecuting. For example, in 1794 the city's chief constable suggested that the cabildo license six additional cabarets to pay for the extra bailiffs needed to prosecute the growing number of criminals.

It seems, however, that colonial Louisiana already had an inordinate number of drinking establishments. New Orleans alone boasted one tavernkeeper for every 71 residents in 1791. By comparison, in Philadelphia in the 1780s there was one tavernkeeper for every 429 inhabitants; in 1790 Boston claimed one for every 694 residents. Like other port cities in the Americas, New Orleans catered to the needs of a large transient population that kept the numerous tavernkeepers, innkeepers, and billiard-hall owners in business.

In the nineteenth century gambling and drinking combined easily in cafes, taverns, billiard halls, and other recreational sites. During a cockfight at a New Orleans arena in

1867 traveler Giulio Adamoli noted with amusement that "behind the seats a roulette game was running for the entertainment of the spectators during the interval between the matches." Journalist Edward King compared the atmosphere of a New Orleans gaming den with those of France: "Here you pass a little café, with the awning drawn down, and, peering in, can distinguish half-a-dozen bald, rotund old boys drinking their evening absinthe, and playing picquet and vingt-et-un, exactly as in France."

Legal organized gambling came to Louisiana in 1868 with the creation of the Louisiana State Lottery Company. Reputed to be one of the largest privately owned businesses in United States history, the Louisiana State Lottery Company operated legitimately between 1868 and 1893. Louisiana's newly reconstructed 1868 General Assembly approved organization of "the company," as it was called, and chartered it for twenty-five years. The lottery company was exempted from paying taxes and licensing fees but made annual payments of \$40,000 to the state treasury. This money funded public education and health care.

Charles T. Howard served as the company's first president. Howard was a native of Baltimore and resided in Louisiana from 1852 until his death in 1885. Prior to his involvement with the Louisiana State Lottery Company, Howard acted as Louisiana agent for the Alabama Lottery and the Kentucky State Lottery. An avid horseracing fan, Howard purchased the Metairie Race Track and converted it into a cemetery in 1872, allegedly because the track's jockey club denied him membership. Howard's family established the Howard Memorial Library and the Confederate Museum in his honor.

The company held daily, monthly, and semi-annual drawings. Former Confederate generals P. G. T. Beauregard and Jubal Early lent validity, integrity, and publicity to monthly and semi-annual drawings. Set on a large stage, blindfolded boys removed tickets and prizes wrapped in cylinders simultaneously from two wheels. One boy pulled a winning ticket from the large drum and handed it to General Early, where it was matched with the prize ticket that another boy pulled from the small wheel and handed to General Beauregard. Early announced the winning numbers, Beauregard the amount won.

The company survived a challenge to its existence in 1879 and entered its halcyon days of the 1880s, part of an era commonly known throughout the United States as the Gilded Age (1873–1898). Ticket prices rose from 25¢ with a capital prize of \$3,750 to \$40 with a capital prize of \$6,000. Unsold winning tickets returned to the company's coffers. It was estimated that the company kept 48 percent of the money collected in each drawing and that in 1890 its gross earnings exceeded \$28 million a year.

Ironically only about 7 percent of the company's revenue came from within Louisiana. Residents of the United States, the Caribbean, Central America, and Mexico purchased tickets from agents of the Louisiana State Lottery Company. Because its influence reached throughout the continent, it earned the nickname of the "Octopus." The United States mail system allowed people from all over to purchase tickets in the hopes of striking it rich. In fact, it required one express wagon every day just to carry the company's mail to and from the New Orleans post office.

With its charter scheduled to expire at the end of 1893, the company persuaded the 1890 state legislature to pass a constitutional amendment to renew its charter for another

twenty-five years. This amendment would then be submitted to the voters. Lottery officials tantalized legislators by offering to raise annual payments to the state from \$40,000 to \$500,000; the company's final offer was \$1.25 million.

Opposition to the Louisiana lottery gained strength in the early years of the 1890s. Lottery opponents alleged that the lottery company engaged in vote-buying and other corrupt practices. Leading the fight was the Anti-Lottery League, formed in 1890 for the express purpose of closing down the lottery. The League held its first public meeting on 12 May 1890 in New Orleans's Grunewald Opera House. Most newspapers in the state, including the New Orleans *Mascot*, backed the company and its allies. Thus the Anti-Lottery League had to create its own media voice: the *New Delta*.

The federal government assisted the Anti-Lottery League's efforts. In 1890 Congress passed, and in 1892 the United States Supreme Court upheld, a law that prohibited the mailing of lottery tickets and bulletins through the United States postal system, as well as closed the mails to newspapers that contained lottery advertisements and lists of prizes. In March 1892 Louisiana voters further threatened the lottery company's operations when they voted against the amendment renewing the charter and elected the antilottery candidate for governor, Murphy Foster, by a landslide. An attorney and former state senator, Foster served as Louisiana's governor (1892–1900) and United States senator (1900–1913). With Governor Foster's support, an antilottery majority in the 1892 state legislature prohibited lottery operations.

The Louisiana State Lottery Company held its final drawing in December 1893. The company subsequently moved to Honduras and continued to run illegal lotteries in the United States. Because such lottery activities were illegal and conducted covertly, we do not know much about them. However, letters to company officials indicate that company agents often found tickets difficult to sell. In 1907 United States authorities raided and closed down a Wilmington, Delaware, plant that printed tickets, thereby ending the saga of the Louisiana State Lottery Company.

* * *

Conclusion

Residents of and visitors to Louisiana found many ways to amuse themselves, an attraction the state can still boast of today. People of diverse racial, cultural, and economic backgrounds participated in various forms of social and spatial interaction. Such diversions helped make the daily grind bearable and contributed to the rich mosaic of Louisiana's culture.

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